Using Storytelling: From EFL Teachers' Perceptions to Young Learners' Reading Performance

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Article information	Abstract
	The query on how to teach young learners to succeed in their English learning has been somehow under-explored. Just a few studies investigated the usefulness of the storytelling (ST) technique on English as a foreign language (EFL) young learners' (YLs) in the Vietnamese context. Consequently, this study attempts to examine (1) EFL teachers' perceptions of the contributions of ST, (2) YLs' attitudes towards the effects of ST on their reading performance, and (3) the impacts of ST on YLs' reading performance (RP). The study followed a mixed-methods design, using a questionnaire, interviews and reading tests to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. First, a survey was administered to 38 EFL teachers who have taught YLs for more than five years. The experimental study recruited 43 YLs who were divided into two groups, 21 YLs in two control groups and 22 others in two experimental ones. Six YLs in the experimental groups were invited to partake in the interviews, and 43 YLs took the reading pre-test and post-test. The results showed that the teacher participants positively perceived the potentials of ST. The YLs interviewees showed their positive attitudes towards the effects of ST on their RP. The test results indicated the significant impacts of the technique on the YLs' RP. Pedagogical implications and suggestions were presented at the end of the paper.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a complex skill including various interactive elements (Louw, 2018), and reading comprehension (RC) is essential for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners (Villanueva de Debat, 2006). In Vietnam, English is a compulsory school subject. Students start learning English from grade 3 to 12. Ten years of learning English in primary, secondary and high schools seem insufficient for students to complete RC tasks, especially in the high school graduation English examinations. The grammar-translation method is commonly used for teaching RC skills in Vietnam (Denham, 1992). However, the use of this method is considered somehow inadequate. As a piece of evidence, in 2021, just around 40% of school students got below the average

score (under five out of ten as the maximum) in Vietnam's National High School Exam (https://diemthi.vnexpress.net/). Their unsatisfactory performance in RC is considered as the main reason as reading counts for around 40% of the weight of the examination. Consequently, it is necessary to investigate strategies which can   enhance Vietnamese language learners' reading performance (RP), especially when students are still young learners (YLs) because they should learn L2 reading earlier (Oroji & Ghane, 2014).

Teaching YLs is not an easy task. Several reasons make YLs feel uninterested in reading lessons and prevent them from developing their reading skills to perform well in examinations. Firstly, the hidden adverse effects of technology development on YLs have been discovered (Mahmud, 2018). As well-recognized, YLs are attracted by games or entertaining mobile applications. Thus, if a teacher cannot arouse learners' interest and curiosity during the lessons, learners are unwilling to participate in classroom activities due to their low motivation for learning English, especially reading skills. Stimulating learners' interest in learning requires EFL teachers to consider and try out effective gamification in their reading classes. This endeavour, however, is time-taking, which is a barrier for Vietnamese EFL teachers as they are in full charge of all tasks related to their teaching. Secondly, reading activities seem to be overlooked by teachers because they spend much time explaining difficult words and introducing grammatical structures to help learners find the correct answers in the text rather than trigger their prior knowledge to deal with the complicated texts (Javed et al., 2016). Specifically, in the study by Javed et al. (2016), the mean score for teaching literal comprehension questions was significantly higher than for teaching inferential comprehension questions, requiring language learners' RP and higher thinking capacities (M=3.61 and M=2.98, respectively). Thirdly, even though YLs can learn new languages quickly (Oroji & Ghane, 2014), they lack vocabulary repertoire and background knowledge in both first and second language to grasp the purpose and message from the writers (Shin & Crandall, 2018). Consequently, they show a slight improvement in L2 reading to understand exactly what is written in the text.

Oroji and Ghane (2014) indicated that learners should learn L2 reading at an earlier stage because YLs tend to learn and memorize the language implicitly without having to put much effort into comprehending the language. However, the early stage of reading lessons has not been paid too much attention because classroom practitioners focus heavily on oral practicing for YLs. It is likely that teaching learners to become proficient readers is not an easy task, and helping them master the language for dealing with the reading tasks requires much time and effort. To increase learners' knowledge of literacy skills, YLs should get exposed to the techniques of learning how to read in English more effectively because many scholars have claimed that children who grow up in a literacy environment could develop their literacy skills and would have more chances of success in reading than those who do not (Rosenhouse et al., 1997). In Vietnam, Decision No. 1400, signed by the Prime Minister and issued in 2008, aimed to increase Vietnamese language learners' exposure to English to help them succeed in their study, work and lives. However, the implementation of that government policy has not been as successful as expected due to a big gap in terms of teachers' expertise, learners' language proficiency and motivation, administrators' competences in academic management and teaching and learning facilities. The lack of teaching facilities and competent teachers prevents primary school students in mountainous areas of Vietnam from constant access to good English teaching and learning (Bui & Nguyen, 2016).

Vietnamese students desire to be competent but are not much keen on reading and just spend little time reading outside the classroom (Jensen, 2007). Therefore, it is essential to gain insightful look into appropriate techniques that satisfies learners' needs and interests to make L2 reading enjoyable. Many studies have investigated the extent to which storytelling (ST) had significant impact on language acquisitions (Çubukçu, 2014; Dhaif, 1990; Mokhtar et al., 2011; Zare-Behtash et al., 2016). ST has showed to be an effective technique for teaching reading because it encourages language users to read, imagine, and comprehend the text (Peck, 1989; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990; Slattery & Willis, 2001; Wajnryb, 2003; Wright, 1995). ST is not only a widely used technique for teaching reading, but has been approved to be more effective than such as grammar-translation, story-singing, or reading aloud techniques (Moon & Maeng, 2012; Isbell et al., 2004). However, little research focused on the impact of the technique on YLs' literacy skills. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effects of storytelling on YLs' RP according to Vietnamese teachers' perceptions, the empirical results of ST and YLs' attitudes towards the technique.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The input and output hypothesis

Language input has no longer been doubted about its importance in language teaching and learning. Comprehensible input through listening comprehension and reading promotes fluency in speaking and writing (Wang & Castro, 2010). Comprehensive input can facilitate the acquisition of lexical knowledge (Ellis, 1994; Wang, 2015). However, second language acquisition cannot be without output produced by learners because output gives learners opportunities to notice the gap in their interlanguage (Swain, 1985). Schmidt (2001) explained that the gap notice increases learners' concentration on the target linguistic form, which raises their consciousness of the language. Besides, Wang and Castro (2010) proved that visual input significantly impacts learners' attention and consciousness. Particularly, the more visual input is used, the more language learners pay attention to the texts. In sum, input and output play essential roles in second language acquisition, and how learners receive input and produce outcomes affect learners' achievements in learning the target language.

Reading performance

The most essential role of reading is to comprehend the text (Pimsarn, 2009). Griffin et al. (1998) affirmed that reading is a process that readers have to use their experience or existing knowledge to understand the meaning of printed texts. Likewise, reading is a process of decoding and deriving meaning from the printed word (Linse & Nunan, 2005; Muhassin et al., 2021). In other words, reading is a skill that requires comprehending the intention from the printed words and demands decoding the printed words to understand the unknown terms. In line with the definition of reading, Maria (1990) indicated that RC is how learners interpret meaning from the reading passages by using word recognition ability, word knowledge, and knowledge of linguistic conventions. Besides, Goodman (2005) pointed out that "comprehension" produces what the reader already knows and what the readers can learn during the reading

process. Thus, the process of comprehending refers to the transaction between the readers, the writer, and the text in making up the meaning (Goodman, 2005; Grabe, 2009). However, Smith (2004) noted that making sense of printed texts can be more challenging than oral language because reading is a complicated process. Readers do not passively receive information as they read. They continually form a hypothesis, test prediction, and use their background knowledge to keep themselves engaged in constructing the meaning. Consequently, learners' RP could be interpreted as their abilities to activate existing knowledge, make up the text meaning, lexicon knowledge, decode the meanings of unknown words, and comprehend the intention form the texts.

Young learners' reading performance

Young learners' characteristics

Teaching a foreign language to YLs is a challenging endeavor to many language teachers (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2019; Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2020; Oga-Baldwin et al., 2017; Pinter, 2017). According to McKay (2006), YLs' personalities may be complicated, and their language acquisition is often incidental. YLs from five to twelve develop better eye-hand coordination to do simple activities such as painting, drawing, cutting, and folding. Therefore, EFL teachers often use classroom activities requiring YLs to act out or move around the class. Even though children at these ages cannot have convincing reasoning like adults, they are creative in thinking and solving problems logically. It could be helpful if language teachers create English conversational situations requiring YLs to use their creativity to make up their own storylines. In the classroom, YLs have a great desire to communicate with others through group activities such as working and playing games (McKay, 2006; Shin & Crandall, 2018). Additionally, they can match things, trace the dots or recognize the false ones in the sentences. They can also follow the content of a story and predict what might come, and ask a question about it. Primarily, they can act as the characters in the stories (Ba & Huan, 2017). One's concentration is undoubtedly vital in their language learning (Basri et al., 2020). Nonetheless, children have a short concentration span of about ten to fifteen minutes. They often get diverted and distracted by their classmates, and they may give up quickly if they find the tasks more challenging to address. In terms of these characteristics, learners' cognitive development in this age group should be further explored to understand their learning better.

Young learners' attitudes and reading performance

Language learners' attitudes refer to their how they feel about a language and what they connect it with (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Learners' attitudes towards a particular teaching or learning technique is an essential factor affecting their motivation of using this technique (Gardner, 2010). Undoubtedly, motivation or attitudes affect their learning achievements. Language learners who have negative attitudes towards reading spend little time reading texts (Lazarus & Callahan, 2000). Even though the participants in the study by Şentürk (2015) recognize the importance of English reading skills, they refuse to read because they lack motivation. Therefore, their RP was low. It becomes clear that learning outcomes are strongly affected by learners' attitudes. Mihaljevic Djigunovic (2012) also affirmed that attitudes and

motivation are expected to interact with learners' language aptitude, anxiety, learning styles and strategies, and the like. Consequently, learners' attitudes are likely to decide whether they accept or refuse a particular teaching or learning technique due to its suitability for their learning. Consequently, YLs' attitudes towards the ST technique could be observed throughout their acceptance or resistance to the technique due to its contributions to their learning outcomes.

EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching techniques

According to Graham (1869), perception is an internal process for selecting, evaluating, and organizing others' ideas in different external contexts. Williams et al. (1998) added some cognitive skills into his definition of perception, a process that human ability recognizes and interprets sensory stimulations. Yook and Lee (2016) echoed previous definitions of perceptions when emphasizing perception as a process of how one chooses, organizes and interprets the inputs and existing experience to analyze them and create one's own beliefs or evaluations. In other words, perception could be understood as a process how a person evaluates the values of something based on his/her own experience. In this current study, EFL teachers' perceptions of the ST contributions to YLs' RP could be resulted from their experiences using the technique in teaching reading in their classes. One of the aims of this study is to investigate how EFL teachers perceive the contribution of ST to YLs' RP in order to gain insightful look into its effectiveness as teachers are likely to refuse to use a certain teaching technique if it is not perceived as a valuable tool (Wozney et al., 2006).

Storytelling and English language teaching

According to Barzaq (2009), ST is defined as a knowledge management technique that distributes information and informs the contents to targeted audiences. "Telling" includes direct contact between the teller and listeners. The storyteller can provide messages, and the listeners can perceive what teller's experiences through the messages. However, ST will be bored if the tellers do not make the stories alive and entertaining. ST should then be combined with total physical responses to motivate YLs in learning language, and ST is a helpful tool to learn vocabulary, sentence patterns, and RP (Mart, 2012).

The powerful stories or passages can have remarkable effects on learners' personalities and emotions in behaving properly with people surrounding them. Davies (2006) stressed that ST provides valuable information, knowledge and lessons about morality, personality, and values. ST can create good conditions for language learning as it can provide learners with comprehensible input, foster language acquisition devices and promote language acquisition (Brewster et al., 2002; Hendrickson, 1992; Krashen, 2004; Wajnryb, 2003). Besides, ST can stimulate receptive language development and encourage learners to read and develop their imagination to better their RP (Peck, 1989; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Moreover, ST can create a collaborative learning environment and develop learners' critical thinking (Chance, 1986). Additionally, ST can be regarded as one technique that captures students' interest and encourages students to learn a language (Elkılıç & Akça, 2008; Slattery & Willis, 2001; Wajnryb, 2003; Wright, 1995). Furthermore, YLs who hear the stories have greater story comprehension, as demonstrated

in their retelling of the stories (Isbell et al., 2004). Elkılıç and Akça (2008) also claimed that using audio and visual teaching aids and comprehension questions would help YLs understand the storylines better. In a nutshell, ST seems to be a noticeably useful technique for teaching reading skills to YLs.

Research questions

Almost no studies investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of the values of ST to teach YLs, impact of ST on YLs' RP, and the YLs' attitudes towards ST in the researched context. As a result, this study attempted to address the answers to two primary research questions with two sub-research questions for the second question as follows:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of the contributions of storytelling to young learners?
2. What are the effects of using storytelling
    2a. on EFL young learners' attitudes towards learning reading?
    2b. on EFL young learners' reading performance?

METHODOLOGY

Context of the study

The study was conducted in a central city in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, where the number English language centers, has been increasing. Three English language centers were chosen as the research sites, one for the pilot experiment and two others for the principal study. This current study followed the framework displayed in the figure below.
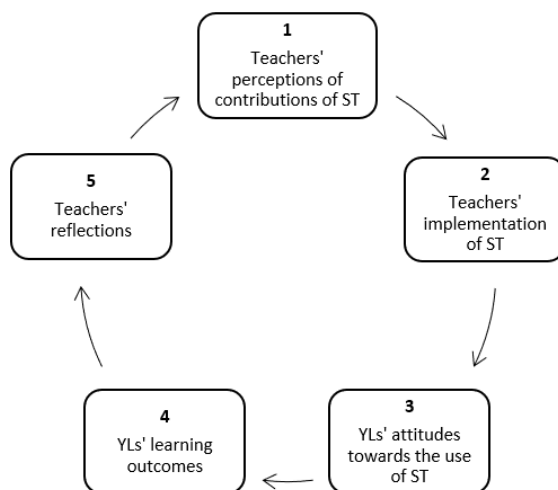

Figure 1 Framework of the study

Based on the literature review, the research framework was developed. As can be seen, insights into teacher's perceptions of the contributions of ST to YLs' learning reading first shaped whether and/or how the technique was implemented. Once implemented, the technique was evaluated through YLs' learning attitudes and RP. The teacher then reflected on the results of the use of the technique to further clarify how to use ST effectively. Accordingly, the study followed a mixed-methods approach, using questionnaires, experiments, and semi-structured interviews to collect data.

Participants

The researchers received consents to participate in the study from all teacher and YL participants. Table 1 summarizes the participants in this study.

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Table 1
Summary of the participants

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	Questionnaire	Interviews	Reading tests
Teachers' survey	38 EFL teachers	-	-
Pilot study	-	-	19 YLs
Principal study	-	6 YLs	43 YLs

Participants for the survey

The official questionnaire collected data from 38 EFL teachers, four males, and thirty-four females in a central city of southern Vietnam who have taught YLs for at least five years. All have got familiar with the technique under investigation in the current study. Two teachers, who achieved B2 according to the Common European Framework for References for Languages (CEFR) English language proficiency, volunteered to teach the intervention programs for the principal experimental study.

Participants for experiments

Pilot study

Nineteen YLs from 10 to 11 years, six males and thirteen females, attending English classes at an English language center in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam volunteered to participate in the study. That language center was selected to get involved in the pilot study for two reasons. First, the director of the center and teachers were willing to offer their support as they were informed of the research aims which fit their inspiration in promoting the quality of teaching English to YLs. Second, the center was well-recognized as a dedicated and trust-worthy venue for implementing innovated curricula and programs teaching English to YLs by the local government's unit of quality assurance.

In the pilot study, the YLs were divided into two groups, including a control group and an experimental one. The experimental group consisted of nine YLs who learned reading with ST. The control group, on the other hand, including ten YLs experienced their learning English-

reading with reading aloud technique, a traditional teaching technique in the researched context. Those participants would not participate in the principal study.

Principal study

In the principal study, there were four intact classes of learner participants from two different English language centers sharing the same characteristics with the one in the pilot study, 15 males and 28 females in total. There were two different groups of participants in each center, one ST group and another one with traditional technique, reading aloud. These learners were randomly assigned with their consents to be either control or experimental group. All YLs participants had obtained the English Certificate Level Pre-A1, equivalent to A1 level in the CEFR before the principal experiment.

Participants for semi-structured interviews

In the principal study, six out of 22 YLs in the experimental group, three least successful learners (labeled A, B, and C) and three most successful ones (labeled D, E, and F) in the pre-test results, were invited to participate in the individual interviews to investigate their attitudes towards ST.

Instruments

Questionnaire

The researchers used the questionnaire to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of the contributions of ST to YLs. According to the model developed by Wozney et al. (2006), teachers would decide to use a particular teaching technique if they highly perceived its potential values. Consequently, the first stage of this research aimed to check the teachers' perceptions of the technique before practicing them.

The questionnaire encompassed 13 items with a five-point Likert scale, covering five central values, including activating learners' experiences or existing knowledge (items 1 and 2), increasing learners' abilities to make up the text meanings (items 3, 4, and 5), developing learners' lexicon knowledge (items 6, 7, 8, and 9), enhancing learners' abilities to decode the meanings of unknown words (items 10 and 11), and improving learners' abilities to comprehend the intention from the texts (items 12 and 13). Additionally, the questionnaire had the "Others" item to gain new ideas from the teacher participants.

Semi-structured interviews

It is quite complex to elicit data on YLs' attitudes towards a particular learning and teaching technique because they sometimes find it challenging to articulate their thoughts, perceptions or feelings like adult learners (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012). However, interviews are considered a helpful instrument to investigate in-depth YLs' thoughts. YLs can provide relevant information on "Why questions", such as why they preferred some classroom activities or why they disliked

others (Mihaljević Djigunović & Lopriore, 2011). Therefore, the interviewers used supporting questions to elicit the YLs' attitudes towards the use of ST as follows:

- What do you think of the ST technique your teacher used in your reading lessons?
- What do you think of the impact of ST on your RP?
- Which one do you prefer to be taught with: the newly applied ST or the reading aloud your teacher used in your previous course?

The follow-up questions were asked if necessary to clarify the underlying reasons for YLs' perceptions.

Reading pre-test and post-test

The reading tests were adapted from "Fun for Movers" by Robinson and Saxby (2016) and "Movers 9: Cambridge English YLs Movers" by Cambridge English Language Assessment (2015). The main objective of learning reading for learners at this level was to understand the gist and some of the specific information of the short reading passages. The tests were designed based on the format of the Movers test. The pre-test and post-test were similar in structure, the number of items, level of difficulty, and allowed time to complete the test. Participants had to finish the tests in one and a half hours.

In designing the reading tests, the researchers developed forty items for the pre-test and the post-test. Each correct answer was awarded one-fourths. The tests followed the format proposed by Cambridge English Language Assessment. There were six parts to the tests.

- Part 1 required the examinees to look at the pictures with words under pictures. Then, the YLs were given an equivalent number of definitions of these words. The YLs would match the words with their correct definitions.
- Part 2 asked the YLs to look at a picture and then read the descriptions. After that, the examinees wrote "Yes" for the correct descriptions and "No" for the incorrect ones.
- In Part 3, the YLs read a conversation between two people. They would play the role of one of them to answer the counterpart's questions.
- Part 4 was divided into two parts, filling gaps and entitling the topic. For filling gap, the YLs were asked to fill the words given by the tests in the blanks to complete the stories. For entitling the topic, the learners were asked to reread the stories to choose their best titles.
- In Part 5, the learners looked at three pictures and read three stories. They were required to write words to complete the sentences about the stories.
- Part 6 comprised a multiple-choice task. The learners read a story with blanks and chose the correct words to fill in these blanks.

The tests were sent to an expert in testing and assessment for her feedback on the instructions, question sequence, the relevance of the test items to ensure its validity. To test the readability, the researchers used the Readability Test Tool provided by WebFX as an online tool for testing

the readability of language tests. According to the developers of the tool, it uses the Flesch Kincaid reading ease test, the Flesch Kincaid grade-level test, the Gunning Fog score, the Coleman Liau index, the Automated Readability Index (ARI), and the SMOG index to help its users understand the difficulty level of their tests. The research team used "Test by Direct Input" to test the tests' difficulty used in this study. After calculating the readability of the reading tests, the results showed that the test had an average grade level of about six, which is equivalent to the learners in the current study. Therefore, it was accepted to move on to the next step, piloting the instruments. The tests were piloted in a group of ten learners from different classes but were supposed to be similar to the study participants.

Procedures

Conducting teachers' survey

The questionnaire was piloted to check its reliability. Thirty EFL teachers who shared the same teaching background as the teacher participants of the principal study responded to the questionnaire. The coefficient alpha (α=.87) of the pilot questionnaire confirmed the reliability of the instrument. Then, the questionnaire was delivered to 38 EFL teachers through the Google Form platform for data collection. The data collected were then analyzed by SPSS version 20.0.

Organizing the pre-test on reading and implementing the experiments

Two experimental studies were conducted in this current study, a pilot and a principal one.

Pilot study

The purpose of the pilot study was to offer the researchers what could be improved in terms of the intervention program, the length of the intervention, the number of participants per group to enhance learners' learning outcomes. The principal experimental study aimed to test the effects of ST on YLs' attitudes to learning with ST and their RP.

The pilot experiment lasted eleven weeks with two groups of YLs, one with traditional technique, reading aloud, and another with ST. From the second to the tenth week, both groups learned the same units in the "Fun for Movers" book published by Cambridge University Press. The experimental group was instructed by ST, whereas the control group learned with the traditional technique, reading aloud. A member of the research team who has five years teaching YLs took responsibility for teaching in the pilot experiment. For the ST group, the teacher adapted the story-based lessons by Ellis and Brewster (2014) that consisted of three main stages: pre-storytelling, while-storytelling, and post-storytelling. The three-step model for a story-based methodology (Plan – Do – Review) includes the following three phases, namely:

- *Pre-story telling*: (also called "Plan" phase). Lead-in activity is set at the beginning of a lesson to release learners' anxiety and activate learners' prior knowledge. Next, the teacher informs learners the purpose of the activity and possibly demonstrates it. The teacher uses visual aids, props, or tangible objects to teach a new language.

- *While-story telling*: (also called "Do" phase). The teacher directs learners' attention to the story. Learners participate in the activities the teacher demonstrates.
- *Post-story telling*: (also called "Review" phase). Learners will reinforce their understanding of language from the previous stage by expanding and personalizing it. The teacher will ask some questions such as ''What did you do?'', ''How well did you do it?'', ''What was easy/ difficult for you?'' and ''What did you learn so far?''

For the control group, there were three main stages in teaching reading to YLs, including pre-, while- and post-reading, which was adapted from the study by Trelease (2013) as follows:

- For *Pre-reading stage*, the teacher sets up the classroom to help the YLs listen to the teacher and see pictures in the book.
- In *While-reading stage*, the teacher shows the picture introducing the story and gives YLs chances to brainstorm their ideas about it. During the reading process, the teacher involves students by asking them to notice the exciting features of the story. If possible, the teacher provides their YLs with a chance to create their own story.
- In the *Post-reading stage*, the teacher identifies the YLs' understanding of the story and their emotions through the story. Then, the teacher asks them to share their ideas about the story.

In the last week of the pilot stage, week 11, both groups did the post-test to examine whether there was an improvement in learners' RP after the experiments.

The results of the pilot study showed both techniques, reading aloud and ST, affected piloting participants' reading performance in the same way (p>.05). However, the results of the pilot study offered the researchers measures to address limitations to be avoided in the principal study. First, both groups spent just three hours, equivalent to two sessions per week, and the duration of the intervention program which lasted nine weeks was inferred as being short to possibly affect the significant changes in learners' RP. Secondly, the n-size in the pilot study was too small to allow generalizing the research results. These limitations were fixed in the principal study.

Principal study

The principal study was administered in 15 weeks, 4.5 hours a week for teaching YLs reading as abovementioned. Compared to the pilot study, the principal study lengthened the intervention to 15 weeks; each week participants took 4.5 hours, equivalent to three sessions per week. As described in the previous section, the number of participants for the two conditions therefore were bigger, 21 for the control group and 22 for the experimental one. Besides the mentioned distinctions between the two studies, the principal study followed the same procedure as in the pilot one.

Organizing semi-structured interviews

After the principal experiment, the researchers recruited six YLs participants from the experimental

group to participate in semi-structured interviews. YLs themselves were willing to be involved in interviews with their parents' consents. The interviews lasted around 45 minutes to one hour and were conducted in the classroom after the class finished. During the interviews, Vietnamese language as the mother tongue was used so that interviewees could respond to questions comprehensively and comfortably. All interviews were recorded and note-taken under the permission of the interviewees and their parents. Then, the data were read by the parents to ensure there was no make-up story in the transcripts. The Vietnamese transcripts then were translated by two translators with more than 20 years of work in translation and interpretation. If any differences occurred in the transcripts, the research team selected the one closer the participants' communicative intentions.

Administering the post-test

While analyzing the data of the interviews to understand the YLs' attitudes towards ST, the researchers administered the post-test in both groups to investigate the impact of the interventions on YLs' RP. The 43 YLs were invited to do the post-test two days after the interviews. The two instructors of the current study proctored the test. The test results were marked and cross-checked by the instructors and the researchers. SPSS version 20.0 was then used to compare the test results of the two groups.

Data analysis

Data from the survey

Data collected from the questionnaire were subjected to SPSS version 20.0. The researchers first used a Scale test to check the reliability of the questionnaire. The coefficient alpha (α=.90) showed a strong level of reliability of the questionnaire used in the study. A Descriptive Statistics test was then employed to examine the average mean scores of teachers' perceptions of the ST contributions to YLs' RP. The normal distributions of the test were confirmed by the Mean scores, Median values, and Skewness values. The results of these tests were displayed in the results section.

Data from the interviews

The interview data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique developed by Braun and Clarke (2012). The data analysis procedure followed these steps. First, the researchers read through the interview transcripts to be familiar with data on the YLs' thoughts of the impact of ST on their reading learning. The learners' thoughts were grouped, following four main themes, including YLs' attitudes towards ST, impact of ST on YLs' language aspects, effect of ST on YLs' usage of English outside of the classrooms, and additional values after learning with ST. For instance, one of the excerpts collected from the data was, "I practice telling the stories those ways in front my parents…" it then was coded as the theme of YLs' usage of English outside of the classrooms. Data related to participants' attitudes towards ST were then coded in green, impact of ST on YLs' language aspects in yellow, effect of ST on YLs' usage of English outside the classrooms in red, whereas the additional values of ST were blued. Next,

all excerpts of the same category were grouped together; four main themes and all excerpts were collated.

Data from the reading tests

The researchers used the Scale tests to check whether the pre-test and post-test were reliable enough to use for data collection. According to Kline (1999), the alpha value in reliability analysis is acceptable if it is .70 or above. Therefore, the test results indicated that the tests were appropriate for measuring the YLs' RP (α = .72 and α = .75, respectively). Data from reading tests were also computed by SPSS version 20.0. First, Independent Sample T-tests were run to check whether there was any significant difference between the results in the pre-and post-tests of the two groups in the study. Then, the two GLM for Repeated Measures tests on SPSS version 20.0 were run to examine whether there were any changes in terms of RP within the two groups before and after the principal study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EFL teachers' perceptions of the contributions of storytelling

The results of the teacher participants' perceptions of the ST contributions to YLs' RP are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

The teacher participants' perceptions of the contributions of ST (N=38)

Contributions	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Activating learners' experiences or existing knowledge	2.00	5.00	4.17	.74
Increasing learners' abilities to make up the text meaning	2.00	5.00	3.76	1.00
Developing learners' lexicon knowledge	3.00	5.00	3.97	.68
Enhancing learners' abilities to decode the meanings of unknown words	3.00	5.00	4.20	.69
Improving learners' abilities to comprehend the intention from the texts	2.00	5.00	4.12	.80
Total	**2.92**	**5.00**	**4.04**	**.59**

The distribution of participants' scores was interpreted as normal (*M = 4.04*; *Median = 4.21*; *Skewness = -.16*). The results also showed the teachers highly perceived the contributions of ST to YLs' RC. Besides, the teacher participants perceived that the use of ST enhances YLs' abilities to decode the meanings of unknown words the most (*M = 4.20*) and increases YLs' abilities to make up the text meanings the least (*M = 3.76*).

The results also indicated that the teachers strongly believed in the contributions of ST to developing YLs' RP. Basically, according to their perceptions, ST helped YLs develop skills for improving their RP, including decoding and deriving meaning from the printed words (Linse & Nunan, 2005; Muhassin et al., 2021), interpreting meaning from the reading passages by using word recognition ability, word knowledge, and knowledge of linguistic conventions (Maria, 1990), and making up the text meanings (Goodman, 2005; Grabe, 2009).

The teachers provided further ideas by responding to "Others" item in the questionnaire. Participants firmly believed that the ST technique could enhance learners' moral values (Davies, 2007), provide comprehensible input (Brewster et al., 2002; Hendrickson, 1992; Krashen, 2004; Wajnryb, 2003), acknowledge RC strategies (Peck, 1989; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990), develope critical thinking (Chance, 1986), and increase learning motivation (Slattery & Willis, 2001; Wajnryb, 2003; Wright, 1995). In many cultures, bedtime stories are popular. Story plots stimulate listeners' curiosity, and as a result, these plots hold on the learners' interest and engagement in predicting the storylines (Huck, 1993). It is undeniable that the more learners engage in in-class activities, the more input they gain (Getie, 2020). As a result, their learning outcomes are higher.

The teachers also believed that ST could contribute to improving YLs' oral skills. It was similar to Isbell et al.'s (2004) study, which found the improvement of YLs' speaking and listening skills after the interventions. Vietnamese teachers often integrate four reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in their EFL classes (Trang & Trang, 2020). Regarding the ST technique, the oral interaction between teachers and students can be promoted and sustained during three stages, "Plan", "Do", and "Review". In the Vietnamese context where this study was conducted, reforms and innovations in teaching and learning English are highly encouraged, so piloting and implementing perceived effective methods or techniques in English lessons are likely to be welcome by classroom practitioners.

Young learners' attitudes towards the contributions of storytelling

Four main themes related to the contributions of ST to the YLs' learning reading emerged from interview data. First, it enhanced the YLs' interest in learning reading. According to Learners A and D, the use of ST was more interesting than the previous techniques that he used to experience. They said,

> "I think this technique is new and interesting for me. Moreover, it is more exciting than the one I used to learn. In the previous courses, my teachers just showed the illustrations and read the stories." (A; Male; Eleven years old; 4.00 in Pre-test)

> "I had a lot of fun after learning with this technique. I enjoyed the stories that I used to think they are boring." (D; Female; Eleven years old; 8.25 in Pre-test)

Based on the above narrative, their teacher often used reading-aloud technique in previous courses they took. Reading aloud is one of the traditional teaching techniques for RC in the researched context, so that it might become familiar and a little bit boring to the YLs. Therefore, the innovation increased the YLs' curiosity, positively correlated with their interest in English learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The findings partly explained why the ST group gained more in terms of RP than the control one. ST was considered as an exciting change in English classes in the researched context and met the learners' needs. According to Skinner and Belmont (1993), when children are satisfied with the basic psychological needs, their motivation will flourish.

The ST technique also enhanced the learners' confidence and willingness to communicate with their teachers in the target language. Furthermore, they also improved the effectiveness of their body language. Learner B remarked,

> "I used to feel quite difficult to communicate in the target language, even with foreign teachers [...] but now learning ST makes me more confident to retell the story to my teachers because I can present my ideas better. I know how to use my body language due to my teacher's actions." (B; Female; Eleven years old; 4.5 in Pre-test)

In the "Do" phase of this technique, the teacher directed the learners' attention to the story, and the learners actively participated in the activities that the teacher had demonstrated in this phase (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). The participation and practices in retelling stories with their own performances might potentially help improve the YLs' uses of body language.

The YLs seemed to be attracted by their teachers' actions and facial expressions. Learners C and E said,

> "I feel that the reading lessons are more attractive and fun when my teacher tell the stories and acts like the characters in the story. The stories become livelier." (C; Male; Eleven years old; 4.75 in Pre-test)

> "I prefer learning ST because it gained my attention through interesting pictures and my teacher's actions. Last course, my teacher did tell stories, but she had just used facial expressions. Even though it was fun, the teacher's actions made the stories livelier." (E; Male; Eleven years old; 8.50 in Pre-test)

The finding was similar to the study by Arbuthnot (1936), stating that using ST enables the storytellers as teachers to deliver the story's contents more directly, interestingly, and attractively. Moreover, teachers' actions, facial expressions, or use of pictures as visual input were perceived to help the learners produce better output and learning achievements (Wang & Castro, 2010).

Second, the ST technique developed the learners' reading skills. ST acknowledged the learners' reading strategies, such as skimming and scanning the text to get general and detailed information. Learner E said,

> "My teacher used pictures while telling so I can know the key ideas of the text. [...] I can read for the gist and remember the words and the pictures that my teacher presented so the stories are easy for me to comprehend. Therefore, I reread and skip unimportant parts, and deal with the filling gap exercises easier." (E; Male; Eleven years old; 8.50 in Pre-test)

Several preceding studies have found that ST can stimulate receptive language development and encourage learners to read and build their imagination to develop their RP (e.g., Peck, 1989; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Moreover, ST fosters teachers' sense of the story contents, including the principal and sub-characters, plot twists, and understanding specific story details (Arbuthnot, 1936). Thanks to this sense, the teacher using storytellers can highlight the ideas

through the stories and enhance their YLs' awareness of important and unimportant details; and as a consequence, the YLs' reading skills improve.

ST increased the learners' range of vocabulary and understanding of grammatical points. Learner B remarked,

> "I felt my vocabulary improved. Thanks to ST, I learned many new words and used grammar from the stories or passages more effectively than I used to." (B; Female; Eleven years old; 4.5 in Pre-test)

The finding reaffirmed the study by Mart (2012), which stated that ST combining with teacher's physical responses is a helpful tool to learn vocabulary, sentence patterns, and RP.

The use of ST with technological development bettered the learners' understanding of the story contents. Learner F shared,

> "I like the words and pictures that popped up by the use of PowerPoint software. It helps me comprehend the texts better and learn words in a more interesting way rather than learning by listening to teachers only." (F; Male; Twelve years old; 8.75 in Pre-test)

Technology advancements have made huge impact on people's lives, and English education in particular (Thuy & Qalati, 2020; Wongseree, 2021). Nomass (2013) highlighted using educational technology like presentation software in English learning and teaching. Accordingly, using the technique with the support of technological development can maximize the effects of teaching techniques, and ST in this case is an example. Moreover, ST not only fostered the storytellers' sense of the story contents (Arbuthnot, 1936), but it also helped the listeners understand the story contents.

Third, ST enhanced the learners' spending time using English outside of class. The interviewees agreed that ST enhanced their learner autonomy by reading stories. Learners A and F stated,

> "The ways my teacher tells the stories with actions make me feel so excited and pleasant. I practice telling the stories those ways in front my parents. I have got a lot of compliments from them because I acts so cute." (A; Female; Ten years old; 4.00 in Pre-test)

> "After listening to the stories in class, I go home and tell my parents about them. I used to hate reading books, but now I usually find fairy tales and comic books to read by myself." (F; Male; Twelve years old; 8.75 in Pre-test)

The mentioned sharing claimed that ST captured the YLs' interest and encouraged them to learn English outside of the classrooms. The finding was similar to several previous studies (e.g., Slattery & Willis, 2001; Wajnryb, 2003; Wright, 1995). Undoubtedly, learner autonomy would significantly contribute to the learners' successful language learning (Chang, 2020; Jenwitthayayot & Tepsuriwong, 2016).

Forth, the technique helped raise their awareness of moral values and extend the learners' knowledge of living values. Learners D and F stated,

> "After learning with ST, I was aware that we should be kind and tolerant with others." (D; Female; Eleven years old; 8.25 in Pre-test)

> "I think being a nurse or doctor is so difficult. I also like the Farmers Jack and I did know more about his job." […] I understand more about their jobs. (F; Male; Twelve years old; 8.75 in Pre-test)

Stories for children are usually embedded with teaching philosophies or moral values. Types of stories selected to tell children are folk tales, fables, myths, and legends (Garvey, 1964). For example, the novel entitled "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" by Haddon (2003) teaches children to be honest and not telling lies to other people. Therefore, the use of ST could significantly affect the development of YLs' characteristics (Saripudin et al., 2021).

Based on the interview findings, the current study concluded that almost all YLs showed positive attitudes towards ST. The findings were aligned with several preceding studies (e.g., Elkılıç & Akça, 2008; Inayah, 2015; Isbell et al., 2004; Moon & Maeng, 2012). The results confirm an existing expectation among Vietnamese YLs in English lessons; new teaching and learning experiences should be practiced.

The effects of ST on learners' reading performance

Table 3 displays the results of the pre- and post-tests on YLs' RP before and after the interventions.

Table 3
Comparison between the groups

Tests	Groups	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	p
Pre-test	Control groups	21	4.75	8.75	6.90	1.45	.83
	Experimental groups	22	4.00	8.75	6.82	1.46	
Post-test	Control groups	21	6.00	10.00	8.10	1.33	.01
	Experimental groups	22	6.75	10.00	9.00	1.04	

The pre-test results showed that both groups had an equivalent level of RP before the intervention (*MCon-pre = 6.90*; *MExper-pre = 6.82*; *p = .83*). Otherwise, the post-test results showed a significant difference between the post-test results of the two groups (*MCon-post = 8.10*; *MExper-post = 9.00*; *p = .01*).

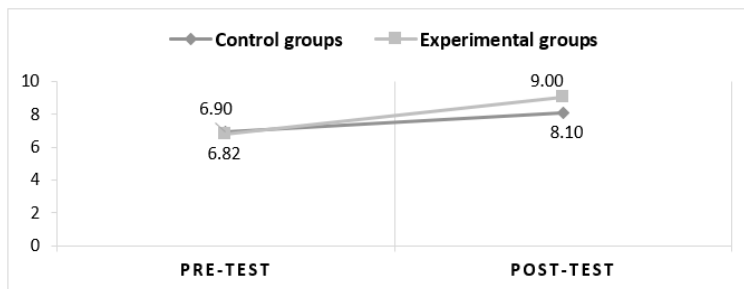Figure 2 illustrates the progress of participants in RP in both conditions.

Figure 2 YLs' changes before and after the intervention

According to the results, the ST group improved their RP (*df = 1*; *F = 61.4*; *p = .00*). Moreover, the results of the control group also confirmed a significant improvement in their RP (*df = 1*; *F = 49.4*; *p = .00*). The results proclaimed that both groups improved their RP after the experiment, and the experimental group gained more than the control group after the intervention.

The findings aligned with Isbell et al.'s (2004) study, which found that both groups of ST and reading aloud as a traditional technique in the research context significantly developed their story comprehension. Besides teacher-related factors such as teaching techniques, many other factors affect the Vietnamese students' learning process, such as learning purpose, learning ability, learning method, hard-working, self-awareness, parental indicators, demographics, and school-environment (Nguyen et al., 2021). Therefore, these factors might motivate the learners to improve their learning even though they learned with ST or traditional techniques. There is another way to clarify this finding. According to Maynard (2004), both boys and girls enjoy listening to stories. However, while male students tend to like drawings expressing the strength, scary things, and the like, girls prefer cute things like small animals or flowers and tend to be more careful with their learning production. As mentioned, the types of stories for YLs, such as folk tales, fables, myths, and legends (Garvey, 1964), may be more suitable for girls than boys. The number of girls was more extensive than that of boys in this current study. Therefore, the YLs' improvement in both groups using stories to involve the YLs in learning reading was observed.

Moreover, the ST technique showed prominent contributions to the YLs' literacy learning in the research context. It was similar to the study by Paul (2003), who found that the technique is a useful pedagogical tool for enhancing Asian EFL YLs' literacy knowledge and building their interest in literacy and learning English. As inferred, the ST technique might encourage the YLs' to learn English-reading more prominently than the reading aloud technique did in this study. As mentioned, Vietnamese students have a great desire to be competent in their English reading skills, but they spend little time reading because it is somehow unattractive to them (Jensen, 2007). Therefore, regarding the positive impact of ST on YLs' RP, ST should be considered as a promising measure to contribute to developing Vietnamese learners' interest in learning English reading and enhancing their RP in English.

IMPLICATIONS

Not only did the ST technique improve the YLs' attitudes towards learning reading but also greatly developed their RP. Based on the results of the current study, pedagogical implications for English teaching are offered. Reading culture is dying out due to electronic devices, such as mobile phones, televisions, and tablets. Fortunately, ST potentially promotes learners' motivation for reading according to the YLs' narratives in the current study. Therefore, the use of ST needs to be taken into account by English language instructors to implement ST in an EFL context. If ST were considered to be part of reading lessons in the school curriculum, English teachers should be trained to use it proficiently. Moreover, they need to understand the challenges that may prevent learners from constructing the meaning of English texts. As a consequence, they can provide some exciting activities involving EFL learners in English-reading classes.

The better EFL teachers perceive the contributions of a particular teaching technique, the better their teaching performance can be (Wozney et al., 2006). The current study found the positive impact of ST on YLs' RP. However, ST is still not widely used as much as other techniques in schools in Vietnam. Therefore, it is to suggest that EFL teachers' understanding of ST should be further realized in their using the technique to develop learners' RP. The ST lesson sequence and activities used in the experimental study satisfied learners' learning expectations. As such, learners put more effort into every reading task in class which resulted in higher learning outcomes.

The choice of stories should be well-considered in terms of their contributions to developing EFL learners' competencies in getting them interested in the study plot, activating their schemata and decoding the message towards comprehending the text. The implementation of ST requires EFL teachers to make best use of falling or rising intonations, purposeful pauses, eliciting questions, and helpful clues to help learners predict the storylines and develop their critical and creative thinking accordingly. Listening to English stories and using English to re-tell stories are good instances for learners to enhance their language proficiency significantly as these activities play a role in promoting learners' writing, speaking, and listening skills in English.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study followed a mixed-methods design, using a questionnaire for EFL teachers, semi-structured interviews and reading tests for YLs to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The study found that EFL teachers highly perceived the role of ST in supporting YLs in not only learning reading in English or other language skills but also developing children's personalities. The use of ST resulted in positive effects on learners' attitudes towards the technique and their RP in English. To be able to observe the positive effects of ST on learners' attitudes, lessons followed the structure of stories should satisfy YLs' psychological needs, develop their self-efficacy in language, be conducted with the support of ICT, and provide moral values and reasons for their using English outside of the classroom; and on RP, the intervention program should last at least 15 weeks in which participants took 4.5 hours each

week, equivalent to three sessions per week. The findings contribute insights into how ST can be used in teaching English reading to improve YLs' learning outcomes.

However, the current study also displayed some limitations that need further improvement to clarify ST's contributions to language teaching and learning. To observe the effects of ST in this study, class size was taken into consideration; each class did not accommodate up to fifteen students. It would be a good idea to use ST in a class of around twenty students and measure the effects of ST on students' RP. It would also be a worth-doing study using teachers' teaching logs and classroom observations to investigate how teachers plan their reading lessons by using ST in light of the study by Ellis and Brewster (2014) and what challenges they face delivering reading lessons employing ST. Moreover, the study just focused on investigating the impact of ST on YLs' RP; it, therefore, is highly suggested that impact of ST be studied on YLs' development of other language skills, such as speaking, listening, and writing. Besides, the effectiveness of ST on EFL adult learners' language skills or motivation could be a promising topic for further explorations. Last but not least, the current study did not examine the influence of teachers' demographics on their perceptions and practices of ST or the possible effect of YLs' genders on learners' RP. Studies on such areas where this current study did not cover would enrich the body of literature in the field and inform classroom practitioners of empirical evidences of using ST in EFL classroom settings.

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