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EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY & COUNSELLING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Resilience in language learners and the relationship to storytelling

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Abstract: International students, who study a foreign language abroad, experience more adversities than their domestic peers. The social challenges they face include problems with immigration status, isolation, difficulty speaking a new language, and learning unfamiliar customs. There is limited research focused on the coping strategies of these individuals. A growing body of research suggests storytelling may provide an important role in promoting resilience, defined as an individual's ability to bounce back or recover from stress. The study investigated possible relationships between experiencing storytelling as a child and adult resilience. The sample consisted of 21 international college students studying Chinese or English. Students were examined with a survey, a narrative interview, and the brief resilience scale. Data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative results produced significant correlations between resilience scores and the survey scores for adults who reported using storytelling in their own teaching of a second language to peers and children. Qualitative results identified five protective factors for resilience: (1) social competence, (2) problem-solving skills, (3) autonomy, (4) sense of purpose, and (5) use of storytelling. Implications of the findings for research and intervention are discussed.

Subjects: Adult Education and Lifelong Learning; Bilingualism/ESL; Classroom Practice; Education; Educational Research; Higher Education; Social Sciences

Keywords: resilience; retention; storytelling; adult learners; foreign language acquisition

1. Introduction

After English, Mandarin Chinese is becoming the first choice as a foreign language for a growing number of international university students (Dube, 2009). The popularity of Chinese results in

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This study provides examination of the strategies that resilient college students use when studying a foreign language. Furthermore, it examines how students' own storytelling narratives can support them in meeting challenges of learning a new language, and adjusting to a new culture. Previous findings suggest more than half of colleges are not doing enough specifically to accommodate the foreign student population and many indicated they wanted more training on how to make foreign students successful. Finally, a practical, research-informed, resilience rating scale provides faculty and counselors with a measure for promoting student retention.

China's ascendancy in the global market. International students often study one language to an advanced level, and a second, or even third one at a basic level. Anyone doing business on the international basis is going to be more competitive with speaking two languages, English and Chinese.

International students, who study a foreign language abroad, may experience more social adjustment problems than their domestic peers (Narra-Tumma & Claudius, 2013). The challenges they face can include problems with immigration/visa status, separation from family, limited financial resources, and isolation due to difficulty speaking a new language and learning unfamiliar customs, and negotiating a new educational system. Di Maria and Kwai (2014) explored the attitudes toward foreign students of staff members in student-affairs offices at colleges and found that as many as 64% said their offices were not doing anything specifically to accommodate the foreign student population and 90% said they wanted more training on how to make foreign students successful. The researchers concluded that the conversation for international educators should shift from recruitment strategies to retention.

To succeed and maintain their well-being, foreign-language learners must be resilient, able to bounce back from stress. Benson, Bodycott, and Brown (2013) emphasized that studying abroad is a holistic experience with a variety of potential benefits including linguistic, cultural, personal, professional, and intercultural. Achieving personal outcomes of language proficiency and competence require individuals to overcome challenges, and to form and project a new second-language identity. There is limited research focused on the protective factors and the coping strategies among international foreign-language learners. Caruana (2014) suggested that institutions reconceptualize global citizenship as a concept embracing diversity, belonging, community, and solidarity, and support the development of pedagogies that embrace cultural biography and storytelling.

Storytelling is an important educational technique that may play an important role in the process of development for individuals. Not enough is known about the relationship between storytelling and the psychological resilience of the adult learner. Adults draw upon stories for strength in multiple contexts. One can recall the stories of childhood, and one can recall the past and present stories of adulthood, and one can tell stories and some learn to teach through stories.

The purpose of this research study is to produce information about the relationships and predictability between experiencing storytelling as a child and adult resilience.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Resilience

Researchers stated that while debate remains about what constitutes resilient behavior and how to best measure adaption to hardship, certain trends have emerged (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Psychologists have moved away from vulnerability/deficit models of resilience. A paradigm shift has occurred that focuses on strengths as opposed to deficits and on health as opposed to illness. Resilience is viewed as part of ordinary healthy development, rather than extraordinary. Resilience is not viewed as a one-dimensional trait that an individual either has or has not. Resilient behaviors are often expressed in various degrees, depending on the context of the challenging circumstances. Further research should focus on finding assets and resources that promote healthy outcomes.

Psychological systems researcher, Henning (2011), argued that the struggles of life are a necessary, inherent process where one learns to shed an old self to grow to be a more developed resilient self. He advocated systems thinking and openness to view adversity as a developmental transition to facilitate resilience.

2.2. Resilience and storytelling

Storytelling plays an important part in the development of identity and autobiographical memories as children mature into adults (Dingfielder, 2008). Storytelling creates a sense of belonging and connectedness. Family histories are an important vehicle through which to create meaning and a sense of intergenerational self. Storytelling links past experiences to the present, while providing a rich resource for emotional coping and psychological resilience to face life's events. Researchers (Duke, Lazarus, & Fivush, 2008; Frude & Killick, 2011; Kiser, Baumgardner, & Dorado, 2010) discovered through ethnographic studies that knowledge of family history, specifically from family storytelling, can be a predictor of a person's ability to overcome psychological challenges. Children who knew more about their family histories: (1) had lower anxiety and behavioral problems and (2) greater self-esteem, internal control, family functioning, and family cohesion. Knowing family stories, when facing the negative events of life, was significantly correlated with increased resilience, better adjustment, and improved chances of good clinical outcomes.

Trees and Kellas (2009) found by analyzing narrative data that there were two primary functions of storytelling: (1) narratives help people make sense of difficult experiences, and (2) stories provide insight into people's conceptualizations of the world, including their understanding of their family relationships.

Storytelling is an important educational technique that may play an important role in the process of development for individuals. Previous survey research (Nguyen, Stanley, & Stanley, 2014) found that the most popular stories experienced by adults as children were personal, folktales, literary, religious, and blended. This study will focus on investigating the effects of these types of stories.

Storytelling can help people form new identities in times of conflict, recall old wisdom, and transform endings to challenges of life. Accomplished cultural members could develop resilience, a way to face the challenges of life, facilitated by the deep and personal meaning of storytelling (Dingfielder, 2008). The lessons learned from stories serve as a protective balm against the painful, storms of life.

Story framing is a technique designed to redirect people's narratives about themselves in a way that can lead to lasting changes in behavior. It is most useful for people who have failed to come up with a coherent interpretation of a traumatic event in their lives. Traumas that cause prolonged stress are usually the ones that people cannot make sense of and that people find troubling. Wilson (2011), who uses narratives for improving resilience, stated that writing allows individuals to take a step back to reframe and reinterpret what happened.

Wilks and Spivey (2010) analyzed the relationship between academic stress and resilience in social interaction through an examination of case studies. Storytelling may provide decreased academic stress, while at the same time the storytelling enhanced resilience. East, Jackson, O'Brien, and Peters (2010) were health care professionals who analyzed case studies of individuals who witnessed tragedy, human adversity, and resilience. They concluded that storytelling is both a valuable qualitative research method and an approach that can improve resilience.

Noltemeyer and Bush (2013) concluded that adult nursing students sharing stories was effective in developing resilience in a number of ways. The researchers examined the data from audio-taped interviews and found out the significant themes for participants were the efficacy of learning resiliency through the pedagogy of storytelling, the value of community, and the transformative resiliency development of applying the learning to their own lives. Storytelling provides a safe and non-threatening environment. Resiliency is an abstract concept that can be made concrete in the context of story. The stories written and told by students are measures of their growth in understanding resilience. Storytelling and the subsequent discussion move resiliency from the theoretical to the practical. College students who fail may not have developed productive strategies to address life challenges. Adults recalling childhood stories of resilience may discover coping strategies as they negotiate the challenges of college. Knowledge of how adult students' experiences

of childhood storytelling influences resilience could provide practical benefits for increasing retention. Adult students as parents or future parents could educate their own children in resilience through storytelling.

Research findings using controlled experiments (Thompson & Haddock, 2012) suggested that narratives may be more effective in persuading some people than others. Some participants were motivated by emotional situations in stories, while other participants had a need for cognition, facts and information. This finding has implications for the present study, and amplifies the question of whether different types of stories (e.g. personal, folktale, or religious) are more effective in influencing resilience than others.

3. Method

3.1. Purpose
This research seeks to advance our understanding of the relationship between resilience and experiences with storytelling, and identify specific coping skills when faced with the real-life adversity of attending college in a foreign land and learning a second language. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed: (a) What is the relationship between childhood experiences of storytelling and adult resilience? (b) What is the relationship between adulthood experiences of storytelling and adult resilience? (c) Is there a noteworthy difference between resilience scores and being told stories by family members, being read stories aloud from books, or hearing personal tales, folktales, religious stories, literary stories, or blended stories? (d) What are the protective factors or coping strategies adult foreign-language learners use for resilience?

3.2. Design
To address these questions, researchers used a mixed-method non-experimental research design. The quantitative part of the study addressed the first three research questions. Data collection consisted of survey results which measured adult foreign-language learner's perceptions of the role of storytelling in promoting resilience. Correlations and multiple linear regression analysis addressed whether childhood experiences and adult experiences of being told stories could predict adult resilience. The goal was to determine if storytelling was related to a standardized measure of resilience. The qualitative part of the study addressed the last research question, and used interviews with a narrative analysis to attempt to understand the protective and promotive factors of resilience. The focus on the lived experiences of students employed the qualitative research approach steeped in phenomenological methodology. Writing and telling a story revealed a deeper understanding of the participant, the person they were in younger years and the person they would like to be in the future. Responses to adversity involved understanding emotions which are best explored through the safety of reflecting and reframing the stories of our lives.

3.3. Participants
Participants were 21 adult college students (18–35 years old), of which 17 were studying Chinese as a second language and 4 were studying English as a second language at Shaanxi Normal University (SNNU, Xi'an, China, population, 6.5 million). The 17 Chinese language learners came from different countries and spoke 11 different languages as their primary language. The 4 studying English came from rural towns in China. The participants may or may not have used storytelling to teach previously. "Teaching" is defined here as informally mentoring peers outside of class or teaching one's own children, or doing practice teaching during a language class while supervised by an instructor or professor.

3.4. Procedures
Participants were recruited through email. A database of participants was generated from two SNNU second-language class email lists, one Chinese and one English. The total class lists contained emails for 57 individuals. The researchers emailed participants an invitation to complete an informed consent document, background questionnaire asking to self-report their age, gender, country of origin, native language, type of graduate program, and second language currently studying. Participants also were

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required to affirm their willingness to schedule a 30–45 min face-to-face interview. Researchers invited a selection of the first 25 participants who responded within one week. Participants clicked on a link to access a secure website and completed the survey ($n = 21$). The narrative interviews ($n = 20$) were conducted in English and Chinese by a multilingual female Vietnamese doctoral psychology candidate fluent in English, Mandarin Chinese, and Vietnamese. Clarification of questions was provided in the participants' second language, which was English or Chinese. Each interview was conducted in private settings and averaged 30–45 min. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the interviewer.

3.5. Measures

3.5.1. Brief resilience scale (BRS)
The BRS (see Table 1) (Smith et al., 2008) was designed as an outcome measure to assess the adult's ability to bounce back or recover from stress. This scale consists of six-item statements, three are positively stated (e.g. I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times) and three are negatively stated (e.g. It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens). The adults rate the extent to which they agree with the statements by using the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Higher scores on the BRS indicate higher levels of resilience. The BSR is scored by calculating a mean for the entire instrument for each participant. Windle, Bennett, and Noyes (2011) assessed the psychometric rigor of 19 measures of resilience, including the BRS. Their results indicated that BRS was in the top four measures that received the best psychometric ratings. Research on the BRS has focused on the benefits of intervention for clinical populations recovering from illness and stress. Shortcomings of the BRS were found to include that the BSR does not explain the resources and assets that an individual possesses to bounce back from stress. The Cronbach's alpha for the BRS for the sample was .69, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

3.5.2. Storytelling survey (SS)
This self-report survey (see Table 3) was developed by the researchers to measure participants' storytelling experiences, and based on analysis of the review of literature and findings from previous studies conducted by the researchers (Nguyen, Stanley, & Stanley et al., 2014; Stanley & Dillingham, 2013). The first part of the survey (*Intensity of Childhood Storytelling*) addresses the respondents' personal experiences as children with storytelling. The questions are about how the adults had been exposed to storytelling, who the primary storytellers were (e.g. parents, relatives, or teachers), the story types remembered (e.g. personal, folktale, and literary), and the delivery method (storytelling versus read aloud from books, mono or bilingually). The Cronbach's alpha for the storytelling questionnaire for the sample was .77, indicating good internal consistency.

Table 1. The BRS (Smith et al., 2008)				
Items				
Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements by using the scale:				
5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.				
2. I have a hard time making it through stressful events.				
3. It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.				
4. It is hard for me to snap back after something bad happens.				
5. I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.				
6. I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life.				

Note: Items 1, 3, and 5 are positively worded, and items 2, 4, and 6 are negatively worded. The BRS is scored by reverse coding items 2, 4, and 6, and finding the mean of the six items.

The SS Part 2 (*Respondent Indicating Use of Storytelling*) addresses the respondents' personal experiences as adult storytellers and the nature of those experiences. This section contained two basic questions: (1) Did the adults recall the stories of childhood and tell those stories to peers or children, and (2) Did they use storytelling in their own teaching?

The SS Part 3 (*Relative Impact of Storytelling*) addresses the possible effects and impacts on resilience, specifically coping with the struggles of learning a second language abroad. Questions probed both the impact of childhood and the adult storytelling. SS items are positively worded, and responses are on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating more experiences with storytelling.

3.5.3. Semi-structured narrative interview

The researchers developed the narrative interview (see Appendix) to identify and to describe the role of storytelling in fostering resilient behavior among adult language learners at a foreign university. The narrative interview explored the unique experiences of international second language learners in China. Participants related detailed and complex stories about how they overcame adversity to learn a second language. The interview consisted of a list of eight "catalyst" questions (Ungar et al., 2007). These eight catalyst questions were a stimulus for the participants' to tell their stories about learning a second language.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative analysis

The purpose of this study was to determine if childhood experiences of storytelling can predict resilience with an adult student population. To address the research questions (Q) for this study, correlations and linear regression analyses were conducted. Descriptive statistics of the BSR showed that the mean resilience was 3.5 on a five-point scale, standard deviation of .69 (see Table 2).

(Qa) Is there a significant relationship between childhood experiences of storytelling and adult resilience? This was partially supported with a significant relationship found between adults experiencing childhood religious storytelling with the BSR resilience score ($r = -.55$, $p < .05$). The correlation indicated that those adults who experienced religious storytelling had a moderate, negative relationship with their score on the BSR. Contrary to expectations, none of the other types of storytelling experienced as child (e.g. personal, folktales, and literary) were significantly related to resilience. More exploration of the role of religious storytelling in future studies would clarify this issue.

(Qb) concerned the relationship between experience of adult storytelling and resilience. The correlation analysis indicated that adults reporting using storytelling in their own teaching of peers or children ($r = .55$, $p < .01$) was significantly correlated with resilience.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the sample	
	College Students
Sample Size	21
Age (years)	
18–25	14
25–30	5
30–40	2
Gender (% female)	52
BRS score	M (3.5) SD (.69)

(Qc) asked if certain types of story experiences could predict score on resilience (BSR). Linear regression analysis indicated a significant positive relationship between adults using storytelling in their teaching and resilience, ($r = .55$, $R^2 = .31$, $F (1, 19) = 8.374$, $p < .009$). Regression equation: Score on BRS = 2.323 + 0.55 (score on the SS using storytelling in teaching question.) This indicates that those adults who use storytelling in their teaching tend to have a moderately higher score on their resilience score on the BSR. The BRS was positively, moderately correlated with use of storytelling, That is, when a participant took on the role of storyteller to teach his/her own child or adult peers in class, there was a positive association with resilience.

The lack of other significant relationships does not necessarily mean that there are no relationships between childhood storytelling and resilience to be discovered. Future research is needed to examine relationships between childhood storytelling and adult resilience in a more comprehensive fashion.

There were other significant relationships between measures, unrelated to the stated research questions, but noteworthy for understanding the experience and impact of storytelling. The correlation analysis indicated that the variable, "recalling the stories of my childhood helps me cope with the struggles of learning a second language", was significantly positively correlated ($p < .01$) to most types of stories: religious ($r = .56$), literary ($r = .47$), blended ($r = .56$), read aloud ($r = .55$), and multilingual ($r = .50$) (see Table 4).

The variable, "recalling the stories of my childhood helps me cope with the struggles of learning a second language," was significantly positively correlated ($p < .01$) to the storytelling source: teachers ($r = .46$). The variable, "recalling the stories that I have heard in my adulthood help me cope with my struggles learning a second language," was significantly positively correlated ($p < .01$) to these types of stories: religious ($r = .66$), read aloud ($r = .56$), and storytelling source of relatives ($r = .56$).

Personal childhood experiences with storytelling were a major topic in the SS. The adult second-language learners were asked to respond to a series of statements about storytelling grouped in five categories (experiences, storytellers, types, use, and impact) using a Likert-type scale with "1" indicating that they strongly disagreed and "5" indicating that they strongly agreed with the statement. The items, mean responses, and standard deviations (SD) are shown in Table 3.

Results showed that the second-language adult learners in this study could remember a variety of experiences with storytelling. For the childhood storytelling experiences as a significant part of childhood, there was a mean rating of 4.0, SD = .90. Being told stories or read to in more than one language was not that common, with a mean rating of 2.69, SD = 1.49.

Storytelling questions indicated the most common sources of storytellers were parents ($M = 4.43$, SD = .75) and grandparents ($M = 3.05$, SD = 1.47). Types of stories remembered included personal stories being remembered most often, $M = 4.38$, SD = .74, with literary tales being remembered less often, $M = 3.43$, SD = 1.10.

Respondents indicated that the use of storytelling as adults had average scores below 3.0. The relative impact of storytelling in second-language acquisition responses were in the 3.0 average ranges.

4.2. Qualitative analysis

(Qd) What are the protective factors or coping strategies of adult foreign language learners for resilience? Data analysis was guided by the Glaser and Strauss' constant comparative method (as cited in Ungar et al., 2007). Both sensitizing concepts derived from previous case studies (Bernard, 1993, 1995; Mullet, Akerson, & Turman, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2014; Pyne & Means, 2013) and indigenous concepts that arose directly from the data were used to identify common themes in the

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Table 3. Mean scores of college students' perceptions about storytelling questionnaire items		
College student responses		
n **= 21**		
Item		
Intensity of childhood storytelling		
1. Being told stories by my family was a significant part of my growing up	4.0	.90
2. I can recall many family stories told from my childhood	3.85	1.04
3. Being read stories aloud from books was a significant part of my growing up	2.67	1.20
4. Being told stories or read to was done in more than one language	2.69	1.49
Most common storytellers		
5. My grandparents told me stories	3.05	1.47
6. My parents told me stories	4.43	.75
7. My siblings told me stories	2.29	1.51
8. Relatives (uncle, aunt, cousin, etc.) told me stories	2.76	1.14
9. My teachers told me stories	2.24	1.04
Types of stories remembered		
10. I was told folktales (Stories about make believe, magic, and good and evil.)	3.19	1.50
11. I was told personal stories	4.38	.74
12. I was told literary tales (Stories from books and movies)	3.43	1.16
13. I was told religious stories	2.48	1.33
14. I was told blended stories (Stories that blend the personal + folktale + literary)	2.76	1.30
Respondents indicating use of storytelling		
15. I often tell stories to my own children or children I know	2.90	1.41
16. I often tell stories in English or Chinese to my classmates	2.76	1.34
17. I have used often storytelling in my own teaching (of classmates or children)	2.81	1.03
Relative impact of storytelling promoting 2*nd language acquisition*		
18. Storytelling has been a significant part of my Chinese language learning	3.10	1.22
19. Recalling the stories of my childhood help me cope with the struggles learning Chinese or English	2.95	1.32
20. Recalling the stories that I have heard in my adulthood help me cope with my struggles learning Chinese or English	3.19	1.25

present study. To gain deeper understanding of the data, both researchers listened to the recordings of the participants narratives, transcribed the data, and read the transcripts multiple times. The themes of the narratives were also analyzed using the Coding Analysis Toolkit (Lu, 2008). This assisted coding raw text data of each participant's narrative. It was an additional tool to tease out how the researchers were in agreement or disagreement, identify what the narratives have in common and what differences could be found. It helped to understand the role of the factors that lead to different language identity outcomes for second language learners.

In addition, the Text Analyzer, (Adamovic, 2009) a software utility, provided an analysis of each of the participant's narrative text by finding the most frequent phrases and frequencies of words. This further validated the themes of the narratives. It amplified commonalities and differences.

Upon reflection and discussion, the researchers developed a scoring rubric (see Figure 1) based on the previous case study research of Bernard (1993, 1995) to categorize and evaluate the emerging themes of the narratives. Narratives were then analyzed using a rubric designed by the

Table 4. Intercorrelations of the BRS and measures of storytelling										
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**
1. Resilience											
2. Religious	−.55*								56**	.66**	
3. Literary							.54**		.47**		
4. Blended									.56**		.56**
5. Read										.55**	.56**
6. Multilingual										.50*	
7. Teacher									.46**		
8. Relatives										.56**	.60**
9. Child										.57**	
10. Adult											
11. Storyteller	.55**										

Notes: Key to measures: 1 = BRS; Storytelling items, 2 = 13, 3 = 12, 4 = 14, 5 = 3, 6 = 4, 7 = 9, 8 = 8, 9 = 19, 10 = 20, 11 = 17.

$*p < .05$.

$**p < .01$.

Figure 1. Narrative resilience scale adapted from (Bernard, 1993, 1995).

Resilience Qualities	Clearly Stated 5	Stated 4	Cleary Implied 3	Implied 2	Absent 1
Social Competence Seeks positive interactions Moves between cultures Communicates, empathizes, uses humor					
Problem Solving Identifies problems, plans solutions Seeks help from others, uses resources Thinks critically, creatively, reflectively					
Autonomy Knows and expresses his/her identity Acts independently, confidently Exerts control over environment					
Sense of Purpose Works toward a better future Sets goals, prioritizes Aspires, focuses and persists					
Use of Storytelling Derives benefits from storytelling. Recalls the lessons of stories. Self awareness as hero/heroine.					
Subtotals					
Total Score = Sum of Subtotals/5					

researchers for the presence of these traits: (1) social competence, (2) problem-solving skills, (3) autonomy, (4) sense of purpose, and (5) use of storytelling The two researchers reread the narratives, looking to code statements representative of the five traits (Bernard, 1993, 1995) and noting other indigenous concepts found in the data. Using the rubric, we assigned a score of 1 ("absent") to 5 ("clearly stated") for each of the five factors with a total possible score rating of 25. For ease of interpretation, we divided the total score by 5 to the familiar Likert-type 1–5 scale. The review of the research on resilience amplified the need for researchers to develop practical assessment tools, which was done.

Data analysis revealed that the five traits of social competence, problem solving, autonomy, sense of purpose, and use of storytelling were found in the narratives of 16 second-language learners studying abroad. Some other indigenous concepts were revealed in the data. The researchers were able to quantify the qualitative findings by using a scoring rubric developed by the researchers based on previous research. The mean score on the narrative resilience scale was 3.6 with scores ranging from 1 to 5. Interestingly, the results are commensurate with the previously reported BRS score of 3.5. What follows is an example of a complete narrative, scored a 5.0., indicating all five traits on the rubric are well expressed.

4.2.1. Example Narrative Score = 5.0 on the Resilience Rating Scale

It clearly states five traits of social competence, problem solving, autonomy, sense of purpose, and use of storytelling**.**

> I come from America where my first language is English. I have been working about two years on my goals to earn a Bachelor's Degree in international business management and finance with a minor in Chinese. Learning a second language will help me fulfill my dreams of combing work with travel. My dad has encouraged me to study hard and shared with me a lot of newspaper articles about the rise of the Chinese economy.

> When I was a child, both my parents told me personal stories that help me now dealing with my problems like loneliness, homesickness and struggles speaking Chinese which is very difficult. My Dad, when often telling me about his personal stories included what it was like for him in his twenties like me. The most interesting stories were about how he moved around a lot, made friends with lots of different people, and did a lot of odd jobs. My Mum was originally from Italy, so most of the stories she told me were about Italy and what it was like to come to America and learn English. When I was in high school, she had to have surgery for a brain tumor. Thus, if I am ever feeling nervous, I pretty often think of that, when we took her to the hospital to undergo surgery. This was one of the most nervous feelings I have ever experienced. So now I really I have no reason to feel as nervous as that when giving a Chinese presentation at school. Mum was in a very serious situation, but she overcame, so my situations now seem minor in comparison.

> Here in China, my biggest challenge has been a loss of interest. One of my Chinese teachers was not very motivating. She didn't even speak Chinese in the class and her methods were not effective. Some of the other students and I complained to the administration. Chinese is quite a difficult language to study. I have had trouble with action phrases, including saying things, prepositions, and dealing with so many one syllable words. To study Chinese well, one of the most important things is the building of Chinese vocabulary, paying attention to how Chinese people pronounce the words and phrases, which will help me to sound more like them. One way I learned to speak better was to push myself to be more outgoing with Chinese people; another way was I began to understand better by watching popular Chinese TV shows. Also, remembering how in the past I solved similar, tough problems when studying in America helps me. You can always find other people with similar problems in class to help you.

> I know I can overcome problems if I face each one at a time. I know if I just think back to my parents and think, "what would they do?" I will have positive outcomes. I know my success will make my parents proud.

What follows next is an example of a complete narrative, scored a 0, indicating all five traits on the rubric are not expressed.

4.2.2. Example Narrative Score = 0 on the Resilience Rating Scale

It clearly does not state the five traits of social competence, problem solving, autonomy, sense of purpose, and use of storytelling.

I don't have goals in the life, but options. I can "live on" my parents all my life, even though they are not rich, but because this is the way I am. So, right now, I am here to study the Chinese language and culture, but I myself do not care about getting a degree. My parents pay for me to go to school and insist I find employment after my graduation. But for me, I just want to have experience in China. For this reason, I do not attend classes very often as everything that happens in class is very boring. I do not want to learn any more Chinese in class. I don't like social situations. I wish everybody would just shut up. I prefer to spend time alone with my computer. I do not study or talk with others. I have no special methods for studying or solutions for overcoming the challenges of speaking Chinese. I tend just to do nothing a lot and let things go. I used to like to take pictures, but I lost my camera.

I often feel sad. I do not have a lot of memories about my childhood. Most discussions by my parents were the orders for me to do this, or to do that. It seemed as though they didn't talk, didn't communicate, but they just shouted at me. I don't remember being told stories. I am quiet, stay to myself so I don't like telling stories either.

Next, the five traits and challenges/adversity with selected participants' illustrative responses for each trait or concept are summarized in the following sections.

4.2.3. Challenges/Adversity (n = 19)

There are personal, emotional, social, and cognitive factors in learning a language. All of the participants studying Chinese reported feeling anxiety about the challenges of moving to a foreign country like China by themselves and not speaking the language fluently. They expressed experiences of social isolation, and missing family and friends. The four Chinese students who were not studying English abroad indicated that their biggest struggle was moving from a poor rural farming community to a large city.

This response captures the adversity second language learner's face studying abroad.

They stare at you because your skin color is different and they can tell you are not from here. Language instruction classes are often boring. Instructor quality can be very uneven. You have to study long hours. You have limited resources. If you can get a job then you don't have enough time to study. The weather seems to be either very cold or very hot.

4.2.4. Social competence (n = 17)

Social competence is assessed by the quality of one's relationships and the ability to form relationships for mutual benefit. Most of the participants expressed seeking social interaction to make friends and practice their language skills, and moving between two or more cultures. Having caring, supportive people around you acts as a protective factor during times of crisis.

The only way that I can overcome the problems is keep studying very hard and try to talk as much as possible to Chinese classmates. Also, I like to meet new people and share our stories.

4.2.5. Problem solving (n = 14)

People who are able come up with solutions to a problem are better able to cope with problems than those who cannot. Most participants developed coping strategies for overcoming the shortcomings of their language program.

My instructor was not effective. I wasn't learning. I started watching Chinese TV, and listening to language audio-tapes. I would force myself to write my friends every day in Chinese on Facebook and RenRen.

4.2.6. Autonomy (n = 12)

Autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning. Autonomous learners have insights into their learning styles and strategies; take an active approach to the learning task at hand; and are willing to take risks. Most of the participants had a clear sense of identity and self-direction.

> I know whether I learn Chinese is totally up to me. I will succeed; I have set my mind to it. I believe in my abilities.

4.2.7. Sense of purpose (n = 10)

Having a sense of purpose gives people a reason to aim for something. Having a sense of purpose means having clear goals that fit into one's wider life story, so that what is done holds meaning and direction. Half of the students had clear personal and career goals for studying a second language. Half of students did not express clear goals, priorities, or the focus of their studies.

> I started studying Chinese in High School because it's a fast growing economy and America is trading with it more. I want to become an American diplomat to China.

4.2.8. Use of storytelling (n = 11)

Storytelling provides a safe and non-threatening environment. Resiliency is an abstract concept that can be made concrete in the context of story. About half of the participants reported recalling favorite personal family stories from childhood that they could draw strength and life lessons from. This finding is commensurate with the authors' two previous studies (Nguyen et al., 2014; Stanley & Dillingham, 2013).

> My mom told me stories of women who were infatuated with brand name fashion. When I asked my mom to buy me some brand name clothes, my mom got very angry with me. Her reason is she did not want me to be someone else's brand; she wanted me to be my own brand. I learned always to be true to myself.

Three participants displayed reframing (Wilson, 2011) which capitalizes on the subjective nature of personal stories to uncover underlying, underemphasized themes in people's stories that are potentially helpful. Its purpose is to arrive at an authentic and helpful story, one that does not eliminate the pain that hardship can cause but that also includes the strength that is forged in the struggle to prevail.

> At first I was sad, and when I came to study in China because I separated from my boyfriend and did not see my mother. Most of my decisions had depended on my Mum and my boyfriend. Whenever I had a difficulty, I would ask my Mum or my boyfriend to help me to make a decision or for advice what to do. I realize now they were very controlling and I was immature. I have had to learn to be more independent and that is a good thing, and I am stronger.

This reframing example amplifies the relationship between storytelling and resilience. Resilience is a natural process (Henning, 2011) where one learns to give up what he/she is for what he/she might become. Pain and adversity can be at the center of the stories we tell ourselves or we could learn to tell a reframed story that was more constructive. Through the power of story, a lonely, fearful person can become independent, and confident, ready to succeed at learning a second language in a foreign land.

4.3. Coping strategies

The preliminary qualitative analysis of the narratives identified the role of storytelling and a number of coping strategies to deal with the challenges of learning language in a resilient way. These coping strategies can be revealed and learned through storytelling. The development of these strategies is key in improving academic performance and enabling students to experience success in school, and subsequently, in life with lasting effects on academic performance.

5. Discussion

In this study, we explored the relationship between resilience and personal narrative, and identified specific coping skills when faced with the real life adversity of attending college in a foreign land and learning a second language. A unique contribution of the study was that quantitative and qualitative research methods were used together.

The BRS (Smith et al., 2008) was used as a quantitative measure. The BRS used in combination with a SS developed by the researchers was used for identifying protective and vulnerability factors of resilience. The mean resilience was 3.5 on a five-point scale (see Table 1) which was consistent with the 3.5 score of undergraduates in a study by Smith et al. (2008).

Research has indicated storytelling plays an important part in the development of identity and autobiographical memories as children mature into adults (Dingfielder, 2008). Research (Duke, Lazarus, & Fivush, 2008; Trees & Kellas 2009) further supported that strengthening social bonds and developing emotional resilience can result from storytelling. In this study, we proposed positive relationships between childhood experiences of storytelling and adult resilience.

The quantitative results indicated most of the childhood experiences of storytelling did not predict adult resilience. Surprisingly, one relationship between experiencing religious stories and resilience was negative. We conjecture that while participants spoke of fondness for parables, stories that teach life lessons, there may be sometimes a negative reaction to religion. As some of the participants, expressed in their narrative, "When my parents were strict and tried to impose a specific religion upon me, I often had strong feelings of anger and would rebel by doing the opposite of what they told me". In contrast, some narrative research supported the benefits of adult storytelling upon resilience (East, Jackson, O'Brien, & Peters, 2010; Wilks & Spivey, 2010; Wilson, 2011), but scant attention has been paid to the specific context of learning a second language.

Research question (Qb) proposed a positive relationship between adulthood experiences of storytelling and adult resilience. Results indicated only one factor, adults who used storytelling in their own teaching of peers or their own children, was a positive predictor of resilience. A typical participant description of "teaching" was "I would meet after class and help fellow students learn Chinese by telling stories in Chinese and then asking those questions about the stories." The research of Thompson and Haddock (2012) suggested that different types of narratives may be more effective in persuading some people than others. The researchers' previous research (Nguyen et al., 2014; Stanley & Dillingham, 2013) indicated the most frequently kinds of stories recalled by adults from childhood were personal stories, folktales, literary stories, and blended stories. However, there is scant research on what types of stories affect resilience the most, or is it a combination of different stories? In this study, a positive relationship existed between the types of stories experienced as a child and their adult resilience scores. The results indicated that adults reporting experiencing childhood religious stories were significantly negatively correlated with resilience, which was contrary to expectations. None of the other types of storytelling experienced as child (e.g. personal, folktales, and literary) predicted noteworthy correlations in resilience as measured by the BRS.

Several types of stories predicted noteworthy correlations in resilience measured by the SS. The results indicated that recalling the stories of childhood help adults cope with the struggles of learning a second language. This was significantly positively related to most types of stories: religious, literary, blended, read aloud multilingual, and storytelling source of teachers. Also, the results indicated that recalling the stories that adults heard in their adulthood helped adult cope with their struggles learning a second language. Recalling adulthood stories was positively related to types of stories: religious and read aloud, and storytelling sources of relatives.

The quantitative and qualitative findings in this study complement one another to provide support for the role of storytelling and resilience in second-language learning, a previously limited research area. The qualitative analysis helped us understand the role of the factors derived from previous resilience studies (Bernard, 1993, 1995) in the context of different language identity outcomes for second-language learners (Mullet, Akerson, & Turman, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2014; Pyne & Means, 2013).

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A major limitation of quantitative methods lead to conclusions divorced from lived reality. Researchers observed that qualitative research allows for a more in-depth report of lived experiences (Benson, Bodycott, & Brown, 2013; Narra-Tumma & Claudius, 2013). Analysis of narratives is a method of data analysis and communicating findings to readers.

6. Limitations and implications for future research and practice

The reliability and validity of the BRS has been clearly established for English, not yet for Chinese. The Cronbach's alpha of .69 for the BRS indicated acceptable reliability. The Cronbach's alpha of .77 for the storytelling questionnaire indicated good reliability. The storytelling questionnaire exhibited good face validity as the questions were derived from on analysis of the review of literature and findings from previous studies.

The sample size of 21 participants was small and not randomly selected; therefore, this investigation should be viewed as a pilot study. The process of using a rubric for transforming the qualitative data into quantitative data was not subject to rigorous statistical analysis. While utmost care was taken in the qualitative analysis by two researchers assisted by two software programs, no inter-rater reliability statistics were reported.

The interviews were conducted in the participant's second language of English or Chinese so therefore some meaning may be lost.

Despite these limitations, our findings suggest important implications for future practice and research on using storytelling as both a research method for studying resilience and a practical intervention for promoting resilience. The growing number of second-language learners studying abroad can be helped to overcome adversities. Di Maria and Kwai (2014) observed that educators need to ensure that international students succeed academically, because retention is important to continuing recruitment. Understanding the role of resilience for retention can provide better training for both faculty and staff members in working with international students. For one, screen students' resilience with the BRS. Use the narrative storytelling and scoring rubric to further explore students' resilience and awareness of storytelling's role for promoting resilience. This activity itself may be beneficial in reducing stress and identifies coping strategies. The act of students discussing and telling stories about how they are overcoming struggles not only promotes the use of a second language, but may be therapeutic and motivates social connections that will hopefully continue outside of the classroom and even into social media.

A growing body of research indicates storytelling is not being used as it could be. Previous research (Nguyenet al., 2014) found instructors and learners reported using storytelling in the classroom, but the researchers concluded that storytelling's full potential has not been realized. Participants in previous studies found storytelling an effective strategy for language learning and a good teaching tool. Further research is needed to focus on finding psychological aspects of tellers and listeners during the storytelling process. Research needs to illuminate the principles/guidelines that would better inform instructors how to use storytelling for teaching and therapeutic psychological benefits. However, using storytelling in the classroom in China is still viewed as something separate, less esteemed as academic content, despite its many benefits. Using narrative as a qualitative research method appears less esteemed among researchers than quantitative methods. The authors recommend that future research on teaching with storytelling should include larger sample sizes, more longitudinal studies and investigation of how different L1 languages affect L2 learning. Storytelling is an important educational technique that may play an important role in the process of development for individuals. Not enough is known about the relationship between learning from experiencing storytelling as a child and the values of the adult learner or psychological resilience of the adult learner. The differences, if any, between storytelling, values and resilience among college students who come from different countries should be investigated in future studies.

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Appendix

Semi Structured Narrative Interview (Nguyen, Stanley, & Stanley, 2014)

I am researching education and conducting a survey on storytelling which is one of the requirements which will enable me to complete my research. I highly appreciate your time and effort. I assure you that your personal information will be kept confidential. Your name will not be used in the analysis or publication. Please fill in the following information.

Name_____ Male___ Female ___ Age_____

Birth Place _____ First Language _____

Other Language(s)_____

Educational Goal(s)_____

Degree(s) Earned_____

Did you grow up in a bilingual home? _____

Your personal story

I am going to ask you a series of questions, to help me understand your personal story of how you ended up studying Chinese (or English) as a second language.

(1) When did you start studying language?

(2) Why did you choose to study this language?

(3) Do you have someone who has influenced on your choice of studying this language?

(4) Did she/he/or they tell you their own stories related to language study? Do you remember certain stories? What did they teach? How did they make you feel?

(5) Have you had any challenges during studying language? If you have had challenges, what are they?

(6) How do you overcome the challenges of studying language? What are your solutions?

(7) Is your study of language difficult or not? Why? What important things make studying the language easy?

(8) Who plays important roles in your achievement of learning the language?

(9) Could you share with me a family story that you recall often that gives you strength?

(10) Could you share a story from your adulthood that gives you strength?