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CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Perspectives of learners and teachers on implementing the storytelling strategy as a way to develop story writing skills among middle school students

Fatma Alkaaf^{1*}

Abstract: This study explores teachers' and learners' views on the impact of the storytelling strategy on developing the story writing skills of Omani seven graders. One hundred and twenty grade seven learners and five teachers participated in this study. The participants completed two questionnaires. The first questionnaire administered to the learners referred to the benefits gained from the storytelling strategy. The second survey was designed for the five teachers who applied this strategy to the grade seven learners. Semi-structured interviews were also used for the five teachers participating in this study. The main findings of the study were: 93.4% found the strategy useful, 92% liked this strategy and 92.4% agreed that whilst they prepared for writing the story, they were doing more things during their preparation, such as organising their ideas and creating conceptual maps. Furthermore, teachers' opinions indicated that most of the teachers agreed that they have benefited from the strategy.

Subjects: Teachers & Teacher Education; Language & Linguistics; Language Teaching & Learning; Literature

Keywords: storytelling; strategy teaching; Arabic teaching

1. Introduction

Storytelling is still largely featured in both entertainment and communication, with a firm footing in every human institution: churches of all kinds, schools and universities, businesses and families (Abrahamson, 1998). All kinds of stories are to be found on television, film, email, magazines, books



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Fatma Alkaaf has a MPhil in philosophy from Dundee University in the UK and a PhD in Education from Egypt. She has extensive experience in various areas of Arabic teaching. She is currently an assistance professor of curriculum and teaching methods of Arabic language at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman. She is interested in all things that will enhance student's learning in school. This led to the present study looking into how the storytelling strategy can be used to enhance student's story writing.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Storytelling is imperative that learners develop their story writing. This study aims to explore the views of learners and teachers on implementing the storytelling strategy as a way to improve learners' story writing. The research data are collected from teachers' questionnaire, teachers' interview and pupils' questionnaire. The findings of this research have shown (1) 93.4% found the strategy useful; (2) 92% liked this strategy; (3) 92.4% agreed that while they prepared for writing the story, they were doing more things during their preparation, such as organizing their ideas, creating conceptual maps and taking their teachers' suggestions into account; (3) teachers' opinions indicated that most of the teachers agreed that they have benefited from the strategy.

and in the press amongst others. People communicate with one another by telling stories about their day to day existence, giving advice or telling children what will happen if they misbehave. In addition, researchers have found that storytelling is coming back as a teaching and learning tool in both education and businesses (Douglas, 2005). Moreover, both national and international storytelling guilds are increasing in number so that oral storytelling is gradually expanded to cover additional areas, including both political and cultural fields.

Abrahamson (1998) believes that storytelling is the base on which education stands. Storytelling has always been used with children in the earlier grades, but there is now evidence to indicate that it is being used as a teaching tool. It is equally applicable across all disciplines with adult learners. Storytelling is also being suggested for online education in order to create more immediate learning atmosphere, thus enabling learners to think deeply as they enrich their existing knowledge (Heo, 2004).

McDrury and Alterio (2003) believe that storytelling in education is a very thoughtful learning activity equating to experiences in life. They indicate that storytelling is itself a learning theory because of the deep thought it provokes and the new information it brings to the fore.

Business organisations of various kinds now regard storytelling as a leadership tool and also as a way of making organisational change easier (Denning, 2005). In addition, Kouzes and Posner (2003) argue that organisational stories are needed in order to take organisations forward because they give employees a sense of personal commitment and they show how to do something rather than someone simply saying it should be done. Denning (2005) thinks that storytelling could easily be that sixth discipline. The features Peter Senge (2006) imagined are all new and refer to broader patterns of thinking and a way of sharing hopes throughout the ongoing learning process.

2. Benefits of storytelling

Ellis and Brewster (2002) made it clear that young children should both listen to stories and tell stories themselves from the earliest age possible. These early years are of vital importance in a child's development. During these years, children grow mentally, physically and emotionally, and acquire attitudes about themselves that may remain with them for the rest of their lives. In addition, their individual creativity begins to come to the fore as children grow. Stephanie (1991) states that children change more in these years than at any other time. Kortner (1988) indicates that parents of young children, along with their teachers must take advantage of these crucial years in order to make sure the children are provided with activities that will be of use to them in the future. He feels that storytelling could be one of these. Therefore, young children should be read or told stories in order to help them to develop:

- A confident feeling about learning.
- Creativity to make up their own stories.
- The ability to tell, write, listen and act stories from their picture books.

In this regard, Chen (2008) found that storytelling builds up the self-confidence of students towards English learning and furthermore develops their learning independence. There are a number of things to be taken into account when storytelling is used at this level. As propounded by Malkina (1995), storytelling as a means to communicate seeks to foster cultural literacy as follows:

- Storytelling as written text.
- Storytelling to understand.
- Storytelling as a way of coding and decoding.

Garvie (1990) states that storytelling can be successful if the storyteller and pupil use the language properly. She also mentions that the different types of language awareness such as linguistic, cognitive and semantic, discourse, strategic, socio-linguistic and communicative awareness are very important. In order to begin to use language well, a young pupil must establish his or her own mental

setting in order to help him or her to improve the ability to speak and listen within the context of storytelling. Life and linguistic experience are both innate features of storytelling. Stories make a different world real to a child, so that he or she feels and knows a different kind of life. Rixon (1992) believed that storytelling gives children the same kind of experience as play does. He considered that the way they saw the story in their minds helped them to live within it, thus getting to know the characters and becoming involved all the way through. Shirley (2005) indicated that storytelling can enable students to implement what they have learned from stories in their own lives.

Storytelling is a one to one experience rather than a group activity. Every story has some cultural value. Fairy tales are in the ancient folklore of many societies, but modern stories are about individuals and their immediate surroundings (Malkina, 1995). Mallan (1991) and Eela (2016) find that learning a foreign language can help the learner to build a whole new view of the world. Storytelling is thus a very useful tool in language teaching.

Garvie (1990) feels that the next structure is important as it follows a recognisable course. Content structure has also been investigated. Text has an outer structure constituted by the sentence sequence and an inner structure formed by the original meanings. Overall, the story consists of structure, method and those elements that form the way in which the story is understood. Chang (2004) and Lucarevski (2016) noted that storytelling improves learners' vocabulary and sentence structure.

The manner in which storytelling is understood is thought by Malkina (1995) to be the way in which the audience can interpret written information. Part of the information may be knowledge already inferred from either experience or perhaps pictures. Every story needs a structure (or perhaps a restructure) for the listener to make sense of it.

3. Storytelling in the classroom

Storytelling and folklore together have provided a basis for teaching that is both sensible and different. Children and adults nowadays find themselves learning through oral tradition just as people have done from ancient times. As always, we use oral/aural communication in order to discuss everyday occurrences and our relationships with one another.

Dyson (1988) observed how storytelling is important in terms of oral language development. He found evidence to support the claim that children's understanding of the story improved as they collaborated in order to refine their language skills. Stories in the classroom create a greater cultural awareness of how other people see the world. In this regard, Chongruksa, Prinyapol, Wadeng, and Padungpong (2010) found that storytelling helped students' multicultural understanding and cooperative learning. Since stories have come down over the course of time, they carry the hearts and souls of the people who first told them (Hendrickson, 1992). They remind us of life as it once was (Zabel, 1991).

Teachers must help young children to improve their speaking ability since it is known that a child's oral development is important for his or her literacy and a sensitive programme can make reading and writing a joyful experience (Ryan, 1993 cited Zayed, 2003).

Mary A. Jenson (1985) is a professor of early childhood education in New York. She suggests that young children are beginning to have a sense of story when they:

- (1) Remember important information more and more as they talk about a story that has already been read.
- (2) Take the roles they know when they recount a story once again.
- (3) Put the story's events in their correct order.
- (4) Use ordinary storytelling language when retelling a story.

4. Story grammar and schema

Research into story comprehension has provided new insights into the development of cognitive structures behind children's ability to tell a story. One particularly interesting model is that of narrative comprehension (i.e. the story grammar approach). This takes the view that stories have an internal structure or "grammar" constituted by a network of categories with a logical connection between them (Stein & Glenn cited Moss, 1984). The "grammar" is a set of rules to describe this. Derived from different models of story grammar, stories may be composed of several episodes: a beginning, a setting, a character or characters, a problem, action and the problem to be solved.

This approach was used by Amer (1992) in his research into how children understand stories. He indicated that children use their awareness of story grammar both in understanding and making up tales. Amer (1992) claimed that being taught story grammar helped EFL (English as a foreign language) learners to recognise the inner sequence and meta structure of the story.

Furthermore, story grammar is based on the concept of intellection schemas or format schemes which are about the mentality of abstract plans acting as a working guide for any act or structure to interpret the information encoded in our minds and by their social context. It creates a picture of what is known about life. Piaget called it the method of adjusting the world according to the mental simulation scheme. The knowledge does not conform to the pattern of knowledge within an individual. It adjusts the schema to attain harmony between prior knowledge and the new knowledge obtained and this is what Piaget referred to as accommodation (Pfeiffer & Boles, 2008).

Schema is a mental virtual structure for selecting and forecasting the story's grammar (Spivey, 1989). The story grammar includes an analysis of how characters interact with events, similarly to the manner in which the story that learners understand and practice consists of elements that collectively constitute the story grammar. This grammar is considered to verify specific elements of the schema. These elements are:

- (1) Setting: the collection of the main characters and the location of the story's events and its time.
- (2) Initiating event: an event or activity that presents a problem or a conflict, events revolving around it.
- (3) Internal response: a reaction from the hero(es) of the story related to the initial or main events.
- (4) Attempt: an activity or plan carried out by the hero to solve the problem.
- (5) Consequences: the implications of the hero's acts on the story.
- (6) Reaction: the hero's responses in the story (Stien & Glenn, 1979 cited Duchan, 2006).

Reference may be made to a particular form of story grammar which can be applied in all stories. For example, Lauritzen and Jaeger (1997) mentioned that each story should consist of five elements:

- Setting
- Characters
- Action
- Causation
- Importance

Another researcher such as, Fisher (2007) indicated that a story includes the following structures:

- Opening
- Build up
- Problem
- Solution
- End

In addition, Ibnian (2010) suggested the notion of “story-mapping” indicating that there are certain structures or elements of a story:

- Setting
- Characters
- Conflict
- Plot
- Solution
- Theme

In the light of the above, some elements can be seen as common to all three researchers. Each one has a starting point giving the setting or beginning of the first event (episode) of the story and most of them are common. The last event includes the solution of the problem or plot. In addition, each design involves a reaction or moral which makes sense of the story.

The purpose of this study was to determine learners’ and teachers’ perceptions about storytelling.

5. Significance of the study

This study will contribute to the research on the storytelling strategy in the Arabic language and its effect on developing the story writing skills of seventh grade pupils in Oman. It also endeavours to:

- (a) Raise the awareness of Arabic language teachers with reference to the importance of using storytelling in enhancing the story writing process.
- (b) Raise the awareness about the storytelling strategy among Arabic language teaching and possibly encourage the teachers to explore its potential in their classrooms instead of the conventional method.
- (c) Focusing the attention of Arabic teachers on the fact that storytelling is suitable in our practice and suitable for our students.
- (d) Directing the attention of Arabic language teachers towards the importance of storytelling as an aid for enhancing communication skills.

5. Method

5.1. Research questions

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the perceptions of learners about the storytelling strategy?
- (2) What are the perceptions of teachers about the storytelling strategy?

5.2. Design

The present study adopts a quantitative and qualitative design, employing two questionnaires and semi-structured teachers’ interviews. The first questionnaire was administered to 120 learners. This questionnaire aims to explore learners’ views on whether they have benefited from their experience

with the storytelling strategy. The questionnaire consisted of 24 items. The items were classified into three sections:

- (1) Learners' opinions regarding the storytelling strategy.
- (2) Their writing in stories.
- (3) Their preparation before story writing in classroom and at home.

The second questionnaire was administrated to the five teachers who employed the study's strategy in order to explore their perceptions about the benefits they thought they had obtained from the storytelling strategy. The questionnaire consisted of 19 items and two open-ended questions. These teachers involved and used interviews in order to collect data about the effect of storytelling.

5.3. Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 120 learners from grade seven (12–13 years old in Salalah, the main city of Dohfar Governorate in Oman. Participants were recruited from four public schools (two boys' schools and two girls' schools) and one private school (mixed learners) in the present study. All of them were taught using the adopted storytelling strategy.

The researcher provided the teachers involved in the study with a two-week workshop about how to implement the storytelling strategy among their learners. The training involved the 5 teachers who taught the 120 learners at the 5 schools. The storytelling strategy consisted of 18 lessons.

6. Steps of the storytelling strategy

6.1. Pre-storytelling stage

Before telling the story, the following pre-activities were conducted: pictures and asking learners warm-up questions related to the story.

6.2. During storytelling stage

In this stage, the teacher uses different voice pitches in order to tell the story, as well as various stress and intonation patterns. Sometimes, s/he may be able to imitate certain voices in the story. The story bag can be used successfully in this stage. Sometimes, the teacher can pause and ask learners about their predictions and expectations of the coming events in the story. In addition, the teacher asks some stimulating questions and asks the learners to participate in some activities such as role-playing, writing and drawing. Finally, the teacher expects that the learners do some homework.

6.3. Post-storytelling stage

In this stage, the teacher uses consolidation activities such as: evaluation of writing activities.

Five stories covering several themes were included in the strategy. These stories are, "I'm free", "Silence of a River", "Redha and the Wiseman of the Mountain", "In the Forest", "A Small Lantern" and "Khawla bint Al-Azour". All the stories were drafted by the researcher with the exception of "Khawla bint Al-Azour", which was borrowed with permission from the Ministry of Education. The strategy relied on sources such as Alex (1988), Anderson (2005), Dujmovic (2006), Groce (2001), Robinson (2008), and Rosen (1986), in order to formulate stimulating questions; Ralston (1993) and AhSeo (2007) for displaying the pictures and discussing them with learners; Morrow (1986) and Vygotsky (1978) for acting and role-playing; Vygotsky (1978) and Ball and Stafford (1986) for writing and drawing activities.

7. Instruments of the study

7.1. Learners' Questionnaire

This questionnaire (see Appendix A) was administered to the learners in the experimental groups. It aims to explore learners' views on whether they have benefited from their experience with the storytelling strategy. The questionnaire consisted of 24 items. The items were classified into three sections:

- (1) Learners' opinions regarding the storytelling strategy.
- (2) Their writing in stories.
- (3) Their preparation before story writing in classroom and at home.

The first section consists of 13 items and aims to capture the learners' perceptions in the experimental groups about any potential learning benefits from the storytelling strategy. The second section consisted of five items and targets perceptions related to the effect of the storytelling on their composition of stories. The third section consists of five items exploring how learners prepare when they write a story in the class and the last question identifies how many times they write a story as homework.

7.2. Teachers' questionnaire

The teachers' questionnaire (see Appendix B) was administered to the five teachers who employed the study's strategy in four public schools and a private one in order to explore their perceptions about the benefits they thought they had obtained from the storytelling strategy. It includes 19 close-ended statements and 2 open-ended questions.

7.3. Teachers' interview

Semi-interviews (see Appendix C) were also used in this study. When designing the interviews, the occasional participant mentioned in the questionnaire used previously came into play. Despite this, the interviews proved to be helpful, contributing to method triangulation and a number of participants preferred being interviewed to answering a questionnaire. The interviews were semi-structured with a schedule of questions as in the questionnaire, but also let the interviewees elaborate on their responses as and when they saw fit.

Five teachers involved in the strategy used interviews in order to collect data about the effect of storytelling and all the participants were interviewed in Arabic.

In order to determine the validity of the above instruments, 10 jury members represented by college professors specialising in language teaching or language literature verified the face validity of the instruments and suggested certain changes which were subsequently taken into consideration before arriving to the final draft of the instrument. The jury members identified and suggested corrections for some Arabic language mistakes in the teachers' questionnaire.

The reliability of the questionnaire was established by calculating the Alpha Cronbach; the coefficient was 0.81, which is considered very appropriate, thus indicating that the questionnaire is reliable.

8. Results and discussion

8.1. Analysis of the first question (the learners' questionnaire data)

1. What are the perceptions of the learners about the storytelling strategy?

Table 1. Information about the learners' responses

| Gender | | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|-----|----------------|
| Male | 62 | 51.7 |
| Female | 58 | 48.3 |
| Nationality | | Percentage (%) |
| Omani | 111 | 92.5 |
| Non-Omani | 9 | 7.5 |

8.1.1. Learners' questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was initiated in order to obtain feedback on their views about the strategy from learners. The learners' comments were analysed in order to give support to the research findings. The demographics of the 120 learners are demonstrated in Table 1.

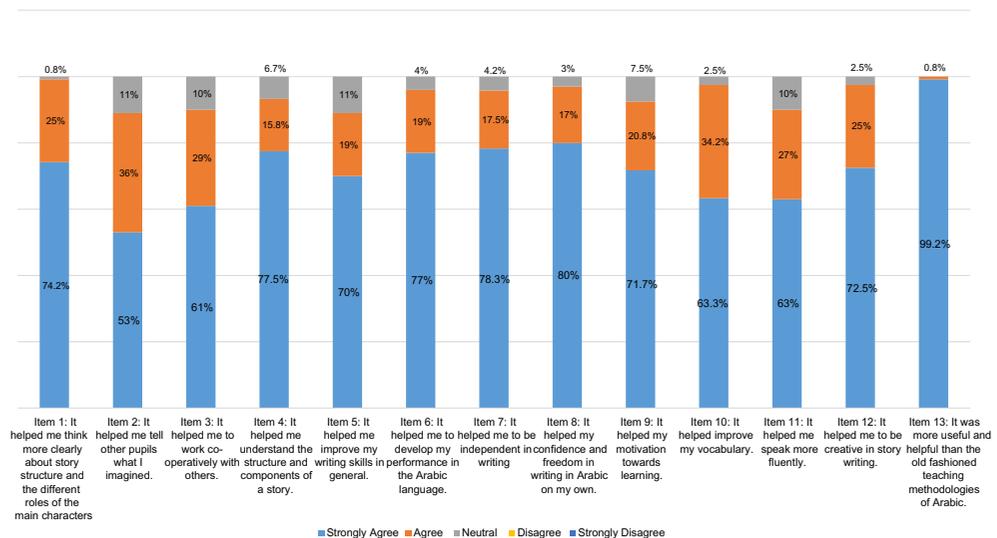
This questionnaire was administrated to the learners ($N = 120$) after the strategy was completed in order to investigate the learners' views about their experience of the storytelling strategy. The participants were asked to rate 23 items on a five-point Likert scale (i.e. 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The items were classified into three sections:

- (1) Learners' opinions regarding the storytelling strategy.
- (2) Their story writing.
- (3) Their preparation before the story writing process in the classroom and at home.

All analysed responses were used for reporting the learners' perceptions in order to provide support to the research findings. Overall, as a result of using the storytelling strategy, most of the learners felt excited when writing their stories.

Figure 1 illustrates that 93.4% of learners mentioned that they benefited from this strategy. However, it is possible to say that 94.4% agreed that they found it beneficial and were let with a favourable impression about the storytelling strategy activities in general. For example, they indicated that the strategy helped them to think more clearly about the story's elements and structure and components of a story. Moreover, they indicated that this strategy improved their writing skills in general and story writing skills in particular. For instance, one of those learners responded orally to the researcher when he handed out the questionnaire: "I believe that I know enough story

Figure 1. Questionnaire responses, Section 1: learners' opinion regarding the storytelling strategy.



structures to write a story". Furthermore, 100% of the respondents stated that the strategy was more useful than the commonly practiced method of teaching composition.

In addition, during the administration of the questionnaire, the learners orally mentioned that they had found the story map useful because they could write a story based on the story elements. Learners can visualise both the structure and the elements from a story map (Daqili, 2000).

It is particularly helpful in promoting a sense of the story and the realisation that the setting, events, characters, moral, plot, conflict and the story's final denouement are all inter-related. Learners may also use story maps to plan their story writing because of their visual characteristics. A total of 92.5% enjoyed the strategy, finding it stimulating. It also motivated them in a proportion of 90% because they liked working cooperatively with one another. Storytelling may be used in association with various language skills, such as for example, communication skills and group work (Mello, 2001).

Furthermore, 89% of the learners expressed that this strategy helped them to improve their writing skills in general and 96% of them felt that it would develop their performance in the Arabic language. Storytelling has an effective impact on engagement and motivation among learners, encouraging them to carry on improving their writing skills (Campbell & Hlusek, 2009).

Moreover, 90% of learners mentioned in this section that the storytelling strategy assisted them in speaking more fluently and 89% of them shared what they had been imagining in the course of the storytelling with other learners. Egan (2005) had already acknowledged that the value of story teaching, regardless of the nature of the story, lies in the way learners react in terms of having their emotions and imaginations stimulated. Storytelling is of use in so many ways. It can help with verbal expression and improve vocabulary by introducing new words that are easily understood in context. It improves skills in both oral and written communication, as an understanding of the story schema evolves (Colon-Vila, 1997). Storytelling shows just how unique every single person's imagination is as it sets it in motion (Hamilton & Weiss, 2011; Hana, 2010).

In addition, 97% of the learners felt confident while writing in Arabic, and started using written planning. This made them more eager to produce an interesting story (Houston, Goolrick, & Tate, 1991).

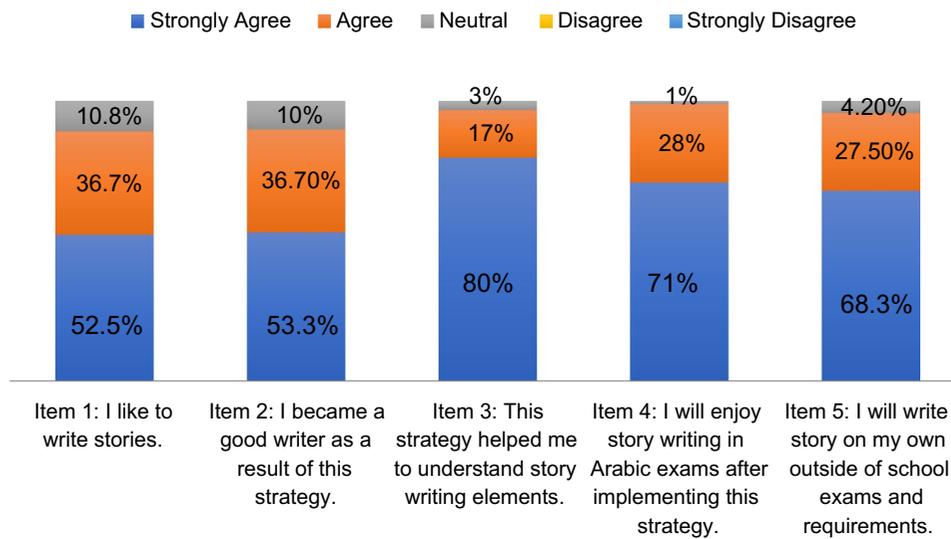
Most of the learners, namely 97.5%, indicated that the storytelling had widened their vocabulary as they decoded the meanings of words in context. It improves fluency, vocabulary acquisition, writing and recall (Farrell & Nessell, 1982). Language skills, such as vocabulary, comprehension, sequencing and story recall all improved in line with the storytelling.

A total of 96.6% of the learners considered that the storytelling not only helped them to write independently but also to be more creative in their story writing. Along with shared writing, common writing, interactive writing and guided writing, independent writing should also be monitored in learners' writing (Kowski, 2001). Another outlet for storytelling is language classes, giving learners a more creative classroom activity. Storytelling is a two-way communication model and since ideas beget ideas, it is co-creative (Roney, 1996).

All participants thought that the storytelling strategy was more useful than the accepted methodologies.

It can be seen from the data in Figure 2, that 92% of the learners in the experimental group like this strategy and are able to write stories at school and at home based on its elements. A total of 97% of the learners also expressed that the strategy helped them to know story writing elements and 89.6% of them were ambitious enough to expect that after this strategy, they would become good writers and enjoy the story writing process. In fact, Arabic language examinations in Omani

Figure 2. Questionnaire responses, Section 2: learners in story writing.



schools tend to focus mainly on two composition topics, namely writing stories and free writing. Unfortunately, the learners usually choose the second option because it is easier for many of them to write about. Around 99% of the learners also indicated that they would enjoy story writing in Arabic exams after implementing this strategy, as they had not before. They argued that the predetermined topic is always difficult to write about and in order to secure their marks they always opt for the free writing option. In addition, 95.8% of the learners mentioned that their story writing would not be limited to school but they would carry on writing at home as well. This demonstrates that the strategy had an effective impact on their story writing, which led them to look forward to writing outside of school as well (Figure 3).

Overall, 92.4% of the learners in this section agreed about the preparations required in order to improve their story writing skills either in classroom or at home. Eighty-seven per cent of the learners responded that they will write a story in the class using conceptual maps in order to organise their thoughts and 96% preferred to write more than one draft or more when writing stories. In general, it could be said in this case that 96% of the learners agreed that when writing a story, they revise their writing based on the suggestions of their teacher. Furthermore, 97.2% of them performed a final punctuation and grammar check in class during story writing. Moreover, the learners indicated

Figure 3. Questionnaire responses, Section 3: Learners' preparation before story writing in the classroom and at home.

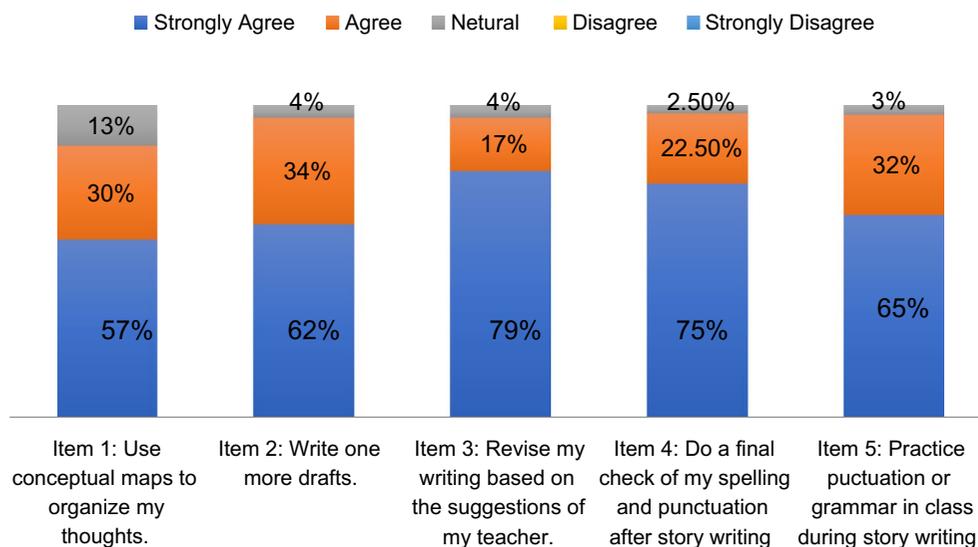


Table 2. Information about schools

| School name | Gender | Public/private | Pupils number |
|-------------|--------|----------------|---------------|
| School (A) | Male | Public | 23 |
| School (B) | Male | Public | 24 |
| School (C) | Female | Public | 28 |
| School (D) | Female | Public | 26 |
| School (E) | Mixed | Private | 19 |

that a similar percentage performed a final check of their spelling and punctuation after the story writing process concluded. As clearly stated by Daqili (2000), any writer before he or she can even being to think about writing, must learn various rule-governed language skills such as, spelling, vocabulary, syntax, capitalisation, punctuation and handwriting.

When asked, “How often do you have to do story writing for homework?”, 80% of the public school learners indicated that they wrote a story once a week, whilst 20% of the private school learners highlighted that they wrote a story more than once a week. This result is dependent on the teacher at each school who assigns the story writing tasks to the learners. This is because the number of classes for grade seven in private schools is lower than that of the number of classes in public schools, and the number of learners in private school classes is also lower than in the case of public schools. Consequently, as opposed to public schools, the teachers in private schools usually assign the learners with story writing tasks more than once per week. Moreover, this is outstanding compared to the pre-strategy practice in which they used to write only once per semester.

8.2. Synopsis of analysis data from learner’s questionnaire of each school

Five schools were chosen randomly to implement the study in Salalah city (Dohfar Governorate). There were four public schools (male/female) and one private mixed school. Table 2 shows the numbers of the learners in each school.

8.2.1. School (A)

A total of 23 learners responded to the questionnaire after the intervention. Around 89.2% ($n = 21$) of them stated that they benefited from this strategy. They agreed that the strategy helped them think more clearly about the story elements. All of them also agreed that this strategy was helpful and useful compared to the old fashioned teaching method of teaching Arabic story composition. In addition, results indicated that 92% ($n = 21$) liked this strategy and they thought they would be good writers in the story writing containing story elements at home and in the classroom. Moreover, 99% ($n = 23$) of them mentioned that after using this the strategy, they will prepare for the story writing through using conceptual maps to organise their thoughts and ideas, write one or more drafts, revise their writing based on their teacher’s suggestions and practice and check spelling, grammar and punctuation during and after their story writing. They also highlighted that they write a story once per week for homework during strategy implementation.

8.2.2. School (B)

A total of 24 learners filled in the questionnaire about the benefits obtained from strategy. They responded to the first section of the questionnaire, which addressed the pupils’ perspectives about storytelling strategy. About 95% ($n = 23$) agreed that the strategy had a positive impact on their writing story. All the respondents in this school also agreed that this strategy was beneficial compared to the normal method. Moreover, respondents indicated in the second section (i.e. learners’ writing in stories) that 92.2% ($n = 22$) they like this strategy think they will be good writers and will enjoy story writing in Arabic exams after implementing this strategy. Furthermore, 93.5% ($n = 22$) of the learners in the third section (i.e. learners’ preparations before story writing in the classroom and at home) indicated that they revised their writing based on the suggestions of their teacher and they

checked spelling, grammar and punctuation. About 100% ($n = 24$) indicated that they also write a story at home once per week during the strategy was employed.

8.2.3. School (C)

A total of 28 learners responded to the questionnaire representing a 93% ($n = 26$) response rate. All respondents agreed that the strategy was more beneficial than the normal method. Around 92% ($n = 26$) of the respondents thought that their writing improved because of the story writing both in the classroom and at home. Moreover, over 92% ($n = 26$) of them agreed that they prepared something when they wrote the story such as writing more than one draft of the story and using conceptual map to organise their thoughts and ideas. All of these learners stated that they also write a story once per week for homework during the implementation.

8.2.4. School (D)

Like the other schools, school (D) also participated in the learners' questionnaire. A total number of 26 pupils responded to it. Roughly 95% ($n = 25$) of the learners reported that they felt positive towards the storytelling strategy. All respondents agreed that this strategy was more beneficial than the normal method. Over 91% ($n = 24$) of the learners became interested in story writing after the teacher implemented the strategy. Moreover, 95% ($n = 25$) of these learners incorporated their teachers' feedback into their story writing in classroom and at home. They revised their writing based on the suggestion of their teacher. Similar to the other public schools, these learners indicated that they write a story once per week at home during the strategy was employed.

8.2.5. School (E)

The learners of this school were asked after the intervention to complete a questionnaire. Around 95.5% ($n = 18$) of the participants indicated that they benefited from this strategy and it helped their motivation towards learning. Moreover, 94% ($n = 18$) of them indicated that they will enjoy story writing in Arabic exams after implementing this strategy. In terms of learners' perceptions regarding writing a story in the classroom and at home, 97% ($n = 18$) of them expressed that they prepared when they wrote a story such as organise their ideas and thoughts using conceptual maps. All of these learners stated that they write a story more than once per week for homework during the strategy was employed.

8.3. Analysis of the second question (the teachers' questionnaire and teachers' interviews data)

2. What are the perceptions of the teachers about the storytelling strategy?

8.3.1. Teachers' questionnaire

The teachers' questionnaire (see Appendix B) was administered to the five teachers who employed the study's strategy in order to explore their perceptions about the benefits they thought they had obtained from the storytelling strategy. The questionnaire centres around the five-point scales: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. Together with these (19) closed-ended statements, the questionnaire had two open-ended questions. The results obtained from the five teachers are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Information about the teachers' responses

| Participants | Gender | Teaching experience (years) | Qualification |
|---------------|--------|-----------------------------|---|
| Participant 1 | Male | 5 | Bachelor in Education |
| Participant 2 | Male | 7 | Bachelor in Education |
| Participant 3 | Female | 5 | Bachelor in Education |
| Participant 4 | Female | 4 | Bachelor in Education |
| Participant 5 | Female | 15 | Bachelor in Education + Master's Degree |

In general, the five teachers strongly agreed that they have benefited from the storytelling strategy and that it was an effective teaching method compared to the method in the teacher's guide. They strongly agreed with most of the statements namely (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19). For instance, when handing out the questionnaire to the research, participant 3 said: "Fortunately, I know how to teach story writing lessons. It is a really useful teaching method" and participant 1 said: "It is a really brilliant strategy".

Four teachers out of five mentioned that the strategy created a positive attitude in their general social contact (i.e. items number 6, 9, 10, 12 and 14), such as fluently speaking with others. Only one teacher disagreed and mentioned that the strategy did not provide an extra positive social impact to her personal characteristics but stated that it enabled her to acquire more vocabulary items.

All the five teachers were pleased that the storytelling gave their learners a chance to practise story writing. Before putting pen to paper, learners begin by talking their stories through with fellow learners who are listening (Davis, 2000). Storytelling is a communicative activity during which teachers can impart knowledge, values and new skills to their learners. Garvie (1990) also states that storytelling is a communication tool for use between the learner and the storyteller (in this case, the teacher). Teachers certainly use storytelling well in their classes. In addition, learners enjoy learning more when their environment is to their liking and they recognise a real-life approach to learning (Marzano, 2001). When receiving information in the right environment, storytelling makes learners want to learn to write and to appreciate other people's beliefs and social cultural values.

The majority of the teachers (80%) were also delighted by the sense of motivation that storytelling had associated with their personal characteristics. Comparing their personal characteristics prior and following the strategy, all teachers acknowledged that these were much better than before.

At the end of the questionnaire, two opened-ended questions asked why this strategy was useful and called for any other suggestions in order to further develop it. In these questions, the five teachers expressed that the strategy is useful in teaching the story elements in the story writing lessons. They thought it encouraged the learners to be more interactive and competitive in answering the different questions. Also, they commented that this strategy had developed the learners' imagination, knowledge and thinking about the story's events. Unfortunately, the teachers did not provide any negative feedback about the strategy. Consequently, the researcher interviewed these teachers and asked eight further questions about the strategy.

8.4. Teachers' interview

All the five teachers confirmed the effectiveness of the storytelling strategy during and after the intervention. In fact, they all noticed that they had benefited from this strategy. Commenting on the strategy, one of the participants stated:

[The strategy is absolutely fantastic because it really does make it far more motivating and interactive for the learners. The storytelling enhances my interest in the Arabic language because I can teach it through many kinds of interesting activities in the storytelling class.

(Teacher 2)

Seven themes were obtained from the five interviewees. Table 4 illustrates the themes of the teachers' interview related to the storytelling strategy (see Appendix C).

Table 4. Teachers' perceptions about the storytelling strategy

| Themes | Teachers (5) |
|---|--|
| Teachers' experience of storytelling | All teachers have adequate experience to teach the storytelling strategy |
| | Four teachers suggested that the strategy encouraged motivation and learning among learners. |
| | All teachers helped the learners with the story style |
| Challenges of storytelling | Four teachers thought that the strategy included too many questions |
| | To all teachers, the strategy had a large number of lessons |
| Useful aspects of the strategy | Three teachers used role playing |
| | Four teachers used drawing activities |
| | Three teachers liked and used stimulating questions in the strategy |
| | All teachers used the stories' pictures |
| | Only two teachers incorporated cooperative learning |
| Teachers' feelings towards the strategy | All teachers seemed comfortable in teaching the strategy on their own |
| Changes in the strategy | Four teachers suggested decreasing the number of activities |
| | Two teachers preferred making the stories shorter |
| | Only one teacher opted for deleting the drawing component while teaching the strategy |
| Need more teacher training on new methods | All teachers expressed a need for more training in new methods, especially story writing skills |
| Learners' interaction | All teachers stated having witnessed an effective interaction among learners and with the teachers |
| | All teachers pointed out that their lessons became more interesting and engaging |

8.4.1. Theme one: Teachers' experience of using storytelling

All teachers expressed that they have gained new expertise in teaching stories through the storytelling strategy. It also encouraged and motivated learners towards learning. One of the participants expressed this point:

... this strategy was very beneficial compared with the normal method. It encourages learners' motivation and guides them towards learning. I hope to include this strategy as a method in the Arabic language curriculum. Frankly, I acquired enough experience in this semester from this strategy.

(Teacher 2)

8.4.2. Theme two: Challenges of storytelling

The five teachers faced some administrative challenges whilst employing the strategy. For example, four out of the five teachers interviewed stated that the strategy had a lot of questions and they need to be reduced. However, in their opinion, the questions of each story were examined carefully and found them very crucial and useful for writing the story. Through these questions the learners can generate ideas, new vocabulary, and expressions in their story writing. Due to the limited time of the lesson and the syllabus plan, the teachers suggested reducing these questions too. For example, a participant stated:

... among the negatives of teaching the strategy is the large number of questions, even if these questions are useful to the learners. These questions made them conclude the story's events and then write a story, but the school lesson system is not enough.

(Teacher 4)

Moreover, the five participants indicated that another challenge they encountered in the strategy was the large number of lessons (three lessons per month). Picking up on this theme, a participant commented:

Ok ... there were some challenges that we faced with the teaching strategy. For instance, the syllabus plan does not take into account the strategy teaching in three lessons, because there are a maximum of two composition lessons per month.

(Teacher 1)

In general, all five teachers addressed these challenges in an appropriate manner. They suggested increasing the number of composition lessons in the Arabic syllabus plan to the Ministry of Education as they realised that these lessons have improved their learners' writing skills following the implementation of the strategy.

8.4.3. Theme three: Useful strategy aspects

The teachers reported that the stories' pictures were extremely useful in the strategy. For instance, a teacher stated that

The most useful thing that the learners liked in the storytelling are the stories' illustrations, especially because they imagined the artist in them.

(Teacher 5)

Another teacher also pinpointed that:

I think that the stories' pictures are very animating to the learners, because they imagined the story's situations and events very well, as well as a logical sequence of the story. Consequently, they answered the questions of the story correctly.

(Teacher 2)

Using pictures during storytelling may help learners to imagine the story's events and changes the information included into the mental pictures created by them. In addition, the researcher noticed that learners often spent time just thinking about the story pictures. Some learners imagined quite different pictures and were given leave to do so. When writing stories, learners can voice their ideas, express their opinions and take their imagination for a ride. Writing a story is not always just to entertain others; it can be fun for the writer as well. Thus, stories of any kind may appeal to learners.

Moreover, the majority of teachers revealed that acting, role-playing and drawing activities were beneficial to the strategy. One of the participants indicated:

Frankly, I observed that acting and role-playing are very important aspects in teaching storytelling because the learners at this level need to imagine the story's events and act it cooperatively... This is good for their age.

(Teacher 5)

In addition, three teachers out of five expressed that stimulating questions were useful in the strategy. One of these teachers commented:

... in my opinion, the second most useful aspect in this strategy are the stimulating questions. These questions helped learners to induce the story's messages, which led to an improvement in their story writing. Also, these questions encouraged learners to brainstorm and think of it as a good thing.

(Teacher 5)

Stimulating questions can help each learner become more active and interactive with the story's events. Moreover, these questions could assist the learners in creating other characters, plots, resolutions, places, events and conflicts in the story, which would lead them to write a story from their imagination.

Two teachers out of five commented that cooperative learning whilst teaching the strategy was a useful aspect of the strategy. Two teachers elaborated on this point:

I think the most useful dimension in this strategy is the cooperative learning, because the Ministry of Education urges us to do that in the class.

(Teacher 1)

Also, among the useful aspects of the strategy is cooperative learning. This may be a good interaction among learners.

(Teacher 3)

There is a fairly general agreement that cooperative learning is effective as an educational method (Ellis, 1992), being used so that learners may talk about their ideas and exchange new vocabulary items as well. The researcher feels strongly that it is essential for the delivery of meaningful instruction and helping learners to understand. In addition, the Ministry of Education (2004) has recommended that learners in the middle school system should learn through a number of different teaching methods among which cooperative learning is one of the most advocated techniques. It is used by educationalists in order to allow learners to interact with their peers whilst learning, giving and receiving support from one another. It has been acknowledged that cooperative learning helps grade seven learners to improve their story writing skills.

8.4.4. Theme four: Teachers' Feelings towards the Strategy

All teachers agreed that they felt more comfortable and confident when they taught the strategy on their own. The researcher observed during the intervention that the five teachers got used to the strategy from the second time/lesson of its introduction and gradually became more comfortable in implementing it on their own. For instance, a participant indicated:

Yes, I have been trained on this strategy adequately and now I'm confident to implement it on my own. I will be comfortable and confident implementing it on my own.

(Teacher 5)

And another one stated:

I'm comfortable with implementing this strategy in the future independently, because frankly I achieved more than the lesson's objectives through the strategy.

(Teacher 4)

8.4.5. Theme five: Changes in the strategy

The teachers recommended some changes when using the strategy in the future. Four teachers suggested decreasing the activities in the strategy. For example, one of the participants stated:

In the future, we would like to delete some activities and make the whole strategy accord with the lesson's time.

(Teacher 2)

Two teachers preferred making the stories shorter. They mentioned that some stories are slightly longer, despite being very interesting. One of the teachers stated:

I prefer to make stories shorter to accord with the time of lesson ...

(Teacher 1)

The researchers based the stories they created on the story elements. When writing a story, it is usual to follow a particular structure. All good stories, no matter how long they are, always have a beginning, a middle section and an end. The beginning usually introduces the moral, the characters and the conflict that animates the plot. The middle section takes the plot forward in a series of events. The ending is either a climax or the conflict resolved (often known as the denouement). The structure is important and should always be borne in mind when writing a story. Only one teacher decided to leave out the drawing component whilst teaching the strategy. Regarding this point, one of the participants stated:

I would like to delete the drawing part because some learners were not able to draw and this depends on the learners' drawing skill.

(Teacher 3)

She believed that drawing depends on the learners' skill because some of the learners in her class could not draw or rather thought that they could not do so. However, we cannot generalise this, as most of the learners managed to draw and many of them enjoyed it. These aforementioned changes recommended by the teachers should be compatible with the syllabus plan on the one hand and the lesson's time on the other.

8.4.6. *Theme six: Need for more teacher training on new methods*

We need workshops about new teaching methods, particularly in story writing. This strategy is considered to be a new method in Omani schools and it has not been applied in schools until now.

We require the Ministry of Education to introduce some training courses about story writing teaching.

(Teacher 3)

In general, every participant involved in this study said that there are insufficient training courses in teaching methods in general and felt there was a need for more training in new methods, particularly in story writing skills. Moreover, the teacher training workshops offered by the Ministry of Education face a number of challenges, such as for example, the old methods used by trainers. There are in addition too few expert trainers available to conduct teacher development workshops. All respondents emphasised that Arabic language teachers ought to be trained in this strategy in the middle school. The Arabic language curriculum is of course undergoing a process of development but training courses in this field are still very scarce if not almost inexistent. Teachers need to be aware of the latest teaching methods, especially where writing skills are concerned.

8.4.7. *Theme seven: Learners' interaction*

All the five teachers agreed that interaction amongst learners and between teachers and learners definitely resulted in an increased involvement in the storytelling classes. The relationship between learners and teachers during the storytelling was different from the ordinary. For instance, some of these teachers stated:

In the past, story writing lessons were very boring, but with this new strategy I am surprised how my story writing class became interactive and engaging. Even the weak learners participated in answering the questions

. (Teacher 2)

The teachers thought that in the storytelling strategy class, the interaction between the learners and teacher was warm and comfortable. As the researcher observed, the teacher's role in a storytelling class is not one of authority. He or she is there simply in order to tell the story and make it easier for learners to learn what it is all about. Although just the charm of a story in itself can appeal to

young audiences, the storyteller has to bring it to life in the way he or she tells it. The researcher noticed that teachers used both verbal and non-verbal language, as well as various props. They used different voices, action and eye contact and their body language made a real impact on the way learners received the story.

In conclusion, since it is different from the authoritative tone of traditional teaching, the dynamic communication in storytelling harmonises the relationship between learners and teacher and enhances learners' enjoyment and learning. It has become obvious therefore that the positive interaction between teachers and learners during storytelling can provide better teaching and learning.

9. Conclusion

Although storytelling is recommended for composition lessons, other strategies that focus on teaching new words should also be used in order to equip learners with more vast vocabulary. Combining such a strategy with that of storytelling could be valuable to learners who need a larger vocabulary. The researchers recommend that the Ministry of Education should increase the awareness of the storytelling strategy which is giving a more varied use of words and also suggest including textbook stories in the written composition lessons.

Activities that focus on the writing process should be initiated by the teachers and they must also give learners enough time to finish them. Planning, drafting, revision and editing are all part of the writing process and written composition lessons must teach this. On the other hand, there are surprisingly few written composition lessons mentioned in the teacher's guide book and one session is not really adequate to cover all the writing steps. The recommendation is therefore that written composition lessons should encompass the various literary genres and their structures. Once learners are familiar with each form of writing, they can write down their ideas in the way they prefer. Some learners, particularly in the second cycle, often write letters, articles and stories. In order to attract learners to written composition lessons, the teacher's guide ought to be based on new methods for each separate writing form which of course means that the teacher's guide will need to be renewed every year. When teaching learners in middle school and particularly in the seventh grade to write stories, it might be a good idea to brainstorm and prepare an outline to start with, then let learners write their first draft next time. That way, they will not feel impelled to finish writing their story in one session, nor will they lose interest.

The researcher believes that training programmes should be developed in a number of ways. In most cases, all teachers, for example, claimed that they had never had the practical training needed to help them teach a particular skill and process it properly. In addition, they need particle examples in order to teach different methods and skills in the Arabic language. All these suggestions if followed up would help to improve teachers' performance. Thirdly, practitioners would improve using certain writing forms in order to help learners do more than what the official curriculum calls for. Teachers therefore should expose learners to various genres, learning resources and opportunities in order to show them how to use their imagination and improve their writing abilities such that they may become able to produce several types of genres.

This study amplifies the existing knowledge concerning teaching storytelling strategy in story writing lessons. In the first place, it uses an unusually varied bank of data to support its claims, giving researchers empirical and practical information about how Arabic story writing is taught. Second, the storytelling has traditionally seldom been given much attention particularly in Arabic countries even though story writing is important for learners at both the academic and social levels.

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Appendix (A)

Learners' perceptions of the storytelling strategy

| | |
|-------------|----------------------|
| Name | |
| School | |
| Gender | A: Male B: Female |
| Nationality | |

Please tick (✓) the statement that closely matches with your view about the benefit of the storytelling strategy.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Section 1: This section will be about your perspectives regarding the storytelling strategy.

| | Statement | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | It helped me think more clearly about the story structure and the different roles of the main characters | | | | | |
| 2 | It helped me tell other students what I imagined | | | | | |
| 3 | It helped me to work co-operatively with others | | | | | |
| 4 | It helped me understand the structure and components of a story | | | | | |
| 5 | It helped me improve my writing skills in general | | | | | |
| 6 | It helped me to develop my performance in the Arabic language | | | | | |
| 7 | It helped me to be independent in writing | | | | | |
| 8 | It helped my confidence and freedom in writing in Arabic on my own | | | | | |
| 9 | It helped my motivation towards learning | | | | | |
| 10 | It helped improve my vocabulary | | | | | |
| 11 | It helped me speak more fluently | | | | | |
| 12 | It helped me to be creative in story writing | | | | | |
| 13 | More useful and helpful than the old fashioned teaching methodologies of Arabic | | | | | |

Section 2: This section will be about your story writing.

| | Statement | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I like to write stories | | | | | |
| 2 | I became a good writer as a result of this strategy | | | | | |
| 3 | This strategy helped me to understand story writing elements | | | | | |
| 4 | I will enjoy story writing in Arabic exams after implementing this strategy | | | | | |
| 5 | I will write stories on my own outside of school exams and requirements | | | | | |

Section 3: This section is about your preparations before story writing in the classroom and at home.

When you write a story in the class, how do you prepare each of these things?

| | Statement | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Use conceptual maps to organise my thoughts | | | | | |
| 2 | Write one or more drafts | | | | | |
| 3 | Revise my writing based on the suggestions of my teacher | | | | | |
| 4 | Do a final check of my spelling and punctuation after the story writing | | | | | |
| 5 | Practice punctuation or grammar in class during story writing | | | | | |

How often do you have to do story writing for homework?

| | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|----------------------|
| | More than once per week | | About once per month |
| | Once per week | | Rarely |
| | More than once per month | | Never |

Appendix (B)

Teacher's perceptions about the storytelling strategy

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Name: | _____ |
| School: | _____ |
| Gender: | A. Male B. Female |
| Qualification: | A. Bachelor B. Master's C. Others (please specify) |
| Graduated from: | _____ |
| Experience: | A. 0–5 years B. 6–10 years C. 11–15 years D. 16–20 years E. Over 20 years |

Please tick (✓) the statement that closely matches with your view about the benefit of the storytelling strategy.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | Statement | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|----|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 | The storytelling strategy has helped me to examine my role as a teacher in new and productive ways | | | | | |
| 2 | This strategy immersed me in a creative process | | | | | |
| 3 | This strategy made me a unique teacher with a unique way of storytelling/I have found my voice | | | | | |
| 4 | This strategy increased my sense of empowerment | | | | | |
| 5 | This strategy made me better at thinking on my feet | | | | | |
| 6 | This strategy made me change my understanding of others in a more positive way | | | | | |
| 7 | This strategy helped me to communicate with my students in a new way | | | | | |
| 8 | This strategy helped me to generate new ideas on how to link stories with my curriculum | | | | | |
| 9 | This strategy helped me to get over my fear of talking to groups of people | | | | | |
| 10 | This strategy gave me new perspectives and information on the role of the Arabic language and narration in my professional life | | | | | |
| 11 | This strategy is an effective teaching method compared to the method in the teacher's guide | | | | | |
| 12 | This strategy enhanced my fluency, vocabulary acquisition and recall | | | | | |
| 13 | This strategy is an effective method for enhancing story writing skills | | | | | |
| 14 | This strategy is an educational tool that enhances the self-awareness, imagination and cultural knowledge of teachers | | | | | |
| 15 | This strategy helped me in developing my understanding of the teaching profession | | | | | |
| 16 | This strategy helped me in implementing my Arabic curriculum in new, creative and/or exciting ways | | | | | |
| 17 | This strategy clarified the structure and components of story writing in detail | | | | | |
| 18 | This strategy helped me in observing gifted learners in story writing in my classroom | | | | | |
| 19 | If this strategy is successful, it should be included in the Arabic teacher training curriculum in the second cycle of basic education | | | | | |

Do you think that the storytelling strategy is useful? If so, please explain.

.....

Any other suggestions?

.....

Appendix (C)

Teachers' interviews

- Q1: What was the experience of using that strategy in their class?
- Q2: Were there any challenges and difficulties? What were they?
- Q3: What were the most useful aspects of the strategy?
- Q4: Will you be comfortable implementing the strategy on your own?
- Q5: Would you make any changes when using the strategy in the future?
- Q6: Do you need any further training about this strategy or story writing related skills?
- Q7: What is your view about the learners' engagement with the strategy?
- Q8: Did you notice any change in their engagement/interaction in class?



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