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إدارة: البحوث والنشر العلمي ( المجلة العلمية)

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**THE IMPACT OF STORYTELLING ON  
CHILDREN'S READING COMPREHENSION  
SKILLS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EARLY  
CHILDHOOD TEACHERS IN SAUDI ARABIA  
(CASE STUDY)**

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"تم دعم هذا المشروع من قبل جامعة الجوف تحت مشروع بحثي رقم ٤٠/٣٣٩"

**Abstract**

The study aimed to explore the impact of storytelling on children's reading comprehension skills, ages 5 to 6 years, from the perspective of early childhood teachers in Saudi Arabia. During the academic year 2021, a case study was applied to discover the impact of storytelling on children's reading comprehension skills. Individual interviews, group discussions, and other research methods were used to gather data. The study sample randomly selected teachers teaching in an early childhood school in Sakaka city in the Al-Jouf region, Saudi Arabia. The study highlighted important points; one of the main results was that telling children stories with a clear objective or goal improved their comprehension skills, especially if a set of activities accompanied the reading. Activities that enhanced the child's understanding of the meaning of content were drawing, acting out the story, re-telling, asking questions, and meaningful discussion.

**Keywords:** Comprehension, reading comprehension skills, storytelling, early childhood teachers.

## ملخص البحث

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على تأثير سرد القصة على مهارات الاستيعاب القرائي لأطفال خلال المرحلة العمرية ٥ إلى ٦ سنوات تقريبًا، وذلك من وجهة نظر معلمات الطفولة المبكرة في المملكة العربية السعودية. تكونت عينة الدراسة من معلمات الروضة الحادية عشر في مدينة سكاكا في منطقة الجوف والذي تم اختيارها عشوائيًا. واتبع البحث المنهجية النوعية وبالتحديد أسلوب دراسة الحالة؛ لما لها من أثر فعال في تحديد تأثير سرد القصة على مهارات الاستيعاب القرائي لأطفال. وذلك من خلال المقابلات الفردية مع العينة، والمقابلة الجماعية، وجمع المستندات والوثائق من المعلمات خلال العام الدراسي ٢٠٢١. توصلت الدراسة إلى مجموعة من النتائج ومن أهمها، سرد القصص الهادفة لطفل الروضة أسلوب ذا تأثير فاعل في تطوير مهارات القراءة الاستيعابية. خاصة إذا صحبة القصة بمجموعة من الأنشطة التي تعزز فهم الطفل في إدراك المعنى للمحتوى مثل الرسم، تمثيل الأدوار، وإعادة سرد القصة من قبل الأطفال، والحوار الهادف حول أحداث القصة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الاستيعاب، مهارات الاستيعاب القرائي، سرد القصة، معلمات الطفولة المبكرة.

## **1. Introduction**

Reading is the weapon of knowledge, the key to mature minds, and the secret of human development across nations. Reading helps individuals perceive surroundings through understanding what they read or hear. Through reading, individuals acquire new knowledge or develop previous knowledge and learn new information about topics in which he seeks to develop themselves. However, there is no point in reading without understanding the content. Individuals will not be able to benefit from reading until they develop comprehension skills.

Comprehension is an essential skill that helps an individual understand and learn different knowledge skills. Comprehension skills cannot be taught directly to young children in early childhood. During a child's early years, parents can help their child build their comprehension skills by talking to them, practicing multiple activities, reading, or telling stories. When children enter the second year of their lives, they understand what they used to hear (Almufdi, 2020). Researchers recommended that educators focus on improving comprehension skills as a first stage of learning to enhance student learning (Alnashif, 2021). Then, when children turn three to four years old (preschool stage), they start to develop reading comprehension skills (Al- Shennawy & Meshaal, 2020). Reading comprehension is one of the basic skills that help learners remember, understand, analyze, evaluate, and create new ideas (Pourhosein& Sabouri, 2016; Hasbaini& Abdul Manan, 2017).

Reading comprehension skills develop before children talk or read (Qenawy, 2014). For example, children understand that a storybook contains words and sentences related to the pictures on the page. By listening to stories, they try to understand by looking at the pictures, asking questions, and answering CCQs (Concept checking questions) (Ali, 2020; Hamrawy & Gnaim, 2017; Qenawy, 2014). Reading comprehension is a skill that develops gradually. When children improve their reading comprehension, they know how to think while reading or listening (Hasbaini & Abdul Manan, 2017). The weakness in reading comprehension skills impacts children's literacy skills negatively and reduces vocabulary enrichment (Oakhill et al., 2019)

Reading comprehension is a complicated process that requires children to have specific skills to comprehend well. Decoding, fluency, vocabulary, word and sentence construction, background knowledge, and children's motivation to read are vital skills to understand what is written or told (Pardo, 2004). Early childhood teachers should improve learners' reading comprehension skills through developmentally appropriate practices (Pourhosein & Sabouri, 2016). One of the approaches that early childhood could use to improve children's reading comprehension skills is storytelling (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008; Al-Saraj, 2021). Parents and educators could improve reading comprehension skills by telling or reading stories or books from the first year of the children's lives. Telling stories to children frequently helps to improve reading comprehension skills.

Storytelling is one of the practical approaches that help learners of different ages understand text concepts (Hamrawy & Gnaim, 2017; Al. Jubori, 2007; Al Nassar & Al Majidal, 2010; Powell & Murray, 2012; Yaghmour & Obaidat, 2016). Al Nassar and Al Majidal (2010) found that telling stories to young children improves children's perception of reading. Moreover, Hasbaini and Abdul-Manan (2017) explored the effectiveness of short stories in teaching reading comprehension to enhance the quality of students' reading. They found that the students taught using short stories had better achievements in reading comprehension than those trained using conventional methods.

Children in early childhood are attracted to picture stories in storybooks, cards, or puppets (Al Nassar & Al Majidal, 2010). During storytelling, children attempt to understand the story's content by looking at the story's pictures, identifying the story's characters, focusing on teachers' facial expressions and voice expressions, and using their minds to create images related to the words. Qenawy (2014) stated that telling picture stories and discussing the content assist children in understanding and learning new vocabulary.

Al-Jubori (2007) conducted a comparative study comparing the impact of picture stories and narrative stories on reading comprehension and vocabulary for kindergarten students. The research findings emphasized that picture stories positively affected kindergarteners' reading comprehension and vocabulary developments rather than narrative stories. Thus, the research recommended that teachers use picture stories to teach young children multiple concepts. Additionally, an experimental study by Roslina (2017) found that teaching using picture storybooks influences students' reading and learning positively and enhances students' interest in reading.

Many studies have proven that storytelling impacts learners' reading comprehension skills in different grades. For instance, Isbell et al. (2004) conducted an experimental study to explore the effectiveness of storytelling and story reading on language development and story comprehension in young children ages three to five. The sample of the empirical study was divided into two groups- A and B. All the children in the two groups listened to 24 stories. The first group heard the stories while the other group listened to the stories read from books. The researchers discovered that storytelling and story reading positively impacted oral language. Moreover, they found that young children in group A who heard the stories positively impacted their story comprehension skills. In contrast, reading to children in group B positively affected their language complexity skills.

In addition, Powell and Murray (2012) investigated storytelling strategies to improve undergraduate student comprehension in online classes. They emphasized that teachers should focus on presenting the content of the text as a story instead of traditional ways of teaching to enhance learners' comprehension of concepts. Alsamadani (2017) also recommended using talking storybooks to improve student reading comprehension skills in teaching EFL students.

Al-Saraj (2021) found that storytelling is an attractive method that attracts children's attention and helps enhance their motivation to learn. The study also found that improving reading comprehension depends on teachers' attitude toward telling stories, the content, the discussion and question about the story, and student incentive toward stories. Al-Saraj recommended that teachers use storytelling to teach Arabic concepts to primary grade students.

In conclusion, early childhood teachers are responsible for guiding children to build their reading comprehension skills. According to the standard of kindergarten Saudi teachers provided by the Education and Training Evaluation Commission (2020), teachers must support children's language development and learning by giving various practices and activities such as reading and telling daily stories.

## **1.2 problem of the study**

The researcher noticed that the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia has recently focused on improving student reading comprehension skills in all grades. As a result, in 2011 and 2016, the ministry participated in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) tests applied to fourth-grade students. The International Association prepared the cycle test for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). As reported by the IEA, Saudi Arabia was one of the countries that achieved a lower achievement in reading comprehension and reading literacy skills (Mullis et al., 2017). Moreover, the IEA stated that attending preschools and engaging children in early literacy activities significantly impacted reading comprehension and literacy skills.

Additionally, since early childhood teachers are responsible for educating children and developing their skills, and early childhood is the first year of academic learning that effect the following, the researcher found that it is essential to focus on children's comprehension reading skills in the early years. Therefore, the researcher decided to observe different kindergarten schools to explore teachers' methods to enhance children's reading comprehension skills and explore the impact of storytelling on reading comprehension skills.

The research found that teachers tell stories to children to present new themes and content. In addition, the researchers noticed that children loved to sit and listen to the teacher. Thus, the researcher decided to conduct a case study to determine the impact of storytelling on the development of reading comprehension skills from the perspective of teachers who teach kindergarteners in early childhood schools.

## **2. Research Question:**

To investigate the impact of storytelling on children's reading comprehension skills, the researcher formulated the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of storytelling on children's reading comprehension skills from the perspectives of early childhood educators?
2. How do early childhood teachers assess children's reading comprehension skills?
3. What challenges do early childhood teachers face during storytelling to support children's comprehension skills?



### 3. Research Objective:

Throughout the case study, the researcher aimed to identify the effectiveness of storytelling on children's reading comprehension skills from early childhood teachers' perspectives. The study observed how teachers applied storytelling time, what kind of story they read, how they told the stories, and how they assessed their students' comprehension. Recognizing the significance of storytelling helped the researcher determine early childhood teachers' challenges during storytelling time to support children's comprehension skills.

The assessment of reading comprehension varies; thus, the researcher desires this research will assist in identifying the different approaches that early childhood teachers could use to assess children's comprehension reading skills. Consequently, the researcher expected that the study would provide valuable recommendations and suggestions to help early childhood schools and teachers improve students' reading comprehension skills.

### 4. The Importance of the Study

The study focused on highlighting the impact of storytelling on young children's reading comprehension skills. Early childhood years are the significant stage of students' learning and development. Educational research emphasizes that the early childhood stage is a substantial development period (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Specifically, the first five years of children's lives are essential years that could affect them socially, psychologically, cognitively, mentally, or linguistically (Almufdi, 2020).

According to the standards of early childhood Saudi teachers provided by the Education and Training Evaluation Commission (2020), teachers should support all children's development and needs by providing a rich learning environment with activities and materials that enhance children's learning.

The importance of the study lies in determining the following points that may provide best practices to early childhood teachers in order to improve children's skills. The researcher in the study focused on reading comprehension skills first to underscore the positive impact of storytelling on reading comprehension skills in the kindergarten stage. Second, the research explored the challenges teachers may face to improve children's reading comprehension skills through storytelling time which will help teachers avoid storytelling time. Lastly, the research investigated different approaches that early childhood teachers could use to assess children's comprehension and reading skills.

## **4. Method**

### **4.1 Participant**

The study population was the public early childhood schools in the Al- Jouf region of Saudi Arabia. Al-Jouf region includes four cities: Sakaka, Tabarjal, Dumat Al-Jandal, and Al-Qurayyate. Sakaka was chosen randomly by the researcher to determine the study's sample.

After defining the area, the Al Hadia Ashar School in Sakaka city was randomly selected. The case study sample was all the teachers in this school. Early childhood teachers in Saudi Arabia are female teachers who teach children ages 3 to 8 in kindergarten schools that include children ages 3 to 5 or early childhood schools that have children ages 6 to 8.

The study was conducted through the academic year of 2021. The school included five kindergarten teachers who teach 55 students in five classrooms. Each teacher was given a code to protect their identity. As demonstrated in (table 1), the research presented information related to participants' years of experience and general specialty.

**Table 1:**

**Background of the teachers in Al Hadia Ashar kindergarten school**

Early childhood Teachers in Al Hadia Ashar school	Years of experience	General specialty
T1	3 years	Kindergarten Education
T2	3 years	Kindergarten Education
T3	5 years	Kindergarten Education
T4	8 years	Kindergarten Education
T5	23 years (18 years teaching in high school and five years teaching in kindergartener school)	Islamic Education

## 4.2 Research design

A case study method was used to discover the impact of storytelling on children's comprehension and reading skills from the perspective of early childhood educators in Saudi Arabia. The researcher used three tools to collect the data: open-ended interview questions for individual interviews, group discussions, and collected documents.

First, the researcher designed open-ended interview questions for the individual interview. The interview questions included 22 questions that were divided into two aspects. The first part focused on the implementation of storytelling, and the other section focused on children's reading comprehension skills. Each interview took about 60 minutes.

Second, the researcher applied group discussion for all the teachers in one online meeting. The researcher led the interview for 75 minutes. Through the interview, the participants discussed the importance of storytelling and how it could impact children's comprehension skills and learning.

Finally, the researchers collected documents through the academic year of 2020. The documents were samples of the stories told to the children and children's paper drawings related to the stories. The researcher asked the teachers to provide evidence that could lead the researcher to answer the research questions.

#### **4.2.1 Validity of the Interview Questions**

To examine the validity and reliability of the interview questions, the researcher presented the questions to five expert reviewers to verify the suitability of the questions for the study and verify the accuracy of the language. All the reviewers recommended deleting one question. In addition, three of them suggested changing four questions. According to the reviewers' comments, the researcher modified the interview question to attain the purpose of the study by answering the research questions.

### **5. Result and Discussion**

The study's finding was described using multiple data collecting tools to achieve reliable results. As mentioned in the previous section, the researcher illustrated the three tools: individual interview, group discussion, and collected documents to answer the research questions. After collecting and analyzing the data, the result of the study was organized into three themes.

The first theme was the effect of using storytelling on children's reading comprehension skills from the perspectives of early childhood educators. The researcher asked the teachers multiple interview questions (see Appendix A). The study found the teachers' perspectives on the effect of using storytelling on children's reading comprehension (see table 2).

**Table 2:**

**The effect of using storytelling on children's reading comprehension skills**

Assessment method	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Improve children learning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Enhance the understanding of the units	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Learn new vocabulary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Attract children's attention to a specific subject	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Improve thinking skills	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

It was found that all teachers agreed that telling children picture stories is an essential method in their school to improve children's learning and understanding. Consequently, the teachers were required to tell a story daily for 10 minutes at storytime. They also had to tell a story during the last meeting time. As the teachers reported, they all told a story twice a week during the previous meeting. This result agreed with the outcome of Roslina's study (2017). The study found that using picture storybooks in teaching children positively affected students' reading and learning.

The study sample agreed that storytelling enhanced children's understanding of the concepts for the oncoming weeks. The teachers tell stories about the subject of the units to assist children in understanding the information in an enjoyable way. One of the teachers mentioned that in (Family unit) she told a story about a new baby in a family to explain to children how they could deal with babies socially and emotionally. The story explained how children could express their feeling when they have a new brother or sister. Moreover, they all mention that telling children daily stories helped them learn new words and increased their vocabulary list. The teachers reported that they told stories containing new words and spent time explaining them to the children.

The teachers believed that children love stories and enjoy listening to enjoyable stories. It has been found that the teachers tell a story to get children's attention to particular behavior or values. For instance, the teachers described when they want to teach children specific values such as the value of patience or correct unacceptable behaviors such as beating and screaming. In addition, two teachers reported that storytelling improves children's thinking skills. They believed that when teachers ask children questions that require them to think about answers or solutions, it could enhance thinking skills. The teachers discussed that the questions had to be appropriate to children's development, not too simple nor too complicated.

There was a story committee in the school that contained three teachers and the school principal. The committee was responsible for selecting picture storybooks for storytime. They determined stories according to the unit's subject, children's needs, children's ages, and children's development. The story could be fictional, nonfictional, historical, or religious. The teachers reported that they used different materials to tell picture stories. They could use books, puppets, puppets theatre, or visual presentations.

The second theme was teachers' methods to assess and support children's comprehension and reading skills. The study discovered that all the teachers used three ways to evaluate children's comprehension skills to enhance children's comprehension skills. However, some teachers applied additional methods besides the three approaches to ensure that children understood the stories (As exhibited In Table 3).

**Table 3:**

**The teacher's method of assessing children's comprehension**

Assessment method	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Discussion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Asking Questions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Re-telling	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Roleplay	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Drawing	No	No	Yes	No	No

The teachers agreed on a follow-up discussion after telling a story to children promoting an accurate understanding of the story's content. Also, asking questions to children before, during, and after telling the story supports children's knowledge of the story's content. The study highlighted that discussion and questions significantly improve children's comprehension skills. Through discussion and questions, children used their thinking skills and connected what they knew with what they learned from the story.

The teachers follow a re-telling story to enhance children's comprehension skills. In addition, the teachers used this method to assess children's ability to understand the story's main idea. The teachers first distribute the story's characters to a group of children. They then asked the children to act the story in front of their friends. The teachers asked the children to play the role of the characters in front of their friends. Teachers stated that this method allowed them to improve children's skills with an enjoyable approach. In addition, three teachers emphasized that the roleplay strategy after telling a story enhanced children's comprehension skill. They reported that they used the strategy when they had children who had difficulty understanding. These results align with the Yaghmour and Obaidat (2016) study of the effect of roleplay and acting after storytelling on improving reading skills.



Drawing the story after telling stories was a strategy used by T3 only. After telling stories, the teacher asked the children to draw what they understood from the story. The teacher reported that children in her class enjoy art; thus, she took advantage of that and used it to support and assess children's reading comprehension skills.

The last theme was challenging that face early childhood teachers during storytelling time to support children's comprehension skills. All the teachers in the study sample agreed on three challenges they faced in supporting children's comprehension during storytime (see table 4).

**Table 4:**

**The challenges that faced the teachers during storytime**

Challenges	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Being attentive to all children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Choosing appropriate stories	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The first challenge was time. The teachers stated that 10 minutes for story time was not enough to tell stories, answer all children's questions, and apply follow-up activities. Follow-up activities such as re-telling stories and roleplay strategies were necessary to support children's understanding of the content.

The second challenge was the teachers' ability to give attention to all children while telling stories since there was only one teacher in each class. The teachers stated that each child has a unique need and interest that required the teachers to consider teaching children.

The last challenge was the difficulty of choosing appropriate stories for children. Through group discussions, the story committee member reported that they could not find a proper story in some themes. Therefore, they sometimes chose a story that matched children's development and needs regardless of the unit subjects.

In conclusion, the previous discussion shows that telling stories to young children impacts children's learning and reading comprehension skills. The finding of the study goes in line with other studies such as Alssamadani (2017), Al-Saraj (2021), Hasbaini and Abdul Manan (2017), Rosline (2017), and Yaghmour and Obaidat (2016) in confirming the positive impact of telling a story on improving reading comprehension skills.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendation**

As a result of the study, telling a daily picture story to children positively impacts young children's reading comprehension skills. In addition, when early childhood teachers apply interactive activities related to the story's content, such as re-telling, roleplay, drawing, discussion, and asking questions, it significantly enhances children's comprehension of the story. Lastly, a story committee to select stories for reading time according to defined standards was very beneficial. It helped ease the challenges and reduced teachers' time and effort. Early childhood teachers have specific and many goals to achieve in a specific period. Thus, choosing the right books for children in terms of content, childrens' needs and development level may require extra effort and time, so having a school reading committee helps the teacher reduce the effort and save time.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher suggested the following recommendations that could benefit early childhood schools, teachers, parents, and researchers to improve students reading comprehension skills:

## **Recommendations for early childhood schools and teachers**

- Early childhood teachers should tell children daily stories for approximately 10 minutes minimum to improve children's comprehension by using different methods such as puppets, storybooks, and story cards.
- Early childhood teachers should enhance students' comprehension of content by implementing practical activities such as asking questions, re-telling stories by children, acting the characteristic of a story, and asking children to draw the content of stories.
- Presenting different concepts using stories to help children excitingly comprehend the content.
- Each early childhood school should enhance children's motivation to read stories by having an attractive central library.
- Each early childhood school should have a committee responsible for providing suitable books and stories for teachers in their classroom and re-newing the central library books.

## **Recommendation for parents**

- Engage parents to support children's comprehension. Teachers should send a weekly story to parents to read to their children at home.
- Parents should tell stories frequently and ask Concept checking questions to enhance children's comprehension skills.

## **Recommendation for researchers**

- The researcher suggested follow-up studies to determine storytelling's effectiveness in improving primary students' reading comprehension skills.
- The researcher recommended follow-up studies on storytime's impact on children's learning and behaviors.

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