The Role of Silent Storytelling in Developing Conversational Skills among Non-Native Arabic Language Learners

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Abstract:

This research investigates the effectiveness of using silent stories as a pedagogical tool for developing speaking skills among learners of Arabic as a foreign language.

The study is based on the premise that visual, non-verbal narratives can stimulate learners' oral production by encouraging them to describe, interpret, and narrate events freely, without relying on written or spoken input.

A quasi-experimental method was adopted, with participants divided into two groups: an experimental group that received instruction through silent stories, and a control group that followed traditional speaking instruction.

Both groups were assessed on several oral performance indicators, including fluency, pronunciation, emotional expression, use of syntactic structures, and interaction.

The results revealed a clear advantage for the experimental group, which achieved a mean overall score of 4.48, compared to 3.46 for the control group. These findings support the hypothesis that silent stories significantly enhance the quality and depth of spoken language output among learners.

The study concludes that silent stories are not merely supplementary materials but are comprehensive communicative tools that foster learner engagement, autonomy, and expressive ability. It recommends integrating such stories into Arabic language curricula for non-native speakers and providing teacher training to maximize their instructional value.

Keywords: Silent Stories, Speaking Skills, Arabic as a Foreign language, Fluency, Oral Expression.

INTRODUCTION:

Conversational skills encompass language production skills alongside writing skills. The importance of conversation lies in the fact that it is the primary goal of language learning. Any language one learns aims to be spoken, and it is a fundamental form of communication with others.

The process of language production requires continuous effort and practice for the student to achieve proficiency. This involves rearranging and organizing all the sounds, vocabulary, structures, and comprehension acquired to formulate expressive sentences that convey oneself and coherent ideas, allowing the listener to understand the speaker's intent.

The Importance of Conversational Skills:
The aim of language education is to simplify linguistic communication and social interaction. Because expression is an

art of communication, it has gained paramount importance in all aspects of life.

Oral expression is of great importance in human life, manifested through interaction with members of society in all spheres; therefore, it is indispensable. Because human need for it is akin to needing air and water, expression is a manifestation of human activity in all its forms.

It is the translation of human thoughts, opinions, experiences, and feelings. It can be said that expression is a universal phenomenon shared by all members of the human race, regardless of their languages and environments(1).

Therefore, most educators see the necessity of paying attention to oral expression and giving it paramount importance in education, because it represents the functional aspect of language. It evokes ideas, expresses them in organized words, helps in facing situations, and leads to self-confidence and self-affirmation(2).

Al-Naqa (3) believes that one of the reasons for students' weakness in conversation is the absence of educational strategies and diverse teaching methods that would highlight activities that encourage the practice of this art and its expression in its various forms.

Researchers attribute the weakness of Arabic language learners as non-native speakers in oral expression to the use of traditional teaching methods.

They emphasize the necessity of employing modern teaching methods that can be used to develop vocabulary, enhance oral expression skills, and present them in conversational and narrative situations (5).

From the above, we conclude that the traditional and semi-traditional teaching methods used by teachers in conversation instruction are among the most significant reasons for students' weakness in the language and their reluctance to engage with it.

This is because the teacher's role becomes more prominent than the student's, even though the student is the primary focus of the teaching and learning process.

Therefore, a pressing need has arisen to conduct a study to address this problem and to search for a language teaching method that allows learners the opportunity to practice the language in real-life, functional situations that are authentic and consistent with their lived reality.

Al-Naqa(4) emphasizes that "a high percentage of non-native Arabic speakers learn the language with the aim of being able to speak it.

However, we find that this skill does not receive sufficient attention in the language learning process; it is viewed as a secondary or incidental part of the language that can develop and be achieved automatically as the learner progresses in learning the language.

Perhaps this view is entirely incorrect and is the reason for the failure to use the language effectively." In this context, it is worth noting that the teaching methods used in teaching conversation to non-native Arabic speakers are not modern, which negatively affects their language acquisition.

Research Objectives :
This research aims to achieve the following:
1- To determine the effectiveness of using silent storytelling in developing conversational skills among non-native Arabic language learners.
2- To reveal the extent to which silent storytelling stimulates oral expression and idea generation among learners.
3- To provide practical recommendations for teachers of Arabic as a foreign language on how to effectively integrate silent storytelling into the curriculum.

Research Questions :
This research seeks to answer the following questions:
1- What is the impact of using silent storytelling on the conversational performance of non-native Arabic language learners?

2- To what extent does silent storytelling contribute to increasing the vocabulary and linguistic structures used in conversation among learners?

3- How can silent storytelling be effectively employed in Arabic language classes for non-native speakers to develop conversational skills?

Research Methodology:

This research will adopt an experimental approach, where silent storytelling will be applied to an experimental group of learners, and their results will be compared to a control group that will not undergo the same experiment.

Section One:

The Importance of Storytelling in General and Silent Stories in Particular In Developing Conversation Skills.

The short story is considered one of the oldest and most modern educational methods in the learning and teaching process.

There is an Indian saying: "Tell me a proven fact so that I may learn, tell me a true fact so that I may believe, but tell me a story so that it may live in my heart for a lifetime (6)" .

Storytelling is one of the most important and powerful stimuli for human beings. It draws them in by consciously paying attention to its events and meanings.

Human beings, by their social nature, found it necessary to establish rules of virtue to govern their interactions with others. Hence, stories have existed since ancient times and continue to do so today to refine character and spread virtue indirectly, seeping into the senses without permission, thanks to their powerful appeal.

Through their inherent meaning, stories, with their entertainment and humor, encourage the reader or listener to adopt good behavior and compare it to their own actions without resorting to direct instruction(7).

Stories were found in ancient civilizations such as the Persians, Romans, and Egyptians, who inscribed hundreds of stories on walls before the invention of the alphabet.

Nor can we ignore the story in the Holy Qur'an, which varied in length and brevity and had clear objectives, as God Almighty said: "We relate to you the best of stories" (Yusuf: 3).

The story has a clear role in education, and the successful teacher is the one who can employ this story to attract the attention of learners, excite them, and move away from the traditional lesson.

The Concept of Silent Storytelling: A silent storytelling is a series of sequential images that tell a story without using written text. Examples include picture books and interactive books that rely on visual illustrations of events.

This method provides learners with an opportunity to form their own understanding of events and build a personal context that they translate into dialogue when sharing the story.

The role of silent storytelling (picture story without text) is highlighted as an innovative educational strategy and a visual tool that encourages thinking, idea generation, and spontaneous oral expression.

Silent storytelling relies on the interpretation of sequential images, requiring the learner to imagine dialogues and events, and to construct vocabulary and structures from a rich visual context.

The importance of this strategy is highlighted in the following:

1- Stimulating Oral Production: Silent stories provide a low-stress environment for practicing speaking, where the learner is required to generate language based on images without relying on written text, thus enhancing fluency and narrative coherence(8).

2- Developing Creativity and Critical Thinking: Because silent stories are open to interpretation, they encourage learners to be creative, consider multiple perspectives, analyze characters, and infer emotions, thus enhancing linguistic proficiency and pragmatic functions(9).

3- Enhancing Cultural Awareness and Learning Engagement: Silent stories based on Arab culture are an effective way to present both linguistic and cultural content, increasing learner engagement and understanding of the Arab context(10).

4- Aligning with current calls from linguists and educators for a review and restructuring of curricula, presenting them with modern teaching strategies that contribute to interaction between teachers and students in educational situations. This strategy is one such modern approach.

5. This study aims to draw the attention of those responsible for developing Arabic language curricula for non-native speakers, emphasizing the importance of using modern teaching methods and removing obstacles to their implementation. One such method is the silent story.

6. Based on its data and findings, this study serves as a positive indicator for conducting further research into the impact of the silent story strategy on the learning outcomes of non-native Arabic speakers.

This research plan will explore how the silent story contributes to enhancing the ability of Arabic language learners to converse fluently and confidently.

Section Two: Research Methodology and Procedures: First: Research Methodology:

To achieve the study's objectives, the researcher used an experimental approach based on an experimental group taught using the modern strategy (silent storytelling), and a control group taught using the traditional method.

Study Sample: The study sample consisted of 20 male and female students at the intermediate level B1, randomly distributed across two sections of the Arabic Language Department for Non-Native Speakers.

Table (1) Study Sample

Group	Level	Number of student	Teaching Method
Control	Intermediate level B1-A	10	**Using Silent Storytelling**
Experimental	Intermediate level B1-B	10	**In the Traditional Way**

Study Instrument:
- Educational Material: The process of preparing the educational material according to the silent story strategy involved the following steps:
1- To demonstrate the impact of the silent story strategy, the researcher selected conversation lessons (The Safe Place – The Talkative Turtle – The Wolf and the Sheep – ...) because their topics were suitable for the silent story strategy.

2- The researcher adapted the conversation lessons according to the silent story strategy and then presented them to a group of expert reviewers specializing in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers and experts in Arabic language curricula for both native and non-native speakers.

They were asked to provide feedback on the adaptation method and content of the educational material, and the necessary modifications were made based on their feedback.

Second: Study Procedures To achieve the study objectives, the researcher undertook the following:

1- Preparing the study instruments, which consisted of the teaching material developed according to the silent story strategy and an achievement test. The validity and reliability of these instruments were verified through their application to the pilot sample.

2. Prepare a list of speaking skills, then present it to a group of experts and specialists in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, and ask them for their feedback regarding modifications and deletions.

3. Test the study sample and randomly assign classes to two groups (experimental and control) based on the teaching strategy.

4. Prepare the teaching material to be taught using the silent storytelling strategy.

5. The control group studied the same teaching material that was taught to the experimental group using the traditional method. 6. Administer an achievement test to both the control and experimental groups to measure their learning.

Third: Analysis of Results:

Table (2) Average score (out of 5)

Skill	Experimental Group	Control Group
Fluency	4.5	**3.6**
Pronunciation	4.2	**3.7**
Expressing emotions	4.8	**3.2**
Using structures	4.3	**3.5**
Interaction	4.6	**3.3**
Overall score	4.48	**3.36**

• The learner will be able to describe scenes from the silent story accurately.

• The learner will be able to express the characters' feelings using appropriate words and phrases.

• The learner will participate in a group discussion about the events and the ending.

• The learner will use past and present tenses correctly in narration.

• The learner will be able to present a possible ending for the story. Learning Materials and Tools:

• Video of the silent story "Safe Place" or a storyboard presentation.

• Whiteboard Worksheets – Drawing Sheets. • Pre-written vocabulary: (hides – drinks – is afraid – hits – protects – belt – toy – brave...).
• Story scene cards.

Statistical Analysis:
• A statistically significant difference favored the experimental group at the 0.01 significance level.

• The greatest difference was in expressing emotions and communicative interaction.

Fourth: Results and Interpretations:
• The silent story provided students with a space to express themselves freely and without textual constraints, thus enhancing fluency and confidence.

• The story's profound human themes (fear, safety, violence) encouraged students to speak spontaneously and realistically.

• Role-playing and dramatic play contributed to consolidating language and using it in semi-realistic situations.

• The control group did not demonstrate the same level of engagement or emotional expression due to the nature of the standardized exercises.

Section Three:
   A Comprehensive Applied Lesson Plan for Teaching Speaking Skills Using the Silent Story "Safe Place" (The plan considers educational, psychological, and linguistic aspects and is formulated according to a modern lesson planning model that uses the communicative approach.).

Lesson Steps: Phase 1:
 Preparation (10 minutes)
• Display one image from the story on the screen.
• Ask predictive questions such as:
 • What do you see in this picture?
 • What do you expect to happen?
 • Introduce basic vocabulary (hides – drinks – is afraid – hits – protects – belt – toy – brave...) through cards or role-playing.

Phase 2: Presentation, Understanding, and Expressing the Scenes (15 minutes) :
• Students are asked to pay attention to the details of the scenes, facial expressions, and actions.
 • Play the video once without commentary.

• (From the following link: https://youtu.be/W8L8Dz_j7l8)

• Divide the students into pairs or groups of three.

 • Replay the video, pausing at key moments (3-4 stops).

 Basic Information:
 • Lesson Title: Developing Speaking Skills Through the Silent Story: "Safe Place" Language: Arabic for Non-Native Speakers – Intermediate Level (B1) Lesson Duration: 60 minutes Targeted Skill: Conversation (Speaking) – Description, Expressing Feelings, Narrating Events Learning Objectives:

• *After each pause, ask the students to:*

• Describe what has happened so far.
• *Predict what will happen next. Phase Three:*
Post-Watching, Interaction, and Dramatic Play (35 minutes) Activity 1:

Oral Retelling:
• Each student or group is asked to retell the story using expressions such as: "At first... then... after that... and finally..."
• Students are encouraged to express the characters' feelings: "When was the boy happy...? What did the father feel? When was the boy scared?" Activity .

2: Role-Playing :
• Students choose a character from the story: (the child, the Superman toy, the father).
• *Each student is asked to:*
• Express themselves aloud as if speaking on behalf of the character. • Example: "I am Superman... I will protect you, my little one."
Objective:
To encourage free speech, use of the first-person pronoun, and emotional engagement with the characters. Activity.

3: Open-Ended Ending .
• Students are asked to provide an alternative ending to the story orally. • Some guiding questions:
• Will the father change?
• What might the child do next?
• Who can help him?

Objective Developing the ability to think creatively and speak fluently in an open context. Homework:
• Write five sentences describing the child's character in the story. • Choose a feeling (fear, sadness, hope, etc.) and describe a similar situation in your life.

Educational Notes:
• *Sensitivity of the Topic:* The story addresses issues of domestic violence, so it is essential that the teacher is aware of students' reactions and creates an atmosphere conducive to humane, rather than confrontational, dialogue.

• *Flexibility:* Activities can be adapted according to age, cultural background, and language level.
• Language Support: It is recommended to provide a short list of key vocabulary words before presenting the story.

It provides them with a natural communicative environment that encourages spontaneous and expressive language production without linguistic or psychological pressure.

What distinguishes this type of storytelling is its ability to integrate visual input with linguistic output. Learners interact with the story using their existing vocabulary and reconstruct events and meanings in their own words, thus contributing to the enhancement of various aspects of oral competence.

The experimental study conducted with two groups of learners supported this hypothesis. Silent storytelling was used with the experimental group, while the control group continued learning using traditional methods.

After the teaching period, the experimental group showed clear superiority in most indicators of oral performance, including fluency, pronunciation accuracy, expression of emotions, use of linguistic structures, and level of interaction.

These results indicate that using silent storytelling in teaching speaking skills not only improves quantitative language performance but also enhances the qualitative quality of communication by encouraging learners to express themselves freely and motivating them to use language in meaningful contexts.

This approach also reduces anxiety related to public speaking, increases self-confidence, and contributes to creating a dynamic and interactive classroom environment.

Therefore, it is recommended to integrate silent storytelling into Arabic language curricula for non-native speakers, especially in early learning stages or at levels lacking natural communication environments.

It is also suggested that teachers be trained on how to systematically employ this method and link it to clear linguistic and communicative objectives. In conclusion, it can be said that silent storytelling is not merely a supplementary tool, but a comprehensive educational tool that promotes learner-centeredness and places the learner at the heart of the educational process as a producer of language, not just a recipient.

Conclusion and Recommendations :
The results of this research demonstrated that silent storytelling is an effective teaching tool for developing speaking skills among non-native Arabic learners.

Footnotes :

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