ONCE UPON A TIME: THE FOLKTALE AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) TEACHING AND LEARNING

Gumbo Lettiah, Gumbo Irvine and Primrose Hlatshwayo

Corresponding Author: Gumbo Lettiah

_____

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the extent to which folktales can be used in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL). This study has established that within a whole-language framework, folktales can build crucial communication skills. The folktale thus can help ESL students improve their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. The intended goal for integrating folktales as a pedagogical tool in ESL is to offer a variety of teaching methods and activities that will lead to freedom from other usual teaching/learning methods. Folktales highly encourage a tolerant, learner-centred classroom environment that enhances effective and enjoyable learning. In other words, learners will not only master their English skills, but they will, in addition, deepen their understanding and appreciation of the English language and develop their own path to developing English communicative skills in an enabling environment. This study adopted a survey research design as the operational framework for data gathering. This study is useful to those who may want to incorporate folktales in the teaching of English as a second language to develop students' listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills, discipline etc. Thus through folktales students will become better listeners, better readers, better writers, and better storytellers in the English language as a second language.

© Ideal True Scholar

_____

INTRODUCTION

Pedagogy is defined as the art or science of teaching education; instructional methods (Random House Dictionary, 2015). The Collins English Dictionary (1998) says pedagogy is the principles, practice, or profession of teaching, study of teaching methods, including the aims of education and the ways in which such goals may be achieved. This paper discusses how a folktale can be used as a pedagogical tool in the teaching and learning of English as a Second language (ESL). In addition, this paper relies heavily on educational psychology, or theories about the way in which learning can take place in a classroom. A folktale is often defined as a tale or legend that begins from a community and is traditional among a people or folk. This traditional folktale doesn't have an individual author; instead it is owned by the community. This *collective conscious* stored within the folktales is the reason why telling folktales in the classroom is a matter of utmost importance. Collective consciousness, according to Durkheim (1893) is the set of shared beliefs, ideas and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society. Thus, the **collective conscious** has power to influence a group's perceptions, attitudes, behaviours, and many other factors important to human's life as well as the society (Songsin, 1999:6).A folktale therefore, has an important role in knowledge transfer and personality development. Hence, the authors of this paper assert that this group conscious effort and achievement can(in the teaching of ESL) result in more than half the students' pass rate. The folktale, by its nature and characteristics fosters communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing through providing a wide range of group discussion and cooperative learning activities. Hence, according to Lantof et al (1994) folktales promotes learning contexts in which students may play an active role in leaning.

The Learning Theory

The Monitor Model has been proposed by Krashen in 1975 and 1977 as a general model for adult second-language performance. The model claims that adult second-language performers have two means of internalising the rules of a target language: (1) language acquisition, which is primarily subconscious, is not influenced by overt teaching or error correction, and is very similar to primary language acquisition in children; (2) language learning, which involves the conscious representation of pedagogical rules, is influenced by teaching and error detection. Basing on the contentions above, language "acquisition" is learning that is subconscious and takes little or no effort on the part of the learner. It is characterised by listening and understanding messages, reading interesting books and articles, and other enjoyable activities that take place in the language being learned. On the other

hand, language "learning" is learning that takes conscious effort on the part of the learner and is characterised by learning grammatical rules, memorisation of vocabularies and speaking performances. Therefore, according to Krashen's theory, the only thing that can lead to fluency in the language is language acquisition. It therefore means that, language learning can only be used as a way to consciously learn grammar rules, vocabularies and oral communication. In English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching, language acquisition can be enhanced by the teaching of folktales. Listening to folktales is learning that is subconscious and takes little or no effort on the part of the learner. It is characterised by listening and understanding the messages and other enjoyable activities that take place in the folktale being told. Caretakers and native speakers can modify their utterances addressed to acquirers to help them understand, and these modifications are thought to help the acquisition process (Snow and Ferguson, 1977). This is greatly supported by Brown and Hanlon, (1970) who argue that error correction and explicit teaching of rules are not relevant to language acquisition.

Another key component of Krashen's theory is the affective filter. The affective filter hypothesis states that language is more easily acquired when people are relaxed and open to learning. All these elements are to be found in folktale teaching as there is some relaxation on the part of the listeners. In using the general method in teaching ESL, utterances are initiated by the acquired system; the fluency in production is based on what one has "picked up" through active communication and students can experience negative emotions such as anxiety, self-doubt, and boredom, and the language is much less likely to be acquired. It can be argued that, subconscious language acquisition (relaxed learning)and conscious language learning (restricted learning) are interrelated in a definite way, but, subconscious acquisition appears to be far more important and powerful. Basing on the second language acquisition theory of Krashen, it holds that, the best way to help ESL students develop both fluency and accuracy in a target language is to expose them to large amounts of comprehensible input. In light of this theory, lecturers teaching ESL should spend the vast majority of their teaching time on input-based activities, such as the utilisation of the folktale as a pedagogical tool. It is much easier and more enjoyable to acquire a language than it is to learn a language (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Hence, folktales can be used in ESL with the intention to develop students listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills in an enjoyable way.

Learning Environments
Since learning never takes place in isolation, it can be argued that the learning environment or context within which the learning takes place is very important. Several studies apparently show that formal learning environments are best for attaining second language proficiency, while other studies appear to show that informal environments are superior (Krashen, 1977). Thus, it can be argued that, informal learning environments promote real language learning and are conducive to language acquisition, while the formal environment has the potential for encouraging both acquisition and learning. As a result, folktales can be used in "natural" child second language acquisition. Folktales create more conducive, free, flexible learning environment, an atmosphere which allows learners to express themselves freely using the target language without being afraid of ridicule from either the lecturer or the other students. It is through such enabling environment that lecturers foster student second language acquisition. ESL students will not be ashamed of the grammatical errors as the environment is relaxed. Through folktales ESL students are encouraged to say what they think regardless of whether it is correct or wrong. The storyteller and the audience are flexible and no one worries about making a mistake. Consequently, something new is being created. It is through such enabling environment that lecturers foster student acquisition of ESL. Students (ESL) will not be ashamed of the grammatical errors as the environment is relaxed. This theory does not ignore the existence of innate qualities (Chomsky, 2008) in human beings which play a role in language acquisition

Motivation
There are factors that encourage language acquisition such as motivation and attitude. "Motivational variables... determine whether or not the student avails himself of... informal language contexts" (Gardner, etal 1976: 200).This is supported by Carroll (1973:8) who asserts that, the second component is motivation to learn the language...Folktales motivate ESL students to learn and acquire the language. According to Stevicks 1976:113), the integratively motivated performer will not feel a threat from the "other" group and will thus be more prone to engage in "receptive learning" (acquisition), rather than "defensive learning". Defensive learning is whereby lecturers will be correcting each and every mistake that students make in their ESL learning. Folktales encourage students ESL students to interact with each other and with other students who are proficient in the English language to achieve certain ends. This makes the student to be self-confident hence leading to more ability and encouragement to acquire the second language. "Presumably, the person with high self-esteem is able to reach out beyond himself more freely, to be less inhibited, and because of his ego strength, to make the necessary mistakes involved in

language learning with less threat to his ego" (Brown 1977:352). Furthermore, Schumann (1975:227) suggests that "... the natural factors that induce ego flexibility and lower inhibitions are those conditions which make the learner less anxious, make him feel accepted and make him form positive identifications with speakers of the target language". Therefore, traits relating to self-confidence are thus predicted to relate more to second language acquisition and positive attitudes toward the classroom. Folktales makes ESL students become confident and at ease. The student who feels at ease in the classroom and likes the teacher may seek out intake by volunteering (Seliger, 1977), and may be more accepting of the teacher as a source of intake (Stevick, 1976). Hence, attitude toward the classroom and teacher may relate to both acquisition and learning. A folktale encourages acquirers to communicate with lecturers and among themselves, thereby obtaining the necessary input, or intake, for language acquisition.

Furthermore, another motivating factor is for ESL students to interact with other students who are more knowledgeable of the target language. According to Dulay and Burt (1977) the acquirer must not only understand the input but must also, in a sense, be "open" to it. Vygotsky (1978) argues that interaction with peers is an effective way of motivating and developing language acquisition skills and strategies. Landolf (2000) claims that, in early stages of second language learning, the ESL student is dependent on the more knowledgeable *others,* for language acquisition. Thus students will be integrative motivated. Integrative motivation is defined by Stevick (1976:113), as the desire to be like valued members of the community that speak the second language... the integratively motivated performer will not feel a threat from the "other" group and will thus be more prone to engage in interaction. Hence, the presence of integrative motivation encourages the ESL students to interact with speakers of the second language out of sheer interest, and thereby acquiring the target language. Attitudinal factors generally relate to subconscious language acquisition (Carroll, 1973:5).Language learning is influenced by the desire of ESL students to communicate with others. This is the same view as Bates (1993) contention that, children are born with a powerful brain that matures slowly and predisposes them to acquire new understandings that they are motivated to share with others. Vygotsky (1978) views interaction with peers as an effective way of developing language acquisition skills and strategies. Less competent students will develop with the help from more skilful peers.

Collaborative Learning
Through class discussion and group work about important issues in the folktale, lecturers and students can collaborate and practice four key interactive skills; summarising, questioning, clarifying and predicting. The ESL students can engage peer learning, in group work as well as creation of dialogue between the lecturer and the student vice-versa. Moreover, through folktales, which are familiar to most ESL students, lecturers are enabled to teach from the known to the unknown, from complex to simple, and from the abstract to concrete, integrating reading, writing, listening and writing skills. Folktales are familiar because most people in the world have heard folktales at some time or the other. Most people can still remember early childhood folktale telling moments, of which all have grown up on folktales of some type or the other. This makes it easier for the lecturer to avoid labelling the ESL learner as an empty slate, and the lecturer as a fountain of knowledge. In folktales lecturers can use co-operative learning exercises. Cooperation and collaborative dialogue promotes cognitive development, in the sense that students play an active role in learning.

Furthermore, the lecturer should act as a midwife, giving tasks so that students can work on them collaboratively, resulting in discovery learning, which is a very significant strategy of any learning process. According to Vygotsky (1978) adults play a more instrumental role of fostering language acquisition, as the more knowledgeable others, they can do this through scaffolding. Clay and Cazden (1992) say that scaffolding is the withdrawal of adult control and support as a function of children's increasing mastery of a given task. Scaffolding is motivating. It provides ESL students a platform where the acquired language could be used. This works very well with the folktale, because discovery learning is explored. Bruner who is the proponent of the discovery method believes that learners, whether they are children or adults, learn best when they discover knowledge for themselves. He believes that students retain knowledge more when it is something they discover on their own. This creates an enabling environment for learners to acquire the target language.

The lecturer can give some of the following group-work activities to students:
- Discuss the characters in the folktale and their roles.
- Make an analysis and discussion of the important facts or lessons from the folktale.
- Retell the folktale
- Write a summary of the folktale
- Which character do you like best and why?
- use the words and phrases in the folktale in a sentence

Learning, therefore, becomes a reciprocal experience for students and lecturers, the dynamic nature of the

interplay between lecturers, students and the task (Berk, 1986: 680).

Role Play

Many, if not all, aspects of ESL can be taught using hands-on activities, such as role playing. Through role play an ESL learner can fully acquire the target language. This will ensure that the students learn information through their own experiences. In doing this, they will gain an increased understanding of vocabulary and many aspects of grammatical skills, thereby developing their oral communication skills. Overall, this will make for a more meaningful learning experience. Students can use their creative skills. After hearing a story, various students can act it out together or assume different roles while their peers watch. The lecturer may retell the story with slight variations, replacing one character with another, and engaging different students in the acting. Role playing integrates two areas of learning; listening and speaking. Thus, role playing encourages the participation of the learner in the acquisition process the target language. Through folktales ESL can all their linguistic resources and push ahead their linguistic knowledge to the limit.

Berk (1986:680) emphasise the dynamic nature of the interplay between teachers, learners and tasks. Through role plays, lecturers are able to deduce the language proficiency of each individual student and are able to offer individualised necessary help. Archibald (2000) contends that, in role playing individualised attention is necessary because it addresses the needs, motivation and performance of each individual learner through role play ESL students becomes familiar with words and they develop the ability to reason analytically about verbal materials. Through folktales, actors will not be intimidated as the learning atmosphere is as relaxed and fun as possible. Ideally, the actors will act in a humorous, emotional, or otherwise memorable way. This helps students to make visual and emotional connections to the new language structures they are hearing. Thus, through dramatization of the folktale, ESL students get good language development skills, especially orally or speaking skills as well as mastery of the English language.

Language Compentence

Carroll (1973) compares knowledge of a language with the subconscious or tacit knowledge entailed in Chomsky's term "competence": Although it is often said that linguistic "competence" in the sense defined by Chomsky (1965:65) involves some kind of "knowledge" of the grammatical rules of a language, this "knowledge" is ordinarily our conscious awareness... nevertheless, some adolescents and adults can be made to demonstrate an awareness of the syntactical structure of the sentences they speak ... In support, Vygotsky (1978) argues that social learning tends to precede language development, in the sense that infants are born with the basic materials or abilities for intellectual development. Basing on this argument, folktales give them the social linguistic exposure they need to learn a language. Through folktales the ESL student is not regarded as an empty slate or tabula rasa. ESL is regarded as a semiotic process where participation in socially mediated activities is essential. Folk tales are sources of entertainment for human. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that cognitive development takes place in the matrix of the person's social history, and as such, every cultural setup upholds folktales and as such they will be familiar to the ESL students. This makes students acquire the English language easily.

Grammatical Skills

Language acquisition through folktales can result in vast improvements of the ESL students' grammatical skills. The lecturer can choose words from the folk story that he/she feels the students are not familiar with, after the folktale has been told. Together with the students they go through them repeatedly, discussing their pronunciation and meaning. This is intended to provide repetition of the target vocabulary in context and enable students to learn the vocabulary, grammar and phonology of their new language in a holistic way (Marsh, 1996). Thus, if these words are taught and their meanings given to students, comprehension of these words will be fast and long lasting. This exercise, will therefore, improve ESL students' vocabulary and spelling. Furthermore, the lecturer can give spelling lessons so as to analyse whether the students have comprehended the words. The lecturer can also let the student use the newly acquired words orally in sentences. This type of learning enables acquisition in more areas of learning; comprehension, grammar, pronunciation and spelling, which saves time in the teaching of ESL. Thus one can do four parts of ESL in one lesson. Grammar is the key to every language (Stafford and Covitt, 1978) and therefore by listening to folktales students acquire unconsciously the rules of grammar in a language through performance. This is a strategy that integrates new words and their meanings and relates them to any part of speech in the target language. Furthermore, the ESL students automatically become translators as all words from the folktale into their mother tongue. This helps them to increase their vocabulary and at the same time developing their listening and oral language skills.

Writing Skills

Writing skills can be improved when lecturer asks ESL students to express in writing their feelings about a character they liked in the folktale. The lecturer should encourage them to tell why they like the character they chose. Have them write and tell what their character looks like and the role the character played in the tale allows ESL students to

use critical thinking skills. The students can also make a summary of the folktale. These techniques all have the same basic aim of keeping the class comprehensible, interesting, and as efficient as possible for language acquisition. Consequently, as students enjoy the folktale read in class, it is possible to eventually write about enjoyable episodes from the folktale. Writing skills can also be improved when answering the questions in group work activities; this is how writing can be integrated in the lesson using the folktale.

Listening

Simply hearing a second language with understanding appears to be necessary but is not sufficient for acquisition to take place. As the students listen to the folktale, they usually go through a "silent period", during which they build up acquired competence through active listening. Thus, folktales advocate for reciprocal teaching and learning. They improve listening skills. Hence, learning will be student centred not lecturer centred.After the listening process, the lecturer may ask ESL students some questions to check their level of understanding the message. Furthermore, the questions must not only be a method of checking comprehension but must simultaneously engage the target vocabulary in context. As the students respond to questions, lecturers would allow them to answer with one or two words. Lecturers must not worry about the students speaking in full sentences, because by answering using single words or very short phrases the ESL students can keep their attention on acquiring words to be learnt from the folktale. Hence, folktales help make the target language comprehensible to the students, including careful limiting of vocabulary, constantly asking easy comprehension questions, making of frequent comprehension checks, and very short grammatical explanations.

Reading

The best language lessons may be those in which real communication takes place, in which an acquirer understands what the message being communicated. Similarly, a reading passage is appropriate for a student if he or she understands the message. Enjoying the folktale motivates ESL students to read them. The lecturer must read the folktale first loudly. Then important and new words in the folktale should be explained and then the lecturer should give a short summary. This process ensures that ESL students understand important words in the reading, as well as the meaning of the folktale as a whole. After the lecturer's reading, students then read the folktale as in class reading after which there will be individual reading. Thus the reading process will become appropriate for a student because he or she will understand what they are reading about. According to Seliger, (1977) teachers teach language best when they use it for what it was designed for:

communication. Krashen, (2004) says that, the best way to help ESL students develop both fluency and accuracy in a language is to expose them to large amounts of comprehensible input. Reading of the folktale helps ESL lecturers to provide this input by making the language both comprehensible and engaging.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that through folktales ESL students will become better listeners, better readers, better writers, and better storytellers in the English language. Krashen and Vygotsky theories go a long way in guiding lecturers to resort to teaching and learning ESL through strategies such as the folktale. It can be concluded that ESL students would acquire the English language naturally if lecturers give use the folktale as comprehensible input. Language is a social process, which shapes and is shaped by human interaction. This helps the ESL Students to be competent and to be cognitive developed

REFERENCES

Archibald, J. 2000. *Second Language Acquisition and Linguist Theory*, Malden Mass: Blackwell.

Bates, I. 1993.*The Social Construction of Competence: Qualitative Studies of Vocational Training,* Proposal to the Economic and Social Research Council.

Berk, L. E.1986.*Relationship Of Elementary School Children's Private Speech to Behavioural Accompaniment to Task, Attention and Task Performance, Developmental Psychology,* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Brown, H. D. 1977. "Cognitive and Affective Characteristics of Good Language Learners," in*Second Language Acquisition Research Forum*, UCLA.

Brown, R. and Hanlon, C. 1970. "Derivational Complexity and Order of Acquisition in Child Speech" in J. Hayes (Ed.) Cognition *and the Development of Language,* New York: Wiley, pp. 155-207.

Carroll, J. 1973. "Implications of Aptitude Test Research and Psycholinguistic Theory for Foreign Language Teaching." *Linguistics,* Volume 112 pp. 5-13.

Chomsky, N. 1965.*Aspects of the Theory of Syntax,* Cambridge: MIT Press

Chomsky, N. 2008. *on phases. In Foundational Issues in Linguistics theory: Essays in Honour of Jean-Roger Vergnaud, C. Otero et al (Eds)* pp. 134-166. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Clay, M. and Cazden, C. (1992). A Vygotskian Interpretation of Reading Recovery in L.C. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and Education: Instructional Implications and Applications of Socio-historical Psychology* (pp. 206-222). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Collins English Dictionary. 1998. Complete and Unabridged: HarperCollins Publishers.

Dulay, H. and Burt, M.1977. "Remarks on Creativity in Language Acquisition," in M. Burt, H. Dulay, and M. Finnochiaro (Eds.), *Viewpoints on English as a Second Language*. New York: Regents.
Durkheim, E. (1893)

Gardner, R., Smythe P. Clement, R. and Gliksman, L. 1976. "Second-Language Learning: A Social-Psychological Perspective "in *Canadian Modern Language Review* 32: 198-213.

Krashen, S. 1975. "The Critical Period for Language Acquisition and its Possible Bases, "in D. Aaronson and R. R *Psycholinguistics and Communicative Disorders,* New York: New York Academy of Science.

Krashen, S. 1976. "Formal and Informal Linguistic Environments in Language Learning and Language Acquisition," In *TESOL Quarterly* 10: 157-168.

Krashen, Stephen 2004. *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research* (2nd Ed.) Heinemann.

Krashen S. and Terrell, T. 1983. *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Landolf, J. P. 2000.*Introducing Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Larsen Freeman, D. 1975. "The Acquisition of Grammatical Morphemes by Adult ESL Students," *TESOL Quarterly* 9: 409-420.

Long, M.1976."Encouraging Language Acquisition by Adults in a Formal Instructional Setting," *ELT Documents* 76/3: 14-24.

Marsh, H. W. 1996.*The Relationship Between Research and Teaching: A Meta-Analysis,* University of Western Sydney: Macarthur.

Random House Dictionary (2015) Random House.
Schumann, J. 1975. "Affective Factors and the Problem of Age in Second Language Acquisition," in *Language Learning* 25: 209-235.

Seliger, H. 1977. "Does Practice Make Perfect? A Study of Interaction Patterns and L2 Competence," in *Language Learning* 27: 264-278.

Snow, C. and Ferguson, C.1977. *Talking to Children: Language Input and Acquisition,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Songsilp, P. (1999). "Study and Analysis of Khmer Legends and Folk Tales Regions 1-9" Bangkok : Thai Language Field of Study, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Thonburi Rajabhat Institute.

Stafford, C. and Covitt, G.1978. "Monitor Use in Adult Second Language Production, " ITL: *Review of Applied Linguistics,* 39-40: 103-125.

Stevicks 1976: Stevick, E. 1976.*Memory, Meaning, and Method*, Rowley, Ma: Newbury House.

Vygotsky, L.1978.*Mind in Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.