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LANGUAGE LEARNING VIA STORYTELLING: EFFICIENCY AND METHODS

Storytelling has been proven to be one of the more efficient tools that allows one to learn a foreign language. For instance, according to one study, the introduction of storytelling to a group of English learners improved their performance across four major language skills – reading, listening, speaking, and writing [2, p. 6]. Another study proved that learning via storytelling contributed to the betterment of the speaking capabilities of Greek language learners at a higher pace than those pursuing a more traditional instruction approach [3, p. 7].

Storytelling works, that much is clear. But what it is about storytelling that makes such a great tool of instruction? To start with, it is the universal nature of storytelling makes it effective. [2, p. 1] After all, storytelling has existed for millennia across different cultures and has been the way information has been transmitted for centuries [2, p. 2]. It is, thus, the familiarity of the method that makes it available to all students.

Besides its ubiquitous nature, storytelling comes with other benefits. For example, it has a particularly positive effect on the learner's speaking capacity [3, p. 2]. Often, being able to speak the target language is the primary motivation for language learners to learn one, which is why this effect of storytelling is particularly important.

Storytelling also engages students as it is a collaborative activity. It is this interaction between students that makes learning enjoyable to students, thus motivating them [2, p. 2]. It also creates a sense of authenticity because when discussing stories, whether someone else's or their own, language students reflect on their beliefs and identity [2, p. 2].

When it comes to the use of storytelling as part of the language learning curriculum, one can find a variety of learning methods. Any list will be by no means exhaustive – storytelling can come in many shapes in forms – but it does cover the methods used for storytelling-based instruction highlighted in some of the studies that proved the efficiency of the technique.

One suggestion is to harness the *communicative potential* of the storytelling instruction method. By taking part in activities, such as discussions of stories among students, retelling of the stories, acting out the stories, and rewriting and revising stories, language learners can become active users of the language and learn more efficiently [2, p. 4]. One study showed that conducting the following activities – total physical response storytelling, storytelling relying on picture books, and mime-based storytelling – allowed language learners to achieve significant progress in language learning [2, p. 5]. Additionally, the study suggests that activities involving the students imitating the teacher who tells a story, coming up with stories describing their experience, telling stories by describing visual images, modifying stories, and other

techniques, such as clustering, story games, story pyramid, story models, create and write are equally helpful [2, p. 5]. The story pyramid is a particularly useful method for beginner learners. It asks the learners to describe the different components of the story, such as the characteristics of the protagonist, the setting of the story, its chief problem, and other aspects in an increasingly expanded word count, drawing on both the comprehension and reproduction language skills [1].

Using technology can facilitate storytelling-based language learning. The use of technology makes it possible to engage students by employing auditory (recordings, songs, etc.) and visual (photos, videos, text, etc.) input to immerse learners in a given story. It also allows for a varied type of activities: from students learning pronunciation by listening to the recordings of specific words to them creating a presentation about themselves, which encourages them to tell their story with images and text [3, p. 3]. The incorporation of technology into the storytelling method makes for more interactive assignments: for instance, learners can record themselves discussing the images as part of the story and post the recording online, making it easy for the teacher to provide feedback [3, p. 3]. Alternatively, learners can discuss the story on the online class board and comment on one another's posts, thus multiplying the communicative effect of storytelling.

Finally, storytelling activities should involve *creative assignments*. One study describes a range of activities that allowed to improve the language capacity of the language learners: these included the writing of poems, discussions of important events in the students' lives, and the creation of podcasts based on student recordings throughout the period of instruction [4, p. 9]. This study emphasized that students should be encouraged to share their own stories, aspirations, and concerns that incorporate the material they

Матеріали XLI-ої Міжнародної науково-практичної конференції
(07 лютого 2024 року, м. Анкара, (Туреччина), дистанційно)

are studying [4, p. 1]. Even when learning basic grammar and phonetics topics, a creative approach can be useful to help students benefit from storytelling. Thus, one language instructor asked students to talk about their home country using passive voice [4, p. 9]. Another example was the reciting of poems that emphasized the correct pronunciation, helping students engage with the study of phonetics in a livelier fashion [4, p. 9]. The bottom line is that by coming up with varied kinds of creative exercises, it is possible to engage and motivate learners, thus improving their command of the target language.

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