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Teaching English as a Foreign/International Language (M. Ed.)

Postgraduate Dissertation

**Teachers' perceptions on the use of storytelling with young learners
within the Greek EFL context: An IPA study**

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Η παρούσα εργασία αποτελεί πνευματική ιδιοκτησία της φοιτήτριας («συγγραφέας/δημιουργός») που την εκπόνησε. Στο πλαίσιο της πολιτικής ανοικτής πρόσβασης ο συγγραφέας/δημιουργός εκχωρεί στο ΕΑΠ, μη αποκλειστική άδεια χρήσης του δικαιώματος αναπαραγωγής, προσαρμογής, δημόσιου δανεισμού, παρουσίασης στο κοινό και ψηφιακής διάχυσής τους διεθνώς, σε ηλεκτρονική μορφή και σε οποιοδήποτε μέσο, για διδακτικούς και ερευνητικούς σκοπούς, άνευ ανταλλάγματος και για όλο το χρόνο διάρκειας των δικαιωμάτων πνευματικής ιδιοκτησίας. Η ανοικτή πρόσβαση στο πλήρες κείμενο για μελέτη και ανάγνωση δεν σημαίνει καθ' οιονδήποτε τρόπο παραχώρηση δικαιωμάτων διανοητικής ιδιοκτησίας του συγγραφέα/δημιουργού ούτε επιτρέπει την αναπαραγωγή, αναδημοσίευση, αντιγραφή, αποθήκευση, πώληση, εμπορική χρήση, μετάδοση, διανομή, έκδοση, εκτέλεση, «μεταφόρτωση» (downloading), «ανάρτηση» (uploading), μετάφραση, τροποποίηση με οποιονδήποτε τρόπο, τμηματικά ή περιληπτικά της εργασίας, χωρίς τη ρητή προηγούμενη έγγραφη συναίνεση του συγγραφέα/δημιουργού. Ο συγγραφέας/δημιουργός διατηρεί το σύνολο των ηθικών και περιουσιακών του δικαιωμάτων.

Abstract

This dissertation investigates Greek EFL teachers' beliefs and perceptions of the role of storytelling in vocabulary acquisition and the development of oracy and literacy skills in young learners. In particular, it focuses on how storytelling impacts language development and student engagement in the classroom. A qualitative research approach was employed, using semi-structured interviews with a sample of EFL teachers. This allowed teachers to express their views and experiences with integrating storytelling into their teaching practices and assess its effectiveness in fostering language skills. The findings indicate that storytelling plays a critical role in enhancing young learners' vocabulary retention. Teachers reported that the use of stories improves students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. Moreover, storytelling was found to create an engaging and supportive classroom environment where learners were more actively involved and motivated to participate in language-related activities. Teachers also observed that storytelling not only facilitated comprehension and the use of new vocabulary but also contributed to the development of critical thinking and creativity in young learners. This research highlights the value of storytelling as an effective pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms, particularly in the early stages of language learning. It suggests that storytelling can be used strategically to enhance language skills while reinforcing student engagement and emotional connection to the learning process. The study offers practical insights into how storytelling can be incorporated into teaching practices and curriculum design, ultimately contributing to the improvement of language education for young learners.

Keywords: EFL learning, storytelling, Greek teachers, young learners, qualitative research

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα διατριβή διερευνά τις πεποιθήσεις και αντιλήψεις των εκπαιδευτικών των αγγλικών ως ξένης γλώσσας στην Ελλάδα σχετικά με το ρόλο της αφήγησης ιστοριών στην απόκτηση λεξιλογίου και την ανάπτυξη των δεξιοτήτων προφορικής και γραπτής έκφρασης σε μαθητές μικρούς σε ηλικία. Συγκεκριμένα, επικεντρώνεται στο πώς η αφήγηση ιστοριών επηρεάζει την ανάπτυξη της γλώσσας και την συμμετοχή των μαθητών στην τάξη. Χρησιμοποιήθηκε ποιοτική ερευνητική προσέγγιση, με τη χρήση ημιδομημένων συνεντεύξεων με δείγμα εκπαιδευτικών των αγγλικών ως ξένης γλώσσας. Αυτό επέτρεψε στις εκπαιδευτικούς να εκφράσουν τις απόψεις και τις εμπειρίες τους σχετικά με την ενσωμάτωση της αφήγησης ιστοριών στις διδακτικές τους πρακτικές και να αξιολογήσουν την αποτελεσματικότητά της στην ενίσχυση των γλωσσικών δεξιοτήτων. Τα ευρήματα δείχνουν ότι η αφήγηση ιστοριών διαδραματίζει κρίσιμο ρόλο στη βελτίωση της συγκράτησης λεξιλογίου των μικρών σε ηλικία μαθητών. Οι εκπαιδευτικοί ανέφεραν ότι η χρήση ιστοριών βελτιώνει τις ικανότητες ακρόασης, ομιλίας, ανάγνωσης και συγγραφής των μαθητών. Επιπλέον, διαπιστώθηκε ότι η αφήγηση ιστοριών δημιουργεί ένα ενδιαφέρον και υποστηρικτικό περιβάλλον στην τάξη, όπου οι μαθητές παρακινούνται να συμμετέχουν πιο ενεργά σε δραστηριότητες σχετικές με τη γλώσσα. Οι εκπαιδευτικοί παρατήρησαν επίσης ότι η αφήγηση ιστοριών διευκόλυνε όχι μόνο την κατανόηση και τη χρήση νέου λεξιλογίου, αλλά συνέβαλε και στην ανάπτυξη της κριτικής σκέψης και της δημιουργικότητας στους μικρούς σε ηλικία μαθητές. Η έρευνα αυτή αναδεικνύει την αξία της αφήγησης ιστοριών ως αποτελεσματικού παιδαγωγικού εργαλείου στη διδασκαλία των αγγλικών ως ξένης γλώσσας, ιδιαίτερα στα πρώτα στάδια της εκμάθησης της γλώσσας. Προτείνει ότι η αφήγηση ιστοριών μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθεί στρατηγικά για την ενίσχυση των γλωσσικών δεξιοτήτων, ενώ παράλληλα ενδυναμώνει την συμμετοχή των μαθητών και τη συναισθηματική τους σύνδεση με τη διαδικασία της μάθησης. Η παρούσα μεταπτυχιακή διατριβή προσφέρει πρακτικές πληροφορίες για το πώς μπορεί να ενσωματωθεί η αφήγηση ιστοριών στις διδακτικές πρακτικές και τον σχεδιασμό του προγράμματος σπουδών, συμβάλλοντας τελικά στη βελτίωση της εκμάθησης της γλώσσας σε μικρούς σε ηλικία μαθητές.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: εκμάθηση των αγγλικών ως ξένη γλώσσα, αφήγηση ιστοριών, Ελληνίδες δασκάλες, μικροί σε ηλικία μαθητές, ποιοτική έρευνα

List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

AI: Artificial Intelligence

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IT: Information Technology

PC: Personal Computer

L1: first language

L2: second language

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1. Introduction

Storytelling has been recognised as a powerful tool for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), facilitating not only language development but also fostering cognitive, social, and emotional development (Hava, 2021; Kasami, 2018; Torres et al., 2012; Vinogradova et al., 2011). For young EFL learners, storytelling offers a developmentally appropriate approach that supports vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, cultural awareness, and increased motivation. It integrates visuals, sound, and language, creating a meaningful learning environment that stimulates both cognitive and affective domains. Despite its recognised benefits, there remains a gap in understanding how storytelling is implemented in real-world classrooms.

In Greece, although children start learning English as early as kindergarten, there is a notable lack of research exploring EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding storytelling. Specifically, no studies have investigated how Greek EFL teachers incorporate storytelling into their teaching practices, the challenges they encounter, or their perceptions of its effectiveness in language learning (Chadjipapa et al., 2019). Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how storytelling can be more effectively utilised to support young EFL learners and for identifying practical strategies to overcome barriers to its successful implementation. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes function as critical filters that shape their choices of teaching methodologies, approaches, topics, and classroom activities, making it essential to understand how these factors influence storytelling in practice (Fives & Buehl, 2012). This study seeks to address the research gap by exploring Greek EFL teachers' perceptions regarding storytelling with young learners. Specifically, it investigates how teachers perceive the advantages, challenges, and pedagogical strategies associated with storytelling. It also examines the impact of professional experience, teacher education, and individual conceptions on its implementation in EFL instruction.

To achieve its aims, the study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and provides a detailed exploration of the personal meanings Greek EFL teachers attach to storytelling in their teaching practice. Through semi-structured interviews with six teachers, the study highlights the diverse and complex ways in which storytelling is perceived and applied in the classroom. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the connection between EFL teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices. They also offer valuable implications for improving EFL education in the

early years by encouraging the adoption of innovative pedagogies, such as storytelling. Furthermore, the study's results aim to inform educational policy in EFL and support teacher training programs by providing actionable insights into how storytelling can be effectively integrated into teaching practices, ultimately enhancing the learning experiences of young EFL learners.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Storytelling in EFL for Young Learners

2.1.1 The importance of storytelling for young learners

Special attention has been paid to the use of narration as one of the most successful approaches to EFL learning, especially when young learners are involved. Its relevance lies in its capacity to support language development by making it possible to design and implement interesting comprehensive environments. As identified from the literature, storytelling is very effective in many ways, from language development to the child's emotional and cognitive development. It assists young learners learn new words, comprehend words that are heard, and gain an understanding of cultural knowledge. It also increases motivation and involvement and provides meaningful situations for language use that in turn helps to consolidate and reproduce the language (Lucarevschi, 2016).

Research has shown that storytelling is useful in the development of language skills, especially listening and speaking. Nasir and Inayah (2019) stated that storytelling effectively develops children's narrative, improving their lexical density and rhetorical patterns while fostering a stronger emotional connection with the content and improving their social understanding. Likewise, Miller and Pennycuff (2008) pointed out how storytelling boosts listening skills since children listen purposefully and form connections through repetition and visualisation. Of the sources consulted, Santos (2018) observes that storytelling enables learners to conditionally process language through listening in context, reducing the stress commonly found in standard listening exercises.

However, storytelling also enables listening to play a significant role in students' active involvement. Children are let to develop context understanding and comprehend what is being said, predict outcomes of a story, and listen to tones of voice and body language. In this way, storytelling encourages children to acquire new vocabulary and repeats the previously learnt structures in a fun and highly effective way (Lucarevschi, 2016). Storytelling also enhances participation in learning since it is an interactive activity, enhancing students' collaboration in the classroom and making them feel valued and motivated (Cremin et al., 2017).

Storytelling in EFL contexts fits well with other progressive goals such as encouraging learners to think critically, act creatively, or become more empathetic. An appreciation of intercultural understanding and social responsibility is developed as children listen to, think about, and compare stories from different cultures. It enhances language acquisition, which involves all aspects of language, and improves young children's personal and social-emotional growth (Nasir & Inayah, 2019).

Finally, using stories in teaching young learners is not only a language development tool but also a basis for lifelong learning. The former points out the benefits of focusing on creating highly interesting and lively ways to promote the learning process compared to ordinary approaches. That is why students can state that this teaching method provides a lot of fun in the process of language acquisition and makes it an interesting journey.

2.1.2 Selecting a suitable story

Choosing the right story for young learners in the EFL classroom is a complex process that has an immediate and direct connection with the learners' achievements. The primary requirement is to select a story using appropriate language that aligns with the educational programme and is relevant to students' attitudes and culture. Storytelling must follow the developmental age of the learners, with familiar topics and basic syntactic patterns to enable learning by young students. From what has been learnt in the course of the research it can be said that stories, when chosen properly, have the potential to positively influence language acquisition, the development of the moral compass, and critical thinking skills in children.

Fairy tales are traditional texts used in teaching EFL learners because they are popular across different cultures, and their plots contain cause-and-effect relations and frequent stimuli. The above characteristics enable young learners to encode language aspects like vocabulary, syntactic, and discourse. The study conducted by Papadaki et al. (2023) shows that converting fairy tales also helps learners cross the divide between language and culture, thus helping them come across the values and norms of societies. However, these traditional narratives often contain gender stereotypes, as highlighted by several scholars using well-known fairy tales such as 'Cinderella' and 'Snow White.' Gilbert and Gubar (1979) argue that these tales maintain and reinforce patriarchal ideals by presenting women's roles as defined primarily by their beauty and by their dependence

on male characters (like the prince) for rescue. The authors analyse how female protagonists in these stories are depicted as needing to be saved, while female villains (like the stepmother and evil queen) are depicted as monsters. These themes reinforce the creation of stereotypes and patriarchal views of women, depicting them as helpless and in need of male intervention. Similarly, it is necessary for educators to either choose or endorse such ontologies to support equality and diversity and eliminate prejudice among learners (Pardede, 2021).

Digital storytelling also adds to the experiences as it installs audiovisuals and interactions to the storytelling. Digital technology allows teachers to select the materials presented, making stories engaging and appropriate regarding language and learners' preferences. Thus, it caters to various learning styles and enhances the learning environment that facilitates language acquisition. Based on the recommendation of Antolinez (2017), students find it easy to comprehend difficult ideas or abstract concepts when presented in a proper digital story format in order to catch the learners' attention and keep them motivated.

However, the teacher as the storyteller is a critical component in using the selected story to make the intervention as effective as possible. Storytelling employs the use of the voice, tone, speed, use of the body, facial expressions, and gestures to make meaning and sustain interest. Teachers are urged to encourage learner engagement by asking the learners to try and guess, recall details of the story, and initiate discussions relating to their own experiences (Hwang et al., 2016).

In conclusion, it is possible to claim that while the focus is on selecting interesting and suitable stories and using various forms of presentation, the development of both the linguistic and socio-emotional aspects is promoted. By creating and contributing to the development of a comprehensive, diverse, and participatory learning process, storytelling has become a revolutionary practice for teaching and learning languages.

2.1.3 The difference between storytelling and story reading

The difference between storytelling and story reading lies in their methods, with storytelling focusing on students' engagement, and story reading emphasising language acquisition in young children. Narration is a comprehensive communication process in which the storyteller communicates a story using all available forms of expression, such as gestures, facial expressions, and voice inflections, without relying on a script or a

text. On the other hand, story reading is where the teacher or the storyteller reads aloud, focusing on staying true to the story of the book being read. To some extent, both are useful in teaching, but they address two distinct areas of language acquisition and interactions (Khaerana & Nurdin, 2018).

As mentioned above, storytelling also provides an individual approach and makes it possible to establish close communication with the learner, as well as develop the learners' imagination necessary for an interactive activity. According to Alkaaf and Al-Bulushi (2017), storytelling also encourages originality, improves understanding, and encourages cognition. Learners can be able to comprehend meaning, anticipate events, and feel empathy with characters within the story. This interactive aspect of a well-developed story is also an excellent opportunity for learners to retell the story, allowing them to practise redundancy, vocabulary, and grammar.

On the other hand, story reading familiarises the learners with the features of writing, structures such as sentence and paragraph structures, punctuation, and orthography. According to Suzuki et al. (2018), story reading prepares children to understand that text is meaningful and makes connections between the oral and written word. Story reading is less dynamic than storytelling but guides the presentation of narratives, which is necessary for teaching the learners; the value of narrative elements is unquestionable for the literacy teaching process.

The two approaches also entail differences in terms of the level of learners' engagement. Storytelling is, by design, an essential interactive art form that offers flexibility for a storyteller to address the audience in response to their reactions (Talibong & Abdulfattah, 2020). This flexibility is especially beneficial to EFL development since it aligns with a reduced affective filter, which is a positive learning factor. On the other hand, story reading is more structured and literacy centred, emphasising the correct presentation of language and fewer points at which the learner can respond (Alkaaf & Al-Bulushi, 2017).

This is further to say that both methods can be incorporated into EFL instruction to accomplish complementary purposes. These two approaches to narrative are especially fruitful for developing oral language proficiency and listening comprehension as well as for developing attitudes towards stories, while story reading is the best for developing reading understanding and literacy. Therefore, by adopting these strategies, educators can foster an integrated language-learning environment that addresses the

needs of young learners. Besides, the ability to comprehend and use language creates a healthy approach to learning and develops a strong language foundation for a lifetime (Zhou & Yadav, 2017).

2.2 Storytelling in EFL in Greece for young learners

Having highlighted the necessity of using stories as the subject matter in the learning and teaching process at the earlier stage of learning English as a foreign language, the significance of stories for determining the motivation of young learners in Greece and for achieving multiple goals in the educational process would also be pointed. Teaching in a story content is most appropriate for young learners due to their developmental characteristics and the cognitive needs of the young learner to learn language in context. Besides, it helps address the task of knowing at least one foreign language and enhances cognitive abilities, creativity, and socio-emotional skills, which are crucial components of emotional intelligence. Socio-emotional skills involve the ability to recognise, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as the ability to understand others' emotions and build strong interpersonal relationships. These skills enhance communication and collaboration, making them an essential element of the EFL learning strategy (Kavvadia, 2016).

It is also important to note that research highlights the specific benefits of the process in terms of children's interests and language fluency. It is particularly easy to engage the child's interest when using stories in the learning-teaching process because this method involves using narratives to explain new words, grammatical patterns, and pronunciation. Both these aspects are essential for language learning, and storytelling helps develop both aspects among those learning a language. Thus, repetition and context in stories facilitate easy learning and retention by students learning the new linguistic patterns being taught. Moreover, the structural organisation of the story gives a more relevant context to language, helping learners develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of words and the patterns in which they are used (Vasilomanolakis, 2009).

Storytelling enhances the learning preferences and the developmental stages of learners in Greek EFL classrooms. These students are easily distracted and struggle with concentration, with their lesson deliveries being more effective when multiple techniques are used. As Kallinikou and Nicolaidou (2019) explain, this approach

effectively addresses learners with various learning styles because storytelling engages visual, auditory, and tactile senses. For instance, fables like 'Little Red Riding Hood' greatly help the teaching process because learners look forward to using these words and constructing new patterns of language use while reading a favourite story. Since storytelling approaches create a relaxed and non-stressful learning atmosphere, the students learning language anxiety is lowered, and they are encouraged to be active participants (Papadaki & Karagianni, 2023).

Digital storytelling enhances the teaching process so that traditional storytelling practices are complemented by modern technological advancement. Computers, tablets, videos, and e-books are helpful in illustrating and narrating a story to young children to simplify their understanding of the storyline. They also ease the use of desirable interactive activities including quizzes and games which support the language aspects learnt in the stories. Besides improving the quality of EFL teaching and learning processes, the integration of digital technologies not only advances teachers' and learners' knowledge and abilities in technology but also helps develop technological competencies and language development (Elli, 2020).

Besides helping learners acquire linguistic skills, storytelling enhances students' socio-emotional and cultural development effectively. Inter- and intrapersonal conflicts are established as learners can learn different stories, which gives them identification skills and, therefore, allows them to pass on the required cultures. Stories are explained by Vasilomanolakis (2009) as the means of learners referring their own experiences to those of the characters to develop appropriate personal and professional values and norms. This cultural learning dimension is most important in EFL instruction since learners are usually immersed in new cultural contexts through the target language. In addition, storytelling enhances the possibility of student cooperation and collaboration through activities like retelling various stories or acting out of story characters.

Nevertheless, there are challenges in the use of storytelling in the Greek EFL classroom. One challenge is that teachers do not receive a comprehensive initial preparation for their task to tell a story. Some of these educators have not learnt how to make the stories come alive that makes this method less effective than it could be. Also, most printed textbooks employed in class learning contain stereotypical cultural and gender aspects, which may not align with today's education vision of promoting non-discrimination (Mattheoudakis et al., 2015). Teachers need to choose or adapt stories suitably in order

to avoid negative stereotyping. These difficulties can only be solved on a systemic level; teachers must be provided with special professional development programs, and long, pedagogically valuable, and inclusive story-based texts need to be developed (Kavvadia, 2016).

Thus, storytelling has a crucial link with the teacher in order to produce positive results. The best narrators make their stories enjoyable, primarily through the tone of their voice, the rate at which they speak, and the use of their hands and faces. These elements aid the learners in understanding the narrative and appreciating the relationships between the spoken language and meaning. In addition, teachers can help students remain active and make choices while reading the story and influence students by inviting them to predict what will happen or asking them questions and letting them explain their opinions. This way, learners benefit from language learning and increase their confidence and interest in EFL (Loutrari et al., 2018).

The use of learner stories also enhances the development of learner autonomy, a key objective in modern teaching methods that promote a more interactive and student-centred learning environment, encouraging students to take control of their learning while emphasising critical thinking, collaboration, real-world application, and the integration of technology. Having students write their own stories, favourite story recreations, or new endings also allows children to assume responsibility for their learning to become proficient in the language. This autonomy is further supported by reflective practices because teachers will be sharing moral lessons of stories, or comparing cultures, beliefs, and traditions. Such an activity engages the learner in a way that makes them analyse and interpret the language used and content (Kallinikou & Nicolaidou, 2019).

More recently, storytelling has been used as a complete character educational approach in Greek EFL education. The multidimensional approach of oral language, cognitive, and socio-emotional development makes this strategy efficient for children as young as three years of age learning. As discussed earlier, the use of digital technology is expanding, which means there are new possibilities for developing unique and creative approaches to the language learning process. As shown by these ideas, by training educators, creating considerable materials, and making an environment that encourages and facilitates learning, storytelling becomes not just a teaching aid in EFL classes in Greece but also a vital learning tool (Kavvadia, 2016).

This study focuses on understanding the narrative purpose of storytelling in learning English as a foreign language to young learners in Greece. It is realised that the content and delivery style spark a lot of interest, promoting effective training and learning. However, since storytelling bridges the gap between traditional and modern educational methods, it acts as a connector that helps educators enhance their approaches, making the learning process more engaging, productive, and enjoyable while improving linguistic and cultural competence.

2.3 Traditional storytelling

Storytelling has been a conventional teaching method for several generations and, as one might expect, can be a powerful method for spreading language and culture. It involves telling different stories orally, using body language loaded with voice intonation, hand gestures, and facial expressions.

A weakness of traditional storytelling is that it often fails to engage young learners actively. Santos (2018) acknowledges that storytelling is an excellent combination of audio and visual that aids in understanding and memorising new linguistic components. The essence of storytelling also introduces contextual usages of repeated lexical phrases within the narrative, which learners use to understand and modify their language and language use. While mechanical learning techniques can be effective, storytelling will compel children to listen carefully, understand the meaning, and anticipate results, improving their cognitive and linguistic growth (MacDonald, 2013).

It also offers conventional learning experiences and relationships between the storyteller and the listeners, which are healthy emotional experiences. In the emotional domain, Huang (2006) went further and noted that this is important for enhancing engagement in a positive learning environment, eliminating anxiety, and increasing motivation. When a storyline is presented to learners with characters they can easily identify with and moral questions to answer, empathy and critical thinking skills will be engaged. In addition to enabling the learners to understand the language, this facilitates the aspect of culture in the stories, making storytelling an all-rounded aspect of learning (Huang, 2006).

The acoustic charge inherent in the traditional approach of learning through stories is especially useful when it comes to training phonemic awareness and listening comprehensibility of young learners. During storytelling, students hear different

intonations, rhythms, and accents. This knowledge helps them differentiate between phonemes and learn how to pronounce English. Additionally, they are not bound by written text, so they are able to concentrate on the auditory modality, thus improving their real-time processing of spoken language, as pointed out by Kim and Kim (2018). However, like with any other type of learning, traditional storytelling has specific difficulties. Of more significant concern is the likelihood that the learners may experience challenges comprehending stories, given that they are in limited contact with the target language. To avoid this, teachers must choose only easy-level stories or fables, simple language, and topics the children will likely know about. Moreover, the employment of objects such as props, visuals, and timely pauses can help learners understand the meanings of what is being said and reactivate vocabulary (Santos, 2018). Using storytelling in EFL also poses a challenge in that the teacher needs to be a good storyteller, with appropriate modulation or tone when using voice and gestures when using the hand. The author of this work, Huang (2006), suggests that it would be feasible to enhance teachers' abilities to effectively use storytelling to the ultimate optimum through specialized professional development programs designed to adapt this ancient strategy. However, the cultural values and beliefs as portrayed in the content of the stories should also be selected well so that the content does not represent or imply culturally wrong and established beliefs that may be considered unsuitable for learners.

Storytelling is still as effective in EFL teaching as it was in the past for it combines the language, thinking, and social-emotional aspects of learning. As it incorporates student participation into lessons, it contributes to young learners' total developmental process and language and cultural intelligence. Nonetheless, a satisfactory technique depends on careful planning, the fitting choice of stories, and meaningful narration by the teachers. In a search for balance, the traditional and specified value of storytelling is that it can help fill the gap between language teaching and cultural understanding in language education (MacDonald, 2013).

2.4 Digital storytelling

2.4.1 Definition of digital storytelling

Digital storytelling is a modern version of storytelling using technology to support the overall process. In its broadest sense, digital storytelling is the art of weaving stories

through images, audio and video, text, and animation. This method focuses on the best-known way of storytelling while integrating present-day tools that can contribute new interaction strategies in teaching EFL to young learners (Lugmayr et al., 2017).

Digital storytelling is based on the foundations of traditional storytelling principles, characterised by an organised structure that embraces a narrative framework. However, the digital medium enables the inclusion of captivating stimuli that enrich the stories for the audience. Illustrations, photographs, and animations are incorporated into the lesson as contextual aids to improve understanding and memorisation, particularly for ELT students with poor comprehension of the target language. The addition of other auditory components like voice-over and sound effects enhances the capability of the learner when it comes to the reception of linguistic stimuli, to enhance their pronunciation skills, intonation, and listening skills (Rizvic et al., 2020).

While conventional digital presentations are often associated with straightforward information delivery, digital storytelling focuses on the story's affective and subjective aspects of the broader narrative. It relies on word of mouth, telling of the incident or hypothetical story that the target group can relate to. Robin (2016), however, states that, apart from being an informative tool, the digital story elicits emotions and provokes thinking. In young EFL learners' context, this view enhances the learning and understanding process notable in a multiple-faceted manner that facilitates deeper interaction with the language and its use of cultural and traditional perspectives.

In conjunction with educational settings, the potential of the use of digital stories as an effective means of practising language skills is unparalleled. The nonlinear format employed by digital stories enables learner engagement since the students can choose what they want to watch, when, and how they want to do it. Amidst this type of flexibility, the educational needs of the students are taken into consideration to ensure that each learner's individual needs are addressed in the classroom. Furthermore, constructivism can be seen in digital storytelling as it involves active participants, allowing creativity, collaboration, and self-directed learning. By doing so, students not only employ language skills or proficiencies they have learnt but also enhance their vital twenty-first-century digital literacies (Yee & Stevens, 2019).

Digital storytelling goes beyond the acquisition of language skills. Culturally it is a useful tool as learners are educated on different cultures and ways of looking at life. This exposes the young learners to a conducive environment of the globalised world

and enhances the culture of accepting everyone without discrimination. Also, digital storytelling fosters 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, critical-thinking, and technological skills, which have come a long way in the current curriculum (Wu & Chen, 2020).

However, challenges are associated with applying digital storytelling in EFL classrooms. Teachers need skills in language teaching and adequate skills in using IT and related software. However, pre-service and continuing professional development, along with resources, are essential for enabling teachers to apply instructional strategies within their classroom context effectively. In addition, techno-connectivity and access to technology can be perceived as problematic to digital storytelling due to its application primarily in poor facilities and educational environments. These problems can only be solved with institutional support: targeted professional development and investment in technology (Lugmayr et al., 2017).

The implementation of digital media in language learning is an innovative pedagogical shift, which adapts the two-extremes narrative, storytelling technique to the framework of digital culture. Multimedia aspects used in digital storytelling help learners develop language and socio-emotional development aspects essential for learning. As part of EFL instruction, students benefit not only from its effects on language acquisition but also from the skills necessary in a virtual and global environment. In implementing the strategies discussed, digital storytelling can potentially transform language learning and teaching, especially in enhancing young learners' acquisition of the English language because of its interactive and enjoyable methods (Wu & Chen, 2020).

2.4.2 Types of digital stories

Digital storytelling has become a highly effective and multi-form approach to teaching and learning, offering numerous applications that meet a wide range of instruction goals and learning environments. These formats are referred to as the types of digital stories, which include the use of photographs, images, music, voice, audio, videos, and graphics, making the learning process appealing to the learners and enhancing their linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. From the aspect of EFL teaching, it is considered important to define different forms of digital stories in order to choose the appropriate material for classroom instruction (Choo et al., 2020).

There are many types of digital stories but one of the most common is the telling of a story based on a person's experience, viewpoint, or reflection. These stories tend to focus on a particular event or an experience, hence creating a way for learners to develop empathy for a topic. One-on-one accounts are especially useful for fostering listening comprehension when comprehending natural spoken language patterns, and mass meanings. Through interaction with these storylines, EFL learners may increase their cultural literacy and address the issue of how people of different cultures perceive spoken English as a foreign language (Alexander, 2017).

Another common type of digital story is the historical type of narrative. Historical anecdotes involve factual content based on the history of events or people or on significant cultural happenings in human society but are presented in the format of an anecdote. Historical narratives are quite useful in the rationale of L2 implementation in content-based instruction, as they promote broader language teaching, learning, and the development of multiple intelligences. That is why when studying historical concepts and events, learners are so often exposed to such terminologies as well as technically sound complicated sentence structures. Moreover, the indirect self-reflection in these stories allows learners to look at the same event from a different angle, thus adopting critical thinking of history and culture (Oskoz & Elola, 2016).

An instructional narrative is a PC-based digital story directed towards the learning of certain skills or ideas. Such stories are usually of the 'How to' narrative, sequencing processes and using graphics, animations, and narrations for ease of understanding. In any EFL classroom, instructional narratives can be most effective in teaching grammar, pronunciation, or any language function in a non-repetitive and catchy manner. Using the contents or the rules of language in the context of a narrative, instructional stories facilitate the learner to understand abstract concepts and teach them how to use such knowledge in practice (Hung, 2019).

Another kind of digital story is myths or fables of mythical, or fantasy nature. These stories use picture galleries of imaginary worlds, mythology, and fantastic adventures that may fascinate young learners and encourage creativity. The stories feature a rich choice of words, exposing learners to a variety of adjectives, adverbs, and other forms of figurative language. The fantasy-based stories are also used as a base for performing other creativity-related activities, such as role-play, history-telling, or writing,

contributing to the reinforcement of the targeted language in parallel to promoting the development of the learners' fantasy (Artamonov et al., 2021).

Staking the claim approach offers a true-life experience, especially when the documentary-style digital stories feature interviews, photos, and facts. Each of these stories helps learners familiarise themselves with different accents, speech, and cultural practices and in a way, expand their listening and cultural palette. Documentaries also can offer learners a chance to develop critical discussions and debates on the subject matter to the students, help in exercising their speaking as well as argumentative skills, and finally, promote the learners' cultural literacy (Canella, 2017).

Hybrid digital stories encompass features from more than one type of digital story and are a highly elastic type of media. For example, a hybrid story could involve an autobiographical type of story followed by historiographic information or could include didactic material intermingled with fiction. This provides flexibility to integrate the digital stories in a certain way to the teaching-learning objectives and users based on their needs hence they can prove to be useful in EFL classes (Shelton et al., 2016).

The forms of digital stories including personal narratives, historical narratives, instructional narratives, fantasy stories, documentaries as well as the hybrid mode create diverse and creative means to promote language learning. All of them hold different educational objectives in language learning and cognition processes among learners. When choosing and implementing these types of learning activities, educators are able to design powerful and diverse learning experiences which foster and develop learner language, cultural, and critical thinking competencies. However, based on the contemporary advances in the application of digital storytelling, a deep and significant impact on EFL education is still remarkable (Damayanti, 2017).

2.4.3 Digital storytelling as an effective instructional tool for teachers

This study shows that digital storytelling is an effective teaching method in EFL education. As a form of animating the traditional means of telling a story to young learners and at the same time using technology in learning the language, it makes it very useful in modern society. Teachers especially benefit greatly from the digital storytelling approach in teaching and learning since it provides a rich platform that sharpens students' language proficiency and fosters teacher-created learning cultures with an emphasis on digital creativity, cooperation, and evaluation. The increased use

of digital storytelling as a teaching aid in EFL classrooms shows how the technique can enhance teaching and learning and meet the needs of individual students (Robin, 2006). This also explains why digital storytelling, used as an instructional tool, is one of the most effective methods of maintaining children's attention. This audio-visual property of text which is possible only through technology is highly stimulating for learners because it includes images, videos, animations, and sound effects. These elements simplify complex technical processes and concepts, making them easier to understand at a basic level. By breaking down complicated ideas into simpler parts, they help learners better grasp complex content, making advanced concepts more accessible and easier to relate to. Thus, by organising the material in an entertaining and bottom line, interactive way, the teacher effectively develops an emotional association between the learners and the content. Thus, this makes the learning experience more effective and meaningful because participants are more motivated to be active (Robin, 2015).

Digital storytelling also plays a great role in enhancing several language skills simultaneously. When teachers use digital stories in class, they give the learners a chance to use the four skills in the context of a single lesson. For example, students can listen to a story at the same time that they focus on illustrations, which will strengthen their understanding and knowledge of the words they learn. In the same respect, other activities would include narration of their own digital stories, enhancing their pronunciation, formation, and coherence of the required sentences. These approaches highlight the importance of language teaching, methodologies in general, and special correspondence in particular that focuses on the acquisition of the comprehensive skills needed in today's society (Çetin, 2021).

Also, additional benefits of using digital stories are connected with differentiated instruction: speaking of this method, teachers can meet students' individual needs with diversification of abilities. Thus, modifying the material and challenge level of the digital formats of the stories will enable the teachers to arrange individualised lessons that would suit the kind of learners and their learning preferences and abilities. Hence, visual loss learners may learn via the multimedia elements in this technology, while the hearing-impaired learners must understand what is being said via sign language, reading from the computer screen, or viewing video clips if suitable descriptions have been incorporated into the digital story. This is why digital storytelling serves as a

universally accessible instructional tool since all learners are active participants (Rahiem, 2021).

In addition to boosting participation in language acquisition, digital storytelling improves the acquisition of the skills necessary for the 21st-century learner. Upon assessing the individual and collaborative aspects of producing and posting digital stories, the learner develops familiarity with the technological tools and application software as well as refine their information technology skills. However, digital content creation initiatives such as collaborative storytelling teach individuals attitudes to work in teams, sharing ideas, and solving problems. To the teachers, it facilitates the development of a friendly environment in the classroom that encourages all students to learn from each other (Robin, 2018).

The use of digital stories as a form of instructional technology is also based on its characteristic that promotes the understanding of intercultural communication and global citizenship. In other ways, teachers can use digital stories to make the learners embrace different cultural practices and worldviews they otherwise might not discover. Such exposure enhances students' language education and develops tolerance and understanding of the diverse world. In a world gradually becoming a global village, such competencies are very important for young learners (Rahiem, 2021).

2.4.4 Digital storytelling as a practical learning tool for students

Digital storytelling has emerged as an effective form of learning in contemporary learning institutions and a potential tool for improving learning in the EFL classroom. The use of images, video, sound, comments, and narration ensures that the lesson delivered by the digital storyteller is enjoyable and that the users are able to follow it to the end. In terms of students, this method affords a rich and versatile context in which to build language resources and cognitive processes as well as values creative and critical learning skills (Smeda et al., 2014).

As a result, it is justified to identify language acquisition as one of the main benefits arising from the use of digital storytelling as a learning tool. This study demonstrates how the construction and analysis of digital stories allow students to use language in meaningful contexts. This process also helps in widening of vocabulary list, understanding and using grammatical sentences or phrases appropriately, and correct pronunciation of a language. Understanding good digital stories enhances students'

mimicry of language usage, while creating digital stories offers explicit time for the students to speak and hence fluency. Besides, the use of multimedia resources in digital storytelling positively contributes to the learning of reading and writing since learners get acquainted with both the text and, respectively, the corresponding visual and auditory images, which will be useful in consolidation (Yang et al., 2022).

It is for this reason that Jenkins (2009) suggested that through digital storytelling, the learner gets important skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. When students are narrating their own stories, they have to choose how their story is going to be built up; whether to select characters; what role their characters have to play and how and when to incorporate various icons of multimedia to spread out the message embedded in the story. These tasks evidence the ability of the learners to analyse and synthesise information and reflect on the choices made in addition to reflecting on their work. Through doing these higher-order thinking activities, Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that students develop good cognitive skills that are not limited to language learning but may be useful in other academic fields and more especially in other real-life situations (Kim & Li, 2021).

Digital storytelling also plays a great part as one of the tools contributing to further motivation of the students. Learner contextual learning can at times be boring or irrelevant to the learner causing learners to lose interest in the language being taught. However, in digital storytelling, there is an opportunity for students to put their own concepts, passions, and cultural experiences into the process. This personalisation raises their perceived responsibility for their learning and improves their organisational self-identity, thereby elevating their interest in learning. Furthermore, as a result of digital media being highly engaging and inviting students' participation, digital stories enable students to have fun whilst learning at the same time (Kim & Li, 2021).

The integration and use of technology for telling digital stories also add to its effectiveness as a learning tool because it is collaborative. Assigning the students into groups to work on the creation of digital stories deepens cooperation so that all learners' need to accomplish shared objectives is met. By working in groups, students are able to practise ways to convey ideas, establish roles, and share resources in order to come to an agreement. Also, presenting their stories during peer discussion enables the students to learn various strategies and offer feedback that will help to enhance their classroom practices and develop a safe learning space.

Based on the above analysis, there are various advantages of incorporating digital stories: Intercultural understanding is one of the most crucial advantages of using digital stories in any classroom. Through working on digital stories based on different topics and subjects students understand various cultures, traditions, and approaches to life. This exposure assists them to gain a better understanding and appreciation of cultural differences. In the context of EFL learning the development of this intercultural competence helps EFL learners to communicate appropriately and entirely in a globalised environment (Chen & Chuang, 2021).

2.5 Benefits of storytelling in language acquisition

2.5.1 Vocabulary acquisition

The delivery of word knowledge is considered critical in language learning and has been associated with the use of stories for vocabulary development among young learners. In the case of EFL which is the concern of this study, storytelling presents a colourful and flexible means of presenting new vocabulary and consolidating meaning in context. Thus, storytelling puts learners in situations where rich, context-based narratives, which the learners would require for understanding, are presented through gradually increasing levels of complexity. This approach enhances keyword acquisition in a meaningful and natural manner that exceeds traditional instructional approaches and random drills (Özdemir, 2012).

The most notable strengths of storytelling for growing the size of a child's vocabulary include the fact that new terms are introduced to the child in a context that is both comprehensible and quite easy to remember. Experiences give the context to words making it easier for learners to associate words with stories, themes, events, and feelings. This contextualisation is crucial for young learners because, using actual circumstances or invented situations, the learners relate new terms to what they already know. In addition to this, as mentioned above they also favour the building of semantic associations, and in this context improvement of retention increases the formation and development of semantic networks in order to link related words and ideas (Korosidou & Bratitsis, 2021).

It also has the added advantage of increasing the children's vocabulary through word repetition and word exposure, which are fundamental to language learning. There are several situations when, within a story being read, the same terms and expressions are

used with a certain frequency in the text of the narrative discussed and thus exposed to the learners more than once. Repetition aids in word identification and pronunciation, further, exposure to the words in different contexts assists the learners in interpreting the more precise meaning of the words. Also, storytelling can create a visually appealing language that enriches your learners' vocabulary as they come across color and growth adjectives, adverbs, and idioms that they are likely not to come across in the day-to-day conversations or their curriculum books (Lenhart et al., 2018).

One more characteristic of the narrative approach is that it is very effective in developing learners' affect, a critical factor in semantic memory. When learners are interested in the story, they are being read they are likely to better listen and understand the words used and the new words that are taught. The emotionally enhanced bond that storytelling offers also infuses a positive tone and makes for a favorable learning atmosphere that will help a learner to lessen his or her language anxiety while at the same time motivating the learner towards further learning. That is why learners are ready to try, navigate, and even play with using new words in their own speech or writing (Abdulla, 2012; Nasir & Inayah, 2019).

Also noteworthy is the use of opportunities for learner talk, as a variety of narrative strategies – such as discussing the story, revoicing it orally or in writing, or co-creating an additional part of the story – are used by the audience. These activities offer the learner authentic ways and situations of using the newly acquired vocabulary in the course of learning. Using the words learnt, the students retain competency and gain more confidence in their use of languages (Gao et al., 2023).

2.5.2 Oracy skills

One of the key goals of teaching EFL is mastering speaking skills, fluency, and coherence. Storytelling has been found to be an informal but effective means of strengthening young learners' relevant skills. By creating opportunities for active listening, verbal expression, and meaningful interaction, storytelling enhances the essential components of oracy: vocabulary, language development, pragmatic ability, cognitive and information processing, and social interaction (Yang et al., 2022).

Therefore, listening skills constitute one of the primary ways whereby storytelling enhances oracy. In stories, learners get in contact with real-life language, they get to hear, the writer's intonation, pace, and accent, all of which help them in spoken

language. Listening to the stories helps the learners acquire all these features, which will enhance their auditory display and comprehension. In addition, storytelling helps the participants stay focused and engaged, which is essential in spoken language. It also contributes to the enhancement of the learners' passive knowledge of the target language and also gives a background for the learners' oral output (Tahriri et al., 2015). It also stimulates oral speaking skills as it invites the learners to tell or act out an end to the narratives they are presented with. These activities involve thinking and planning for what to say, choosing proper words and the right way to phrase them systematically. Thus, they rehearse various speaking skills, including the process of speaking clearly, speaking fluently, and using stress, rhythm, or intonation. In addition, stories and storytelling development enable learners to be more creative and imaginative while using the second language and data to read, write, speak, and listen; thus, the proven technique does not cause nervousness or anxiety when learners are speaking their second language.

Interactive communication is another advantage of storytelling to the extent that Storytelling involves the community in communication processes. Many narratives within a lesson typically include questions or group work, which allow learners to communicate with each other. In the process of these interactions, the learners grow in skills that enable them to start conversations and maintain them, answer questions, and give their opinions and ideas, respectively. Furthermore, as a social activity, storytelling contributes to the learners' pragmatic knowledge of how they should engage to tell a story: The timing, appropriate signals to use while engaging in storytelling, and how to use the language depending on the purpose and the audiences of the stories narrated (Demir & Toplu, 2021).

Two aspects related to emotions and cultural elaboration of the narratives also contribute to developing oracy. Stories allow learners to connect with other experiences and ideas, engage feelings, and prompt opinions from learners. Such an engagement not only enriches the learners' interpretation of the language but also facilitates meaningfully and naturally the language in different roles and needs (Nair & Yunus, 2021).

2.5.3 Literacy skills

Oral narration can be considered a critical component in building up the literacy needs of the learners, especially young learners in their EFL learning process. Being a combination of listening, speaking, and reading, storytelling helps the child learn aspects of language. Due to the exploratory processes of storytelling, it can be said that storytelling mediates between spoken language and reading in an effort to promote learners' meaningful and contextual vocabulary processes (Abdul Mutalib et al., 2011). This study argues that one of the main roles of storytelling is to introduce learners to different narratives and their features. By reading and writing text from stories, students learn features that include plot, characters, and sequence, which is critical in reading and writing other texts. This exposure assists the learners in developing reading skills such as making predictions, summaries, and inferences on cause and effect. Further, and perhaps more importantly, storytelling exposes learners to the different words and language use they are expected to encounter in writing. This contextualised reading comprehends and supports word recognition and decoding, both of which are crucial in early reading development (Al-Shaye, 2021).

Of particular interest is that storytelling makes children appreciate the use of language and encourages them to read. Students enjoy the emotional and imaginative contexts of the stories, and they are motivated to read books and other materials on their own. In addition, the participation of learners in the storytelling process that engages discussions and further reading comprehension exercises also promotes the development of phonemic skills to increase learners' reading fluency, which is recognised as a way of enhancing reading achievement (Melzi et al., 2023).

This study further reveals that storytelling enhances the writing skills among young EFL learners. As a teaching technique, storytelling helps students understand a rich and diverse language and use it as a model for writing meaningful texts. This learning approach encourages creativity, improves language proficiency, and develops structural and linguistic features of writing, alongside valuable writing skills within a meaningful and motivational framework for learning (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008; Tanrikulu, 2022). Students receive examples of structures people use in their narratives, such as start, middle, and end, which are important reference points for learners as they write. In their case, they learn how to structure ideas logically and the best way of putting these plans in writing in the process. Besides, storytelling allows learners to learn new language

features and use them in their styled writing, thus developing a broad vocabulary and improving their ways of using it.

This means that using narratives in teaching has the added advantage of forcing the students to present whatever they are learning creatively. Additionally, certain activities, such as retelling, modifying, or expanding stories, require learners to use the forms and structures they have learned while stimulating their imagination. These activities not only help learners focus on language formalisms but also build their confidence in their written communication (Spencer & Pierce, 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1 Purpose and research questions

This study investigates how Greek EFL teachers understand and hold beliefs about storytelling as a teaching technique for young learners. In particular, it is a question of how language skills are developing in the EFL context through storytelling. This research aims to find insights into the usage of storytelling in class, and how this usage can influence learners' vocabulary acquisition, oracy skills, and literacy skills through the focus on the teacher's perspective. In addition to this, the study tries to determine the practical challenges and opportunities that may surface when storytelling is implemented in the EFL classroom. In addition, this research seeks to uncover some of the big implications for storytelling with regard to its use in language education by offering a detailed analysis of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this teaching method.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

- What are Greek EFL teachers' perceptions of using storytelling to teach vocabulary to young learners?
- What are Greek EFL teachers' perceptions of using storytelling to teach oracy skills to young learners?
- What are Greek EFL teachers' perceptions of using storytelling to teach literacy skills to young learners?

3.2 Research methodology

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, a qualitative methodology, has been selected for this study as it is suitable for exploring the participants' personal experiences and perceptions. This approach gives a good, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In this research study, IPA offers the framework necessary to investigate how Greek EFL teachers perceive and utilise storytelling in their practices of teaching vocabulary to young learners and developing their oracy and literacy skills.

Qualitative research studies gather information from a less broad but more in-depth area. In this context, IPA is the method that explores individuals' lived experiences and interprets their meaning and significance. This fits in with the study's goal of examining

the distinctions of teachers' thoughts on storytelling for language learning (Alase, 2017).

One of IPA's biggest strengths is its ability to provide rich, detailed insights into what the participants are thinking and doing generally. Having the focus on individual experiences, IPA enables one to examine how participants make meaning from their professional roles and teaching strategies and the challenges and opportunities they face. Additionally, IPA views meaning as being interpretatively constructed between the researcher and the research participants (Shinebourne, 2011). This interpretive aspect allows the study to accomplish the capture of not only what teachers do in their classrooms, but also why they do it, and how they believe the effectiveness applies.

3.3 Sample and sampling method

The study sample comprises six female Greek EFL teachers teaching young learners in foreign language schools. All participants graduated from the Department of English Language and Philology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and worked in schools in the broader area of Athens. Teacher 1 is 45 years old and has been teaching English for approximately 17 years in foreign language schools and private lessons, working with students across all primary grades. Teacher 2, aged 35, has taught English for about 12 years in foreign language schools and private lessons, primarily with Junior A-B and Senior A-B-C students. Teacher 3, 26 years old, has taught English for 7 years, mainly in private lessons, but for the past three years in foreign language schools, working with all primary grades and preschoolers. Teacher 4, aged 27, has taught English for about 8 years in foreign language schools and private lessons, working with students in all primary grades and kindergarten. Teacher 5, 40 years old, has taught English for around 15 years in foreign language schools and private lessons, working with students in all primary but primarily with younger students. Teacher 6, aged 47, has taught English for about 22 years in foreign language schools and private lessons, working with students in all primary grades, with a focus on upper primary students.

The selection of participants was guided by two complementary non-probability sampling methods: convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Cohen et al., 2002). A convenience sampling method was a practical approach as it allowed the researcher to gather input from a group of people who were easily accessible and willing to

participate in the study (Etikan et al., 2016). Referrals from the initial sample were also used as a snowball sampling to identify additional participants (Parker et al., 2019). However, this method was successful in reaching a group of teachers who have the appropriate knowledge and experience in storytelling and EFL education. In this manner, the combination of these sampling methods makes sure that the study will be rich with various perspectives in the context of Greek EFL education. The sample is small relative to what is typical in qualitative research, but the depth rather than the breadth is of focus. The chosen participants offer helpful insights on the use of storytelling in language instruction and contribute towards a richer understanding of the phenomenon being explored.

3.4 Research instrument

In this study, the semi-structured interview was used as the primary research instrument, a qualitative tool recognised for its capability to capture participants' experiences and beliefs in depth (Kallio et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility – they allow the researcher to explore pre-determined topics while giving the participants the option to elaborate on their responses as well as bring in new ideas. All these are compatible with the objective of this study to interpret Greek EFL teachers' perceptions of storytelling as a teaching strategy for young language learners (Bryman, 2016).

The interview questionnaire was designed to address the study's research questions and consisted of five main sections, each focusing on a different aspect of the participants' experiences and practices:

- **General Information:** This section's objective was to collect demographic and occupational information on the participants. The questions focused on the participants' teaching experience, the grades they taught, and the inclusion of storytelling in teaching material or practice.
- **Vocabulary Acquisition Through Storytelling:** This section explored participants' perceptions of how storytelling influences young learners' vocabulary development. Questions within it concerned the role of storytelling in vocabulary acquisition, how teachers clarify unknown words, and whether they do this before, during, or after storytelling sessions.

- **Impact of Storytelling on Oracy Skills:** In this part, I concentrated on storytelling's role in supporting the students' speaking and listening skills. I asked teachers to share their views about whether storytelling helps develop these skills and, if so, how.
- **Impact of Storytelling on Literacy Skills:** In this part, I concentrated on storytelling's role in supporting the students' reading and writing skills. I asked teachers to share their views about whether storytelling helps develop these skills and, if so, how.
- **Challenges in Implementing Storytelling:** The final section addressed the practical challenges for teachers in implementing storytelling in the lessons.

Open-ended questions were used in each section, enabling participants to provide detailed responses about their current practices and beliefs. In addition to improving the depth of the data collected through this approach, narrative helped to make sense of the multifaceted role of storytelling for young learners learning EFL education.

3.5 Research procedure

The research followed a systematic and ethical process during which all participants were well-informed and comfortable at all levels. They were identified through convenience and snowball sampling methods. At the time we approached potential participants, we gave them detailed information about the reason for the study, what the study was trying to achieve, and what would be involved in the procedures. They were also told about their rights, amongst other things, the right to sign out of the study at any time without consequences, and their data being confidential and anonymous. Participants were also briefed as regards their responsibilities in sub-serving the research process. All participants stated their willingness to participate in the study voluntarily.

Each participant chose a time and place most comfortable and convenient for the interview. The nature of this setup was flexible to promote open, sincere responses. All interviews were conducted in person and all participants were interviewed only once. All interviews were audio recorded with the explicit consent of each participant to ensure compliance with ethical standards. The interviews were conducted in English, with an average duration of 20 minutes.

After completing the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim in order to guarantee the accuracy and integrity of the data. The transcriptions were carefully reviewed and organised so that analysis could be undertaken. Then a qualitative analysis was conducted to identify commonalities in recurrent themes and other patterns similar to the study objectives. This analytical process is intended to offer a descriptive account of the participants' perspectives and experiences in order to inform overall research findings.

3.6 Ethics and ethical considerations

Throughout the whole research process, all of the ethical principles are strictly followed to protect the rights of the participants and the integrity of the study. Before agreeing to participate, all participants were fully informed about the aim, objective, and procedures of the study. Personal data was also never linked to any participant's identity at any part of the research and participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012).

As a significant part of the ethical framework of the study, participants were informed about the scope, role, and measures of data protection before they conducted the interviews and confirmed that they participated voluntarily. Moreover, the participants gave explicit consent to the recording of the interview audio and were reassured that the audio recordings were to be used only for research purposes and would be stored securely (Dowling, 2005).

Maintaining ethical rigor, the researcher assured that the questions asked in the interviews were non-invasive, and indeed in line with the study focus. There was no pressure or judgment on those who participated. Moreover, the data was handled in compliance with ethical standards. All identifying information was removed during analysis and transcriptions, as well as audio files were securely stored. The participants were anonymised, and the findings were presented in a way that no participant could be identified by the results.

4. Results

Five key themes, encompassing subthemes, emerged from this research. These themes are explained below, along with relevant verbatim interview extracts.

Themes	Subthemes		
Integrating digital storytelling	-----		
Vocabulary acquisition through storytelling	Storytelling as a tool for vocabulary retention	Strategies for explaining unknown vocabulary	Timing of vocabulary explanation
Impact of storytelling on oracy skills	Enhancing listening skills through storytelling	Developing speaking skills through follow-up activities	The role of interactive storytelling
Impact of storytelling on oracy skills	Storytelling and reading skills	Storytelling and writing skills	Adapting storytelling activities to students' needs
Challenges in implementing storytelling	Time management	Addressing unknown vocabulary	Managing students' anxiety

4.1 Integrating digital storytelling

The analysis indicates that digital storytelling is a valuable supplementary tool in the learning process. However, participants acknowledged that they cannot depend solely on it for the progression of their lessons.

Five out of six teachers admitted the inclusion of digital storytelling in their lessons. Teacher 3 highlighted, “...*digital storytelling adds variety to the lessons and keeps students engaged, excited about learning English.*” and Teacher 4 added, “*Digital storytelling is a great way to add variety to lessons and make the learning process more*

interactive.” However, two of the participants support traditional storytelling methods. Teacher 6 explains “...*I recognise its potential benefits, (but) I prefer traditional teaching methods because I find them more effective when executed correctly... I am not very comfortable with technology, so I prefer to stick to methods I know well.*” Conversely, Teacher 5 indicated a preference for digital tools for younger learners, noting, “*Digital tools such as animations, sound effects, and interactive activities make the stories more fun and interesting for this age group.*”

4.2 Vocabulary acquisition through storytelling

4.2.1 Overview of common subthemes

The analysis reveals three key subthemes regarding vocabulary acquisition: the effectiveness of storytelling for vocabulary retention, the various strategies to explain unknown vocabulary, and the timing of vocabulary explanation during storytelling sessions. Across these themes, the teachers consistently highlighted the importance of context, repetition, and emotional engagement in promoting vocabulary acquisition, though their methods varied depending on student age and language proficiency.

4.2.2 Storytelling as a tool for vocabulary retention

All six teachers agreed that storytelling is an effective method for helping students learn and retain new vocabulary. They emphasised the role of context in making words memorable. Teacher 1 explained, “*Stories introduce new words in a meaningful way, helping students to understand and remember more easily.*” Similarly, Teacher 6 noted, “*When new vocabulary is linked to a story, characters, or events, it becomes easier to remember.*”

Repetition emerged as another critical factor. Teacher 3 observed, “*Repetition, which is common in storytelling, also reinforces learning,*” while Teacher 5 added, “*Repetition within stories also helps vocabulary learning.*” Emotional engagement also played a significant role; as Teacher 5 pointed out, “...*I think stories evoke emotions, helping students make new words easier to remember.*” However, Teacher 5 cautioned that the effectiveness of storytelling depends on the story’s complexity, stating, “...*the story must match the students’ language level so that they don’t feel overwhelmed by the too many unknown words.*”

4.2.3 Strategies for explaining unknown vocabulary

The teachers used a variety of methods to explain unknown vocabulary, adjusting their approaches to the students' age and understanding. Visual aids were widely used, particularly for younger learners. Teacher 1 shared, *"...I often show pictures or use gestures to explain the meaning of new words, as visuals are very effective for this age."* Teacher 5 echoed this sentiment, stating, *"If the story has illustrations, I point to them to help students understand the meaning."*

Older students were encouraged to deduce meanings independently. Teacher 2 explained, *"I encourage students to share their own understanding of the words, and if someone knows the meaning, they explain it to the class."* Teacher 5 emphasised collaboration, noting, *"Once the story is complete, I discuss the unknown words and encourage students to guess the meanings from the context."*

While all teachers aimed to minimize the use of Greek translations, some acknowledged their occasional necessity. Teacher 6 remarked, *"If the word is abstract or too complex, I sometimes translate in Greek, but I try to do this as little as possible."* Similarly, Teacher 4 stated, *"If a word is more challenging or abstract, I might translate it into Greek to make sure they understand."*

4.2.4 Timing of vocabulary explanation

The teachers had differing preferences regarding when to explain unfamiliar vocabulary, each with well-reasoned justifications. Teacher 1 favoured explaining words during storytelling, stating, *"Explaining vocabulary during the story keeps students interested, as they can immediately connect the word to the narrative."* Teacher 6 adopted a similar approach, noting, *"During the storytelling, if students have an unknown word, I explain it briefly using simple English definitions, synonyms, or examples in the sentence."*

Others preferred addressing vocabulary before or after the story to avoid interruptions. Teacher 3 explained, *"I usually explain the most difficult words before reading the story. This helps students focus on the narrative without getting stuck on new vocabulary."* Teacher 5 supported this, adding, *"I usually explain unknown vocabulary after reading the story."*

4.3 Impact of storytelling on oracy skills

4.3.1 Overview of common subthemes

The responses highlight three central subthemes concerning oracy skills: the effectiveness of storytelling in improving listening skills by exposing learners to natural language patterns and encouraging active engagement, the role of storytelling in developing speaking skills through follow-up activities, and the importance of interactive storytelling in fostering participation and confidence. Throughout all the responses, the teachers recognised storytelling as a dynamic tool for enhancing listening and speaking abilities in an engaging and meaningful context.

4.3.2 Enhancing listening skills through storytelling

All participants unanimously acknowledged the value of storytelling in enhancing students' listening skills, mainly through exposure to authentic language use. Teacher 1 emphasised, *"When students listen to a story, they are exposed to the natural rhythm, intonation, and flow of English,"* while Teacher 3 noted, *"This helps develop their ability to understand spoken English in a more meaningful context."* Teacher 6 supported this, adding, *"...storytelling requires active listening, as students must pay attention to follow the plot and understand the characters and events."*

Repetition and predictable patterns within stories were highlighted as additional benefits. Teacher 2 remarked, *"Stories often include repetitive phrases and patterns, which help students follow along and build confidence in listening."* Teacher 1 observed, *"Stories often use repetition and patterns, which help young learners to develop their listening skills."*

Teachers often incorporate interactive elements to further engage students. Teacher 4 explained, *"...I often pause during the story to ask questions or check for understanding, which reinforces their listening comprehension,"* and Teacher 3 noted, *"I often ask comprehension questions or pause during the story to ask students to predict what will happen next in order to keep students engaged."*

4.3.3 Developing speaking skills through follow-up activities

Storytelling was also identified as an effective tool for enhancing speaking skills, mainly through structured follow-up activities. Teacher 1 said, *"After listening to a story, I often ask students to retell it in their own words or to describe their favourite*

part. This gives them the opportunity to practise speaking in a supportive environment.” Teacher 5 echoed this approach, stating, “*...I always encourage students to say the story again in their own words, and talk about their favourite parts, or discuss the characters. This helps them use new vocabulary and practise making sentences.*”

Creativity emerged as a significant factor in fostering speaking skills. Teacher 3 observed, “*Storytelling also encourages creativity, inspiring students to create their own stories or think of alternative endings,*” and Teacher 6 noted, “*I often ask students to create their own endings or imagine new scenarios, which develops their confidence and fluency in speaking and also inspires creativity.*”

The teachers also tailored activities to suit different age groups and proficiency levels. Teacher 4 explained, “*For younger students, I use simpler tasks like asking them to name objects or describe actions from the story,*” while Teacher 2 remarked, “*...engaging them in small group or pair work discussions can boost their confidence and help them develop fluency.*”

4.3.4 The role of interactive storytelling

Interactive storytelling was a recurring theme, with teachers emphasising its role in fostering active participation and building confidence. Teacher 1 highlighted, “*Also, storytelling often involves interactive elements, such as asking students questions or encouraging them to predict what happens next.*” Teacher 2 shared a similar view, stating, “*...I also ask comprehension questions during or after the story, which helps them improve their understanding of spoken English.*”

Teacher 6 emphasised the importance of expressive narration, noting, “*...I use expressive narration and pause often to ask questions or encourage predictions, which keeps students interested.*” Teacher 4 added that interactive storytelling could be particularly beneficial for younger students, explaining, “*...using visual aids or animated digital stories makes the listening process more interesting and helps them follow along.*”

4.4 Impact of storytelling on literacy skills

4.4.1 Overview of common subthemes

The analysis identifies three main themes: the role of storytelling in improving reading fluency and comprehension through exposure to natural language patterns and visual

aids, its effectiveness in improving writing skills by providing narrative models and stimulating creativity, and the importance of adapting storytelling activities to students' age and language level. Across all responses, storytelling was recognised as a powerful tool for literacy development, although some teachers pointed out its limitations in supporting the development of advanced writing skills.

4.4.2 Storytelling and reading skills

The teachers unanimously agreed that storytelling improves students' reading skills by exposing them to vocabulary, sentence structures, and natural language flow. Teacher 1 emphasised, *"Listening to stories helps students become familiar with sentence structures, vocabulary, and the rhythm of the language, which are all very important for developing reading fluency."* Similarly, Teacher 5 noted, *"Stories introduce students to new vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammar in a meaningful context, which improves students' comprehension and fluency."*

Follow-along activities during storytelling were frequently mentioned as a beneficial practice. Teacher 2 shared, *"When I narrate a story, I often encourage students to look at the text as they listen. This helps them connect the written words with their pronunciation and improve their fluency."* Teacher 6 echoed this approach, explaining, *"...when students follow the text during storytelling, they connect words to their sounds, improving both their decoding and pronunciation skills."*

Illustrations were identified as particularly helpful for younger students. Teacher 4 observed, *"...stories with illustrations are especially helpful because the pictures support their understanding of the text."* Similarly, Teacher 3 remarked, *"For the young learners, the combination of text and illustrations helps them connect the written words with their meanings."*

For older students, storytelling provided an opportunity to engage with more complex texts. Teacher 5 shared, *"For older students, ...I use simplified versions of classical literature, which encourage them to read more complex texts which are still very easy to understand."* Teacher 4 added, *"For older students, reading longer stories over several lessons encourages them to practise reading more complex texts."*

4.4.3 Storytelling and writing skills

Storytelling was also seen as a valuable tool for enhancing writing skills, primarily through exposure to narrative structures and opportunities for creative expression. Teacher 2 explained, *“Storytelling familiarises (students) with narrative patterns, such as the beginning, middle, and end of the story, which can reproduce in their own writing.”* Teacher 1 supported this view, stating, *“Stories are excellent examples of narrative structure, grammar, and vocabulary, which students can use in their own writing.”*

Creative writing tasks inspired by storytelling were frequently mentioned as effective follow-up activities. Teacher 2 described, *“After listening to a story, I often assign creative writing tasks, such as continuing the story, describing a character, or imagining a new setting.”* Teacher 5 added, *“These activities allow students to practise using new vocabulary and grammar in their writing.”*

Several teachers noted that storytelling stimulates imagination, which is essential for creative writing. Teacher 4 explained, *“...storytelling inspires creative writing by showing students different types of narratives.”* Teacher 1 observed, *“Students who are inspired by a story are more likely to express themselves and experiment with language in their writing.”*

However, some teachers pointed out the limitations of storytelling in developing advanced writing skills. Teacher 6 remarked, *“Storytelling can improve students’ writing skills, of course, but it has a smaller impact compared to vocabulary or reading. ...improving writing requires more focused practice through structured activities...”*

4.4.4 Adapting storytelling activities to students’ needs

The teachers emphasised the importance of adapting storytelling activities to their students' age and proficiency levels. Teacher 4 explained, *“For younger students, simpler activities like filling in missing words or drawing and labeling scenes from the story help develop writing skills over time.”* Teacher 6 noted, *“...for younger students, illustrated stories connect the text with visuals, making it easier to understand and keep engaged.”*

For older students, more complex tasks were preferred. Teacher 3 shared, *“For the older students, storytelling encourages them to explore more complex texts and builds their reading fluency.”* Teacher 5 added, *“For older students, ...I use simplified*

versions of classical literature, which encourage them to read more complex texts which are still very easy to understand.”

4.5 Challenges in Implementing Storytelling

4.5.1 Overview of common themes

The analysis of the responses reveals three main challenges teachers face when implementing storytelling: time management, dealing with unknown vocabulary, and managing students' anxiety. Teachers shared strategies to overcome these issues, highlighting the importance of selecting appropriate stories, creating a supportive classroom environment, and balancing storytelling with other curricular demands.

4.5.2 Time management

Time management was consistently identified as one of the main challenges in using storytelling effectively. Teachers highlighted the difficulty of balancing storytelling sessions, including follow-up activities, while also addressing other aspects of the curriculum. Teacher 2 noted, *“A storytelling session, including discussions and follow-up activities, can take up a lot of time, making it difficult to cover other important topics like grammar or vocabulary.”* Similarly, Teacher 4 explained, *“A storytelling session can take up a lot of lesson time, leaving less time for other important parts of the curriculum.”*

Teacher 3 also addressed the unpredictability of time management, stating, *“Preparing for and delivering a storytelling session, especially with the follow-up discussion or the activities, can take longer than planned, leaving less time for the other parts of the lesson.”* To manage this, Teacher 1 suggested breaking storytelling into smaller segments, sharing, *“I try to balance this by breaking the storytelling process into multiple lessons...”* Similarly, Teacher 6 emphasised the need for efficiency, noting, *“Long stories or follow-up discussions can take more time than planned, making it difficult to cover other necessary topics.”*

4.5.3 Addressing unknown vocabulary

Another common challenge was handling unknown vocabulary, particularly when stories included words beyond the students' comprehension levels. Teacher 1 emphasized, *“If there are too many unknown words, students may feel overwhelmed or*

frustrated, which might reduce their interest in the story.” Teacher 4 echoed this concern, stating, *“If a story contains too many unknown words, students might feel overwhelmed and lose interest, especially younger ones.”*

Teachers shared various strategies to address this issue. Teacher 5 explained, *“...I also choose stories with appropriate language for the level, and I try to explain the difficult words after the story so that students can stay interested and focused.”* Teacher 6 highlighted the importance of preparation sharing, *“I address this by pre-teaching key vocabulary and explaining new words during the story if needed.”* Teacher 3 also emphasised balancing challenge and accessibility, stating, *“I select stories carefully and ensure they are both challenging and accessible to all.”*

Visual aids and interactive methods were also employed to clarify vocabulary. Teacher 1 noted, *“...I make sure to explain new words during the storytelling process, using visuals or simple definitions to keep the flow of the story.”* Teacher 4 added, *“...I use visual aids or interactive elements to make storytelling more interesting and easier for all students.”*

4.5.4 Managing students' anxiety

Another prominent challenge is students' anxiety, particularly during follow-up activities. Teacher 2 shared, *“...some students may feel anxious about participating in follow-up activities, especially speaking tasks.”* Teacher 1 observed, *“...some students, particularly shy or anxious ones, might hesitate to participate in activities like retelling the story or answering questions.”*

Teachers highlighted the importance of creating a supportive environment to reduce anxiety. Teacher 6 explained, *“To reduce these problems, I always try to incorporate follow-up activities that are appropriate for the students' level in order to make the lesson enjoyable and build their confidence.”*

Simplified tasks and gradual participation were strategies used to build students' confidence. Teacher 1 shared, *“To make them feel more comfortable, I try to encourage them by giving them simpler tasks to do in order to build their confidence.”* Teacher 2 noted, *“...allow them to share their thoughts in pairs or small groups before speaking in front of the class.”*

5. Discussion

5.1 Relating results to the relevant literature

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the role of storytelling as a teaching strategy within the Greek EFL context and can help the EFL teaching community implement evidence-based approaches for young learners. The following sections discuss the results of the three leading research questions of this dissertation.

RQ1: What are Greek EFL teachers' perceptions of using storytelling to teach vocabulary to young learners?

The findings align with previous works, suggesting that immersing young EFL learners in meaningful language experiences through storytelling facilitates their vocabulary growth (Abasi & Soori, 2014; Gao et al., 2023; Mol & Bus, 2011). Participants of the current work unanimously believed effective learning scenarios can help students learn and retain new vocabulary. They viewed storytelling as a powerful teaching tool that can deeply engage young learners with the narrative and the mental images it evokes. They specifically referred to the emotional connections stories create and believed storytelling is powerful because it aligns with natural language acquisition methods, building stronger links between students and the learning content. Strong emotions appear to play a key role in making an experience feel important, which helps determine how well it will be remembered. This is likely because emotions trigger brain processes that help strengthen and store recent memories (McGaugh, 2006). Participants also believed that simply reading picture storybooks aloud to young EFL learners, without deliberately emphasising or repeatedly reviewing target words, can still be a highly effective and efficient learning method. This aligns with the empirical findings of Gao et al. (2023), which suggest that even incidental exposure to vocabulary through storytelling can significantly contribute to the language development of young EFL learners. However, this contrasts with studies that stress the necessity of deliberate vocabulary exercises (Abasi & Soori, 2014), where a more active approach is taken to reinforce target words. Overall, participants' views echo Haven (2007: 71), who suggests that “experiences not framed into story suffer loss in memory,” as they believed that the younger learners enjoy the stories, the more deeply they engage with them and the better they retain the words, ultimately enhancing their vocabulary acquisition in English.

RQ2: What are Greek EFL teachers' perceptions of using storytelling to teach oracy skills to young learners?

Key findings corroborate with findings from previous works that also suggest storytelling is beneficial for young EFL learners' oracy skills development (Hibbin, 2016; Nair & Yunus, 2019; Tahriri et al., 2015). Participants disagreed with the widespread misconception among EFL educators that listening is a passive skill that develops independently without requiring structured instruction in early education. Their views aligned with Bland (2015), who suggests that EFL teachers should implement methodical teaching of listening comprehension skills from an early age. They specifically referred to how exposure to authentic language structures including rhythm and pronunciation through storytelling, helps develop listening comprehension skills. Participants further believed that storytelling is essential for developing EFL young learners' speaking skills as it provides opportunities for playful, meaningful, and interactive spoken language practice. They specifically believed structured speaking practice occurs when students engage in follow-up activities including story retelling and the creation of new endings, which is ideal for facilitating speaking interaction among young EFL learners. Participants also suggested that EFL teachers should try to build storytelling experiences using dialogues, predictions, and role-playing exercises because they facilitate student engagement and oral language skill development. This finding agrees with previous works focusing on the use of storytelling as a scaffold for facilitating the speaking skills of young learners (Nair & Yunus, 2019; Tahriri et al., 2015). However, this focus on structured speaking practice goes beyond previous studies that mainly highlighted the importance of listening comprehension through storytelling (Bland, 2015). Overall, the findings suggest that participants recognise the benefits of interactive storytelling for promoting active listening and increasing oral speech production in English. This is especially crucial in the certificate-driven Greek EFL system, where literacy and subsequent exams are emphasised from primary school years (Giannikas & Nikitaki, 2022).

RQ3: What are Greek EFL teachers' perceptions of using storytelling to teach literacy skills to young learners?

Participants found storytelling to be highly effective at developing literacy abilities. They believed text-following practice during storytelling activities leads students toward greater decoding ability and better word recognition while enhancing their

reading fluency. They specifically thought storytelling guides children in understanding narrative structures and language patterns, which function as examples for creative and structured writing tasks. These findings align with the perspectives of other researchers (Lisenbee & Ford, 2018; Maureen et al., 2022) who emphasise that storytelling, as an effective literacy tool, naturally blends activities by involving L1 and L2 young children in experiences that link educational objectives with real-life contexts. According to some participants, however, storytelling was perceived as having limited potential for enhancing advanced writing skills, which they believed required more direct, focused writing exercises. While storytelling was considered an excellent introductory strategy, these EFL educators argued that it must be integrated into a broader literacy development framework to support comprehensive skill-building.

Moreover, the findings align with previous research on the value of digital storytelling in the classroom, demonstrating the balance between traditional and digital storytelling methods. The findings suggest that digital storytelling enhances student engagement and enriches the learning experience by adding variety to EFL lessons (Banaszewski, 2005; Robin, 2008). While digital storytelling is recognised as a useful supplementary tool, some participants expressed their preference for more traditional teaching methods, which echoes existing literature that emphasises the importance of teachers' comfort with technology and the need for familiarity with instructional strategies (Laurillard, 2013). Additionally, the positive response to digital tools for younger learners supports studies highlighting the effectiveness of multimedia and interactive elements in engaging young students (Berk, 2009).

Overall, the findings suggest that participants recognised storytelling as offering various benefits for learning and presenting challenges for EFL educators. A key issue identified was time management, as participants noted their difficulty in balancing storytelling with the demands of the curriculum. This aligns with previous research highlighting EFL teachers' struggles with time management, particularly in Greece, where the certificate-driven culture, especially in the private sector, places additional pressure on educators (Kaldi et al., 2016). Participants believed that for EFL teachers to incorporate storytelling into their lesson plans effectively, they must choose concise narratives and carefully structure lessons to ensure that storytelling aligns with other teaching objectives. A significant challenge mentioned by participants was dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary, which often impeded comprehension, especially for younger

learners (Gao et al., 2023). All participants agreed that pre-teaching key vocabulary and using visual aids were helpful strategies to support students' understanding of the story content. These findings highlight the importance of adapting the content and delivery of stories based on students' age and language proficiency levels, ensuring that all learners remain engaged and benefit from the activity.

In addition to these challenges, this study highlighted student anxiety as a critical barrier to engagement during storytelling exercises. Some young EFL learners, especially those who are shy or lack confidence, hesitate to participate in interactive sessions or follow-up tasks (Tsang & Dewaele, 2024). A key strategy for overcoming these difficulties is fostering a non-threatening, supportive classroom environment. According to participants, when teachers provide manageable tasks, incorporate group work, and offer positive reinforcement, students tend to build the confidence necessary to engage actively in storytelling exercises. The findings from this study underscore the importance of the classroom atmosphere in facilitating the successful use of storytelling methods as part of EFL education.

5.2 Implications for EFL Teaching

The research results create multiple implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The field of language learning needs to identify storytelling as both a multi-faceted teaching resource and a powerful method to develop language proficiency. The teaching community of EFL encourages educators to integrate storytelling into their teaching practices, as it greatly enhances student engagement and creates valuable learning experiences. Teacher training programs must provide educators with direct methods for confronting storytelling challenges.

The research results highlight that student anxiety can hinder participation in storytelling activities, particularly for shy or less confident students. In this regard, teacher training should focus on strategies to reduce anxiety and build confidence in all students. Training teachers to gradually increase the complexity of storytelling tasks, starting with simple activities like story sequencing or vocabulary building, can help students feel more confident. Over time, students can progress to more complex tasks, such as retelling stories or creating their own narratives. Teachers should be trained to provide specific, constructive feedback that highlights students' progress and efforts rather than focusing solely on correctness. This helps build a positive learning

experience and encourages ongoing participation. Establishing a supportive and empathetic classroom environment where mistakes are seen as part of the learning process can make storytelling more accessible to students who might otherwise hesitate to participate. Teachers can model vulnerability by sharing their own mistakes in a non-judgmental way, highlighting that learning is a shared experience for everyone.

Considering the time management challenges highlighted in the research, teacher training should provide practical approaches to incorporate storytelling into the broader curriculum without compromising other essential learning goals. Training teachers to structure lessons with clear objectives and time allocations can help ensure that storytelling remains a central part of EFL instruction without overwhelming the students. Teachers can be taught how to incorporate storytelling in a way that complements vocabulary acquisition, grammar, and other skills. Teacher training should also introduce digital tools that can enhance storytelling, such as interactive story apps, digital storytelling platforms, or online collaborative platforms which can save time during storytelling sessions.

Storytelling, as a teaching method, offers a unique opportunity to incorporate culturally responsive teaching into ELT. By selecting narratives that reflect the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students, teachers can make lessons more relatable and meaningful. Culturally relevant stories engage students and validate their identities, promoting a sense of belonging in the classroom. Teacher training programs should emphasise the importance of culturally diverse story selection. Educators must be trained to recognise the cultural diversity in their classrooms and adapt stories to reflect this diversity, integrate a variety of cultural perspectives, ensuring students can see themselves represented in the stories they encounter, and use stories to highlight global interconnectedness, making language learning not just about vocabulary acquisition, but also about understanding different ways of life. Incorporating cultural aspects in storytelling enables teachers to promote empathy and cross-cultural understanding, essential components of global citizenship. Culturally responsive teaching does not just involve selecting appropriate stories but also ensuring that the narratives do not reinforce stereotypes or biases. Teacher training should guide educators in identifying and avoiding these challenges while promoting an inclusive and respectful environment for all students.

Storytelling can be a highly inclusive strategy, but its effectiveness for students with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, can be greatly enhanced through personalised teacher training. For students with disabilities, such as dyslexia, storytelling can help break down the language learning process into more manageable, sensory experiences. In terms of teacher training, the focus should be on differentiating storytelling techniques. Teachers should be trained to adapt stories and storytelling activities according to students' individual needs. For example, students with dyslexia can benefit from the use of larger fonts, visual aids, and audiobooks to support both listening and reading comprehension. Incorporating multimedia, such as audio recordings and visual story elements, can help students with reading difficulties engage with the material on multiple levels. Storytelling that integrates multiple sensory pathways (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic) is particularly effective for dyslexic students. Teachers should be trained in using props, gestures, and physical movement to bring stories to life. Students with disabilities often benefit from peer support. Storytelling activities incorporating group work or peer support systems can encourage collaboration, allow students to learn from each other, and reduce anxiety related to individual performance. Teacher training should focus on the importance of fostering group dynamics that promote inclusive participation.

6. Conclusion – Research Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this study generates essential information about storytelling in EFL classrooms certain limiting factors exist that researchers need to recognise when interpreting results. This investigation suffers from a limited participant basis because it only involved six Greek EFL teachers. Their range of experiences produced meaningful qualitative data, yet these findings fall short of representing larger educational setups and other global regions. Future research that increases sample size should produce results that extend beyond current findings and reveal new insights. This study faces a constraint because it depends solely on information participants reported themselves. Although subjects gave detailed self-descriptions of their teaching methods and understanding the lack of classroom observation indicates that the results represent personal interpretations instead of objective storytelling assessment. Research moving forward should use observational or experimental methods for real-time teaching environment evaluations of storytelling techniques. While the study concentrated on teachers' views, it neglected to analyse student experiences and learning results. Research should examine the relationship between storytelling practices and student linguistic growth, with motivation measurement to achieve deeper EFL educational insights. Research into digital storytelling functions alongside technological trends in education represents an important next step for examining advantages for new generations of students. Moreover, future studies should explore the role of AI in storytelling and EFL teaching. AI has the potential to enhance storytelling practices, offer personalised language learning experiences, and assist teachers in creating more dynamic and interactive lesson content. Integrating AI tools could revolutionise how storytelling is utilised in the classroom, making it an exciting area for further exploration. The current results make a solid basis for further scholarly inquiries despite existing restrictions. A response to these research gaps allows future work to advance the established concept of storytelling as a multifunctional asset for language learning.

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Appendix – Interview Transcripts

Interview 1 (Teacher 1)

1. How many years have you been teaching English as a foreign language to young learners?

I have been teaching English to young learners for 17 years in foreign language schools. Throughout this time, I have gained a lot of experience in how young learners engage with the language and what methods work best to enhance their learning.

2. Which grades have you taught?

During my teaching career, I have taught all grades at primary level, from junior A to Senior C. Each grade presents its unique challenges and opportunities. For example, younger learners require more visuals and simpler storytelling, while older students can engage with more complex stories and deeper discussions.

3. Do the coursebooks that you use in your classes include storytelling?

What kind of stories do they include?

Yes, I find the material to be very well-designed. The stories often revolve around themes that are relatable and engaging for young learners, such as animals, friendships, and adventures. Many of them have colourful illustrations, which capture the students' attention and make the learning experience more enjoyable.

4. Do you incorporate storytelling in your lessons, excluding whatever is included in the coursebooks?

While I heavily rely on the stories provided in the coursebooks because I find them comprehensive and aligned with the curriculum, I always incorporate some form of storytelling in every lesson. Even when I use the coursebook stories, I add gestures, expressions, and interactive elements to make the experience more interesting for the students. Sometimes, I might expand on the story or ask the students to imagine alternative endings to foster creativity and critical thinking.

5. Do you think young learners like storytelling? Why do you believe so?

Yes, I absolutely believe that young learners enjoy storytelling. Storytelling naturally captures their attention and imagination, especially when it is accompanied by colourful illustrations or expressive narration. Stories create a sense of excitement and curiosity, as children are eager to find out what happens

next. Also, storytelling often involves relatable characters and scenarios, which makes it easier for students to connect with the content emotionally. I've noticed that when I narrate stories with enthusiasm and use gestures or changes in tone, students become more engaged and actively participate.

6. Do you think students can learn English more easily through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes, yes. I believe so. Stories provide a context for new vocabulary and grammar, making them more meaningful and memorable for the learners. When students encounter new words in a story, they see them in action and understand how they fit into sentences and real-life situations. Also, storytelling often involves repetition, which helps promote language structures and vocabulary without making it feel monotonous. What is more, stories create an emotional connection to the material, which aids in retention, as students are more likely to remember a word or phrase if it's linked to a character or event in a story.

7. Do you incorporate digital storytelling in your classes? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I do, but not very often. I mainly use the animated stories provided in the Interactive Whiteboard Material that accompanies the coursebook, as the stories provided in the coursebooks are complete and well-suited to the needs of my students. These stories already include illustrations and activities, which, along with the animations, make them engaging and effective without the need for additional digital resources. Also, I prefer to maintain a more traditional approach to storytelling, as I believe it allows for more interaction between the teacher and the students. When I narrate stories myself, I can adapt the pace and style to the specific group I am teaching or change my voice for each different character, making sure that everyone is following and participating.

8. Do you think it is easier for students to learn new vocabulary and remember it in the future through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes, yes. Stories introduce new words in a meaningful way, helping students to understand and remember more easily. For example, when vocabulary is presented within a story, students can relate it to the characters, actions, and settings. Also, storytelling often involves the repetition of keywords and phrases, which reinforces learning without feeling repetitive. The emotional connection that students form with stories also plays an important role in memory retention. Words learnt in an

engaging and enjoyable context are much more likely to stay with the students over time.

9. Do you explain the unknown vocabulary in the stories? How?

Yes, I explain the unknown vocabulary to ensure that students understand the narrative and can follow along. I usually use a combination of methods depending on the situation. For younger students, I often show pictures or use gestures to explain the meaning of new words, as visuals are very effective for this age. Sometimes, I use simple English definitions or put the word in another sentence to help them understand the meaning. If the word is particularly challenging or abstract, I might translate in Greek, but I try to minimise this to encourage thinking in English.

10. Do you explain unknown vocabulary before, during, or after reading? Why?

I usually explain unknown vocabulary during the storytelling process. This approach allows me to address the words in context, which makes it easier for students to understand their meaning and use. Explaining vocabulary during the story keeps students interested, as they can immediately connect the word to the narrative. If I were to explain all the vocabulary before reading, it might overwhelm the students or take away some of the surprise and curiosity that comes with discovering the meaning within the story. After reading, I might go back to some of the words to reinforce understanding and allow students to practise using them in different contexts.

11. Do you think storytelling can improve students' listening skills? How?

Yes, yes. I believe so. When students listen to a story, they are exposed to the natural rhythm, intonation, and flow of English. This helps them become more familiar with how the language sounds in a real-world context. Also, storytelling encourages active listening, as students need to focus on the story to follow along and understand the plot. Stories often use repetition and patterns, which helps young learners to develop their listening skills. I also encourage students to listen for specific details or new vocabulary during the story, which helps sharpen their focus and comprehension.

12. Do you think storytelling can improve students' speaking skills? How?

Absolutely. Stories provide a rich source of language input, including vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures, which students can later use in their own speech.

After listening to a story, I often ask students to retell it in their own words or to describe their favourite part. This gives them the opportunity to practise speaking in a supportive environment. Storytelling also promotes imagination and creativity, encouraging students to create their own stories. These activities build their confidence in speaking and help them develop fluency over time. Also, storytelling often involves interactive elements, such as asking students questions or encouraging them to predict what happens next.

13. Do you think storytelling can improve students' reading skills? How?

Yes, I think so. Listening to stories helps students become familiar with sentence structures, vocabulary, and the rhythm of the language, which are all very important for developing reading fluency. When I use stories from the coursebooks, I encourage students to follow along with the text as I read aloud. This helps them connect the written words to their sounds, improving their decoding and word recognition skills. Also, stories often include repetitive patterns and predictable structures, which make it easier for young learners to recognise words or phrases.

14. Do you think storytelling can improve students' writing skills? How?

Yes, yes. Stories are excellent examples of narrative structure, grammar, and vocabulary, which students can use in their own writing. After listening to a story, I often encourage students to write about their favourite character, describe the setting, or even create an alternative ending. These activities help them organise their thoughts and use new vocabulary in context. Also, storytelling stimulates imagination, which is essential for creative writing. Students who are inspired by a story are more likely to express themselves and experiment with language in their writing.

15. What are the main problems that arise during the lessons regarding storytelling?

One of the main challenges I face when using storytelling is dealing with unknown vocabulary. If there are too many unknown words, students may feel overwhelmed or frustrated, which might reduce their interest in the story. To address this, I make sure to explain new words during the storytelling process, using visuals or simple definitions to keep the flow of the story. Another challenge is time management. A storytelling lesson can be time-consuming, especially if it involves follow-up activities like discussions or writing tasks. I try to balance this by breaking the

storytelling process into multiple lessons or skipping some of the follow-up activities. Lastly, some students, particularly shy or anxious ones, might hesitate to participate in activities like retelling the story or answering questions. To make them feel more comfortable, I try to encourage them by giving them simpler tasks to do in order to build their confidence.

Interview 2 (Teacher 2)

1. How many years have you been teaching English as a foreign language to young learners?

I have been teaching English to young learners for about 12 years. During this time, I've gained valuable experience in working with students of different ages and levels, adapting my teaching methods to suit their needs.

2. Which grades have you taught?

I have taught all grades at the primary level, junior A-B and Senior A-B-C. Each grade has its unique challenges, but I enjoy the variety it brings to my teaching. For example, younger students require more visual and hands-on activities, while older students can handle more complex language concepts.

3. Do the coursebooks that you use in your classes include storytelling? What kind of stories do they include?

Yes, the coursebooks I use include storytelling, and the stories are interesting and age-appropriate. They often feature relatable characters, simple plots, and moral lessons. Many stories focus on everyday situations, which helps students connect to their own experiences. Some also include fantasy elements or cultural themes, which promote students' imagination.

4. Do you incorporate storytelling in your lessons, excluding whatever is included in the coursebooks?

Yes, I often include additional storytelling material, especially when I feel the coursebook stories don't fully address my students' needs or interests. I usually prepare extra materials, such as printed stories or short texts, to supplement the lessons. But I don't include storytelling in every single class.

5. Do you think young learners like storytelling? Why do you believe so?

Yes, I think young learners enjoy storytelling, but it depends on the type of the story and how it is presented. Students generally like stories because they

encourage their imagination. However, if the text is too complex or not interesting, they may lose interest or feel frustrated. In my experience, young learners prefer stories with colourful illustrations, familiar topics, and simple language so that they can understand. Storytelling also differs from more traditional teaching methods, making the lesson more enjoyable for them.

6. Do you think students can learn English more easily through stories? Why? / Why not?

I believe that storytelling can help students learn English, but its effectiveness depends on how it is used. Stories provide a meaningful context for new vocabulary and grammar, making them easier to understand and remember. But, if the story is too difficult or contains too many unknown words, students might struggle. That's why I carefully select or adapt stories to match my students' level.

7. Do you incorporate digital storytelling in your classes? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I do. Digital stories include animations, sound effects, and interactive elements that capture students' attention. However, I don't rely only on digital resources; I prefer to combine them with printed materials and traditional storytelling methods. Digital storytelling is useful for adding variety, and it is also appealing to students who enjoy technology, but I believe printed stories have their own advantages, and they encourage students to focus on the text and illustrations without distractions.

8. Do you think it is easier for students to learn new vocabulary and remember it in the future through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I think so, but this depends on how the vocabulary is introduced. Stories provide context, which helps students understand the meaning of new words more easily. When words are linked to a specific situation, they are more easily to remember. But, if the story contains too many unknown words or if the students struggle to follow the plot, they might feel overwhelmed. That's why I prefer using stories with vocabulary that matches the students' level.

9. Do you explain the unknown vocabulary in the stories? How?

I explain unknown vocabulary through a discussion with the students after the story is finished. I encourage students to share their own understanding of the words, and if someone knows the meaning, they explain it to the class. If no one knows a particular word, I provide a definition or use it in another sentence. Sometimes, I

show a picture or give a synonym to clarify the meaning. But I try to avoid using Greek unless it is absolutely necessary, as I want students to use English as much as possible.

10. Do you explain unknown vocabulary before, during, or after reading? Why?

As I already said, I usually explain unknown vocabulary after reading the story. This allows students to engage with the narrative without interruptions and gives them a chance to deduce the meaning of unknown words. During the discussion that follows, we address any unknown words, and I guide the students in understanding their meanings. I find this approach more effective because it encourages active listening during the story.

11. Do you think storytelling can improve students' listening skills? How?

Yes, I believe so. When students listen to a story, they are exposed to the natural use of a language. Stories often include repetitive phrases and patterns, which help students follow along and build confidence in listening. Also, storytelling encourages active listening, as students need to pay attention to understand the details of the story. I also ask comprehension questions during or after the story, which helps them improve their understanding of spoken English.

12. Do you think storytelling can improve students' speaking skills? How?

Yes, I think so, but it requires follow-up activities. After listening to a story, I encourage students to discuss their favourite parts, tell the story in their own words, or think of a different ending. These activities give students opportunities to practise speaking in a creative way. Stories also provide them with a variety of vocabulary they can use in their own speech. While more students may hesitate at first, engaging them in small group or pair work discussions can boost their confidence and help them develop fluency.

13. Do you think storytelling can improve students' reading skills? How?

Yes, I do, especially when combined with follow-along reading activities. When I narrate a story, I often encourage students to look at the text as they listen. This helps them connect the written words with their pronunciation and improve their fluency. Stories also introduce students to new vocabulary in a more interesting way, which improves their comprehension skills.

14. Do you think storytelling can improve students' writing skills? How?

Yes, storytelling can be a great tool for developing students' writing skills. After listening to a story, I often assign creative writing tasks, such as continuing the story, describing a character, or imagining a new setting. These activities encourage students to use their imagination while practising vocabulary and grammar in context. Storytelling familiarises with narrative patterns, such as the beginning, middle, and end of the story, which can reproduce in their own writing.

15. What are the main problems that arise during the lessons regarding storytelling?

One of the main challenges I face with storytelling is time management. A storytelling session, including discussions and follow-up activities, can take up a lot of time, making it difficult to cover other important topics like grammar and vocabulary. Another issue is unknown vocabulary. If the story includes too many difficult words, students can feel frustrated. To address this, I carefully select or adapt stories to match their level and discuss unknown words after the story. Finally, some students may feel anxious about participating in follow-up activities, especially speaking tasks. To minimise this, I create a supportive environment and allow them to share their thoughts in pairs or small groups before speaking in front of the class.

Interview 3 (Teacher 3)

1. How many years have you been teaching English as a foreign language to young learners?

I have been teaching English to young learners for about 7 years. In addition to teaching primary level, I have been working with preschool students for the past couple of years, which has added a new perspective to my teaching experience.

2. Which grades have you taught?

I have taught all grades at primary level and, more recently, preschool students. Teaching different age groups has helped me adapt my methods, using visuals and interactive activities for young students and more complex language and storytelling for older students.

3. Do the coursebooks that you use in your classes include storytelling? What kind of stories do they include?

Yes, I find them to be a valuable resource. The stories are usually designed to be engaging and age-appropriate, often featuring topics like friendship, school life, and cultural traditions. For younger students, the stories are typically shorter, with simpler language and colourful illustrations. For older students, the stories become slightly more complex and focus on relatable situations and moral lessons even.

4. Do you incorporate storytelling in your lessons, excluding whatever is included in the coursebooks?

Yes, I frequently use additional materials from the internet, especially for preschoolers and younger primary students. For these groups, I choose stories with rich, colourful illustrations and digital material to make the experience more engaging. In the higher primary grades, I always incorporate storytelling into my lessons because I believe it stimulates curiosity and motivates students to learn.

5. Do you think young learners like storytelling? Why do you believe so?

Yes, especially in the upper primary grades, I would say. They are naturally curious and eager to discover what happens next in a story. Storytelling captures their imagination and keeps them engaged, particularly when it involves relatable characters or exciting events. For younger students, visual elements, such as colourful illustrations or animations, they play a big role in holding their attention. Also, storytelling creates a fun and interactive learning environment, which helps to maintain their interest in the language. I've noticed that students are more attentive and they participate more actively during storytelling sessions compared to other traditional activities.

6. Do you think students can learn English more easily through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I think storytelling is a powerful tool. Stories provide context for new vocabulary and grammar; they make it easier for students to understand and remember them. They also expose students to the rhythm and intonation of the language, which helps them improve their listening and their speaking skills. For example, when students hear repeated phrases or see words in action, it reinforces their understanding in a meaningful way. However, the effectiveness of storytelling also depends on the story's difficulty level; if it is too complex, it can overwhelm students instead of helping them.

7. Do you incorporate digital storytelling in your classes? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I do. It enhances the learning experience, especially for pronunciation and listening skills. Digital stories, they, often include audio narration, animations, and sound effects, which make the content more engaging and interactive for students. These features also expose students to authentic language and accents, which is important for developing their listening comprehension. While I still use printed materials and the traditional methods, digital storytelling adds variety to the lessons and keeps students engaged, excited about learning English.

8. Do you think it is easier for students to learn new vocabulary and remember it in the future through stories? Why? / Why not?

I do. Stories provide context, which helps students understand the meaning of new words in a more natural way. When vocabulary is introduced in a story, students can see how the word is used in the sentences and relate them to the characters or events, making the words more memorable. Repetition, which is common in storytelling, also reinforces learning. Additionally, stories often evoke emotions, and emotional connection helps students remember the vocabulary longer. However, it is important to choose stories that match the students' language level to ensure they can follow along and feel confident.

9. Do you explain the unknown vocabulary in the stories? How?

Yes, I explain the unknown vocabulary, and I use different methods depending on the students' level. Before starting the story, I explain more challenging words that I think students have a harder time understanding. I often use pictures, gestures, or synonyms in English to clarify their meaning. For simpler or more contextual words, I wait till the end of the story and discuss them with the students. I even may encourage them to guess the meanings first and explain them afterwards. Honestly, I only use Greek translations as a last resort for very abstract or difficult words.

10. Do you explain unknown vocabulary before, during, or after reading? Why?

Well, like I mentioned previously, I usually explain the most difficult words before reading the story. This helps students focus on the narrative without getting stuck on new vocabulary. Or for less challenging words, I prefer to explain them after the story through discussion. This way, the students have the chance to guess their meanings from context, which enhances their critical thinking and their language

skills. I avoid interrupting the storytelling process to keep students engaged and allow them to, you know, enjoy the flow of the story.

11. Do you think storytelling can improve students' listening skills? How?

Yes, storytelling is an excellent way to improve students' listening skills. When students listen to a story, they are exposed to natural pronunciation, intonation, and the rhythm in English, which helps them become more familiar with how the language sounds. Stories also encourage active listening, as students need to focus on the plot, and the characters, and the events to follow along. This helps develop their ability to understand spoken English in a more meaningful context. Also, I often ask comprehension questions or pause during the story to ask students to predict what will happen next in order to keep students engaged.

12. Do you think storytelling can improve students' speaking skills? How?

Sure. After listening to a story, I encourage students to retell it in their own words or discuss their favourite parts, which helps them practise using new vocabulary and sentence structures. Storytelling also encourages creativity, inspiring students to create their own stories or think of alternative endings. These activities give them the opportunity to express themselves and build their confidence in speaking English.

13. Do you think storytelling can improve students' reading skills? How?

Yes, I believe it can. When students follow along with the text as they listen to the narration, they become familiar with word recognition, sentence structure, and punctuation. Stories provide an engaging context that motivates students to read and understand. For the younger learners, the combination of text and illustrations helps them connect the written words with their meanings. For the older students, storytelling encourages them to explore more complex texts and builds their reading fluency. Also, by revisiting stories and assigning reading tasks, I help my students practise their reading skills independently while reinforcing their vocabulary and comprehension.

14. Do you think storytelling can improve students' writing skills? How?

Yes, I think so. After listening to a story, I often ask students to write their own version of the story, create an alternative ending, or describe their favourite character. These activities encourage them to use the new vocabulary and practise

grammar. Storytelling also inspires creativity and imagination, which are essential for developing strong writing skills.

15. What are the main problems that arise during the lessons regarding storytelling?

For me, the main challenge I face with storytelling is time management. Preparing for and delivering a storytelling session, especially with the follow-up discussion or the activities, can take longer than planned, leaving less time for the other parts of the lesson. Another issue is unknown vocabulary, especially when the text is too advanced for some of the students. While I do explain the difficult words before starting the story, some students may struggle, which can slow down the lesson and lead to frustration and anxiety. For this reason, I select stories carefully and ensure they are both challenging and accessible to all.

Interview 4 (Teacher 4)

1. How many years have you been teaching English as a foreign language to young learners?

I have been teaching English to young learners for 8 years in total. This includes teaching in foreign language schools and private tutoring, and I had the opportunity to work with a wide range of age groups and language levels.

2. Which grades have you taught?

I have taught all grades at the primary level and kindergarten students. Currently, I teach younger grades, junior A, and junior B.

3. Do the coursebooks that you use in your classes include storytelling? What kind of stories do they include?

Yes, they do. In the upper grades, the stories are longer and are accompanied by interactive digital materials, such as videos and audio narrations. These stories are engaging and usually explore topics like adventures, friendship, and problem-solving. For the younger students, the coursebooks feature simpler, shorter stories, often with colourful illustrations to capture their attention. These are basic narratives designed to introduce vocabulary and simple grammar structures.

4. Do you incorporate storytelling in your lessons, excluding whatever is included in the coursebooks?

Yes, sometimes I use additional storytelling materials, especially for my younger grades. For these students, I rely on my personal archive of simple, illustrated

stories to supplement the coursebooks when needed. For my older students, I stick to the coursebook stories combined with digital storytelling resources, as they are more advanced and engaging. However, I don't always use storytelling with younger learners, as I find songs or other interactive activities more effective for their level.

5. Do you think young learners like storytelling? Why do you believe so?

I believe it depends on their age and language level. Older primary students generally like storytelling because they are curious about the plot and characters and are often eager to participate in related activities. Stories motivate them to engage with the lesson and practise their language skills. However, for younger students, I've noticed that storytelling might not be as effective. They sometimes lose focus if the language or content is too challenging. For this group, I believe songs or short, highly visual stories are more engaging as they provide a simpler and more interactive learning experience.

6. Do you think students can learn English more easily through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I think so, especially in the upper primary grades, where students have a basic understanding of the language. Stories provide context for new vocabulary and grammar, which helps students understand and remember them. They also improve listening and reading skills through exposure to natural language structures. However, for younger students with limited vocabulary, stories can sometimes be overwhelming, especially if the content is too complex. In such cases, simpler activities like songs or games might be more effective.

7. Do you incorporate digital storytelling in your classes? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I use digital storytelling, especially with my older students. Digital resources like audio, animations, and interactive elements make the stories more engaging and easier to follow while at the same time helping students with pronunciation and listening skills. Digital storytelling is a great way to add variety to lessons and make the learning process more interactive. For my younger students, I use digital tools less frequently because I find that simpler, hands-on activities like illustrated books or physical props work better to keep their attention.

8. Do you think it is easier for students to learn new vocabulary and remember it in the future through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes, especially for older students. Stories provide a meaningful context, which helps students understand how new words are used in real-life situations. When vocabulary is tied to a narrative, students can relate the words to the characters or scenes from the story, making them more memorable. Repetition in stories also reinforces learning.

9. Do you explain the unknown vocabulary in the stories? How?

Yes, I explain unknown vocabulary, but I adapt my approach depending on the students' age and the difficulty of the words. For younger students, I often use pictures, or gestures, or simple synonyms to explain the meaning of new words. For older students, I encourage them to guess the meanings from context or provide definitions in English. If a word is more challenging or abstract, I might translate it into Greek to make sure they understand. My goal is to keep the explanations clear and concise while maintaining the flow of the story.

10. Do you explain unknown vocabulary before, during, or after reading? Why?

I usually explain unknown vocabulary during or after reading. If the word is essential for understanding the story, I explain it during the storytelling to ensure students can follow along. For less critical or simpler words, I wait until the end and discuss them with the class. This approach allows students to enjoy the story without too many interruptions and encourages them to try and guess the meanings from the context. For older students, I sometimes discuss key words briefly before the story to prepare them without giving away too much of the content.

11. Do you think storytelling can improve students' listening skills? How?

Yes, I believe so, especially for older students. When students listen to a story, they become familiar with how the language sounds in context; they are improving their pronunciation and their intonation. Stories also encourage active listening, as students need to focus on the plot and characters to understand what is happening. For younger students, using visual aids or animated digital stories makes the listening process more interesting and helps them follow along. Also, I often pause during the story to ask questions or check for understanding, which reinforces their listening comprehension.

12. Do you think storytelling can improve students' speaking skills? How?

Storytelling can definitely enhance students' speaking skills through follow-up activities. For my older students, I encourage them to retell the story in their own words, describe their favourite part, or discuss the characters. These activities help them practise using new vocabulary and sentence structures while building their confidence in speaking. For my younger students, I use simpler tasks like asking them to name objects or describe actions from the story. Interactive storytelling, where students predict what happens next or answer questions, also provides opportunities for more spontaneous speaking practice.

13. Do you think storytelling can improve students' reading skills? How?

Yes. For older students who have a basic understanding of English, stories provide exposure to sentence structures, vocabulary, and punctuation in a natural context, which helps students develop their reading fluency and their comprehension. When students follow along with the text during the storytelling, they can connect the written words with their pronunciation. For younger students, stories with illustrations are especially helpful because the pictures support their understanding of the text. I find that stories motivate students to read independently as they become curious about what happens next, encouraging them to explore more texts on their own.

14. Do you think storytelling can improve students' writing skills? How?

I really do. After listening to a story, I often ask students to create their own endings, write about their favourite character, or describe their favourite scene from the story. These tasks encourage them to use new vocabulary and practise sentence construction in a more meaningful way. For older students, storytelling inspires creative writing by showing students different types of narratives. For younger students, simpler activities like filling in missing words or drawing and labeling scenes from the story help develop writing skills over time.

15. What are the main problems that arise during the lessons regarding storytelling?

The biggest challenge with storytelling is time management. A storytelling session can take up a lot of lesson time, leaving less time for other important parts of the curriculum. Another issue is unknown vocabulary. If a story contains too many unknown words, students might feel overwhelmed and lose interest, especially younger ones. For this reason, I carefully choose stories that are level-appropriate

and explain difficult words. Students' anxiety can also be a problem, particularly if they feel like they don't understand the story well enough to participate in discussions. To reduce anxiety, I use visual aids or interactive elements to make storytelling more interesting and easier for all students.

Interview 5 (Teacher 5)

1. How many years have you been teaching English as a foreign language to young learners?

I have been teaching English to young learners for about 15 years. All these years, I have gained extensive experience in working with students of different age and this has helped me to improve my teaching methods.

2. Which grades have you taught?

I have taught all grades at primary level, but I enjoy teaching the younger grades more. I find it is rewarding to work with younger students because they are enthusiastic and curious, and I can use creative methods like storytelling and games to engage them in the lessons.

3. Do the coursebooks that you use in your classes include storytelling? What kind of stories do they include?

Yes, they include storytelling, and the stories are usually well-designed to suit the students' age and language level. For younger students, the stories are short, illustrated, and often based on everyday situations or simple adventures. And for older students, the coursebooks include more complex and meaningful stories, sometimes are also inspired by literature or cultural topics.

4. Do you incorporate storytelling in your lessons, excluding whatever is included in the coursebooks?

Yes, I often use additional storytelling materials, especially for the younger grades. I like to incorporate illustrated classic fairy tales that children are already familiar with, as these stories make it easier for them to engage and participate in the lessons. For older students, I use simplified versions of classical literature, which we read gradually over the lessons.

5. Do you think young learners like storytelling? Why do you believe so?

Yes, I believe young learners enjoy storytelling. Stories spark their imagination and curiosity, which makes learning more interesting. Younger students love the

visuals and dramatic elements of storytelling, especially when it includes colourful illustrations or animations. Also, storytelling is an alternative to more traditional teaching methods, making the lesson more fun and interactive.

6. Do you think students can learn English more easily through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I think storytelling is a very effective way to help students learn English. Stories provide meaningful context for vocabulary and grammar, making it easier for students to understand and remember them. Also, they expose students to the natural rhythm and structure of the language, which improves both listening and reading skills. And for younger students, stories are an excellent way to introduce new words and phrases in a fun way. For older students, though, more complex stories allow them to practise using the language in discussions and writing tasks. However, it's important to choose stories that are always appropriate for their level to make sure they don't feel overwhelmed.

7. Do you incorporate digital storytelling in your classes? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I do, especially with younger students. Digital tools such as animations, sound effects, and interactive activities make the stories more fun and interesting for this age group. These resources also help students improve their listening skills and pronunciation by exposing them to authentic language use. And for older students, as I said before, I rely more on traditional methods like simplified versions of classical literature, as they benefit more from focused reading and discussion without the distractions of digital content.

8. Do you think it is easier for students to learn new vocabulary and remember it in the future through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I believe storytelling makes it easier for students to learn and retain new vocabulary. Stories provide a meaningful context where words are presented naturally, making it easier for students to understand their usage. When students hear new words within a narrative, they can connect them to characters or events, which helps them remember them. Repetition within stories also helps vocabulary learning. Also, I think stories evoke emotions, helping students make new words easier to remember. However, the story must match the students' language level so that they don't feel overwhelmed by the too many unknown words.

9. Do you explain the unknown vocabulary in the stories? How?

Yes, I explain unknown vocabulary, but I adapt my approach depending on the students' age and the complexity of the word. For younger students, for example, I often use pictures, gestures, or synonyms in English to explain new words. If the story has illustrations, I point to them to help students understand the meaning. As for older students, I encourage them to guess the meaning from context first. If a word is particularly difficult or abstract, I might use Greek, but I try to avoid this to encourage students thinking in English.

10. Do you explain unknown vocabulary before, during, or after reading? Why?

I usually explain unknown vocabulary after reading the story. This allows students to focus on the narrative and enjoy the storytelling experience without interruptions. Once the story is complete, I discuss the unknown words and encourage students to guess their meanings from the context. For very challenging words, though, that are essential to understanding the plot, I might give a quick explanation during the story, but I try to keep these interruptions minimal.

11. Do you think storytelling can improve students' listening skills? How?

Yes, I think so. When students listen to a story, they are exposed to natural language patterns, including pronunciation and intonation, so they understand how English is spoken in the real world. Also, storytelling requires active listening, as students need to follow the plot, understand the characters, and anticipate what happens next. Also, I often use digital stories with sound effects or ask comprehension questions during the storytelling lessons.

12. Do you think storytelling can improve students' speaking skills? How?

Yes, I think that storytelling improves students' speaking skills. After listening to a story, I always encourage students to say the story again in their own words and talk about their favourite parts or discuss the characters. This helps them use new vocabulary and practise making sentences. Now, for younger students, I use simpler tasks like asking them to name objects or describe pictures from the story. I also ask students to create their own endings for the story or imagine new scenarios to promote their imagination.

13. Do you think storytelling can improve students' reading skills? How?

Yes, I think stories introduce students to new vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammar in a meaningful context, which improves students' comprehension and

fluency. When students follow along with the text as I read aloud, they practise recognising words and understanding their meaning in context. For younger students, illustrated stories help them connect images to the text, making it easier to understand and engage with the reading material. For older students, as I have already said, I use simplified versions of classical literature, which encourage them to read more complex texts which are still very easy to understand.

14. Do you think storytelling can improve students' writing skills? How?

Yes, storytelling is a great way to develop students' writing. Stories provide examples of how to structure a narrative. After listening to a story, I often assign creative writing tasks, such as continuing the story, imagining a new character, or describing their favourite scene. These activities allow students to practise using new vocabulary and grammar in their writing. As for younger students, I use simpler tasks like labeling pictures or completing sentences from the story.

15. What are the main problems that arise during the lessons regarding storytelling?

One of the main problems is managing classroom behaviour during storytelling lesson. Some students become too excited or start making jokes about parts of the story, so they interrupt the lesson all the time. Another issue is time management, as storytelling can take longer than planned, especially if follow-up activities are included. Another challenge is unknown vocabulary, as students might stop paying attention if they don't understand certain words.

16. And what do you do to address these problems?

To address these problems, I set clear rules for behaviour during storytelling, I also choose stories with appropriate language for the level, and I try to explain the difficult words after the story so that students can stay interested and focused.

Interview 6 (Teacher 6)

1. How many years have you been teaching English as a foreign language to young learners?

I have been teaching English to young learners for 22 years. Throughout these years, I have seen how language teaching changes, but I still believe in the value of traditional teaching methods, like storytelling, that have lasted through time.

2. Which grades have you taught?

I have taught all grades at the primary level. In recent years, I have mainly been teaching upper primary students, as I enjoy the challenges and opportunities that come with working with older learners. However, I have experience with younger students as well, and I understand the different approaches needed for each age group.

3. Do the coursebooks that you use in your classes include storytelling? What kind of stories do they include?

Yes, the coursebooks I use often include storytelling, but I don't always rely on them. The stories in the coursebooks tend to be tailored to the students' level, with themes like school life, cultural traditions, or simple adventures. For younger students, the stories are shorter and usually include colourful illustrations, while for older students, the texts are longer and sometimes more thought-provoking. However, I find that not all coursebook stories suit the specific needs of my classes, so I adapt them if necessary.

4. Do you incorporate storytelling in your lessons, excluding whatever is included in the coursebooks?

Yes, I often use my own material for storytelling. I choose or adapt stories based on the students' level and interests. For younger students, I prefer short, illustrated stories that capture their attention and simplify the learning process. For older students, now, I select longer, more detailed stories, sometimes broken into segments that we cover over several lessons. These stories often allow us to dive deeper into vocabulary, language structure, and critical thinking. While I don't use digital storytelling, I make sure that storytelling is interesting by using expressive narration and interactive activities.

5. Do you think young learners like storytelling? Why do you believe so?

Yes, I believe so, but their level of interest depends on the way it is presented. Younger students, especially in the lower grades, tend to love storytelling when it includes colourful illustrations or dramatic narration. These elements capture their attention and make the learning process more enjoyable. For older students, storytelling the stories should be engaging and challenging enough to match their language level. Stories allow students to use their imagination, which motivates

them to participate actively in the lesson, making the learning environment more exciting for students.

6. Do you think students can learn English more easily through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes. Stories provide meaningful contexts for vocabulary and grammar, making it easier for students to understand and remember new words and structures. For example, students can see how words are used in sentences and how grammar rules apply in real situations. Storytelling also improves listening and reading skills by exposing students to natural language. However, for storytelling to be effective, the story must be appropriate for the students' level.

7. Do you incorporate digital storytelling in your classes? Why? / Why not?

No, I recognise its potential benefits, I prefer traditional teaching methods because I find them more effective when executed correctly. I focus on direct interaction with my students during storytelling, which allows me to adapt the narration to their reactions and needs. I am not very comfortable with technology, so I prefer to stick to methods I know well. I believe that when storytelling is done well, it can be just as effective without the use of technology.

8. Do you think it is easier for students to learn new vocabulary and remember it in the future through stories? Why? / Why not?

Yes, I think so. Stories present words in meaningful contexts, allowing students to understand their use naturally. When new vocabulary is linked to a story, characters, or events, it becomes easier to remember. Also, the repetitive nature of some stories reinforces the words, helping students remember them over time. Emotional engagement also plays a role; when students enjoy the story, they are more likely to remember the language used. However, it's essential to choose stories appropriate for the students' level to avoid overwhelming them with too many unfamiliar words.

9. Do you explain the unknown vocabulary in the stories? How?

Yes, I explain unknown vocabulary, and my approach varies depending on the word and the students' age. Before the storytelling lesson, I introduce difficult words that are crucial for understanding the story. During the storytelling, if students have an unknown word, I explain it briefly using simple English definitions, synonyms, or examples in the sentence. For younger students, I use

visual aids, gestures, or pictures to clarify meanings. If the word is abstract or too complex, I sometimes translate in Greek, but I try to do this as little as possible.

10. Do you explain unknown vocabulary before, during, or after reading? Why?

I usually explain key vocabulary before reading the story, especially if the words are central to understanding the narrative. It helps students follow the story more easily without frequent interruptions. During the storytelling, I explain any additional unknown words, as this helps the flow of the story while ensuring comprehension. After reading, I encourage students to use the new vocabulary in discussions or follow-up activities.

11. Do you think storytelling can improve students' listening skills? How?

Yes. When students listen to a story, they are exposed to authentic language use, including pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. This helps them become more familiar with naturally spoken English. Storytelling requires active listening, as students must pay attention to follow the plot and understand the characters and events. Also, to make listening more effective, I use expressive narration and pause often to ask questions or encourage predictions, which keeps students interested.

12. Do you think storytelling can improve students' speaking skills? How?

Yes, especially through follow-up activities. After listening to a story, I often ask students to retell it in their own words, describe their favourite part, or discuss the characters and their feelings. These activities encourage them to use new vocabulary and practise the formation of sentences. For younger students, I keep the tasks simple, for example, repeating key phrases or answering questions about the story. I often ask students to create their own endings or imagine new scenarios, which develops their confidence and fluency in speaking and also inspires creativity.

13. Do you think storytelling can improve students' reading skills? How?

Yes. Stories expose students to a variety of sentence structures in a natural context, which helps improve their comprehension and fluency. For example, for younger students, illustrated stories connect the text with visuals, making it easier to understand and keep engaged. For older students, reading longer stories over several lessons encourages them to practise reading more complex texts. Also, when students follow the text during storytelling, they connect written words to their sounds, improving both their decoding and pronunciation skills.

14. Do you think storytelling can improve students' writing skills? How?

Storytelling can improve students' writing skills, of course, but it has a smaller impact compared to vocabulary or reading. Stories provide a model for narrative structure, such as how to create a beginning, middle, and end. After listening to a story, I often assign tasks like describing a character, which helps students practise organising their ideas and using new vocabulary. However, I believe that improving writing requires more focused practice through structured activities, apart from storytelling, such as grammar exercises or guided compositions.

15. What are the main problems that arise during the lessons regarding storytelling?

One of the biggest challenges with storytelling is time management, especially in upper primary classes where lessons are already packed with curriculum requirements. Long stories or follow-up discussions can take more time than planned, making it difficult to cover other necessary topics. Another issue is unknown vocabulary, which can be particularly challenging for younger students. If a story contains too many unfamiliar words, students may struggle to follow along and lose interest. I address this by pre-teaching key vocabulary and explaining new words during the story if needed. Also, some students may feel anxious if they don't fully understand the text or if they are asked to participate in speaking activities. To reduce these problems, I always try to incorporate follow-up activities that are appropriate for the students' level in order to make the lesson enjoyable and build their confidence.