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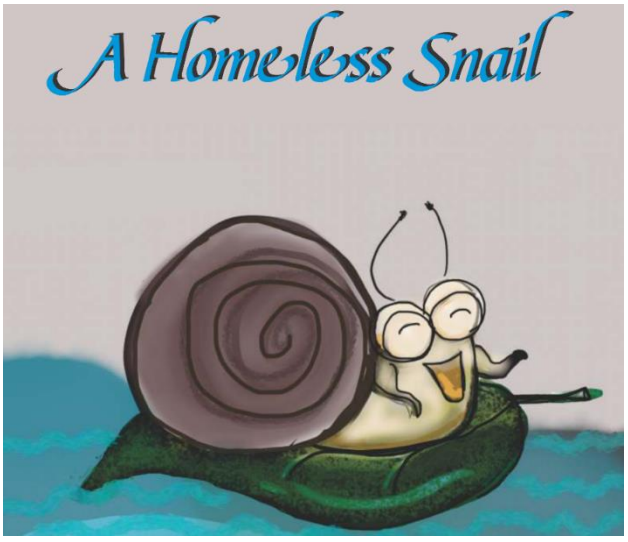

October 2023

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College of Education

DRAMATIC STORYTELLING DEVELOPS EMERGENT LITERACY IN EFL: EVIDENCE FROM THE UAE KINDERGARTENS

Ghada Yahya Alkilani

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Language and Literacy Education

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Cover: A homeless snail story

(Photo: by Ghada Yahya Alkilani)

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Declaration of Original Work

I, Ghada Yahya Alkilani, the undersigned, a graduate student at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), and the researcher of this dissertation entitled "*Dramatic Storytelling Develops Emergent Literacy in EFL: Evidence from the UAE Kindergartens"*, hereby, solemnly declare that this is the original research work done by me under the supervision of Dr. Qilong Zhang, in the College of Education at UAEU. This work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any academic degree, diploma, or similar title at this or any other university. Any materials borrowed from other sources (whether published or unpublished) and relied upon or included in my dissertation have been properly cited and acknowledged in accordance with appropriate academic conventions. I further declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, data collection, authorship, presentation, and/or publication of this dissertation.

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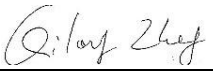
   Signature  Date 1/Nov/2023

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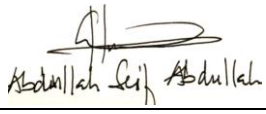
   Signature  Date 2/Nov/2023

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Abstract

There is increasing importance of the English language for educational excellence and career success in the UAE. The early years is a sensitive period for language acquisition, and preschool age is the best time to learn English as a foreign language (EFL). Stories are a main vehicle used in early childhood education (ECE) to engage children in language learning. Although previous studies have found dramatic storytelling to be particularly effective in developing children's emergent literacy in English as a native language, little is known about the effect of dramatic storytelling on developing young children's emergent literacy in EFL. Also, there is little empirical research that examines "how" the potential effect of dramatic storytelling on acquisition of emergent literacy in EFL can be realized. To address the research gap, this study was intended to develop and validate a dramatic storytelling approach to EFL teaching in the UAE kindergartens. The two research questions were: (1) How can a dramatic storytelling approach for teaching EFL be tailored to UAE kindergarten settings? (2) To what extent does the dramatic storytelling approach improve emergent literacy in EFL among UAE kindergarten students? Adopting a combination of quasi-experiment and action research design, this study developed, implemented, and evaluated an intervention model that provided the kindergarteners with intensive experiences with dramatic storytelling. The samples were a total of 200 children from 10 classes of three kindergartens in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi. A total of 107 children from five of the 10 classes received intervention (intensive dramatic storytelling), and 93 children from the other five classes served as comparison group. The intervention program covered four English dramatic stories that were taught in 16 sessions in eight weeks. The dramatic storytelling sessions were characteristic of use of print copy of storybook, multimodality, dramatization, mediation, and scaffolding. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to examine the effect of dramatic storytelling on kindergarten children's acquisition of emergent literacy in EFL. The quantitative data were collected through observation of child activities which measured the young children's emergent literacy skill and knowledge before and after the intervention. The child activities included: greeting in English, saying the objects in the picture in English, answering questions in English, recognizing English letters, writing English letters, and writing the child's own name. The quantitative data were also collected through parent

survey to assess the children's interest in EFL and act to learn EFL before and after the intervention in home environment. The qualitative data were collected through informal participant observations (fieldnotes), photos, videos, children's work samples, and informal conversations. General linear model repeated measures were used to examine whether there was significant difference in the change of the composite outcome variables between the intervention group and control group. The main effect of group (intervention and control) and time (pre- and post-) in predicting the mean score of the composite of six activities was significant, $F(5,194) = 7.789$, $p < 0.001$, partial eta squared = 0.167. The main effect of group and time in predicting the mean score of the composite of two types of learning English at home (interest in EFL, act to learn EFL) was insignificant, $F(1,146) = 0.539$, $p = 0.464$, partial eta squared = 0.004. However, separate one-way ANOVA repeated measures revealed that the effect of group and time in predicting the mean score of acting to learn English at home was significant, $F(1,146) = 6.363$, $p = <0.05$, partial eta squared = 0.042, while the effect of group and time in predicting the mean score of interest in learning English at home was insignificant, $F(1,146) = 2.856$, $p = 0.093$, partial eta squared = 0.019. Qualitative data analysis confirmed fidelity of the intervention. Specifically, the intervention foregrounded storybook reading, dramatization, multimodality, and collaboration. Qualitative data analysis also corroborated the effectiveness of the intervention program in terms of the impact of dramatic storytelling on the kindergarten children's emergent literacy in EFL. Specifically, the children acquired a number of emergent literacy skills (e.g., writing English words, understanding English instructions), developed interest in learning English (e.g., interest in the English sessions, interest in shared reading with peers), expressed love for learning English (e.g., love for the story characters, love for the English storybook, love for English letters). This study developed and tested a micro-curriculum model of a dramatic storytelling approach to EFL teaching. The intervention model may serve as a conceptual and operational framework for the development of kindergarten based EFL curriculum in the UAE and similar contexts.

Keywords: Dramatic storytelling, Emergent literacy, EFL, Kindergarten, UAE.

Title and Abstract (in Arabic)

سرد القصص الدرامية كأداة لتطوير معرفة القراءة والكتابة الناشئة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: دليل من رياض الأطفال في الإمارات العربية المتحدة

الملخص

تتزايد أهمية اللغة الإنجليزية في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، وخاصة من أجل التميّز التعليمي والنجاح الوظيفي، ولذا تعد السنوات الأولى مدّة حساسة لاكتساب اللغة، وسن ما قبل المدرسة هو أفضل وقت لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية. وتعدّ القصص أداة رئيسية في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة لإشراك الأطفال في تعلم اللغة، على الرغم من أن الدراسات السابقة قد وجدت أن رواية القصص الدرامية فعالة بشكل خاص في تطوير معرفة القراءة والكتابة للأطفال في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أم. إلا أنه لا يعرف الكثير عن تأثير سرد القصص الدرامي على تطوير معرفة القراءة والكتابة للأطفال الصغار في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. كما أن هناك القليل من الأبحاث التجريبية التي تدرس "كيف" يمكن تحقيق التأثير المحتمل لسرد القصص الدرامي على اكتساب معرفة القراءة والكتابة الناشئة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. من هنا ولمعالجة هذه الفجوة البحثية، فإن رسالة الدكتوراه هذه تهدف إلى التحقق من صحة نهج سرد القصص الدرامي لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في رياض الأطفال في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. وقد قامت الدراسة على هذين السؤالين: كيف يمكن تصميم نهج سرد قصصي درامي لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ليناسب رياض الأطفال في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة؟ إلى أي مدى يعمل أسلوب السرد القصصي الدرامي على تحسين معرفة القراءة والكتابة الناشئة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بين طلاب رياض الأطفال في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة؟. باعتماد مزيج من شبه التجربة وتصميم البحث الإجرائي، طوّرت هذه الدراسة، ونفذت وقيمت نموذج التدخل الذي قدم لرياض الأطفال خبرات مكثفة في سرد القصص الدرامية. وبلغ مجموع العينات 200طفل من 10 صفوف مختلفة من ثلاث رياض أطفال في مدينة العين بإمارة أبوظبي. تلقت خمسة من الفصول العشرة تدخلاً (سرد القصص الدرامي المكثف). وكانت الفصول الخمسة الأخرى بمثابة مجموعة مقارنة. غطى البرنامج أربع قصص درامية إنجليزية تم تدريسها في 16 جلسة لمدة ثمانية أسابيع، وكانت جلسات سرد القصص الدرامية مميزة لاستخدام نسخة مطبوعة من الكتب القصصية، والوسائط المتعددة، والدراما، والوساطة، ونماذج الدعم. استُخدِمت كل من البيانات الكمية والنوعية لفحص تأثير سرد القصص الدرامي على اكتساب أطفال رياض الأطفال لمحو الأمية الناشئة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تم جمع البيانات الكمية من خلال مراقبة أنشطة الأطفال التي تقيس مهارة ومعرفة القراءة والكتابة للأطفال الصغار قبل وبعد التدخل. وقد تضمنت أنشطة الطفل: التحية باللغة الإنجليزية، وقول الأشياء الموجودة في الصورة باللغة الإنجليزية، والإجابة على الأسئلة باللغة الإنجليزية، والتعرف على الحروف الإنجليزية، وكتابة اسم الطفل. كما جُمعت البيانات الكمية أيضاً من خلال استطلاع أولياء الأمور لتقييم تصرفات الأطفال وإجراءات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية قبل التدخل في البيئة المنزلية وبعده. وقد جُمعت البيانات النوعية من خلال ملاحظات المشاركين غير الرسمية (الملاحظات الميدانية) والصور ومقاطع الفيديو وعينات عمل الأطفال والمحادثات غير الرسمية. استخدمت المقاييس المتكررة للنموذج الخطي العام لفحص ما إذا كان هناك فرق

كبير في تغيير متغيرات النتائج المركبة بين مجموعة التدخل ومجموعات المراقبة. وجاءت التأثيرات الرئيسية للمجموعة (التدخل والتحكم) والوقت (قبل وبعد) في التنبؤ بمتوسط درجة المركب من ستة أنشطة معنوية، F (5,194) = 7.789، p < 0.001، مربع eta الجزئي = 0.167 بشكل عام، كان متوسط الدرجة للأنشطة في مجوعة التدخل مختلفاً بشكل كبير (p < 0.01)، حيث M = 2.286 (SE = 0.07) مقارنة ب M = 2.027 (SE = 0.08) في المجموعة الضابطة. كانت التأثيرات الرئيسية للمجموعة والوقت في التنبؤ بمتوسط درجة المركب لنوعين من تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في المنزل (الاهتمام بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، والعمل لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية) ضئيلة، F(1.146) = 0.539، p = 0.464، مربع eta الجزئي = 0.004. ومع ذلك، كشفت مقاييس متكررة ANOVA أحادية الاتجاه أن تأثير المجموعة والوقت في توقع متوسط درجة العمل لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في المنزل كان كبيرا، F (1,146) = 6.363، p = 0.013، مربع eta الجزئي = 0.042، بينما كان تأثير المجموعة والوقت في متوسط الاهتمام بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في المنزل ضئيلاً، F(1.146) = 2.856، p = 0.093، مربع eta الجزئي = 0.019. أكد تحليل البيانات النوعية دقة التدخل على وجه التحديد، أبرز التدخل قراءة القصص المصورة والتمثيل الدرامي، والوسائط المتعددة، والتعاون. أكد تحليل البيانات النوعية أيضاً فعالية برنامج التدخل من حيث تأثير سرد القصص الدرامي على معرفة القراءة والكتابة الناشئة للأطفال في رياض الأطفال في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. على وجه التحديد، اكتسب الأطفال عدداً من مهارات القراءة والكتابة الناشئة (على سبيل المثال: كتابة الكلمات الإنجليزية، وفهم تعليمات اللغة الإنجليزية)، وتطوير الاهتمام بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية (على سبيل المثال: الاهتمام بجلسات اللغة الإنجليزية، والاهتمام بالقراءة المشتركة مع أقرانهم)، كما أعرب الأطفال عن حبهم لتعمل اللغة الإنجليزية (على سبيل المثال: حب شخصيات القصة، حب القصص القصيرة الإنجليزية، حب الحروف الإنجليزية). طورت هذه الدراسة واختبرت نموذج المنهج الصغير لنهج سرد القصص الدرامي لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. قد يعمل نموذج التدخل كإطار مفاهيمي وتشغيلي لتطوير وتحويل منهج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية القائم على رياض الأطفال لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة والسياقات المماثلة.

كلمات البحث الرئيسية: السرد الدرامي، محو الأمية الناشئة، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، رياض الأطفال، الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

Author's Contribution

The contribution of Ghada Yahya Alkilani to the dissertation was as follows:

I. played a pivotal role in the planning phase of the research and was primarily responsible for the collection, processing, and analysis of the data, ensuring a robust and reliable dataset for the study.

II. critically evaluated various research methodologies and selected the most appropriate one to effectively address the research questions, aligning the chosen methods with the objectives of the research for optimal outcomes.

III. draft, revise and finalize the dissertation.

Author Profile

Ghada Yahya Alkilani is currently a PhD candidate in the domain of language and literacy at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, UAE University. She has an MA in Curriculum and Methods of Instructions. In her PhD thesis, she is investigating the use of dramatic storytelling as a tool to develop emergent literacy in EFL in the context of UAE kindergartens. Ghada has participated in five conferences locally and internationally. She published her master's paper as a book entitled "Kindergarten English teachers' perceptions of teaching listening strategies, assessment strategies and the obstacles they face", and she has a published article with colleagues entitled "A Conceptual Home for Reading Stories in Arabic, Chinese, and English: A Schema Analysis". Her bachelor's degree is in English language and literature from UAE University. She worked as a teacher for 14 years in private and government schools. She currently works as a head teacher in Tolerance schools- Abu Dhabi.

Acknowledgements

One's path ends on school benches, nevertheless, searching for knowledge does not end, our learning begins from the first day of existence and it stretches out to the last breath. May Allah, almighty bless those who walks on earth as heirs of the prophets, who lighten up those "not taken roads", and who take hands of who they were fortunate to meet. Praise be to Allah who blessed me with not only one but two of them, to both, I humbly thank you. First, to my supervisor Dr Qilong Zhang who guided me through the past two years, who spared me every minute of his time and never left me to drown in the cycle of anxiety and withdrawal. You have shown me this moment, moment of arrival, thank you Dr. Qilong.

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Finally, my thanks to my children who fill the world with love and kindness (Nasser & Alya).

Dedication

To the apple of my eye [Nasser & Alya] you are the light that keeps shining in my life.
I love you, always and forever.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an International Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
KG	Kindergarten
KG1/KG2	Kindergarten Grade 1/Grade 2
UAE	United Arab Emirates
VYL	Very Young Learner

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction, Acronyms, and Key Terms

This chapter presents a brief overview of the theoretical and practice context of the research project. The literature context foregrounds pivotal concepts that underpin the conceptualization of the project, namely, English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as an international language (EIL), emergent literacy and young children as EFL learners, stories and storytelling in teaching EFL, and dramatization in early childhood education (ECE). Subsequently, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and significance of the study will be presented. The chapter will close with an overview of the dissertation. Some of the key terms are defined as below:

Dramatic storytelling: Dramatic storytelling has the characteristics of both storytelling and drama which build on children's innate capacity for fantasy and imaginative play. A range of elements were incorporated in the storytelling, including, for example, variations in voice for different characters or to create surprise or suspense, mime or actions to convey meaning, puppet shows, drawing, story retelling.

Dramatization: Denoting creation of dramatic performance of material depicting real or fictional events, dramatization can play a role in education. When children identify with the various characters in the story, they naturally want to imitate those characters (Briggs & Wagner, 1979). Effective storytelling leads directly to story dramatization. Story dramatization is the re-creation of a story with the emphasis on spontaneity, action, and dialogue (Briggs & Wagner, 1979).

Emergent literacy: The introduction of the term "emergent literacy" highlights the developmental traits of the acquisition of language and literacy among young children. Emergent literacy refers to development of children's oral, reading and writing ability in the years prior to formal literacy instruction.

Mediation: As one of the two concepts of the sociocultural theory highlighted in this study, mediation is concerned with how children make meaning in storytelling. Mediation of understanding occurs through the interaction of artefacts and activities. In

EFL learning, the artefacts that support mediating can be a system of symbols, including a language or a set of gestures.

Multimodality: Multimodality has different connotations in different disciplines. In this study, multimodality is conceptualized as a pedagogical term that refers to utilization of multiple modes of communication in teaching and learning of EFL.

Scaffolding: As another sociocultural concept underpinning the study, the term refers to a process where adult intervention in an activity supports children to sustain the conversation. Often accompanied by paralinguistic support such as gestures, facial expressions, tones, or pitch of voice, storytelling provides additional scaffolding of the language through various cues and enables the children to comprehend the language of stories, namely, to reach their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

1.2 EFL Versus EIL

This study has been conceptualized under the framework of teaching EFL in the context of early years learning. Therefore, understanding the meaning of English that is taught in the UAE is the starting point. The English language has acquired the status of an international lingua franca language, which has led to different approaches to conceptualizing and teaching English (Marlina, 2014). There lacks unified terminology around the status of English. Traditionally, the ESL (English as second language) and EFL dichotomy has been dominant paradigm for research and teaching. According to the Kachruvian concentric circles (Kachru, 1992; Sánchez-Hernández & Martínez-Flor, 2022), the Inner Circle presents the countries where English is used as a native and first language (e.g., the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), the Outer Circle includes countries where English is used as a second language or in some sectors such as business and education (e.g., India, Singapore, Nigeria), and the Expanding Circle refers to countries where English is introduced as a foreign language in schools and universities (e.g., Turkey, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Japan, China). Recently, scholars advocate for a paradigm shift from the traditional ESL/EFL dichotomy to viewing English as an international language (EIL) which recognizes the varieties and variations of the English language and the legitimate role of multilingualism and multiculturalism in shaping the English language.

The notion of EIL has been well received in the UAE. For example, the guiding document National Unified K–12 Learning Standards Framework (Ministry of Education, 2014) includes "English as an International Language (EIL)" in its title. In this research, instead of EIL, the term EFL is used to refer to the English taught in kindergartens. There are three reasons for the choice. First, EFL highlights the "foreign" nature of the context in which English is taught. Such a context is paramount in terms of pedagogical decision making, which is particularly important for teaching young learners. Second, from the perspective of a learner, EIL is a vision, and it is a long journey to transition from EFL to EIL. Third, there lacks empirical research on EIL in ECE, hence the lack of literature support. On the contrary, the EFL research has been well established in all stages of education.

1.3 Emergent Literacy and Young Children as EFL Learners

Although the scope of this study falls within teaching of EFL, due to the age stage of the EFL learner in ECE, there exist principles and practices that can be fundamentally different to EFL teaching in schools. First, formal literacy instruction starts at school although young children are often immersed in a literacy-rich environment at home or at the preschool. The term "emergent literacy" is a pivotal concept in ECE. Coined by Clay (1966) and reported by Teale and Sulzby (1986), the term "emergent literacy" foregrounds the skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions that are developmental precursors to reading and writing and formal literacy instruction.

The issues of early English language education at pre-primary level have been growing interest all over the world. To differentiate from the term "young learners" which can refer to EFL learners at primary school and secondary school levels, many scholars have used the term "very young learners" (VYLs) to refer to pre-primary level EFL language learners. VYLs are below the age of formal entry into compulsory education, usually under 6 years (Güngör & Önder, 2023; Mihaljević Djigunović, 2016; Nikolov, 2016).

Given the unique connotation of "emergent literacy" and "VYLs", it is important to accentuate that principles and practices of EFL teaching used in schools may not be

applicable to EFL teaching in ECE. Also, it should be pointed out that EFL proficiency among VYLs is often measured against the native speaker model.

1.4 Stories in Teaching EFL

Story-based contexts provide rich opportunities for implicit and explicit language learning because they provide ritualized dialogue (Lenhart et al., 2020). In particular, story-based teaching activities enhance effective incidental vocabulary acquisition (i.e., without direct teaching of words) (Lenhart et al., 2020). Stories can be utilized in a variety of ways, including shared reading or dialogic reading (Mol et al., 2008; Vaahtoranta et al., 2019), interactive elaborative storytelling (Vaahtoranta et al., 2018), combination of individual storytelling together with public story-acting (Paley, 1990), interactive storytelling and picture-book-based drama activity (Mages, 2018), and dramatic storytelling (O'Neill et al., 2016). In shared reading, there can be varied level of interaction with the children, namely, there can be varied degree to which children actively participate in the story activity. The interaction may have different focus, specifically, a dialogic focus or a narrative focus (Vaahtoranta et al., 2018). Dialogic reading is story reading that involves children in a discussion on the story content or vocabulary. In dialogic reading, the adults make conscious effort to engage children actively in shared reading by facilitating them to talk about the story, asking questions, and discussing word meanings or story characters (Mol et al., 2008). In contrast to dialogic reading, in storytelling (narration), the adult teaches the content while the children listen (Vaahtoranta et al., 2018). Storytelling is a "sophisticated decontextualized form of oral language" (Spencer et al., 2013, p. 244).

In the context of ECE, given the VYLs' very limited English vocabulary, the traditional story-reading or storytelling may not work since the very young listeners may have no idea what is being read or told. It is imperative to adopt a systematic approach to introducing stories into the informal EFL instruction in ECE. This research has been driven by this intention.

1.5 Dramatization in Early Childhood Education

EFL teaching for VYLs must be captivating, and drama, dramatic play, and dramatic storytelling are on the top of the list of captivating activities. My personal experience as a schoolteacher and anecdotal evidence show that not all stories in the primary school curriculum are captivating, and some stories are dull and boring even to adult learners. It is important to develop awareness among the school educators of the criteria of "being dramatic", hence the importance of the concept of dramatization in ECE.

Researchers have tackled the issue of dramatization. It is suggested that the teachers can dramatize stories by telling or reading the stories in engaging and expressive ways; using facial expression and body language; and using costumes, props, and technology (Rahiem et al., 2020). "Dramatic performance" is considered to be the core of dramatization, and it includes use of multiple modes such as image, gaze, print, talk, sound, and movement (Wessel-Powell et al., 2016). Some experts highlight that educational drama should rely on "dramatic improvisations" rather than on the performance of written texts (Mages, 2018).

It is intriguing and important to explore what dramatization should be like in early learning settings so that dramatic storytelling can be best used for EFL learning among VYLs. Such an intention contributes greatly to the justification for this study.

1.6 Statement of the Problem

Dramatic stories are play-like action of telling stories that allows children to involve in more attractive way as they mimic the function of play (Wright et al., 2008). Recent evidences continue to confirm the positive role of storytelling in the development of emergent literacy among native English-speaking children (e.g., Zivan & Horowitz-Kraus, 2020), however, little is known whether dramatic storytelling plays similar roles in enhancing young children's emergent literacy in English as a foreign language.

The National Charter 2021 of the UAE states, "All Emiratis will have equal opportunity and access to first-rate education that allows them to develop into well-rounded individuals, enhance their educational attainment, and achieve their true potential, contributing positively to society" (The Cabinet of the UAE, 2021). Due to the sweep of

the English Medium of Instruction movement in higher education worldwide, and the UAE in particular, the English language competency has become essential to educational success. Research has shown that early second/foreign language learning can greatly influence later achievement (Birdsong & Paik, 2008; Zhang et al., 2021), and the early years are found to be a sensitive period for second/foreign language acquisition, specifically, from the age of 5 or 6 years old a significant age-related decline occurs in the ability to learn a second/foreign language (Berk, 2013; Zhang et al., 2021). It is very important to provide support for preschoolers to learn the English language.

Learning English in the UAE is different to that in other countries due to the unique language environment in the UAE. On one hand, English is not completely foreign language in the UAE since the children have ample opportunities to be exposed to English. On the other hand, English is not considered as a second language in a native English-speaking country as it is not the language of medium of instructions in many schools. It is a unique situation to have the mixture of having English spoken regionally and having Emirati vernacular as the first language of Emirati children. Therefore, the vast amount of research on early English learning in other places of the world is largely not directly transferable to the UAE context.

In a similar vein, effective methods of EFL teaching in other countries may not necessarily be equally effective in the UAE, especially for VYLs of EFL. In the UAE early years learning context, there lacks both empirical research and established practices in the field of teaching EFL to VYLs. In contrast, the UAE government has high literacy expectations for kindergarten students (Ministry of Education, 2014, 2018). Such a mismatch between expectations and reality poses challenges for both kindergarten teachers and parents who have shared responsibility for supporting kindergarten children's learning of EFL. The present study was part of an effort to tackle the problem.

1.7 Purpose of the Study

Given the universally recognized educational function of dramatic storytelling and the critical importance of early childhood for development of emergent EFL, it is important to explore the "how" with regard to utilizing and optimizing the educational benefit of dramatic storytelling for Emirati young children's learning of English. Having

been designed to fill the gap in both theory and practice, this study has two objectives: (1) Develop and implement an EFL intervention model incorporating key elements of dramatic storytelling; (2) Examine the effectiveness of the dramatic storytelling inspired pedagogical model in enhancing young children's emergent literacy in EFL.

In the context of UAE kindergartens, this study aims to answer two research questions: (1) How can a dramatic storytelling approach for teaching EFL be tailored to UAE kindergarten settings? (2) To what extent does the dramatic storytelling approach improve emergent literacy in EFL among UAE kindergarten students?

1.8 Significance of the Study

Although it is widely known practice that formal instruction of EFL starts from primary school, given the "critical period" of learning a foreign language (Penfield & Roberts, 1959) and in preparation for formal instruction, English has been taught at preschool level in diverse informal ways (Ministry of Education, 2014). In the UAE, the National English Language Curriculum Framework prescribes learning outcomes across 10 levels which "are aimed at learners who are studying from KG or Grade 1 (zero beginners) to those studying at tertiary level education" (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 5). The National Unified K–12 Learning Standards Framework provides details content standards for KG1 and KG2 learners of English (Ministry of Education, 2014).

This study addresses an important issue that is faced with by early childhood practitioners both in the UAE and abroad. The study aims to develop and validate a model of integrating dramatic storytelling into a kindergarten curriculum in the UAE context. Therefore, the study makes meaningful contribution to the practice of EFL teaching in ECE, and ultimately to the pedagogical theory of EFL teaching and learning for VYLs of EFL given the applied and practice-based nature of the discipline of pedagogy, curriculum, and instruction.

1.9 Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into nine chapters.

Chapter 1: "Introduction" introduces the subject matter and scope of the study, the purpose of the study, and key concepts leading to and underpinning the study.

Chapter 2: "Conceptual Framework" foregrounds six disciplinary specific concepts (i.e., emergent literacy, mediation, scaffolding, multimodality, storybook as a pedagogical tool, and dramatization) that are fundamental to conceptualization of the study and collectively formulate a cross-disciplinary conceptual framework for planning, designing, executing, analyzing and reporting the intervention model of EFL teaching in UAE kindergartens.

Chapter 3: "Literature Review" presents an extensive review of the extant literature on four broad topics that shape the theoretical context of the study. The four broad topics are: stories as a teaching tool in ECE, emergent literacy in EFL, effect of storytelling on emergent literacy, and story-based intervention in the context of EFL and VYLs. Research gaps are identified and research questions are articulated.

Chapter 4: "Context of the Study" provides a factual description of the policy and practice context in which the study is conducted. Specifically, four aspects are covered, namely, ECE in the UAE, English teaching in UAE kindergartens, National Unified K–12 Learning Standards Framework, and National English Language Curriculum Framework.

Chapter 5: "Methodology" describes and justifies the methods and procedure of the design and execution of the research project. First, it elaborates on a combination of action research and quasi-experimental design adopted in this study, including selection of stories, production of the storybook, and details of both the action research design and quasi-experimental design. Second, it reports the sampling and recruitment procedure. Third, it describes the intervention procedure. Fourth, it describes the key measurement tools used in this study. Lastly, the methods of collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data are detailed.

Chapter 6: "Quantitative Results" reports results from the quantitative analysis which contribute to the answer to Research Question 2. The quantitative analyses include: descriptive statistics on the participants; group comparison on the outcome variables at

pre-assessment; group comparison on the outcome variables at post-assessment; group comparison on the outcome variables over time.

Chapter 7: “Qualitative Findings” reports findings from the qualitative analysis which contribute to the answer to Research Questions 1 and 2. The qualitative findings are epitomized into two overarching themes: fidelity of intervention; effect of intervention.

Chapter 8: “Discussion” offers critical and reflective analysis of the findings by exploring several issues that derive from this study, namely, why the dramatic storytelling approach should be introduced, what a dramatic storytelling approach should be like, how we know a dramatic storytelling approach is effective, what a formalized way of dramatic storytelling is to teach EFL in kindergarten, and what the challenges are in implementing the dramatic storytelling approach.

Chapter 9: “Conclusion” provides concluding statements on what the study demonstrates. Specifically, theoretical and pedagogical implications are contemplated, limitations are identified, and recommendations are presented.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 presents a conceptual framework which is collectively formulated by six important concepts in different disciplines. The first concept is emergent literacy in EFL which highlights the dispositional or attitudinal dimension of learning EFL. Drawn from the sociocultural theory, the second and third concepts are mediation and scaffolding respectively. The fourth concept is multimodality for VYLs of EFL which emphasizes that VYLs of EFL benefit from multiple modes of communication between the teacher and the learners and between the learners themselves. The fifth concept is storybook as a pedagogical tool which recognizes storytelling as a desirable way of teaching for VYLs of EFL. The sixth concept is dramatization in ECE which distinguishes storytelling in ECE from that in other contexts, hence manifestation of the particular importance of dramatic storytelling in teaching of EFL for very young learners.

The six concepts serve as six pillars of the proposed intervention model. Emergent literacy in EFL defines the purpose and direction of the teaching of EFL for very young learners. Mediation and scaffolding define the nature of interaction between the teacher and the children and interaction among the children. Multimodality for very young learners of EFL, storybook as a pedagogical tool, and dramatization in ECE inform fundamental principles in formulating the methodology of teaching EFL for very young learners. Therefore, the six concepts originated from different disciplines can be re-conceptualized as integral components of a unified conceptual framework termed as "conceptual framework of six pillars of intervention" in this study as illustrated in Figure 1.

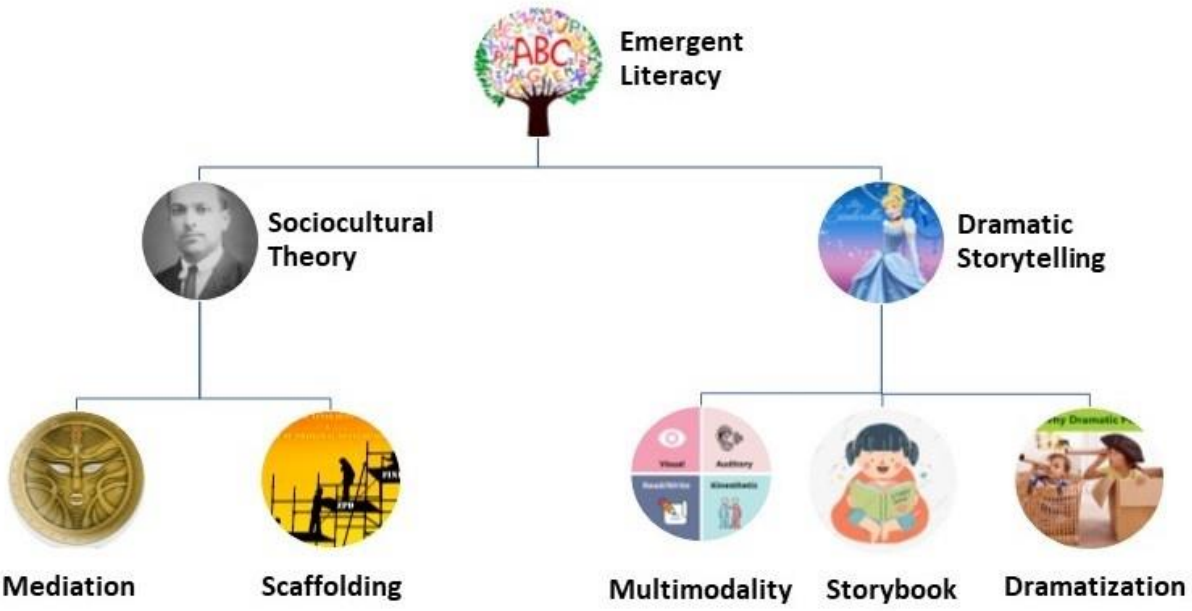

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of six pillars of intervention

2.2 Emergent Literacy in EFL

The origin of the term "emergent literacy" can be traced back to Clay's (1966) doctoral thesis which reports an observational study on young children's "emergent reading" behaviors. Clay focused on the transition between non-reading and reading in the first year of formal instruction of reading. Some researchers considered that Clay (1966) coined the term "emergent literacy" (Auleear Owodally, 2015). Teale and Sulzby (1986) are among the earliest scholars who dealt with "emergent literacy" in an explicit and systematic way, which is evidenced by their monograph titled "Emergent Literacy: Writing and Reading". The introduction of the term "emergent literacy" highlights the developmental traits of the acquisition of language and literacy among young children. Emergent literacy refers to development of children's oral, reading and writing ability in the years prior to formal literacy instruction.

Built on the concept of emergent literacy, "emergent literacy skills" has been used by some researchers to refer to the skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions that are developmental precursors to formal reading and writing (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Nowadays, emergent literacy skills have been used for developing pedagogical approach

and curriculum standards in early childhood education (Cabellet al., 2011; Krijnen et al., 2020; Meng, 2021).

Emergent literacy skills consist of both oral language skills and code-related skills (Auleear Owodally, 2015; Cabell et al., 2011). Oral language skills are children's ability to understand and use language through listening, speaking and acquisition of vocabulary. Code-related skills include print knowledge and alphabet knowledge. In the EFL teaching context, code-related skills are particularly worth noting. Print knowledge includes children's understanding of the forms, conventions, and functions of print. Difference between letters and word is an example of the form of print. Space, direction, and sequence are the examples of conventions of print. Meaning and entertainment are examples of functions of print (McGinty & Justice, 2009). It is important to note that print knowledge also includes young children's attitudes to print, their motivations towards and their interest in print (Roskos et al., 2003).

Alphabet knowledge refers to young children's ability to identify letter names and letter sounds (Puranik et al., 2011). Children start paying attention to the letter names and their own names sometimes as early as the age of three (Snow et al., 1998). Across cultures and across socio-economic classes, one of the first words that appears in the child's early writing activities is his/her first name (Drouin & Harmon, 2009). It has been recommended that name-writing be used as one early literacy assessment tool (Haney et al., 2003).

Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are different terms. Phonological awareness refers to the awareness of constituent sounds of words in learning written words while the term phonemic awareness means the awareness of sounds (phonemes) that make up spoken words (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004). Phonological and phonemic awareness facilitates reading because the English alphabet is a graphic system in which letters and speech sounds are associated with each other. When the child discovers the relationship between speech sounds and letters, she/he will gain graphophonics which is an important cueing system in reading (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). Phonological awareness has been found to have positive effect on reading comprehension and spelling skills (Chen et al., 2023; Tong et al., 2023).

2.3 Mediation and Scaffolding in Storytelling

Sociocultural perspective provides a useful framework for understanding stories and storytelling. Instead of language structures, sociocultural perspective focuses on communication and meaning in story-related activities (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Two concepts of the sociocultural theory (i.e., mediation and scaffolding) are concerned with how children make meaning in storytelling, which is particularly relevant to the topic of the study. First, "mediation" of understanding occurs through the interaction of artefacts and activities. In EFL learning, the artefacts that support mediating can be a system of symbols, including a language or a set of gestures. The interaction takes place between an animated source of symbols or between symbols and another person (Gibbons, 2003). Without being imposed by others, such mediating process transforms learning acts into higher order mental functions including memory, attention, and EFL learning strategies (Gibbons, 2003).

Another sociocultural concept underpinning the study is "scaffolding". First used by Wood et al. (1976), the term scaffolding refers to a process where adult intervention in an activity supports children to sustain the conversation. Often accompanied by paralinguistic support such as gestures, facial expressions, tones, or pitch of voice, storytelling provides additional scaffolding of the language through various cues and enables the children to comprehend the language of stories, namely, to reach their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). In EFL learning, the zone of proximal development can be interpreted as a form of interaction or "collaborative dialogue" (Swain, 2000; Swain et al., 2015) or as a process of "collective scaffolding" (Donato, 1994). The term "collective scaffolding" denotes building up a scaffold for a shared understanding during learning processes through peer collaboration (Donato, 1994). In the storytelling context, mutual engagement by the teacher and children for sharing and extending meaning through multimodalities can be conceptualized as collective scaffolding (Nguyen & Phillips, 2022).

In EFL learning there is less reinforcement and less opportunity to use language both inside and outside classroom. Storytelling may overcome such limitation. In story-related activities, the teacher may facilitate and establish collaborative dialogue and

achieve collective scaffolding, which helps engage children in learning through participating in story language and sequential activities (Dewey, 1906). Since the children's body, soul and mind are fully involved in collaborative dialogue with peers and the teacher, language learning is enhanced. Therefore, according to sociocultural theory, mediation and scaffolding both take place in collective and collaborative setting, and teacher-children interaction and interaction between peers are important context in which EFL learning takes place, and story-related activities provide such a context.

2.4 Multimodality for Very Young Learners of EFL

Multimodality has different connotations in different disciplines. In this study, multimodality is conceptualized as a pedagogical term that refers to utilization of multiple modes of communication in teaching and learning of EFL. Previous studies have provided numerous examples of such multiple modes of communication. First-grade English learners may draw on several semiotic resources in the text when reading a picture book with the adult, and such semiotic resources can be categorized into typographical features, paralinguistic features, design features, illustrations, and background knowledge (Kachorsky et al., 2017). In a study of microethnographic account of a learning event, the physical and discursive moves of emergent bilinguals were examined when students determined a word's meaning from a book, and body movement and positioning were found to determine the students' understanding of the word meaning (Handsfield & Crumpler, 2013).

Multimodal texts create opportunities for EFL learning such as different access points for comprehension, invited participation, and motivation for repeated practice. Through repeatedly joining in with accompanying actions and sound effects and by imitating language unprompted, the young learners respond to the different modes of the input (e.g., movement, sound, image, and speech) (Kaminski, 2019). Multimodal literacies should be used by emergent bilinguals for learning their home language and an additional language. Young children's multimodal meaning-making processes are evident in diverse cultural and linguistic settings which are realized through a variety of activities and resources such as drama, stories, music, drawings, play, artifacts, graphic text, books, and museum (Brown & Hao, 2022). Young children draw on a range of semiotic resources in

their meaning-making, such as posture, gesture, facial expression, gaze, and physical proximity, and language. Multimodality highlights the intentionality of the semiotic work that involves diverse communicative modes and the multimodal texture of engagement (Taylor, 2016).

Educational drama is a typical example of multimodality since it provides playful environments in which children actively engage in the action, and drama activities provide social contexts for decontextualized language in which children are introduced to new language structures and vocabulary (Mages, 2018). Storytelling is also a typical example of multimodality. Young children interact with stories across multiple media platforms such as picture books, movies, video games, videos, and social media, which reshape young children's understanding of text. Young children nowadays understand text and make meaning through multiple sensory modes such as image, talk, movement, gaze, sound, and variation in sound effects. Multimodal storytelling leverages the playful ways children create meaningful stories through voices, actions, props, and printed words (Wessel-Powell et al., 2016).

2.5 Storybook as a Pedagogical Tool

Storybook is the best vehicle for the development of emergent literacy. Reading storybooks aloud to children is found to be an effective context for enhancing print awareness (Mol et al., 2009). During book reading, young children are exposed to oral and written language simultaneously. There are many benefits of book reading for strengthening print-knowledge skills (Mol et al., 2009), in particular, book reading expose children to print which, in turn, contributes to their print knowledge and book concepts (Zucker et al., 2009). During reading the adult tends to make references to print by pointing to and saying the names of letters, and the child's attention is thereby drawn to print, hence enhanced print awareness (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2014).

Previous studies have found book characteristics to be influential on interactions and language use (Nyhout & O'Neill, 2013). Book qualities such as genre or complexity may define how the adult interacts with the child (Saracho, 2017). One book characteristic most frequently studied is the presence of illustrations which have been reported to encourage more interactive reading, and more story recall by children (Greenhoot et al.,

2014). Illustrations excite a high level of joint attention which supports children's processing of book content (Petrie et al., 2023). Wordless narrative books provide stimulus for decontextualized maternal talk when parents read to infants and offer opportunities for more complex talk (Nyhout & O'Neill, 2013).

As a traditional way to develop children's language skills, storybook reading provides a meaningful context for young children to understand the meanings of vocabulary (Dickinson et al., 2012). Effective vocabulary teaching is often realized in a storybook reading context, including incidental instruction, embedded instruction, and rich instruction (Yeung et al., 2016). Parent/teacher–child interactions during shared storybook reading or read-aloud events have many benefits. Children create a verbal referent or meaning of an unknown word when it is embedded in the context of following a storyline. Interactions with the adults help the children make connections and inferences as they extract information from stories and their prior knowledge (Hepburn et al., 2010; Kang et al., 2009). Storybook reading as well as storytelling have positive impact on young children's language development (Isbell et al., 2004; Wright & Dunsmuir, 2019).

2.6 Dramatization in Early Childhood Education

Dramatization originated from the Greek word *dramatopoesis* which is formed by the words *drama* and *poetry*. "Drama" here means "I act", "I do", "I intervene", and "poetry" refers to "making", "doing", or "constructing" (Papageorgiou, 2022). Denoting creation of dramatic performance of material depicting real or fictional events, dramatization can play a role in education. When children identify with the various characters in the story, they naturally want to imitate those characters (Briggs & Wagner, 1979). Effective storytelling leads directly to story dramatization. Story dramatization is the re-creation of a story with the emphasis on spontaneity, action, and dialogue (Briggs & Wagner, 1979). In Paley's storytelling and story-acting approach, story scribing and story dramatization are considered to be two key practices, as asserted by Paley (2004), "… the dictated story is but a half-told tale. To fulfil its destiny, it is dramatized on a pretend stage with the help of the classmates as actors and audience and the teacher as narrator and director" (p0.5).

Dramatization can influence educational process in various ways (Papageorgiou, 2022). Dramatization helps children understand the plot and the feelings of the characters even if they do not comprehend the words. By using their bodies and voices to dramatize the characters' words and actions, children gain a sense of how interactions among the characters shaped the events described in the story, and therefore can touch, see, and experience the meaning of the words (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Mages, 2006).

Through dramatizing stories, children may build a pathway from the decontextualized language to comprehension of the words. Early childhood teachers routinely read out loud to young children, and often guide the children in dramatizing short scenes from stories. By using their voices to dramatize the characters' words and actions - or their bodies to create settings or moods – young children learn to connect the decontextualized text used in the classroom to their experiences outside of classroom (Papageorgiou, 2022). Rahiem et al. (2020) reported three ways to dramatize stories in classroom, namely, telling or reading the stories in engaging and expressive ways; using facial expression and body language; and using costumes, props, and technology. Similarly, Mages (2018) reported picture-book-based drama activity that features dramatization by providing children with opportunity to fully imagine and dramatize specific aspects of the story, including the children pretending to be animals as part of exploration of life on the farm.

2.7 Summary and Conclusion

Six concepts are pivotal to conceptualization of this study. Emergent literacy defines the purpose, scope, and direction of EFL for very young learners. Teaching EFL for very young learners is grounded on the fundamental aim, namely, development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in emergent literacy in EFL. Under the central pillar of emergent literacy, there are five secondary-level pillars which support and facilitate the accomplishment of the aim of emergent literacy in EFL. The first two secondary-level pillars are the sociocultural concepts of mediation and scaffolding which foreground the EFL learning mechanism of interaction, collectivity, and collaboration in story-related activities. The other three secondary-level pillars are multimodality, storybook, and dramatization which all point to one of the most important methodologies in ECE. There

exists close relationship between each of the five methodological concepts. First, the five secondary-level pillars are entwined rather than independent from each other. For example, mediation and scaffolding more likely take place in multimodal storytelling settings, storybook and dramatization are both a concrete path to multimodality, multimodality can be expansion of storybook, dramatization can lead to multimodality, and storybook can be a vehicle for both multimodality and dramatization.

Despite that the six core concepts are conceptually intertwining with each other, given their importance, they are conceptualized as six separate principles that constitute a unified conceptual framework underpinning the design, data collection, and data analysis of this study. Specifically, emergent literacy, the only top-level pillar, defines the focus and scope of the outcome variable of the intervention program. The concept of emergent literacy not only frames the objectives of the intervention program but also determines how the outcome variable should be measured, which helps to address both Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. The five secondary-level pillars (i.e., mediation, scaffolding, multimodality, storybook, and dramatization) set forth key principles of the dramatic storytelling intervention programs, which delineates how Research Question 1 should be answered.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature background that is most relevant and underpins the present study, and it includes several broad themes: stories as a teaching tool in ECE, emergent literacy in EFL, storytelling and emergent literacy, and story-based intervention in the context of EFL for VYLs. The current literature review identifies the research gaps and leads to the articulation of subsequent research questions. In light of the concept of emergent literacy in EFL, it should be emphasized that teaching EFL to VYLs is fundamentally different to teaching EFL to adult learners. This chapter does not include the vast amount of theories on language acquisition and EFL teaching among school and adult learners. In doing so, the focus and direction of this study can be better manifested.

3.2 Stories as a Teaching Tool in Early Childhood Education

3.2.1 Introduction

Stories are reports of experiences that are recreated and revived in new ways (Norrick, 2010). Stories for children are journeys where they can be tellers of tales, actors and learners (Paley, 1990). For centuries, *One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of Middle Eastern folk tales, have been of great interest to people around the world, children and adults alike (Mirza, 2018). Emirati grandmothers played a pivotal role in the early stages of literacy development for children in the region. Historically, when men embarked on lengthy pearl diving expeditions, children were left under the sole care of the females, predominantly their grandmothers. These wise matriarchs, deeply rooted in their culture, would regale the young ones with captivating stories, drawing from rich Middle Eastern folk tales, such as One Thousand and One Nights.

This nightly ritual of storytelling not only kept the cultural legacy alive but also provided children with a significant exposure to language and literacy, laying a strong foundation for their linguistic growth. Stories are valuable tools for development of young children's emergent literacy skills (Theobald, 2016). Listening to stories are one of the key situations for vocabulary development to occur in early and later childhood (Robbins &

Ehri, 1994). Representing highly ritualized dialogue, story-based contexts provide rich opportunities for implicit and explicit language learning (Lenhart et al., 2020). During shared storybook reading or read-aloud events, children create a verbal referent or meaning of new words when they are embedded in interesting contexts such as following a storyline. Through interactions with the adults, the children make connections and inferences while extracting information from narratives and their prior knowledge (Hepburn et al., 2010; Kang et al., 2009).

Participation in storytelling experience allows children to develop a sense of story which is beneficial for reading and writing (Lwin, 2016). Through storytelling children encounter a broad range of language and thereby build an extensive oral language base for literacy skills such as word recognition (Speaker et al., 2004). Shared story activity between adults and children lays the foundation for oral language skills and literacy (Cremin et al., 2018). The teacher plays an important role in children's storytelling. Storytelling is a "constructed" activity where the teacher devotes specific times to children's story-based activities for shaping the topic, agenda and methods of storytelling (Abbott & McCarthey, 2001). The teacher affects the interactional aspects of storytelling in children's daily conversation (Theobald, 2016).

There is increasing interest in the use of stories to bridge children's oral language and literacy skills or to develop their emergent literacy skills. Situations that attract particular interest include teachers/parents reading stories to/with children, the adult's use of language features, and the adult's use of pictures to complement text in storybooks (Lwin, 2016).

3.2.2 Storybook Reading and Oral Storytelling

Read-aloud and oral storytelling share much similarity in that they both provide knowledge in the context of a story and the opportunity for interaction between listener and narrator (Isbell et al., 2004; Melzi et al., 2023). There is subtle difference between story reading and storytelling in their effects on oral language complexity and story comprehension among young children aged three to five (Isbell et al., 2004; Melzi et al., 2023).

Compared to listening to story reading and assessed against mean length of utterance, total number of words and vocabulary diversity, the young children's listening to storytelling has similar positive effects on their oral language. Listening to storytelling is more effective than listening to story reading in terms of story comprehension and story retelling (Isbell et al., 2004). In read-aloud activity, the narrator usually needs to handle the book and followed the printed words, hence the less freedom to create or act. In contrast, oral storytelling activity allows the narrator to exhibit more non-verbal attention-guiding behavior, and therefore, makes it easier for the narrator to initiate the interaction with, and capture the attention of, the listeners by maintaining eye contact with the listeners and using gestures and postures (Lenhart et al., 2020). There has been evidence of the benefits of incorporating oral storytelling into preschool classrooms (Melzi et al., 2023).

Oral language typically consists of less complex and less diverse lexical structures than written texts, therefore, storybooks are important for children's lexical development because the vocabulary contained in children's picture books is considerably more diverse than oral language (Montag et al., 2015). Oral storytelling may provide flexibility to adapt language to the audience, and may thus enhance interest and comprehension (Roney, 1996), also, literature has reported oral storytelling as strategies to develop emergent writing, and the strategies facilitated the students to "leverage knowledge from their family and community resources [and] generate ideas for writing" (Schrodt et al., 2023, p0.511).

The use of storybooks is beneficial in terms of the opportunity for children to learn letter recognition, reading and writing (Lenhart et al., 2020). There are advantages of storytelling compared to story reading, for example, more opportunities for spontaneous audience participation, easier evocation of audience responses by the storyteller's use of voice modulations, gestures and facial expressions, and greater levels of eye contact with the storyteller (Isbell et al., 2004; Lwin, 2016). Isbell et al. (2004) articulated the difference, "[w]hen a story is read, the primary reference for the communication event is the text, as fixed upon the page. In a storytelling event, the words are not memorized, but are created through spontaneous, energetic performance, assisted by audience participation and interaction" (p0.158).

Both oral storytelling and shared-reading activities are used widely to foster emergent literacy skills (Lenhart et al., 2020). With a sample of primary school children, Suggate et al. (2013) examined the effect of one-to-one reading sessions and oral storytelling sessions. The oral storytelling condition was found to be most effective, followed by the read-aloud condition. Suggate et al.'s (2013) study was replicated by Lenhart et al. (2018) who found that oral storytelling was more effective than read-aloud among young children aged 3-6.

Vaahtoranta et al. (2018) found no significant differences in word learning between the two story-delivery conditions (orally-told and read-aloud). Since oral language is typically less complex than written texts (Montag et al., 2015), children who are less linguistically competent may benefit more from oral storytelling condition which is less linguistically demanding and vice versa (Lenhart et al., 2020). Shared reading is the most suitable context for promoting young children's language development. Parent-child shared reading predicts child's early and later language development (e.g. Marjanovič-Umek et al., 2012; Marjanovič-Umek et al., 2019). In a non EFL teaching setting in China, interactive storybook reading has been found to enhance kindergarten children's vocabulary and morphological awareness (Nevo et al., 2023).

In summary, literature has shown the benefits of both storybook reading and oral storytelling, which is highly relevant to Research Question 1 of this study. In the intervention program of this study, storybook reading by the teacher is the foundation of both storybook reading and storytelling by the children, and storytelling by the teacher is the outcome of storybook rading, hence integration of the two methods.

3.2.3 The Storytelling and Story-Acting Approach

Initially formulated and promoted by Vivian Gussin Paley (1929-2019), a prominent American pre-school and kindergarten teacher and ECE researcher, storytelling and story-acting is a form of constructing oral language skills. The storytelling and story-acting approach demonstrates how young children's natural interest in fantasy can be utilized for learning. Paley believed stories to play a central role in children's growth. Paley would script an individual child's story and then ask the other children in her class

to help act it out, which was made a regular classroom practice. Paley would read out the story first, then support children in acting it out without props (Dombrink-Green, 2011).

Cooper et al. (2004) provides methodological overview of Paley's storytelling curriculum. Paley's storytelling curriculum includes three components: storytelling/dictation, story acting/dramatization, and dramatization of adult-authored stories. The component of storytelling/dictation includes seating the children, selecting paper, writing down name and date prior to dictation, and inviting the children (e.g., "Would you like to tell a story about the day you went shopping?"). The other aspects of storytelling/dictation are: stories limited to one page; very few restrictions on subject matter; the teacher's echoing back to the child what the child has just said while writing; the teacher encouraging the child to proceed if the child hesitates (e.g., "Yes? And then what happened?"); the teacher asking questions about decoding (e.g., beginning sounds, double consonants, and rhymes); the teacher asking the child to spell a word ("Do you remember how to spell floor?"); the teacher editing and revising the story told by the child; the teacher reading the dictated story; the teacher encouraging the child to choose the cast, and the teacher being upbeat, involved scribe (e.g., "No kidding? Oooh, that's scary"). The component of story acting/dramatization highlights these aspects: less deliberation on rehearsals or props; semi-circle seating; the teacher announcing who will play which roles; the chosen actors acting and following the storyline while the teacher rereads the story; the teacher checking if the children remember their lines; and the teacher interrupting the dramatization with suggestion ("Can you look upset like the little bear would?"). The component of dramatization of adult-authored stories is characteristic of the opportunity for the children to act out adult-authored books, which helps children to learn how good stories are constructed and extends their vocabulary and knowledge of sophisticated sentence structure (Cooper et al., 2004; Paley, 1981).

The theoretical underpinning of Paley's storytelling and story-acting approach is Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural conceptualization of play (Flewitt et al., 2016; Wright, 2007). According to Nicolopoulou and Cole (2010), Paley's approach sits within cultural-historical activity theory which draws on Vygotsky's views about the cultural nature of learning and foregrounds complex interacting systems within distinctive learning ecologies formed through combination of social interactions and meaning-making

activities. Paley's approach is characterized by the conception that within the particular "learning ecology" of the classroom, children's spontaneous imaginative activities can be guided through story (Flewitt et al., 2016). According to Nicolopoulou and Cole (2010), the storytelling and story-acting practice demonstrates a number of characteristics of a learning ecology, for example, problem or task oriented, discourse oriented (i.e., children dictate their stories), and cultural tools oriented (e.g., the tools used to record the stories).

Participation in storytelling and story acting can promote young children's oral and narrative development significantly. For children from low-income or otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds who may have lower level of oral language skills and are less familiar with narrative conventions, participation in storytelling and story acting help them build up basic language and narrative foundations (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). Nicolopoulou and colleagues have consistently found that storytelling and story acting enhance all children's oral language in the long run regardless of the child's starting point, and this is more so when storytelling and story acting are integrated into regular classroom book reading practices (Nicolopoulou et al., 2014; Nicolopoulou et al, 2015). When the storytelling and story acting practice was used in the US Head Start preschool classrooms, the children developed a wider range of decontextualized, oral language skills, and they are aware of connections between thoughts, spoken words, marks on paper, text on the page, and the link between spoken and written representation (Nicolopoulou et al., 2006).

Cooper et al (2004) reported their research on Paley's storytelling curriculum with 95 children (public prekindergarten, kindergarten, and mixed-aged) from low and mixed-income in Texas. It was found that children who had been exposed to Paley's storytelling curriculum had more increase in oral language and literacy skills in comparison with children in the control group. To support the language and communication skills of young children who were learning English as an additional language and had difficulty meeting the curriculum milestones for speaking and listening, researchers introduced Paley's story-based approach to practitioners in two mainstream school nurseries and two nursery schools in England.

It was found that all children made significant progress in language learning when Paley's story-based approach was given in combination with a teacher training program

named Talking Together (Westminster Education Action Zone, 2005). Paley's approach provided a practical and flexible framework for the adults to truly listen to children within a large classroom both on one-to-one basis and on whole-class basis (Typadi & Hayon, 2010). Instead of an instruction-oriented intervention focused on early literacy development, Paley's storytelling and story-acting approach is more of classroom culture building by which storytelling and imaginary play support each other to create wider developmental benefits (Paley, 1990).

When children regularly share their stories with responsive adults and peers in classroom, a common classroom culture is built by the peer group, which in turn reinforces children's participation as storytellers and story actors (Cremin et al., 2018; Nicolopoulou et al., 2010, 2014, 2015; Paley, 1990). Research from China provided evidence of positive effect of storytelling activities (e.g., use of body movements, props, vocal tones, choral singing) on preschool children's aesthetic literacy and co-participation (Xiao et al., 2023).

To sum up, literature shows that teacher-child storytelling activities are inevitably a mixture of storytelling and story acting which the intervention program in the present study is also characteristic of. The literature on storytelling and story acting provides theory-based, enriched resources that largely inform the development of the intervention program of the present study.

3.2.4 Dramatic Stories and Dramatic Storytelling in ECE

Dramatic storytelling and dialogues are oral narrative type of second language acquisition that is inspired in Bruner's notion of predictable situations of scaffolded interaction (Coyle & Mora, 2018) as well as social constructive theory and dialogism (Vygotsky, 1978). Gardner (1975) called for dramatic storytelling in child psychotherapy which was firstly a technique used by the therapist to probe the psychodynamic meaning and create a story of the child using the same characters in a similar setting (Gardner, 1975).

Kemp (2010) explored storytelling dramatization and its effectiveness and the opportunity to build community within the context of kindergarten classroom. After 20 videotaped storytelling dramatization sessions, it was proven that dramatization provided

opportunity to promote community building through participation, membership and inclusion, relationship building, and environment. Kemp (2010) found that storytelling dramatization led to healthy social-emotional development of young children in all areas of growth and achievement, which was supported by Ripstein (2018) who investigated art as production of dramatic stories.

Meta-analyses and literature reviews have concluded that drama has a positive effect on language development (Lee et al., 2015; Mages, 2017, 2018). Dramatic storytelling creates opportunities to develop skills in listening, speaking, collaborating or negotiating. The child is engaged through voice, expression, visual images, visual creations and body actions during dramatic storytelling. Dramatic storytelling is a refreshing way of telling stories in class and a teaching strategy that can be implemented to enhance learner involvement. It captivates the attention immediately, motivates the learners, and leads to a positive classroom atmosphere. The learners come out of their shells and become active participants. In dramatic storytelling, language concepts and sentences building skills are enhanced. Dramatic storytelling provides many opportunities for developing emergent literacy in a fun way (O'Neill, et al., 2016).

Notably, although the relationship between dramatic storytelling and dramatic stories is intriguing, it is essentially unexplored in previous studies. Two questions are yet to be answered. Frist, what criteria should stories meet for them to be labeled dramatic stories? Second, to what extent do the stories themselves affect their potential of being dramatic when they are told? Such questions will partially be tackled in the development of the intervention program of the present study.

3.2.5 Pedagogical Benefits of Stories

Storytelling not only leads to the growth and achievement of young children but is crucial to enhancing the ability to produce decontextualized language and to acquire literacy in general (Mages, 2018; Peterson & McCabe, 1994). Lenhart et al. (2020) found that living and interacting with oral storytelling resulted in acquiring vocabulary knowledge and story comprehension. In a more comprehensive study, it was found that if children are exposed to stories being told by a narrator who tailors the story to the listeners and makes it more relevant to children, the contextualization of the stories would increase,

and the children would acquire greater vocabulary learning and literacy gaining, and therefore, storytelling is an effective tool in improving children's language and a facilitator in young children's language acquisition (Suggate et al., 2021).

Storytelling not only provides children with the acquisition of language and literacy skills, but also develops vocabulary growth and knowledge (Bravo, 2020). Storytelling helps with students' listening skills, concentration and comprehension skills, and particularly, helps children to understand all story elements from story sequence, to events, characters and words meanings (Bravo, 2020). One of the most important methods in storytelling is repetition which encourages children to develop narrative ability, helps children to comprehend stories, promotes children's engagement in storytelling activity, and helps children in remembering the words, meaning of the words, and the sequence of the stories (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). Repetitive patterns can be used in different contexts (Bravo, 2020).

When children join kindergarten, parents, teachers and practitioners are to ensure that the first experience with learning is enjoyable, fruitful and age-appropriate (Coyle & Mora, 2018). Using storytelling by parents and teachers is likely to promote the child's cognitive, communicative, emotional and linguistic patterns in memorable context, and storytelling is widely used since the child's birth to foster comprehension and promote vocabulary acquisition and oral language development (Ghosn, 2013; Coyle & Mora, 2018). Up to date studies with children of second language learners and second language instructional settings showed that stories can be effective tools for promoting children's lexical development. Use of illustrations, key words, gesture and synonyms can be more effective when children are actively involved in repeated storytelling sessions where they will be able with time to have the ability to tell parts of the story (Collins, 2010; Chlapana & Tafa, 2014), which in a way leads to promoting children's incidental lexical acquisition and enhancing word knowledge in a second language. Storytelling is one of the most powerful teaching techniques that teachers use with younger children (Albaladejo et al., 2018; Leśniewska & Pichette, 2016).

Previous studies indicate that storytelling alone (without reading from a book) may improve language development (Lenhart et al., 2020; Vaahtoranta et al., 2018). In an

experimental study, elaborative storytelling was compared to dialogic reading, and elaborative storytelling was found to yield more positive effects on children's oral narrative and story comprehension (Reese et al., 2010). In Lenhart et al.'s (2020) study, the effect of story-delivery methods (oral storytelling and read-aloud) were examined among 60 young children aged 4-6. A 4 × 2 mixed-design included four methods of story delivery (i.e., live read-aloud; live oral storytelling; audiotaped read-aloud; audiotaped oral storytelling). The outcome variable was the target words learned by the children and story comprehension of the children. It was found that there was learning effect with all four methods, specifically, live oral storytelling was most effective among the four methods in terms of the children's acquisition of receptive vocabulary and story comprehension. Suggate et al. (2021) identified a pattern in research on the effect of storytelling, namely, shared-reading can be effective in improving preschool children's language exposure and language development, repeated reading in shared-reading, explicit explanation of words, and increased contextualization can be beneficial, and free-telling of stories through increasing the contextualization also enhances language acquisition.

3.3 Emergent Literacy in EFL

3.3.1 Concept of Emergent Literacy

Emergent literacy refers to the skills, knowledge and attitudes that young children have relating to reading and writing before they begin formal literacy instruction (Al-Oaryouti et al., 2016; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Five main components have been identified to be associated with subsequent foreign language emergent literacy abilities of kindergarten children: print awareness, phonological awareness, knowledge and understanding of book and other texts, knowledge of letters and words, and early writing abilities (Al-Oaryouti et al., 2016). Early exposure to emergent literacy learning experience is vital for future success in literacy learning. Children's precursory language and emergent literacy skills prior to school is a strong predictors of reading development and language learning success (Al-Oaryouti et al., 2016). It is suggested that emergent literacy learning should begin as early as possible, and parents and educators should introduce the foreign language in an early age with interactive ways (Alexious, 2020).

The importance of early emergent literacy learning has been shown in a study conducted by Auleear Owodally (2015) which aimed to consider whether preschool children develop code-related literacy skills in their final year at preschool as a preparation and readiness for their first year of school. The data was collected from a longitudinal study of two comparable groups of Mauritian preschoolers using pre and post-assessment of their code-related skills and interest in print-related activities. Auleear Owodally (2015) highlighted the necessity of learning experience in early emergent literacy and offered suggestions on helping Mauritian children overcome the challenges in developing both language-related skills and code-related skills in foreign language and making meaningful links between oral language and their written representations.

Although the right age to learn a second/foreign language has been in debate, it has been agreed upon and acknowledged that the earlier the better (Lucas et al., 2021). A study was conducted on native Portuguese preschool children between 3-5 years old who were extensively exposed to a specific pedagogic approach for learning English (Lucas et al., 2021). Lucas and colleagues examined the effects of the EFL teaching approach in terms of receptive vocabulary, oral production, and emergent word-level reading and writing skills. The results showed that there were several advantages of an early exposure to English, including children's ability to recognize English words in text, visual discrimination, memory and phonological skills, and willingness to write the learned words, improved native language literacy skills and mental flexibility (Lucas et al., 2021).

It is well established that oral language is closely linked to school-based literacy (Lawrence & Snow, 2010; Snow et al., 2001), specifically, higher level of oral language skills such as vocabulary, syntax, and key and narrative abilities lead to better reading skills. Constrained skills are the print-based and sound-based language skills including alphabet knowledge and letter-sound correspondence. Unconstrained skills include knowledge of words, story structure, and the ability to tell coherent stories and describe and explain concepts and events. Constrained skills support decoding of printed text and reading fluency, and unconstrained skills support higher-order reading abilities such as reading comprehension (Melzi et al., 2023). For preschool children, the oral language skills enhance both constrained and unconstrained skills (Snow & Matthews, 2016).

Teachers play a pivotal role in young children's emergent literacy. Young children are restless learners in nature and will lose interest in active learning if a teacher is not experienced and qualified enough to engage children and keep their interests at a high level (Alexious, 2020). Teachers should engage children in the activities, familiarize them with the story, talk to their minds in the best way, and touch their hearts (Alexious, 2020). Teachers' language proficiency and high level of fluency are needed to teach emergent learners and involve them with the learning process (Alexious, 2020). An Omani study conducted by Al-Oaryouti et al. (2016) examined how teachers supported children's emergent literacy in the Arab Gulf countries (GCC) and suggested that a qualified teacher should be able to make good decision to promote children's emergent literacy by providing the best experience to his emergent learning. According to Al-Oaryaouti et al. (2016), teacher's perspective, beliefs, and attitudes influenced the degree of support in emergent literacy acquisition provided to the children.

3.3.2 Studies on Emergent Literacy in EFL

There has been a plethora studies that investigate various facets of developing emergent literacy in EFL, including importance of early EFL learning, effects of individual variables on emergent literacy, teaching methods of emergent literacy in EFL, and some of the psychological issues in emergent literacy in EFL. Meta-analyses of research on early literacy have confirmed that young children's emergent literacy skills are strong predictors of later reading development (e.g., Duncan et al., 2007). In many countries nowadays, young children in some families and some ECE institutions are introduced to and taught English although formal instruction does not usually start until the child attends primary school.

In light of the role of emergent literacy skills in later literacy development, there had been government effort to develop emergent literacy skills as part of school readiness initiatives which paid particular attention to children from disadvantaged homes (Cabell et al., 2011; McGinty et al., 2011). The importance of children's exposure to print had been documented for the development of print knowledge (e.g., Levy et al., 2006). Alphabet knowledge has been found to be the strongest predictor of later reading proficiency, and letter name knowledge facilitates the development of letter-sound

relations (Phillips et al., 2012). According to Tekin (2015), parents in the Gulf Region in general and in Oman in particular are keen to have their children acquire English language skills as early as possible, and there had been hundreds of ECE programs that offered bilingual education systems. Tekin (2015) investigated parental beliefs about early EFL learning in Oman, and found that parents were well aware of the benefits, challenges, and solutions of early EFL education.

Amidst the universal consensus on the benefits of early EFL teaching, the mandatory EFL learning at the kindergarten level, and the optional and non-formal learning of EFL in ECE and care institutions (Erk & Ručević, 2021), the presumed advantages of starting to learn a foreign language at the primary level has recently been challenged (Baumert et al. 2020; Erk & Ručević, 2021). Erk and Ručević's (2021) study investigated the relationship between language achievement and the age of starting EFL learning among 147 young EFL learners. It was found that, in spite of the significant relationship, the long-term effect was not confirmed and that very young and young learners achieved language results equally well after five years and three years of EFL instruction, respectively. Erk and Ručević's (2021) study questioned long-term advantages of early EFL teaching. Auleear Owodally (2015) examined whether Mauritian preschool children developed code-related emergent literacy skills in an EFL context. The results showed that the children were inadequately prepared in terms of code-related skills and interest in print-related activities.

Researchers have identified several components as constructs predicting emergent literacy, including parental expectations (Baroody & Dobbs-Oates, 2011), home literacy practices (Kim, 2009), and home literacy resources (Marsh & Thompson, 2001). Home literacy environment has been found to be one of the most important factors influencing young children's language development. Young children first encounter language (i.e., are exposed to literacy materials and activities) through their interactions with caregivers and literacy materials (Collins, 2014; Zhang et al., 2021). Parents' home literacy practices and home literacy resources contribute to children's language development (Aram, et al., 2013; Chow et al., 2017). Łockiewicz et al. (2018) examined the early predictors of learning EFL among Polish pre-school children who had not yet started formal literacy instruction. Participants were 30 children (aged 41-70 months) attending kindergarten. Variables that

were measured included: non-verbal intelligence, emergent literacy, phonological awareness in Polish, and knowledge of English. It was found that learning EFL was influenced by emergent letter identification from their first language alphabet, phonological awareness in their first language, and non-verbal intelligence.

Albaladejo et al. (2018) compares the effects of listening to stories, songs and the combination of both on EFL vocabulary growth among Spanish children aged 2-3 years old with minimal English exposure. One group of 17 children were exposed to 15 target words embedded in one story, one song, and the combination of a story and a song. The story only condition was found to yield the highest scores. Preschool children learn a foreign language through engaging and fun activities and by kinesthesis and the association of words with actions, which validates storytelling as one of the best teaching strategies (Albaladejo et al., 2018). Choi and colleagues (2020) examined the effect of parent-child interactions and digital pen use during English picture book reading on the child's interest in learning English. Participants were a total of 320 Korean mothers of preschool children. It was found that children's interest in learning English was higher when they used digital pens and engaged in frequent parent-child interactions during English picture book reading. Kawaguchi and Hardini (2022) confirmed the effectiveness of early EFL teaching in young children's grammatical development.

Researchers have been actively engaged in exploring effective methods for developing emergent literacy in EFL. Task repetition is a technique that has been claimed to raise learners' attention to meaning and form in efficient, effective and accurate ways (Azkarai et al., 2020). Task repetition provides second language learners with many opportunities for feedback, serves to improve second language complexity, accuracy and fluency (Kim & Tracy-Ventura 2013), and helps young English learners to express ideas more fluently and to use feedback (Azkarai & Oliver 2019). In English as a second language (ESL) settings learners receive more input than in EFL settings in and outside of the classroom (Mayo & Lecumberri, 2003). Task repetition enables young EFL learners to make fewer errors (Azkarai & Oliver, 2019). Karakas and Saricoban (2012) investigated 42 Turkish first-grade students. In the experimental group, the learners were taught by using caption cartoons, whereas, in the control group, the learners were taught using cartoons without captions. The findings showed no significant difference in the students'

vocabulary acquisition between the groups who were taught using caption and non-caption cartoons. Arifani (2020) examined the effectiveness of children's at-home incidental vocabulary learning using cartoon videos with and without captions. The participants were 30 EFL Grade3 Indonesian children who had no English background. The results indicate that children who learned incidental vocabulary using short cartoon videos with captions at-home learned better than those in the cartoon videos without captions group. EFL children in both groups responded positively towards the implementation of cartoon videos.

Picture books are one of the most widely used tools for emergent literacy development (Choi et al., 2020). Listening to what adults read, observing pictures, and expressing their thoughts are all opportunities for young children to learn emergent literacy skills (Deckner et al., 2006). Picture books provide advancements in vocabulary with interesting images that are decontextualized (Santoro et al., 2008), and allow young children to learn new words that are not commonly used. For young English learners in EFL context who are rarely exposed to English, reading picture books allows them to experience a new language and culture. Learners need to have a positive attitude and maintain interest in learning the language in order to learn the language successfully in the long run (Choi et al., 2020).

Songs are a valuable teaching resource in EFL classrooms (Fonseca-Mora, 2000). The sounds, rhythm, and intonation in songs are important for developing children's pronunciation skills, and the melody and repetitive structure help with the retention of vocabulary and language patterns (Forster, 2006). Action songs for younger learners are characteristic of physical movement or gestures which reinforce the meaning and retention of new language. Coyle and Gómez Gracia (2014) investigated the effects of song-based activities on the EFL vocabulary acquisition of five-year-old Spanish EFL learners. Three 30-minute lessons were given to 25 preschool children, and the lessons were based on a well-known children's song. It was found that teaching EFL through a song led to the development of receptive knowledge of vocabulary but not productive knowledge (Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2014).

Ellis and Ibrahim (2021) investigated 47 preschool children's experiences and perceptions of EFL learning by using metaphor elicitation. The activity was structured around the production of a book titled "My Learning English Senses". Flashcards were used to review the concept of the senses and to introduce or review the nouns and verbs in English. The flashcards included: a nose for the sense of smell, a hand for the sense of touch, eyes for the sense of sight, a mouth for the sense of taste, and an ear for the sense of sound). The sentence stem "Learning English sounds/tastes like …" was introduced. The findings showed that the children associated English language learning mainly with their lived experiences. The findings confirmed that preschool children were capable of giving their own metaphorical representations of their English language learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2021).

Hardini et al. (2019) investigated how children in Indonesian kindergarten develop their EFL through classroom interaction. Participants were two groups of children aged 4-6 at a kindergarten offering a bilingual program in Bandung, West Java. The results help understand early English education in Indonesia and other Asian countries where early EFL was promoted. In the Mauritian context, the look-and-say method rather than the phonics approach was used to teach children to read English, which resembles Hong Kong children who are taught to read English using the look-and-say method (Holm & Dodd, 1996). In such contexts, the letter-phoneme relationship may come as a result of learning to read (Auleear Owodally, 2015).

Lucas et al. (2021) explored the effect of an innovative EFL teaching approach (Content for Language and Integrated Learning, CLIL) on emergent literacy among Portuguese preschool children. The effects were examined in the areas of receptive vocabulary, oral production, and emergent word-level reading and writing skills. Results showed improvement in awareness of intentionality of print, the match between spoken and written words, and the conventions of print. Lin et al.'s (2022) study explored Enhancing EFL vocabulary learning with multimodal cues supported by educational robot and 3D book. Participants were two Grade 4 students who went through exploratory and enhancement phases. Pre- and post-tests on vocabulary recognition and oral production were given to the two learners. Results showed a significant improvement in oral production. Lee and Choi (2022) compared on the effect of independent e-book readings

with that of listening to an adult reading printed books aloud in EFL learning context among 19 Korean young children aged 7-9. The results revealed that both reading conditions had a positive effect on the young children's incidental EFL vocabulary learning to different degrees.

In early EFL research, one unresolved issue is whether the students' first language should be used when teaching EFL (Song & Lee, 2019). Three theoretical positions were suggested on the use of the first language in EFL. The "virtual position" holds that EFL classroom should simulate English-speaking communities and that the child's first language should not be used in EFL teaching. Similarly, the "maximal position" asserts that the use of EFL should be maximized and the use of the child's first language should be restrained. The "optimal position" acknowledges the fact that classroom condition can never be English "authentic", and that the child's first language may be used occasionally in EFL teaching (Macaro, 2014). Song and Lee (2019) compared the effect of teacher code-switching with that of English-only instruction on EFL vocabulary acquisition among 72 Korean preschoolers aged 5-6. The participants were involved in storytelling activities in code-switching and English-only conditions respectively, with the former involving the teacher's use of children's first language when teaching vocabulary. It was found that switching to the children's first language was more effective than English-only instruction in vocabulary acquisition. Also, it was found that the children preferred the use of some first language and were resistant to the English-only condition.

Neuroscience research demonstrates neuroplasticity in the brain as a function of one's experience with a second language (Li et al., 2014), and there is a consensus in the literature that children who are exposed to two languages demonstrate advantages over their monolingual peers (Bialystok, 2011). Young children display a positive attitudinal advantage over older learners in terms of second language acquisition (e.g., Hammer et al., 2014; Nikolov & Djigunovic, 2011), which calls for the introduction of foreign language education programs in the ECE. The concept of "affective filter" showed the importance of attitudes in foreign language learning. Affective factors are decisive because they influence how much effort is spent on second language learning (Krashen, 1982). Choi, Sheo and Kang (2020) examined factors that affect young children's foreign language anxiety in an EFL setting. Subjects were 453 mothers and 47 English teachers of

children aged 3-5. Children's foreign language anxiety was assessed by the mothers and teachers. Results showed that foreign language anxiety was correlated with maturity, impulsiveness and harm avoidance, and that the mother's belief in the importance of EFL teaching affected the child's foreign language anxiety.

In summary, with the increasing prevalence of the practice of teaching EFL to VYLs, numerous studies on emergent literacy in EFL can be found that address almost all aspects of emergent literacy in EFL. Nevertheless, as the following section indicates, there lack universally applicable tools that measure emergent literacy among VYLs.

3.3.3 Assessment of Emergent Literacy in EFL

Assessment of EFL at pre-primary level has been an issue that attracts wide interest since very young learners (VYLs) of EFL at pre-primary level are fundamentally different to learners at formal education stages (Djigunović, 2016; Nikolov, 2016). The VYLs have distinctive characteristics from other learners. Early EFL assessment needs to take into consideration factors such as VYLs' shorter attention span, emergent literacy, limited learning experience, and beginning level of knowledge in EFL (Güngör & Önder, 2023). The quality and quantity of young children's exposure to EFL can be diverse given the different amount of time invested in EFL at home and teacher's teaching approaches in pre-primary schools among many other factors, and it is difficult to measure EFL learning outcomes among young children from different families and different early childhood institutions (Nikolov, 2016).

In Łockiewicz et al.'s (2018) study, the young children's EFL was assessed using a self-developed English Knowledge Test. Administered mostly in English, the test was developed according to the core curriculum skills for kindergartens as outlined by the Ministry of National Education in Poland. The tasks included greeting (The child responds to a greeting), self-introduction ("What is your name?" "How old are you?"), color recognition (The child points to colors named by the researcher), color naming (The child names the colors pointed to by the researcher, i.e., "What color is this?"), animal naming (The child names the animals pointed to by the researcher, i.e., "What is it?"), phrase repetition (The child repeats three phrases, i.e., "a big cow, an old man, a red car" said by the researcher), and following instruction (The child draws an apple). The task also

included repetition and comprehension of a nursery rhyme. The researcher sung to the child a popular nursery rhyme, then asked the child to repeat the single lines recited by the researcher and answer the questions (e.g., "What is the song about?") about the nursery rhyme (Łockiewicz et al., 2018).

Various EFL education models and programs in pre-primary settings provide different quantity and quality of learning experience for young learners, which makes it challenging to assess the EFL learning outcomes (Rixon, 2013). In the early EFL context, there are numerous types of programs, for example, the Awareness Raising Programs, the Traditional Foreign Language Programs, and the Content and Language Integrated Learning curricula (Rixon, 2013). It would be problematic to expect a global assessment that fits the diversity of content for, and needs of, very young learners across the world (Rixon, 2013). Age-appropriateness is crucial for assessing VYLs of EFL, and researchers tend to prioritize young children's vocabulary knowledge (Nikolov, 2016). In the EFL context, young children start to learn English with vocabulary. Building up a useful vocabulary is central for EFL learning for young children (Hestetræet, 2019).

Vocabulary is a priority area in EFL teaching at pre-primary level, and young children's progress in vocabulary learning needs to be monitored (Güngör & Önder, 2023). Pre-primary children in most countries where English is taught as a foreign language can be categorized as "false beginners" or "absolute beginners" with no or limited prior exposure to English (Council of Europe, 2018). The acquisition of basic vocabulary in context and in a meaningful way is a priority in EFL teaching for very young learners (European Commission, 2011). The starting point to effective and relevant EFL vocabulary instruction at pre-primary level is to make VYLs become conscious of theme-specific English vocabulary and its meaning (Güngör & Önder, 2023).

Researchers have identified some principles for developing age-appropriate assessment tools in EFL teaching for young learners, for example, selecting and designing the developmentally and culturally appropriate and familiar themes, tools, and methods, taking into consideration the amount of time allocated for EFL teaching, and considering the developmental characteristics, predisposition, and motivation of very young learners (Conteh, 2012; Güngör & Önder, 2023). Güngör and Önder (2023) constructed and

validated English Picture Vocabulary Test for assessing the VYLs' receptive and expressive vocabulary knowledge in EFL in Turkey. In the receptive test the child was expected to point to the correct picture among four pictures. The child was expected to show the correct picture rather than repeating the word. In the expressive test, the child was asked to express the name of the picture loudly. With a sample of English speaking and French speaking families in Canada, Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) developed a "home literacy model" which manifests that most parents value language and literacy, but some parents go further in terms of supporting children to learn emergent literacy knowledge and skills, including vocabulary. The model was extended by Sénéchal's (2006) work which found that parent teaching literacy in kindergarten directly predicted the child's kindergarten alphabet knowledge and Grade 4 reading fluency.

Previous studies are inconsistent in conceptualizing preschool children's learning English and no universally influential measurements are available for measuring VYLs' EFL learning. Given the fundamental difference in preschool children's EFL learning compared to school children, the measurements of EFL learning in school settings are not applicable to preschool children. For age appropriateness, the present study adopted the notion of "approaches to learning" (ATL) to conceptualize English learning among preschool students. ATL is an umbrella term extensively used to refer to the attitudes, habits, learning styles, and behaviors relevant to the act of engaging in learning and achieving learning goals (Kagan et al., 1995). ATL is critical to children's engagement in learning and lays the foundation for early academic readiness. First appeared as one of the critical dimensions of school readiness in the 2000 U.S. National Education Goals (Kagan et al., 1995), ATL is defined as a combination of "the inclinations, dispositions, or styles" that facilitate children's involvement in and pursuit of learning (Kagan et al., 1995; Katz, 1993). In the study, assessment of preschool children's English learning was focused on "approaches to learning" English.

3.4 Storytelling and Emergent Literacy

Storytelling involves telling a story from memory or imagination without a book. Found to be a phenomenon much earlier than writing, storytelling is practiced in almost all cultures across the world. Popular among all societies, storytelling has important social

and educational function and is used in the transmission of cultural heritage (Mello, 2001). Little is known about the effect of dramatic storytelling on young children's learning of EFL in the extant literature. Previous studies have attempted to examine the effect of dramatic storytelling on children's learning that is not specific to foreign language learning. Goodman and Dent (2019) explored the impact of the intervention (storytelling/story-acting activity) in two rural village libraries in Uganda on preschool children's school readiness skills.

The storytelling activity took one hour twice per week for six months. The intervention consisted of two phases: storytelling and story-acting. The storytelling phase featured young children's dictation of spontaneously generated stories, and in the story-acting phase, young children acted out those stories on a makeshift stage. The results showed that the participated children in the intervention group were more able to recognize colours of the emergent literacy measure than children who did not participate (Goodman & Dent, 2019). More relevantly, in another study conducted in Spain, Saucedo (2008) explored the development of story-related emergent literacy skills of a group of 4-5 years old children who received daily English lessons as a foreign language and their ability to retell stories. The results showed that technology assisted stories motivated children and improved the children's level of participation in the lesson. The results also showed that the children made progress in meaning making and organizing story events in sequence although their mother tongue language was still developing (Saucedo, 2008). A case study conducted in Chile with 10 playgroup students in private school yielded similar result and corroborated that storytelling was a positive activity to promote emergent literacy and engage early childhood EFL learners (Widow, 2018).

An experimental study conducted in Indonesia investigated the effectiveness of literacy intervention that blended events of instructional design with storytelling (Maureen et al., 2018). The experimental study had a sample of 45 children of 5-6 years old from three kindergarten public classrooms. The intervention was a three-week long storytelling condition, with the first classroom receiving storytelling activities, the second classroom receiving digital storytelling activities, and the control condition receiving regular literacy classroom activities (Maureen et al., 2018). The result suggested that both types of storytelling activities enhanced digital literacy skills. Maureen and colleagues (2020)

investigated the effects of structured storytelling approach on the development of young children's literacy and digital literacy. The six-week experimental study had a sample of 62 children aged 5-6 years from three public kindergarten classrooms. Consistent with Maureen et al. (2018), the results showed that both classes with storytelling conditions significantly enhanced children literacy and digital literacy skills. A US based study conducted by Nicolopoulou (2019) investigated the effect of an integrated activity combining voluntary storytelling with group story-acting on preschool children's narrative and other oral-language skills. Results indicated that storytelling and story-acting significantly promoted the development of both narrative and productive vocabulary skills.

In the setting of a private tuition EFL class of 16 Vietnamese children aged 9-10, Nguyen and Phillips (2022) explored the elements of storytelling working as a pedagogy to facilitate children's EFL learning. Termed "storytelling workshops", the storytelling and follow-up class activities were designed to investigate what is possible in storytelling as pedagogy for EFL learning. Eight workshops (WS 1 to WS 8) covered three stories (The Gingerbread Man, Friends, and Slop). The Gingerbread Man was told three times in three workshops (WS 1, 2 and 3), and the other two stories were repeated twice in WS 4–5 and WS 6–7. Workshop 8 was consolidating and reflective. The three stories addressed themes of family, friends, and animals, which is consistent with the Vietnamese syllabus at the primary school level. The stories were selected according to three principles: a new story plot with child related themes, rich and contextualized language use in stories, and thematic and temporal organization. The selection of stories was also based on a balance of familiar and unfamiliar content, the complexity length to match English level, the curriculum, the researchers' experience of teaching EFL, and the classroom teacher input (Nguyen & Phillips, 2022). It was found that the elements of storytelling working as enhancer of EFL learning included: storytelling as a responsive strategy; storytelling as multimodal scaffolding; storytelling as mutually inspiring engagement; and storytelling as a linguistic model (Nguyen & Phillips, 2022).

Wright and Dunsmuir (2019) explored whether storytelling would lead to improvements in oral language, written language, and self-perception among British young children aged 6-7. The participants were 194 children randomly assigned to one of

three groups: the storytelling group, the story-reading group, or the comparison group. It was found that the storytelling group retold stories that were significantly longer than the other two groups. Also, the storytelling group used a significantly wider range of vocabulary than the other two groups. Further, the story-reading group scored significantly higher on oral vocabulary than the comparison group.

Isbell et al. (2004) reported the effect of storytelling on young children's language development and story comprehension in comparison with storybook reading. Over a 12-week period, the storytelling group of children was told stories, and the storybook reading group was read the same stories from books. It was found that the storytelling group performed better on story comprehension, while the storybook-reading group scored higher on language complexity. Therefore, both storytelling and storybook reading had a positive effect on children's language development (Isbell et al., 2004). Epstein and Phillips (2009) examined the storytelling abilities of children with language impairments and found that giving prompts while telling stories is more effective than merely giving a wordless picture book in terms of the children's ability to tell stories with quality independent clauses and their modifiers. Previous studies have investigated the effect of story reading on children's oral and written language development (Baker et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2014; Pullen et al., 2010).

An increasing national awareness has been reported in the UK of the benefits of storytelling, with a move toward embedding storytelling into teaching practices (Wright & Dunsmuir, 2019). The UK Minister of State for School Standards articulated the importance of storytelling for children's language skills, imagination, reading competence (Gibb, 2016). The UK national initiative Talk for Writing had been used in many UK elementary schools (Corbett, 2007). The Talk for Writing approach involves children being told a story by their teacher from memory and then learning the story themselves and taking part in related activities (Corbett, 2007).

Storybook reading is a traditional way to develop children's language skills since it provides an excellent context in which young children are able to be supported to understand the meanings of vocabulary through active engagement in the learning process and rich dialogues (Dickinson et al., 2012). In terms of whether new words are explicitly

taught or not, three instructional approaches have been identified in relation to storybook reading: embedded instruction, rich instruction, and incidental instruction (Yeung et al., 2016). In embedded instruction and rich instruction, the teacher teaches vocabulary explicitly, namely, teaching the meanings and definitions of new words before, during or after storybook reading, and reviewing the taught words through follow-up activities (Yeung et al., 2016). Different to extended approaches (embedded instruction and rich instruction) and as implicit or indirect method, the incidental approach does not involve deliberate teaching of the meanings of target words (Elley, 1989). Findings on the effects of the three types of instructions in storytelling are mixed. The incidental approach can be effective since it facilitates the association of a word with its meaning by providing repetitions (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). The embedded and rich instructions engage children in active mental manipulation of new meanings and active interactions with the new words. There is a lack of research that compared these instructional approaches for learning vocabulary in early EFL settings (Yeung et al., 2016). Yeung et al. (2016) evaluated the effects of extended approach (rich and embedded approach) in comparison with incidental approach on word recognition for 43 Hong Kongese Chinese EFL kindergarten children in a storybook reading context. Results showed that extended instruction led to significant increase in receptive and expressive knowledge of word meanings.

In summary, previous studies have covered the topics of emergent literacy in EFL teaching and storytelling in ECE settings. However, there is little research that deals with the effect of dramatic storytelling on emergent literacy in EFL in institutional teaching settings, which is the main justification for the topic of the study.

3.5 Story-Based Intervention for VYLs

Story-based intervention programs have been reported in English teaching for VYLs. Previous research has included use of story-based interventions to address discrepancies in vocabulary development. Designed to promote literacy skills, the Early Learning Through the Arts (ELTA) Head Start intervention involved participatory theatre-in-education and drama activities with the children and their teachers. Instead of performance of formally scripted plays or written texts, drama and theatre in the ELTA

intervention are based on dramatic improvisations. The theme-based dramatic improvisations are at the heart of ELTA's theatre-in-education approach (Mages, 2018). Two participatory theatre-in-education dramas (five-day and four-day respectively) were included in the initial stage of the intervention. In addition, the actor teachers facilitated two teacher training sessions titled "Interactive Storytelling" and "Creating Activity from Picture Book" respectively. In total, the intervention lasted for 14 days (Mages, 2018). Dramas were designed to highlight the uses and functions of reading and writing which may enhance children's understanding and appreciation of literacy. During the theatre-in-education dramas, the children were asked to repeat target words or phrases, to say the target words syllable by syllable, and to clap their hands to punctuate each syllable. Integrated into the dramas, these activities reinforced the importance of literate behaviors and helped the children understand the structure of words (Mages, 2018). Rituals, songs, and chants were embedded into the dramas to foster phonemic awareness. The teacher asked the children open-ended questions and incorporated the children's responses into the dramas, which was similar to dialogic reading (Mages, 2018).

The component of interactive storytelling and picture-book-based drama activity was added to the ELTA Head Start program. Drawing on elements of drama (i.e., plot, character, environment, costumes, props, and tension and conflict) that optimize the children's experience of a story, interactive storytelling was aimed at developing children's imaginations and literacy skills including phonetics, sequencing, and recall. In interactive storytelling, the children were fully engaged within the storytelling experience, and the teacher invited the children into the stories through creating ample opportunities for the children to make contribution to the telling (Mages, 2018). Selecting a picture book was the first step to the interactive storytelling process. The teacher then added points of participation using the text as a starting point. Points of participation are moments when the children were asked for a response which could be a sound, a gesture, repetition of a phrase, or prediction (Mages, 2018). As an extension of interactive storytelling, picture-book-based drama was exploration of a dramatic element presented in the book such as the environment, a character, or a theme. For example, if the story setting was a farm, then the teacher might ask the children to pretend to be animals. Such activity further dramatized the story (Mages, 2018).

Vaahtoranta et al. (2018) developed an approach called Elaborative Storytelling. This approach was characteristic of provision of more contextual information and drawing children's attention to certain words without explicit teaching of words. Examples of such approach included rhetorical questions, elaborations, and use of synonyms. By avoiding explicit teaching, Elaborative Storytelling avoided taking children's attention away from the story plot. With benefits for children's engagement, Elaborative Storytelling was found to present an alternative or addition to explicit teaching in shared reading (Vaahtoranta et al., 2018). Vaahtoranta et al. (2019) developed Interactive Elaborative Storytelling (IES) in which both word-learning techniques and children's storytelling were performed in a shared-reading setting. In the IES condition, target words were accompanied with the word learning techniques and children were included as storytellers. In IES, the stories were first read aloud, with the target words accompanied by word-learning techniques which were designed to draw the children's attention to what is close to the target words in meaning and to provide additional contextual information. The word learning techniques included paraphrasing, use of synonyms, closer descriptions, rhetorical questions, and questions stimulating the children's imagination (Vaahtoranta et al., 2018). Afterwards, the interactivity was increased, specifically, the teacher read aloud a paragraph of the story and then asked the children to continue the story. Subsequently, the children were encouraged to tell the stories by themselves.

The above-described intervention programs are implemented in non-EFL settings. There are few published storytelling-based intervention programs that are conducted in EFL settings. Aiming to investigate narrative competence of bilingual children from low socio-economic status, Temiz (2019) employed storytelling intervention to improve the narrative skills. The intervention included 14-week Turkish storytelling activities. Bilingual Turkish children first produced narratives using a popular English storybook. In total, fourteen stories were read to the children. The teacher then told each story to the children using different storytelling techniques, after which the children were asked to retell the stories. The study is limited in terms of its relevance to the present study. First, its research questions were oriented toward linguistics rather than emergent literacy, and second, the stories and storytelling were in Turkish or Kurdish rather than in English.

Apparently, many strategies used in non-EFL settings might also be applicable in EFL settings given the commonalities of all storytelling activities. However, significant differences in the nature of story-based intervention for VYL can be envisaged between EFL and non-EFL settings. Due to the envisaged differences and the lack of story-based intervention in EFL settings, the intervention-oriented design of the present study becomes more important.

3.6 Evaluation, Research Gap and Research Questions

The extant literature covered in the above review includes three broad lines of research, namely, emergent literacy centered research, dramatic storytelling centered research, and research on the relationship between emergent literacy and dramatic storytelling.

Emergent literacy is a central concept of the study, which is largely due to the uniqueness of VYLs (Djigunović, 2016; Nikolov, 2016). Emergent literacy centered research reviewed in this study focuses on emergent literacy in EFL. The concept of emergent literacy was coined in the context of English as the first language (Clay, 1966; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Due to the vast amount of research on emergent literacy in English as the first language and the focus of the study being development of EFL among young children, the research reviewed in this chapter is predominantly in the EFL teaching context. Some studies in non-EFL settings are included in this review because their findings may to certain extent be transferable to the EFL context or they provide insight into certain relevant aspects of the study, for example, storytelling intervention and assessment of emergent literacy. Assessment of emergent literacy in EFL has been a focus of many studies (Auleear Owodally, 2015; Cabell et al., 2011) since the assessment tasks in emergent literacy for native English-speaking young children are apparently different to those for VYLs of EFL.

While the assessment tasks for VYLs of EFL are based on the universally applicable definition of emergent literacy (i.e., phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, print knowledge, alphabetical knowledge), the vocabulary related tasks are fundamentally different. The classic English vocabulary tests widely used in the English-speaking countries no longer suit the VYLs of EFL due to their limited exposure to the

English language and cultural differences (Rixon, 2013). Therefore, across different studies on emergent literacy in EFL, not a single set of vocabulary test can be directly used in a different study, and almost all the assessments of vocabulary are self-developed (e.g., Güngör & Önder, 2023; Łockiewicz et al., 2018). Also, the target words or target vocabulary for the VYLs of EFL are developed based on the national EFL curriculum guideline (e.g., Łockiewicz et al., 2018).

Strategies to enhance emergent literacy in EFL is another area that is well researched. The strategies frequently explored include stories, songs and combination of stories and songs (Albaladejo et al., 2018), cartoons with and without captions (Karakas & Saricoban, 2012), cartoon videos (Arifani, 2020), Content for Language and Integrated Learning (Lucas et al., 2021), task repetition (Azkarai et al., 2020), picture book (Choi et al., 2020), metaphor elicitation (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2021), and educational robot and 3D book (Lin et al., 2022).

Storytelling focused research largely originates from Paley's (1990) storytelling and story-acting approach. The Paley approach is predominantly implemented in the context of learning English as the first language and based on stories created and told by the young children with the support of the classroom teachers. At least in its original form, the storytelling and story-acting approach does not involve storybook. Most of the previous studies on storytelling were devoted to the effect of various storytelling related approaches on different aspects of young children's current or later development (Cremin et al., 2018; Lenhart et al., 2020; Lwin, 2016; Mages, 2018; Speaker et al., 2004). More relevant to this study, many studies focus on comparison on the effect between different types of story-related activities.

Apart from the storytelling and story-acting approach as aforementioned, the more frequently investigated story-related approaches include: young children's listening to story reading versus listening to storytelling (Isbell et al., 2004), the narrator's read-aloud activity versus oral storytelling activity (Lenhart et al., 2020), young children's use of storybooks (Lenhart et al., 2020; Montag et al., 2015) versus oral storytelling (Isbell et al., 2004; Lwin, 2016), young children's one-to-one reading sessions versus storytelling sessions (Suggate et al., 2013; Vaahtoranta et al., 2018), and parent-child shared reading

(Marjanovič-Umek et al., 2012; Marjanovič-Umek et al., 2019). It appears that there is no boundary between story and dramatic story or between storytelling and dramatic storytelling. Since most story-based learning activities are accompanied by drama-like acting, most researchers did not make particular effort to define what a dramatic story is and what dramatic storytelling looks like.

A third line of research is the relationship between dramatic storytelling and emergent literacy. Many studies have attempted to examine the effect of dramatic storytelling on children's learning that is not specific to EFL, for example, school readiness skills (Goodman & Dent, 2019), level of participation in the lesson (Saucedo, 2008), digital literacy skills (Maureen et al., 2018). Some researchers examined effect of one or more types of storytelling on one or more components of emergent literacy in EFL, for example, effect of storytelling on emergent literacy in EFL learners (Widow, 2018), effect of storytelling and story-acting on vocabulary skills (Nicolopoulou, 2019), effect of story reading on children's oral and written language development (Baker et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2014; Pullen et al., 2010).

In spite of the depth and breadth of the literature as above reviewed, several research gaps can be identified in the area of utilizing dramatic storytelling to enhance emergent literacy in EFL. First, there are inconsistent findings on the desirable story-based strategies in terms of optimizing the learning outcomes in emergent literacy in EFL, which is not an issue or a problem at all. However, when it comes to implementation and intervention, there lacks a research-informed, practice-oriented model of best practice. In fact, due to the impact of diverse sociocultural contexts, the international models of storytelling in various contexts may not work well in the UAE context, and any intervention model of instructional strategies should be co-constructed from within rather than imposed externally (Vygotsky, 1978). It is imperative to explore in authentic teaching context what storytelling strategies best suit the young children in specific sociocultural context, hence the importance of participatory action research for this study. Second, previous studies explored storytelling in both EFL and English as the first language contexts, however, it is unclear in the extant literature how the first language-related variables influence dramatic storytelling and its effect on emergent literacy in EFL. Third, given the utmost importance of approach to learning (Kagan et al., 1995) or learning

dispositions for ECE (Zhang, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022) and language acquisition in particular (Roskos et al., 2003), there lacks research that scrutinizes attitude, interest and other dispositional attributes as part of the learning outcomes of EFL learning.

The research gaps were even more prominent in the UAE context. A thorough literature search reveals a paucity of research in the UAE on young children's EFL learning. Several articles published in a Scopus indexed journal dealt with a topic that is related to children's English learning in UAE, including use of computer assisted language learning to develop children's reading skills in English as a second language (Al-Awidi & Ismail, 2014), selection of dual language texts for young children in multicultural contexts (Hojeij et al., 2019), and emergent writing of young children (Tibi et al., 2013). Several doctoral studies also addressed issues in English learning in the UAE context, for example, impact of English on young Emirati's use of Arabic (Hanani, 2009), and use of music in English language classrooms (Hejjawi, 2007). One master's dissertation attempted to address kindergarten English teachers' teaching and assessment strategies (AI Kilani, 2016). Published research related to children's English learning in the UAE context is limited, and covers home literacy as cultural transmission and parent preferences for shared reading (Barza & von Suchodoletz, 2016) and role of reading motivation, self-efficacy, and home influence in students' literacy achievement (Yang et al., 2018). Two master's studies investigated role of parental involvement in improving private school students' English language skills (Karamali, 2011) and Emirati parents' involvement in their children's English reading of primary grades (Saeed, 2019).

Given the universally recognized educational function of dramatic storytelling and the critical importance of early childhood for acquisition of EFL, it is important to explore the "how" with regard to utilizing and optimizing the educational benefit of dramatic storytelling for Emirati young children's learning of English. Having been designed to fill the gaps in both theory and practice, this study has two objectives:

(1) Develop and implement an EFL intervention program incorporating key elements of dramatic storytelling;
(2) Examine the effectiveness of the dramatic storytelling approach to enhancing young children's emergent literacy in EFL.

The overarching research questions are:

(1) How can a dramatic storytelling approach for teaching EFL be tailored to UAE kindergarten settings?
(2) To what extent does the dramatic storytelling approach improve emergent literacy in EFL among UAE kindergarten students?

Chapter 4: Context of the Study

4.1 Early Childhood Education in the UAE

The UAE government has taken significant steps to keep the country's education on par with the latest improvement toward quality education. In the UAE, the compulsory school age is six, and therefore, ECE in the UAE can be seen to range from zero to six years old although there are also occasions when it is regarded to include 0-8 years old (Dillon, 2019). The institutional ECE takes the form of nurseries (below four years old, public and private) and kindergartens (age four to six, public and private) (Dillon, 2019). The UAE government recognized the importance of early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2021). Also, the government places huge importance on gamification of the early childhood curriculum, as Ministry of Education (2021) pronounced,

Incorporating educational games in early childhood curriculum to simplify the delivery of information to the child, help him absorb it in a faster way and think of how to learn things around him. The curricula of this stage simulate the intellectual and mental capacities of children through adopting global inspection strategies and standards based on sharing and entertainment.

The UAE Ministry of Education applies stages and cycles for education of K-12 in the government schools. Children are admitted to the kindergarten level (stage 0 Cycle 0) at the age of four. Kindergarten in the UAE is voluntary and accommodates children who are below the age of admission to the first grade (7 years old). Kindergarten consists of two levels, Kindergarten 1 (KG1) and Kindergarten 2 (KG2), where children attend two years of mixed-gender classes. This level prepares children to be successful in primary level (Cycle 1) and beyond. KG students spend their time developing social, language, physical and academic skills (Ministry of Education, 2023).

4.2 English Teaching in UAE Kindergartens

Improving English language skills at all levels of education including ECE is a top priority for the UAE government. In the academic year 2010–2011, all Abu Dhabi government schools started a new approach to children's education in kindergarten 1 (KG1), kindergarten 2 (KG2) and primary school classes (1–3). The new approach

emphasizes the teaching of English as a second language for young children and the creation of bilingual students (UNESCO, 2011). The National Unified K-12 Learning Standards Framework states that by the end of Kindergarten (KG1 - KG2) students should be able to acquire four strands of emergent literacy skills in EFL (Ministry of Education, 2014). The content standards provide guidance for EFL teaching in all kindergartens in the UAE, and partially serve guiding principles for the development of the intervention in this study.

4.3 National Unified K–12 Learning Standards Framework 2014

The Ministry of Education of the UAE developed a set of KG1–12 English standards to guide schools towards a more relevant, rigorous, and coherent curriculum for Emirati learners (Ministry of Education, 2014). The structure of the English Standards Framework includes five components: subject, domains, strands, standards, and student learning outcomes. Subject is the curriculum area of interest. Domains are the major elements of a subject. The subject of English includes four domains: listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is notable that the four domains (listening, speaking, reading and writing) also cover KG. Strands are the key topics within the domains. The document specifies that the domain of reading for Grades KG1-4 includes "foundational skills" only which covers phonemic awareness, phonics, print concept, and fluency. Standards are the target objectives within each strand and are grade specific. For example, in Grade 2, the foundational skills standard is "Students demonstrate understanding of spoken English words, syllables, and phonemes". Student learning outcomes are statements of the grade-specific expected learning outcomes about what students should know and be able to do. Tables 1-3 show the components of domain, strand, standards, and student learning outcomes specific to the subject of English for KG1-2. Given the great relevance, the four components are described below in details.

For KG1, the component of "domain" includes listening and speaking and reading (Table 1). For "listening and speaking", one strand is derived, that is, "discussions and collaboration" which is assessed against the standard of being able to understand the classroom instruction in Arabic and English. Four specific learning outcomes are prescribed: nursery rhymes participation; listen to others; classroom participation;

interacting with others in simple English. For “reading”, two strands are derived, that is, “print concepts” and “phonological awareness” which are assessed against two standards respectively – knowledge of foundational reading skills, and initial exposure to English based on the understanding of oral Arabic. The learning outcomes for “print concept” includes distinguishing between Arabic and English in alphabets and words, and the direction of writing (from left to right and from top to bottom). The learning outcome for “phonological awareness” relates to counting and clapping the syllables and sounds in oral English.

For KG2, the component of “domain” includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Tables 2-3). For the domain of “listening”, different to that for KG1, the strand of “comprehension skills” is derived which is assessed against the standard of listening to and understanding simple, repetitive talk, rhymes, and songs. The strand is measured by four learning outcomes: understanding and following simple oral directions; identifying familiar words in a speech; asking and answering questions about the meaning of a piece of oral information; and listening and responding to simple oral instruction. For the domain of “speaking”, two strands were generated: discussions and collaboration; presentation of knowledge. Discussion and collaboration are assessed against the standard of engaging in conversations, providing and obtaining information, expressing feelings and exchanging views. The strand of “discussion and collaboration” points to six learning outcomes: using simple language; introducing; talking about what they like or dislike; talking about needs, wants, and abilities; participating in short conversations; and engaging in small group discussions. The strand of “presentation of knowledge” is assessed against the standard of orally presenting information and ideas in different situations. The strand points to two learning outcomes: reciting simple and repetitive songs and rhymes; giving and following simple direction.

For the domain of “reading”, eight strands were derived: print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension skills, structural organization, connection of ideas, and vocabulary and lexis. The strand of “print concepts” is assessed against the standard of developing knowledge of basic reading skills. The strand is linked to three learning outcomes: tracking print in English with the right direction; recognizing

the relationship between letters, words, sentences; recognizing uppercase of all alphabets and alphabetical order.

The strand of “phonological awareness” is assessed against the standard of understanding of oral English. The strand is linked to six learning outcomes: knowledge of letter-sound correspondence; distinguishing between letter names and letter sounds; knowledge of vowels and consonants; making rhyming words; forming syllables with letters; and blending the initial sound and the rime.

The strand of “phonics” is assessed against the standard of decoding and reading words. The strand is linked to three learning outcomes: blending sounds; recognizing vowel sounds; and reading high frequency words. The strand of “fluency” is assessed against the standard of reading with accuracy and fluency. The strand is linked to two learning outcomes: reading simple text; and reading names. The strand of “comprehension skills” is assessed against the standard of reading, understanding, and responding to a range of simple texts with Arabic support when necessary. The strand is linked to four learning outcomes: engaging in group reading; reading and responding to English signs in classroom; answering questions using visual support; and identifying characters, setting and events of a story.

The strand “structural organization” is assessed against the standard of knowledge of features of the text. The strand is linked to two learning outcomes: knowing the difference between stories and rhymes; and modifying stories. The strand “connection of ideas” is assessed against the standard of understanding text by connecting ideas. The strand is linked to two learning outcomes: comparing and contrasting characters in a story; and linking a story to real life experience.

The strand “vocabulary and lexis” is assessed against two standards: using basic vocabulary in familiar topics; and knowing the meaning of words. The strand is linked to three learning outcomes: use of an increased number of high frequency words; categorizing patterns of objects; and asking and answering question about the meaning of words. For the domain of “writing”, two strands are derived: handwriting; and research skills. “Handwriting” is assessed against the standard of developing handwriting skills which is linked to two learning outcomes (i.e., writing in the right direction; writing both

uppercase and lowercase letters correctly). “Research skills” is assessed against the standard of conducting simple research assignments which is linked to one learning outcome (i.e., identifying sources of information on the research topic).

Tables 1-3 below are all adapted from National Unified K–12 Learning Standards Framework 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Table 1: The UAE student profile for KG1-2: student learning outcomes KG1

Kindergarten 1

Domain	Strand	Standards	Student Learning Outcomes	Level
(K1.1) Listening & Speaking	(K1.1.1) Discussions And Collaboration	(K1.1.1.1) Understand the nature of academic communication through their instruction in Arabic and English	(K1.1.1.1.1) Participate in simple nursery rhymes	1
			(K1.1.1.1.2) Listen attentively to others during conversations	2
			(K1.1.1.1.3) Participate in instructional activities led by the teacher	1
			(K1.1.1.1.4) Engage with others in social interactions using terms like “hello”, asking and answering very simple questions, and stating feelings in Arabic and English	2
(K1.2) Reading	(K1.2.1) Print Concepts	(K1.2.1.1) Develop and build knowledge of foundational reading skills	(K1.2.1.1.1) Distinguish between letters of the alphabet, numbers and words written in Arabic and in English script	2
			(K1.2.1.1.2) Understand that print moves from left to right across the page and from top to bottom	2
	(K1.2.2) Phonological Awareness	(K1.2.2.1) Demonstrate understanding of components of spoken words, syllables, and phonemes in Arabic as a foundation for initial exposure to English	(K1.2.2.1.1) Count and clap the syllables and sounds in his or her own name and words spoken orally in English	2

Table 2: The UAE student profile for KG1-2: student learning outcomes KG2A

Kindergarten 2

Domain	Strand	Standards	Student Learning Outcomes	Level
(K2.1) Listening	(K2.1.1) Comprehension Skills	(K2.1.1.1) Listen to and understand clear, slow, repeated speech, songs, and rhymes with simple repetitive language	(K2.1.1.1.1) Understand and follow one-step oral directions	2
			(K2.1.1.1.1) Identify familiar words in a stream of speech which carries key information about a person, thing, number, time, place, or action	2
			(K2.1.1.1.3) Ask and answer questions about main idea and key details in a text read aloud, or information presented orally or through other media	2
			(K2.1.1.1.4) Listen to respond to single-step instructions or information presented orally or through other media and supported by teacher demonstration	2
(K2.1) Speaking	(K2.2.1) Discussions And Collaboration	(K2.2.1.1) Engage actively in conversations and discussions, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions in the process of developing a strong lexis and language base	(K2.2.1.1.1) Participate in songs and rhymes using simple repetitive language	1
			(K2.2.1.1.2) Engage in making introductions and use basic leave taking expressions	1
			(K2.2.1.1.3) Talk about likes and dislikes using simple words	2
			(K2.2.1.1.4) Talk about needs, abilities, and wants using simple words	2
			(K2.2.1.1.5) Participate in short conversations while reading with the teacher and peers, making simple comments, asking and answering simple questions (e.g., yes/no)	2
			(K2.2.1.1.6) Listen to others, take turns speaking about the topic, and add one's own ideas in small group discussions or tasks	2
	(K2.2.2) Presentation of Knowledge	(K2.2.2.1) Apply speaking skills to present information, concepts, and ideas effectively in a variety of situations	(K2.2.2.1.1) Recite songs, rhymes and action games using simple repetitive language with in-built or external repetition	1
			(K2.2.2.1.2) Add, give, and follow single-step directions	1
(K2.1) Reading	(K2.3.1) Print Concepts	(K2.3.1.1) Develop and build knowledge of foundational reading skills	(K2.3.1.1.1) Track print in English from left to right, top to bottom and page-by-page	2
			(K2.3.1.1.2) Recognize that written words are made up of sequences of letters, and that words are combined to form sentences	2
			(K2.3.1.1.3) Identify and name all uppercase of the alphabet, learn and apply knowledge of alphabetical order; identify and name numbers from 1 to 5	2
	(K2.3.2) Phonological Awareness	(K2.3.2.1) Demonstrate understanding of spoken English words, syllables, and phonemes	(K2.3.2.1.1) Demonstrate knowledge of one-to-one letter-sound correspondences by producing the primary or many of the most frequent sound for each consonant	2
			(K2.3.2.1.2) Distinguish between letter names and letter sounds (phonemes)	2
			(K2.3.2.1.3) Demonstrate knowledge of short vowels, initial and final consonants, vowel sound /u/ (oo), Y as a vowel (penny, cry)	2
			(K2.3.2.1.4) Identify and create a series of rhyming words in response to an oral prompt	2
			(K2.3.2.1.5) Blend and segment words into syllables	2
			(K2.3.2.1.6) Blend the initial sound and the rime to make words	2

Table 3: The UAE student profile for KG1-2: student learning outcomes KG2B

Kindergarten 2 cont.

Domain	Strand	Standards	Student Learning Outcomes	Level
(K2.1) Reading	(K2.3.3) Phonics	(K2.3.3.1) Decode and read words by applying phonics and word analysis skills	(K2.3.3.1.1) Blend sounds in CVC patterns to make words	2
			(K2.3.3.1.2) Recognize short vowel sounds	1
			(K2.3.3.1.3) Read common high frequency sight words	1
	(K2.3.4) Fluency	(K2.3.4.1) Read with accuracy and fluency	(K2.3.4.1.1) Read level appropriate text (e.g., emergent readers) with appropriate pace	1
			(K2.3.4.1.2) Read their own name and some names of other students from lists, or on books	1
	(K2.3.5) Comprehension Skills	(K2.3.5.1) Read, understand and respond to a variety of grade-appropriate texts to extract and construct meaning using a range of comprehension skills. (Using Arabic as necessary to aid expression and understanding, but referring to the text)	(K2.3.5.1.1) Participate in group reading activities led by the teacher	1
			(K2.3.5.1.2) Read and respond to information in classroom labels, signs, lists, and captions written in familiar words and simple phrases	1
			(K2.3.5.1.3) With help and support, answer questions about main ideas and key details using visual clues	2
			(K2.3.5.1.4) Identify the main elements of a story (e.g., characters, setting, and events)	3
	(K2.3.6) Structural Organization	(K2.3.6.1) Develop understanding of text using knowledge of text features and structure	(K2.3.6.1.1) Distinguish between stories and rhymes	2
			(K2.3.6.1.2) With prompting and support, use pictures and context to make and modify predictions about story content	2
	(K2.3.7) Connection of Ideas	(K2.3.7.1) Build understanding of text by making connections between ideas	(K2.3.7.1.1) Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories	3
			(K2.3.7.1.2) Connect the information and events in a text or a story to life experiences	3
	(K2.3.8) Vocabulary & Lexis	(K2.3.8.1) Recognize, understand, build, and use basic vocabulary related to familiar topics in listening, speaking reading, and writing using various strategies and sources	(K2.3.8.1.1) Build an increasing number of high frequency words and phrases through listening, reading, or being read to; understand them when used by others, and produce these words themselves	2
		(K2.3.8.2) Use various strategies to determine meanings of words	(K2.3.8.2.1) Categorize pictures of objects (e.g., shapes, numbers, colors)	2
			(K2.3.8.2.2) Ask and answer questions to clarify the meanings of words	2
(K2.1) Writing	(K2.4.1) Handwriting	(K2.4.1.1) Develop handwriting skills	(K2.4.1.1.1) Write by moving from left to right and from top to bottom	2
			(K2.4.1.1.2) Write all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet correctly	2
	(K2.4.2) Research Skills	(K2.4.2.1) Conduct short research assignments and tasks to build knowledge about the research process and the topic under study	(K2.4.2.1.1) With prompting and support, identify relevant sources of information on a topic (e.g., pictures and illustrations)	1

4.4 National English Language Curriculum Framework 2018

In collaboration with Cambridge English, the UAE Ministry of Education developed the UAE's English Language Curriculum Framework (the Framework) in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The national curriculum framework delineates outcomes for different levels of English language.

Adopting a level-based approach to English language learning, the Framework accommodates learners' language skills, aptitude and English language background.

Learning outcomes are prescribed across a 10-level scale. It is remarkable that the scale covers “zero beginners” who are KG or Grade 1 learners (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Level 1, the lowest level on the scale of the framework, may reflect the level of EFL of some of the kindergarten children. At Level 1, VYLs are expected to meet three expectations, namely, understanding the main meaning of short, simple English texts with the visual support; participating in short, simple interactions on familiar topics in English; and writing short, simple sentences on familiar topics in English. To meet these expectations, the VYLs of EFL will be provided the learning environment that is characteristic of: (1) VYLs are taught the English language adopting a multimodal approach, including songs and rhymes, stories, conversations; (2) The teaching content is based on the VYLs’ life experiences such as families, schools and community; (3) The teaching content including the written and spoken texts is age appropriate; (4) The learning is based on visuals, body language, and repetition; (5) The speech for the VYLs is age appropriate.

Table 4 shows the four domains of learning for Level 1, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The domain of listening includes two strands: phonological awareness; and comprehension skills. For phonological awareness, VYLs are expected to listen and identify phonemes and the number of syllables. The VYLs are also expected to have the knowledge of intonation patterns. For comprehension skills, VYLs are expected to listen and respond. The VYLs are also expected to listen and understand the meaning of simple texts and familiar words and set phrases.

The domain of reading includes three strands: phonological awareness; reading strategies; and comprehension skills. For phonological awareness, the VYLs are expected to decode new words, whereas for reading strategies, VYLs are expected to follow English words from left to right, read high frequency words, know word spacing and punctuation, and read simple texts. For comprehension skills, VYLs are expected to understand the meaning of simple texts with visual support.

Table 4: The UAE's english language curriculum framework: student learning outcomes level 1

LEVEL 1			
Domain	**Strand**	**Code**	**Learners will be expected to:**
Listening	Phonological Awareness	En.1.L.PA.1	Listen and identify all phonemes.
		En.1.L.PA.2	Listen and identify initial, median and final phonemes in simple words.
		En.1.L.PA.3	Listen and identify the number of syllables in words.
		En.1.L.PA.4	Develop an awareness of intonation patterns when listening.
	Comprehension Skills	En.1.L.CS.1	Listen and respond appropriately to peers and adults.
		En.1.L.CS.2	Listen and understand the overall meaning of very short and simple texts on familiar topics.
		En.1.L.CS.3	Listen and understand familiar words and set phrases in very short and simple texts on familiar topics.
Reading	Phonological Awareness	En.1.R.PA.1	Decode short and simple unfamiliar words using phonemic awareness and blending strategies when reading.
	Reading Strategies	En.1.R.RS.1	Follow words and sentences in English from left to right.
		En.1.R.RS.2	Read the most common high frequency words.
		En.1.R.RS.3	Recognise the effect of word spacing and simple punctuation when reading.
		En.1.R.RS.4	Read and re-read very short and simple texts.
	Comprehension Skills	En.1.R.CS.1	Read and understand the overall meaning of very short, simple texts with the help of pictures.
Speaking	Pronunciation	En.1.S.P.1	Accurately reproduce modelled language.
		En.1.S.P.2	Pronounce learned words using correct stress and intonation.
	Fluency	En.1.S.F.1	Use basic language structures when speaking.
	Interaction & Production	En.1.S.IP.1	Express own ideas using familiar words and set phrases.
		En.1.S.IP.2	Retell very simple stories and personal experiences using familiar words and set phrases.
		En.1.S.IP.3	Ask and answer simple questions on familiar topics.
		En.1.S.IP.4	Participate in very short, simple interactions on familiar topics.
Writing	Handwriting	En.1.W.H.1	Write correctly formed letters and words moving from left to right.
	Writing Strategies	En.1.W.WS.1	Use phonological awareness and blending strategies to write new words.
		En.1.W.WS.2	Write sentences using spacing, capitalisation and full stops.
		En.1.W.WS.3	Write the most common high frequency words correctly.
	Writing Production	En.1.W.WP.1	Write very short, simple sentences on familiar topics.

The domain of speaking includes three strands: pronunciation; fluency; interaction and production. For pronunciation, VYLs are expected to reproduce modeled oral language and use stress and intonation, whereas for fluency they are expected to use sentence structures. For interaction and production, VYLs are expected to express own ideas, retell simple stories, ask and answer questions, and participate in simple interactions.

The domain of writing includes three strands: handwriting; writing strategies, and writing production. For handwriting, VYLs are expected to write letters and words in the right direction, whereas for writing strategies, they are expected to write new words, write

sentences, and write high frequency words. For writing production, VYLs are expected to write simple sentences.

Requirement on the lexis for Level 1 includes 40 phonics such as *s, a, t, p, o, e, u, ff, ff, oa, oo.* High frequency words include 100 words such as *the, to, I, was, can, Mr, about, house, too, asked, an*. The lexis used in Level 1 relates to 16 themes, including: animals, at home, clothes, colours, education, family, feeling, food and drinks, health and fitness, home, numbers, places, shapes, the body, time, transport, and weather (Ministry of Education, 2018).

No official reports or research articles are available that evaluate the feasibility of the high literacy expectations for kindergarten students (as indicated in Table 4) and the potential challenges in supporting the VYLs' learning of EFL. Due to complex socioecological factors such as family language policy and VYLs' home literacy environment (Liang et al., 2022; Said, 2021), it can be envisaged that some Emirati families may find it difficult for their kindergarten-aged children to reach the high standards set out in the UAE's English Language Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 2018). Therefore, it is important to explore effective strategies to help the kindergarten teachers to provide the VYLs with the best possible learning experiences in EFL. Aiming to develop, implement and validate a dramatic storytelling-focused intervention program, the present study is part of the effort to bridging the potential gap between the high expectations prescribed in the official curriculum document and the zone of proximal development of the kindergarten students in the UAE.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents all aspects of the research methodology in this study. The study uses a combination of action research and quasi-experimental designs. Below sections cover justification for combination of action research and quasi-experiment, selection of the stories and production of the storybook, action research, quasi-experimental design, sampling and participants recruitment, intervention procedure, instrumentation (child observations and parent survey), collection of data, analysis of quantitative data, analysis of qualitative data, and ethics considerations.

5.2 Justification for Combination of Action Research and Quasi-Experiment

The study is of a mixed method design, specifically, it adopts a quasi-experimental action-research approach (Waardenburg et al, 2020). The methodology of the study is "mixed" in two senses. First, the data of the study are both qualitative and quantitative. For example, when evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention, established, psychometrically sound measures were used to assess the kindergarteners' emergent literacy in EFL, and advanced statistical analyses were performed to validate the measures and determine the effect of the variables. Meanwhile, semi-structured interview, journaling, and observation were used to achieve the depth, richness and nuances of the data. Second, the design of the study was of both quasi-experiment and action research. On one hand, to ensure the rigor of the practice-based and intervention-driven, applied study, especially when examining the effectiveness of the intervention, a quasi-experimental design (Thyer, 2012) is most desirable. On the other hand, there does not exist a ready-made, contextually sensitive and salient intervention program that can be implemented straightaway, rather, development of the intervention program was exploratory and involved a "trial and error" process. Therefore, for a relatively mature, reliable intervention program to become available, an action research process (Zhang, 2021) is desirable. The extant literature has confirmed the legitimacy of the combination of quasi-experimental and action research design in one study (Bielska, 2011; Hunt, 2017; Waardenburg et al., 2020; Wanous & Reichers, 2001).

5.3 Selection of the Stories and Production of the Storybook

The precursor of the action research was selecting stories, drawing the illustrations, and printing the storybooks. Six criteria were used for selecting the stories:

- Age appropriate language
- Age appropriate moral value
- Intriguing setting
- Captivating plot
- Patterned language
- Repetitive phrases

A number of strategies were tried when selecting the stories, including

- Libraries and bookstores
- Websites
- Research articles
- Experts' recommendation

Eight stories were selected:

- Little bear's fence
- A homeless snail
- Hanging a bell on the cat
- The greedy lion
- The donkey with a lion's pelt
- It's going to rain
- Little monkeys and the moon
- A lantern for others

Four stories were printed:

- Little bear's fence
- A homeless snail
- Hanging a bell on the cat
- The greedy lion

The selected stories are all very popular, particularly within the Emirati society, and have different versions across the world. We made minor modifications just to remove some difficult or less attractive parts. The stories are all publicly available on the internet, and there are disparate descriptions of the origin of the stories. To avoid inaccuracy or controversy, we have chosen not to attribute these stories to specific authors or publishers. In fact, the copyright protection period for literature work should all have elapsed in anyway. For the readers to scrutinize the stories, full text of each story has been included in Appendix 8.

For production of the storybook, below criteria were set:

- Colorful pictures
- Captivating illustrations
- Quality paper
- Quality printing

The researcher drew all the illustrations, and the professional printing provider refined the drawing. A total of 150 copies of A4 size storybooks were printed, intended for one to two children a copy, and six copies of A1 size storybook were printed, intended for each classroom teacher in the intervention group a copy.

Effort was made to provide the children and teachers in the intervention group with quality print copies of storybook because of the proved benefits of print copy of storybook for emergent literacy such as its roles in better supporting the child's learning about story

content and phrasing (de Jong & Bus, 2002) and better facilitating the child's communicative initiations (Moody et al., 2010).

5.4 Action Research

The action research included two cycles. The first cycle was completed during 23 January -17 February 2023, and the second cycle was completed 19 February -17 March 2023. For each cycle, four stages of "plan, act, observe, and reflect" (McTaggart, 1991) were followed. The four stages of each cycle led to development (plan), delivery (act), and evaluation (observe and reflect) of the intervention program. The intervention program was semi-structured in that it not only included a series of pre-planned stories, activities and strategies of implementing dramatic storytelling but also encouraged classroom improvisations that were relevant to the implementation of dramatic storytelling (Gilli et al., 2018; Yang & Ostrosky, 2023). The encouragement of improvisations resonates with the notion of ownership-responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice (McTaggart, 1991).

Both cycles covered two different stories. In terms of pedagogical approach, Cycle 1 was exploratory, and Cycle 2 was confirmatory. While review and evaluation were ongoing, formal assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention was conducted prior to and immediately after the two cycles of the intervention, that is, there was no post-assessment at the end of Cycle 1. The action research aimed to develop, deliver and improve the intervention program, with a focus on activities and strategies in the local context. The dramatic storytelling-based intervention approach was formalized by the end of Cycle 2.

Below guidelines were observed during the two cycles of action research:

(1) Dosage of storytelling. In Cycle 1 (four weeks), in line with the kindergarten's English teaching timetable, one same story was taught during two of the four weeks, which means two stories were taught by the end of Cycle 1. In Cycle 2 (four weeks), two different stories were taught in an improved, more structured, and more acting-oriented mode.

(2) Approach to dramatic storytelling. Dramatic storytelling has the characteristics of

both storytelling and drama which build on children's innate capacity for fantasy and imaginative play. The dramatic storytelling was shared, communal classroom events which engaged children's interest, attention and imagination and developed their language skills in a holistic way. A range of elements were incorporated in the storytelling, including, for example, variations in voice for different characters or to create surprise or suspense, mime or actions to convey meaning, puppet shows, drawing, story retelling. The picture storybook was held up and illustration initially shown slowly round the group. The children were holding their own storybook which was the same as the teacher's, and given time to think, look, comment, ask, respond to questions, react, interact, and act.

(3) Nature of the intervention program. The intervention program was of EFL teaching by nature. Same as the traditional, regular EFL teaching sessions occurring in a UAE kindergarten, the intervention program aimed to meet the content standards in the National Unified K-12 Learning Standards Framework (Ministry of Education, 2014).

(4) Feature of the intervention program. The intervention program was dramatic story based and characteristic of the use of dramatic storytelling as a tool for developing the young children's emergent literacy in EFL.

Dramatic storytelling in the intervention program followed a semi-structured, pedagogically consistent procedure. The procedure contained nine essential elements, namely,

- storybook with colorful illustrations and printed with good quality;
- dramatization (use of voice, facial expression, bodily gesture, mime, rhythm, exaggeration);
- elaboration of meaning of words;
- engagement with the children;
- contextualization (tailoring the story to the listeners and make it more relevant to children);

- repetition;
- tell and retell;
- story-acting;
- inclusiveness (participation by all children).

The process of the action research is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: The process of the action research

Cycle	Stage	Action
Pre-assessment 9-13 January 2023		Assessment of variables related to emergent literacy of EFL before the intervention.
Cycle 1: Four Weeks 23 January - 17 February 2023	Plan	1. From a picture book of dramatic stories provided, the teaching team selected two for Cycle 1 (four weeks) of the intervention program. 2. The teaching team developed a plan for teaching of the two dramatic stories.
	Act	Content: *Little bear's fence* *A homeless snail* *Hanging a bell on the cat* *The greedy lion* Methods: (Guideline only) Step 1: Pre-storytelling activities (e.g., introduction by the teacher) Step 2: Teacher telling the story in English Step 3: Teacher explaining the story in Arabic Step 4: Teacher modeling story acting Step 5: Teacher teaching the key words or phrases Step 6: Post-storytelling activities (e.g., story acting by the children)
	Observe	Teacher observing for the children's responses: 1. How well are they engaged? 2. What are they learning?
	Reflect	Teacher reflecting on how to improve the storytelling in the next cycle.

Table 5: The process of the action research (Continued)

Cycle	Stage	Action
Cycle 2: Four Weeks 19 February - 17 March 2023	Plan	1. The teaching team selected two new stories for Cycle 2 (four weeks) of the intervention. 2. Based on observation and reflection in Cycle 1, the teaching team modified the content and methods of the intervention for Cycle 2.
	Act	Content: *Little bear's fence* *A homeless snail* *Hanging a bell on the cat* *The greedy lion* Methods: Step 1: Teacher re-telling the story in English Step 2: Teacher modeling story acting Step 3: Teacher revising the key content taught in Cycle 1 Step 4: The children re-telling the story Step 5: The children acting the story
	Observe	Teacher observing for the children's responses: 1. How well are they engaged? 2. What are they learning?
	Reflect	Teacher reflecting on the effect of dramatic storytelling on learning of EFL among children.
Post-assessment 18-23 March 2023		Assessment of variables related to emergent literacy of EFL after the intervention.

5.5 Quasi-Experimental Design

This study aimed to explore the causal effect of the semi-structured dramatic storytelling-based intervention program on the children's emergent literacy learning. Intervention and control groups were employed. The intervention group were not randomly assigned, nor were the control group randomly assigned. Instead of random selection, in a typical quasi-experimental design, the researcher may select the participants for both intervention and control groups taking into consideration certain factors such as cost, feasibility, equity concerns, or convenience (Thyer, 2012). The study was conducted

in the kindergartens where groupings of the children were previously determined. The researcher selected the intervention group based on the availability of the classroom teacher being able, ready, and willing to work on an intervention program. Therefore, random sampling was not applied in the participants selection, and a quasi-experimental design serves the purpose of the study well.

The predictor variable was the intervention program (a set of activities and strategies based on dramatic storytelling) that was manipulated in order to affect the outcome variables which were relevant indicators of emergent literacy. The intervention in this study included the delivery of the intervention program in both cycles of the action research. The "pre-post assessment" (child observations) was performed. Pre- and post-parent survey was also conducted to examine the change in the young children's disposition/approach to learning EFL displayed in the home environment.

5.6 Sampling and Participants Recruitment

The study was conducted within the kindergartens in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates. Upon ethics approval from the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of UAE University, Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) in Abu Dhabi and Emirates Schools Establishment (ESE) in Abu Dhabi during July-December 2022, the researcher approached kindergarten director of six schools, conducted a PowerPoint presentation to introduce the research, in particular, what the kindergarten was expected to do for participation. The steps of the action research, the intervention program, and pre- and post-assessment were explained in detail. As a result, three kindergartens gave their permission to take part in the study. The participants were 10 classes from the three kindergartens, with five classes assigned to the intervention group and five classes assigned to the control group. The teachers were involved in program implementation, and they were not a part of the study sample.

5.7 Intervention Procedure

The researcher visited the participating kindergartens regularly during 19 December -13 January 2023 to train classroom teachers and keep them on track on what story should they start with, how many days each story took, and most importantly, to

maintain documentation of the intervention. The teacher who taught the intervention classes were trained to assume the responsibility to develop and deliver the intervention program with the guidance from the researcher.

Each story took two weeks to complete the implementation, including reading, telling, retelling and children telling the story on their own. Teachers were free to choose any of the four stories from the given storybook to read and present to their children. All stories were adaptable to the level and kindergarten context. The teachers were encouraged to ask for any guidance whenever there are any doubts or difficulties.

A typical intervention session lasted for 30-45 minutes across all kindergartens, started with the teacher calling the children to take a seat on the carpet and get ready for the story. Reading activities ranged from telling the story by the teacher only sharing what is happening in pictures and asking the children to help with the reading. Each class had their own style and strengths of teaching. The session was play-based and involved a range of fun activities such as conversation and free acting. Also, the session involved no formal instruction, and the children were allowed to walk around if they wanted. Therefore, the duration of each session was age appropriate. Table 6 shows the standards, strategies and outcomes for the intervention classes.

Table 6: Standards, strategies and outcomes of the intervention program

Task	Standards	Strategies	Outcomes
Cycle One 23 January -17 February 2023	Dosage and duration (8 sessions): 2 stories (Stories 1-2) 4 weeks, 2 sessions per week 30-45 minutes per session Elements: Storybook appreciation Story reading Storytelling and retelling Story acting Improvising Principles: Playfulness (interest based) Multimodality Interaction (teacher-child, child-child)	Given the diverse class context, there was no unified schedule or syllabus for the individual sessions. The following was a guideline: • The teacher introduces the picture storybook. • The teacher reads the first story. • The teacher tells the first story. • The children act the first story. • The children retell the first story. • The children "read" the first story. • The children invent own story. The above procedure was repeated for the second story.	The Cycle 1 intervention aimed for below learning outcomes: • The children's love for the print copy of storybook • The children's love for "reading" • The children's interest in the storylines • The children's interest in English phonemes • The children's interest in the English letters • The children's interest in English graphophonics • The children's incidental vocabulary acquisition • The children's spontaneous creation (e.g., costumes and props)
Cycle Two 20 February-17 March 2023	Dosage and duration (8 sessions): 2 stories (Stories 3-4) 4 weeks, 2 sessions per week 30-45 minutes per session Elements: Story reading Storytelling and retelling Story acting Improvising Principles: Playfulness (interest based) Multimodality Interaction (teacher-child, child-child)	The following was a guideline: • The teacher reads the third story. • The teacher tells the third story. • The children act the third story. • The children retell the third story. • The children "read" the third story. • The children invent own story. The above procedure was repeated for the fourth story.	The Cycle 2 intervention aimed for below learning outcomes: • The children's love for the print copy of storybook • The children's love for "reading" • The children's interest in the storylines • The children's interest in English phonemes • The children's interest in the English letters • The children's interest in English graphophonics • The children's incidental vocabulary acquisition • The children's spontaneous creation (e.g., costumes and props)

Two stories were introduced, told to the children, retold by the children, and acted by the children for a duration of four weeks, with 30-45 minutes a session and two sessions a week. The first 15 minutes were used to appreciate the storybook, that is, the teacher and the children went through the parts of the book, knowing it is a big storybook, it has title, it has pictures, it has words, and it has events. Then the story was read to the children. The story then was told using different strategies to catch the children's interest. In the following sessions the children participated in the retelling of the story, became familiar with the plot, voluntarily engaged in acting the story, improvised the acting, and used the puppets to play out their own version of the story. Some videos were taken of the children doing their own version of stories. These procedures were repeated for both stories used in the first intervention month. With a focus on two different stories, what happened in the first four weeks were repeated in the second four weeks.

In the control group, instead of the dramatic storytelling sessions, the business-as-usual EFL lessons were maintained. A typical lesson followed the weekly theme, for example, the letter/sound of the week. Using a selection of picture cards, the teacher modeled the shape writing, and the children followed the teacher's direction and copied her. The children worked in different centers, such as playdough center (writing the letter with playdough), reading center (reading with a focus on words, letters and sounds), writing center (writing on worksheets with dotted pictures of the letter words), drawing center (drawing the letters), and puppet center (playing characters such as penguin, peacock, policeman). The teacher discussed with the children about what they were doing. The weekly time spent on EFL in the control group equated with that in the intervention group.

5.8 Instrumentation

5.8.1 Child Observations

Measuring the outcome variables "emergent literacy" is crucial to the quasi-experiment design in the study. The extant literature includes numerous instruments that measure emergent literacy of young learners of English as the first language, nevertheless, there is a paucity of studies that include such measurements for young learners of EFL. Emergent literacy is comprised of code-related skills and oral language skills (Cabell et

al., 2011). Auleear Owodally (2015) assessed code-related aspects of emergent literacy of preschoolers in an EFL context, which is most relevant to this study. Following the example of Auleear Owodally (2015), in this study, assessment of emergent literacy included observation of child activities and parent survey.

The children were pre-assessed before the intervention started and post-assessed after the intervention was completed. All the children were assessed in the kindergarten by the researcher in collaboration with the research assistant and the classroom teacher. The children were observed during a series of activities, which took approximately 10–12 minutes per child. The children were given Arabic translation in the activities, with questions being asked in Arabic if necessary. Arabic translation was needed and used especially in the pre-assessment when children were asked to answer specific questions on letters and sounds knowledge (e.g., Can you tell me what letter/sound is this? Can you say the sound of this letter? Can you write the letter of this sound?)

The child observations consist of six activities through which the child's performance on emergent literacy was observed, recorded and scored. In Activity 1 Greeting in English, the teacher welcomes each child at the door of the classroom by saying "Good morning [name of the child], how are you today?", and records the child's response. In Activity 2 Say It in English, the teacher shows the child the image (picture/PowerPoint slide) of each of a list of English words, asks the child to say it in English, and records the child's response. In Activity 3 Answer It in English, the teacher askes the child each of the five questions on the child's name, age, favorite food, favorite colour, and best friend, and records the child's response.

In Activity 4. Letter Recognition, the teacher encourages the child to pronounce each of the 26 English letters (either lower case or upper case) presented in order, and records the child's response. In Activity 5 Letter Writing, the teacher asks the child to write each of the 26 English letters (either lower case or upper case) in order, and records the child's response. In Activity 6 Name Writing, the teacher asks the child to write their name, and records the child's response. Activity 1 and Activity 3 measure oral English. Activity 2 measures vocabulary and concept of print. Activity 4, Activity 5 and Activity 6 measures familiarity with the alphabet, letter naming/writing, and name writing. In this

study, the six activities were conceptualized as forming two constructs: oral language (Activity 1, 2, and 3) and code-related skills (Activity 4, 5, and 6) (Auleear Owodally, 2015). Appendix 6 provides details of the measurement including the rubric for scoring.

The scoring was conducted by the researcher and her research assistant. The children's performance on each of the six activities was scored on a five-point (1 to 5) scale following the rubric. The inter-rater reliability was calculated. Since the variables were ordinal (1-5), Kendall's Tau was used (Lange, 2011). We started with one class (I_KG2-1) that included 18 children. Both researcher and the research assistant rated Activity 1-6 separately. Using SPSS [Analyze – Correlate – Bivariate – Kendall's Tau for correlation coefficients], Kendall's Tau values for the six activities for all children in the class were calculated, and they were 0.96, 0.98, 0.97, 0.95, 0.94, and 0.94 respectively, indicating excellent inter-rater reliability. We resolved the very few inconsistencies by negotiation. The very high inter-rater reliability was largely due to the clear rubric for the six activities (Appendix 6) which were mostly counts based.

5.8.2 Parent Survey

In addition to questions on demographic information on the child or the primary caregiver (i.e., the child's gender, the number of children, first language, education, employment, and household income), parent survey for both pre- and post- assessment included nine questions on the parent's perception of the child's level of interest in learning English at home (Questions 6-9) and the child's act of learning English at home (Questions 10-14) (Appendix 7).

5.9 Collection of Data

In spite of the division of the stages of each cycle of the action research, data collection of the project took place across all stages of both cycles. Collection of quantitative data included the pre- and post- assessment of the components of emergent literacy (child observations and parent survey). During 9-13 January 2023 and 18-23 March 2023 child observations were conducted in all the participating kindergartens including both intervention and control groups. The children from both intervention classes and control classes were observed. Except the first class (I_KG2-1) which were

observed by both the researcher and her research assistant for calculating and ensuring acceptable inter-rater reliability, the rest of the classes were observed by either the researcher or her research assistant. The classroom teacher assisted with the observation.

Parent survey was administered with print copy and with online version. In total, all children (N=200) were observed both pre- and post- intervention. Among the 200 children who were observed, 148 (74.0%) had their parent completed both pre- and post-parent surveys. The reason of lower response rate of parent survey was mainly due to the delay in returning the survey response on the part of the parents. Given the relatively short period intervention, the two-month gap between the pre- and post- assessment was strictly observed. For example, the parent survey responses that were returned three days after the commence of the intervention were not counted as pre-assessment, and the cut-off point for returning the post- survey was within one week of the closure of the intervention program. For this reason, although the response rate of parent survey was a bit low, demographic information was collected for all 200 children with the help of the kindergartens. The parents' delay in returning the parent survey was mainly due to the fact that most of them were not the ones who picked up or dropped off their child, and that there were occasions when the print copy of the survey went missing according to the nanny. The required total sample size of participants was calculated using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007) for an effect size of 0.60, a power of 90%, and an alpha value of 0.05 in a repeated measure MANOVA test; the calculated total sample size was 61. The total sample sizes of this study were 200 and 148 for child observation and parent survey respectively, therefore, the sample sizes of this study were sufficient.

The qualitative data were collected mainly to assess the "process quality" of the intervention. As the primary driver for positive outcomes in ECE programs (Slot et al., 2015), process quality focuses on the types and nature of the children's learning experience that occurred during the intervention, with a focus on interaction between the teachers, the children, and the dramatic stories (Howes et al., 2008). Instead of interview that is typically used in a qualitative study, qualitative data on the effectiveness of the intervention program in this study were collected through participant observation, photos, videos, work samples, and informal conversations. Participant observation is the main data collection method for ethnographic study. Participant observation focused on periods where the phenomenon of

research interest is most observable and is documented through fieldnotes (Zhang & Morrison, 2020). Photographs show depth and detail of phenomena that cannot be expressed through texts (Guest et al., 2013). Photos were taken mainly using the method of autophotography in which the research participants (teachers) took photographs of the intervention environment as actual data (Glaw et al., 2017). Autophotography including videography allows the researcher and the reader to see the world through the participant's eyes (Knoblauch et al., 2014). Interviews "are not ideal to studying situational dynamics because respondents usually have difficulties recalling details about situations … [and] provide a poor primary source for microlevel studies of what happened and why" (Nassauer & Legewie 2021, p0.141).

Through visual data analysis, researchers "are able to focus on even the most fleeting of information … and reconstruct the exact sequence of interactions frame by frame" (Nassauer & Legewie 2021, p0.141). Several traditional qualitative data analysis methods can be used for video analysis, including content analysis (to get an overview of the data and identify interactions sequences of expressive, noteworthy, and engaged behavior), thematic analysis (to identify categories of practices), the enacted approach (to search for video sequences that display the elusiveness of data and to stimulate the discussions and reflections), and the hybrid approach (to integrate text and the visual as mutual dependent sources of understanding (Skjælaaen et al 2020, p0.63). Video recorded in the field, also referred to as videography, is used as an instrument for collecting and analyzing social interaction in natural settings, and it includes "many different activities in the process ranging from fieldwork to fine-grained analysis of single utterances" (Knoblauch et al., 2014, p0.446).

5.10 Analysis of Quantitative and Data

For quantitative data, IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25 was used to perform all analyses. Chi square tests were performed to check uniform distribution of demographic variables across groups. Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were obtained as part of relevant statistical analyses.

One-way ANOVA was used to compare the difference in outcome variables at Time Point 1 (pre-assessment) between the intervention and control groups. One-way ANOVA was

also used to compare the difference in outcome variables at Time Point 2 (post-assessment) between the intervention and control groups.

General linear model repeated measures were used to compare the difference in outcome variables between the intervention and control groups taking into consideration of the mean scores measured at both Time Point 1 (pre-assessment) and Time Point 2 (post-assessment). Specifically, one-way repeated measures MANOVA was used to compare the difference in the composite outcome variable between the intervention and control groups taking into consideration of the mean scores measured at both Time Point 1 (pre-assessment) and Time Point 2 (post-assessment). Also, one-way repeated measures ANOVA (within-subjects ANOVA) was used to compare the difference in individual outcome variables between the intervention and control groups taking into consideration of the mean scores measured at both Time Point 1 (pre-assessment) and Time Point 2 (post-assessment). Repeated measures MANOVA in addition to a series of repeated measure ANOVAs were performed for two reasons: (1) To reduce the experiment-wise level of Type I error; (2) A repeated measures MANOVA addresses the potential interactions between the individual outcome variables.

Three assumptions need to be met for performing ANOVA and MANOVA: (1) independent observations; (2) normality (the outcome variable must follow a normal distribution within each subpopulation); (3) homogeneity (the variance of the outcome variable must be equal over all subpopulations). For this study, independent observations were met since each record represented distinct participant and there was no interaction among participants that were likely to affect the responses. Normality was not an issue for this study since, according to literature, with large enough sample sizes (> 30 or 40), the violation of the normality assumption should not cause major issues (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012; Pallant, 2007), and in such cases, parametric procedures can still be used even when the data are not normally distributed (Elliott & Woodward, 2007; Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). If the samples consist of over a big number of observations, then the distribution of the data can be ignored (Altman & Bland, 1995; Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). According to the central limit theorem, in large samples (> 30 or 40), the sampling distribution tends to be normal, regardless of the shape of the data (Elliott & Woodward, 2007; Field, 2013).

For homogeneity, two types of test were performed. For Box's Test of Equality of Covariance, Sig. was smaller than 0.01 and the assumption was violated, so Pillai's trace instead of Wilks' Lambda was used. For Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances, Sig. of Levene statistic for each outcome variable was greater than 0.01 and the assumption was met. The results of the two types test will be reported in Chapter 6 Quantitative Results.

5.11 Analysis of Qualitative Data

For qualitative data, reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020) was used to capture the themes/categories informing the degree of effectiveness of the intervention. Thematic analysis suits the analysis well of photographs as well as videos (Glaw et al., 2017; Skjælaaen et al 2020). RTA was an upgraded version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. RTA offers flexibility in coding, and particularly it requires a significant level of "reflexivity". In RTA, a theme is multi-faceted and is united by a central concept or idea (Braun & Clarke, 2020). My analytical goal was to identify patterns of meaning across a range of forms of data (i.e., fieldnotes, photos, videos, informal conversation) that could illustrate how effective the intervention was. Themes were generated through an inductive process following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of analysis.

5.12 Ethics Considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of UAE University, Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) in Abu Dhabi and Emirates Schools Establishment (ESE) in Abu Dhabi prior to conducting this study. Permission from the kindergarten authority was also granted to legitimate access into the sampled kindergarten and the children. All parents gave their permission to complete the parent survey, and all parents in the intervention group gave their permission for their child to be observed. Key research ethics principles were adhered to, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, respect for privacy, and no harm. Participant's agreement was obtained via informed consent document which is a necessary step in order to make sure that parents/families allow their children to participate in the study with their free will, and full understanding of its nature (Gay, et al., 2011). With this respect, the

participants' parents were informed in advance about the importance of the study, its purpose, possible outcomes, and their role and rights in the process. Also, they were explicitly informed of any potential risks. In addition, confidentiality of obtained data and anonymity of participant's identity was assured. As this research involved children, ethical procedures were taken to ensure that no harm was done on children. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured.

5.13 Summary

Success of the study largely depended on the smooth execution of the pre- and post-assessment and the development and delivery of the intervention program. To ensure the whole process was successful, the researcher had a step by step plan in place, monitored the process according to the plan, and adjusted the plan timely when necessary.

The intervention was describable and replicable although it was semi-structured instead of fully structured. It was a challenge to ensure what was planned for was what actually happened. It was also a challenge to ensure what was documented was accurately what happened. The Covid-19 pandemic created huge unpredictability and disruption. The researcher kept reflective diaries, identified potential issues, and tried to address all the issues effectively in time. As a combination of quasi-experiment and action research, many aspects of this study needed to be closely examined to ensure the protocols for both quantitative and qualitative designs were well followed.

Chapter 6: Quantitative Results

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention program that directly address the second research question. The results of the quantitative analyses mainly include the outcomes of the mean comparisons on the outcome variables between the intervention group and the control group taking into consideration the effect of the intervention program. The outcome variables in this study include both emergent literacy activities at kindergarten (i.e., Activity 1 – Activity 6) measured through the child observations and the child's learning English at home (i.e., interest in learning English; and act to learn English) measured through the parent survey. Since accurate information on the sampled kindergartens, children and parents were not available until the quantitative analyses were performed, it is reported in the present chapter (Table 7 and Table 8) instead of the previous chapter.

To provide a broader view of how the two groups differed in the outcome variables, Table 9 and Table 10 present the results of the group comparisons on the outcome variables at Time Point 1 (pre-assessment) and Time Point 2 (post-assessment) respectively. Most relevant to Research Question 2, with the results of two sets of repeated measures MANOVA, Table 11 and Table 14 demonstrate how effective the intervention program was on the two composite outcome variables (i.e., emergent literacy activities at kindergarten; and the child's learning English at home) respectively. Table 12 and Table 15 are presented to demonstrate how the two composite outcome variables changed from Time Point 1 to Time Point 2 within the two groups respectively (i.e., within group difference rather than between group difference). Directly relevant to Research Question 2, Table 13 and Table 16 are presented to demonstrate how effective the intervention program was on the individual constructs of each of the two composite outcome variables, namely, each of the six emergent literacy activities at kindergarten as well as the child's interest in learning English at home and the child's act to learn English at home (*c.f.,* Table 12 and Table 15). Congruent with Table 13, Figures 2-7 are visual presentation of the between-group comparison on the change of each of the six emergent literacy activities at kindergarten. Likewise, congruent with Table 16, Figures 8-9 are visual presentation of

the between-group comparison on the change of the child's interest in learning English at home and the child's act to learning English at home, respectively.

The effect sizes of the analyses are interpreted using the established criteria, namely, for Cohen's *d*, the thresholds for small, medium and large effect size are 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 respectively, and for partial eta squared (ηp^2), the thresholds for small, medium and large effect size are 0.01, 0.06, and 0.14 respectively (Cohen, 1988; Murphy & Myors, 2004).

6.2 Participant Description

Participants of child observations were 200 children from 10 classes of three kindergartens (labeled as Kindergartens A, Kindergarten F, and Kindergarten I) in Abu Dhabi, with 112 girls and 88 boys. A total of 118 children were from Kindergarten A, 43 from Kindergarten F, and 39 from Kindergarten I. A total of 81 children were attending KG1, and 119 children attending KG2. A total of 107 children were assigned to the intervention group while 93 children to the control group. The number of young children in each classroom was between 16-26. A summary of the participants from each of the three kindergartens is provided in Table 7.

Table 7: Number of participating children in each kindergarten

Kindergarten	Class	Group		Gender		Grade		Total
		Intervention	Control	Boy	Girl	KG1	KG2	
Kindergarten A	A_KG1-1	20	0	8	12	20	0	118
	A_KG1-2	0	19	8	11	19	0	
	A_KG1-4	0	16	9	7	16	0	
	A_KG1-6	26	0	11	15	26	0	
	A_KG2-1	21	0	11	10	0	21	
	A_KG2-5	0	16	8	8	0	16	
Kindergarten F	F_KG2-1	22	0	12	10	0	22	43
	F_KG2-2	0	21	5	16	0	21	
Kindergarten I	I_KG2-1	18	0	9	9	0	18	39
	I_KG2-2	0	21	7	14	0	21	
Total		107	93	88	112	81	119	200

Table 8 provides demographic information of the participants. For the whole group, over one third of the participants (36.0%) had 3-4 children, followed by 5-6 children (24.5%), 1-2 child (18.5%), 9 or more children (12.0%), and 7-8 children (9.0%). Almost all the parents (91.0%) spoke Arabic as their first language. Over half of the parents attained undergraduate qualification (57.0%), followed by secondary school (31.5%), postgraduate (5.5%), and other (6.0%). Over half of the parents were full-time employee or student (52.0%), followed by home-maker (28.5%), self-employed (11.0%), part-time employee or student (7.0%), and other (1.5%). Over one third of the parents had monthly household income of AED10,000 - less than AED20,000 (37.0%), followed by less than AED10,000 (26.5%), AED40,000 and above (14.5%), AED20,000 - less than AED30,000 (14.0%), and AED30,000 - less than AED40,000 (8.0%).

A series of chi-square tests for independence were computed to determine whether the demographic variables were independent of group (intervention, control). For all demographic variables, the results are not statistically significant. Specifically, for gender, χ^2 (1, N = 200) = 1.565, p = 0.211; for number of children, χ^2 (4, N = 200) = 4.477, p =

0.345; for first language, χ^2 (1, N = 200) = 0.034, p = 0.855; for education, χ^2 4, N = 200) = 9.013, p = 0.061; for employment, χ^2 (4, N = 200) = 3.706, p = 0.447; and for income, χ^2 (4, N = 200) = 5.209, p = 0.266. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a uniform distribution of the demographic variables across the two groups.

Among the 200 children who were observed, 148 (74.0%) had their parent completed both pre- and post- parent surveys within the prescribed timeframe. This reduced sample size affected the outcome variable “learning English at home” assessed by the parent.

Table 8: Distribution of demographic variables in the two groups

Variable	Category	Intervention (N = 107)		Control (N = 93)		Whole (N = 200)	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Number of chidlren	1-2	22	20.6	15	16.1	37	18.5
	3-4	41	38.3	31	33.3	72	36.0
	5-6	21	19.6	28	30.1	49	24.5
	7-8	8	7.5	10	10.8	18	9.0
	9 or more	15	14.0	9	9.7	24	12.0
First language	Arabic	97	90.7	85	91.4	182	91.0
	English	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
	Other	10	9.3	8	8.6	18	9.0
Highest education	Secondary	27	25.2	36	38.7	63	31.5
	Undergraduate	70	65.4	44	47.3	114	57.0
	Postgraduate	6	5.6	5	5.4	11	5.5
	Other	4	3.7	8	8.6	12	6.0
Employment	Full time job/student	60	56.1	44	47.3	104	52.0
	Part time job/student	8	7.5	6	6.5	14	7.0
	Self-employed	13	12.1	9	9.7	22	11.0
	Home-maker	25	23.4	32	34.4	57	28.5
	Other	1	0.9	2	2.2	3	1.5
Household Income	Less than 10,000	22	20.6	31	33.3	53	26.5
	10,000 - less than 20,000	43	40.2	31	33.3	74	37.0
	20,000 - less than 30,000	14	13.1	14	15.1	28	14.0
	30,000 - less than 40,000	10	9.3	6	6.5	16	8.0
	40,000 and above	18	16.8	11	11.8	29	14.5

6.3 Group Comparison on the Outcome Variables at Pre-Assessment

To compare on the outcome variables between intervention and control groups at the time point of pre-assessment, one-way ANOVA was performed for each of the outcome variables. Table 9 presents the means, standard deviation, F value, and p value of each of the outcome variables (indicators of emergent literacy). As shown in Table 9, except Activity 2 ("Say It in English") for which there was significant difference between intervention and control groups, there was no significant group difference in the scores of the six activities measured at baseline through child observation.

Table 9: Group comparison on the outcome variables at pre-assessment

Outcome variable	*M* [*SD*]		*F* value	*p* value
	Intervention (*N*=107)	Control (*N*=93)		
Activity 1	1.62 [0.96]	1.62 [0.98]	0.002	0.960
Activity 2	1.54 [0.92]	1.29 [0.67]	4.739	0.031
Activity 3	1.79 [1.27]	1.67 [1.04]	0.510	0.476
Activity 4	1.75 [1.07]	1.74 [1.06]	0.001	0.970
Activity 5	1.44 [0.82]	1.57 [1.02]	1.018	0.314
Activity 6	1.79 [0.97]	1.91 [1.07]	0.979	0.373
	(*N*=77)	(*N*=71)		
Interest	3.82 [0.94]	3.80 [1.00]	0.026	0.872
Act	3.81 [0.90]	3.83 [0.96]	0.017	0.895

6.4 Group comparison on the outcome variables at post-assessment

To compare on the outcome variables between intervention and control groups at the time point of post-assessment, one-way ANOVA was performed for each of the outcome variables. Table 10 presents the means, standard deviation, *F* value, and *p* value of each of the outcome variables (indicators of emergent literacy). As shown in Table 10, there was significant difference in all six emergent literacy activities at kindergarten between intervention and control groups. However, there was no significant difference in the child's interest in learning English and the child's act to learning English between intervention and control groups at post-assessment.

Table 10: Group comparison on the outcome variables at post-assessment

Outcome variable	*M* [*SD*]		*F* value	*p* value
	Intervention (*N*=107)	Control (*N*=93)		
Activity 1	2.90 [0.87]	2.32 [0.92]	20.56	< 0.001
Activity 2	2.68 [0.86]	2.22 [0.75]	16.43	< 0.001
Activity 3	3.23 [1.02]	2.30 [1.02]	41.85	< 0.001
Activity 4	2.91 [1.00]	2.47 [0.90]	10.27	0.002
Activity 5	2.80 [0.87]	2.48 [0.86]	6.81	0.010
Activity 6	2.99 [0.8]	2.72 [0.85]	5.01	0.026
	(*N*=77)	(*N*=71)		
Interest	4.16 [0.85]	4.01 [0.98]	0.97	0.325
Act	4.15 [0.85]	3.99 [1.01]	1.13	0.291

6.5 Group Comparison on the Outcome Variables Over Time

General linear model repeated measures (one-way repeated measures MANOVA) were performed to examine whether there was any significant difference in the change to the composite outcome variable of emergent literacy activities at kindergarten between the intervention and control groups as a result of the intervention.

First, one-way repeated measures MANOVA were performed to examine whether there was any significant group difference in the change to the composite variable of the six emergent literacy activities at kindergarten as a result of the intervention. As Table 11 shows, main effect of group (intervention versus control) plus time (pre- versus post-) in predicting a combined variable of all six emergent literacy activities at kindergarten was significant, F (5,194) = 7.789, p <0.001, partial eta squared = 0.167. The effect size (> 0.14) was large. Overall, the mean score for emergent literacy activities at kindergarten in the intervention group [M = 2.286, SE = 0.07] was significantly higher than that in the control group [M = 2.027, SE = 0.08], p < 0.01.

Table 11: Repeated measures MANOVA on the composite variable of the six activities

Effect		Value	*F*	H *df*	Error *df*	*Sig.*	η_p^2
Tests	Pillai's Trace	0.395	25.313	5.000	194.000	<0.001	0.395
tests x group	Pillai's Trace	0.084	3.541	5.000	194.000	0.004	0.084
Time	Pillai's Trace	0.810	842.702	1.000	198.000	<0.001	0.810
time x group	Pillai's Trace	0.190	46.413	1.000	198.000	<0.001	0.190
tests x time	Pillai's Trace	0.092	3.940	5.000	194.000	0.002	0.092
tests x time x group	Pillai's Trace	0.167	7.789	5.000	194.000	<0.001	0.167

Paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean difference between pre- and post- assessments in intervention and control groups respectively for the composite variable of emergent literacy activities at kindergarten. As Table 12 shows, in the intervention group, the mean score of the composite variable of all six emergent literacy activities increased from $M = 1.65$, $SE = 0.08$ at pre-assessment to $M = 2.92$, $SE = 0.07$ at post-assessment, and the difference was statistically significant, $t\ (106) = 23.76$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.55$. The effect size (> 0.5) was medium. In the control group, the mean score of the composite variable of all six activities was $M = 1.63$, $SE = 0.09$ at pre-assessment and $M = 2.42$, $SE = 0.08$ at post-assessment, and the increase was also statistically significant, $t\ (92) = 17.62$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.43$. The effect size (< 0.5) was close to medium.

Table 12: Paired samples t-tests on within group difference in intervention and control groups for the composite variable of emergent literacy activities at kindergarten

	Time points	Mean	Std. Error	Mean difference	Std. Error	*Sig*
Intervention group	Pre-	1.65	0.080	1.266*	0.048	<0.001
	Post-	2.92	0.072			
Control group	Pre-	1.63	0.086	0.785*	0.052	<0.001
	Post-	2.42	0.077			

Separate one-way ANOVA repeated measures were performed to undertake group comparison on pre-/post- change to the mean score of individual emergent literacy activities at kindergarten. As Table 13 shows, for Activity 1, the mean score in the intervention group increased significantly from pre- (M=1.62, $SD = 0.96$) to post- ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.87$). The mean score in the control group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.62, $SD = 0.98$) to post- ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.92$. The group difference across time was

significant, F (1,199) = 376.00, $p < 0.001$, partial eta squared = 0.654. The effect size (> 0.14) was large. For Activity 2, the mean score in the intervention group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.54, SD = 0.92) to post- (M = 2.68, SD = 0.86). The mean score in the control group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.29, SD = 0.67) to post- (M = 2.22, SD = 0.75). The group difference across time was significant, F (1,199) = 449.40, $p < 0.001$, partial eta squared = 0.693. The effect size (> 0.14) was large. For Activity 3, the mean score in the intervention group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.79, SD = 1.27) to post- (M = 3.23, SD = 1.02. The mean score in the control group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.67, SD = 1.04) to post- (M = 2.30, SD = 1.02). The group difference across time was significant, F (1,199) = 323.13, $p < 0.001$, partial eta squared = 0.619. The effect size (> 0.14) was large. For Activity 4, the mean score in the intervention group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.75, SD = 1.07) to post- (M = 2.91, SD = 1.00).

Table 13: One-way repeated measure ANOVA for group comparison on pre-post- change to the mean score of individual emergent literacy activities

Activity	Group	Time points	*M*	*SD*	*F* (1,199)	*p*	η_p^2
Activity 1	Intervention	Pre-	1.62	0.96	376.00	< 0.001	0.654
		Post-	2.90	0.87			
	Control	Pre-	1.62	0.98			
		Post-	2.32	0.92			
Activity 2	Intervention	Pre-	1.54	0.92	449.40	< 0.001	0.693
		Post-	2.68	0.86			
	Control	Pre-	1.29	0.67			
		Post-	2.22	0.75			
Activity 3	Intervention	Pre-	1.79	1.27	323.13	< 0.001	0.619
		Post-	3.23	1.02			
	Control	Pre-	1.67	1.04			
		Post-	2.30	1.02			
Activity 4	Intervention	Pre-	1.75	1.07	287.28	< 0.001	0.591
		Post-	2.91	1.00			
	Control	Pre-	1.74	1.06			
		Post-	2.47	0.90			
Activity 5	Intervention	Pre-	1.44	0.82	449.21	< 0.001	0.693
		Post-	2.80	0.87			
	Control	Pre-	1.57	1.02			
		Post-	2.48	0.86			
Activity 6	Intervention	Pre-	1.79	0.97	345.30	< 0.001	0.634
		Post-	2.99	0.85			
	Control	Pre-	1.91	1.07			
		Post-	2.72	0.85			

The mean score in the control group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.74, SD = 1.06) to post- (M = 2.47, SD = 0.90). The group difference across time was significant, F (1,199) = 287.28, p < 0.001, partial eta squared = 0.591. The effect size (> 0.14) was large. For Activity 5, the mean score in the intervention group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.44, SD = 0.82) to post- (M = 2.80, SD = 0.87). The mean score in the control group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.57, SD = 1.02) to post- (M = 2.48, SD = 0.86). The group difference across time was significant, F (1,199) = 449.21, p < 0.001, partial eta squared = 0.693. The effect size (> 0.14) was large. For Activity 6, the mean score in the intervention group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.79, SD = 0.97) to post- (M = 2.99, SD = 0.85). The mean score in the control group increased significantly from pre- (M =1.91, SD = 1.07) to post- (M = 2.72, SD = 0.85). The group difference across time was significant, F (1,199) = 345.30, p < 0.001, partial eta squared = 0.634. The effect size (> 0.14) was large.

Figures 2-7 illustrate group comparison on the change of the mean score from pre- to post-assessment for each of the six activities.

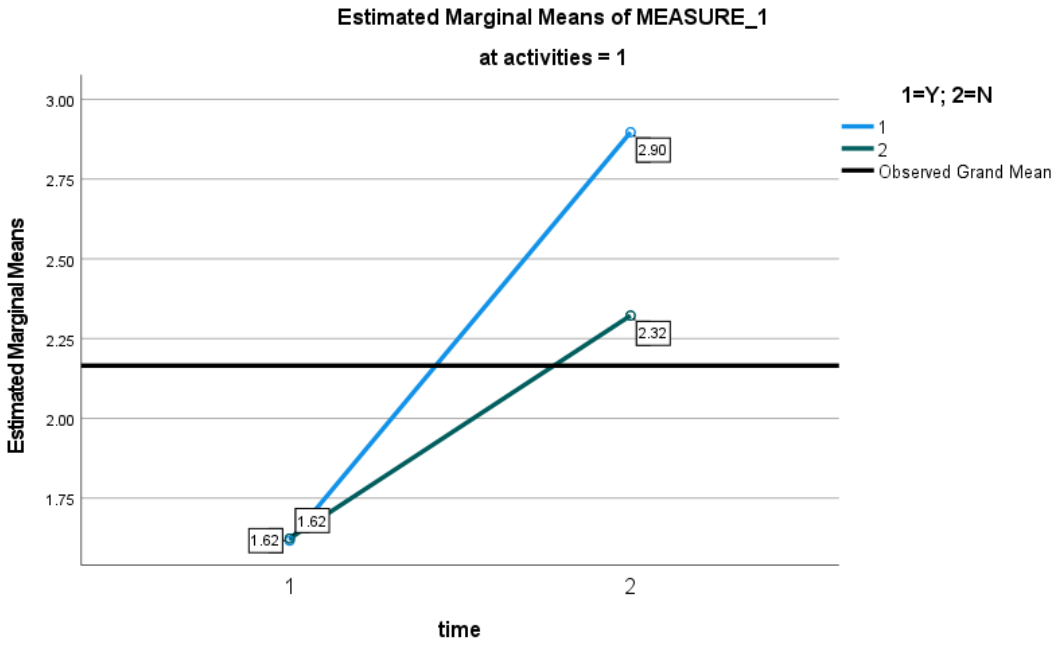

Figure 2: Pre- and post-intervention scores of child activity 1 of intervention and control groups

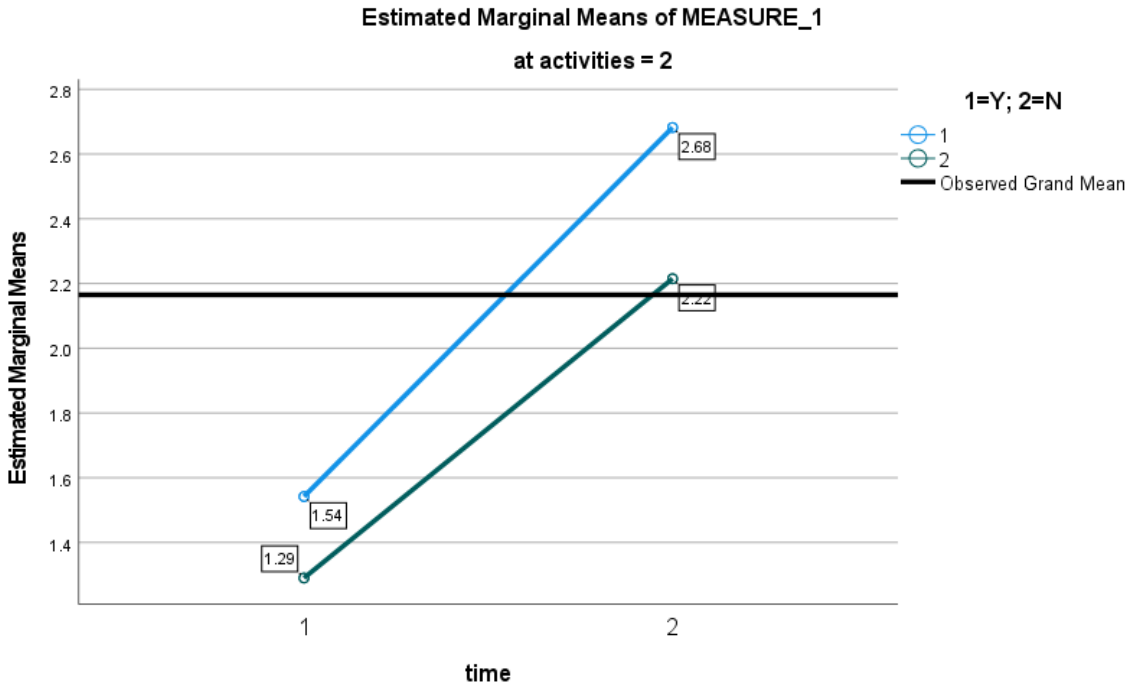

Figure 3: Pre- and Post-intervention Scores of Child Activity 2 of Intervention and Control Groups

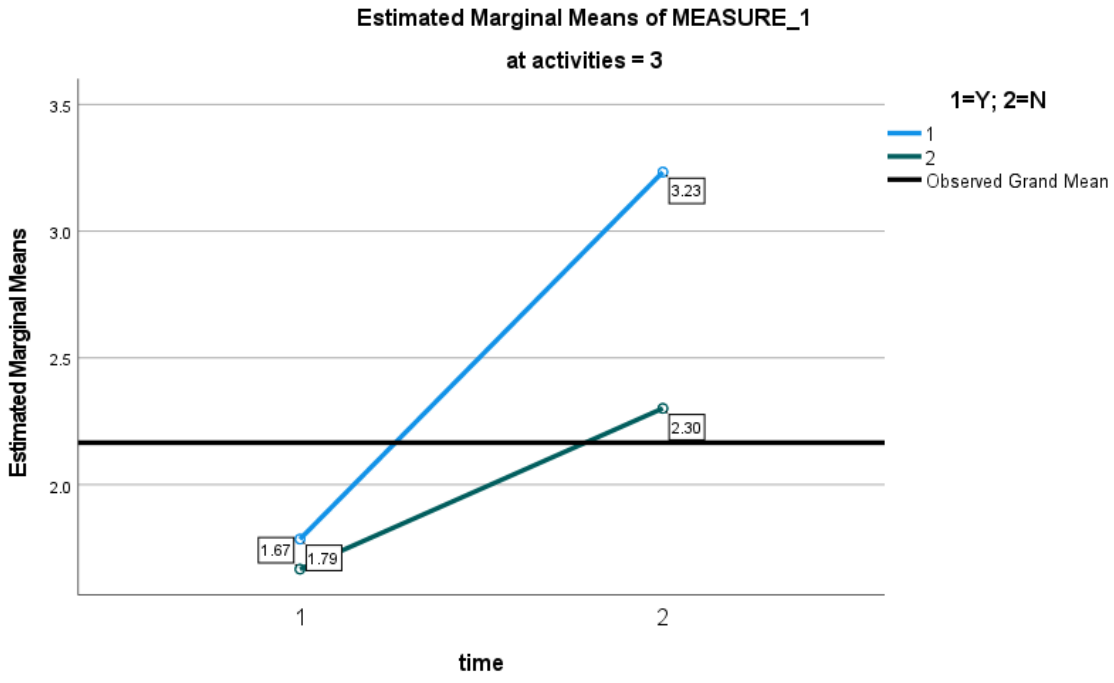

Figure 4: Pre- and post-intervention scores of child activity 3 of intervention and control groups

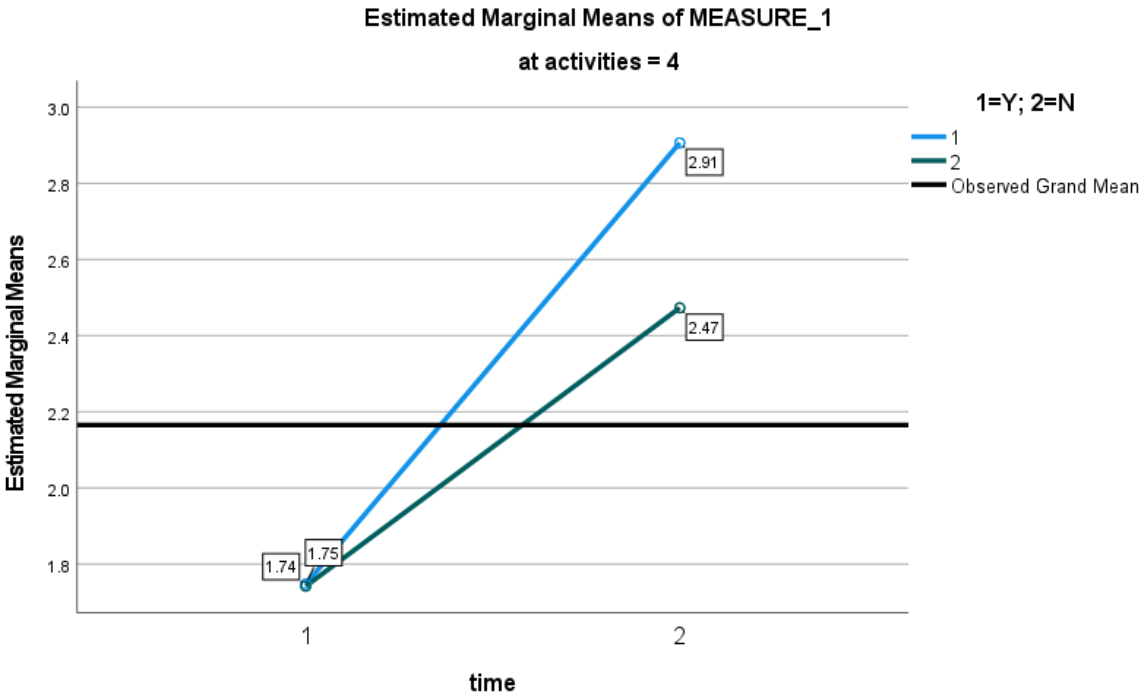

Figure 5: Pre- and post-intervention scores of child activity 4 of intervention and control groups

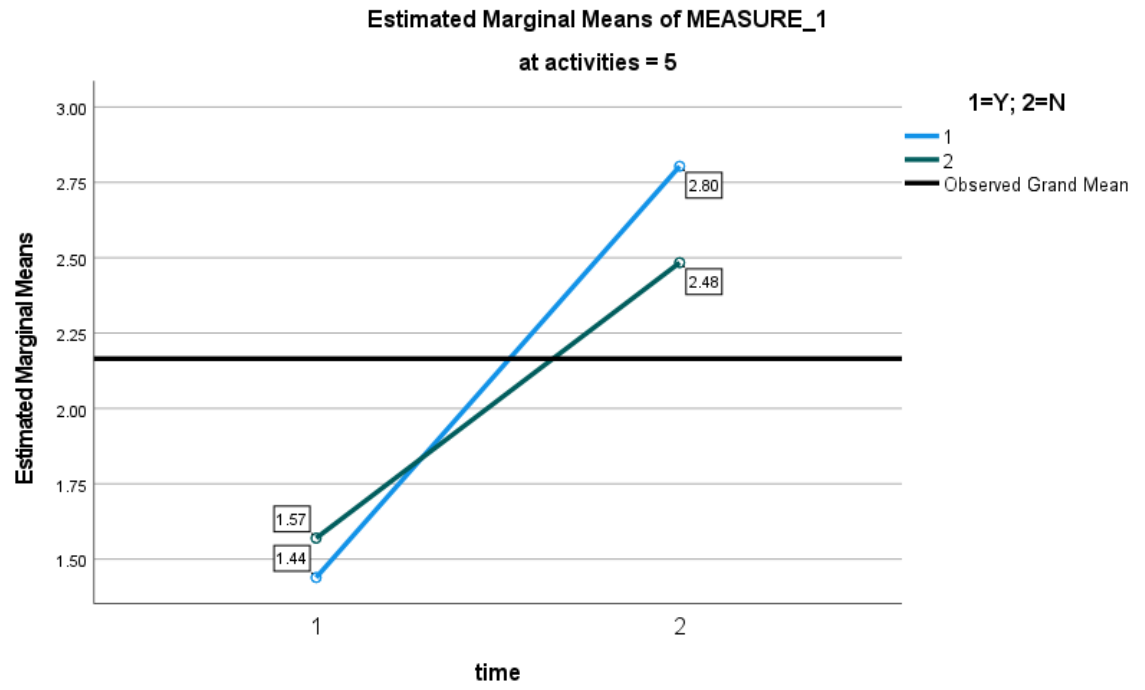

Figure 6: Pre- and post-intervention scores of child activity 5 of intervention and control groups

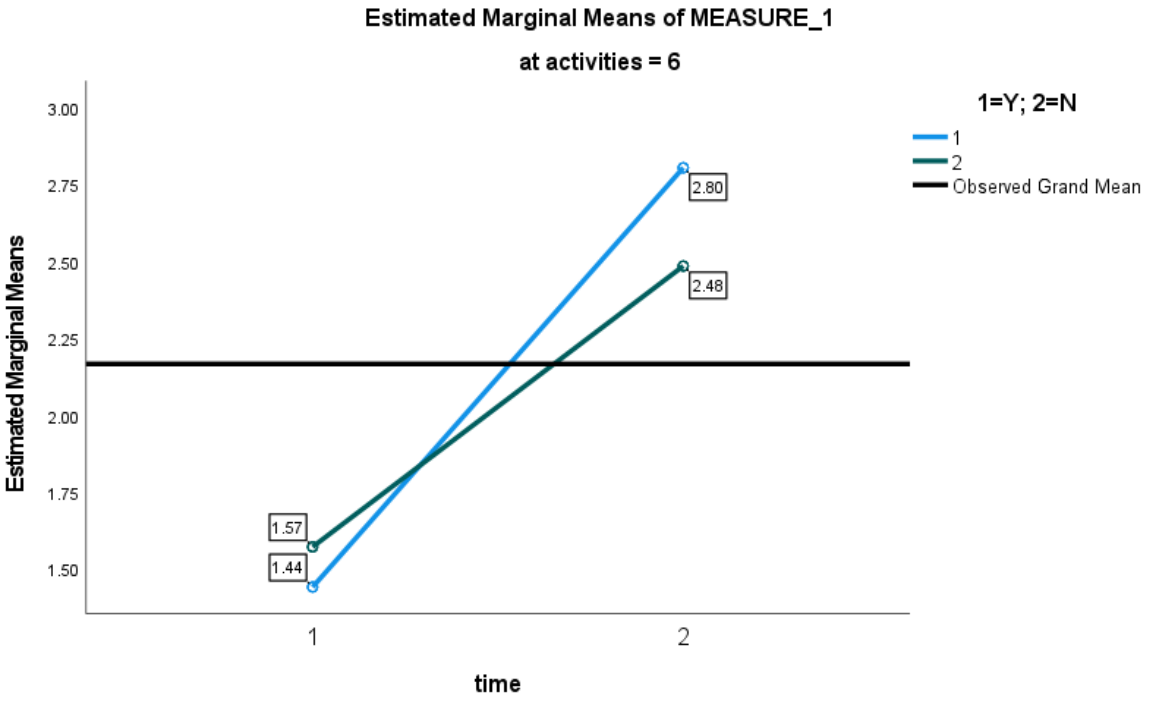

Figure 7: Pre- and post-intervention scores of child activity 6 of intervention and control groups

One-way repeated measures MANOVA were performed to examine whether there was any significant group difference in the change to the composite outcome variable of the child's learning English at home (i.e., the child's interest in learning English, the child's act to learn English) as a result of the intervention. As Table 14 shows, main effect of group and time in predicting learning English at home was statistically insignificant, F (1,146) = 0.539, p = 0.464, partial eta squared = 0.004. The effect size (< 0.01) was insignificant. Overall, the difference between the intervention and control groups in the mean change from the pre-assessment to post-assessment was not statistically significant, mean difference = 0.079, SE = 0.146, p = 0.591.

Paired samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean difference between pre- and post- assessments in intervention and control groups respectively for the composite variable of learning English at home. As Table 15 shows, in the intervention group, the mean score of the composite variable for learning English at home increased from M = 3.81, SE = 0.10 at pre-assessment to M = 4.16, SE = 0.10 at post-assessment, and the

difference was statistically significant, t (76) = 7.54, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's d = 0.40. The effect size (< 0.5) was close to medium.

Table 14: Repeated measures MANOVA on the composite variable of learning EFL at home

Effect		Value	*F*	H *df*	Error *df*	*sig.*	η_p^2
Tests	Pillai's Trace	0.000	0.009	1.000	146.000	0.924	0.000
tests x group	Pillai's Trace	0.000	0.073	1.000	146.000	0.788	0.000
Time	Pillai's Trace	0.349	78.401	1.000	146.000	<0.001	0.349
time x group	Pillai's Trace	0.042	6.398	1.000	146.000	0.012	0.042
tests x time	Pillai's Trace	0.002	0.226	1.000	146.000	0.635	0.002
tests x time x group	Pillai's Trace	0.004	0.539	1.000	146.000	0.464	0.004

In the control group, the mean score of the composite variable of learning English at home was M = 3.81, SE = 0.11 at pre-assessment and M = 4.00, SE = 0.12 at post-assessment, and the increase was also statistically significant, t (70) = 4.84, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's d = 0.33. The effect size (< 0.5) was small.

Table 15: Paired samples t-tests on within group difference in intervention and control groups for the composite variable of learning English at home

	Time points	Mean	Std. Error	Mean difference	Std. Error	*Sig.*
Intervention group	Pre-	3.81	0.10	0.34	0.046	<0.001
	Post-	4.16	0.10			
Control group	Pre-	3.81	0.086	0.19	0.039	<0.001
	Post-	4.00	0.077			

However, as Table 16 shows, separate one-way ANOVA repeated measures revealed that the effect of group and time in predicting the mean score of the child's act to learn English at home was significant, F (1,146) = 6.363, p = 0.013, partial eta squared = 0.042, while the effect of group and time in predicting the mean score of the child's interest in learning English at home was insignificant, F (1,146) = 2.856, p = 0.093, partial eta squared = 0.019. The effect sizes of both analyses ($0.01 < \eta_p^2 < 0.06$) were small.

For the child's interest in learning English at home, the mean score in the intervention group increased significantly from pre- (M =3.82, SD = 0.94) to post- (M = 4.16, SD = 0.85). The mean score in the control group increased from pre- (M =3.80, SD = 1.00) to post- (M = 4.01, SD = 0.98). For the child's act to learn English at home, the mean score in the intervention group increased from pre- (M =3.80, SD = 0.90) to post- (M = 4.15, SD = 0.85).

Table 16: One-way repeated measures ANOVA for group comparison on pre-/post-change to the mean score of the child's learning English at home

Activity	Group	Time points	M	SD	F (1,146)	p	η_p^2
Interest	Intervention	Pre-	3.82	0.94	2.856	0.093	0.019
		Post-	4.16	0.85			
	Control	Pre-	3.80	1.00			
		Post-	4.01	0.98			
Act	Intervention	Pre-	3.81	0.90	6.363	0.013	0.042
		Post-	4.15	0.85			
	Control	Pre-	3.83	0.96			
		Post-	3.99	1.01			

Figures 8-9 shows the changes of the mean score of each of the two outcome variables on learning English at home from pre- to post- between the intervention and control group.

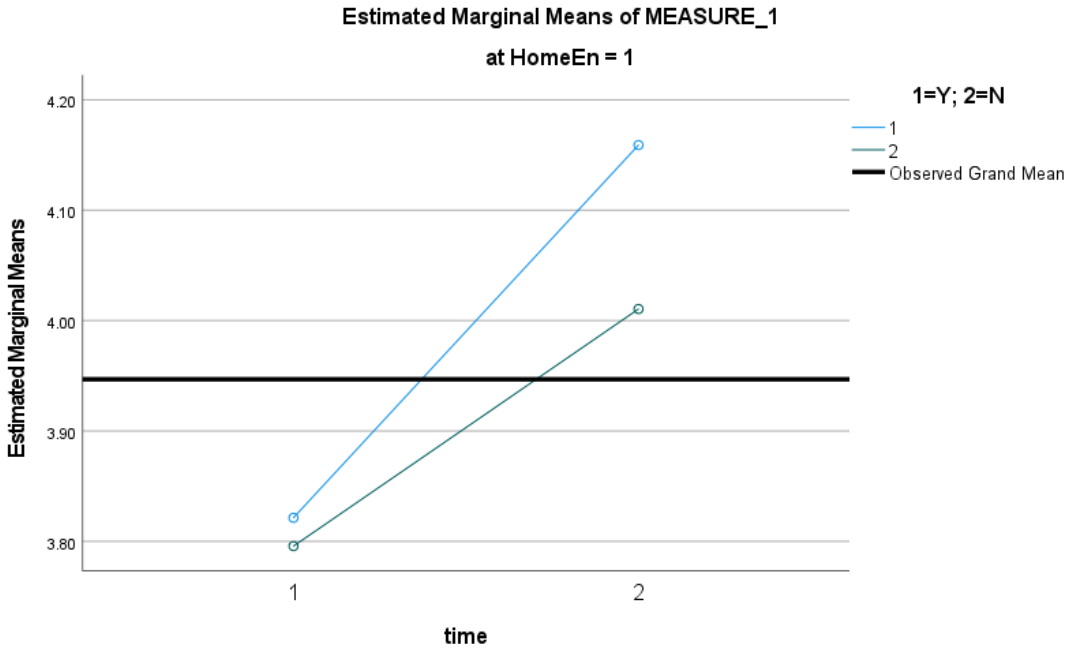

Figure 8: Pre- and post-intervention scores of the child's interest in learning english at home of intervention and control groups

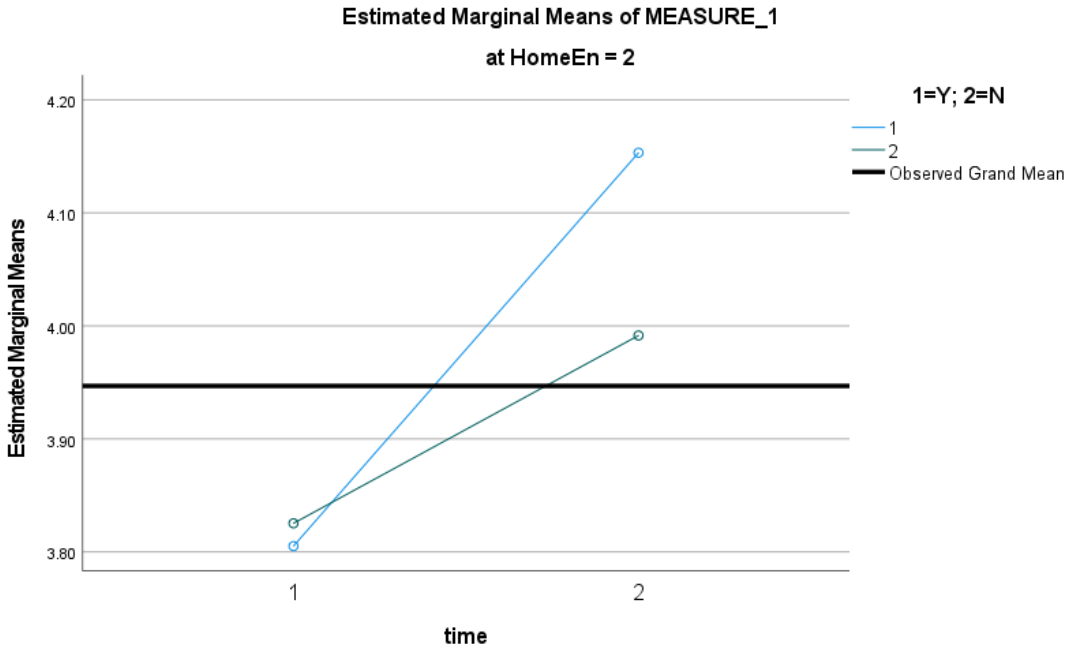

Figure 9: Pre- and post-intervention scores of the child's act to learn english at home of intervention and control groups

6.6 Summary

General linear model repeated measures were used to examine whether there was significant difference in the change of each composite outcome variable between the intervention group and control groups. Main effect of group (intervention and control) and time (pre- and post-) in predicting the mean score of the composite of emergent literacy activities at kindergarten was significant, F (5,194) = 7.789, p <0.001, partial eta squared = 0.167. Overall, the mean score for activities in the intervention group (M = 2.286, SE = 0.07) was significantly higher than that in the control group (M = 2.027, SE = 0.08), p < 0.001. Main effect of group and time in predicting the mean score of the composite of two types of learning English at home (interest in learning English, act to learn English) was insignificant, F (1,146) = 0.539, p = 0.464, partial eta squared = 0.004. However, separate one-way ANOVA repeated measures revealed that the effect of group and time in predicting the mean score of the child's act to learn English at home was significant, F (1,146) = 6.363, p = 0.013, partial eta squared = 0.042, while the effect of group and time in predicting the mean score of the child's interest in learning English at home was insignificant, F (1,146) = 2.856, p = 0.093, partial eta squared = 0.019.

The quantitative data revealed that the intervention group scored significantly higher than the control group on both the child's emergent literacy activities at the kindergarten as well as the child's act to learn English at home.

Chapter 7: Qualitative Findings

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis of the study that addressed the second research question. The findings from the qualitative analysis include thematized and categorized narratives (i.e., informal conversation, fieldnotes, reflective journals) and visuals (i.e., photos, videos, work samples).

The qualitative data were thematized and categorized, and two overarching themes emerged: fidelity of intervention, and effect of intervention. Each of the two themes were substantiated by several categories and subcategories.

7.1 Introduction

Although the variety of qualitative data may generate more themes, two overarching themes were found to be particularly relevant to the research questions. "Fidelity of intervention" refers to the extent to which the intervention program delivered was identical to what was intended and developed. Before investigating into the effect of certain intervention program, it is important to ascertain that the intervention program has actually been delivered according to the prescribed standards, strategies, and outcomes. If the intervention program is not "real", "authentic", or "correct", then it becomes meaningless to evaluate the effect of the intervention program. In this sense, considerable attention was paid to "fidelity of intervention" when analyzing the qualitative data. Comparatively, it is much easier to understand the importance of the theme "effect of intervention" which is pivotal to this study.

7.2 Theme 1. Fidelity of Intervention

Four categories were captured which demonstrate that the intervention was delivered as planned to the intervention classes: storybook reading, dramatization, multimodality, and collaboration. Below presents each of the categories, with each category illustrated by one or more excerpts from respective forms of data.

7.2.1 Category 1: Storybook Reading

The category is a label that broadly includes a range of activities centered on storybook reading, such as: the teacher reading the story, the children imitating the sound,

the children drawing the pictures and writing the English words, and the teacher's scaffolding. The category was captured through the researcher's classroom observation as below fieldnotes denote.

> The teacher places some copies of storybooks in front of the children along with some blank sheets of paper and crayons. She starts to read the story in the book. She engages the children with the activity by asking them to imitate the sound of the character. The children are invited to look through the book and draw pictures or write some words. The teacher keeps using prompt questions that require the children to fill the gaps, for example, to complete the sentence "Oh no, I lost more … …" She also uses open-ended prompts by asking the children to guess what will happen next [Fieldnote 4 (A_KG1-6) Little Bear's Fence].
>
> Children are floor seated in circle around the teacher, they are facing the teacher who sat on a chair holding her big book. The teacher introduces the story book and goes through the parts of the story asking the children about the title, picture, writing, characters in the pictures, and colors they recognize, then asks the children to guess what they think the story is about and what will happen [Fieldnote 1 (F_KG2-1) Little Bear's Fence].
>
> The Teacher reads the story and uses all the voice intonation that will help the children to interact with the story. The teacher uses the pictures to elicit the children' understanding as she reads through [Fieldnote 1 (I_KG2-1) The Greedy Lion].
>
> During the 45-min storytelling session, about 10 min was spent on reading one story, about 20 min on retelling the story with the participation of the children. The teacher then asks the children to bring their own copy of the story book and go on their own exploration, reading and storytelling. The children are trying to copy voices and read. [teacher reading – children retelling – children exploration] [Fieldnote 1 (F_KG2-1) A Homeless Snail].

7.2.2 Category 2: Dramatization

The category highlights the teacher's intentional dramatization of the stories, which is evident from the two fieldnotes below:

> After the first time when the teacher reads the story for the children, she opens the book and starts to retell the story by pointing out the events that happens. With the participation of the children, she puts emphasis on the voice tone and facial expression, as well as on the use of body language and puppets or soft toys [Fieldnote 5 (A_KG1-1) Hanging a Bell on the Cat].

> The children are very close to the teacher when she holds the book facing them. The teacher introduces some puppet characters from the story with the help of other teachers. She starts with telling the story in acting. She uses her actual voice to speak the narrator. She changes her voice with the mood state of other characters (happy, sad, surprised, angry …) [Teacher acting with puppets – dramatizing with voice variations] [Fieldnote 2 (A_KG2-1) Hanging a Bell on the Cat].

7.2.3 Category 3: Multimodality

The category refers to the teacher's effort to make use of multiple modes of teaching and learning, which is collectively illustrated by three fieldnotes below,

> The teacher starts to seat the children in a circle around her to listen to the story. The first time she reads the story with no pictures. Neither she shows the book, nor does she use puppets. She reads for children only. (When asked for a reason, she says that she wants the children to listen and imagine the events - by eliciting some emotional and action words such as jump, walk, run, laugh, angry, hungry [Fieldnote 5 (F_KG2-1) A Homeless Snail].

> The teacher provides sheets of papers in the writing/reading and drawing centers for the children to produce paperwork. The children are free to choose the activity they prefer [Children drawing – practice writing/imitating] [Fieldnote 5 (A_KG2-1) A Homeless Snail].

> The teacher then asks the children to repeat what they have heard with the voice intonation. The teacher leaves the puppets with the puppet theater and some reachable copies of the book to use while acting the story. The children practice some phrases of anger, surprised and happy [The teacher allowing the children to practice acting – following the example of the teacher] [Fieldnote 2 (I_KG2-1) The Greedy Lion].

Below video transcript also illustrates the category -

> Teacher: Let's count the carrots. Put your fingers on the carrot, one, two, … how many carrots do we have? [ask the child to use their finger to point at each of the carrots].
>
> Children: five.
>
> Teacher: show me five fingers.

7.2.4 Category 4: Collaboration

The category foregrounds the teacher's effort to facilitate communication and cooperation between the teacher and the children as well as among the children. The teacher's invitation to participate is evident from the below two fieldnotes:

> After introducing the story to the children, the teacher retells the story, expecting the children to interact when her voice changes or when there is a repetition in the sentence, so the children are participating in retelling the story. The children are left for more drawing and acting activities [Fieldnote 4 (KG2) Little Bear's Fence].

> The children are asked to answer questions of dialogic reading prompts such as recalling prompts (e.g., "what happened to the bear after he found out that he lost carrots?" The teacher asks wh- prompt questions (e.g., who, what, where, when, why, and how). The teacher also asks distancing prompt questions that require the children to relate the content to their own personal experience (e.g., "Can you tell me about a time you felt happy like the bear?") [Dialogic reading prompts] [Fieldnote 6 (KG two) Hanging a Bell on the Cat].

In Figure 10, a message in English is shown to the children, “You have 30 second to pick a picture and find your group.” The photo illustrates that the teacher was making conscious effort to facilitate collaboration among the children.

Figure 10: I can understand the instruction in English (photo)

7.3 Theme 2. Effect of Intervention

The theme “effect of intervention” was substantiated by three categories: acquired skill, developed interest, and expressed love. The three categories are illustrated by the children’s work samples, video clips and photos. The videos and photos were taken predominantly by the classroom teachers as part of pedagogical documentation. The classroom teachers shared the videos and photos with the researcher, and gave consent for the de-identified photos and the encrypted videos to be included in the dissertation.

7.3.1 Category 1: Acquired Skill

The category features all the skills that the children are acquiring as a result of the intervention program, including both oral and written skills in relation to the English stories, for example, retelling the story and matching the picture, text, meaning, and oral. Because of the dramatic storytelling sessions, the children were able to produce significant amount and quality of oral and written English which may otherwise be impossible.

In Figure 11, one child has just finished drawing and writing and is showing his work to the teacher. The words read, “Fence Bear’s Little”, and the head of the bear is drawn. He looks proud of his work. The handwriting looks great although the word order of the story title is reversed, that is, it should read, “Little Bear’s Fence”. Apparently, the handwriting has been achieved through copying that in the storybook.

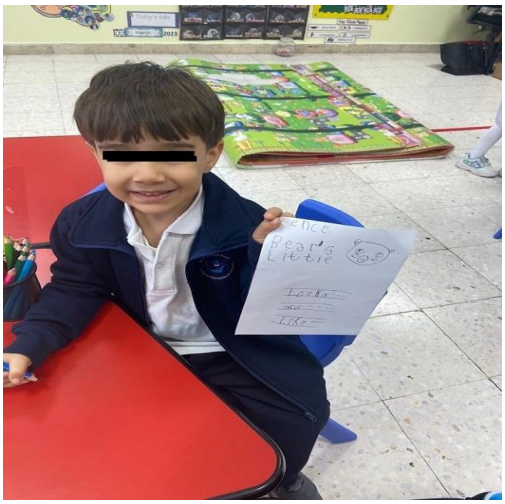

Figure 11: I can write Little Bear’s Fence (photo)

In Figure 12, a rabbit, a story character, has been drawn by a child. More relevantly, the word “rabbit” as well as the child’s name have been written with correct spelling. It is interesting to note that the child focuses on “rabbit”, and the child is doing well in both drawing (the rabbit) and handwriting (the name of the animal with capital “R”) in English.

Figure 12: I can write “rabbit” (work sample)

Figure 13 show the characters of the story Hanging a Bell on the Cat. Three small mice and one big cat are drawn, and the English words “cat” and “mice” are written correctly.

Figure 13: I can write “cat” and “mice” (work sample)

Figure 14 shows the image of a bear, carrots, and fence. In addition, the photo shows handwriting of several English words that are part of the story.

Figure 14: I can write Little Bear's Fence (work sample)

Figure 15 shows the image of a big snail and the handwritten "A Homeless Snail" and the name of the child. There are a couple of mistakes, namely, "Homeless" is written into "Homeleoss", and "Snail" is written into "Shail".

Figure 15: A homeless snail (1) (work sample)

Figure 16 shows a big snail drawn in beautiful colors. The child's name and the story title "A Homeless Snail" are clearly written.

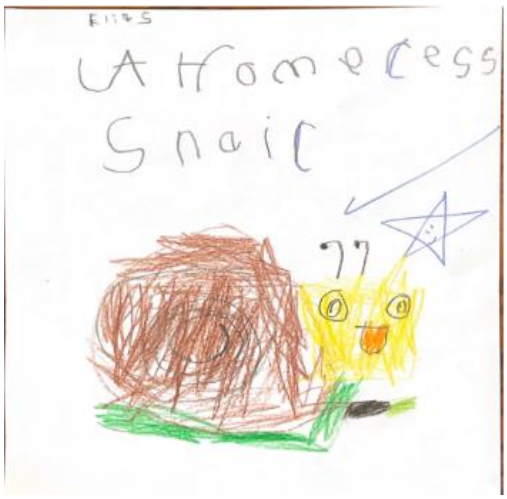

Figure 16: A homeless snail (2) (work sample)

Figure 17 shows the image of a cat and two mice as well as handwriting of several English words, namely, the child's name, "hangiine" ("hanging"), "the", "on", "bell", and "mice".

Figure 17: Hang the Bell on the Cat (work sample)

Apart from the fieldnotes and photos as presented above, video clips also demonstrate that through the dramatic storytelling intervention sessions, the children are learning and have acquired many skills related to emergent literacy in EFL. Video clips are transcribed verbatim and relevant excerpts are quoted below.

Video 1 shows that, with scaffolding provided by the teacher, the little girl is able to read the story Little Bear's Fence and point at the text of the line of the story and retell. After the teacher has read the first part of the sentence, the girl is able to say the rest of the sentence.

Girl: I have made a fence for my carrot.

Teacher: or the rabbit …

Girl: or the rabbit will steal them.

Teacher: very good.

Girl: [Turns the page] oh no …

Teacher: I lost …

Girl: I lost some carrots!

Teacher: The rabbit took them.

Girl: the rabbit took them. Ha ha ha, I can carrot …

Teacher: I can jump over …

Girl: I can jump over …

Teacher: the low fence.

[Video 1 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://youtube.com/shorts/-oz4llNErsE]

Video 2 demonstrates how the child is able to retell the story through puppet show with the teacher's scaffolding.

Rabbit: I can walk between the fence gaps.

Rabbit: Oh, no, …

Teacher: I lost more …

Rabbit: I lost more carrots.

Teacher: ha ha ha, my baby …

Rabbit: My baby can get then easily.

Teacher: Very good!

[Video 2 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/zvL1SNuJht8]

Video 3 shows that the child is able to create and innovate by using a word (i.e., “steal”) that is different to what is taught by the teacher.

Child: I will make a fence for my carrot.

Teacher: Oh, I lost …

Child: Oh, I lost my carrots. The rabbit took them and steal them.

Teacher: yeah, I can … ha ha ha

Child: Ha ha ha,

Teacher: [put outside] I can jump …

Child: I can jump over

Teacher: over the low …

Child: over the low fence.

Teacher: Very good!

[Video 3 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://youtube.com/shorts/76v_2qiWl5U]

In Video 4, a child is very confident to retell the story The Greedy Lion accompanied by his own puppet show. The child’s storytelling is creative and involves changes to the plot and storyline.

[prop: toy lion]

Teacher: story?

Child: yeah.

Teacher: About what?

Child: About the lion and the bear.

Teacher: Okay, can you tell me first of all the lion? What is the story?

Child: yeah.

Child: Hello guys, I am a lion, I can run, I can eat meat, I can eat the rabbit, I can eat the meat,

Teacher: Are you a wild or a domestic animal?

Child: I am a wild animal,

Teacher: Very good, give him a clap!

Children: applauses.

Teacher: okay do you want to talk about the bear? [with the toy bear]

Child: [laugh] yeah.

Teacher: hold the bear.

[now the child wears two hand puppets]

Teacher: (to all children) listen!

Child: once upon a time there is a lion, and a bear, the bear likes to eat the meat, [laugh - enjoyment] and the lion likes to eat the meat,

Teacher: were they fighting? Did they fight?

Child: no.

Teacher: what happened in the story?

Child: so

[Video 4 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://youtu.be/kUo40PU2Bys]

The child's storytelling is creative since he includes in one story both lion and bear. None of the stories that are taught includes both a lion and a bear!

Video 5 features the child's acting skill. He acts well with the help of the costume – a lion suit.

Child: I am a lion, I eat meat,

Teacher: Are you a wild or a domestic anyway?

Child: I'm a wild animal. I live in the jungle.

Teacher: how do you move?

Child: I can run.

Teacher: excellent!

[Video 5 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://youtu.be/fSPade7r-1w]

Video 6 documents the moment when the children are able to work in pair, share their reading, and discuss the story. A group of children are sitting on the floor turning the pages of the storybook. With the teacher's deliberate provision of the opportunity for the children to extend the storytelling activity, the children are capable of having dialogue in English.

[Video 6 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://youtu.be/ah50kOFBx28]

7.3.2 Category 2: Developed Interest

The category features the children's increased interest in the activities that were an integral element of emergent literacy in EFL. The category is illustrated by photos and videos.

In Figure 18, the teacher is showing the big storybook to the children, introducing the story "Little Bear's Fence" with all children in a U-shape on the mat. All children look very interested.

Figure 18: The big storybook (photo)

Video 7 demonstrates the child's strong interest in drawing the story characters which is greatly linked to their learning of EFL given the stories being in English.

Child: [shows her drawing]

Teacher: what is this?

Child: the bear here. [one side]

Teacher: yes, and what is this?

Child: rabbit. [the opposite side]

[Video 7 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://youtu.be/dxqu_DzEhZU]

Video 8 exemplifies the child's interest in drawing and writing the characters. One of the many benefits of a storybook is combination of drawing and writing.

Child: [shows his drawing – little bear's fence. Caption: Little Bears Fence. Akef – name of the child]

Teacher: what did you draw?

Child: the bear.

Teacher: the bear, and what are those?

Child: the fence, and the rabbit took the carrot,

Teacher: yeah,

The child draws the characters of the story: bear, rabbit, fence, carrots.

[Video 8 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://youtu.be/VE8yAedlLWc]

Video 9 shows the children's interest in group/shared reading with peers – the children's story reading activity is more of exploration and play-like adventure.

On the floor, a dozen of children, each with a big storybook, sitting on the floor, unfold the book on legs, one hand holding the book, another hand point at the words or picture, and read. The teacher provided individual guidance, "I can jump …". Every child is fully engaged with their own book. Since each child has a book, they are turning the page, and reading the story. Some children read, "I can jump …", some children laugh "ha ha ha". The seating is on the floor instead of the chair and table, making the activity more play-like.

[Video 9 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://youtu.be/05LdaMErfu4]

In Figure 19, about 10 children are sitting on the floor in pairs, and each pair are holding a book and discuss. The children show strong interest in storybook reading.

Figure 19: We are all interested in storybook reading (photo)

In Figure 20, four children (all boys) are sitting at the same table. [Clockwise]

Child A: Putting the book on the desk and read.

Child B: Holding the book up with the cover facing outward.

Child C: Putting the book at the table and pointing at the title "A homeless snail".

Child D: Holding up the book and reading.

Figure 20: We can all read (photo)

7.3.3 Category 3: Expressed Love

The category focuses on the moments when the children express love for the characters and associated learning. When it comes to children learning, love for the learning is more powerful than interest in terms of real learning in EFL.

In Figure 21, two boys are sitting on the floor. Child A is holding a little hand puppet rabbit, and Child B is holding a big toy bear in his arm. Both children look very excited. Meanwhile, the storybook is open and in front of them, with the pages of “Little bear’s fence” facing up. They love the storybook, they love the story characters, they love the English names of the characters, and they love the English storyline.

Figure 21: We love the characters! (photo)

In Figure 22, two girls are sitting at the table, each holding a toy character, tiny toy bear? And the book is opened at the page of “The greedy lion”. They show their love for the English storybook, and the English words.

Figure 22: We love the English storybook (photo)

In Figure 23, eight children are sitting on the mat, with the storybook open on their legs. They are concentrating on reading the story – A homeless snail - “hello turtle”, “hello frog”. They love the story. They love the English words.

Figure 23: We are concentrating on reading the story (photo)

In Figure 24, three children are sitting at a table, each having a storybook, and open at “Hanging a bell on the cat”. They are enjoying their own book.

Figure 24: Let’s read! (photo)

In Figure 25, three children (2 boys, 1 girl) are sitting on the sofa in the reding corner, each holding a book on their legs and read attentively. One of them looks up at the camera. They can't hide their love for the storybook and the English stories.

Figure 25: The English story is fascinating! (photo)

Video 10 shows the children's love for the dramatic stories, particularly drawing the story characters.

Children: [holding the storybook up above their head, showing his enjoyment and excitement.]

Teacher: from where we should start?

Children: here! Here!

[Video 10 is accessible to authorized viewers: https://youtu.be/KU4KyTHYbsA]

In Figure 26, a boy is drawing rabbit with pencil. The other character that he has drawn is covered with his left hand, maybe a bear? The child is smiling when drawing, showing great affection.

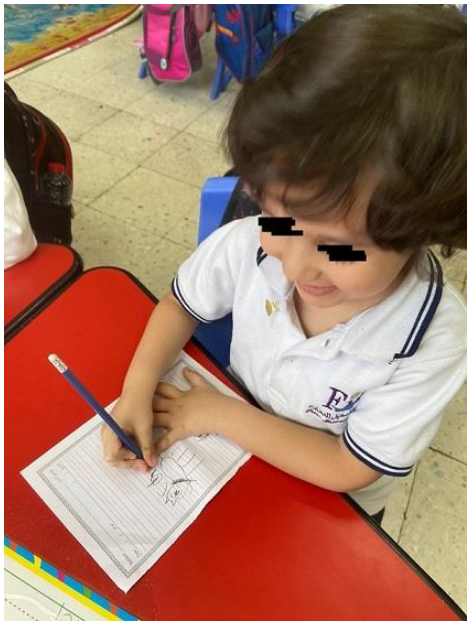

Figure 26: I can draw the rabbit and bear (photo)

In Figure 27, one boy is drawing the story characters, and the girl is also drawing, or is she writing?

Figure 27: I can draw the characters (photo)

In Figure 28, two girls are posing for photos when performing the puppet show, one holding a toy bear, one holding a toy bear too? The photo shows their love for acting the characters of the story.

Figure 28: We can act the story with puppets (photo)

In Figure 29, two boys are sitting at the table, with the storybook open at the page "Little bear's fence". Both children are drawing the character bear, and writing the words. They are copying the letters and are imitating the image bear attentively. Apparently, they love the English letters very much.

Figure 29: We can copy the letters (photo)

7.4 Summary

The qualitative data showed that the intervention program incorporated four principles of teaching of EFL, that is, storybook reading, dramatization, multimodality, and coloration. More remarkably, the qualitative data confirmed the improvement of the intervention group in three aspects which all constitute a part of emergent literacy in FEL. First, the intervention group acquired skills to write English words, to understand English instruction, to retell story, to create story, to act, and to share reading. Second, the children in the intervention group developed strong interests in the intervention sessions, in drawing the story characters, and in reading English book. Third, the children in the intervention group expressed love for the story characters, love for storybook, and love for the English letters.

Chapter 8: Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results and findings reported in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. Some relevant facets of methodology described in Chapter 5 will also be discussed. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, through reflecting on certain important facets of the methods, the chapter evaluates the robustness of this study so that some conclusions relating to the two research questions can be safely drawn. Second, through engaging the methods and the results and findings of this study with the extant literature, the chapter assembles the knowledge obtained from this study into the existing knowledge base so that theoretical contributions of this study can be claimed.

Taken both the quantitative results and the qualitative findings together, it can be concluded that the intervention program was effective in enhancing the kindergarten children's emergent literacy in EFL. These results and findings, along with the descriptions in the Methodology Section of the procedure of the action research (i.e., details of the intervention program), jointly address the two research questions.

8.2 Do Stories and Storytelling in English Suit VYLs of EFL?

In the non-EFL context, stories represent ritualized dialogue and provide rich opportunities for implicit and explicit language learning (Lenhart et al., 2020), and storybook reading, storytelling, and story acting allow children to create meaning of new words and establishing connections between spoken and written language by extracting information from the storyline, their prior knowledge, and their interaction with the teacher (Bravo, 2020; Cremin et al., 2018; Theobald, 2016). Literature in the non-EFL context has also confirmed the positive effect of picture-book-based drama activity (Mages, 2018). However, it is unknown in the extant literature to what extent such findings apply to VYLs of EFL who have very limited English vocabulary, specifically, to what extent the stories can be read and told by the VYLs in English. The present study provides evidence from the UAE context that stories, storybook reading, and dramatic storytelling can be an ideal tool of developing VYLs' emergent literacy in EFL.

Dramatic storytelling can be associated with specific pedagogical objective. For example, Vaahtoranta et al.'s (2018) Elaborative Storytelling approach provides more contextual information and draws children's attention to certain words without explicit teaching of words. The intervention program in the present study displayed similar pattern. In the present study, largely due to the repetitive nature of the storyline, the teachers in the intervention classes unanimously focused on certain English words such as "snail", "bear", "cat", "lion" which are the key characters of the stories. Notably, such a pedagogical focus was not planned or prescribed by the teacher but naturally chosen by the children. The children were fond of reading, writing, and saying those English words because those words represented or were associated with the characters that gave the children a lot of fun and enjoyment. In this sense, it can be confirmed that dramatization is the soul of the dramatic storytelling approach, particularly for VYLs of EFL.

To my knowledge, there has been little research, if not none, that focuses on the implementation of the dramatic storytelling approach in the English language for VYLs of EFL. Therefore, it is unknown how the dramatic storytelling approach is received among VYLs of EFL in other sociolinguistic contexts. Nevertheless, this study has confirmed that, in UAE kindergartens, the stories can be told in English to VYLs of EFL if certain conditions are met. The conditions on the quality of stories include: age appropriate language, age appropriate moral value, intriguing setting, captivating plot, patterned language, and repetitive phrases. The conditions on the delivery of the stories include: storybook with colorful illustrations and printed with good quality; dramatization; elaboration of meaning of words; engagement with the children; contextualization; repetition; tell and retell; story-acting; and inclusiveness (participation by all children). Therefore, whether stories and storytelling in English suit VYLs of EFL depends on what the stories are like and how they are delivered to the VYLs of EFL.

8.3 Why the Dramatic Storytelling Approach?

The choice of the dramatic storytelling-based program as the substance of the emergent literacy-driven intervention program was made on two assumptions, first, the storytelling in EFL approach was favored by the young children in UAE kindergartens; and second, the dramatic storytelling approach enhances emergent literacy in EFL.

There is no doubt that storytelling in the first language is liked by young children (Lenhart et al., 2020; Paley, 1990). However, in the EFL context and for the VYLs, it is not taken for granted that young children understand the dramatic stories which are written and told in a foreign language due to their very limited English. It was unknown before the intervention how much Arabic was needed when the teacher taught the dramatic stories in English. It was somewhat surprising that for the majority of the young learners, Arabic translation was not required. Thanks to the colorful pictures and the gestures and postures of the teacher, the very young learners of EFL had little difficulty understanding the dramatic stories in English. Therefore, their limited English was not a barrier in terms of appreciating the dramatic stories in EFL. Thus, the first assumption was met, that is, the storytelling in EFL approach was favored by the young children in UAE kindergartens. The photos and videos vividly show the young children's skills in, interest in, and love for all the facets of dramatic storytelling in EFL, including strong interest in acting the characters (e.g., Figure 29, Video 7), writing the English words (e.g., Video 8), and reading the storybook (e.g., Video 9).

The second assumption (i.e., the dramatic storytelling approach enhances emergent literacy in EFL) was also initially only a hypothesis. Although the link between story-based teaching and emergent literacy has been well established (e.g., Bravo, 2020; Suggate et al., 2021), it was unexplored whether such a link exists among the VYLs of EFL in the UAE context. Both quantitative and qualitative data confirmed existence of such a link, hence the second assumption being met.

Now that dramatic storytelling in EFL is favored by the young children, and it leads to improvement in young children's emergent literacy in EFL, it makes logical sense that dramatic storytelling was chosen as substantial content of the intervention program.

The dramatic storytelling-based intervention program is not only feasible and beneficial in terms of teaching of emergent literacy in EFL, it is also pedagogically desirable in ECE. Hands-on and play-based experiences are cornerstones of ECE. Research findings have consistently advocated for the importance of playful learning (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008), play-based teaching (ten Braak et al., 2019), and playful learning curriculum (Størksen et al., 2023) in early childhood education. In the UAE, the

educational authority explicitly promotes "gamification" of the early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2021). Some of the essential elements of children's play include: children making their own decisions, children being intrinsically motivated, children becoming immersed in the moment, being spontaneous rather than scripted, and being enjoyable (Drew et al., 2013). According to the findings from the qualitative data, dramatic storytelling in the intervention program of this study contains all these essential elements. It can be said that the dramatic storytelling approach manifested in the present study ensures that the learning experiences of the VYLs of EFL are play-based and conform to the officially promoted ECE discourses both in the UAE and in many other jurisdictions across the world.

8.4 What Should a Storytelling Approach Be Like?

Before the intervention, six key concepts were used as six pillars of the intervention program: emergent literacy, mediation, scaffolding, multimodality, storybook, and dramatization. The six concepts should be the key descriptors of the dramatic storytelling approach. The use of the concept "emergent literacy" (Auleear Owodally, 2015; Teale & Sulzby, 1986) defines the scope of young children's learning of EFL, including the aim and objective of the intervention program and measurement of the VYLs' progress in EFL. A fundamental gist of the concept of emergent literacy is the recognition of the utmost importance of attitudinal traits as part of emergent literacy itself instead of factors influencing emergent literacy (Kagan et al., 1995). In light of the concept, the intervention program aimed for four areas of the young children's emergent literacy: oral English, code-related skills, interest in EFL learning, and act to learn/use English at home. In line with the established practice of following the core curriculum skills for kindergartens as outlined by the government authority (Łockiewicz et al., 2018), the code-related skills of the kindergarten children were assessed with reference to National Unified K–12 Learning Standards Framework (Ministry of Education, 2014) and National English Language Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 2018). The concept of "emergent literacy" implicates age appropriateness and informality of the teaching of EFL. The pre- and post-assessment of emergent literacy of the present study incorporated key components of emergent literacy.

"Mediation" of understanding is another important concept of sociocultural perspective underpinning the intervention program. The mediating process transforms learning acts into higher order mental functions such as memory, attention, and learning strategies. Mediation of understanding was achieved through interaction between symbols, pictures, gestures, and activities as well as between peers (Gibbons, 2003). In the present study, there were ample opportunities during the intervention program for the young children to mediate their understanding and transform their learning acts into mental functions. The notion of mediation of understanding well explained the mechanism of the young children's acquisition of emergent literacy in EFL through the dramatic storytelling approach. The concept of scaffolding defines and prescribes the teacher's role. The video clips showed many examples of scaffolding. The teachers provided scaffolding by saying the first part of the sentence and then encouraging the children to continue. For example, the teacher said, "I lost …", and then the child said "I lost some carrots!" (Video 1). The notion of scaffolding is transformative as a pedagogical approach since it effectively rules out the teacher-centered direct instruction. The teacher who scaffolds would first of all observe the children closely, assess the children's current level of performance, and make the judgement on whether the children need support and what kind of support is needed. The notion of scaffolding also emphasized the autonomy and agency of the children in that it requires the teacher to stop scaffolding once the children no longer need it. Both concepts are under the umbrella of sociocultural perspective (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

The concept of multimodality defined the major melody of the intervention program. Throughout the program, there were constantly variations in the children's learning activities, from storybook listening, storybook exploration, storybook reading, to storybook acting, storybook retelling, story characters drawing, and story reproduction and creation. The wide range of activities afforded multimodal learning activities. Multimodal learning activities create better opportunities for EFL learning (Kaminski, 2019), and young children's multimodal meaning-making processes are evident in diverse cultural and linguistic settings, and are realized through a variety of activities and resources including drama, plots drawings, play, artifacts, pictures, and texts (Brown & Hao, 2022). In the dramatic storytelling activities in the present study, young children understood the storylines and made meaning through multiple sensory modes including picture, talk,

movement, gaze, sound, and variation in sound effects (Wessel-Powell et al., 2016). Notably, in the present study, such multimodality enhanced the mediation of understanding, which exemplifies how the six key concepts interact with each other.

In the present study, "storybook" was a pivotal concept since almost all learning activities were directly or indirectly related to the print copy of storybook. From the teacher introducing the story, telling the story, acting the story, to the children reading the story, retelling the story, drawing the story, and sharing the story, the print copy of the storybook was in the center of the stage. Storybook is the best vehicle for development of emergent literacy, including print awareness (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2014; Mol et al., 2009; Zucker et al., 2009), interactions and language use (Nyhout & O'Neill, 2013; Saracho, 2017), interactive reading and story recall (Greenhoot, Beyer & Curtis, 2014), and processing of book content (Petrie et al., 2023). In spite of the numerous reports on the benefits of digital book (e.g., Choi et al., 2020), the present study highlighted the extraordinary benefits and utmost importance of print book. As the qualitative data (i.e., observation, photos, videos) showed, a typical gesture of the children was to hold the storybook happily (e.g., Fieldnote 1, Video 9, Photo 8). This study demonstrated that, for very young learners of EFL, a print copy of storybook is essential for the smooth implementation of the dramatic storytelling approach regardless of the many benefits of e-storybook.

In the present study, dramatization was deliberately observed as one of the several principles of the intervention program. Dramatization is the re-creation of a story with the emphasis on spontaneity, action, and dialogue (Briggs & Wagner, 1979). In the intervention program, the young children naturally wanted to imitate the characters (Briggs & Wagner, 1979). Dramatization influenced the teaching process in a range of ways, including, for example, helping the children understand the plot and the feelings of the characters no matter whether they understand the words (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Mages, 2006; Papageorgiou, 2022). In the intervention program, the teachers first read out loud to young children, and then guided the children in dramatizing the stories by using their voices, gestures, and postures. Because of the enhanced understanding of the story through dramatization, according to the qualitative data, the young children in the present study were able to say quite a few of the story sentences in English. In the

intervention program in the present study, the teachers, along with the young children, read and told the stories in engaging and expressive ways, used facial expression and body language, and used costumes and props (Rahiem et al., 2020). The dramatization was also featured by the opportunity to fully imagine and dramatize specific aspects of the story, including the children pretending to be the characters as part of exploration (Mages, 2018).

The theme "fidelity of intervention" generated from the qualitative data corroborated the implementation of the above evaluated six concepts in the intervention program. The four categories of the theme (i.e., storybook reading, dramatization, multimodality, and collaboration) reflect the characteristics of the dramatic storytelling approach in the present study.

In summary, a dramatic storytelling approach in the context of emergent literacy in EFL should meet below criteria:

- Aiming for development of young children's emergent literacy in EFL;
- Opportunity for young children's mediation of understanding though interaction between artefacts, symbols and persons.
- Teacher's role of scaffolding.
- Multimodal learning experiences.
- Storybook-based learning activities.
- Dramatization of the stories and the learning process.

To evaluate whether the intervention program was delivered as it was intended for, the concept of "implementation fidelity" is greatly relevant. Implementation fidelity refers to the degree to which an intervention program is consistently delivered according to protocol (Borrelli, 2011; Carroll et al., 2007), and it is "a potential moderator of the relationship between interventions and their intended outcomes" (Carroll et al., 2007, p0.1). As above elaborated, the planned intervention program was successfully implemented in light of the concept of "implementation fidelity", which contributes to answer the first research question.

8.5 The Effectiveness of Storytelling Approach in Teaching EFL among VYLs

To answer the second research question (i.e., "To what extent does the dramatic storytelling approach improve emergent literacy in EFL among UAE kindergarten students?"), the predominant outcome indicators were quantitative, that is, oral skill, code-related skill, the child's interest in EFL, and the child's act to learn or use EFL at home. The four indicators were all about the child's knowledge, skill and attitude in EFL learning. Based on the findings of previous studies in other contexts, it was hypothesized that the intervention program would enhance the children's oral skill in EFL (Auleear Owodally, 2015), code-related skill (Auleear Owodally, 2015), interest in EFL (Kagan et al., 1995), and the child's act to use EFL at home.

Due to the nature of this study being quasi-experimental instead of experimental as such, qualitative assessment of the outcome variables is important. The qualitative data corroborated the quantitative results, specifically, the theme "effect of intervention" confirmed that the young children in the intervention group acquired a range of emergent literacy skills (e.g., writing English words, understanding English instruction, retelling the English story, reading the English book, and drawing the characters), developed strong interest in EFL (e.g., interest in the English storytelling sessions, interest in reading the English story, interest in drawing the English story characters), and deep love for the story characters, for the English storybook, and for the English letters. The qualitative findings on the outcome variables converged with the quantitative results, hence stronger evidence that the intervention program was effective in developing the young children's emergent literacy in EFL.

Although the present study was of pre-post intervention-control design, due to the combination of quasi-experiment and action research, it is necessary to examine the delivery of the intervention program, namely, the fidelity of the intervention program. The logic is: If the intervention program was not the one that was planned, then the effect of the intervention would not necessarily be that of the dramatic storytelling approach. Therefore, as part of the assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention program, fidelity of the intervention was examined. The qualitative data (i.e., fieldnotes, photos, videos) generated the theme of "fidelity of intervention" which foregrounded four

categories: storybook reading, dramatization, multimodality, and collaboration. The four categories were congruent with four of the six key concepts constituting the conceptual framework of the study – mediation, multimodality, storybook, and dramatization. The other two key concepts (i.e., emergent literacy, and scaffolding) were embedded in the theme "effect of intervention", for example, all the categories of "effect of intervention" belong to one or more dimensions of emergent literacy, and the videos not only showed the young children's emergent literacy skills, but also documented how the teacher scaffolded.

In summary, to gauge the effectiveness of the dramatic storytelling approach on young children's emergent literacy in EFL (Research Question 2), both outcome variables (i.e., indicators of the young children's emergent literacy) and delivery process (i.e., fidelity of intervention) were examined, and both quantitative data and qualitative data were used for the evaluation. Based on the quantitative analysis of the outcome variables and the qualitative analysis of the process variables, positive effect of the intervention program can be confirmed on young children's emergent literacy in EFL.

8.6 Formalizing the Dramatic Storytelling Approach

The storytelling approach as an intervention program in this study was evolving. Specifically, in the beginning stage of the action research, the planned approach was semi-structured rather than structured. Upon completion of the study, the practices of the intervention group had become much structured. For the purposes of theorization, dissemination, and potential replication, the intervention program needs to be formalized. The formalization is essentially to weave the individual elements of several dimensions of the dramatic storytelling approach into one operational model. It should be noted that the intervention model was underpinned by the sociocultural perspective, and therefore, the operational model takes into consideration of the diverse contexts and maintains its flexibility.

To formalize the dramatic storytelling approach, the researcher adopted a micro-curriculum approach which allows a micro-curriculum with a specific focus to be incorporated into the existing program structure (Ashraf & Alanezi, 2020). When constructing the micro-curriculum, the researcher used Tyler's classic four dimensions of

curriculum, namely, purpose, content, method, and effect (Kliebard, 1995; Schubert, 1986; Tyler, 1949). As a result, the dramatic storytelling approach can be framed into a four-dimension model as Figure 30 illustrates.

Figure 30 illustrates the four dimensions of the micro-curriculum of the dramatic storytelling approach, namely, the aim, the content, the method, and the effect. Developing and enhancing young children's emergent literacy in EFL is the aim. The content of the micro-curriculum is characteristic of four dramatic stories, namely, Little Bear's Fence, A Homeless Snail, Hanging a Bell on the Cat, and The Greedy Lion. The four stories are certainly adjustable depending on who the program providers are and what stories in English best suit the children in their kindergartens. The dimension of method of the micro-curriculum.

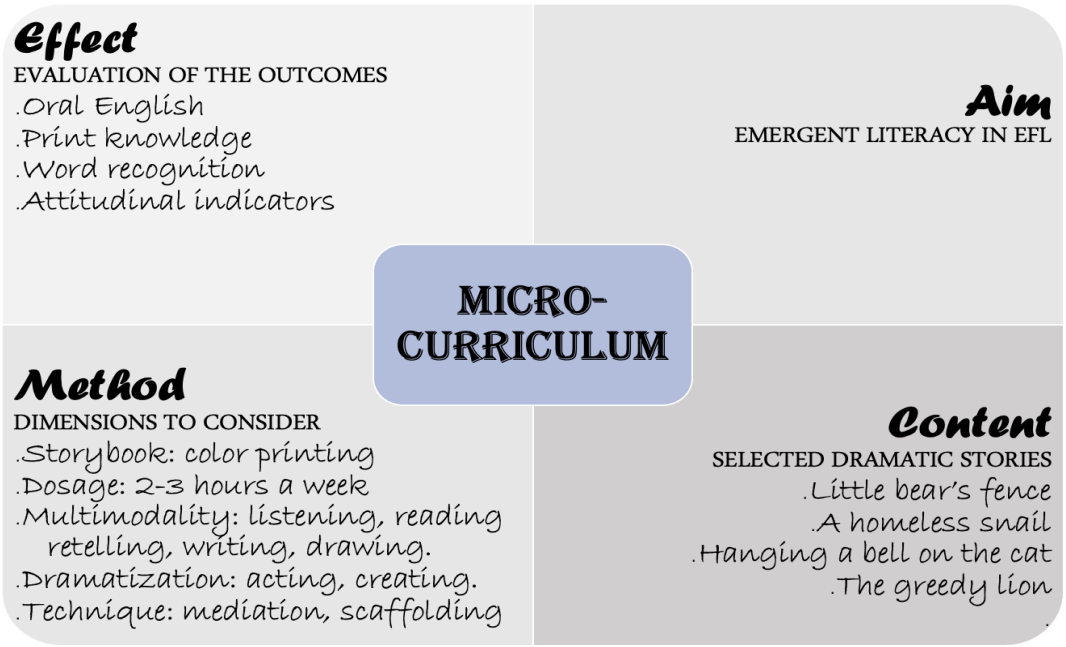

Figure 30: Micro-curriculum of the dramatic storytelling approach

Features several aspects, namely, the storybook being color printed, the dosage of the class meeting being 2-3 hours a week, the delivery being multimodal and includes listening, reading, retelling, writing, and drawing. The dimension of method highlights the use of dramatization which is embodied in acting and creating activities. The dimension of method also emphasizes the techniques of mediation and scaffolding. The final

dimension of the micro-curriculum is effect of program which is mainly evaluated in four areas of learning outcome, including oral English, printing knowledge, word recognition, and attitudinal indicators such as interest and love.

8.7 Challenges in the Implementation of the Dramatic Storytelling Approach

In the present study, most of the qualitative data were collected by the teachers themselves who might have focused on the positive sides of the intervention program, and therefore, it is not apparent whether there were any challenges in implementing the intervention program and what they were if any. Some challenges in teaching EFL in kindergartens reported in previous studies included: lack of training of teachers to teach English to young children in teacher education program; lack of time for EFL teaching in the kindergarten curriculum, and difficulty in using the English language in teaching (Alenezi et al., 2022). With regard to the challenge in the teacher's using English (i.e., using a lot of mother language instead), some researchers explained that using Arabic allowed all the children to understand what was said by the teacher and the children were thereby encouraged to learn the foreign language (e.g., Horst et al., 2010). The captivating stories, the colorful, beautiful storybook, and the exciting dramatization all contributed to the children's enjoyment of the intervention sessions.

Reciprocally, the teachers found the storytelling sessions enjoyable too. Another reason why no challenges were reported by the teachers in the present study is the freedom of code-switching (Mills & Washington, 2015). Although the storybook was in English, and the storytelling was in English, when necessary, the teachers and children were free to switch to Arabic. Because of the freedom, the difficulty in using the English language (Alenezi et al., 2022) became less challenging, and the VYLs' learning of EFL became easier. A third reason for the absence of reported challenges relates to the play-based and inclusive approach to the intervention program. Although the intervention program was intended to improve the children's emergent literacy in English, there was no standard, rigid target (e.g., number of new words to remember) to meet, and each child was encouraged to learn at their own pace. Therefore, the dramatic storytelling approach was pressure free for both the children and the teachers.

In retrospection, the researcher of this study envisaged several challenges that were related to the teacher, the children, and the kindergarten. The first challenge was in obtaining the approval of the project from the Ministry of Education and the Emirates Schools Establishment as well as in recruiting the participants. It took me more than seven months for my application to be approved. It also took me months to finalize the three participating kindergartens due to a number of factors that were beyond my control, for example, staff change, and change to school agenda. Another challenge related to obtaining parents' approval of their child's engagement in the intervention. Given the group teaching model and limited teacher-child ratio, it was hard situation where within one classroom certain children's parents would not give permission for their child to take part in the research. Therefore, to ensure all children were included, the researcher, along with the class teachers, spent significant amount of time explaining the research to individual parents, which led to permission from all parents finally. It was difficult for the researcher to obtain written consent from the parents for various reasons (Temiz, 2019), therefore, oral consent was sought in the present study (Harriss & Atkinson, 2009; Temiz, 2019). The parents were asked orally by the kindergarten principal whether they would give consent for their children to participate in this study, and all of the parents responded positively. One more notable challenge was in the administration of the parent survey. Some parents were not able to return the survey within the prescribed time frame. The accurate time point of completing the survey was important, hence the reduced valid response rate of the parent survey both pre-intervention and post-intervention.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This chapter is an extension to the previous chapter. Based on the procedures, protocols, results, findings, and discussion points presented in the previous chapters, this chapter articulates the implications of this study for the ECE practice. Also, the chapter claims the contributions made in this study to the existing body of knowledge. Further, this chapter acknowledges the limitations to this study.

9.2 Implications

This study has implication for both early childhood practice and early childhood policy making. As a micro-curriculum of EFL, the intervention program developed and tested in the present study might be supplementary to the EFL curriculum in those kindergartens who are interested in the dramatic storytelling approach. Given the manageable dosage of the micro-curriculum (i.e., only 2-3 hour weekly), it is easy to incorporate the micro-curriculum into the existing curriculum of the interested kindergartens with the main body of their existing curriculum essentially intact. Such incorporation is at no cost of opportunity since there is no risk of any consequence of drastic changes. Also, for kindergartens whose existing curriculum is under construction or transformation, then the dramatic storytelling approach formulated in this study may serve as a conceptual and operation framework for the process. Ideally, where applies, the micro-curriculum may be used as protype of the kindergarten-based curriculum (Zhang et al., 2023) which is characteristic of a focus on EFL teaching. Further, since the dramatic storytelling approach contains a substantial proportion of art education (e.g., acting, drawing, performing, improvising, creating), the EFL-focused micro-curriculum can also be utilized to develop an arts-oriented curriculum model. The bottom line is that the micro-curriculum can be used as both conceptual framework and operational framework for curriculum development and curriculum reform.

At policy level, the dramatic storytelling focused micro-curriculum can be used as an exemplar for identifying important areas for initial teacher education and teacher professional development. To my knowledge, in current teacher education programs in the

UAE, there is not yet substantial topics in relation to teaching EFL to kindergarten children in teacher education programs at the time of writing this dissertation. It seems necessary to conceptualize learning to teach EFL through the lens of pedagogical content knowledge (Shi et al., 2022). In many parts of the world to date, there is no authority-approved English language framework or syllabus at the preschool level for ECE teachers to use as a reference to design English curriculum (Liang et al., 2020).

The present study also provides early childhood policy makers with an exemplar of promoting EFL curriculum innovation and curriculum reform. Policy makers in the ECE and EFL teaching fields can utilize the procedures, standards, criteria and outcomes of the micro-curriculum to guide, scaffold or audit the existing kindergarten curriculums, EFL curriculum in particular.

In addition, some key concepts promoted in the present study are beneficial to early childhood practitioners. The present study adopted the concept of emergent literacy which foregrounds the attitudinal dimension of young children's learning, which echoes previous research that applied the concept of integrative and instrumental motivations of second language learners including the children's interest in learning English (Choi et al., 2019). This study may also help raise parental and public awareness of the optimal status of early childhood EFL education (Nafissi & Shafiee, 2020). The finding of this study on the role of print copy *vis-à-vis* electronic copy of book may spark practitioner reflection and public discussion on the role of technology in supporting young children's learning in EFL (Nikolopoulou et al., 2019). For example, for young children who are over exposed to electronic device (e.g., excessive screen time), the role of technology should be de-emphasized. On the contrary, for young children who have little access to technology due to low socioeconomic status, then the kindergarten needs to emphasize the role of technology.

9.3 Contributions

The dramatic storytelling approach developed and tested in this study was not just a teaching technique or strategy, rather, it is an approach that included all components of a curriculum, from the aim, content to method and evaluation. The approach addressed the role of dramatic storytelling in the teaching of EFL in a systematic mode. Because of the

holistic approach, the intervention program can be deemed as a model. The model was developed through participatory action research based on key principles in the established theories, therefore, it conforms to the "complexity thinking" that "are attentive to, but not confined by, externally imposed curriculum mandates while simultaneously honoring the interests and needs of individual students and the classroom collective" (Collins & Clarke, 2008, p0.1003). This model is innovative in several senses. The aim of the intervention program was determined in light of the tenet of emergent literacy while following the UAE national curriculum framework in relation to EFL teaching in kindergarten. The content of the program (i.e., four dramatic stories) was selected according to a set of criteria. The method of the program was based on a set of principles. The effect of the intervention program was evaluated against a set of indicators of emergent literacy.

Another contribution of the present study relates to the design of the study. The combination of quasi-experiment and action research in the present study utilized the strengths of both quasi-experiment and action research. On one hand, the quasi-experiment treated the intervention program as a predictor variable that led to the group difference in the mean score of the outcome variables (i.e., indicators of emergent literacy). On the other hand, the action research allowed the intervention program to evolve within the local teaching context, and therefore the agency of teachers was respected in the curriculum development process (Tao & Gao, 2021; Vähäsantanen, 2015).

9.4 Limitations

Three limitations of the study should be acknowledged. With regard to the homogeneity between the control and intervention groups, several potentially influential demographic variables were controlled (i.e., gender of the child, number of children, the primary caregiver's first language, the primary caregiver's level of education, the primary caregiver's employment status, and the household income), however, the "normal EFL teaching practice" in the intervention and control groups was not controlled. The control group consisted of five classes from three kindergartens. The researcher assumed that the normal EFL teaching practices (status quo) across all the 10 classes (both intervention and control groups) were the same, and therefore, the "business-as-usual" EFL classroom practices were documented or presented in this study. Apart from the intervention

program, the 10 classes of the three kindergartens were considered to be teaching EFL in the same way, leaving the potential effect of possible disparity in teaching practice unexplored. Overall, there was group difference in change of mean score of emergent literacy indicators; however, since each kindergarten's original, own teaching practice was not examined for homogeneity, the connotation of "control group" might have been contaminated to a certain extent. Due to the uncontrolled original teaching approach across the classes, it seems imprecise to attribute all of the group difference in the EFL learning outcome to the effect of the intervention program.

Another limitation relates to the lack of analysis of the learning trajectory of individual children. Overall in the intervention group, the dramatic storytelling approach was proved to be more effective than the status quo approach adopted in the control group; nevertheless, it is almost definite that individual children had different degrees of gains from the intervention program. In ECE, individualized teaching is the norm which might be more important in EFL teaching given the possibly wider gap between individual children in terms of funds of knowledge (Hedges et al., 2011). It was a pity that such gaps were not the target of this study, which is a typical limitation of most quantitative studies. Future research may consider re-conceptualize the study objectives to include analysis of individual difference in learning trajectory and the consequential optimal teaching approach. A third limitation of the study was the lack of focus on parental role in the dramatic storytelling approach. Parents are important stakeholder in young children's learning of language and literacy, and EFL should be no exception. Due to its "quasi-experimental" nature and the corresponding variable control consideration, no parental involvement was designed or examined during the implementation of the dramatic storytelling program, which is kind of discordant with the strong pedagogical ethos in ECE to facilitate parental involvement (Barnett et al., 2020). Although the above limitations seem to be inherent to predominantly quantitative study, quasi-experimental design in particular, they are some of the most important aspects to consider in future studies.

9.5 Summary and Conclusion

Adopting a combination of quasi-experiment and action research design, the study developed and validated an intervention program for featuring a dramatic storytelling

approach to EFL teaching in UAE kindergartens. The intervention program is conceptualized to be a micro-curriculum that includes four curriculum dimensions. The aim of the micro-curriculum is to develop young children's emergent literacy. The content of the micro-curriculum was based on the selected dramatic stories. The method of the micro-curriculum is characteristic of print copy of storybook, multimodality, dramatization, mediation of understanding, and scaffolding. The effect of the micro-curriculum was evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively. The micro-curriculum addresses the role of dramatic storytelling in a systematic mode, and serves as a conceptual and operational framework for developing and revamping the EFL curriculum in kindergartens. The study makes contribution to the exist knowledge base by innovatively generating and validating an exemplary model of EFL teaching that is substantiated by the use of dramatic storytelling. As many other studies of quasi-experimental and action research design, this study has limitations, nevertheless, the study has implications for both practice and policy making in the ECE and EFL teaching fields. Future research may consider improving the rigor of the study by investigating, isolating or controlling more variables, parental involvement variables in particular.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval from UAE University

UAEU جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة United Arab Emirates University

Social Sciences Ethics Committee - Research / Course

Ethical Approval Letter

Date: 06/07/2022

This is to certify that application No:ERSC_2022_682, titled:Dramatic storytelling as a tool to develop kindergarteners' emergent literacy in EFL, submitted by Ghada Alkilani has been reviewed and approved by UAEU Social Sciences Ethics Committee - Research / Course on 22/06/2022.

Sincerely,

Chair of the UAEU Social Sciences Ethics Committee - Research / Course
Research Ethics Sub-Committee
United Arab Emirates University

Appendix 2: Approval from the ADEK

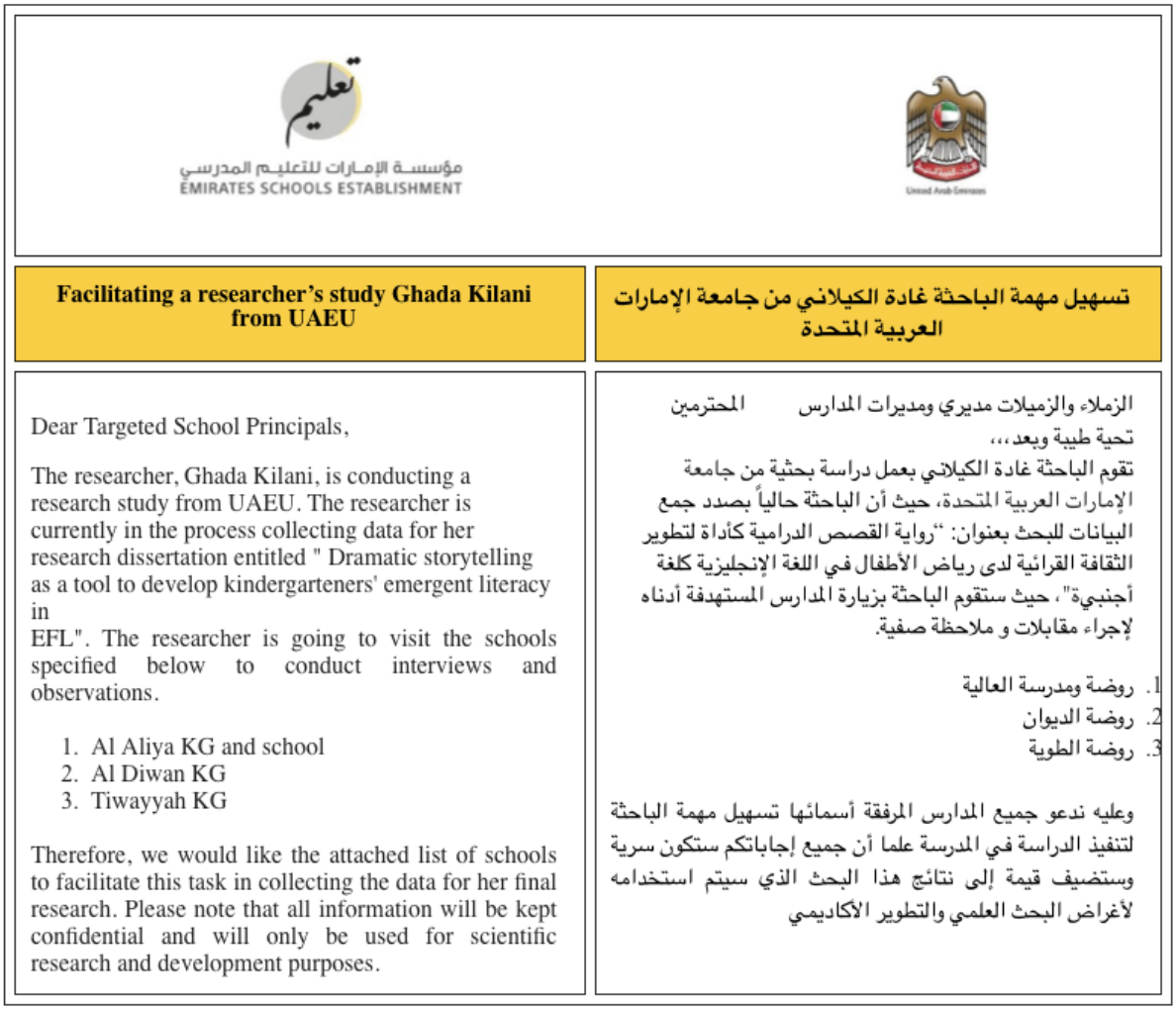
دائـرة التـعلـيـم والمـعـرفـة
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND KNOWLEDGE

Date: 26-Oct-2022	**التاريخ:** 26 أكتوبر 2022
To: Private Schools Principals	**السادة/ مديري المدارس الخاصة المحترمين**
Subject: Research Permission Request	**الموضوع:** تسهيل مهمة باحث
Dear Principal,	تحية طيبة وبعد،
The Department of Education and Knowledge would like to express its gratitude for your generous efforts and sincere cooperation in serving our researchers.	يطيب لدائرة التعليم والمعرفة أن تتوجه لكم بخالص الشكر والتقدير لجهودكم الكريمة والتعاون الصادق لخدمة الباحثين.
You are kindly requested to allow the researcher: **Ghada Yahya Alkilani** to complete her research on:	نود إعلامكم بالسماح للباحثة : **غاده يحيى الكيلاني** باستكمال بحثها بعنوان:
Dramatic storytelling as a tool to develop kindergarteners' emergent literacy in EFL	**رواية القصص الدرامية كأداة لتطوير القراءة والكتابة في رياض الأطفال في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية**
Please facilitate the researcher in conducting the research for the topic mentioned above by **allowing her to conduct surveys and interviews for a sample group of parents and students.**	وبذلك، يُرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهام الباحثة ومساعدتها على إجراء الدراسة المشار إليها، من خلال **السماح لها بإجراء استبانات ومقابلات لعينة من أولياء الأمور والطلبة.**
In case this research involves: a) communicating with students, a prior permission from the parents is required through the school. b) communicating with parents or school staff, please follow the school policies.	إذا كان البحث يتضمن: أ) يتطلب التواصل مع الطلبة إذن مسبق من أولياء الأمور عن طريق المدرسة. ب) للتواصل مع أولياء الأمور أو العاملين في المدرسة يُرجى اتباع سياسة المدرسة.
Thank you for your cooperation. Yours respectfully,	شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير،
Knowledge Management and Data Analytics Division Director	مدير إدارة المعرفة وتحليل البيانات

KMD-Research-1.1-11.2021

T. 00971 (0) 2 615 00 00 IG. ADEK_INSTA WWW.ADEK.GOV.AE

Appendix 3: Approval from the ESE



مؤسسة الإمارات للتعليم المدرسي
EMIRATES SCHOOLS ESTABLISHMENT

Facilitating a researcher's study Ghada Kilani from UAEU

Dear Targeted School Principals,

The researcher, Ghada Kilani, is conducting a research study from UAEU. The researcher is currently in the process collecting data for her research dissertation entitled " Dramatic storytelling as a tool to develop kindergarteners' emergent literacy in
EFL". The researcher is going to visit the schools specified below to conduct interviews and observations.

1. Al Aliya KG and school
2. Al Diwan KG
3. Tiwayyah KG

Therefore, we would like the attached list of schools to facilitate this task in collecting the data for her final research. Please note that all information will be kept confidential and will only be used for scientific research and development purposes.

تسهيل مهمة الباحثة غادة الكيلاني من جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

الزملاء والزميلات مديري ومديرات المدارس المحترمين
تحية طيبة وبعد،،،
تقوم الباحثة غادة الكيلاني بعمل دراسة بحثية من جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، حيث أن الباحثة حالياً بصدد جمع البيانات للبحث بعنوان: "رواية القصص الدرامية كأداة لتطوير الثقافة القرائية لدى رياض الأطفال في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية"، حيث ستقوم الباحثة بزيارة المدارس المستهدفة أدناه لإجراء مقابلات و ملاحظة صفية.

1. روضة ومدرسة العالية
2. روضة الديوان
3. روضة الطوية

وعليه ندعو جميع المدارس المرفقة أسمائها تسهيل مهمة الباحثة لتنفيذ الدراسة في المدرسة علما أن جميع إجاباتكم ستكون سرية وستضيف قيمة إلى نتائج هذا البحث الذي سيتم استخدامه لأغراض البحث العلمي والتطوير الأكاديمي

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

UAEU جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة United Arab Emirates University

Participant Information Sheet

Dramatic storytelling as a tool to develop kindergarteners' emergent literacy in EFL

You will be asked to provide or deny consent after reading this form.

Topic of the research, the researcher(s) and the location

You have been invited to take part in a study to investigate dramatic storytelling as a tool to develop kindergarteners' emergent literacy in English as a foreign language (EFL). The purpose of the study is to explore research informed ways to improve the effectiveness of English language teaching in kindergartens. This study will be conducted by Ghada Yahya Alkilani under the supervision of Doctor Qilong Zhang in College of Education, United Arab Emirates University.

Benefit of the research

The participated kindergarten will benefit from the study through having the opportunity to explore and implement alternative teaching strategies. The participated children will gain unique learning experience. Although the parents will receive no direct benefits from this study, this research may provide an opportunity to get to know a new way of teaching and learning the English language.

Procedure/setting

Adopting a quasi-experimental design, the study includes three stages: (1) Pre-observation - The children will be observed on their emergent literacy in English; (2) Intervention - The children will be attending dramatic storytelling sessions for two months; (3) Post observation - The children will be observed on emergent literacy in English again. Both pre- and post- observations will be administered by the classroom teachers in classroom settings to ensure the observations are authentic and non-threatening. For inter-rater reliability, the researcher will join the classroom teachers in administering the observations. The observations will be administered with Arabic translation and take approximately 10-12 minutes per child.

Safety Information

There will be no realistic risk of any participant experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort.

Confidentiality and Privacy Information

Your confidentiality will be maintained. If published, the data will not be identifiable as yours. Your privet information will be kept confidentiality:

- There will be assigned codes/ numbers for the participants and it will be used in the research.
- Researcher's notes, interview transcriptions and any other information identifying participants will be locked in file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Right to Withdraw

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Appendix 5: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the above information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw.
3. I understand that my data will be kept confidential and if published, the data will not be identifiable as mine.

I agree to take part in this study:

(Name and signature of participant)	(Date)
(Name and signature of person taking consent)	(Date)
(Name and signature of witness (if participant unable to read/write)	(Date)
(Name and signature of parent/guardian/next of kin (when participant unable to give consent due to age or incapacity)	(Date)

Approved by United Arab Emirates University Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on 22 June 2022. Reference Number: ERSC_2022_682.

Appendix 6: Child Observation Record and Rubric

Activity	**Record**
Activity 1. Greeting in English The teacher welcomes each child at the door of the classroom by saying "*Good morning [name of the child], how are you today?"*, and records the child's response.	The child's response (*verbatim*): _____ _____
Activity 2. Say it in English The teacher shows the child the image (picture) of each of the below words, asks the child to say it in English, and records the child's response. *white, black, house, farm, cow, zoo, camel, snake, monkey, giraffe, elephant, zebra, cat, dog, car, bus, taxi, hot, body, hand, head, watermelon, banana, bathroom, kitchen, table, chair, pencil, paper, school, kindergarten, book, teacher, food, happy, sad, old, new, big, small, one, two, three*	The number of words the child can say in English correctly: _____
Activity 3. Answer it in English The teacher askes the child the below questions, and records the child's response. *1. What's your name?* *2. How old are you?* *3. What's your favourite food?* *4. What's your favourite colour?* *5. Who is your best friend?*	The child's answer: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____
Activity 4. Letter recognition The teacher encourages the child to pronounce each of the 26 English letters (either lower case or upper case) presented in order, and records the child's response.	The number of English letters the child can pronounce correctly: _____
Activity 5. Letter writing. The teacher asks the child to write each of the 26 English letters (either lower case or upper case) in order, and records the child's response.	The number of English letters the child can write correctly: _____
Activity 6. Name writing The teacher asks the child to write their name, and records the child's response.	_____

Activity	**Rubrics**
Activity 1. Greeting in English	No answer = 1 Good morning = 2 Good morning Miss (A) = 3 Good morning Miss (A), good = 4 Good morning Miss (A), I am good how about you? = 5
Activity 2. Say it in English The teacher shows the child the image (picture) of each of the below words, asks the child to say it in English, and records the child's response. *white, black, house, farm, cow, zoo, camel, snake, monkey, giraffe, elephant, zebra, cat, dog, car, bus, taxi, hot, body, hand, head, watermelon, banana, bathroom, kitchen, table, chair, pencil, paper, school, kindergarten, book, teacher, food, happy, sad, old, new, big, small, one, two, three*	The number of words the child can say in English correctly: 1-9 words = 1 10-19 words = 2 20-29 words = 3 30-39 words = 4 More than 40 words = 5
Activity 3. Answer it in English The teacher askes the child the below questions, and records the child's response. *1. What's your name?* *2. How old are you?* *3. What's your favourite food?* *4. What's your favourite colour?* *5. Who is your best friend?*	1 question answered correctly = 1 2 questions answered correctly = 2 3 questions answered correctly = 3 4 questions answered correctly = 4 5 questions answered correctly = 5
Activity 4. Letter recognition The teacher encourages the child to pronounce each of the 26 English letters (either lower case or upper case) presented in order, and records the child's response.	1-5 letters correct =1 6-10 letters correct = 2 11-15 letters correct = 3 16-20 letters correct = 4 21-26 letters correct = 5
Activity 5. Letter writing. The teacher asks the child to write each of the 26 English letters (either lower case or upper case) in order, and records the child's response.	1-5 letters correct =1 6-10 letters correct = 2 11-15 letters correct = 3 16-20 letters correct = 4 21-26 letters correct = 5
Activity 6. Name writing The teacher asks the child to write their name, and records the child's response.	Nothing is written = 1 1/4 of the name is correct = 2 1/2 of the name is correct = 3 3/4 of the name is correct = 4 The name is fully correct = 5

Appendix 7: Parent Survey

Name/ID number of the child:

1. How many children do you have?

(1) 1-2

(2) 3-4

(3) 5-6

(4) 7-8

(5) 9 or more

2. What is your first language?

(1) Arabic;

(2) English

(3) Other (Kindly specify): _____

3. What is your highest educational attainment?

(1) Secondary

(2) Undergraduate

(3) Postgraduate

(4) Other (Kindly specify): _____

4. What is your employment status?

(1) Full time employment/student

(2) Part time employment/student

(3) Self-employed

(4) Home-maker

(5) Other (Kindly specify): _____

5. What is your combined monthly household income (AED):

(1) Less than 10,000

(2) 10,000 - less than 20,000

(3) 20,000 - less than 30,000

(4) 30,000 - less than 40,000

(5) 40,000 and above

Please indicate on your degree of agreement with each of the statements below.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
6. My child has an interest in English story books	□	□	□	□	□
7. My child has an interest in signs with English letters.	□	□	□	□	□
8. My child likes to say English words/sentences.	□	□	□	□	□
9. My child is curious about English TV/video programs.	□	□	□	□	□
10. My child listens to English stories at home.	□	□	□	□	□
11. My child reads English stories at home.	□	□	□	□	□
12. My child plays with English books or magazines at home.	□	□	□	□	□
13. My child writes English letters/words at home.	□	□	□	□	□
14. My child watches English TV/video program at home.	□	□	□	□	□

Appendix 8: Screenshot Image of the Storybook Pages


Ha! Ha! I can jump over the low fence!


let me make a tall fence .

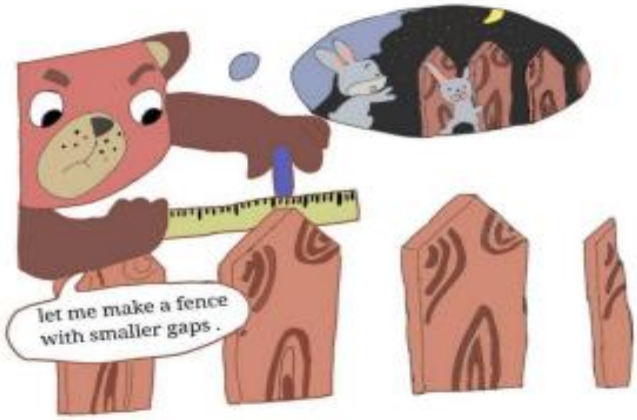

oh no ! I have lost some carrots again .


Ha! Ha! I Can walk between the fence gaps!


Let me make a new one again.


oh dear ! I have lost more carrots.


Ha! Ha! my baby can get them easily

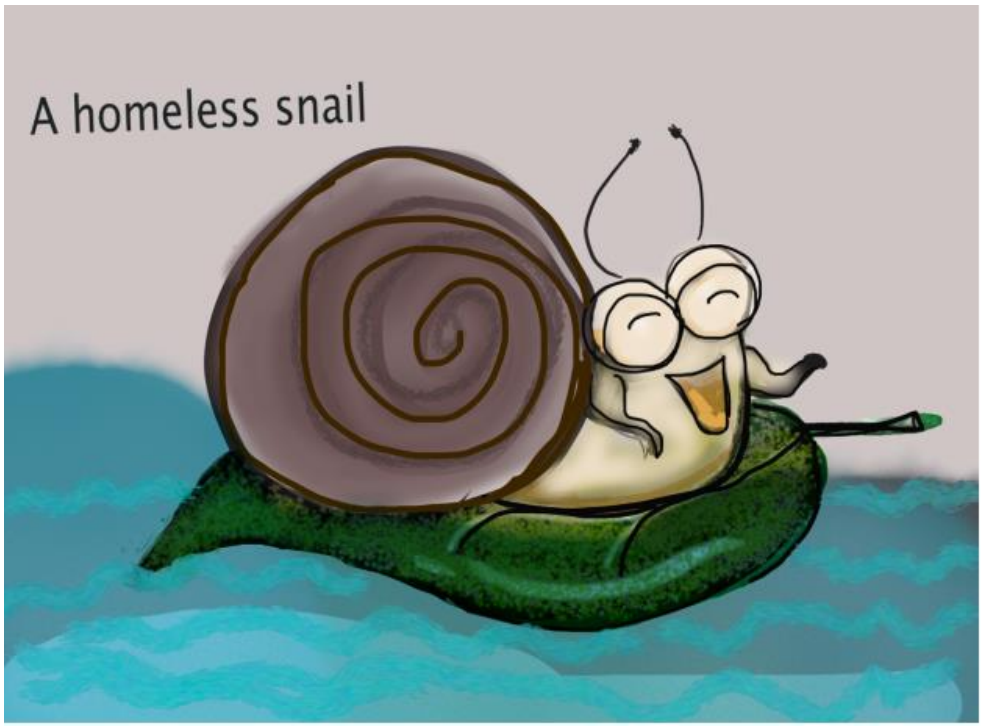

let me make a fence with smaller gaps .

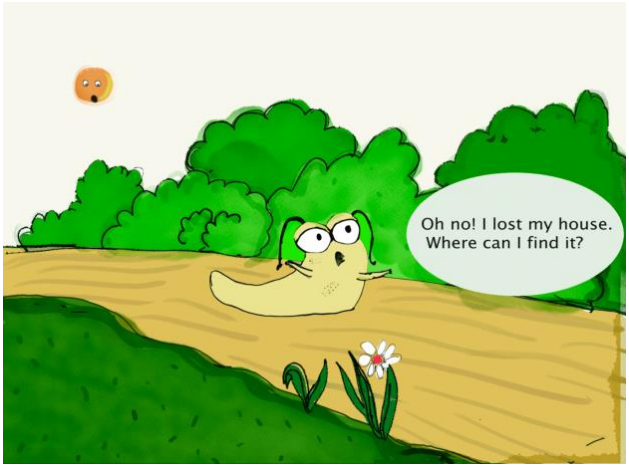

what !! i have lost almost all of my carrots.

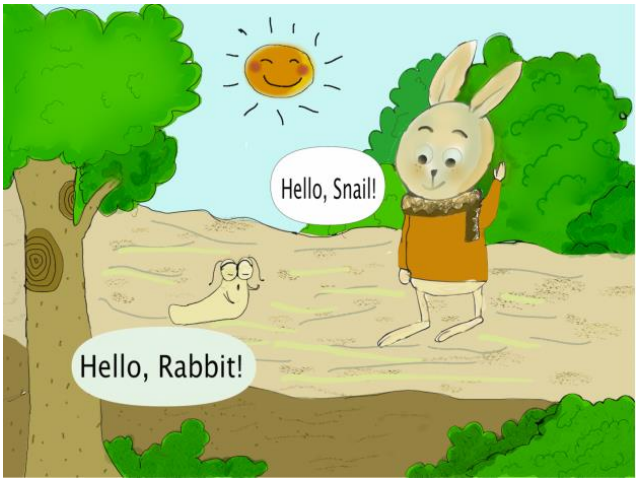

How can the rabbits get my carrots? can they fly?

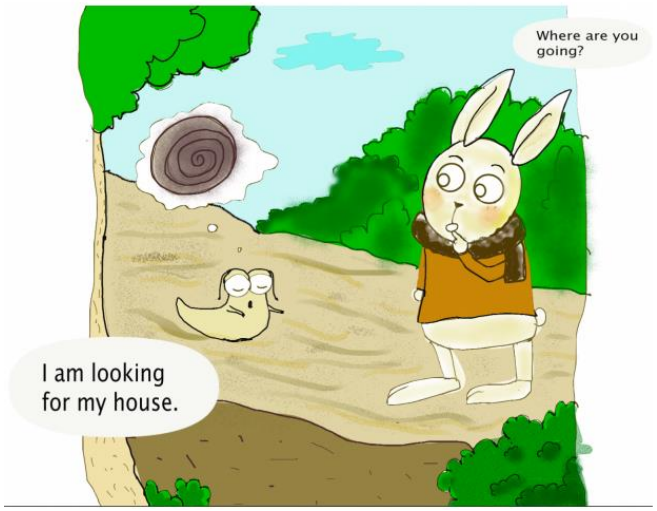

Ha! Ha! we can dig a hole !

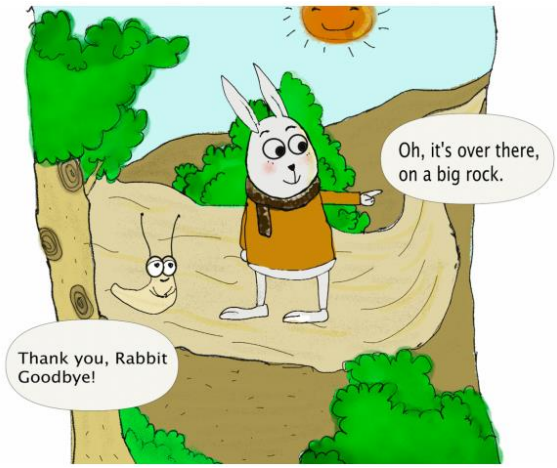

one year later , the little baer grows carrots again.
I will share my carrots with you . please don't steal them.
thanks for sharing. we won't steal again


A homeless snail

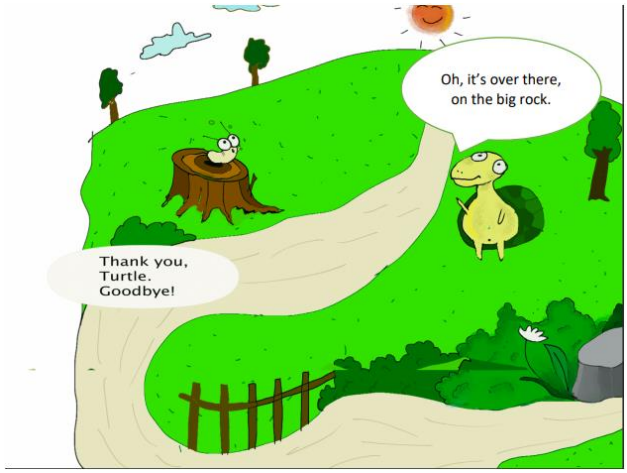

Oh no! I lost my house.
Where can I find it?


Hello, Snail!
Hello, Rabbit!

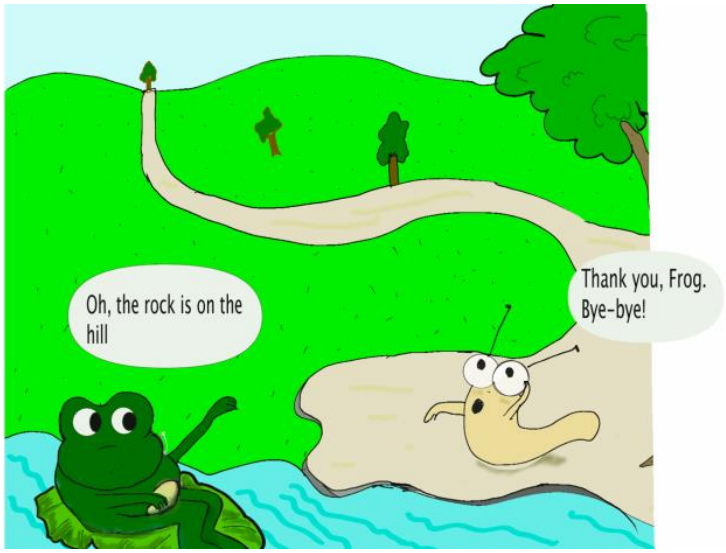

Where are you going?
I am looking for my house.

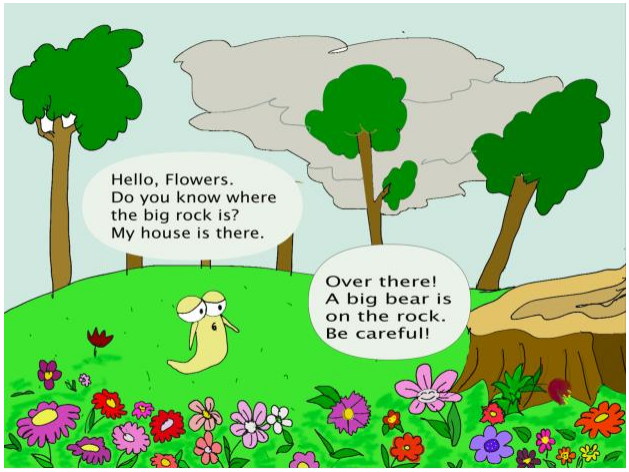

Oh, it's over there, on a big rock.
Thank you, Rabbit Goodbye!


Hello! Snail! What are you looking for?
Hello, Turtle! I am looking for my house.


Oh, it's over there, on the big rock.
Thank you, Turtle. Goodbye!


Hello! Snail! Why are you Crying?
I can't find my house, they say it's on a big rock, but I don't know where.


Oh, the rock is on the hill
Thank you, Frog. Bye-bye!


Hello, Flowers.
Do you know where the big rock is?
My house is there.
Over there!
A big bear is on the rock.
Be careful!

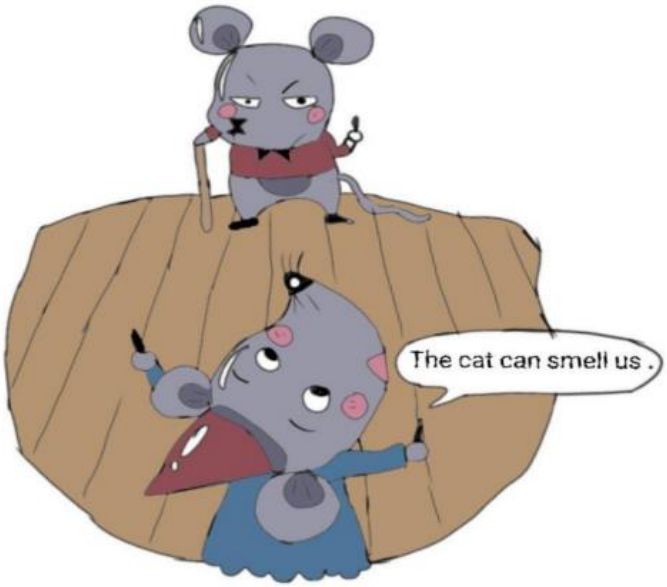

Oh, that's my house.
How can I get it back?

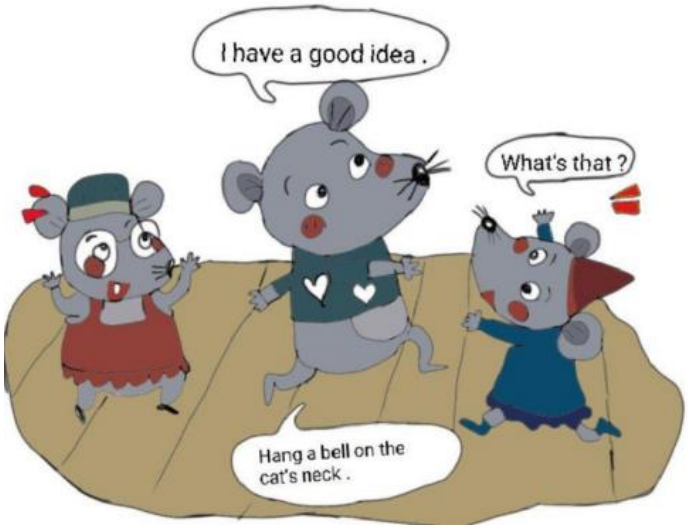

Who's that?

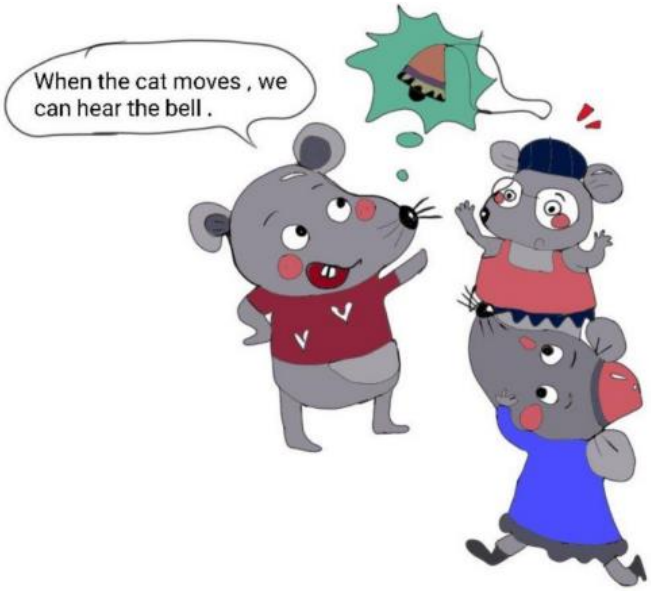
Hanging a bell on the cat


How do we deal with this cat? Let's have a meeting.

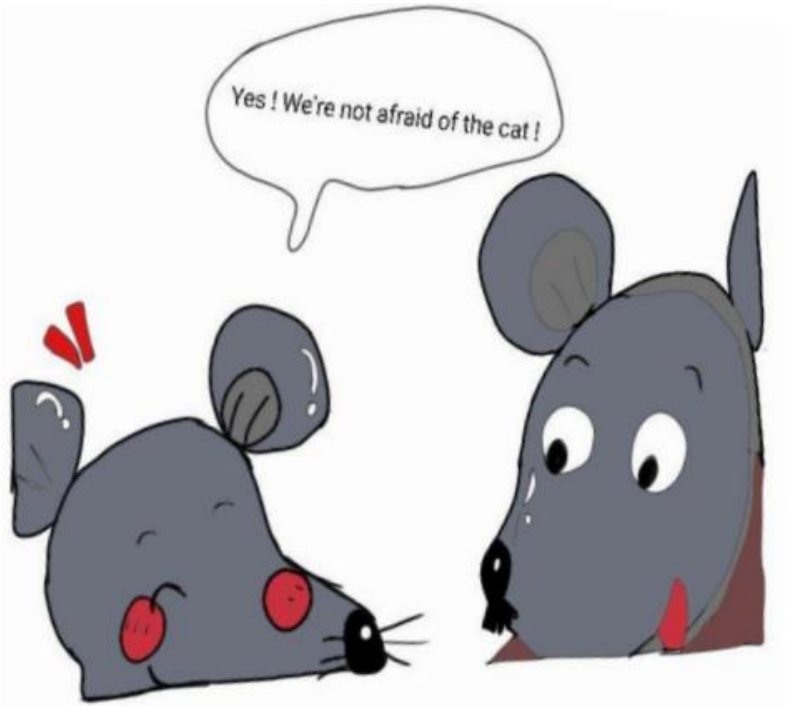

Who has a good idea?
Let's use a new path , so the cat won't find us .


The cat can smell us .


I have a good idea .
What's that ?
Hang a bell on the cat's neck .


When the cat moves , we can hear the bell .


That's a good idea !

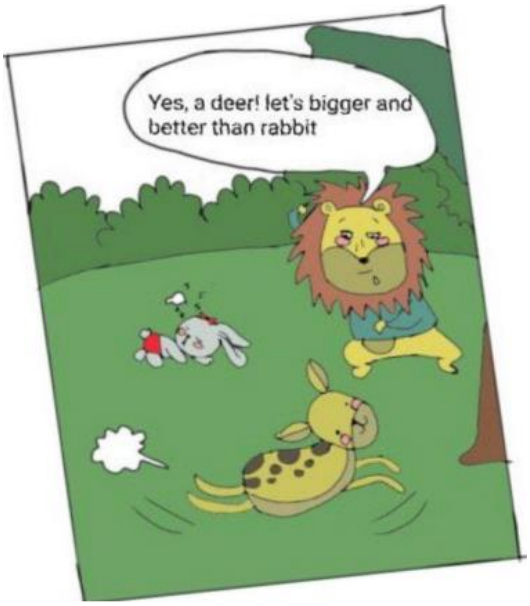


Up to now, the little mice still can't think of a good plan.

The greedy lion


Oh, a rabbit. that's my favourite food


it's sleeping. I can't wake it up


Yes, a deer! let's bigger and better than rabbit


I'll catch the deer for my dinner
A lion? I must run away


I'm tired. I can't catch that deer. I give up


let me go dack to get that rabbit.


ho no! where's the rabbit?
where's my dinner?


No! I lost both that rabbit and
the deer because I was greedy.


I'm so sad. what
a bad day!

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United Arab Emirates University

UAE UNIVERSITY DOCTORATE DISSERTATION NO. 2023:71

This study investigates the impact of dramatic storytelling on emergent literacy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) among preschoolers in the UAE. Recognizing the sensitivity of early years for language acquisition, the research explores how a storytelling approach could be tailored to kindergartens in the UAE. Through a quasi-experimental design involving 200 children, the study tests an intervention model featuring intensive dramatic storytelling. Quantitative measures and qualitative observations suggest the approach notably enhances emergent literacy skills, such as writing and understanding English, and fosters a genuine interest in learning the language. This research offers a potential micro-curriculum framework for EFL teaching in early childhood education.

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