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Enhancing communicative competence in English second language classrooms through traditional storytelling



🗓 Matiso Nomasomi Hilda (a)* 🗓 Ngabeni Pelokazi (b)





(a,b) Lecturer, Department of Adult, Foundation Phase and Educational Foundations, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper aimed to explore the use of traditional stories as a tool to facilitate and enhance communicative competence in English Second Language (ESL) classrooms. The sudden switch from in-person to online instruction during COVID-19 caused a decline in communicative activities, including traditional storytelling. Any language program should aim to generate learners who are proficient in communication. According to research, even learners with low motivation and poor academic skills are more inclined to listen and put much effort into the narrative setting. This paper is grounded on Gardener's Multiple Intelligences Theory, which challenges the traditional view of the Intelligent Quotient Theory and enables teachers to take a renewed look at other views about learning development. This study adopted an interpretive paradigm entrenched in a qualitative approach using a case study design. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 5 conveniently selected Grade 6 teachers. Content analysis was used to analyse data. Findings revealed that (i) learners are not engaged in traditional storytelling in schools and (ii) a lack of recordings of traditional stories. The lack of traditional storytelling in schools denies learners opportunities to share their cultural knowledge and values. This paper recommends that traditional stories be included in the school curriculum to improve learners' communication skills. Furthermore, traditional storytelling can act as a vehicle for restoring the learners' culture.

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Introduction

This paper explored how traditional stories can be utilised in English Second Language (ESL) classrooms to develop learners' communicative competence. The re-opening of schools after COVID-19 needs tailored and comprehensive instruction, which will facilitate students' involvement and readjust to catch-up plans to improve quality education (World Bank, 2021). In order to increase student involvement during times of adversity, Zayapragassarazan (2020) suggested adaptable learning practices. He suggested a learner-centered strategy that offers pupils flexible learning options. According to a communicative method, a language learner should be exposed to various rich target language environments and have many opportunities to use or produce it (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

This paper aimed to explore the use of traditional stories as a tool to facilitate and enhance communicative competence in ESL classrooms. Research has shown that social distancing measures that were in place during COVID-19 resulted in a decline in communicative activities. Language education has shifted from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness with the appearance of specific novel language teaching methods and tactics. Strong tactics are needed in teaching to transfer knowledge. Any educator, regardless of their subject area or degree of education, can use storytelling to improve their student's educational experience (Guijosa, 2018). In this paper, the authors argue that traditional storytelling could facilitate learner engagement.

The earliest type of education is traditional storytelling, which is as ancient as humanity (Allen, 2013). People have always used stories to transmit their cultural values, traditions, and history to subsequent generations (ibid.). According to Chandler et al. (2003),

^{*} Corresponding author. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0605-5590

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a learner's developing sense of identity depends on their perception of the continuity of their culture. How a culture's members pass on their traditions to future generations determines how long that culture will exist. Traditional storytelling is one method of preserving people's cultural traditions. This is especially important today because our many cultural communities endanger people's cultural values. In addition, the spread of modern technology, notably mobile technologies, has been so rapid that it endangers cultural continuity.

Folktales, fairy tales, myths, riddles, proverbs and fables are examples of traditional stories that are distinct and older in origin from short stories (Liden, 2022; Roos, 2022), a more contemporary type of narrative. Fantasy predominates in fairy tales, where we encounter figures that can cross seven oceans and thirteen rivers in a single swift motion or grow as tall as trees (Mohanamd, 2021). Fairy stories, unlike folktales, are more detached from the realities of everyday life since they are founded on fantasy. Fables are stories, although the characters sometimes include animals and other living things (Roos, 2022). Gods, goddesses, and other supernatural entities are characters in myths. All of these stories significantly impact human life and are intimately related to the sociocultural perceptions of a nation. Mohanand (2021) emphasises sociocultural benefits of adding traditional storytelling to the language-teaching program for ESL learners. Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of instruction and an oral tradition frequently used to transmit a prior society's cultures, traditions, and practices (Bala, 2015). In ESL classrooms, storytelling typically offers a relevant context and an engaging environment and is utilized as a strategy to encourage pupils significantly.

In this analysis, the authors investigated the impact of traditional stories on facilitating communication skills among learners. This inquiry was carried out in 5 conveniently selected schools in the Oliver Tambo District of Education in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. An interpretive paradigm, rooted in a qualitative approach, was employed to gather data about how Grade 6 educators engage learners in traditional storytelling to achieve communicative competence. In addition, semi-structured interviews were administered to understand the teachers' interpretations of traditional storytelling.

Literature Review

It is crucial that before beginning a new inquiry, the researcher should conduct a literature review to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the most recent studies in the topic. Literature review enables the researcher to determine what research has already been conducted on the issue under inquiry and what is unknown after conducting a literature study (McCombes, 2023). This enables the researcher to identify any gaps in the study to date and identify areas of controversy and disputed claims (*ibid*).

Theoretical Background

In recognition of the fact that different learners have different learning styles (Boris, 2017), the use of traditional stories, as a resource, could offer possibilities that facilitate and enhance learning. This paper is based on Gardener's (1983) Multi Intelligences Theory, which questions the conventional wisdom surrounding the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) Theory and gives teachers a fresh perspective on alternative theories of how learning develops. Because IQ tests primarily gauge a person's capacity for handling academic accomplishment in later life, Gardener (1983) disputes the reliability of IQ scores in determining human intelligence. According to Gardener, there are at least seven basic intelligences, including kinaesthetic, musical, verbal/language, logical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. The ability to utilize words efficiently and creatively, whether in speaking or writing, is a sign of linguistic intelligence.

Richards and Rodgers (2014) distinguish between three types of learners; visual learning style, auditory learning style, and kinaesthetic learning style. While auditory learning involves the transfer of knowledge through listening to the spoken word and sounds, visual learning encompasses the use of observed objects, such as drawings, diagrams, and displays (Gardener, 1983). Physical experience, such as touching, feeling, holding, and engaging in practical hands-on activities, are all part of kinaesthetic learning. Everyone has a unique learning style and preference, and learners react to learning in different ways. Language is a tool that linguists like using to communicate ideas, transmit knowledge, and comprehend others. To put learners in "real life" circumstances is Gardener's goal in MI theory. This paper complies with Gardener's MI theory since it examines the influence of traditional stories, which, when used successfully, can give students a variety of linguistic abilities, including presenting, storytelling, dramatization, and discussion abilities. This notion enables teachers to see students as unique individuals with various learning preferences and styles.

Empirical Review

Boris (2017) postulates that storytelling is a strategy that caters for almost ever learner because of their varied learning styles. Forty percent of any set of learners will primarily be visual learners who retain information best when presented with images, diagrams, or videos. Another 40% prefer group discussions and the lecture method, which have been observed as the best ways for learners to learn. About twenty percent of any class are kinesthetic learners, who like to learn by doing, experiencing, or feeling. All three of these learning styles have storytelling components in common. Visual learners love the vivid images that narratives evoke in their minds. A storyteller's voice and words are very important to auditory learners. Kinesthetic learners recall the story's emotional connections and feelings (Boris, 2017). The manner in which traditional stories are narrated creates a vivid memory in the listeners' minds. The storyteller uses rhythmic and repeated patterns that are cultural characteristics when delivering a tale. In some stories, storytellers use songs to express and emphasise certain parts, which usually convey the theme of the story. These cultural characteristics have a striking influence on how the stories are told. The story's topic is emphasized in a memorable way through the

recurrent rhythmic frameworks. Storytelling differs from reading a story as learners are taught to retell a story from memory (Dujmović, 2006).

In a study conducted by Patil (2017), in which he aimed at determining the efficiency of the teacher in teaching English short stories in ESL classrooms, it was discovered that although ESL learners know the language, they are unable to communicate effectively in it on a regular basis. Furthermore, Patil also wanted to identify the teacher's function in helping students develop communicative competence in their language abilities. It has been realized that carefully choosing short stories and properly integrating them into ESL classroom instruction can improve students' language proficiency and communicative competence in their target language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) as well as help them develop their cultural identity, which naturally shapes their personality as a whole. His study also aimed on the ways in which teachers support the growth of students' critical thinking skills as well as their creative and analytical abilities, their sense of cultural identity, and their vocabulary. It is crucial that ESL teachers choose authentic resources based on the requirements and expectations of their learners, their level of competence, their areas of interest, their age and gender, and their various proficiency levels (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Some studies have shown the effects of traditional storytelling in ESL classrooms. Traditional stories can be a valuable resource for language learning in the ESL classroom because they are regularly told in multilingual households (Zabel, 2011; Mohanand, 2021). In addition to teaching language, the primary goal of an ESL teacher is to help students enhance their skills so they may be proficient in utilizing the language for a range of purposes (Patil, 2017). There is no doubt that a good teacher leaves a lasting imprint on the minds of the learners. Similarly, Bala (2015) and Mokhtar et al. (2011) argue that although storytelling appears to be mostly based on communicative activities, it is a reliable method of equipping learners with the best tools to acquire the four language skills in both their primary and second languages. Although it is generally believed that storytelling is based on imitation and repetition, many creative activities can be used in the classroom because this method encourages learners to use their imaginations. During storytelling, learners use gestures and facial expression to express their ideas. Such activities facilitate listening and speaking skills. As authors, we maintain that follow-up activities like role-play can stimulate the learners' imaginations and facilitate their communication skills.

Tunnel, Jacobs and Bryan (2012) distinguish between six types of folktales. Beast stories are stories with animals as the main characters, which represent the actions of humans. Trickster stories often have a character who demonstrates intelligence and outsmarts everyone else. (Tuwe, 2016). Examples of such stories include many of the jackal stories in the South African context, which display their intelligence and outsmart everyone in the story. Noodlehead or numbskull tales are light-hearted stories that focus on characters who are dim-witted and cause mischief. Such stories include the dangers of despising one's selfhood resulting in the loss of one's culture. In these stories, animals demonstrate human characteristics such as dissatisfaction, greed, intelligence, jealousy, bravery, etc. The story of a pied-crow who became dissatisfied about his identity and aspired to be a dove lost his cultural identity and recognition of his tribe. African storytelling is special because it has a special ability to entertain, fulfil African people's curiosities, and impart important moral lessons about daily life (Tuwe, 2016).

Research has shown that storytelling has multiple benefits. These include phonemic awareness and language development skills (Mani & Premraj, 2019), critical thinking skills, vocabulary and language patterns (Seng, 2017; Zabel, 1991). When learners listen to traditional stories, the use of songs facilitates sound awareness and its association with letters (Mani & Premraj, 2019). Creative thinking skills are enhanced when learners interrogate one another to solve riddles and proverbs. Traditional storytelling also instils morals and values (Mandela, 2002; Nqabeni & Matiso, 2020) to younger generations. Malan (1991) declares that storytelling is a great platform for learners to improve listening comprehension skills. Learners who have been exposed to traditional storytelling at an earlier stage are likely to develop speaking skills. The Language in Education Policy (1997) stipulates "our cultural diversity is a valuable national asset" which can be utilised to promote multilingualism. In this regard, traditional storytelling could promote communicative competence because it is easy to narrate a story in which one has background knowledge about it.

However, this paper acknowledges works done by some scholars on the contribution of technology to traditional storytelling because the impact of utilizing technology as an instruction tool in the 21st-century classrooms is undeniable and significant (Tamim et al., (2011). Due to the swift expansion of technology, Ahmand and Yamat (2020) conducted a study on the infusion of digital tools into the implementation of storytelling. Digital storytelling incorporates the inclusion of technology in traditional storytelling (Smeda et al., 2014). During digital storytelling, teachers utilise a wide range of digital technologies by making use of digital audio, video, and image files to tell stories (Robin, 2016). In contrast to traditional storytelling which uses images from the books only, digital storytelling uses audio images which stimulate learners' interest and fascination, thus, putting life to storytelling and enhances learning. Teachers can then create engaging stories where students can listen to audio, view real-color visuals, and watch live videos. Thus, digital storytelling helps learners become more engaged in class and become more motivated to learn (Smeda, Darkich, & Sharda, 2014; LoBello, 2015).

Khodabandeh (2018) conducted a study in which he utilised Telegram to examine the effect of storytelling in English foreign language learners' oral language skills. Thirty English students, who were randomly assigned into two equal groups, that is, the control and the experimental group, participated in the research. Prior the commencement of the study, both groups were interviewed by two instructors and were categorized as having limited English proficiency. In the online lesson, the teacher shared four stories with both groups. While the participants in the control group responded to comprehension questions about the stories, the participants in the experimental group were required to summarize the stories that had been repeated several times. All the participants in the

experimental group shared their recorded voices with their groups, and then listen to the speaker while posting their remarks. The findings of comparing the first and second interviews showed that telling stories and responding to queries on Telegram had a beneficial impact. Findings of this study revealed positive effects of the ability to enhance learners' English-speaking skills.

This inquiry was steered by the following question: How can traditional storytelling be used in English Second Language classrooms to facilitate communicative competence?

Methodological Design

Research methodology is a description of how a particular piece of research is conducted. It outlines the methods or processes used to locate and evaluate data pertaining to a certain research topic. In order to gain valid and trustworthy results and achieve their research purpose, the researcher must plan their study in accordance with the research technique (McCombes, 2022).

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm engrained in a qualitative approach. Harrison (2014) makes the argument that the researcher's perspective shapes a number of social facts, including how one behaves personally. According to Hammensely (2013), there are several ways to interpret interpretional connections. The interpretivism paradigm allowed the writers to comprehend how teachers might improve their students' communication ability by using traditional storytelling.

In order for the research to acquire a level of detail from a high level of involvement in the actual event, qualitative research is characterized as an unfolding model that occurs in a natural context (Cresswell, 2014). The goal of qualitative research is to fully comprehend a particular phenomenon. It involves a naturalistic, interpretive perspective on the world. As a result, qualitative research looks at occurrences in their natural surroundings while attempting to explain or interpret them in terms of the meanings that different people assign to various phenomena. The qualitative method was appropriate for this investigation because knowledge was created from the natural setting of the participants.

Kenpro (2012) describes a research design as a comprehensive plan for connecting the various study components logically and coherently. A study design's goal is to make sure the researcher can solve the problem successfully and quickly. The authors used a case study design to collect data 5 teachers who teach English as a First Additional Language.

Population and sampling

The population of this study were Grade 6 English Second Language teachers. Sampling is the process of choosing a small group to represent the entire population (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2016). Convenience sampling technique was utilized to select 5 Grade 6 EFAL teachers.

Research instruments

Data collection instruments used were semi-structured interviews. Howie (2010) states that semi-structured interview is a method that includes "asking open-ended questions, listening to and recording the answers, discussions and interactions between the teacher and the learner and learner and the tool." In this regard, the authors opted for semi-structured interviews because they enabled them to probe deeper into the phenomenon under inquiry. It was crucial that the authors get relevant information pertaining to the utilisation of traditional stories, that is, folktales, fables, riddles and proverbs.

Data collection procedures

The aim of conducting semi-structured interviews was to gain knowledge and ideas about traditional storytelling in schools by actually talking to the participants in their setting. Interviews, which were audio-recorded, were conducted for five days with one teacher interviewed each day.

Data analysis is the procedure of looking over and modifying raw data to find usable information (Maree, 2016). In order to examine the symbolic and meaningful content of qualitative data, qualitative data analysis employs an interpretative viewpoint (op.cit). The authors employed content analysis to examine the data in this study. This style of study recommends that researchers catalogue the newly developing codes before looking for themes (Maree, 2016)).

Below is a thematic analysis of the findings:

Findings and Discussions

This inquiry explored how traditional stories can be utilised in ESL classrooms to enhance communicative competence. Discussion of findings, which emanated from the participants' responses gathered through semi-structured interviews, is organised around two themes; lack of traditional storytelling in schools, and lack of recordings of traditional stories.

Lack of Traditional Storytelling in Schools

The main findings of this inquiry include lack of traditional storytelling in ESL classrooms. Participants revealed that traditional stories are not narrated in class. In class, teachers put emphasis on story reading rather than story telling. However, very little evidences shows that reading is done in schools. International activities testing literacy skills in South African children show

devastating results. Of the 50 countries that participated in PIRLS (2016) South African children achieved the lowest scores. South African children could not even read for meaning in texts that were translated into the indigenous languages. Ninety per cent could not read in Setswana, 89% in Tshivenda, 88% in isiXhosa and 87% both in isiZulu and isiNdebele (Howie, et al. 2017).

Traditional storytelling has lost orality to print. Chandra (2015) voices out his fears about the reproduction and transcription of traditional stories in various languages that they might lose originality. The power of storytelling lies in the context in which it is told, which reinforces the memorising effect, which facilitates rapid spread by word of mouth. The written form loses the most important aspect of orality, that is, direct contact, which engages both the storyteller and the audience in which the storyteller uses facial expression and gestures to narrate the story. Furthermore, some storytellers use songs that are usually sung in specific tunes unique to the storyteller. The traditional stories that are narrated in classrooms are selected from storybooks and have not originated from the learners' backgrounds or environments, and, thus, lack originality. The characters used in these storybooks are foreign to the learners. As such, they lack originality because of the influence of western backgrounds. The responses below indicate this assertion:

Stories that are read in class are those found in the learners' Workbooks provided by the Department of Education. There are very few traditional stories. (Participant C).

Learners sometimes find it difficult to understand the stories read from the books because they do not have background knowledge about them. (Participant E)

Participants' responses above reveal that in schools, focus is on story reading rather than storytelling. The difference between storytelling and story reading is that the book forms the barrier between the information that needs to be retrieved in the learners' minds, and the fear to commit reading mistakes inhibits learners. In the act of storytelling, the learner is in control of the story using body language and facial expression to facilitate comprehension.

It transpired from some participants that storytelling is beneficial to learners. One of the participants revealed the effectiveness of storytelling when followed with role-playing.

My learners enjoy a great deal of storytelling.....more especially when the story is dramatized after the lesson. I still remember when one of my learners (whom I had always labelled as being deficit in language) in my class was called Wanjiru (the character he role-played after he had participated in a class activity). (Participant A)

The response above shows that learners have various skills that can be developed through storytelling. Traditional storytelling has the ability to develop retelling skills and dramatization skills. The power of traditional storytelling lies in the learners' creative, memorisation and retelling skills. Traditional stories are easily spread from one village to another through classroom activities.

Furthermore, the response reveals that traditional storytelling offers opportunities for challenged learners, that is, learners with barriers to learning, to participate and do well in oral communication. This suggests that some of the learners who struggle with reading and writing can be among the best story-tellers. This also reveals that storytelling can be a powerful weapon to facilitate learning in even the most timid learners. Research has shown that even learners with low motivation and weak academic skills are more likely to listen, read, write, and work hard in the context of storytelling (United States Department of Education, 1986).

Some studies have shown that some educational systems are ignorant of how indigenous people learn (Champagne, 2009). Rogoff et al. (2014) maintain that in indigenous cultures, everyone participates in the process of learning. This suggests that traditional stories that are told by the elderly members of the society at home can be shared by learners in class. Folk literacy is innate and every child can narrate a story. Oral traditional storytelling, at the children's homes, provides a good basis for leaner participation in the classroom. Swisher (1997) contends that in countries where indigenous education is practised, the design of classrooms ensures that the teacher shares authority with the pupils and strikes a balance between the need for personal connection and academic performance. This suggests that while the learners interact with one another on the platform of traditional storytelling, the by-product of that interaction is academic achievement. However, among the factors that contribute to the decline in storytelling, are the socioeconomic status of the families, and the advanced technological culture prevailing in almost every sphere of life.

This finding reveals that there is a lack of understanding of the recent contemporary teaching techniques, which state that a learner should have a lot of exposure to the target language and several opportunities to practice it (Department of Education, 2011). To facilitate learners' speaking skills, learners should be engaged in such activities as traditional storytelling, which includes myths and legends, folk tales and fables (DoE, 2011). However, traditional storytelling also include riddles and proverbs. In this paper, the authors are of the view that traditional storytelling can offer opportunities for learners to develop communicative competence.

Lack of Recordings of Traditional Stories

Participants revealed that there are no recordings available for riddles and proverbs. This is in line with Mabaso (2016) who articulates that the majority of works on South African folktales place more of an emphasis on the importance of conserving the art form itself than on the means of preservation. The inadequacy of the print medium, which the indigenous South African languages have primarily embraced to preserve their folktales, is another point made by Mabaso (ibid.). As such, participants revealed that they do not have prescribed material for traditional storytelling. The participants' responses below indicate this claim:

Learners nowadays do not know riddles. Even if we would like learners to tell riddles, we do not have books that can be used by learners. (Participant C)

The response above revealed that lack of recordings about riddles shows that folk literacy is treated as being inferior. Okpewho (1983) concurs that among the riddles are problems (kinds of riddles) that have not been recorded. These riddles are still preserved and spread by word of mouth. In this paper, the authors argue that the unrecorded riddles and proverbs will gain prominence by being narrated in school before they reach a stage which Mabaso (2016) refers to as a "Cul-de- sac" stage. However, traditional storytelling evolved from narratives from communities and spread from one village to another by word of mouth.

Tuwe (2016) argues that for a number of years, oral traditions have been regarded as simple folklore. Furthermore, according to La Rouque, the self-serving colonial cultural delusion that Western stories are more developed and civilized than African stories serves as the foundation for this dismissal. Nevertheless, it has been seen that written stories with western roots have gradually replaced oral traditional storytelling in African civilizations. By refusing to stay apolitical about the domination of western ideology and working to decolonize the foreign western processes, Kuokkanen (2000) contends that indigenous people must go beyond post-modern goals and strive for the recognition and preservation of their culture. Anything that is learnt in a school context is likely to be retained by learners because of the trust and confidence the learners have in teachers as sources of knowledge.

The main education of some of the East African countries, such as Kenya, have included storytelling into their syllabi under the subject of English and Literature where oral literature is mandatory (Githanda, 2016). Githanda (2016) states that traditional stories teach important lessons about history, society and values. He further maintains that learners share the stories they know with their classmates as part of the school curriculum. Similarly, Masembe (2015) states that storytelling was central to her childhood years in Uganda where elementary school students were required to tell stories to their classes as part of the curriculum. Egan (1993) states that a sensitive program of instruction will use the child's oral cultural practices to make reading and writing engaging and meaningful. In this regard, inclusion of traditional storytelling in the curriculum should be obligatory as means of involving all members of the community. Thus, cultural continuity will be enhanced.

There is a burning need for the promotion, preservation, and revitalisation of the indigenous languages (UNESCO, 2021). The folktale's use of writing as a means of preservation reveals a mentality in which oral literature is frequently seen as something that belongs in the past and can only be maintained in writing (Mabaso, 2016). Mutaka (2018) proposes various ways by which traditional stories can be preserved and used by the youth. Given the advanced technological societies in which we live, and socio-economic status of families, Mutaka is of the opinion that the preservation of traditional stories can be enhanced by utilising the gadgets, which our youth is already in possession of. Traditional stories collected from the villages through these gadget can be told in the classroom in the target language. In ESL classrooms, focus is on communication, and, thus, errors committed by learners during traditional storytelling should be regarded as part of the learning process. Narrating traditional stories in the classroom is a dominant platform to facilitate communication among learners, and to retain orality while preserving culture.

Conclusions

This paper concludes that traditional oral storytelling be given a transformed look in ESL classrooms because of its ability to engage all learners and enhance their speaking skills. Since most states have made a severe educational reform effort in their curricula concerning emphasizing learners' speaking and listening skills, there is a dire need to change the status quo and put greater weight on oral communication skills. This article argues that traditional storytelling is an effective and robust methodology in ESL classrooms. Communicative competence, the ultimate goal of any language program, will be enhanced when learners engage in traditional storytelling. This is because every child can narrate a story even if they cannot read it. Finally, the authors of this paper conclude that since traditional stories teach important lessons about the history and values of our societies (Githanda, 2016), teachers should engage learners in traditional storytelling activities for cultural continuity.

Furthermore, stories serve to maintain and regenerate culture (Mohanand, 2021). Our cultural practices and traditions are documented in stories and passed from one generation to another by word of mouth. In other words, stories are a valuable tool for sustaining cultural traditions and enhancing cultural literacy (Roos, 2022). All peoples worldwide have stories ingrained in their culture, which is how morals are passed down to the next generation with a focus on children.

The most significant limitation of this inquiry is the small sample size, whose findings cannot be generalised to other communities. Future research studies could focus on how cultural continuity can be facilitated through traditional storytelling in schools. The authors recommend that teachers engage learners in traditional storying activities, facilitating communication among learners. These activities include the telling of riddles, which facilitate critical thinking skills. Also, traditional stories are authentic texts that can be used to teach language structures in context. Some traditional stories can be dramatized to enhance communicative activities. Furthermore, schools should keep recordings of the traditional stories learners tell.

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