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The Effect of Storytelling and Translation Techniques on Female Iranian EFL Online Learners' Proverb Learning

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Abstract

The current study explored the effect of storytelling and translation techniques on learning proverbs among female Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in online classes, which came into vogue after corona pandemic, and the attitudes of the learners toward proverb learning. In order to do these, participants who were 30 female high school students studying in Iranshahr whose homogeneity as pre-intermediate learners was checked via the Nelson Proficiency Test were assigned to two groups: a storytelling group, and a translation group; each group containing 15 students. Treatment lasted seven sessions and it included 50 English proverbs chosen based on the frequency of their use in Google search. In each session, the participants of experimental groups were engaged in learning seven English proverbs. The translation group were presented with L1 equivalents of the proverbs; the storytelling group were presented with a funny story about each proverb. An attitude questionnaire and a test of proverbs were applied prior to and after the treatment. The results of the paired t-test indicated that both storytelling technique and translation were effective in improving learners' knowledge of L2 (second Language) proverbs. The results of the t-test depicted that there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in the post-test. These findings have implications for material developers, L2 instructors, and L2 learners about the importance of the use of L2 proverbs.

Keywords: proverb, storytelling, translation, online courses, Iranian EFL learners

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1. Introduction

Improving one's communicative competence can be considered the sublime and ultimate intention of any educational program pertinent to second language learning. Among various models proposed for communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980) is an outstanding one. Based on this model, communicative competence is comprised of three sub-competences including Grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Grammatical competence, in this model, refers to the learner's ability to use the lexical items, rules constraining morphology, sentence structure and sound system.

Knowledge of the lexicon is of momentous and substantial importance in developing second Language (L2) communicative competence. As Zarei and Sahami Gilani (2013) prudently stated, lexicon learning is the main component of language and knowledge acquisition. Undeniably, one of the underlying elements of literacy is the lexicon (Pulido & Hambrick, 2008). Production and comprehension of any language rely heavily on its lexical repertoire to a large extent (Mehrpour & Mansourzadeh, 2017). Tajali and Tehrani (2009) claimed that L2 learners should have good command of individual words. What is more, it has been proven that insufficient knowledge of lexicon has a detrimental impact on learners' performance (Stengers et al., 2011).

Lexical items of a language are not confined to single words whose meanings can be understood literally. Examples of figurative language in which more is deciphered than the literal meaning of its component parts are abundant in most human languages. Figurative elements beautify a language via reflection of spiritual treasures of the language of a group of people and their culture (Abdul Malik et al., 2020). They consist of routinized language items and phraseological units such as puns, irony, metaphors, idioms and proverbs. Proverbs are defined as "statements that capture the shared values, beliefs, and wisdom of a society" (Nippold et al., 1997, as cited in Santos, 2000, p.2). Mastery of proverbs can be considered a pedagogical tool in modern societies to teach moral values and social skills (Mieder, 2004). Proverbs are of significance in cultural learning as well (Rusieshvili & Gozpinar, 2014). One of the most interesting features of proverbs, as noted by Gözpinar (2014) is that although they may carry a local origin, they have universal meaning in usage.

There are a lot of profits for L2 learners to learn proverbs of a foreign language as cultural elements of that language. Integrating proverbs in language teaching not only improves the communicative competence of learners but also their cultural and intercultural competence as well as their pragmatic and organizational competence (Ajoke et al., 2015; Daskin & Hatipoğlu, 2019). As Mieder (2004) rightly pointed out it is important to use proverbs in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language so that the learners' ability to communicate effectively be cultivated. This claim is based on the idea that learning a second language or foreign language could also be made easier if we pay attention to its cultural and metaphorical features.

By the way, there are various techniques for effectual learning of proverbs and idioms especially when it comes to learning second language proverbs and idioms. Translation (Ahmadian

& Azad, 2018), association with L1 equivalent (Kimsesiz, 2022), storytelling, WhatsApp emoticon puzzle-solving technique, idiom etymology technique (Reisi Gahroei & Tabatabaei, 2013), telecollaboration (Hirovani & Fujji, 2019), schema activation (Salbego & Osborne, 2016), focus on lexis (Mirzaei et al., 2023), lexical awareness technique, games (Badri et al., 2021), visual mnemonics (Ahmadi et al., 2020), etymological elaboration, keyword method, CALL for proverb learning (Cucchiaroni et al., 2022; Obermeier & Elgort, 2021), explicit instructions and more recently cartoon-based training (Khodayari Moghadam et al., 2021; Malmir & Parhizkari, 2021) are some instances of innovative ways for teaching proverbs and idiomatic expressions. Among the aforementioned methods, storytelling is of multifaceted benefit in teaching (Nguyen et al., 2014). Enhanced development of language skills, enriched comprehension and classroom interaction (Nguyen et al., 2014) are only some of the benefits of story-based techniques. On the other hand, Cook (2001) believed that the translation technique is one of the most important tools for teaching and learning a language, e.g., finding the best equivalence meaning for proverbs of the target language in the first language. Hence, it seems profitable to delve into the impact of storytelling and translation on the acquisition and learning of second-language proverbs.

On one hand, Ellis (2012) believed that studies on the formulaic language are few in the field of language learning. On the other hand, Guven and Halat (2015) believed that the most important subject that should be included in programs for teaching foreign languages is the transfer of proverbs. In the same line, Schmitt (2000) pointed out the integral and facilitative role of fixed language expressions in developing the language learning process. Here lies the significance of the studies dealing with teaching, learning and acquiring these illustrations of cultural and social values. Thereupon, the current study aims to compare the effectiveness of storytelling and translation, as two techniques for teaching proverbs, on the acquisition of proverbs by Iranian pre-intermediate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. It is anticipated that the findings of such kind of study be beneficial for curriculum designers, material developers, second language instructors, and last but not at least EFL learners.

2. Literature Review

Honeck (1997) defined proverb “as a discourse deviant, relatively concrete, present tense statement that uses characteristic linguistic markers to arouse cognitive ideals that serve to categorize topics in order to make a pragmatic point about them” (p.4). Paremiology, as defined by Mieder (2004), is the study of proverbs. This field deals with proverbs more comprehensively concerning “anthropology, art, culture, folklore, literature, philology, religion, and sociology” (Mieder, 2004). Sotvaldieva (2021) represented another definition of proverbs as “concise, metaphorical, easy-to-remember and everyday sayings” (p.12). Vu (2020) proposed that the content of idiomatic expressions including proverbs is a crystallization of the wisdom of the people and a

summary of their experiences. Petrovic (2022) expressed that the main goal in teaching should be equipping learners with knowledge for the use of idioms which is contextually appropriate.

The empirical studies are pertinent to second-language proverbs can be classified into three groups: studies dealing with comparing pairs of first-language and second-language proverbs, studies dealing with teachers' perception of second language proverb learning and studies dealing with various ways and techniques for learning and acquiring second language proverbs. Some instances of these three groups are discussed here.

Neale (2015) scrutinized pairs of proverbs in English and Japanese which were equivalent in meaning. His aim was to find if there were any differences between pairs. The results indicated subtle pragmatic differences between the pairs of proverbs under investigation. It can be concluded that these subtle pragmatic differences between proverbs which are considered equivalent may influence learners' perception and learning of second language proverbs. The problem gets harsher in foreign language contexts where learners are deprived of regular contact with second language culture and of interacting with native speakers of the target language. Therefore, this issue should be considered in EFL contexts such as Iran.

Phoung (2023) tried to find the interest, learning style and frequency of idioms and proverbs among freshmen in Vietnam. He found that factors improving the learning of L2 idioms are better proficiency in language skills, suitable learning environment, and cultural and historical knowledge of L2. The researcher recommended that it is needed that proverb teaching be accompanied with illustrations which will improve students' learning and critical thinking. This recommendation has been considered in this study via the application of storytelling which is an example of illustrative language.

Regarding the second group of studies, Kimsesiz (2021) investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching English proverbs. The findings indicated that for culture teaching in EFL classes, Turkish teachers preferred teaching proverbs for the sake of cultural teaching in their classes. In addition, they believed that teaching proverbs has a number of benefits including improving learners' language skills, grammar and vocabulary learning. Kimsesiz came to the conclusion that in the teaching a foreign language, proverbs are profitable whereby evoking a cultural relationship between two languages, i.e. target language and the native language. In another similar study, Daskin and Hatipoğlu (2019) sought EFL teachers' opinions toward proverb learning and instruction. The results revealed that teachers had positive opinions toward proverb learning. However, they considered proverb teaching via course books insufficient. The same was true about teachers' command of proverbs.

As far as the third group of research is concerned, the researchers examined different ways leading to the improvement of learners' repertoire of second language proverbs. In one such study, Hirotani and Fujji (2019) examined learning of proverbs through telecollaboration with native speakers of foreign languages. It was found that the participants succeeded in utilizing proverbs as far as grammar is concerned. Nonetheless, they sometimes failed to apply them in suitable contexts.

In another study, Abdul Malik et al (2020) explored the use of card games in learning proverbs. The results advocated learners' positive perception of learning proverbs via card games.

The research base for the teaching and learning of English proverbs in the context of Iran is thin. Many studies focused on idioms and idiomatic expressions and proverb learning has been ignored by the researchers in the field. For instance, in a study conducted by Rohani et al. (2012), it was shown that stories and video-graphic contexts have no significant effect on short-term learning of idiomatic expressions. The results of Mehrpour and Mansourzadeh's (2017) study supported the use of pictures and short stories in learning idioms. According to the results of the study carried out by Zarei (2020), storytelling is more effectual than game and lexical awareness techniques in L2 idiom production.

Taking a contextualized perspective on the effect of various techniques on proverb learning, Alisaraee et al. (2018) undertook a comprehensive study. They explored the impact of three techniques, i.e. story-based techniques, L1 translation and WhatsApp Emoticon Puzzle-Solving Technique on proverb learning of Iranian EFL learners. In this study, 60 participants were assigned to three experimental groups. The results indicated that the WhatsApp Emoticon Puzzle-Solving Technique was the most effective one, followed by the story-based technique and L1 translation.

In another study, Ahmadian and Azad (2018) scrutinized the impact of three techniques on the proverb learning of Iranian EFL learners: using pictures, L1 translation and L2 definition. Participants were 60 pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners. The results of a 10-session treatment whereby learners dealt with 40 proverbs indicated that the use of pictures and pictorial technique was more effective than the other two modes in the acquisition of proverbs.

Yet, Shahidipour and Tahririan (2018) explored the difficulties that Iranian high school students experienced at the time of L2 proverb learning. They also examined which strategies are used by these students to understand L2 proverbs. The participants claimed that teaching methods for proverbs were not effective and proverb teaching did not constitute part of their English course. The strategies mainly used by Iranian EFL learners were direct strategies, compensation strategies and metacognitive strategies. In the reviewed studies with a focus on the impact of teaching modes on proverb learning, the influence of translation and storytelling has not been examined in one single study.

As it became apparent from the aforementioned studies, the picture of learning L2 proverbs is still unfinished. There is a need for more studies to explore and compare the impact of various teaching techniques on the acquisition and learning of L2 proverbs. The current study is an attempt to fill this recognized gap in the literature by scrutinizing the influence of two different teaching modes, namely storytelling and translation, on proverb learning of Iranian EFL learners. The research questions of the current study are:

1. Does storytelling technique improve Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of English proverbs?
2. Does translation technique improve Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of English proverbs?

3. Is storytelling technique as effective as translation in improving Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of English proverbs?
4. Does a course on proverbs improve Iranian EFL learners' attitude toward the importance of L2 proverb learning?

3. Methodology

The present study adopted a quasi-experimental design due to the fact that at the onset of the study, participants were not chosen randomly. The data collection phase of the study was conducted in two experimental groups. This study was of a quantitative nature in that data were collected and analyzed quantitatively. The ultimate aim was to determine the effect of virtual education in the form of online courses held on WhatsApp on proverb learning of the Iranian EFL learners.

3.1. Participants

A sample of 30 EFL learners who were at a pre-intermediate level of proficiency was chosen from a high school in Iranshahr based on convenience sampling. They were studying in grade 10, 11, or 12. They were 15-18 years old. All of them were female. The level of proficiency of the participants indicated that they were not acquainted with proverbs in L2. In the first step, the homogeneity of the participants was ensured. In the next step, they were randomly assigned into two experimental groups, each group comprising 15 participants.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments applied in the current study included a proficiency test conducted at the onset of the study and two proverb tests the pre-test and the post-test. A questionnaire inquiring about participants' attitudes toward the importance of proverb learning was also deployed prior to and after treatment. The materials used in this study contained 50 proverbs chosen based on their frequency of use and WhatsApp application mobile. Due to the corona virus pandemic, mobile applications are increasingly being utilized for the sake of education. WhatsApp application was selected in this study for this reason as this is one of the most frequently used applications for virtual education in Iran.

The first instrument utilized in the current study was a proficiency test so that the level of proficiency of the participants be determined. Nelson Proficiency Test (Flower & Coe, 1976) which enjoys high validity (Shahivand & Pazhakh, 2012) and high reliability (Motallebzadeh et al., 2011) was conducted at the onset of the research. This test includes three parts. Respondents are required to answer 50 items of cloze tests, structure, and vocabulary in 50 minutes. Based on the results of the Nelson Proficiency Test, 30 respondents were selected as the participants of the current study

from the total number of 92 respondents. Based on the results of the Nelson Proficiency Test, they were at pre-intermediate level.

Another instrument applied in this study was a researcher-developed proverb test. This test functioned as both a pretest and a posttest. It included 10 items. Initially, a test comprising 34 items exploring knowledge of proverbs was administered. The aim was to ensure that the participants were not familiar with the proverbs. Proverbs with which the participants were familiar were omitted for the sake of the reliability of the study results. Some experts in the field of SLA confirmed the validity of the test. The test was designed in such a way that items required students to write the meaning of the proverb or its Persian equivalent. They were in the form of open-ended short-answer questions. In the last step, 10 items were chosen to be included in the pretest and posttest. The reliability of the test was ensured by administering the 10-item test to a sample whose characteristics were assumed to be similar to the sample in the current study.

The last data collection means in this study was a questionnaire inquiring students' attitudes toward the importance of proverbs in second language learning. This questionnaire was adopted from Kimsesiz's (2021) study. It included 15 items. The questionnaire was translated because participants' level of proficiency did not guarantee that they fully understood the meaning of items in the questionnaire. This, in turn, may jeopardize the validity of the questionnaire. The respondents were required to answer each item on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This data collection means was applied so as to determine the influence of a course of proverb learning on students' attitude toward the importance of L2 proverbs. Before actual application of the questionnaire, a sample of 20 respondents who were assumed to share similar characteristics to the participants of this study responded to the items of the questionnaire twice with a time interval of one week. The reliability estimate was 0.89. Hence, it was utilized in the present study. The validity of this questionnaire was confirmed by two experts in the field. The questionnaire was administered prior to and after the intervention phase of the study along with a pretest and posttest of proverbs.

3.3. Procedure

After the administration of the pretest and questionnaire on the attitudes toward learning proverbial expression, participants were randomly assigned to the two groups. The first group, namely the story-telling group, were taught L2 proverbs via the story-telling technique. The second experimental group of the study, namely the translation group, were taught the targeted proverbial expressions via presenting equivalent in Persian. The intervention lasted about four weeks. Sessions were held biweekly for total of 7 sessions. During treatment, 50 proverbs were taught to the participants of the experimental groups via two different techniques. It should be noted that the online sessions were held in WhatsApp groups.

The first experimental group was the story-telling group. In each session, stories related to the targeted English proverbs were told to the participants in the WhatsApp group. The stories were funny and were researcher-made. Each session lasted about 30-40 minutes during which seven proverbs were presented to the students except for the last session in which 8 proverbs were presented to the students. They were given time to ask their questions regarding proverbs and stories taught in each session.

The second experimental group was the translation group. The researchers presented the best translation equivalents to the participants in the WhatsApp group. In the first step, the lexical items comprising each proverb were translated. That is to say, the literal meaning of the words was given to the participants. Then, participants were asked to guess the equivalent for an English proverb in Persian based on the translated vocabulary. In the case that participants fail to achieve correct equivalents, the researcher provided Persian equivalents of them. Each session lasted about 30-40 minutes during which the participants were presented with seven proverbs except for the last session in which 8 proverbs were presented to the students. The rationale behind using translation as a technique in proverb learning in the current study was the advantageous effectiveness of translation on vocabulary learning in general (Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt, 2010; Peters & Webb, 2018; Webb & Chang, 2015). In addition, translation is a tool to raise awareness and knowledge of meaning nuances that exist between two languages.

3.4. Data Analysis

The results of proverb tests and questionnaires on attitude were analyzed quantitatively. Paired t-test and t-test were applied to determine whether the observed differences were significant or not.

4. Results

Firstly, to examine the obtained results, descriptive statistics of participants' performance in pretest and post-test are presented in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, pretest scores are low-variance, while upon administering the post-test variation of the obtained scores raised and scores distributed in a wider range.

Table 1

Group Descriptive Statistics for Pretest

	Tests	Number	Mean	SD
Storytelling	Pretest	15	1.40	.91
Group	Post-test	15	5.80	2.14
Translation	Pretest	15	1.13	.74
Group	Post-test	15	5.40	1.68

In order to ensure the homogeneity of the participants' knowledge of proverbs who were assigned to the two groups of storytelling and translation, an independent t-test was run on the results of pretest. Based on results shown in Table 2, participants' knowledge of proverbs was not significantly different ($p > .05$). It means prior to implementing the intervention program, participants had similar knowledge of the proverbs and no group was more proficient in this regard.

Table 2*An Independent t-test for Pretest of Two Groups*

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Differences
Storytelling vs. Translation Group	.87	28	.38	-.35, .88

Research Question 1

The first research question of the current study was concerned with the influence of storytelling techniques on proverb learning of Iranian EFL learners. To provide an answer to this question, a paired t-test was deployed to examine possible statistical, significant differences between participants' knowledge of English proverbs after implementing the intervention program. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3*Paired t-test Between Pretest and Posttest of Storytelling Group*

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Differences
Storytelling Pretest vs. Posttest	-8.40	14	.00	-5.52, -3.27

Based on the obtained results shown in Table 3, the differences between the pretest and posttest of the storytelling group were statistically significant ($p \leq .05$). Thus, it can be concluded that the storytelling technique does have a positive effect on proverb learning of the Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, storytelling can be considered an effective method to raise EFL learners' knowledge of proverbs.

Research Question 2

The second research question explored the influence of translation on proverb learning. To this aim, another paired t-test was run between the pretest and posttest of the translation group to see whether the difference between the two tests was statistically significant.

Table 4*Paired t-test for Pretest and Posttest of Translation Group*

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Differences
Translation Pretest vs. Posttest	-7.70	14	.00	-5.36, -3.03

As displayed in Table 4, the translation group's performance on the posttest outperformed their performance on the pretest and the difference was statistically significant ($p \leq .05$). The second research question is answered positively on the ground of positive influence of translation

on proverb learning of the Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, similar to storytelling, translation can be considered an effective method to raise EFL learners' knowledge of proverbs.

Research Question 3

The third research question of this study inquired about the difference between the two experimental groups in improving participants' knowledge regarding English proverbs. To answer this question, an independent sample t-test was deployed. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

An Independent T-test for Post-test of Two Groups

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Differences
Storytelling vs. Translation Group	.56	28	.57	-1.04, 1.84

Tabulated in Table 5, the difference between participants' knowledge of proverbs in experimental groups (storytelling and translation) in the posttest was not statistically significant ($p > .05$). Hence, storytelling and translation can be considered equally effective in improving participants' knowledge of English proverbs.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question targeted the impact of an intervention program of proverb learning on learners' attitudes toward the importance of proverb learning. In order to answer the last research question, participants' level of agreement with the statements of the questionnaire is shown in the pretest and post-test in Tables 6 and 7. Table 6 shows the attitude of participants in the storytelling group and Table 7 shows the attitude of participants in the translation group. As presented, their level of agreement with statements is in percentage. To avoid confusion dealing with the data and for the ease of interpretation, frequencies for strong agreement and agreement were combined; also, the same was done with strong disagreement and disagreement (Khan et al., 2021; Peacock, 2009).

As shown in Table 6, having implemented the intervention program, participants of the storytelling group's level of disagreement with the statements decreased in all of the items and respectively, their level of agreement raised. In order to examine whether such a change in their attitude is statistically significant, the Mann-Whitney test was run. According to the obtained results, the attitude of participants in the storytelling group changed significantly ($p \leq .05$) and positively by appreciating the proverb's cultural importance and agreeing that learning proverbs improves the quality of their communication in all respects.

Table 6*The Attitude of Storytelling Group toward Proverb Learning in Pretest and Post-test*

No	Statement		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	Learning proverbs is integral to the overall English language learning experience.	Pretest	20%	33%	47%
		Post-test	60%	6%	34%
2	To communicate effectively in English, you need to learn to use proverbs	Pretest	40%	13	47%
		Post-test	67%	27%	6%
3	Using proverbs in oral presentations will make them more effective.	Pretest	33%	33%	34%
		Post-test	80%	0	20%
4	Knowing proverbs will improve reading skills.	Pretest	33%	40%	27%
		Post-test	74%	6%	20%
5	Using proverbs in written communication will improve writing skills.	Pretest	40%	0	60%
		Post-test	67%	20%	13%
6	Understanding proverbs improves listening comprehension.	Pretest	47%	20%	33%
		Post-test	74%	13%	13%
7	English proverbs are important in understanding cultural differences and similarities	Pretest	40%	33%	27%
		Post-test	47%	20%	33%
8	Knowing English proverbs is helpful in understanding English humor	Pretest	27%	33%	40%
		Post-test	80%	20%	0
9	Learning English proverbs is helpful in expressing oneself using figurative language	Pretest	40%	20%	40%
		Post-test	67%	20%	13%
10	Outside the classroom, one needs to understand proverbs when communicating in English.	Pretest	40%	20%	40%
		Post-test	60%	7%	33%
11	Proverbs should be included in English textbooks.	Pretest	20%	60%	20%
		Post-test	60%	27%	13%
12	Proverbs should be a part of the English language curriculum	Pretest	40%	47%	13%
		Post-test	73%	0	27%
13	I know the semantic features of proverbs	Pretest	54%	40%	6%
		Post-test	80%	7%	13%
14	I understand the literary aspects of proverbs	Pretest	20%	47%	34%
		Post-test	73%	7%	20%
15	I understand the cultural aspects of English proverbs	Pretest	27%	33%	40%
		Post-test	60%	13%	27%

Having examined the attitude of the participants in the storytelling group, the attitude of the participants in the translation group (the second experimental group) is investigated. Results are shown in Table 7. As demonstrated, having implemented the intervention program, participants of the translation group's level of disagreement with the statements decreased in all of the items and respectively, their level of agreement raised. In order to examine whether such a change in their attitude is statistically significant, the Mann-Whitney test was run. According to the obtained results, the attitude of participants in the storytelling group changed significantly ($p \leq .05$) and positively by appreciating the proverb's cultural importance and agreeing that learning proverbs improves the quality of their communication in all respects.

Table 7*The Attitude of Translation Group toward Proverb Learning in Pretest and Post-test*

No	Statement		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	Learning proverbs is integral to the overall English language learning experience.	Pretest	33%	47%	20%
		Post-test	53%	27%	20%
2	To communicate effectively in English, you need to learn to use proverbs	Pretest	54%	13%	33%
		Post-test	60%	7%	33%
3	Using proverbs in oral presentations will make them more effective.	Pretest	40%	20%	40%
		Post-test	73%	20%	7%
4	Knowing proverbs will improve reading skills.	Pretest	20%	40%	40%
		Post-test	60%	13%	27%
5	Using proverbs in written communication will improve writing skills.	Pretest	27%	13%	60%
		Post-test	60%	20%	20%
6	Understanding proverbs improves listening comprehension.	Pretest	33%	0	67%
		Post-test	67%	20%	13%
7	English proverbs are important in understanding cultural differences and similarities	Pretest	33%	33%	34%
		Post-test	80%	13%	7%
8	Knowing English proverbs is helpful in understanding English humor	Pretest	40%	40%	20%
		Post-test	80%	7%	13%
9	Learning English proverbs is helpful in expressing oneself using figurative language	Pretest	33%	47%	20%
		Post-test	60%	13%	27%
10	Outside the classroom, one needs to understand proverbs when communicating in English.	Pretest	27%	33%	40%
		Post-test	67%	20%	13%
11	Proverbs should be included in English textbooks.	Pretest	20%	27%	53%
		Post-test	67%	13%	20%
12	Proverbs should be a part of the English language curriculum	Pretest	27%	40%	33%
		Post-test	73%	7%	20%
13	I know the semantic features of proverbs	Pretest	20%	20%	60%
		Post-test	54%	13%	33%
14	I understand the literary aspects of proverbs	Pretest	27%	40%	33%
		Post-test	73%	20%	7%
15	I understand the cultural aspects of English proverbs	Pretest	13%	7%	80%
		Post-test	93%	0	7%

As it became apparent from the above tables, responses of experimental groups (i.e., translation group and storytelling group) elevated from pre-treatment to post-treatment in all questioned aspects including the influence of proverb learning on the development of four skills, inclusion of proverbs in textbooks, and influence of online course on enhancing participants' cultural, semantic, and literary knowledge of proverbs. For that reason, it can be concluded that the online courses in proverb learning not only improved participants' knowledge of English proverbs, it could also upgrade their attitude toward the importance of learning sL2 proverbs.

5. Discussion

The findings of the present study advocated the use of storytelling and translation as two teaching techniques for proverbial expressions in L2 online courses. These findings are in line with Mehrpour and Mansourzadeh (2017) who found the positive effect of short stories in enhancing knowledge of L2 idioms for Iranian EFL learners. This finding also confirms Zarei's (2020), and Alisaraee et al. (2018) findings regarding the efficacy of storytelling in proverb learning. What is more, the findings of the present study are similar to Alisaraee et al. (2018), Basal et al. (2016), Motallebzadeh's et al. (2011), and Zhang, Song, and Burston's (2011) which showed beneficial use of the mobile application on learning of vocabulary, collocations, and idiomatic expressions.

Notwithstanding, the findings of the present study regarding the efficacy of translation in proverb learning are in conflict with the findings of Ahmadi et al. (2020) and Ahmadian and Azad's (2018) studies whereby it was depicted that translation was the least effective technique in learning idiomatic expressions. One reason for this discrepancy between findings can be the use of multiple methods of teaching proverbs in the aforementioned studies. That is to say, methods such as pictorial mode, etymological elaboration, definition, and keyword method were utilized in the previous studies which proved to be more beneficial than translation in learning idiomatic expressions; while translation was deployed in the current study in comparison with storytelling techniques whereby efficacy of both techniques were proved.

Explicit encounters of the participants with L2 proverbs in these online courses helped them deal with this source of perplexity. Due to the pervasive nature of proverbs and their intrinsic difficulties, explicit teaching of them can benefit L2 learners a lot (Vasiljevic, 2015). Lack of appropriate lexical knowledge at the pre-intermediate level of proficiency and lack of sufficient exposure to proverbs in high school English books causes this course which aimed at explicit teaching of proverbs via storytelling and translation to be advantageous for the participants.

One of the reasons for the efficacy of the two techniques applied in the current study, i.e. storytelling and translation is that these techniques made participants notice L2 proverbs. Schmidt (1990), in his influential Noticing Hypothesis, claimed that *noticing* is the prerequisite for input to become intake. Cieslicka's (2006) study showed that learners tend to be biased towards the literal interpretation of idiomatic expressions. The fact that they do not expect figurative usage impedes proverb acquisition. Translation and storytelling had a priming effect and promoted noticing of proverbial expressions of English by bringing them to the attention of the participants.

Another feature of the storytelling technique that led to its efficacy is that this technique acts as a kind of coding. Hence, it assists learners to learn and recall proverbs more efficiently and more easily. Instead of memorizing the meaning of proverbs, L2 learners learn proverbs via a pertinent story which corroborates their learning. As a matter of fact, this technique facilitates the encoding of L2 proverbs into the memory system thereby expediting their storage and retrieval. Furthermore,

the cognitive load of learning this aspect of figurative language is also considerably reduced via storytelling.

As for the efficacy of translation in L2 proverb learning, it can be related to the cognitive demand that guessing the meaning of a proverb based on the literal meaning of its component lexical items posed to the participants. Based on the Levels-of Processing-Theory, proposed by Craik and Lockhart (1972), the amount of cognitive effort invested at the information processing stage determines the amount of information retained in long-term memory. Participants were required to direct their attention to the task of guessing the proper equivalent for each English proverb presented to them. This, in turn, led to better encoding of input and its efficient retention. According to Vasiljevic (2015), Encouraging learners to engage in the elaborative mental processing of figurative language should help them to better remember them.

6. Conclusion

The results of the current study depicted that both storytelling techniques and translation are effective in improving knowledge of L2 proverbs for Iranian female EFL learners. Another conclusion drawn from this study is that the importance of proverb learning was increased in the viewpoint of the participants after the intervention, i.e. an online course on proverb learning.

The results of the current study have implications for L2 material developers, instructors, and students. L2 Material developers can benefit from the findings in that they can incorporate the proverbs of L2 as an essential part of the materials they develop. They can accompany this part with an interesting story which can help learners to more efficiently remember the proverbs which have been emphasized in that section. L2 instructors can also make use of the findings of this study. It is suggested that they integrate a proverb piece into their teaching of L2. The onset of each session or the end of each session can be spiced with an attractive part of figurative language such as L2 proverbs. Finally, L2 learners can utilize the findings of this study by devoting some of their L2 learning to developing their knowledge of L2 proverbs.

Undeniably, the current study has some shortcomings. It was confined to female participants and did not include male L2 students. It was limited to one level of participants' proficiency. That is to say, only L2 learners who were at pre-intermediate level of proficiency were included in the study. This study was limited with regard to context. It was carried out in one context, namely Iranshahr. Another limitation of the present study is that the impact of intervention was examined regarding proverbs. L2 idioms were excluded from the research. Long-term effects of the intervention were not also examined given that a delayed post-test was not applied. Lastly, only online education of proverbs was highlighted in the study.

It is highly recommended that comparative studies be carried out with a focus on online and offline courses so as to determine the efficacy of these two modes of teaching on the acquisition of L2 proverbs. Another line of future research can be comparing the influence of virtual and face-to-

face education on the development of knowledge of L2 proverbs. Furthermore, the interplay between the course of proverb learning and gender or age is worth examining. Other researchers are invited to replicate and expand similar studies in their own contexts so that a comprehensive database can be provided for L2 proverb learning and teaching. Other techniques such as games and dramatizing proverbs are also worth examining to determine their efficacy in L2 proverb learning.

The researchers hope what has been reported herein is successful in filling one of the gaps in the field of second language acquisition. It is anticipated that the current study puts one of the somehow ignored aspects of SLA, i.e. L2 proverb learning and teaching at focus for L2 learners and instructors and everyone who is engaged in the process of L2 learning.

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