

AI Cover Sheet

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Benefits of storytelling in context of language and literacy

Introduction

According to Agosto (2016) and Satriani (2019) storytelling benefits children's literacy and language as it supports them through listening, imagination and learning new words (Agosto, 2016). Additionally, children build on their literacy by retelling stories through sequencing and develop early writing skills (Agosto, 2016; Satriani, 2019). However, Satriani, (2019) argues that children learning English as an additional language may struggle to understand the story and therefore be unable to discuss their ideas. Satriani (2019) states that if the stories are too long, children may lose interest and become bored. To mitigate these issues, children should be encouraged to use their own language in storytelling (Satriani, 2019). Choosing age-appropriate books will keep children more focus and engaged (Satriani, 2019). Vice, Pittman and Warnick (2023) stress that the development of digital literacy is important, as digital storytelling can develop children language and literacy through increased engagement. However, Vice, Pittman and Warnick (2023) points out that many practitioners lack confidence. Which suggests that the full benefits for digital literacy are not recognised in education settings, and more training may be required. This essay will explore two storytelling behaviours: onomatopoeia and multisensory learning. It will look at how these behaviours support children's languages and literacy, links to theory and any limitations.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the use of words that imitate sounds (Schlegel *et al.*, 2021; Ma, 2018; Sasamoto and Jackson, 2016), such as swishy swashy or splash splosh. Laing (2019) explains that children often learn onomatopoeia early in their language development, as the sound of the word directly links to its meaning. Motamedi *et al.* (2020) agrees and adds that onomatopoeia can play a key part in helping children build vocabulary as they are easier to connect to real life meaning. This shows that

onomatopoeia makes language feel more concrete for children, as they can match the sound to something they do or hear. This links clearly to Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development, where children build on skills through support and interaction with others (Wu and Bakar, 2025). For instance, by using onomatopoeia, the practitioner offers a simple form of scaffolding that supports children language development as the child is guided to make connection between the sound and its meaning thus building their vocabulary. However, there are limitations as onomatopoeia works best with sensory sounds and other strategies are needed to develop more abstract language (Motamedi *et al.*, 2020). This shows that onomatopoeia supports children with words they can hear and is useful during early language development, suggesting other methods are needed to develop more advanced vocabulary.

Additionally, Chomsky argued that children are born with innate language ability (Khalilah *et al.*, 2025). While this suggests that children can learn language without needing direct teaching or depending on elements like onomatopoeia, research by Laing (2019) and Motamedi *et al.* (2020) shows that children are naturally drawn to sound-meaning words, showing that onomatopoeia still plays a valuable role in supporting language development in early years.

While onomatopoeia is highlighted as beneficial for early language development, research suggests that its impact may be more limited. Laing (2019) points out that children's use of onomatopoeia may be influenced more by how adults exaggerate and repeat these words. This can be seen in storytelling activities, both traditional and digital, where the adult exaggerates the onomatopoeia with actions, real sounds and even the use of images and props. However, Motamedi *et al.* (2021) argues that onomatopoeia can be useful when objects or actions are not visible, as the sound of the word itself gives children a cue to meaning. This can be seen in the storytelling activity *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, where children may rely more on what they see than on the sound words themselves. Without these prompts, onomatopoeia words such as *swishy swashy* and *splash splosh* could become more important in aiding children to imagine the scenes and follow the story. This shows that the value of onomatopoeia depends not only on its sound-based words but also on how it is used in different contexts. This use of adult support in storytelling also links to Bruner's

idea of scaffolding, where children learn more with support, which can be reduced as they become more independent (Yildiz and Celik, 2020).

Additionally, Laili and Putri (2021) state that onomatopoeia has been shown to support phonological awareness. It is the ability to recognise, reflect and manipulate sounds of spoken words (Weldemariam, Sandvik and Yigezu, 2023). For example, in the storytelling activity 'We're going on a bear hunt', the onomatopoeia words like 'hooo woo', and 'swishy swashy', encourage children to closely listen to the sounds. According to Duncan (2018) children first treat words as whole units, but over time they notice smaller parts. They might stretch or separate the sounds, which helps them notice how words are made of smaller parts such as phonemes, the sound of a letter (Duncan, 2018). This shows how onomatopoeia can guide children's awareness of sound patterns and support this developmental shift. This can be seen in the traditional storytelling, where the practitioner stretches the onomatopoeia words which acts as a scaffold to support children's learning. This reflects Bruner's view of scaffolding (Yildiz and Celik, 2020) where the practitioner provides temporary support through storytelling to support early phonological awareness using onomatopoeia. According to Milankov *et al.* (2021) phonological awareness provides an important foundation for early reading. Nkurunziza (2024) and Jimenez *et al.* (2024) agree adding that phonological awareness is key to early reading, forming the basis of decoding and wider literacy skills and that weak phonological awareness has shown to place children at risk of reading difficulties (Milankov *et al.*, 2021). Beyond storytelling, onomatopoeia can also be integrated into songs, nursery rhymes (Laili and Putri, 2021). This suggests that onomatopoeia in nursery rhymes and songs can also support early literacy skills. By repeating sounds such as baa or moo, children notice how sounds are broken down, which links to phonological awareness.

However, Laing (2019) argues that children's responses to onomatopoeia may be more a result of adult emphasis than the words themselves. This means its effectiveness might depend heavily on how practitioners deliver it, rather than on the sound-meaning link alone. Similarly, Weldemariam, Sandvik and Yigezu (2023) note that while phonological awareness is important, it develops through a wide range of language experiences. This suggests the importance of how practitioners present these activities and that onomatopoeia should be seen as one tool for language and

literacy development amongst other tools. Additionally, Shadi *et al.* (2022) points out that not all children may respond equally to sound-based cues such as children with hearing impairments. This shows that children with hearing impairments may find limited benefit from onomatopoeia, showing that its value may depend on the child's individual needs. Practitioners may need to consider alternative strategies such as sensory story. Sensory stories include sensory experiences which help bring the story to life (Grace and Longhorn, 2015).

Overall, these research show that while onomatopoeia may not be the only factor influencing language learning, it plays a valuable role in supporting vocabulary growth and early phonological awareness, all of which contribute to children's wider literacy development.

Multisensory

Another skill that can be observed during storytelling is multi-sensory learning. According to touch Esplendori, Kobayashi and Puschel (2022) and Busari, Ross and Berry (2025) multi-sensory learning is the process of developing new skills by using more than one sense, such as sight, hearing and touch. By engaging several senses at the same time, children form stronger brain connections which support memory and spoken communication (Busari, Ross and Berry, 2025). This suggests that multi-sensory elements support oracy, as children are more able to recall, retell and express ideas.

Additionally, a multisensory approach makes learning more engaging, which helps children feel confident to speak and take part (Busari, Ross and Berry, 2025). This suggest that confidence and motivation play a key role in developing oracy skills. In the storytelling activity 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt', multisensory elements can be seen: such as water trays, grass to feel, and sound effects in digital form. This encourages children not only to listen but to interact with the story. This links with Piaget's theory of the sensorimotor stage highlights that children learn best through physical interaction with their environment, using touch, sound, and movement to build knowledge (Madanagopal, 2020). Linking this to the story telling activity, the sensory materials supported children in making sense of the story, while also prompting them to use language to describe what they were feeling and

experiencing. This shows how theory and practice connect, as sensory learning does not just support understanding but also stimulates oracy.

However, Stevens *et al.* (2021) found that multisensory interventions did not significantly improve vocabulary. This raises questions about how effective such approaches are in supporting broader oracy skills. For example, in the storytelling activity using multisensory learning such as sound effects and sensory materials may increase engagement, however research findings suggest this may not directly result in stronger vocabulary development. Vocabulary development is closely linked to oracy skills (Spencer and Pierce, 2022). This suggests that children need wide word bank to express themselves clearly and confidently.

Additionally, Manja *et al.* (2024) found that limited access to resources, alongside financial constraints, is two of the main barriers to implementing multisensory activities. This suggest that practical barriers may prevent it from being delivered effectively in early years setting and such barriers may affect opportunities to develop language and literacy skills. To mitigate this, Manja *et al.* (2024) suggest that practitioners should be creative in adapting activities and making use of available or low-cost materials. For example, in the storytelling activity, low-cost sensory resources such as grass and water allow the children to engage in multisensory learning, allowing opportunities for children to build descriptive language and build their oracy skills.

Furthermore, Manja *et al.* (2024) found that a lack of time is also a barrier to implementing multisensory activities. This shows, how daily pressure and tight schedules can limit children's access to multi-sensory learning. In contrast, Manja *et al.* (2024) emphasise that time constraints can be reduced when practitioners are organised with their schedules and integrate multisensory elements into existing learning. This suggests that practitioners can incorporate multi-sensory elements into existing planning, as seen in the story telling activity without the need for additional tasks.

Research suggests that multi-sensory learning is beneficial in developing oracy skills for children with learning difficulties. According to Esplendori, Kobayashi and Püschel (2022) multi-sensory learning is often used when supporting children with language and learning difficulties. For children with learning difficulties, this approach is

particularly beneficial as it provides different ways to process information and encourages oracy and language development (Busari, Ross and Berry, 2025).

Additionally, Matos *et al.* (2015) found that multisensory storytelling supports children with learning difficulties by improving attention and memory, which are essential for spoken storytelling and retell. Similarly, Kamei-Hannan, Chang and Fryling (2020) showed that multisensory storytelling improved language and oracy skills, including story retelling, in children with visual impairments. This highlights how multisensory methods like those used in the storytelling activity can strengthen oracy skills by helping children with additional needs recall, retell, and interact through speech. This links with constructivist learning theory, where Piaget and Vygotsky emphasise that children learn and develop through active engagement with their environment (Busari, Ross and Berry, 2025).

However, Jones, Hanley and Riby (2020) found that children with sensory sensitivities were less engaged in multi-sensory environment. Mallory and Keehn, (2021) agrees, adding tactile, visual and auditory input can be overwhelming for them. This suggests that multisensory learning may not meet the needs of every child and that children with sensory sensitivities may struggle to speak, listen and learn vocabulary. Although, De Domenico *et al.* (2024) found that multi-sensory opportunities can support children to manage their sensitivities. This shows that while some children may withdraw from multisensory storytelling, due to overwhelm of sensory input. However, research suggests that adapted and supported multisensory storytelling can support in reducing sensory sensitivities, allowing better participation over time.

In conclusion, storytelling offers clear benefits for children's language and literacy development, however the way it is delivered makes a difference. Onomatopoeia supports children linking sounds to meaning, helping them build vocabulary and early phonological awareness, though its impact relies on how practitioners use and emphasise it. Multisensory approaches make stories more engaging strengthening oracy, including children with additional needs. However, they also depend on resources, time management and may not suit every child.

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