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Storytelling in Higher Education: Comparing Expectancy-Value in Task-Exposed and Non-Exposed English Learners

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Abstract

Purpose

This research aimed to investigate the impact of storytelling with higher complexity on English majors' attitudes and expectancy-value for tasks from the perspectives of their perception, confidence, challenge, and motivation.

Methodology

This quasi-experimental research exposed three storytelling tasks to English majors (N=73) in the experimental group and assigned two control groups(N=74, 152) without storytelling task intervention. Along with and after the experiment, a questionnaire for attitudes and expectancy-value toward storytelling tasks in English learning was administered to English majors (N=299) in the three groups from private and vocational colleges in Guangzhou. Quantitative data was collected through the questionnaire.

Results/Findings

The results showed that many English majors considered storytelling simple and childish, disregarding its role in shaping personal experiences and world values. However, exposure to complex storytelling tasks heightened the challenge of accomplishing the tasks, thus leading to a decline in their overall expectancy and value toward tasks. Students without exposure to complex storytelling tasks, regardless of self-reported relevant experience, demonstrated higher and non-significant differences in expectancy-value components, except challenges. The study emphasized the alignment of storytelling tasks with English majors' career objectives, highlighting the role of storytelling in narrative.

Implications

The results contribute to a theoretical understanding of storytelling in higher education and provide practical insights into designing storytelling tasks for English learners at an advanced level.

Keywords: Storytelling; Expectancy-value; Task-exposed; Non-exposed; English learners; Higher education

1. Introduction

Storytelling is a widely recognized tool in teaching English (Nguyen & Phillips, 2022; Quintuña, 2022). Within language classrooms, storytelling methods can confer several advantages for both teacher and learner. First, it provides learners a captive and unforgettable way to imagine and learn impressive knowledge of the world and life (Hilda & Pelokazi, 2023). Second, it provides an opportunity for learners to improve their speaking skills, communicative skills, and problem-solving skills through preparing, gathering, analyzing, and sharing information (Fitriyeni, 2022; Tandzegolskienė & Balčiūnaitienė, 2018). For these reasons, storytelling provides novel ways for teachers to enhance the quality and autonomy of teaching for young learners (Armie, 2020).

However, in contexts of higher education, the attitude, effectiveness, and approaches to using storytelling

in English classrooms are still inconclusive, despite many studies supporting the use of storytelling methods in teaching English speaking and writing skills (Zuhriyah, 2017; Tajeri et al., 2017). Budiarti et al. (2022) found that storytelling as a medium for teaching speaking can improve EFL students' language skills and make speaking activities enjoyable. Ciccarelli (2015) explored the potential of storytelling for persuasive business presentations by English language learners. Rizal (2021) showed that storytelling techniques can improve the students' involvement and enhance their interest in English writing. Balaman (2018) suggested that using digital storytelling for teaching writing can improve students' narrative skills and meet students' expectations in 21st-century composition classes.

Rationales for storytelling pedagogy in tertiary education typically revolve around three considerations: (1) teacher-centered view, (2) student development, and (3) student attitude. First, the use of storytelling can help teachers enhance students' focus on the lesson and foster interest in the subject. When educators purposefully integrate storytelling into their teaching methods, the immediate emotional impact of storytelling can arise from both the teacher's characteristics and the real-world relevance of the subject matter (Johns, 2019). Storytelling can effectively help teachers transition from different classroom activities and give feedback and advice to college students (Ta et al., 2022). On the second consideration, storytelling can challenge students to think from the lives of others (Adair et al., 2007), evoke empathy (Akula, 2016), cultivate reflective practice with a deeper understanding of the world (Alterio & McDrury, 2003), and hence foster the sustainability (Molthan-Hill et al., 2022). Finally, most students might understand the method of storytelling and feel happy to use it in learning English (Budiarti, 2022). Mirza (2020) also showed that most participants in a digital storytelling activity feel enjoyable.

Proponents of using storytelling in teaching mainly focus on three considerations: (1) the benefits and challenges of using storytelling, (2) the attitude and perception of storytelling pedagogy, and (3) the task design of storytelling for students. On the first point, the benefits of storytelling cover how this method improves students' knowledge (vocabulary, structure, text), language skills (speaking, writing, reading), professional skills (business presentation skills), thinking skills (imagination, critical thinking, and creativity), social, emotional and psychological development (empathy, value, confidence, and motivation), by mirroring the world of stories (Chancellor & Lee, 2016; Frisch & Saunders, 2008). Some researchers have argued that it is an effective tool with many benefits for both teacher and student; however, the challenges should not be overlooked. Satriani (2019) found that students' proficiency and text length will challenge the implementation of storytelling programs. Second, researchers have conducted their studies mainly from a teacher-centered view—teachers' perception of using storytelling (Assauri et al., 2022). Some researchers surveyed teachers and students to explore how the storytelling method was used for college students, and the results showed that all respondents significantly favored storytelling in various aspects (Manwani et al., 2022). However, the small sample size of thirty-five was limited to accept the results.

On the third point, researchers have concentrated on strategies, models, and activities for using storytelling in English classrooms. It found that utilizing course-oriented, concrete, and memorable stories could increase students' perceptions of cognitive interest (Bolkan, 2021). Furthermore, creating novel taxonomy to engage students in analyzing experiences and events to stimulate their deeper insights should be noticed in storytelling interventions (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021). Moreover, fostering students' emotional intelligence to promote their language learning in a low-anxiety context is also meaningful for English learners (Dujmović, 2006).

Despite these considerations, there is no report on the complexity of storytelling tasks, how they influence college students' perceptions of storytelling methods, and their expectancy-value to storytelling tasks. Johns (2019) concluded that considering students' attitudes to teachers' storytelling approach needed further study.

Based on the literature, the originality of the current study focuses on college students' attitudes toward storytelling tasks and compares their expectancy and value, especially their perceptions of challenges in exposure to storytelling tasks with higher complexity.

2. Literature review

2.1. The role of storytelling as narrative

Historically, storytelling was a primary means of transmitting knowledge across diverse cultures (Yılmaz & Ciğerci, 2019). Ancient civilizations relied on oral traditions to impart wisdom, cultural values, and historical events. Epistemologically, storytelling intersects with the study of knowledge and belief and shapes how individuals perceive, understand, and construct meaning in narratives (Alamulhuda, 2020; Jarrett, 2019). The epistemological significance of these narratives lies in their ability to encapsulate collective knowledge and shared experiences. Miller (2009) reflected on personal storytelling from theoretical perspectives in anthropology and cultural psychology and emphasized that stories, as co-creation of person and culture, are not only forms of representation but also sociocultural practices embedded with histories of people's lives.

From a psychological perspective, storytelling is a cognitive tool through which the narrative mindset can increase individuals' memory, empathy, and social cognition by activating narrative knowledge (Trzebiński et al.,

2021). Beyond individual cognition, storytelling contributes to cultural and societal epistemologies. Cultural narratives shape collective beliefs, traditions, and societal norms. Marvasti and Gubrium (2021) emphasized that stories and storytelling are everywhere, from an overall cultural presence to the narrative study of self and society.

Examining these narratives unveils the intricate relationship between storytelling and the construction of shared knowledge within diverse communities (Cannon & Cameron, 2000). For example, Hohti and Tammi (2023) explained that stories represent the material world, shape and make a new world, and develop "composing storytelling" to explore how heterogeneous, open-ended stories interact with daily life. Pino Gavidia et al. (2022) examined how storytelling deconstructs values, assumptions, and beliefs to challenge taken-for-granted meanings from the perspective of knowledge paradigms and reflexivity. Therefore, storytelling is inevitable in constructing learners' knowledge through different narrative formats. To some extent, it aligns with students' experiential learning and facilitates them to contextualize information within personal frameworks.

However, a prevalent stereotype of stories and storytelling tends to make college students underestimate the role of storytelling in English learning. Some likely associate storytelling with children and early childhood and doubt its role in tertiary education (Tabakova, 2023). Investigating college students' attitudes toward storytelling pedagogy in a classroom is essential for designing and integrating relevant teaching and learning tasks.

2.2. Storytelling tasks

Researchers have delved into the varied modalities of storytelling tasks in language education, exploring the effectiveness of incorporating traditional and digital storytelling to engage language learners. These studies primarily focus on aspects of (1) integrating storytelling as a form of narrative into instruction, (2) integrating experience-related elements into storytelling tasks, and (3) regarding storytelling tasks as an approach to improving English learners' communication, collaboration, and deeper insight (Heiden et al., 2010; Talibong & Abdulfattah, 2020; Talibong & Abdulfattah, 2020).

On the first point, for example, Swain (2014) suggested that integrating storytelling into instructional design can improve learner comprehension, engagement, and motivation, thus advocating for more use of the narrative approach in instruction. Kiernan (2005) employed narrative tasks with low-level learners aged 18–19 in a Japanese university and discovered the potential of such tasks for developing general conversational narrative skills. Hilda and Pelokazi (2023) emphasized that even learners with low motivation and poor academic skills are more inclined to put much effort into the narrative setting.

On the second point, many researchers highlight that making meaning from relevant experience is fundamental for storytelling. (Michailidou et al., 2013; Quesenbery & Brooks, 2010; Peng & Matterns, 2016). Therefore, Gjedde (2012) addressed students' individual needs and preferences for expression by creating digital media to form a motivating and meaningful learning environment.

On the third point, for example, Bibi et al. (2020) followed five steps to make storytelling tasks communicative and attractive. Ferdiansyah (2019) provided more opportunities to engage students in genre-based stories and foster students' critical thinking and creativity. Additionally, some researchers found that the lack of opportunities to engage students in traditional storytelling activities at school deprived them of sharing cultural knowledge and values (Hilda & Pelokazi, 2023). Based on the literature, the current study conducted an intervention with storytelling tasks in English majors in China and examined its potential impact on the students' expectancy and value toward storytelling tasks.

2.3. Cost, challenge, and expectancy-value

The expectancy-value theory comprises expectancy, value, and cost as crucial elements. Expectancy refers to students' confidence in their ability to succeed in a task. Value is associated with students' subjective attitude toward a task's importance or interest. Cost represents perceived negative aspects or barriers related to engaging in a task. These elements are crucial predictors of academic achievement and choices. The theory also suggests breaking down subjective task values into subcomponents like intrinsic value, attainment, utility, and perceived cost. Various studies have investigated the structural relationships among these components, considering factors like educational and historical contexts, along with the measurement of cost (Reinhard & Pekrun, 2019; Part & Perera, 2022; Elborolosy & Al Thenyan, 2020).

Several researchers have investigated the cost students perceive when doing tasks and their subsequent impact on expectancy and value (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). For instance, Muenks et al. (2023) explored the role of perceived cost in situated expectancy and value. Moreover, theorists proposed that students' domain-specific expectancies and subjective task values are critical predictors of their achievement and academic choices. Goegan et al. (2021) found that cost positively or negatively predicted students' perceptions of success, while value was not a significant predictor.

Cost is regarded as one component of challenges while completing tasks. Some studies examined the challenges language learners face when engaging in narrative construction. The findings indicated that students

often struggled with organizing coherent storylines, expressing ideas, and incorporating cultural nuances. These challenges, in turn, influenced their expectancy and value, particularly regarding confidence and motivation.

A research gap lies in knowing how the complexity of storytelling tasks influences students' perceived challenges. The current study hypothesized that as the complexity of tasks increased, students reported higher levels of challenges, leading to a potential decline in their expectancy and value toward a task.

Based on the literature review, the following research questions were examined:

RQ1.How does exposure to storytelling tasks influence English majors' expectancy-value toward storytelling tasks, compared with those without recent task exposure?

RQ2. What role does prior bias and perception of storytelling as a "childish" activity play in shaping English majors' expectancy-value in storytelling tasks?

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This quasi-experimental research exposed storytelling tasks to participants (N=73) of English majors from Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology, China. Along with and after the experiment, a questionnaire for college students' attitudes and expectancy-value toward storytelling tasks in their English class was administered to English majors(N=299) from private and vocational colleges in Guangzhou.

All the respondents are divided into three groups described in Table 1. There is an experimental group and two control groups regarding students' previous experience of participation in storytelling tasks in English class during their tertiary education.

Table 1: Experimental group and control groups

Experimental Group and Control Groups			
ID	Group Name	Group Description	Participants
A	Experimental group	Students were given three storytelling tasks within 20 sessions; the Expectancy-Value questionnaire was administered after the intervention.	73
B	Control group with previous experience	Students reported their participation in other storytelling activities in English class besides this intervention; the Expectancy-Value questionnaire was administered to them.	74
C	Control group with no experience	Students did not report any experience participating in English class storytelling activities; the Expectancy-Value questionnaire was administered to them.	152

3.2. Research participants.

The target population for the storytelling tasks used in the study is English majors from private or vocational colleges in Guangzhou, China (70.2% and 25.5%, respectively; see Table 2). The experimental participants were recruited via their class teacher, who was known to the author. Students (N=73) attending two classes participated in the quasi-experiment with the intervention of three storytelling tasks (20 sessions). Students of the control groups (N=74 and 152) were recruited online at different times and at universities in Guangzhou.

Table 2 shows the demographic information of 299 participants. Age ranges spread from 21-22 to 19-20 years old (69.2% and 29.8%, respectively), with 59.6% female and 39.4% male. Their academic directions include teaching (51.8%), translation and culture (19.1%), and business (29.1%).

Table 2: Demographics

Participants' Information			
ID	Types	N	Percentage (%)
Age	19-20	90	29.8
	21-22	209	69.2
	Male	119	39.4
Gender	Female	180	59.6
Major Direction	Teaching	155	51.8
	Translation	57	19.1
	Business	87	29.1
College Type	Private	212	70.2
	Vocational	77	25.5
	Other	10	3.3
Total		299	100

3.3. Instruments

In collecting the data, the researcher used the following procedures and instruments, such as:

a. A quasi-experiment was conducted on junior English majors (N=73) with the intervention of three storytelling tasks.

b. After the quasi-experiment, participants in the experimental group were administered the questionnaire to assess their attitude and expectancy-value for the exposed storytelling tasks.

c. Meanwhile, the questionnaire was administered to two control groups (N=75, 152) to survey their attitude and expectancy-value toward storytelling pedagogy and tasks. Along with the questionnaire items, an intricate description of the three storytelling tasks was presented to respondents.

The instruments include one questionnaire and storytelling tasks designed for English majors.

3.3.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaire comprises two parts: college students' attitudes toward storytelling pedagogy and their expectancy-value for storytelling tasks. Several considerations guided the compilation of items for the questionnaires.

Regarding college students' attitudes toward the use of storytelling, the items with eight questions target their attitude and willingness to use storytelling in English classroom teaching, relevant experience of being exposed to storytelling pedagogy, perception of their career skills and objectives, and teaching methods frequently used in class.

The expectancy-value items target students' perceptions, confidence, values, challenges, and motivation in perceiving and accomplishing storytelling-relevant tasks. It follows the guidelines of the Expectancy-Value Theory (Cooperet et al., 2017; Day, 2020; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Bartz et al., 2015; Pekrun, 2019) and consists of 21 statements to which respondents indicate their level of agreement on a 6-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, partly disagree, partly agree, agree, strongly agree).

The questionnaire reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. A general guide to Cronbach's alpha values is when $0.9 \geq \alpha \geq 0.8$, and it shows the internal consistency of the questionnaire is in good reliability ($\alpha = .814$), so the overall reliability of the questionnaire was good. (Barbera et al., 2020).

The questionnaire was translated into Chinese and administered to participants in experimental and control groups. The experimental group answered the questionnaire after completing the three tasks. The control groups answered the questionnaire without needing to finish any storytelling-relevant task.

3.3.2 Storytelling tasks

Storytelling tasks in this experiment followed a series of steps: (1) imparting narrative and stylistic knowledge before analyzing texts; (2) applying this knowledge in analyzing the texts; (3) infusing this knowledge and background into a storytelling task that requires students to use the forms of stories to present their personal experience and express their ideas pertaining the texts; (4) recording these ideas produced in previous steps, via writing journals, making mind maps, videoing their speeches, making their teaching plans, and other creative ways.

The storytelling tasks were designed based on the standard curriculum framework for English majors in China. The curriculum framework outlines the required courses, learning objectives, and expected outcomes for students pursuing a degree in English (Zhongqing, 2020). Among the courses, the Advanced English course is compulsory for junior English majors, and one of the authority textbooks is *An Integrated English Course Textbook* (by Zhaoxiong He, 2013), from which three tasks were developed for advanced learners (corresponding to CEFR level C1). The following five criteria were considered when selecting the text materials from the textbook:

- Materials should directly relate to the English majors' curriculum and course objectives.
- Materials should be advanced, which is challenging for junior English majors.
- Various genres should be included to expose students to different forms of storytelling.
- Materials should address both historical and contemporary cultural and social themes.
- Materials should allow for interdisciplinary discussions and perspectives.

When using these materials to design the storytelling tasks, some criteria were also followed: (1) tasks need to align with learning objectives; (2) tasks can actively engage students with storytelling elements such as narrative structures, character development, and thematic analysis; (3) tasks should encourage critical thinking and in-depth analysis of the materials; (4) tasks should prompt students to explore the epistemological aspects of storytelling; (5) tasks are designed in various formats, including discussions, group work, and individual reflection.

Combined with the intermediate texts and various language learning activities, the storytelling tasks in this experiment display a higher complexity for English majors. Table 3 demonstrates the skills and techniques participants in the experimental group are required to accomplish their storytelling tasks, which comprehensively demand English majors' language, thinking, and vocational ability.

Table 3: Storytelling tasks for experimental group

Forms of Storytelling Tasks for Experimental Group								
Class	N	EW	RE	TR	TP	MP	SV	BA
1	36	7	4	6	10	0	23	1
2	37	17	7	3	2	3	29	0
Total	73	24	11	9	12	3	52	1

Note. EW=English Writing, RE=Reading Extension, TR= Thinking Reflection, TP=Teaching Plan, MP= Mind Map, SV=Stortelling Video, BA=Business Assignment

4. Results

The findings are presented in several aspects, namely:

4.1. The findings related to junior English majors at Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology, China

Table 4 shows the Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with exposure to storytelling tasks as the independent variable. Exposure conditions included both direct exposure and non-direct exposure with prior experience. The dependent variable is expectancy and value, comprising five factors or components: perception of storytelling in English learning (Factor 1), confidence in accomplishing the storytelling tasks (Factor 2), the value of storytelling tasks in English learning (Factor 3), challenge to accomplish the storytelling tasks (Factor 4), and motivation of accomplishing the tasks (Factor 5). These five factors, as well as the overall expectancy and value, were treated as dependent variables in the analysis. The fixed factor consisted of three groups in total.

The homogeneity of variance test revealed significant differences among all variables across different groups at the 0.05 level, except for Factor 3 (Value) and Factor 5 (Motivation). Consequently, a robust MANOVA test was used for analysis.

The results indicated a p-value of 0.00 for all variables at the 0.05 level. The effect sizes, measured by partial eta squared, were as follows: 0.061 (Expectancy-value), 0.161 (Confidence), 0.181 (Challenges), 0.094 (Perception), 0.0034 (Value), and 0.087 (Motivation). Notably, an effect size of 0.061 suggests a medium effect, while values exceeding 0.14 indicate a large effect. These findings signify that the study's results hold statistical significance and practical relevance.

The MANOVA results reveal significant differences among experimental and control groups, which suggests that direct engagement with storytelling tasks influences students' expectancy-value, perception, confidence, and challenge toward storytelling tasks, compared to those without recent task exposure.

Table 4: Statistics of MANOVA (comparison between Group A, B, and C)

Statistics of MANOVA (comparison between Group A, B, and C)						
Dependent Variable	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	Partial Eta Squared
Expectancy-Value	2693.657	2	1346.829	9.664	.000	.061
Confidence	878.486	2	439.243	28.312	.000	.161
Challenge	1010.501	2	505.250	32.743	.000	.181
Perception	606.083	2	303.042	15.361	.000	.094
Value	169.719	2	84.860	5.219	.006	.034
Motivation	434.458	2	217.229	14.170	.000	.087

Note: SS= Sum of Squares, df=Degree of Freedom, MS=Mean Square, F=F-value

Table 5 presents the result of the Post hoc analysis of all the factors between groups. Figure 1 shows the different performance of all the factors between groups.

Following post hoc tests, it is evident that Group A and B are significantly different, as well as Group A and C at the 0.05 level (p-value = .000). However, there is no significant difference between Groups B and C. Notably, the mean difference between Group A and B, A, and C in expectancy-value is -8.28 and -5.70, respectively. For other factors, Groups B and C consistently show higher values than Group A, indicating that recent exposure to the task might reduce students' expectancy-value.

This unexpected finding prompts further analysis, particularly regarding Group A's higher perception of challenges. Students in Group A appear to have a heightened awareness of the challenges exposed to the storytelling tasks, unlike their counterparts in other groups, who have little perception of challenges due to lack of experience or recent exposure.

Table 5: Post hoc test

Groups	Dependent Variable	Mean Difference (I-J)	95% CI	p-value
A and B	Expectancy Value	-8.28	[-12.87, -3.69]	.000
	Confidence	-4.18	[-5.71, -5.20]	.000

Groups	Dependent Variable	Mean Difference (I-J)	95% CI	p-value
	Challenge	4.57	[3.04, 6.10]	.000
	Perception	-3.10	[-4.83, -1.38]	.000
	Value	-2.15	[-3.72, -.58]	.004
	Motivation	-3.42	[-4.94, -1.89]	.000
A and C	Expectancy Value	-5.70	[-9.66, -1.74]	.002
	Confidence	-3.88	[-5.20, -2.56]	.000
	Challenge	4.10	[2.79, 5.42]	.000
	Perception	-3.40	[-4.89, -1.91]	.000
	Value	-2.15	[-3.72, -.58]	.004
	Motivation	-1.45	[-2.76, -.13]	.027

Note. Group A is the experimental group; Groups B and C are the control groups.

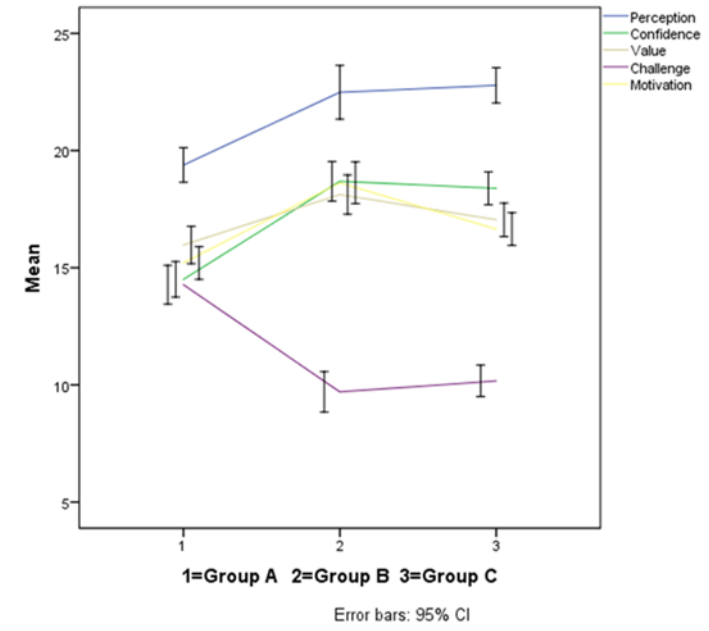

Figure 1: Mean of factors in groups A, B, and C

4.2. The findings relate to the correlations between respondents' attitudes toward the storytelling pedagogy and their expectancy-value and challenge of accomplishing the storytelling tasks.

Table 6 correlates students' attitudes toward storytelling pedagogy with their expectancy, value, and challenge for accomplishing the storytelling tasks. Questions determine to what extent a stereotype of storytelling dominates and influences students' willingness and impression of storytelling.

The correlation analysis revealed that responses to Q1, Q3, and Q8 significantly correlate with expectancy value, with coefficients of .164 (p-value=.005), .140 (p-value=.015), and .118 (p-value=.041), respectively.

Additionally, Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, and Q8 exhibited correlations with the challenge (Factor 4), with coefficients of .232 (p-value = 0.00), -.115 (p-value = .048), .193 (p-value = .001), .118 (p-value = .042), and .118 (p-value = .042), respectively, which indicates a relationship between attitude toward storytelling and expectancy-value, confidence, and challenge. Notably, recent exposure to the task increases perceived challenges while reducing confidence and expectancy value.

Table 6: Correlation between expectancy-value and challenge

Response to Questions and Correlation								
Question Code	Question Text	Response to Questions		Percent (%)	Correlation with Expectancy-value (r)	p-value	Correlation with challenge (r)	p-value
Q1 *	Have you been exposed to storytelling teaching methods in university English classes?	Yes No	138 161	46.2 53.8	.164	.005*	.232	.000**
Q2	If teachers want to adopt storytelling as the primary	Yes No	201 98	67.2 32.8	-.068	.244	-.115	.048*

Response to Questions and Correlation								
Question Code	Question Text	Response to Questions		Percent (%)	Correlation with Expectancy-value (r)	p-value	Correlation with challenge (r)	p-value
	teaching method in English class, would you be willing to accept it?							
Q3 *	Do you think storytelling is more suitable for elementary and middle school students?	Yes No	175 124	58.5 41.5	.140	.015*	.193	.001*
Q4	Do you think it is somewhat childish for college students to learn English through storytelling pedagogy?	Yes No	246 53	82.3 17.7	.097	.095	.118	.042*
Q5	Do teachers like to use direct teaching methods to analyze texts in Advanced English Courses?	Yes No	179 120	59.9 40.1	-.045	.435	-.095	.101
Q6	Do you know what positions you can get after graduation?	Yes No	235 64	78.6 21.4	-.005	.934	.031	.588
Q7	Do you know what knowledge, skills, and abilities you need in future work?	Yes No	237 62	79.3 20.7	-.039	.499	.022	.705
Q8*	In English class, do teachers determine learning objectives together with students?	Yes No	251 48	83.9 16.1	.118	.041*	.118	.042*

Regarding college students' attitudes toward storytelling, Table 6 shows that most participants (82.3%) consider storytelling childish for college students (in Q4), which is evident bias against storytelling. This bias likely induces a sense of ease and relaxation during accomplishing storytelling tasks.

Likewise, participants (58.5.0%) think storytelling as the primary teaching method in English classes is more suitable for elementary and middle school students (in Q3). However, many participants (67.2%) would be willing to adopt storytelling as the primary method in their study if provided by their teachers (in Q2)

Table 6 also presents the respondents' answers regarding career skills for English majors. Many participants (78.6%) reported that they know their career direction (in Q6), and more participants (79.3%) reported that they know the skills required for future careers (in Q7). In Q8, participants (83.9%) had the experience of making specific learning objectives associated with their future careers in the classroom.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study both confirm and extend previous research on the effects of storytelling in teaching English. First, the results demonstrate that non-exposed students' bias toward storytelling might positively influence their expectancy-value before a storytelling task. In contrast, students with task exposure will be influenced by the complexity of the task and tend to report a lower expectancy-value but a higher perception of challenge. Non-exposed students with past self-reported experience score highest in their expectancy-value and the lowest perception of challenge, such as time-consuming, difficulty presenting a meaningful story, and a lack of creativity in representing students' world values.

Students with low cognitive needs often perform less well in challenging tasks. However, English majors must achieve an advanced level to meet graduation and career requirements, which leads to a contradiction between their authentic language ability and career objectives. For these students, facing challenges in a comprehensive and seemingly relaxing approach is beneficial. Stories and storytelling are excellent alternatives due to their relaxing nature and insightful depth, thus quickly sparking students' interest in learning. These students completed three storytelling tasks before the study, gradually increasing their knowledge of storytelling while realizing the limitations of their ability. However, with increasing difficulty and complexity, students' performance may appear to decline.

Therefore, focusing on the complexity of storytelling tasks for students is meaningful and highly needed. Numerous discussions converge on the idea that the career objectives of English majors encompass vital skills such as teaching, research, communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability to societal needs (Liu, 2021). Stewart (1989) highlighted the diverse career options available to English majors: teaching, editing, publishing, and writing. Specifically, English majors aspire towards careers in business-related fields and seek to become qualified educators (Chen, 2021; Stewart, 1989).

For educators, these objectives guide the development and organization of curricula and teaching methods. However, for students, the challenge lies in understanding these career objectives and how to acquire the necessary

skills throughout their college journey.

Despite the wealth of research discussing English majors' career objectives, there exists divergence in students' perceptions of these objectives. Sun (2017) suggested that English majors clearly understand their career objectives, including building a solid foundation in English theory, knowledge, and skills to become teachers. In contrast, Loría Sánchez and Bonilla López (2022) found that English majors in Costa Rica exhibited inconsistent knowledge of their career paths and the job market, indicating a lack of clarity in their objectives. Clayton (1981) mentioned the uncertainty among English majors about job prospects, attributing it to the unclear integration of career objectives in curriculum and teaching. Further research is needed to ascertain how well English majors know their potential career paths and job markets.

Most participants in this study were from private colleges and vocational colleges in China. These students typically exhibit lower cognitive needs and have a weaker language foundation. Consequently, they are more prone to damaging influences when confronted with a complex task. While the research does not provide definitive evidence of bias toward storytelling activities, it is crucial to scaffold students in completing such tasks and facilitate their insight into the essence of storytelling in educational settings.

For college students who are considered adults, there exists a need for a deeper understanding of approaches and tasks. This understanding fosters genuine motivation and allows individuals to recognize the inherent value of activities rather than relying on external judgments of something being inherently good or bad. This realization holds significance for educators as they design curricula and tasks in higher education. Striking a balance between complexity and difficulty is crucial for college students. Future studies could delve into defining these standards and exploring evaluation methodologies.

6. Conclusions

This study had limitations concerning the research design, sample nature, and task design. Firstly, the research design lacked a formal pre-test for students in the experimental group, resulting in the absence of an accurate comparison between the pre-test and post-test. Although participants in the experimental group were asked related questions in daily classroom communication and were observed by their teacher, it still represented a deficiency in the research design. Moreover, if sufficient human resources are available to administer storytelling tasks, more classes will be included to enhance the sample size. Additionally, regarding task design, a rigorous assessment of complexity should be incorporated to provide a more specific explanation of how the complexity of storytelling tasks would negatively influence students' expectancy-value. We would encourage future research to delve into assessing storytelling tasks and their complexity for advanced language learners.

Additionally, the participants in this study were mainly from private and vocational colleges, which differs from English majors from a higher tier university. Therefore, their perception of challenges and complexity could also be different. In future studies, we will encourage more research on English majors from other universities.

Declaration of conflicting interest

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