

Educational Storytelling in Early Childhood: From a Narrative Tool to a Holistic Developmental Approach in the Hands of Educators

Samer Ben Fekih¹, Ameni Elkebir²

Science Step Journal / SSJ

2025/Volume 3 - Issue 10

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17450092>

To cite this article: Ben Fekih, S., Elkebir, A. (2025). Educational Storytelling in Early Childhood: From a Narrative Tool to a Holistic Developmental Approach in the Hands of Educators. Science Step Journal, 3(10). ISSN: 3009-500X.

Abstract

This study explores the use of storytelling as a pedagogical tool to support the holistic development of children in early childhood. It analyzes educators' awareness of storytelling's educational roles and evaluates current storytelling practices in Tunisian educational settings. The research hypothesizes that systematic, intentional use of stories—when combined with appropriate educator training—can enhance children's linguistic, social, emotional, motor, and creative abilities. Data were collected through a field questionnaire for kindergarten and preparatory school teachers, as well as an observation grid to assess children's interactions with stories and the pedagogical methods applied. Findings indicate significant variability in storytelling practices, a shortage of specialized training, and a lack of structured plans for integrating storytelling into daily curricula. The study underscores the need to include storytelling in teacher training programs and to establish it as a core component of the educational process.

Keywords

Early childhood education, Storytelling, Professional training backgrounds of educators, Pedagogy, Kindergarten education, Artistic mediums

¹ PhD in Musical Sciences and Music Mediology at the Higher Institute of Music of Sfax, University of Sfax, within the Interdisciplinary Research Laboratory in Discourse, Art, Music and Economics (LR18ES23) (Tunisia), Samerfekih7@gmail.com

² Master researcher in educational science at the Higher Institute for Childhood Educators, University of Carthage, Research Laboratory "Art, Mediation, Childhood" (LR: ISCE11ES26) (Tunisia) amenielkbir@gmail.com

Introduction

Although numerous studies have addressed the importance of storytelling in early childhood, most have focused on theoretical aspects or the development of specific skills, such as language and imagination. There has been little in-depth analysis of storytelling as a comprehensive pedagogical tool supporting various dimensions of child development. There is also a clear lack of field research, monitoring narrative practices within educational institutions, and assessing educators' awareness of storytelling's roles and formative potential. In the Tunisian context, in particular, stories occupy a marginal place in official educational programs, and specialist training in educational storytelling is absent from teacher training courses. This justifies the need for field studies that investigate the current situation and propose practical alternatives. This research aims to address this issue by taking a comprehensive approach that combines theoretical analysis and field monitoring of storytelling practices in early childhood education.

Recent studies in education and psychology suggest that what is instilled in children at this stage has a profound impact on their psychological, social, mental, and academic development later in life (UNESCO, 2021). From this perspective, modern educational efforts focus on developing teaching and learning methods appropriate to this sensitive stage, which respond to children's psychological and mental needs. One of the most prominent methods to have emerged in recent decades is the use of educational stories as a tool for teaching and development, which can entertain and educate while building values and developing skills.

The educational story has evolved from a mere means of storytelling or passing the time into a comprehensive developmental tool with cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. It is capable of shaping children's awareness, enhancing their expressive and imaginative abilities, training them in critical thinking and problem solving, and instilling a system of moral and social values. (Nicolopoulou, 2010)

The educational story has evolved from a mere means of storytelling or passing the time into a comprehensive developmental tool with cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. It is capable of shaping children's awareness, enhancing their expressive and imaginative abilities, training them in critical thinking and problem solving, and instilling a system of moral and social values. (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978).

In the same context, there is a significant role for educators in using educational stories, which goes beyond mere narration to include preparing and adapting stories to the specific characteristics of the target group and transforming them into participatory activities that enable children to express themselves, analyze, imagine, and even take initiative and be creative. Many researchers in the field of education consider educational stories to be a formative tool that enables educators to practice comprehensive education based on emotional care, mental stimulation, and value guidance,

especially in a changing world that requires the upbringing of a generation capable of interacting positively with its environment (Isbell et al., 2004).

From a psychological perspective, educational stories help children deal with their emotions and fears, as they act as a kind of 'emotional Mirror' of their inner world in a symbolic yet safe way. In the story of a hero who faces bullying, or a female hero who overcomes fear, children find a way to re-enact their personal experiences and acquire strategies for adaptation and overcoming (Bruner, 1990). Educational stories also encourage children to use language effectively and develop their communication skills, which is one of the indicators of later academic and social success (Dickinson & Smith, 1994).

Contemporary pedagogical approaches emphasize the need for a holistic approach to education during early childhood, integrating the cognitive with the emotional, the sensory with the affective, and the interactive with the value-based. In this context, educational stories serve as an ideal tool for achieving this integration, as they can be transformed into artistic, theatrical, linguistic, and even athletic activities, thereby expanding their impact and making them a gateway to developing several essential life skills in children, such as teamwork, respect for others, imagination, self-discipline, and prospective thinking (Fisher & Williams, 2004).

Recent years have seen increased interest in the use of storytelling in various academic programs, at kindergartens and educational institutions, at workshops, and in psychological support, and even in special education centers. Initiatives have emerged to train educators in effective storytelling techniques, interactive reading, the use of puppets and miniature theatre, and the development of local stories that reflect children's culture and social environment (Gallas, 1994).

However, this qualitative shift in employing educational stories still faces several challenges, most prominently the lack of systematic training for educators on the effective use of stories, the lack of sufficient Arabic-language references that combine theory and practice, and inadequate institutional investment in storytelling aimed at Arab children, which is sometimes characterized by stereotyping and direct preaching, thereby undermining its educational effectiveness. For this reason, rethinking educational stories and developing teaching strategies that specify their symbolism, language, and psychological potential are educational priorities in contemporary Arab contexts.

This article seeks to highlight the conceptual and functional transformation that educational stories have undergone in the field of early childhood, from a classic narrative medium to a comprehensive developmental tool that offers educators enormous potential for building psychologically healthy, mentally capable, and socially balanced children.

In this context, it has been emphasized that the effective use of educational stories is not limited to their content or artistic form but depends primarily on the pedagogical methodology used by the educator in presenting and activating them within the classroom. The story is not an off-the-shelf

tool with an automatic effect, but rather dynamic material that must be adaptively tailored to consider the mental and emotional development of children, their ability to concentrate, their cultural and linguistic background, and even their special needs, where applicable. From these stems the crucial role of the educator as an educational designer who reconstructs the story according to specific educational objectives and chooses the most appropriate timing, space, and mechanisms for its active implementation (Nicolopoulou, 2010).

In practical terms, the story can be transformed into a flexible educational framework that can be integrated into the daily activities of children in kindergarten or early education, whether through group reading, open dialogue, role-playing, or even individual or group rewriting. The secret to the success of this narrative pedagogy lies in its ability to democratize information: making knowledge accessible in a way that is understandable, appealing, and appropriate to the child's internal rhythm. This is where the educational story differs from the traditional lesson based on rote learning, as the story allows the child to be active in constructing meaning, rather than merely a passive recipient of it (Piaget, 1972).

On the other hand, the nature of the story, with its characters, conflicts, and sometimes open endings, makes it rich ground for promoting ethical and behavioral thinking. Through their interaction with the story, children learn how to take a standpoint, evaluate behaviors, understand consequences, and propose alternative solutions. This type of 'values training' cannot be achieved with the same effectiveness through direct commands or abstract advice, because stories provide children with a safe emotional space in which they can project their own experiences and gain self-awareness and behavioral awareness (Fisher & Williams, 2004).

Experimental studies have shown that children regularly exposed to interactive storytelling exhibit higher levels of empathy and tend to engage in positive social behavior such as helping, sharing, and cooperating, compared to their peers who are not exposed to storytelling as a systematic educational tool (Isbell et al., 2004). This finding reinforces the argument that storytelling is more than just a means of stimulation; it is one of the most powerful tools for fostering values education.

If we consider the psychological aspects of the story, we find it meaningful for children to release and vent feelings that may be difficult for them to express verbally. Fear, jealousy, anxiety, joy, and even anger can be experienced vicariously through the characters in the story, which helps strengthen the child's emotional resilience and self-awareness (Bruner, 1990). Stories are also a means of psychological prevention, especially when they address sensitive topics such as loss, divorce, or bullying, if they are handled in a manner appropriate to the child's age and sensitivity.

Probably the most important aspect of educational stories is that they can mix formal and informal learning. They are well displayed in schools, are adequate at home, in libraries, cultural centers, and even in therapy for the kids. This flexibility makes stories a strategic tool in comprehensive

educational policies, as recommended by international organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF (UNESCO, 2021).

Investing in stories in the context of early childhood goes far beyond storytelling, becoming an integrated educational and cultural project that requires the development of high-quality story production, the training of educators in storytelling skills, and the integration of this vital resource into general pedagogical planning. The movement towards developing interactive digital stories has also become necessary today to keep pace with children's interests and their advanced technological reality, provided that these stories retain the aesthetic and educational values of traditional storytelling.

1) Problematic:

Despite the symbolic and traditional significance of stories in childhood, their presence in educational settings, especially in kindergartens, remains limited in terms of systematic and organized educational use. Educational literature agrees on the importance of stories in supporting children's overall development (linguistic, emotional, social, and cognitive). Although practical fields remain subject to individual discretion, influenced by the educator's training and awareness of the profound educational role of stories. Furthermore, the absence of specialized training and the failure to include storytelling in clearly defined pedagogical plans limit its effectiveness as an educational and developmental resource.

This situation raises key questions about how stories are used in educational institutions, the degree to which educators are aware of their developmental function, and the challenges that prevent them from being used effectively.

This is where the problem comes in, with the following main question:

To what degree is storytelling used as a pedagogical tool in early childhood education in Tunisia, and what is the level of awareness among educators of their role in supporting children's overall development?

How does educational storytelling contribute to the comprehensive development in early childhood?

Does the early childhood educator merely use stories as a traditional narrative device, or does he adopt them as an educational tool with a comprehensive and integrated educational perspective?

2) Hypothesis:

- 1- Educational stories contribute to supporting the overall development of children (linguistic, social, and emotional) when employed systematically and accompanied by appropriate stimulation techniques.

- 2- The educational impact of the story depends on the educator's awareness of its importance and their ability to select and present it in accordance with clear developmental goals.
- 3- Inadequate training in the field of educational storytelling is one of the main obstacles limiting the use of stories as an effective pedagogical approach in kindergartens.

3) Importance and objectives of the study:

This study shows paramount importance given the significant changes in the field of early childhood, where it is necessary to reassess the pedagogical tools used, foremost among which is storytelling, as an integrated educational and formative tool that transcends its traditional entertainment function to become an effective tool in supporting the comprehensive development of children, linguistically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively. The scientific contribution of this research lies in highlighting the degree of awareness among educators and teachers of the developmental and educational role of storytelling, and in investigating the practices adopted in kindergartens and nurseries in Tunisia, with a focus on the narrative and pedagogical skills required to use storytelling in effective methodological activities.

This approach serves to enrich the debate on the need for specialized and systematic training in the field of educational storytelling, enabling multiple developmental goals to be achieved through storytelling and reinforcing the role of the educator as a key driver in building an integrated educational experience. The research also aims to provide field data that will help develop training programs and improve pedagogical practices adopted within educational institutions, with a view to establishing an educational approach that considers the specificities of the child's age and invests in their potential through appropriate and proven tools.

4) Methodology of the study:

1- Approach:

In this research, a dual approach combining quantitative and qualitative data was adopted, given the specific nature of the subject, which combines descriptive aspects (frequency of use of stories, types of stories, objectives) with interpretative and conceptual aspects (educators' experiences, perceptions, and challenges encountered) This approach allows for a closer look at the reality of daily practice in kindergartens and gives the research depth by exploring what cannot be observed through numbers alone, especially when it comes to the impact of stories on the overall development of children and the extent to which educators are aware of their developmental role.

2- Research sample:

The research sample consists of a diverse group of individuals involved in education, including both educators and children, who were selected at random. This strengthens the representativeness of the sample for the study population and enriches the results.

To begin with, the sample of educators consisted of 40 educators working in various educational institutions, distributed among: • Public and private kindergartens • Preparatory sections in Tunisian public primary schools. This diversity allows for a comparison of perspectives and practices between different educational institutions and provides a deeper understanding of how educational stories are used in different professional contexts (public/private, kindergarten/preparatory). The participation of educators from multiple professional backgrounds also adds to the richness of the qualitative data and helps highlight potential differences in how stories are used as a comprehensive educational and developmental tool.

In addition, the sample of children included 60 children, distributed evenly between two age groups representing two pivotal stages of early childhood: • 30 children aged 4 years (16 females, 14 males) • 30 children aged 5 years (13 females, 17 males). This distribution allows a closer investigation of background differences that may affect a child's reception and understanding of the story's content, as well as enabling the study of interaction with the story material according to age group. The relative balance between the sexes is also considered positive, as it allows the observation of possible differences between females and males in their perception of the educational story.

Overall, this sample represents a rich intersection between educators' pedagogy and children's developmental stages, enabling us to gain a deeper understanding of how educational storytelling can be used as a resource to support children's holistic development within various Tunisian educational policies.

3- Research methods:

Within this research, we prepared a field questionnaire addressed to kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers, intending to study the reality of using stories as a comprehensive educational tool in early childhood. This questionnaire is in line with recent educational developments that have restored the story to its position as an effective means of supporting the integrated development of children, including linguistic, social, emotional, and cognitive aspects.

The questionnaire consists of six main themes, ranging from participants' personal data (with their consent), the extent to which stories are included in educational programs, patterns of use as a developmental tool, narrative methods and techniques, as well as challenges that educators may face in using stories in the academic space as well as open-ended questions that capture perceptions and suggestions from the field. Through this questionnaire, we seek to collect quantitative and qualitative data that will enable us to diagnose the reality of educational practices related to storytelling, explore strengths and weaknesses, and propose ways to develop them in the Tunisian educational sector.

A field observation network was also adopted to monitor children's interaction with the story according to how it was used within the class, to track behavioral and emotional indicators that

reflect their level of engagement and response. The network was designed to cover various aspects of interaction, such as attention and concentration, facial and physical expression, initiative to participate, asking questions, or retelling parts of the story, as well as the rate of verbal or motor interaction depending on how the story was presented (oral, theatrical, illustrated, digital, etc.). This tool made it possible to observe differences in children's interaction depending on the narrative style used, which helped to build a deeper understanding of the child's relationship with the story as a means of stimulating growth and learning within the educational environment. This observation falls within the qualitative aspect of the research, as it allows for an in-depth reading of the daily experience within the class, based on the children's reality lived and not just relying on their words.

4- Study variables:

This study focuses on two main variables, which form the basis of the analysis and investigation. The independent variable is the educational story, its content, presentation methods, and ways of use within the classroom, whether it is an oral, theatrical, illustrated, or digital story. The dependent variable is the overall development of the child in early childhood, which refers to the dimensions that the story contributes to supporting, such as linguistic, emotional, social, sensory-motor, and symbolic development. The study attempts to understand the relationship between these two variables by observing how the nature of the story and the way it is used affect various areas of child development, based on daily classroom experience and the practices of educators within the educational environment.

5) Results:

These results represent the survey data collected in the field and are presented here before being analyzed:

Among the 60 participants, women represented the majority by 48 female educators (80%), compared to only 12 male educators (20%). In terms of age group, 30 educators are between 30 and 40 years old (50%), 17 are between 20 and 30 years old (28%), while only 13 are over 40 years old (22%). This highlights that most of the sample consists of women of working age.

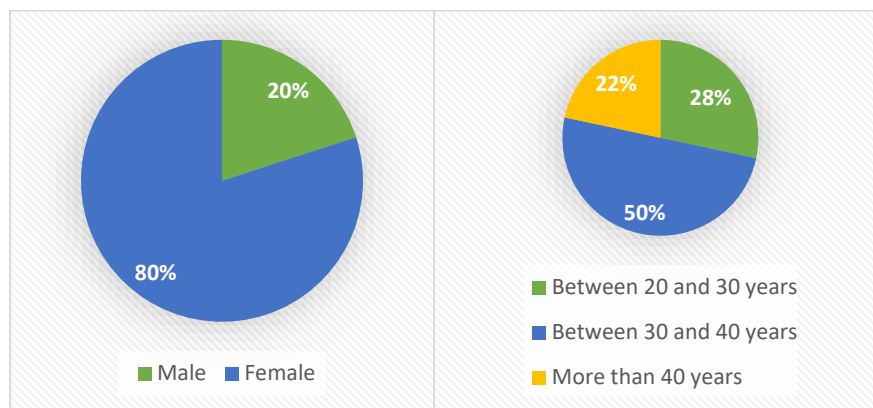


Figure 1: Study sample by age and gender

Figure 2 indicates that 15 out of 60 participants (25%) have more than 10 years of experience, while 25 (42%) have between 5 and 10 years of experience, and 20 (33%) have less than 5 years of experience. This indicates that the sample has considerable field experience, which lends credibility to their perceptions and field practices.

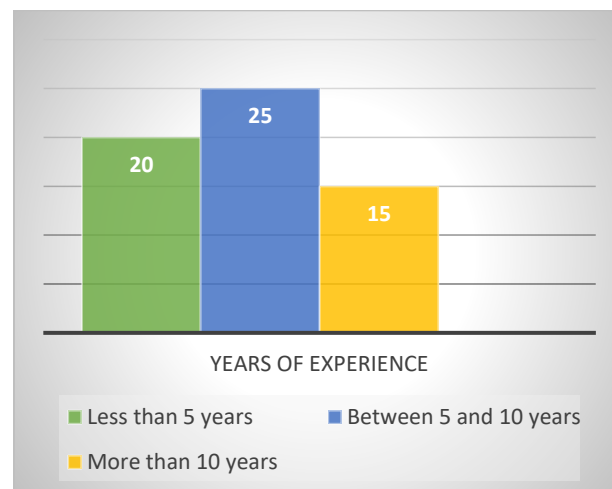


Figure 02: Study samples according to years of experience in the field of education

The results in **Figure 3** reveal clear diversity in educational levels and backgrounds related to the field of early childhood. The results are as follows:

Eighteen educators (30%) have secondary education accompanied by professional training in early childhood, reflecting a trend towards compensating for academic deficiencies with specialised education training.

Fourteen educators (23.3%) with university degrees have also undergone professional training in early childhood education, indicating this group's awareness of the importance of practical training alongside academic qualifications.

Thirteen educators (21.7%) hold university degrees in education and early childhood, and they constitute the most theoretically and practically qualified group, making them the reference group in the application of scientifically based educational practices.

In the meantime, we find that 8 people (13.3%) with university degrees lack any professional training in early childhood, which could affect their teaching performance because they don't have the applied skills they need.

Finally, 7 educators (11.7%) have secondary education without professional training in early childhood, and they represent the weakest category in terms of qualification, which requires consideration of training plans targeting them.

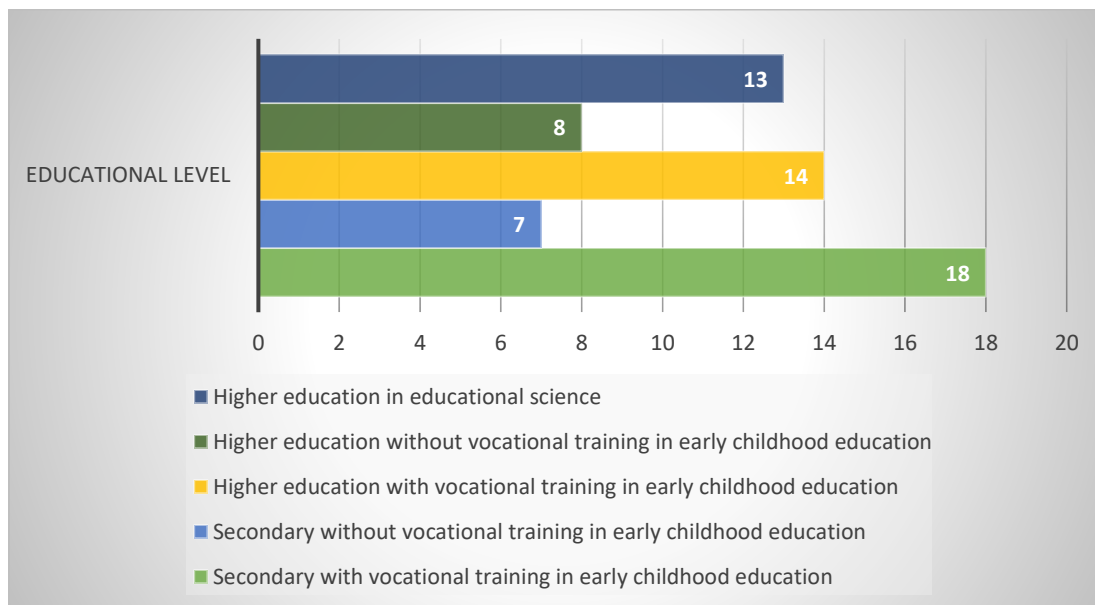
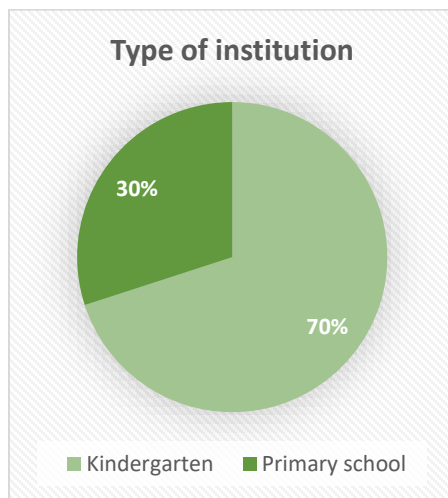


Figure 3: Study sample by the educational level of educators

Forty-two educators (70%) work in kindergartens, compared to only 18 (30%) in primary schools. This result is consistent with the study's focus on early childhood and provides a wider representation of educators working directly with this age group.

Figure 4: Study sample by employer



Thirty-seven educators (62%) had not received any previous training in educational storytelling, compared to only 23 (38%) who reported having received training in this area. This highlights a training gap and confirms the need to strengthen this dimension within continuing education programs for educators.

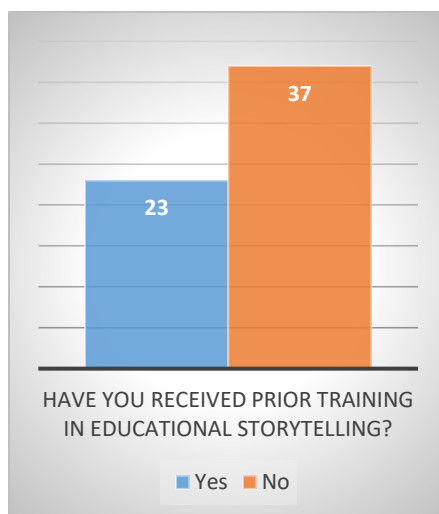


Figure 5: Study sample and composition in the field of narrative fiction

The table presents the distribution of the study sample's responses regarding the use of educational stories in various areas of the questionnaire, according to three approved frequency levels: frequent, often, and rarely.

Sections ³		Rarely		Occasionally		Consistently		Overall percentage
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Integration of Storytelling into the Curriculum	1	15	25	30	50	15	25	100
	2	19	32	22	36	19	32	100
	3	14	23	16	27	30	50	100
Using storytelling as a method of holistic development	1	16	27	20	32	24	41	100
	2	16	27	10	16	34	57	100
	3	18	30	13	22	29	48	100
	4	15	25	11	18	34	57	100
Storytelling Methods and Supportive Techniques	1	12	20	10	16	38	64	100
	2	13	21	9	15	38	64	100
	3	14	23	8	13	38	64	100
Challenges and Obstacles	1	40	67	12	20	8	13	100
	2	42	70	6	10	12	20	100
	3	41	68	8	13	11	19	100

The results of the questionnaire on the frequency of employing educational stories in educators' practices showed varying percentages according to the adopted axes. In the first theme, which concerned the degree to which stories are included in the educational curriculum, 15 participants (25%) reported that stories are explicitly included in the pedagogical guidelines or official programs adopted by the educational institution to which they belong, and 30 participants (50%) reported that they are often included. While 15 participants (25%) stated that it is rarely included in the pedagogical guidelines of the educational institution to which they belong. As for the regular use of stories in methodological activities, 19 participants (32%) indicated that they were used intensively, 22 (36%) indicated that they were used most of the time, and 19 (32%) indicated that they were rarely used. As for preparing a weekly/monthly plan for storytelling, 23% (14 participants) reported intensive preparation, 27% (16 participants) reported mostly preparation, while 30 participants (50%) reported rare preparation.

³ The axes of the questionnaire are presented in the annexes ***

In the second axis related to the use of storytelling as a comprehensive development tool, 16 participants (27%) reported that they use storytelling intensively to enhance language skills, 10 participants (16%) reported that they use it frequently, and 24 participants (41%) reported that they use it rarely. In the second statement, regarding the use of stories to enhance emotional and social skills, 27% (16 participants) reported using them frequently, 16% (10 participants) reported using them often, and 57% (34 participants) reported using them rarely. As for the third statement, which included activities accompanying the story activity, it was used frequently by 18 participants (30%), often by 13 participants (22%), while 29 participants (48%) expressed rare use. In the fourth statement, which was about evaluating and observing the impact of the story on the child's development, 25% (15 participants) said they used it frequently, 18% (11 participants) said they used it mostly, and 57% (34 participants) said they used it rarely.

Regarding the third axis, which concerns the media and techniques used in presenting the story, 12 participants (20%) indicated frequent use of dialogic reading, 10 participants (16%) indicated occasional use, and 38 participants (64%) indicated rare use. In a second statement, 21% (13 participants) reported intensive use of aids and stimuli during storytelling (puppets, drawings, sounds, music, etc.), 15% (9 participants) reported occasional use, and 64% (38 participants) reported rare use. In the third statement, 23% (14 participants) reported intensive use of digital storytelling, 13% (8 participants) reported 'often' use, and 64% (38 participants) reported 'rarely' use.

As for the fourth axis, which concerns the difficulties educators face in using educational stories, 40 participants (67%) in the first statement indicated that they face time constraints in incorporating stories into the daily program regularly, 12 (20%) said they faced difficulties most of the time, while 8 participants (13%) said they faced difficulties rarely, considering that if stories were adapted to the daily program, they would be an essential part of the school day and not just for entertainment. In the second statement, 42 participants (70%) stated that there was a significant difficulty in the lack of appropriate training or resources for educational storytelling, and 6 (10%) stated that it was often the case, compared to 12 participants who agreed that this difficulty was rare. In the third statement, the percentages regarding the limited interaction of children during and after the story reached 68% (41 participants) for "frequently", 13% (8 participants) for "often", and 19% (11 participants) for "rarely".

Once we've gone over the results of the closed-ended questions, we'll move on to the data from the open-ended questions to get a deeper look at what people think. The answers show a bunch of different ideas about the educational story, but there are some common themes. Most educators agreed that the story aims primarily to develop children's imagination, promote positive values and behaviors, and develop language and oral expression. Although these objectives are valid, they

remain largely confined to the traditional dimensions of the educational function of the story, without further exploring its comprehensive developmental dimensions.

As for the employment of stories in field activities, examples such as acting out stories with puppets, redrawing scenes from them, or discussing their events were repeated. These are positive activities in terms of interaction, but they sometimes lack pedagogical planning that ensures the integration of different developmental aspects (social, psychological, sensorial, etc.). ...

A significant number of educators expressed their need for specialized training in storytelling. Their suggestions focused on the need to include storytelling as a regular feature in educational programs, providing an appropriate story database, and offering ongoing training in storytelling techniques and pedagogical applications. As for the criteria for selecting stories, most participants pointed to the importance of their suitability for the child's age, their valuable content, simple language, and attractive illustrations. However, although these criteria are necessary, they remain closer to formal considerations, indicating a lack of a deeper analytical educational perspective for selecting and using stories.

These tendencies generally highlight that the sample's approach to storytelling as an educational tool remains largely linked to personal experience and daily practice rather than being based on systematic scientific or pedagogical training. This reinforces the overall conclusion of the study: that academic and professional training specialising in early childhood remains an essential prerequisite for ensuring the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the use of stories in their developmental dimension.

Presentation of observational grid results:

While implementing ten educational sessions divided between two groups of educators (five educators who use educational stories regularly and effectively, and five educators who do not use them or use them only to a limited extent), significant differences were observed like the children's classroom interaction, revealing the extent of the educational story's impact as a methodological tool in developing learning dynamics within the class.

The first group (Educators who use storytelling as a comprehensive educational tool):

The lessons based on the educational story were characterized by a set of positive educational indicators related to children's interaction, including:

Attentive focus and cognitive engagement:

The children in these classes showed a remarkable ability to maintain their attention throughout the activity, which can be attributed to the sensory and visual interaction with the story. They

demonstrated good listening skills, followed the events, and reacted immediately to changes in the teacher's tone of voice or facial expressions.

Intensive and various language activities:

The children participated with spontaneous verbal comments and questions about the characters or the plot. Some of them also narrated parts of the story in their own words, reflecting an effective stimulation of their oral comprehension, memory, and language reproduction skills. They also used new linguistic structures and vocabulary that they learned from the story context.

Affective interaction:

The story's impact on the emotional level was clear in the children's empathy with the characters, their expression of feelings, and their attempts to identify with certain situations (such as sadness for a wronged character or joy at a happy ending). This interaction reflects the beginning of emotional and social awareness that develops gradually through storytelling.

A child's sustained attention and mental engagement are one of the most important indicators of educational effectiveness in early childhood, as attention is considered the first gateway through which a child receives and processes information effectively. Observations during the educational story-based lessons showed that children demonstrated a remarkable ability to maintain their mental focus for longer periods of time compared to other lessons, reflecting the role of the story as a motivating and effective tool in directing the child's attention. This sustained attention is linked to several educational and psychological factors, including:

Sensory and visual interaction with storytelling:

Stories allow for the use of several means, such as changes in tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, and illustrations, which enrich the information and stimulate the child's different senses. This is in line with the principle of multisensory learning, which emphasises the importance of stimulating several cognitive channels to enhance concentration and sustained attention... (Shams & Seitz, 2008)

The emotional and affective impact of storytelling:

Sustained attention is also linked to affective engagement, as children tend to focus longer on content that evokes their emotions and stimulates their empathy with characters and situations (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). This emotional engagement stimulates the neural reward system and enhances mental aptitude for learning.

Brain dynamics and maturation of attention regions:

In early childhood, neuroscientific studies show remarkable development in brain regions associated with attention and autonomic regulation (Posner & Rothbart, 2007). Dynamically using stories stimulates these regions, contributing to the development of the child's ability to pay attention for longer periods and improve selective attention control.

The role of the teacher as a motivator and guide: The role of the story is not limited to its content, but extends to the teacher's presentation style, which directly affects the child's engagement. The use of voice changes, inflections, asking questions, and direct interaction with children are factors that increase their attention and concentration (Wood, 2007).

Physical and symbolic engagement:

The story motivated children to participate in related representational activities, such as role-playing, acting out an alternative ending, or drawing scenes from the story. These forms of physical interaction are indicators of the integration of symbolic learning and motor expression.

Indirect acquisition of values and behaviors:

Children who interacted with the story seemed to absorb values such as justice, honesty, cooperation, or respect for others through what the characters experienced, which was reflected in their contributions and comments after the session ended.

The second group (educators who did not use educational stories as a comprehensive educational tool):

Classes that did not use educational stories as a teaching tool were characterized by a lack of stimulating narrative structure, which harmed most aspects of classroom interaction. Field observations revealed a traditional teaching style based on direct guidance and instruction-based teaching, which clearly affected the dynamics of the class and the quality of learning among the children.

Weak concentration and attention:

The children showed frequent distractions in their attention, either through mental withdrawal or through preoccupation with side movements and the absence of visual response. This can be explained by the exclusion of the narrative framework, which, according to Bruner (Bruner, 1986), plays a critical role in organizing information in a way that is interactive and accessible to the child, as it provides a 'meaningful structure' that allows the child to connect events and personal experiences.

Lack of verbal initiative and oral interaction:

The children's contributions in these classes were limited and repetitive, with responses restricted to following instructions or giving short, typical answers.

This is in line with Maria Montessori's (Montessori, 1967) assertion that learning should be internally motivated rather than externally motivated, and that mediators (such as stories) should be used to develop self-expression and linguistic freedom within the classroom.

Absence of emotional and affective interaction:

No cases of empathy or significant emotional reactions were captured during the activities, confirming that the approach lacks the emotional engagement needed to make learning happen. According to Daniel Goleman (Goleman, 1995), emotional intelligence in childhood is nourished by situations with a symbolic emotional dimension, such as stories that allow identification with multiple characters and situations.

Absence of figurative play and creative engagement:

The absence of employing the imagination, attempts at free expression, or role-playing was observed. This is an important indicator of the absence of figurative spaces, which, according to Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978), are a prerequisite for the development of a child's higher functions, as he believes that symbolic play and storytelling provide a zone of proximal development (ZPD), through which the child moves from spontaneous learning to organized learning.

Superficial learning devoid of values:

It was noted that the approved content remained mostly factual and did not convey any implicit values. This contradicts the nature of early childhood, which is supposed to be a time when values are built through the indirect transmission of moral content. As indicated by Bandura's 'social learning theory' (Bandura, 1977), which emphasizes that children learn through observation and modelling, stories provide more than any explicit instructional activity.

Field observations highlight the fundamental difference between educational practices that effectively utilize educational stories and those that ignore them or limit their use, in terms of the quality of interaction and the quality of growth in children in early childhood. The absence of stories as an educational basis in teaching classes leads to a strict educational environment dominated by direct instruction and purely didactic teaching, which negatively affects children's ability to engage mentally and linguistically and reduces the opportunities for social and emotional interaction necessary for the development of their personal and social skills.

On the other hand, theoretical and empirical studies confirm that stories are not merely a means of entertainment, but rather a comprehensive and pivotal educational tool that enables children to

build their knowledge and perceptions, enhances their emotional and social development, and develops their linguistic and creative skills in an integrated manner. The systematic use of stories transforms the traditional role of the teacher into a facilitator of an active, interactive learning process based on the principles of 'participatory learning' and 'the zone of proximal development' described by Vygotsky, where lively interaction between the educator and the child plays a vital role in acquiring new cognitive and social skills. Furthermore, stories provide a natural space for indirectly conveying social and moral values, making it easier for children to understand and apply them in their daily lives, and contributing to the formation of their moral and social awareness from an early age. This value dimension is not available in rote learning methods that focus on abstract information without enabling children to interact freely and emotionally with the content.

6) Analysis and discussion of results:

1- Answers to research questions:

Question n°1:

To what degree is storytelling used as a pedagogical tool in early childhood education in Tunisia, and what is the level of awareness among educators of their role in supporting children's overall development?

The results of the questionnaire and observation network reveal that the use of educational stories as a pedagogical tool in Tunisia remains quite traditional. Most responses indicated that stories are included in the daily program in kindergartens as a 'narrative activity', but without any clear investment in their developmental dimensions or comprehensive educational potential.

Nevertheless, some educators (a minority within the sample) demonstrated an advanced awareness of the role of stories, describing in the questionnaire how stories contribute to unlocking children's expression, developing their imagination and integration into the group, and even using stories to indirectly address behavioral or social problems.

However, the observation network also revealed a gap between the theoretical awareness of some educators and actual practice. Even educators who expressed a good understanding of the importance of storytelling were not always able to translate this awareness into integrated pedagogical practices, which is directly linked to deficiencies in training and supervision.

From this perspective, we conclude that the degree of awareness varies and that pedagogical use remains limited among the majority. The traditional narrative approach remains dominant, with signs of a gradual shift among a small group.

Question n°2:

How does educational storytelling contribute to the comprehensive development of early childhood?

The results of the research confirm that stories, when presented systematically and accompanied by complementary activities, clearly contribute to supporting multiple dimensions of child development:

On the linguistic side: Children who are regularly exposed to well-designed stories show improvement in vocabulary, sentence structure, and even listening and comprehension skills.

Socially: Stories encourage children to take turns and interact with fictional characters, which supports social interaction skills, behavior control, and acceptance of others.

Emotional: Stories provide a safe space for dealing with emotions, especially through empathy with characters or interaction with story events.

However, it is important to emphasize that this positive impact is conditional on the method of presentation: stories that are only narrated in a recorded voice or without interaction do not have the same effect.

On the other hand, stories presented in a lively manner, incorporating physical expression, dialogue, open-ended questions, and post-story activities (such as drawing or role-playing) lead to clear results in the development of the indicated aspects. We conclude that storytelling is an effective tool for supporting overall growth, but its effectiveness is linked to the extent to which it is integrated into a comprehensive and guided pedagogical approach.

Question n°3:

Does the early childhood educator merely use stories as a traditional narrative device, or does he adopt them as an educational tool with a comprehensive and integrated educational perspective?

The answers clearly indicate the dominance of the traditional narrative approach. Most of the educators use storytelling as an 'entertainment activity' rather than a 'pedagogical tool.' Stories are told without an introduction and are not always linked to educational units or desired developmental goals.

However, the observation network showed that a small number of educators (mostly those with additional training or extensive experience) comprehensively use storytelling:

They prepare the space, incorporate the story into integrative activities, ask the children to re-narrate or express their feelings, or even translate the story into artwork or theatrical play.

This integrated approach reflects a deep understanding of the story as a 'developmental tool' rather than merely a narrative device.

From this, we see that the majority are still stuck in traditional approaches, but a small group of advanced practitioners are proving that stories can be a rich educational tool if they are adopted within an integrated pedagogical vision.

2- Hypothesis Supporting or refuting:

Hypothesis n°1:

Educational stories contribute to supporting the overall development of children (linguistic, social, and emotional) when employed systematically and accompanied by appropriate stimulation techniques.

This hypothesis was strongly supported by field observations and data extracted from the questionnaire. It was found that children who interacted most with the story (when presented using active and participatory methods) showed improvement in multiple skills, demonstrating the crucial role of storytelling in supporting the integrated development of children.

Therefore, the fundamental condition for the success of this hypothesis must be met systematic use accompanied by stimulating methods.

Hypothesis n°2:

The educational impact of the story depends on the educator's awareness of its importance and their ability to select and present it in accordance with clear developmental goals.

The results also support this hypothesis, as we observe that educators who are aware of the educational potential of stories and who are skilled at selecting and presenting them properly are the most capable of achieving tangible results with children. Educators who present stories randomly, or without awareness of developmental goals, do not achieve the same impact. The analysis clearly showed a direct relationship between awareness and competence on the one hand, and the quality of educational outcomes on the other.

Hypothesis n°3:

Inadequate training in the field of educational storytelling is one of the main obstacles limiting the use of stories as an effective pedagogical approach in kindergartens.

This hypothesis is directly supported by what many educators indicated in the questionnaire, given the absence of specialized training in educational storytelling, both during their studies and in their continuous training. The observation grid also showed that most educators lack storytelling techniques and fail to link stories to clear developmental goals, indicating that poor training is indeed a major barrier to the effective use of storytelling. There is an urgent need to include the component of 'storytelling as an educational and developmental tool' in the basic and continuing training of educators.

Conclusion:

This study underscores the pivotal role that storytelling can play in early childhood education in Tunisia. By examining educators' practices and awareness, and drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, the research highlights persistent challenges and significant opportunities for growth.

Findings reveal that storytelling is still largely treated as a recreational or isolated activity, rather than being systematically integrated into the curriculum to achieve comprehensive developmental goals. However, the work of some educators demonstrates that, when storytelling is used interactively and purposefully, it can foster children's linguistic, social, and emotional development.

The study also finds that effective storytelling practices tend to be the result of individual initiative rather than institutional support, with a lack of specialized training being a critical barrier. This suggests that to unlock the full developmental potential of storytelling, there is a pressing need to embed it within teacher training programs and daily pedagogical planning.

In conclusion, educational storytelling offers a powerful, underutilized tool for supporting holistic child development. Realizing its benefits requires a shift from sporadic, entertainment-focused use to intentional, structured application, supported by ongoing professional development and research. Prioritizing storytelling in educational strategies will help ensure that stories truly contribute to children's growth and learning, transforming them from simple narratives into agents of meaningful change.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval and Consent: The study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Transparency and Availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

References

Books:

- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Dickinson, D. K., & Smith, M. W. (1994). Long-term effects of preschool teachers' book readings on low-income children's vocabulary and story comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 29(2), 105–122.
- Fisher, R., & Williams, M. (2004). *Unlocking Literacy: A Guide for Teachers*. Routledge.
- Gallas, K. (1994). *The Languages of Learning: How Children Talk, Write, Dance, Draw, and Sing Their Understanding of the World*. Teachers College Press.
- Nicolopoulou, A. (2010). The alarming disappearance of play from early childhood education. *Human Development*, 53(1), 1–4.
- Montessori, M. (1967). *The discovery of the child*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Posner, M. I., & Rothbart, M. K. (2007). *Educating the human brain*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds. & Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wood, E. (2007). *Developing a pedagogy of play*. *Early Years*, 27(3), 267–281.
- Websites:
- Isbell, R., Sobol, J., Lindauer, L., & Lowrance, A. (2004). The effects of storytelling and story reading on the oral language complexity and story comprehension of young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 32(3), 157–163.
- Immordino-Yang, M. H., & Damasio, A. (2007). We feel, therefore we learn: The relevance of affective and social neuroscience to education. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 1(1), 3–10.
- Shams, L., & Seitz, A. R. (2008). Benefits of multisensory learning. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 12(11), 411–417.
- UNESCO. (2021). *The Right to Education: Early Childhood*. Retrieved from <https://www.unesco.org>

ANNEXES

The role of storytelling in early childhood education has evolved from a simple narrative activity to a powerful developmental tool. This survey aims to explore how educators in Tunisia use storytelling in early years settings, their understanding of its developmental role, and the challenges they face in applying it effectively.

Section 1: Personal Information

- Name (optional):
- Gender:
 - ☐ Male ☐ Female
- Age:
 - Between 20 and 30 years old ☐
 - Between 30 and 40 years old ☐
 - Older than 40 years old ☐
- Years of expertise:
 - ☐ Less than 5 years
 - ☐ Between 5 and 10 years
 - ☐ More than 10 years
- Educational level:
 - ☐ Secondary without vocational training in early childhood education
 - ☐ Secondary with vocational training in early childhood education
 - ☐ Higher education without vocational training in early childhood education
 - ☐ Higher education with vocational training in early childhood education
 - ☐ Higher education in educational science
- Type of institution:
 - ☐ Kindergarten ☐ Primary school
- Have you received prior training in educational storytelling?
 - ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 2: Integration of Storytelling into the Curriculum

Statement	Consistently	Occasionally	Rarely
Storytelling is explicitly mentioned in pedagogical guides or the institution's curriculum in which you pursue your occupation.			
Do you regularly use storytelling in planned educational activities?			
Is there a weekly/monthly plan embedding a storytelling session?			

Section 3: Using storytelling as a method of holistic development

Statement	Consistently	Occasionally	Rarely
I use stories to enhance dialect skills.			
I use stories to embrace children's emotional and social development.			
I plan additional activities (such as drawing, role-play, and interactive dialogue) following the storytelling.			
I assess the impact of the story on the child's subsequent development (Observation/Evaluation)			

Section 4: Storytelling Methods and Supportive Techniques

Statement	Consistently	Occasionally	Rarely
I use dialogue-based reading techniques.			
I use props such as puppets, visuals, and sounds to support my storytelling.			
My toolkit includes digital stories, incorporating videos and applications.			

Section 5: Challenges and Obstacles

Statement	Consistently	Occasionally	Rarely
I am limited by time constraints when it comes to storytelling in the daily schedule.			
I lack the proper training and resources to tell educational stories effectively.			
Interaction with children is not well achieved during or after storytelling.			

Section 6: Free-form Questions

1. What are your main educational goals for storytelling?

List 3 goals:

-
-
-

2. Illustrate a situation in which storytelling was utilised as a comprehensive development instrument:

.....

3. What recommendations would you offer to strengthen storytelling's role in educational curricula?

.....

4. What are the criteria you use to select a story that is suitable for children's developmental needs?

.....

Observation grid for children's interaction with the story

***General statements *Filled out before the start of class**

Institution Name.....

Observation Date: From .././.... **To** .././....

Class / Age:

Number of children in attendance:.....

Educator's Name:.....

Story Application:

Inclusive development ☐ **Entertaining** ☐ **Just Narrative** ☐

Story Title:

The methods employed: **Puppet** ☐ **Figures** ☐ **Sounds** ☐ **Digital Story** ☐ **Screen** ☐

Background Music ☐ **None** ☐

Observations of children's interaction during the class:

Indicator	Description	Not perceptible at all	Weakly perceptible	Moderately perceptible	Highly Perceptible
Child attention during narration	Does the child attend to the educator and the story?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Physical interaction (gaze, movement, approach)	Is the child showing physical engagement?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Verbal interaction (questions, comments)	Does he speak or comment on the story?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Emotional expression (joy, fear, surprise...)	Is the child expressing emotions?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Participating in a post-story activity: Drawing / Role-playing / Mutual narration Group interactivity	Group or individualized coordination	☐	☐	☐	☐