Story-based Grammar Teaching in Primary School English Education in China: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

In response to the call for improving the quality of English language education in China, this paper's significance lies in presenting a comprehensive mixed-methods study that evaluates the efficacy of story-based grammar teaching (SBGT) within China's primary school educational framework. The methodology utilized involves quantitative analysis, which revealed that SBGT had a significantly greater impact on grammar acquisition compared to conventional instruction methods focusing on linguistic forms. Additionally, the qualitative investigation, conducted through thematic analysis, unveiled recurring themes such as engagement, enjoyment, improved understanding and retention, increased confidence and participation, contextual understanding, and language acquisition, all pointing towards the positive outcomes associated with SBGT implementation. However, the study also identified challenges, including lack of familiarity with SBGT, time constraints and curriculum pressure, and language proficiency and vocabulary limitations. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of SBGT's effectiveness in enhancing grammar proficiency among primary school students in China, while also shedding light on potential obstacles that educators may encounter in its implementation. Further research is proposed to delve deeper into addressing these challenges and refining SBGT methodologies for optimal educational outcomes.
Keywords: English, English Language Education, Story-Based Grammar Teaching, Primary Schooling, China

Introduction

English language education in China has undergone significant development in recent years, reflecting the country's increasing integration into the global community and the recognition of English proficiency as a vital skill for international communication and economic competitiveness (He, 2020; Hu et al., 2022). With the reform and opening-up policies implemented since the late 1970s, English has been designated as a core subject in the Chinese education system, with primary schools playing a crucial role in laying the foundation for language learning (Zhao et al., 2023; Zhou & Zeng, 2023). This emphasis on English

language education in primary schooling aligns with broader educational goals aimed at fostering students' linguistic competence and cultural awareness from an early age.

Despite the growing importance placed on English language education, primary school students in China often encounter challenges in learning and using English grammar effectively (Deng, 2023; Guo, 2023; Liu, 2023). Grammar, being a fundamental aspect of language proficiency, poses difficulties for many learners due to its abstract nature and complex rules. Traditional grammar teaching methods, characterized by rote memorization and mechanical drills, have been criticized for their limited effectiveness in promoting meaningful language acquisition and application (Du, 2021; Hu, 2023a). As a result, there has been a growing recognition of the need for innovative and engaging pedagogical approaches to enhance grammar instruction and learning outcomes (Lou et al., 2020).

In response to these challenges, story-based grammar teaching (SBGT) has emerged as a promising pedagogical approach that integrates grammar instruction with storytelling techniques (Sheng, 2020; Wang, 2021). Drawing on principles of constructivist learning theory and communicative language teaching, SBGT aims to contextualize grammar rules within meaningful narratives, fostering students' comprehension and retention of linguistic structures (Fan, 2023; Lu, 2019). By immersing students in engaging narratives and providing authentic language use opportunities, this approach seeks to promote not only grammatical accuracy but also communicative competence and language fluency (Hu, 2020).

The rise of SBGT in Chinese primary schools may also be attributed to recent educational reforms and initiatives emphasizing the importance of innovative teaching methods and learner-centered approaches. Policies such as the *Guidelines for English Curriculum Standards in Compulsory Education* and the *National English Curriculum Standards* advocate for the integration of diverse instructional strategies to cater to the diverse needs and interests of learners (Hu et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2021). SBGT aligns with these policy directives by offering a dynamic and interactive learning experience that engages students' imagination and creativity while addressing grammatical concepts in context (Sheng, 2020).

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of SBGT in Chinese primary schools and explore the factors that contribute to its success or limitations. By employing a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative assessments of students' language proficiency with qualitative inquiries into teachers' perceptions and instructional practices, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of SBGT on students' language learning outcomes and the underlying mechanisms driving its effectiveness. Specifically, the research will address the following questions:
1. What are the effects of SBGT on primary school students' English grammar proficiency?
2. What factors contribute to the effectiveness of SBGT in Chinese primary schools?
3. What challenges and barriers do teachers encounter in implementing SBGT and how do they address them?
By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on innovative approaches to grammar instruction and inform pedagogical practices in Chinese primary school classrooms.

Literature Review
Use of Stories in English Teaching

The use of stories in English teaching has garnered significant attention in educational research due to its potential to enhance language learning outcomes. Stories, whether traditional folktales, contemporary literature, or digital narratives, offer rich linguistic and cultural content that can engage learners and facilitate language acquisition (Khaleel, 2017). Research suggests that storytelling promotes various language skills, including vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, listening comprehension, and oral proficiency (Amalia, 2018; Dvalidze, 2022; Kurdi & Nizam, 2022; Pardede, 2021; Satriani, 2019; Wenny, 2021). By contextualizing language within meaningful narratives, students are exposed to authentic language use and cultural contexts, which can improve their language proficiency. Moreover, stories provide opportunities for learners to develop critical thinking skills, empathy, and cultural awareness (Baldasaro et al., 2014; Stevenson, 2018).

One of the key benefits of using stories in English teaching is its ability to make language learning enjoyable and engaging. Story-based activities stimulate students' imagination and creativity, fostering a positive attitude towards language learning (Grecu, 2019; Romadhon & Heriyawat, 2023). This positive affective response can lead to increased motivation and persistence in language learning tasks. Additionally, stories offer a natural and meaningful context for language use, enabling students to comprehend and produce language in authentic communicative situations (Grecu, 2019).

Furthermore, stories can be effectively integrated into various language teaching approaches and methodologies. For example, in communicative language teaching, storytelling provides opportunities for meaningful communication and interaction (Al-Amri, 2020). In task-based language teaching, stories can serve as the basis for engaging tasks that require students to use language in purposeful ways (Meri-Yilan, 2020). Additionally, in the context of content and language integrated learning, stories can be used to explore subject matter content while simultaneously developing language skills (Chou, 2022).

However, the successful use of stories in English teaching also depends on effective instructional strategies and teacher competence. Teachers need to select appropriate stories that are linguistically and culturally suitable for their students (Satriani, 2019). Moreover, they should employ a variety of techniques, such as pre-reading activities, story retelling, and post-reading discussions, to scaffold students' comprehension and language production (Pardede, 2021). Additionally, teachers should be mindful of the diverse learning needs and preferences of their students and adapt their storytelling techniques accordingly (Baldasaro et al., 2014).

Overall, the use of stories in English teaching offers numerous benefits for language learners, including improved language skills, increased motivation, and enhanced cultural awareness. By incorporating storytelling into language instruction, teachers can create engaging and effective learning experiences that foster language acquisition and promote students' overall language proficiency. However, successful implementation requires careful consideration of instructional strategies, teacher competence, and learner characteristics.

Story-based Grammar Teaching

SBGT has emerged as a promising pedagogical approach in language education, drawing attention from researchers and educators globally. SBGT integrates narrative elements into grammar instruction, utilizing stories, narratives, or anecdotes as the primary instructional medium to facilitate grammar learning (Sheng, 2020; Wang, 2021). This approach diverges from traditional grammar teaching methods by embedding grammar concepts within meaningful contexts, aiming to enhance students' engagement, comprehension, and retention of grammar rules (Nguyen, 2021). The theoretical foundation of SBGT is rooted in constructivist learning theories, emphasizing the importance of meaningful learning experiences and the contextualization of knowledge (Fan, 2023; Lu, 2019). By incorporating narratives, SBGT aligns with the principles of contextual learning (Ozkaya & Dogan, 2023), which posits that learning is optimized when new information is presented within familiar and meaningful contexts.

Empirical studies investigating the effectiveness of SBGT have reported promising results across various language learning contexts. For instance, research by Wang (2021), Yuan and Pang (2023); Zhang (2018) found that Chinese elementary school students exposed to SBGT showed significant improvements in both grammar knowledge and reading comprehension compared to those taught using traditional grammar instruction methods. Similarly, a study by Fu (2022) demonstrated that SBGT enhanced students' grammatical accuracy and fluency in speaking tasks among young Chinese students. These findings suggest that SBGT holds potential for promoting language proficiency and communicative competence among learners.

Furthermore, SBGT offers several advantages over conventional grammar teaching approaches. Firstly, by embedding grammar instruction within narratives, SBGT enhances students' motivation and engagement by making learning more enjoyable and meaningful (Yunita et al., 2019). Secondly, the contextualized nature of SBGT promotes deeper understanding and long-term retention of grammar rules by providing students with real-life examples and contexts in which grammar structures are used (Fan, 2023). Additionally, SBGT fosters the development of students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills as they analyze and interpret grammar rules within the context of narratives (Utari, 2017).

Despite the growing evidence supporting the effectiveness of SBGT, challenges and limitations exist. One challenge is the need for teachers to design and select appropriate stories that align with students' linguistic proficiency levels and learning objectives (Nguyen, 2021). Additionally, implementing SBGT may require additional time and resources for lesson planning and material development compared to traditional grammar teaching methods (Ozkaya & Dogan, 2023). Moreover, the effectiveness of SBGT may vary depending on factors such as students' language proficiency, cultural background, and learning preferences, highlighting the importance of considering individual differences in instructional design (Satriani, 2019).

Hence, although SBGT stands out as a promising pedagogical strategy for grammar instruction and harnesses the narrative's inherent ability to captivate learners and enrich language acquisition, there remains a pressing need for additional research to delve into the versatility of SBGT across varied educational environments and learner demographics (Nguyen, 2021).

In China, particularly, a significant research gap exists in academia regarding the effectiveness of SBGT, as also noted by Hu (2020) and Wang (2021). This gap underscores the importance of investigating the implementation and outcomes of SBGT within the Chinese educational context, shedding light on its potential benefits and challenges for English language education in primary schools.

Methodology

This mixed-methods study employed an intervention design to investigate the effects of SBGT on Chinese primary school students' English grammar proficiency, exploring contributing factors to its effectiveness and identifying challenges and barriers encountered by teachers in implementing SBGT and their corresponding strategies. This design facilitated the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2017). In the quantitative study, the primary participants consisted of two groups, one experimental group (EG) (N = 45) and one control group (CG) (N = 46) of year-five primary school students from a specific school in a major Chinese city. The demographic information of the participants could be seen in Table 1. Consent had been obtained from the school leaders, participants, and their caregivers before the study. Convenience sampling was utilized, selecting two intact classes to maintain ecological validity and avoid disrupting the participants' original class arrangements (Changder, 2022).

Table 1
Demographic Information of Participants

Group	Gender	Age	Year Level
EG	Male: 21 (47%) Female: 23 (53%)	10-11	5
CG	Male: 24 (52%) Female: 22 (48%)	10-11	5

Both the EG and the CG were instructed by the same teacher, who had extensive expertise in teaching English to primary school students. The EG received the intervention of SBGT, while the CG received regular instruction featuring the Grammar-Translation Method. The intervention lasted for ten weeks, enough for a quasi-experimental study (Hu et al., 2022). Based on the prescribed textbook and curriculum, a selection of well-known stories was chosen to teach fundamental grammatical rules (e.g., the present simple, "be" verb, and "have/has" verb), such as *From Head to Toe* Carle (1999), *Mulan* Li (2014), and *A Prince and His Porcelain Cup* (Li, 2018). The teaching intervention followed Yunita et al.'s (2019) Integrated SBGT Model, which comprised several stages: presentation (introducing stories to students), attention (directing students' focus to specific sentences or story components), co-construction (providing students with examples of grammatical rules to find in stories), and extension (prompting students to generate similar sentences in speech or writing). Throughout these stages, the teacher provided feedback and scaffolding tailored to individual student needs.

A grammar proficiency test was administered to both the EG and the CG before and after the study to assess any progress made during the intervention. These test papers were meticulously crafted in alignment with the learning objectives outlined in the curriculum. A panel of English teaching experts meticulously reviewed the test papers to ensure their face

validity and content validity (Changder, 2022). Additionally, since the grammar test comprised both multiple-choice and fill-in-the-gap questions, a pilot study involving 30 students was conducted to establish the test-retest reliability over a two-week interval. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences 26.0, yielding a coefficient of .87 ($p < .001$), indicative of excellent reliability (Cohen et al., 2017).
In the qualitative phase of the study, efforts were made to ensure data triangulation for research validation (Cohen et al., 2017). Throughout the intervention, non-participant observation was conducted by the researchers to document key learning moments. An observation protocol adapted from Hu (2020), whose study shared similar research interests albeit at a different schooling level, was employed. Following the intervention, the classroom teacher and eight students, selected through voluntary sampling, were interviewed. An interview protocol adapted from the one utilized by Liu (2023) was employed to gather data on participants' perceptions and opinions of SBGT. Prior to the main study, these protocols underwent scrutiny by a panel of English teaching experts and researchers, who confirmed their validity.

The quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences 26.0. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were computed, alongside inferential statistics including the independent samples t-test and the paired samples t-test, where applicable for parametric tests. As for the qualitative data, thematic analysis was conducted following established steps, starting with data familiarization, followed by coding, theme development, and interpretation (Dawadi, 2020).

Findings
Quantitative Findings
Firstly, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the grammar test scores of the EG and the CG before and after the study. Descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 and inferential statistics in Table 3 indicated that prior to the intervention, no significant statistical difference was observed between the EG (M = 85.40, SD = 3.78) and the CG (M = 85.80, SD = 3.16), p = .80. This suggests that both groups exhibited similar levels of grammar proficiency before the study commenced. However, following the intervention, a significant statistical difference emerged between the EG (M = 92.60, SD = 2.84) and the CG (M = 89.40, SD = 2.88), p = .022. This indicates that students in the EG demonstrated a higher level of grammar proficiency compared to those in the CG post-intervention.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest

Group	Pretest				Posttest			
	Mean	Standard Deviation	95% Confidence Interval		Mean	Standard Deviation	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Higher Bound			Lower Bound	Higher Bound
EG	85.40	3.777	82.70	88.10	92.60	2.836	90.57	94.63
CG	85.80	3.155	83.54	88.06	89.40	2.875	87.34	91.46

Table 3
Inferential Statistics of Between-Group Comparisons

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.245	.627	-.257	.800	-.400	1.1556	-3.670	2.870
	Equal variances not assumed			-.257	.800	-.400	1.556	-3.677	2.877
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.396	.537	2.506	.022	3.200	1.277	.517	5.883
	Equal variances not assumed			2.506	.022	3.200	1.277	.517	5.883

Subsequently, a paired samples t-test was performed to assess the progress made by both the EG and the CG separately. As illustrated in Table 4, the average posttest score of the EG exhibited a significant increase of 7.20 compared to the pretest ($p < .001$). Similarly, the CG also demonstrated a significant increase in their average posttest score, with a rise of 3.60 ($p < .001$). These results indicate that both groups showed significant improvement in English grammar proficiency throughout the study, despite receiving different instructional approaches. Nevertheless, considering the earlier finding that the EG achieved higher test scores than the CG post-intervention, it can be inferred that the impact of SBGT was more pronounced than conventional instruction in enhancing students' grammar proficiency within the research context.

Table 4
Inferential Statistics of Within-Group Comparisons

		Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
EG	Pretest-Posttest	-7.200	1.751	-8.453	-5.947	-13.002	.000
CG	Pretest-Posttest	-3.600	1.430	-4.623	-2.577	-7.962	.000

Qualitative Findings
Engagement and Enjoyment
During the non-participant observation, it became evident that students in the EG showcased heightened levels of engagement and enjoyment throughout the SBGT sessions. These students demonstrated active involvement in classroom activities, showing a genuine

enthusiasm and interest in the storytelling approach to grammar instruction. Their interactions with both the teacher and their peers were marked by lively discussions and a palpable eagerness to learn. This was reflected in their attentiveness, as they eagerly participated in activities and discussions related to the narratives presented.

This engagement was also acknowledged by the classroom teacher in the post-intervention interview. The teacher noted, "I could see a noticeable difference in my students' level of interest and participation during the [SBGT] sessions. They seemed more excited to learn and were actively engaged in the activities. The stories helped them connect with the grammar concepts in a way that traditional instruction couldn't." Furthermore, students themselves expressed their enjoyment of the SBGT approach during the interviews. One student remarked, "I really liked how we learned grammar through stories. It made it easier to understand and remember the rules. Plus, the stories were fun to listen to!" Another student added, "I felt more motivated to learn English grammar because of the stories. It did not feel like studying; it felt like we were just having fun."

Improved Understanding and Retention
The qualitative interviews with students corroborated the observation findings, highlighting their improved understanding and retention of grammar concepts through SBGT. Many students expressed that the story-based approach facilitated their comprehension of grammar rules and structures, as they were able to contextualize and visualize the language rules within the story context. One student shared, "I found it much easier to understand grammar when it was taught through stories. For example, when we learned about past tense, the teacher used a story about time traveling. It helped me see how the grammar worked in real situations, and I remembered it better." Another student added, "The stories made grammar more interesting. Instead of just memorizing rules, we got to see them in action. It made the lessons more memorable, and I felt like I understood the concepts better."

Additionally, students reported enhanced memory retention of grammar concepts learned through storytelling, attributing it to the memorable and engaging nature of the narratives. "I still remember the stories we learned last month, and I can recall the grammar rules associated with them," remarked one student. "It is like the stories stuck in my mind, and so did the grammar rules."

In alignment with the students' perspectives, the classroom teacher also noted the effectiveness of SBGT in enhancing students' understanding and retention of grammar concepts. "The stories served as powerful tools for aiding the students in grasping complex grammar concepts more easily," the teacher elucidated. "By embedding grammar rules within the narrative context, students could visualize the application of these rules in real-life scenarios, which significantly contributed to their comprehension and retention." Furthermore, the teacher emphasized the impact of SBGT on students' academic performance, stating, "The students' improvement in their classwork and assessments following the implementation of SBGT was remarkable. Their responses demonstrated a deeper understanding of grammar concepts and a greater ability to apply these concepts accurately in their written and spoken language." Moreover, the teacher highlighted the long-term benefits of SBGT, noting, "Not only did SBGT enhance immediate comprehension, but it also fostered long-term retention of grammar knowledge. Students were able to recall and

apply grammar rules learned through storytelling in subsequent lessons and assessments, indicating a lasting impact on their language proficiency."

Increased Confidence and Participation
Another significant theme that emerged from the qualitative data was the noticeable increase in confidence and active participation among students in the EG. Students conveyed a newfound sense of assurance in their English language skills after participating in SBGT sessions, particularly in their ability to apply grammar rules in speaking and writing tasks. One student remarked, "I used to feel unsure about using English, especially when it came to grammar. But after learning through stories, I feel more confident in my grammar skills." This sentiment was echoed by another student who stated, "The stories helped me understand grammar better, and now I am not afraid to make mistakes. I know I can use English more confidently." These statements reflect the positive impact of SBGT on students' self-perception and willingness to engage with the English language.

Additionally, the classroom teacher noted the palpable increase in students' confidence and participation, affirming, "I noticed a significant change in my students' demeanor after implementing SBGT. They seemed more willing to express themselves in English and were less hesitant to participate in class discussions." The teacher further observed, "Students who were once reluctant to speak up now actively contribute to conversations and share their ideas. SBGT has undoubtedly played a role in boosting their confidence." This increased confidence and participation are indicative of the empowering effect of SBGT, as students feel more equipped and motivated to engage with English language learning. By fostering a supportive and encouraging learning environment, SBGT not only enhances grammar proficiency but also cultivates students' overall language skills and confidence.

Contextual Understanding
The qualitative analysis further revealed that students developed a deeper contextual understanding of grammar concepts through SBGT. The use of narratives provided students with rich and relatable contexts in which to encounter grammar rules, facilitating a practical understanding of language rules in real-life scenarios. One student expressed, "I used to struggle to understand grammar rules when they were just presented in textbooks. But when our teacher started using stories to teach us, everything became clearer. For example, when we learned about past tense, she told us a story about a boy who traveled back in time. It made me realize how we use past tense to talk about events that happened in the past, just like in the story." The classroom teacher corroborated this observation, stating, "I noticed a significant improvement in my students' understanding of grammar concepts when I introduced SBGT into my lessons. By incorporating stories, students were able to see grammar rules in action and understand their practical applications."

Furthermore, students expressed a deeper understanding of grammar concepts when they could relate them to characters and events in stories. One student remarked, "When our teacher told us stories with characters facing different situations, it helped me see how grammar rules are used in real-life contexts." This sentiment was echoed by several other students who appreciated the opportunity to connect abstract language rules with tangible examples from narratives. They found that the contextualized approach of SBGT not only

made grammar more comprehensible but also more relatable and applicable to their everyday lives.

This aspect of SBGT resonated particularly well with students who had previously struggled to grasp grammar concepts through traditional instructional methods. By embedding grammar rules within narrative contexts, students were able to visualize and internalize the relevance and utility of language rules, thus fostering a deeper level of understanding and engagement with the material. As one student expressed, "Before, grammar seemed like a bunch of rules we had to memorize. But now, it feels like something we can actually use to express ourselves better."

Language Acquisition
The qualitative data also underscored the pivotal role of SBGT in facilitating language acquisition among primary school students. By immersing students in authentic language use through storytelling, SBGT provided a fertile ground for natural and intuitive internalization of grammar patterns. The interactive and immersive nature of storytelling encouraged students to engage with language in meaningful contexts, nurturing their linguistic competence and fluency. The teacher emphasized the transformative impact of SBGT on language acquisition, stating, "Introducing SBGT into my classroom has revolutionized the way my students engage with English grammar. Through storytelling, they are not only learning grammar rules but also developing a deeper understanding of how language functions in real-world contexts. It is amazing to see how quickly they are able to absorb and apply what they've learned."

Students echoed this sentiment, expressing their appreciation for the engaging and dynamic nature of SBGT. One student remarked, "When our teacher tells us stories, it feels like we are not even learning grammar. It is like we are just listening to a fun story, but somehow, we end up understanding grammar better." Another student added, "I used to find grammar boring and confusing, but with SBGT, it has become more interesting and easier to understand. I even find myself using the grammar rules I have learned in my own writing!"

The qualitative findings further revealed that SBGT empowered students to transfer their newfound grammar knowledge to their own writing and communication. Students demonstrated a heightened awareness of grammar concepts and their practical applications, which translated into improved language proficiency across various language tasks. As one student reflected, "After learning grammar through stories, I feel more confident when I write. I know how to use different tenses and sentence structures to express myself more clearly."

Therefore, the qualitative data underscored the effectiveness of SBGT in not only enhancing students' grammar proficiency but also fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of language as a communicative tool. Through immersive storytelling experiences, students were able to develop the linguistic skills and confidence necessary for successful language acquisition and communication.

Lack of Familiarity with SBGT

Many students and the classroom teacher shared their initial challenges in adjusting to the narrative-based approach of SBGT. The transition from traditional grammar instruction methods to storytelling posed a learning curve for both students and educators alike. One student reflected on this adjustment, stating, "At first, it was confusing because we were used to learning grammar from textbooks. It took some time to get used to the stories and understand how they related to grammar." Similarly, the classroom teacher acknowledged the initial difficulties faced by students and educators, noting, "Introducing SBGT required a shift in our teaching approach. Students were accustomed to rote learning from textbooks, so adapting to a more interactive and narrative-based method was challenging for both them and me." These sentiments highlight the initial hurdles encountered during the implementation of SBGT and underscore the importance of providing adequate support and guidance to facilitate a smooth transition to this innovative teaching approach.

Time Constraints and Curriculum Pressure

The classroom teacher identified time constraints and curriculum pressure as significant challenges in implementing SBGT effectively. Balancing the need to cover grammar concepts within the curriculum while also incorporating storytelling activities posed logistical challenges. The teacher stated, "With a packed curriculum, finding time for storytelling activities was challenging. I often felt pressured to prioritize grammar drills over storytelling, especially when preparing students for standardized tests." One student echoed similar sentiments, expressing frustration with the limited time allocated for storytelling activities. "Sometimes, I wish we could spend more time on storytelling instead of rushing through grammar drills," the student remarked. "But I understand that our teacher has to follow the curriculum and prepare us for exams."

Another student highlighted the impact of curriculum pressure on their learning experience. "I enjoy storytelling because it helps me understand grammar better," the student explained. "But I feel like we do not get enough time to really dive into the stories and discuss them in detail. It is hard to appreciate the stories when we're always rushing to cover the next topic." These quotes underscore the challenges faced by both teachers and students in integrating storytelling activities into the curriculum amidst time constraints and pressure to meet academic standards. While SBGT offers valuable benefits in enhancing grammar proficiency, addressing these challenges requires careful consideration of curriculum planning and flexibility in classroom instruction.

Language Proficiency and Vocabulary Limitations

Some students struggled with language proficiency and vocabulary limitations, which hindered their ability to fully engage with SBGT activities. Limited vocabulary and language comprehension skills posed barriers to understanding the nuances of grammar concepts embedded within narratives. One student expressed, "Sometimes, I could not understand the stories because there were too many words I did not know. It made it hard to learn the grammar from the stories." This sentiment was echoed by several other students who faced similar challenges in comprehending the narratives due to unfamiliar vocabulary and complex language structures.

The classroom teacher also acknowledged the impact of language proficiency and vocabulary limitations on students' engagement with SBGT. "I noticed that some students struggled to follow the stories because of their limited vocabulary and language comprehension skills," the teacher remarked. "It was evident that these language barriers hindered their ability to fully grasp the grammar concepts presented within the narratives."

The teacher further emphasized the importance of providing additional support and scaffolding for students with language proficiency challenges. "To address these limitations, I incorporated vocabulary-building activities and provided supplementary materials to support students' comprehension of the stories," the teacher explained. "By breaking down complex language structures and introducing key vocabulary beforehand, I aimed to make the narratives more accessible and engaging for all students."

Discussion
The findings of this mixed-method study provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of SBGT in enhancing primary school students' grammar proficiency in China. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allows for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of SBGT on students' language learning outcomes. Firstly, the quantitative findings revealed that SBGT led to a significant improvement in students' grammar proficiency compared to traditional instruction with a grammar translation focus. This aligns with previous research conducted in global academia Hu (2023b); Nguyen (2021); Ozkaya & Dogan (2023); Utari, 2017; Yunita et al (2019) as well as in China's context Fan (2023); Lu (2019); Sheng (2020); Wang (2021), indicating that incorporating storytelling into language instruction resulted in better learning outcomes for students. The quantitative results support the notion that SBGT can effectively enhance students' grammatical knowledge and skills.

The qualitative findings further elucidate the mechanisms through which SBGT facilitates language learning. The theme of engagement and enjoyment emerged prominently, with students expressing enthusiasm and interest in learning grammar through storytelling. This suggests that SBGT promotes active engagement by creating a dynamic and immersive learning environment that captivates students' interest and motivates them to participate actively in their learning. This finding is consistent with the engagement theory Salameh (2017); Yanbo et al (2023), which posits that students are more likely to learn and retain information when they are actively engaged in the learning process.

Moreover, the qualitative findings highlight the role of SBGT in fostering improved understanding and retention of grammar concepts. Students reported a deeper understanding of grammar rules when they were presented in the context of stories, allowing them to make meaningful connections and retain information more effectively. This finding is supported by the cognitive theory of multimedia learning Forsythe (2016); Salameh (2017), which suggests that presenting information in a narrative format enhances cognitive processing and facilitates learning. By embedding grammar instruction within storytelling, SBGT capitalizes on the cognitive benefits of narrative-based learning, thereby promoting better understanding and retention of grammar concepts (Dvalidze, 2022; Kurdi & Nizam, 2022).

Additionally, the qualitative data underscore the positive impact of SBGT on students' confidence and participation in language learning. Students expressed increased confidence in their ability to use grammar structures correctly and demonstrated greater willingness to participate in classroom activities and discussions. This finding is consistent with self-efficacy theory Burrows (2013); Ghasemboland (2015), which posits that students' belief in their own ability to succeed influences their motivation and engagement in learning activities. SBGT, as such, can enhance students' confidence by providing opportunities for success and positive reinforcement, thereby fostering a supportive learning environment that promotes active participation and risk-taking (Amalia, 2018; Pardede, 2021).

Furthermore, the qualitative findings highlight the development of contextual understanding among students through SBGT. By presenting grammar rules in the context of stories, SBGT enables students to encounter language structures in authentic and meaningful contexts, facilitating a deeper understanding of grammar concepts. This finding aligns with sociocultural theory (Aliyua & Yakubu, 2019; Swain et al., 2011), which emphasizes the importance of social and cultural contexts in shaping learning experiences. SBGT creates a socio-cultural learning environment where students can engage with language in contextually rich and meaningful ways, leading to a more holistic understanding of grammar principles (Fu, 2022; Li, 2018; Stevenson, 2018).

Finally, the qualitative data illuminate the role of SBGT in promoting language acquisition among primary school students. Through exposure to authentic language use in storytelling, students develop linguistic competence and fluency, enabling them to transfer their grammar knowledge to real-world communication situations (Fu, 2022). This finding resonates with the theory of second language acquisition, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input and meaningful interaction in language learning (Lee, 2018). SBGT, thus, can provide students with opportunities for authentic language use and interaction, thereby facilitating the acquisition of grammatical structures and linguistic skills (Romadhon & Heriyawat, 2023).

However, despite of these positive points, one of the negative qualitative findings pertained to the lack of familiarity with SBGT among students. This challenges the assumption that students may not readily adapt to innovative teaching approaches without sufficient exposure or prior experience (Hu, 2022; Yuan & Pang, 2023; Zhang, 2018). Additionally, time constraints and curriculum pressure emerged as significant barriers to the effective implementation of SBGT. This finding resonates with previous research highlighting the challenges educators face in balancing instructional innovation with curricular demands (Liu, 2023; Yuan & Pang, 2023).

Language proficiency and vocabulary limitations were identified as further obstacles to the successful implementation of SBGT. Students' limited language comprehension skills and vocabulary hindered their ability to fully engage with SBGT activities, impeding their understanding of grammar concepts embedded within narratives (Nguyen, 2021; Satriani, 2019). This finding underscores the importance of considering students' linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels when designing and implementing language teaching interventions (Hu, 2020; Sheng, 2020).

The negative qualitative findings also align with socio-cultural theories of learning, which emphasize the role of social and contextual factors in shaping learning experiences (Aliyua & Yakubu, 2019; Swain et al., 2011). According to these theories, learners' engagement with instructional materials and activities is influenced by their prior knowledge, experiences, and the socio-cultural context in which learning takes place. The challenges identified in the qualitative analysis underscore the need for educators to consider students' individual differences and address contextual factors when implementing pedagogical innovations such as SBGT (Yuan & Pang, 2023).

Limitation
Moving beyond these implications, it is also important to note the limitations of the present study for future research. For example, the quantitative phase of the study only focused on students' English grammar proficiency, while the qualitative study gave rise to other variables that can be examined in future research, such as classroom engagement and English learning motivation. Additionally, the study was conducted in a specific educational setting in China, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future research could explore the effectiveness of SBGT across diverse populations and educational environments to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its impact. Moreover, the study was conducted over a relatively short period, and longitudinal research could investigate the long-term effects of SBGT on students' language development and academic achievement. Finally, while the qualitative findings revealed several challenges associated with SBGT implementation, further research could explore strategies to address these challenges and optimize the effectiveness of SBGT in primary school English language education.

Conclusion
The findings from this mixed-method study shed light on the effects of SBGT on primary school students' grammar proficiency in China. The quantitative analysis revealed that SBGT significantly outperformed regular instruction with a grammar translation focus in enhancing students' grammar proficiency. This suggests that SBGT holds promise as an effective pedagogical approach for grammar instruction in primary school settings. In the qualitative study, several positive outcomes emerged from the implementation of SBGT. These included increased engagement and enjoyment among students, improved understanding and retention of grammar concepts, enhanced confidence and participation in language learning activities, development of contextual understanding of grammar rules, and facilitation of language acquisition. However, alongside these positive findings, several challenges associated with SBGT were identified. These included students' lack of familiarity with SBGT methodologies, time constraints and curriculum pressure faced by teachers, and language proficiency and vocabulary limitations among students.

Despite these challenges, the overall benefits of SBGT in promoting students' grammar proficiency and fostering a positive learning environment outweigh the drawbacks. The integration of engaging narratives into grammar instruction offers students opportunities for meaningful language practice and application, leading to improved learning outcomes. Therefore, moving forward, it is essential for educators to address the identified challenges by providing additional support and resources to both teachers and students. Professional development opportunities for teachers can enhance their proficiency in implementing SBGT

strategies effectively, while targeted interventions can support students in overcoming language barriers and maximizing their learning potential.

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