# Autobiographical Storytelling in English Language Arts Instruction: Fostering Literacy in the Elementary English Language Learner Classroom

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Background

- The cultural and linguistic profile of US classroom has become increasingly diverse, with English language learners (ELLs) as growing population [14]
- ELLs disproportionately represent low-performing students compared to native English-speaking peers [10]
- Difficulties in language-related skills correspond with protracted academic achievement [9,10]
- Instruction that targets multiple aspects of language acquisition yield improved educational outcomes [15]

Language Proficiency: Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Spelling
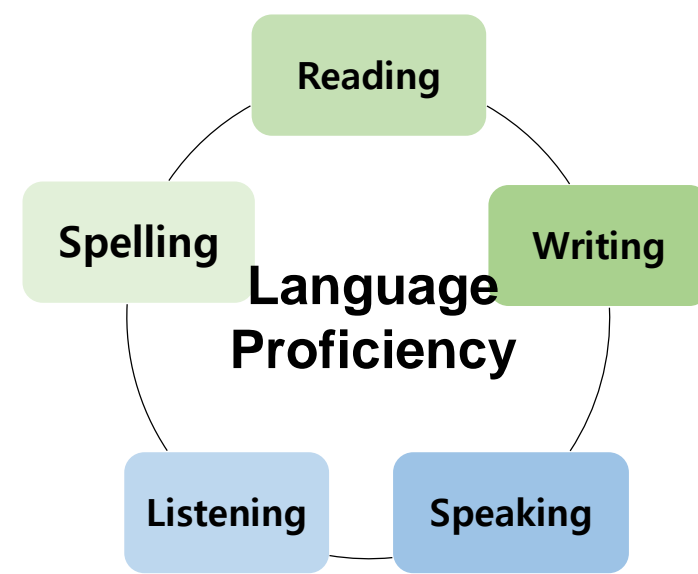
Culturally-relevant teaching strategies that address individual learning needs and establish meaningful learning contexts are important for student success. Narrative-driver storytelling models of English language instruction that may serve as novel educational practice

Methods

In a comprehensive literature review, this study explored storytelling in relation to five focus areas:
- *Classroom dynamics*
- *Interpersonal relationships*
- *Social-emotional development*
- *Engagement and motivation*
- *Academic performance*

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Results

Classroom Dynamics	• Barriers to communication result in prevalence of negative stereotypes [5] • Exposure to diverse narratives heightens student interaction and peer-to-peer connectedness [3,5] • Inclusive classroom environments increase emotional investment in learning [13]
Interpersonal Relationships	• Increased communication contributes to gains in social ability and broadened cultural attitudes [6] • Scaffolded language instruction supported by "teacher-storyteller" promote learning [4,15]
Social-Emotional Development	• Storytelling facilitates gains in expressive language ability and communication skills [6,15] • Re-narrativization of life experiences leads to greater capacity for self-awareness and self-understanding [6] • Storytelling promotes confidence and ease in the learning process [3]
Engagement and Motivation	• Identification with culturally-familiar texts enhances active interaction with learning material [2] • Storytelling provides enriching learning experiences, contributing to high levels of engagement behavior [3] • Increased cognitive engagement facilitates motivation and attention [1,13]
Academic Performance	• Disengagement corresponds to low academic performance [8] • Engagement mediates academic outcomes, such as language proficiency [12,13] • Storytelling interventions employing nonphonological language skills promote comprehension and fluency [7,11,15]

Conclusions

- **Exposure to diverse narratives broadens cultural attitudes affirms interpersonal relationships in positive learning contexts**
- **Exploration of self-narratives legitimizes student experience and voice**
- **Recruitment of multimodal language skills in storytelling enhances language proficiency**
- **Storytelling enhances engagement, which in turn facilitates motivation to learn and contributes to improved academic performance**

Discussion

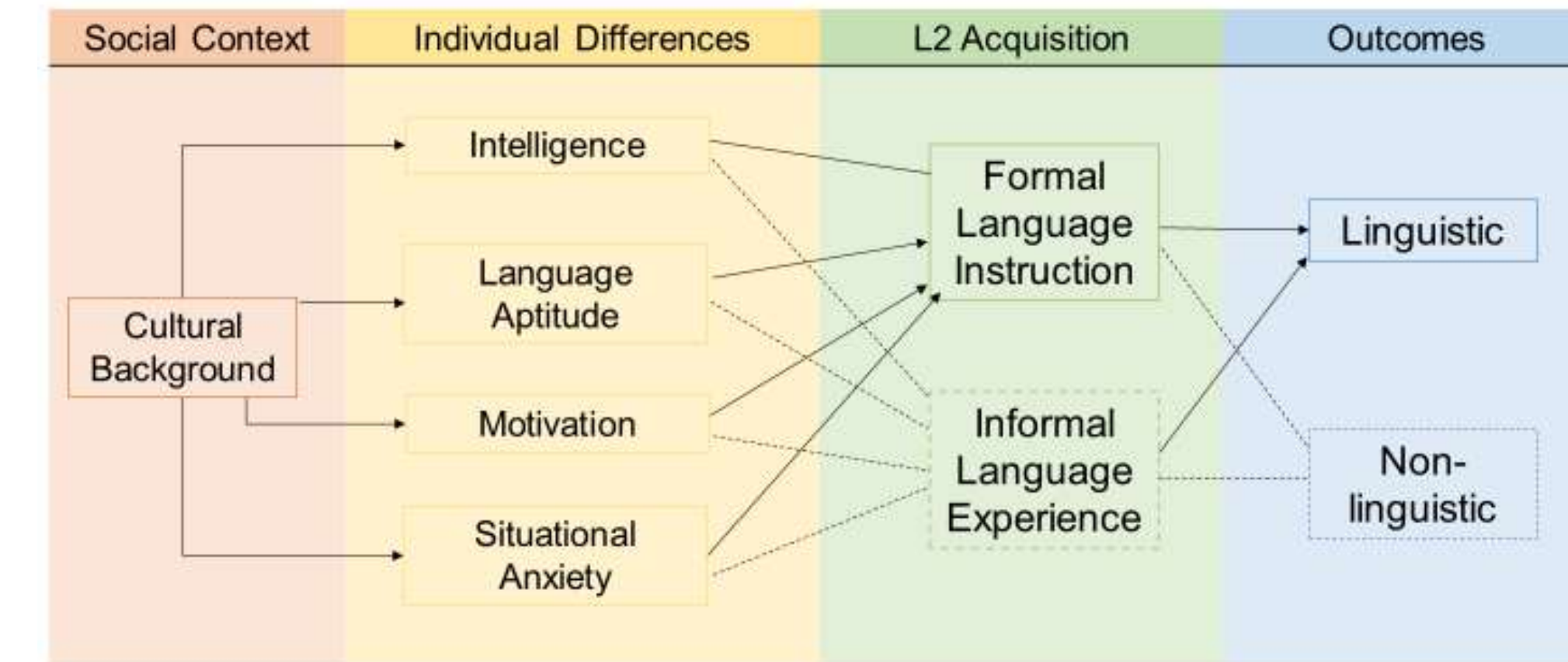Storytelling-based instruction may be evaluated according to Gardner's model of Second Language Acquisition:

Figure 1. Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition. Adapted from Gardner et al. (1979).

Few frameworks for storytelling-based language instruction in diverse classrooms currently exist. From this study, four guidelines emerged:

(1) Acknowledge diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds
- Respect cultural and linguistic diversity
- Incorporate primary language in meaningful ways
- Remain sensitive to prior educational experiences

(2) Legitimize student experience and voice
- Affirm experience through collaborative learning
- Foster inclusive and extended classroom language
- Reinforce contextual definitions for learning

(3) Provide verbal and procedural scaffolding by teacher-storytellers
- Provide strategic cognitive support via verbal language modeling
- Reinforce learning via mediation, response, and corrective feedback
- Assess individual student performance and gains

(4) Support active student roles in learning
- Encourage peer collaboration during discussions
- Assign relevant and engaging activities to stimulate student interest
- Support exploration in novel learning environments

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