



Linguistics

The Flow of Cultural Transmission Through Storytelling to the Generation Z in Vietnam

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A B S T R A C T

Children growing up in Vietnam have mostly heard stories from their family members. At that time, the stories contain cultural knowledge that is preserved and passed down from generation to generation. This study examines the experiences of young people belonging to the Gen Z generation in Vietnam, in the case of students of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Viet Nam National University Ho Chi Minh City with storytelling and exploring the characteristics of cultural transmission from the previous generation to the following generation through the form of storytelling. To explore these issues, the authors used a mixed research design combining qualitative and quantitative research. The results from the quantitative study show data on the students' access to storytelling from childhood to the present, while the data from the qualitative study exploit personal experiences to cross-check with the quantitative data. The results of the study show that close relatives such as fathers, mothers, grandparents, teachers or acquaintances are the ones who often transmit culture through the form of storytelling from the students' childhood. The cultural transmission form contained in the stories is in the form of folklore, literary works, religious stories, stories related to personal experiences and some other types. Storytelling plays the role of knowledge products for the purpose of cultural transmission through the generations. Through that, Gen Z students are provided with spiritual motivation for their own lives. And from there, they also become the ones who continue to transmit culture to the next generation.

I. INTRODUCTION

In modern society, the preservation and transmission of culture play an important role in maintaining national identity. Storytelling is a longstanding cultural transmission method used to preserve and transfer cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from one generation to the next. In Vietnam, storytelling is an entertainment activity and an important educational form, especially for the younger generation.

Children growing up in Vietnam often hear stories from their parents, grandparents, and other relatives. These stories contain valuable cultural knowledge passed down through generations. With the development of society and the strong influence of technology, the transmission of culture through storytelling has also seen significant changes.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing has not only impacted physical health but also deteriorated mental health due to limited social interaction. To overcome this period, the culture of reading has become an essential means and element to spark optimism and is a lever to help us get through difficulties together. According to Dr. Lê Thị Mai Liên, effective reading is seen as a type

of mental vaccine to help us overcome difficult times during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the culture of reading in general, and storytelling, in particular, are seen as factors that significantly impact the community's psychological resilience, cognition, and behavior.

Previous studies related to childhood storytelling and its effects on students are not very abundant. Notable works include studies by Wilks and Spivey (2010); East, L., et al. (2010), Nguyen., K., et al. (2015); Nguyễn Thị Hiền and Nile Stanley (2016); Nurser et al. (2018); Brockington et al. (2021), which indicate that storytelling can help reduce academic stress while also enhancing human resilience. Using childhood stories is one of the ways to "invite" the proactive participation of individuals in retelling stories with their own experiences in a different manner.

Linguistically, especially in socio-linguistics, researchers have developed from studying stories to understanding life stories or narratives. Life stories are social constructs; they are social in that they are exchanged among people; they are orally transmitted and spoken between individuals. Such life stories are a unit of language participating in social interactions; they are cultural products, in content and form (Linde, C., 1993).

For sociologists, stories also reveal much about social life or culture, as culture tells a story. By observing people talk, researchers can analyze the cultural and historical dependencies of the terms, beliefs, and issues the storyteller addresses (Rosenwald, G. C., & Ochberg, R. L., 1992).

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary, a story is a literary work describing characters and events through the narrative of the writer. Stories are interpreted in various genres, from folk literature like fairy tales to modern literature like short stories, novels, and adventure stories. Storytelling is the interaction between the storyteller and the listener, using both verbal forms such as spoken language, and non-verbal forms such as gestures, expressions, etc., to convey the content and meaning of the story (Nguyen Thi Hien and Nile Stanley, 2016). Stories come in many different genres: personal biographies of real or mythical characters, personal stories - recounting events in the life of an individual or group, folk tales, literary works, religious stories, etc.

From the above research overview, this study identifies research gaps and focuses on exploring the experiences of Generation Z in Vietnam, specifically students of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, in receiving and transmitting culture through storytelling. The research aims to understand how cultural values are passed from one generation to the next and explore the role of storytelling in maintaining and developing national cultural identity.

To achieve this objective, the study uses a mixed research design, combining qualitative and quantitative research. The research results will provide data on the extent of access and impact of storytelling on Generation Z students from childhood to the present. Additionally, the study will explore students' personal experiences to compare and supplement quantitative data.

The research results promise to offer profound insights into the role of storytelling in cultural transmission, while also proposing solutions to maintain and develop this cultural transmission method in modern society. Through this, Generation Z will be equipped with the necessary cultural knowledge and values, becoming the individuals who continue to transmit culture to future generations.

II. METHOD

To achieve the maximum research objectives, we conducted two phases: the theoretical research phase to identify the research history of the issue, determine research gaps, and build a theoretical framework for the study; and the practical research phase to collect quantitative and qualitative data as a basis for analyzing the main content of the study. Primarily, the study employs two groups of research methods: quantitative research and qualitative research.

The qualitative research method group used is the document research method. This method collects, synthesizes, and analyzes theoretical perspectives and practical research results related to the topic. Sources include books, specialized journals, scientific reports, research projects, doctoral dissertations, etc., from both domestic and international contexts. Simultaneously, the study also conducts experiments

on subjects who are students at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City. We randomly distributed invitation forms for students to participate in the experiment. After receiving consent from 110 participants, the participants signed consent forms to join the experiment. The research team randomly divided 66 students into two groups, each with 33 students, who then participated in interviews and took tests evaluating various issues related to their storytelling experiences from childhood.

The quantitative research methods group in this study includes the survey method using questionnaires. The questionnaire is designed with a combination of a nominal scale, a ratio scale, and a 5-level interval scale. The questionnaire was distributed based on the research sample determined by Watson's method.

The official survey sample of the study was conducted at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, via G-Form from February 2023 to June 2023, to understand the current state of students' childhood storytelling experiences as they have grown up. Personal information related to the research subjects is kept confidential according to research ethics regulations. This study uses the non-probability sampling - convenience method. According to Watson's (2001) sample size formula, with a 95% confidence level and a 50% variability in Watson's sample size table for a total population of 10,000 to 15,000 people, the sample size ranges from 385 to 390 participants. Therefore, with an official survey sample of 364 full-time students from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, from first-year to fourth-year students, this sample size is appropriate and fundamentally ensures representativeness for the total research sample.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Storytellers in the students' childhood

Most students reported that they experienced being read to or told stories during childhood at the "sometimes" level (mean = 3.02; SD = 0.67). The group most frequently reading/telling stories were "Mothers" with a mean of 3.28, followed by "Teachers" with a mean of 3.23, "Grandparents" with a mean of 2.98, "Fathers" with a mean of 2.84, and the least frequently, "Acquaintances" with a mean of 2.78.

In Vietnamese culture, the roles of mothers and grandparents in child-rearing are crucial. Children are often told stories by their mothers or grandparents, while teachers start to play a role once the children begin attending school. This not only affects who tells the stories but also helps to shape the foundational values and social skills of the children.

The fact that mothers are the ones frequently telling stories to children can be explained by the significant role of the mother in Vietnamese families. According to a study by the Diocese of Bà Rịa, mothers not only play a major role in caring for their children but also are the first and most important educators for them. Mothers frequently interact with and spend a lot of time alongside their children, deeply influencing their personality and intellectual development (Phero Huynh Van Hai, 2021).

Teachers also play an important role in telling stories to children, especially when they start school at the age of three. Teachers not only impart knowledge but also help children develop social and emotional skills through stories told in the classroom. This aligns with the educational culture in Vietnam, where teachers are considered the second most important figure after parents in shaping and developing a child's personality (Nguyen Manh Than, 2020).

Grandparents are also frequently involved in storytelling, reflecting their role in Vietnamese family culture. Traditionally, grandparents participate in the care and education of grandchildren, helping to convey cultural values and ethics through folk tales and their life experiences (Nguyen Manh Than, 2020).

International studies also emphasize the role of mothers in the education and development of children. According to research from Lancaster University, a mother's educational level is closely linked to the academic success and career development of her children. Furthermore, a mother's education

affects the mental health of children, reducing the risk of depression and anxiety (Mind Help, 2023).

Overall, the storytelling experienced by students during childhood was primarily conducted by close family members and teachers. This deeply reflects the culture and social structure of Vietnam, where family and education play crucial roles in shaping the personality and knowledge of children. Continuing to encourage storytelling within families and schools will contribute to preserving and promoting traditional cultural values.

Types of stories that students experienced

The research results indicate that students “sometimes” have diverse and rich experiences with different “Types of stories read/heard during childhood” with a mean of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 0.68. The type of story most frequently read/heard by students during childhood is “stories related to personal experiences” (mean = 3.86), followed by “folktales” (mean = 3.79), and the least frequently read/heard are “religious stories” with a mean of 2.40.

Interview results also show a similar trend. When asked about the opportunity to choose any genre or content to share, most students choose to tell stories based on their own or others’ experiences and true stories (with 10 out of 23 students sharing this view); next are folktales, romantic, emotional stories with humanistic themes (with 7 out of 23 students sharing this view) and occasionally they will adapt or choose the genre and content to better suit the age group and audiences, such as folktales or other life stories (with 4 out of 23 students); finally, 2 out of 23 students said they would choose stories about “spirituality, philosophy”. Some specific student responses are as follows:

«I would choose to tell folktales but with my own version of the story Sơn Tinh Thủy Tinh. Because I feel it resembles the story of my two sisters and me. Sometimes I’m like the character Sơn Tinh, making mistakes but being protected by my parents because I’m the younger one, while my older sister suffers more.» shared by student SV06.

Student SV28 shared the same view of choosing folktales for the following reasons:

«I think I would still choose to tell these kinds of folktales because folktales are common and everyone has heard them before, and I’m not sure if stories from other genres would help them.»

Regarding the choice of real-life stories, some students think this would be more relatable to everyone’s circumstances and have a higher persuasive value.

«If it were me, I would tell others about either my experiences or those of people around me. I believe that the fastest way to learn anything is to listen to and absorb stories that oneself has experienced or felt. Of course, there are things I’ve never tried, so the stories my friends share will partly make up for my personal experience. Moreover, I believe that each person’s life is a miraculous story. Though it might lack fantasy elements, it shows that life is full of surprises. Perhaps for me, I don’t need stories from grand figures or those who are highly successful; I want to hear and share the stories of everyday people who are becoming the protagonists of their own lives.» shared by student SV30.

Additionally, some students during the interviews chose book titles and religious stories, mainly about Buddhism, to share with others. A few students also believed that the choice of a story to share should depend on the characteristics of the audience to make an appropriate selection.

«Depending on the age, I will have different stories for each person. If it is children but we tell them literature, they may not find it interesting or understand the hidden meanings the author intends. On the other hand, if they grow older and hear folktales, they might find them too idealistic and unrealistic. I think every literary work has its own value and deserves to be known more, so I don’t have a single choice. I think I don’t have an exact answer to this question right now.» stated student SV33.

Bruner’s (1991) research also indicates that personal stories can play a crucial role in building personal and social awareness, thereby creating important emotional connections and values during childhood. Bruner argues that these stories help children understand and interpret the world around them through personal experiences and emotions.

Moreover, the high exposure of students to folktales may reflect the role of traditional culture in forming values and awareness from a young age. Propp’s (1968) research shows that folktales not only provide entertainment but also convey cultural and ethical values, thus contributing to the personality development of children. Propp explains that folktales contain certain patterns and structures that help transmit cultural values from one generation to the next.

In contrast, the low exposure to religious stories may reflect a declining interest in religious topics among the younger generation. Hunsberger and Brown’s (1984) study shows that adolescents’ interest in religious matters may decrease over time due to various social and personal factors. Hunsberger and

Brown argue that in a modern society, the interests and priorities of young people can change, leading to a decline in engagement with religious stories.

The research results show that during childhood, exposure to different types of stories significantly influences students' current experiences. Personal and folktales seem to have a more profound impact on students' memories and values compared to religious stories.

The impact of stories on students from childhood to adulthood

Most students rate the impact of storytelling in adulthood as “sometimes” with a mean of 3.14 and a standard deviation of 0.97. The majority of students believe that recalling their favorite childhood stories helps them “reinforce important personal values”; next, it “helps students cope with current difficulties” by remembering the stories they heard and remembered from childhood; and finally, students “retell their favorite childhood stories to others” with means of 3.07, 3.09, and 3.28, respectively.

Interview results also show that most students believe that experiencing childhood stories *has changed their worldview about life, opening up more open perspectives, having faith in reality, and karma, and believing in their positive actions and good deeds, which help them accept and overcome suffering and karma to live more fully* (with 21 out of 23 students sharing this view). For instance, SV28 shared:

“The detail of the elder brother going to the treasure island helped me realize that everyone has certain limits. Sometimes we have to temporarily put aside or give up unnecessary things to avoid being overwhelmed and to improve work efficiency. Now, even though it is not much, I have been able to put aside unnecessary things and focus more on work and also feel that I work more efficiently. The character Lý Thông in the story Thạch Sanh Lý Thông helped me realize that everyone is good; some people forget their initial emotions and goals due to circumstances. This story helps me not only respect the person I have no good feelings for (sometimes reluctantly) but also recognize their bright spots, improving my surrounding relationships.”

SV33 added:

“I still believe that evil will be punished. If I live well, my life will still be good. It may not be as clear as in fairy tales, or I will be helped by fairies and Buddhas, but I think the fairies and Buddhas in fairy tales can be ourselves or our relationships. Perhaps in real life, injustice will be more, and bad things may not be punished immediately, but I still believe that one reaps what one sows. I see nothing wrong with being helped like the main characters because I believe that when we are helped or help others, it is the love between humans. Because we cherish and love each other, we help each other.”

Additionally, one student (SV22) believed that they “*already had enough motivation and life beliefs built during their previous growth process,*” and one student (SV09) stated that the stories heard/read during the experiment “*did not evoke motivation, beliefs, or thoughts that they wanted to explore further.*” This shows that, somewhere along the journey from childhood to the present, students have formed, nurtured, and accumulated certain beliefs and motivations, reinforcing important personal values.

The results align with Bruner's (2004) perspective, who expanded his research on the role of stories in personal life. Bruner (2004) argued that stories not only help organize and convey experiences but also reinforce personal values and shape perceptions throughout life (Bruner, 2004). Students in this study appreciated recalling their favorite childhood stories to “reinforce important personal values” with a mean score of 3.28, consistent with Bruner's view on stories maintaining and reinforcing personal values.

Additionally, students felt that recalling their favorite childhood stories could “help them cope with current difficulties” with a mean score of 3.09, which can be explained by the research of Green and Brock (2000). They suggested that engaging with stories or dramatic content could affect readers' emotions and perceptions, helping them find new ways to deal with current issues. This study's results indicate that students use childhood stories as a source of inspiration and emotional support, reflecting agreement with Green and Brock's theory on the impact of stories on emotions and behavior.

However, the lower average score for the factor “telling favorite childhood stories to others” with a mean score of 3.07 indicates that sharing stories with others is not a common activity. This can be explained by the development of modern digital platforms. According to Eder's (2020) research, in today's digital society, sharing personal stories has shifted from traditional means to digital platforms, affecting how stories are shared and received. This study's results suggest that students may share personal stories less traditionally due to changes in modern communication methods.

Some stories highly appreciated by many students for their impact on their personal development

include:

Table 1. List of stories rated by students as having a significant impact on their growth journey

NO.	Genre	Title of the work	Meaning	Personal problems
1	Fairy tale	The Starfruit Tree and the Gold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lessons about gratitude, the belief in karma (good things happen to good people), and luck for everyone. - Expressing family love, the relationships between family members, reconciliation, and the true benefits and values of kinship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflicts in family relationships, important life decisions - Satisfaction with oneself and others
2	Fairy tale	The Hundred-Knot Bamboo Tree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lessons about life, beliefs, and personal ideals. - Demonstrating the spirit of fighting for justice, defending what is right with one's own abilities, strength, and courage. - Perspectives on love, marriage, and family between the past and present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflicts in social relationships (school, workplace), love, marriage, family - Belief and inner strength.
3	Fairy tale	Tấm and Cám	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The story reflects conflicts within the family, particularly the stepmother-stepchild relationship, and perspectives on love, marriage, and family. - Opportunities, beliefs, and one's own abilities in fighting to defend what is right. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflicts between family members- Niềm tin, năng lực nội tại của cá nhân - Develop critical thinking skills
4	Fairy tale	Thạch Sanh - Lý Thông	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The image of the "hero," the enforcer of justice, protector of peace and freedom, and the desire for a prosperous, happy life. - Demonstrating the spirit of assistance, strength, and enduring willpower to overcome adversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Issues related to oneself concerning strength, belief, ability, and maintaining health and balance between the internal and the external reality.
5	Legend	Sơn Tinh - Thủy Tinh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrating the strength, aspirations, and courage of each individual. - Emphasizing the differences of each individual (strengths and weaknesses). - Emphasizing individuality, fairness, and the determination to achieve goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Issues related to oneself, abilities, and personal development orientation.

Source: Data of the 2023 research group

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study not only clarifies the aspects of storytelling experiences in the childhood of students but also explores the role of storytelling as a cultural transmission tool for Generation Z in Vietnam. The results show that childhood stories, particularly personal and folk tales, play a crucial role in shaping the perceptions and values of current students.

Generation Z students have been influenced by stories from their childhood, primarily told by close individuals such as mothers, grandparents, and teachers. These experiences not only reflect traditional cultural values but also serve as an important means of transmitting and maintaining these values from previous generations to the current ones.

Specifically, the study indicates that personal and folk tales are common forms of cultural transmission in the students' childhoods. This reflects the continuity of cultural and educational values through stories told in families and schools. These stories not only help students understand and perceive the world around them but also create deep emotional and cultural value connections.

Furthermore, the student's perception of the influence of childhood stories in reinforcing life values and coping with current difficulties suggests that storytelling is an effective method of cultural and educational transmission for Generation Z. Childhood stories not only serve as life lessons but also as

sources of inspiration and motivation for personal and social development.

However, the cultural transmission from childhood stories to current practices is also influenced by modern digital platforms. Today's students tend to engage with stories through digital media, which has changed the way cultural stories are shared and received. This shift indicates a transformation in the way culture is transmitted from previous generations to the current one, presenting new opportunities and challenges in maintaining and developing traditional cultural values.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that storytelling is not just a childhood entertainment activity but also an important means of transmitting cultural values from one generation to another. Through personal and folk tales, Generation Z in Vietnam has inherited and maintained traditional cultural values while adapting to new cultural transmission methods in the digital age. Encouraging and maintaining storytelling activities in families and schools will not only help preserve cultural values but also create new opportunities for the younger generation to connect with the nation's cultural heritage.

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