The Effectiveness of Teaching Digital Stories in Developing EFL Primary Pupils' Speaking Skill∗

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Abstract:

This study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of digital stories in developing the EFL speaking skills of the fifth-year primary pupils. For such purpose, criteria of choosing the digital stories, pre-post EFL speaking test, table of specification, teacher reflection, and pupils' feedback questionnaire were used together with eleven digital stories. The sample of the study was forty primary pupils of the fifth grade in a governmental school. The results of the study proved the effectiveness of the digital stories in developing and enhancing the EFL speaking skills. It was recommended that curriculum designers should keep in mind the great positive effect that Multimedia has in education makes it a must to apply it in language learning specially to enhance the speaking skill. It is important also to be aware of the digital world students live in when designing learning experiences to cultivate basic communication skills. Thus, digital tools

can be used effectively in developing EFL Communication situations.

keywords: **Speaking skill - digital stories - primary pupils.**

I. Introduction:

English is the most widespread language in the world and is more widely spoken and written than any other language, it has become one of our principal's assets in getting a global leadership. The teaching of English as a foreign language has become of a great importance in our schools, especially primary ones.

The implementation of English in this stage has brought along the need to change from traditional Education settings to E-settings, which is very essential to make teaching and learning two effective processes. It can be observed that educators have to join in this new wave of change and set-up E-learning opportunities for their students.

Educational environments must be adapted to meet the demands of the 21st century skills (CEO Forum on Education and Technology, 2001). These twenty first century skills include: digital literacy, inventive thinking, effective communication and high productivity (Jakes, 2006). Educational technology can provide teachers of EFL with valuable tools and develop the 21st century skills, which is a primary reason why integration of technology in Education has become a major area of interest over the last decade.

As the debate over the effectiveness of computer technologies in schools' rages on, young people continue to use emerging technologies in their personal lives, even if a large number of educators have not yet found ways to meaningfully integrate them in the classroom.

We can find also that, although Egypt has made great strides in its general educational arena, growth in technological supports that facilitate educational advances have been slower. That the use of computer software and hardware has not been fully understood or used, and the integration of technology into the Egyptian education system is still needed.

The gap between technology presence in schools and its effective use is too wide. Many teachers believe that technology integration is a difficult, time-consuming and resource-intensive endeavor and is more trouble than it is worth (Sheingold and Hadley 1990). The under-utilization of technology is probably a result of a lack of vision of technology's potential for improving teaching and learning (Office of Technology Assessment 1995)

Meaningful technology integration is defined as curricula utilizing authentic tasks that intentionally and actively help learners to construct their own   meanings from thinking about experiences and allows for more interdisciplinary project-based instruction (Jonassen et al. 1999).

Storytelling is the original form of teaching (Pedersen 1995). It is a simple but powerful method to help students to make sense of the complex and unordered world of

experience by crafting story lines (Bruner 1990; Gils 2005). Although storytelling is not new, the idea of digital storytelling is new (Meadows 2003). Within the last 10 years, digital cameras, editing software, authoring tools and electronic media outlets have encouraged teachers to utilize many more approaches and tools than ever before to help students to construct their own knowledge and ideas to present and share them more effectively (Standley 2003). One of these powerful approaches to multimedia production is digital storytelling.

Digital storytelling is a technology application that is well-positioned to take advantage of user-contributed content and to help teachers overcome some of the obstacles to productively using technology in their classrooms. At its core, digital storytelling allows computer users to become creative storytellers through the traditional processes of selecting a topic, conducting some research, writing a script, and developing an interesting story. This material is then combined with various types of multimedia, including computer-based graphics, recorded audio, computer-generated text, video clips, and music so that it can be played on a computer, uploaded on a web site, or burned on a DVD.

The combination of powerful, yet affordable, technology hardware and software mesh perfectly with the needs of many of today's classrooms, where the focus is on providing students with the skills they will need to "thrive in increasingly media-varied environments" (Riesland, 2005).

As an instructional tool, teachers have the option of showing previously-created digital stories to their students to

introduce content and capture students' attention when presenting new ideas. Teachers who are able to create their own digital stories may find that they can be particularly helpful not only in engaging students in the content but also in facilitating discussion about the topics presented in a story and helping make abstract or conceptual content more understandable. A multimedia-rich digital story can capture the attention of students and increase their interest in exploring new ideas. Teacher-created digital stories may also be used to enhance current lessons within a larger unit, and as a way to make abstract or conceptual content more understandable (Robin, 2008).

Using the digital storytelling can help in overcoming the following:

Digital literacy   the ability to communicate with an ever-expanding

                                    community to discuss issues, gather information,

                                    and seek help;

Global literacy   the capacity to read, interpret, respond, and

                                    contextualize messages from a global perspective

Technology literacy   the ability to use computers and other technology

to improve learning, productivity, and performance;

Visual literacy and   the ability to understand, produce,

communicate through visual images;

Information literacy synthesize   the ability to find, evaluate, and

information.

Even though few research studies on the effectiveness of digital storytelling have been conducted, numerous findings have been reported on the benefits of multimedia projects in which students have shown an increase in research skills, increased organizational skills, and a greater interest in the content being taught (Paull, 2002; Salpeter, 2005). Many educators involved in multimedia projects with students would agree that some of the most significant gains pertain to higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, including synthesizing, analyzing, evaluating, and presenting information. When students use technology such as digital storytelling, they learn to "convert data into information and transform information into knowledge" (Cradler, McNabb, Freeman, & Burchett, 2002).

It is worth asking what the findings might have been if digital storytelling had been used by teachers and students in the classrooms. We find that it is clear to many that content integration, supported by powerful computer technologies, is

needed, and the impact that computer technology can have on students is much more meaningful when it involves an impact on higher order thinking skills, not just test scores.

Speaking is the aspect of oral language. It is a skill that can only be acquired through practice. It is well known that speaking skill plays a key role in foreign language teaching, especially with young learners (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Brewester, 1994; Brown, 1986,1989). Human beings in general are usually involved in spoken activities most of their every day time to the extent of estimating that approximately 75% of language activity of most people involves speaking or listening.

Digital stories may promote foreign language learning, that tales and stories are effective listening and visual materials for children to develop speaking literacy both in their first and foreign language (Dickinson, 2001; Elly, 1989; Isbell, 2002; Penno, Wilkinson & Moore, 2002; Raines & Isbell, 1994; Richards & Anderson, 2003; Zevenbergenn & Whitehurst, 2003).

Digital stories can be used in various ways to improve pupils' oral communication skills. Once they have heard a story, they are usually anxious to discuss their understanding of it and relate it to their own experience. So, digital stories have many benefits and values: they refine imagination and visualization; increase vocabulary; enhance speaking skills, and help pupils understand their own and other cultural heritage.

At an early stage of language acquisition, stories can offer a valuable way of contextualizing and introducing new language, making it meaningful and memorable (Wasik & Bond, 2001; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Wright, 2000). They are associated with feelings and memories, as they are a distinctive manifestation of cultural values and perceptions. Besides, they present linguistic forms, grammar, phrases, vocabulary, and formulaic speech within a meaningful and structured context that supports comprehension of the narrative world (Glazer & Burke, 1994; Jennings, 1991; Koisawalia, 2005; Mallan, 1991).

In despite of all these potential benefits, however, there is insufficient research on how technology contributes to improve children's linguistic comprehension (see Haddad & Jurich, 2002 for discussion). Most of the research on the use of computer-based technology as an instructional tool for foreign language learning has concentrated on teenagers and adults (e.g., Salaberry, 2001; Zhao, 1999). As regards primary school settings, the majority of studies report on the positive developmental and motivational effects that access to technology may have on children's foreign language learning (Clements, 1994; Clements, Nastasi & Swaminathan, 1993). Only a few studies suggest that the use of computer-based technologies in the classroom is correlated to positive academic outcomes, including higher test scores, one of the reasons for this situation may be that computer-based technology in the primary classroom is under utilized .

The importance of implementing the digital stories in education is clarified in the Following studies:

Researchers such as Burmark (2004) have found that integrating visual images with written text both enhances and accelerates student comprehension, and digital storytelling is an especially good technology tool for collecting, creating, analyzing, and combining visual images with written text.

(Schrum et al., 2007mentioned that different technologies do have unique positive effect on the educational process. Pierson (2001), Mishra and Koehler (2006, 2007), and others have advocated teachers should be trained on the use of technology in the classrooms.

Hicks (2006) suggested, Using technology in teaching might be helpful in guiding teachers to apply their knowledge in the classroom by providing "the ability to think about and use technology in critical, creative, and responsible. Barrett (2006) found that digital storytelling facilitates the convergence of the student learning strategies. Robin (2005) argued that educators at all levels and in most subjects can use digital storytelling in many ways to support students' learning by encouraging them to organize and express their ideas and knowledge in an individual and meaningful way.

Gils (2005) suggested many advantages of using digital storytelling in education: (1) to provide more variation than traditional methods in current practice; (2) to personalize learning experience; (3) to make explanation or the practicing of certain topics more compelling; (4) to create real life situations in an easy and cheaper way; and (5) to improve the involvement of students in the process of

learning. Gruba (2006) stated that adopting digital media could extend and develop views of second language (L2) listening comprehension.

Al-Sabagh (2006) conducted a study which aimed at investigating the effectiveness of a suggested multimedia short stories program in developing the students' speaking skill.

She presented the following recommendations and suggestions as a result of her study:

- The multimedia short stories can be adopted for teaching speaking to students of various learning stages. Obviously, students' levels, interests, and needs should be taken into account.

- Students should be provided with authentic and real learning situations that might help in developing their speaking skills. Also, there must be a shift in the teachers' role; s/he should become a guide, a language adviser, a motivator, a facilitator and a discussion organizer.

- The Speaking should be given more attention in our EFL classes. More time and effort should be devoted to this skill and its various components.

- Students should become the center of learning process and should share more responsibilities in their learning. Thus, they should be offered more communicative activities (storytelling, discussion, description, making a summary and so on). In this way, they can become more motivated and involved in learning speaking.

- EFL teachers should pay more attention to the supplementary instructional media; e.g., cassette tapes and CDs in order to develop EFL skills. Obviously, these media help motivate learners and make them more involved in various language activities.

- EFL teachers should be aware of the importance of multimedia elements in enhancing the learning process. Also, they should be trained for incorporating these elements in their instruction. Of course, this is a prerequisite for a successfully carrying out language programs in our schools.

       Brett (1997) conducted a study to investigate listening performance in a computer- based multimedia environment. The results of this study indicated that the listening skills are more effective if they are delivered to the student through the multimedia tools. Verdugo and Belmonte (2007) examined the effects that digital stories may have on the understanding of spoken English by a group of six years old Spanish learners. Findings of this study indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the final test administrated. These results raise interesting issues related to the use of technology in the context of foreign language learning. The researchers recommended conducting further research which includes other age groups and digital materials and which explores other linguistic areas. Safaa Eissa(2009) asserted that using the digital stories with young learners proved to be interesting and motivating, that this kind of stories provide an educational environment full of visual stimuli make the pupils enjoy the language learning.

II. Context of the problem:

For many years, teaching of English as a foreign language in most of Egyptian primary schools practiced the traditional system of education which is not effective in terms of resulting in actual learning and has many disadvantages that are actually counterproductive to real learning. It focuses entirely on intellectual and ignores experiential learning, teaches students how to succeed on standardized tests and not much more, it also has an authoritarian nature and leads students to only extrinsically value education and not intrinsically value learning.

This traditional kind of education is not applicable to the students of the primary stage. No doubt that this traditional way of teaching is the main reason of the low level of primary pupils' speaking skills. It has been commonly reported that many EFL learners encounter serious problems when speaking English. This may be due to the various inappropriate teaching practices that focus on language form rather than on developing learners' speaking proficiency. Also, the need for investigating this problem was supported by some previous studies as Al-Khuli (2000) said that the students became unable to express their own thoughts orally and most of them fail to respond correctly and naturally.

In a study conducted by Safaa Eissa, 2009. The Egyptian EFL primary pupils showed low level of listening and speaking skills before being taught with the digital stories, as a teaching tool, the implementation of the digital

stories with theses pupils resulted in developing their listening and speaking skills.

So it is clear that multimedia applications for foreign language learning can provide a more realistic picture of the new language and culture in the classroom, including not only linguistic but also paralinguistic features such as body language, gestures, etc., which help to convey meaning to the learners. The multimedia applications offer children more control of the learning experience. Thus, the technology is beneficial to children learning if used appropriately. In many different studies, children demonstrated increased levels of spoken communication and cooperation during computer use. There are also researches that suggest the positive effects of technology use on cognitive and social learning and development of children.

The need for integrating teaching in Education has rapidly increased in the twenty-first century. Brinton (2001) shows that media tools appeal to students' senses and help them process information, thus empowering their understanding of the target culture and increasing their motivation toward language learning, reinforcing the teaching points, and saving the teacher unnecessary explanation.

Many children learn easily by watching others, and imitating actions, they enjoy viewing pictures of themselves and people they know. They point, name the people, and often tell stories about the pictures of familiar faces. So the digital media applications including the digital stories can be

very useful for the EFL young learners, especially in terms of acquiring Listening and speaking skills.

In response to the call of integrating technology in the Egyptian education , this study intends to make full use of multimedia in teaching digital stories to the fifth year primary school pupils in order to develop the speaking skill and increase pupils' interest and desire to speak accurately.

The researcher believes in this study that digital stories, if appropriately selected, can prove to be very useful in developing children's listening and speaking skills.

III. Statement of the Problem:

This study investigates the teachers' use of digital storytelling in their classrooms, the effectiveness of this use on EFL pupils speaking skills, as it is noticed that the primary pupils in most of schools have a very low levels of proficiency at English speaking skills, the researcher attributes this low level to the implementation of the traditional way of teaching such as leading pupils to pure memorization and repetition of drills rather than training them on technological media to improve the listening and speaking skills.

The current study attempts to answer the following main question:
What is the effectiveness of digital stories in developing the EFL primary pupils' speaking skill?

In attempting to answer the above question, the following sub-questions will also be answered:

- What are the required speaking skills for Egyptian EFL primary pupils?
- To what extent are the digital stories effective in developing Egyptian EFL primary pupils' speaking skills?

IV. Delimitations of the study:

This study is limited to

- Group of fifth grade primary pupils
- Group of primary schools
- This study is limited to apply a number of digital stories during only one semester.

V. Definition of Terms:

Speaking Skills:

Chaney, 1998 defined speaking as the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts. Nunan, (2003) defined the speaking as the use of the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called fluency.

In this study Speaking is defined as the skills which require the young EFL pupils to produce words and simple sentences when they practice the activities which promote the speaking skills after watching the digital stories on the computer.

Digital stories:

Bruner 1990; Gils 2005 defined the digital storytelling as a simple but powerful method to help students to make sense of the complex and unordered world of experience by crafting story lines. Meadows, (2003) defined digital stories as the social practice of telling stories that makes use of low-cost digital cameras, non-linear authoring tools and computers to crate short multimedia stories.

In this study Digital Storytelling is generally defined as the idea of combining the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia, such as images, audio, and video. Just about all digital stories, they present information on a specific topic they all revolve around a chosen theme and often contain a particular viewpoint, a number of activities that promote the speaking skills will be implemented after applying the digital stories.

VI. Method of the study:

This study is a quasi-experimental study applied at group of the Egyptian primary schools.

Sample of the study:

The researcher will concentrate in her study on group of the Egyptian primary schools, and will choose group of the fifth-grade primary pupils to be as a control group, to be educated in the traditional way of teaching, and other group to be as an experimental group, to be learned with digital stories.

Tools of the study:

The following tools were used in this study

- EFL primary stage speaking checklist
- Fifth Grade EFL Primary speaking Pre- and Post-test.
- Criteria for choosing the digital stories
- A scaling rubric instrument to analyze the pupils' results of the pre-posttests.

VII. Procedures of the study:

The following procedures were followed:

1. Reviewing the literature and previous studies related to: Speaking skills – Storytelling - Digital stories.

2. Determining the proficiency upon which the pupils will be measured. This will be done through:

3. Preparing a checklist of EFL speaking skills relevant to the primary stage pupils.

4. Designing a pre- speaking test to measure the fifth grade of primary pupils' speaking skills before the treatment in which the main purpose is to test the pupils' speaking skills on three levels:
   - The word levels
   - The sentence levels
   - The text levels

5. Determining the effect of teaching with digital stories on the levels   of the English speaking skills' proficiency, this will be done through:
   - Teaching a number of digital stories

- Designing a post speaking test to measure the fifth grade of primary pupils' speaking skills.
- Analyzing the results statistically, the discussing them.
- Introducing some recommendations.

VIII. Significance of the Study:

This study is expected to be of importance to:

- Curriculum developers and designers:

It may contribute in making the responsible for the children's education pay attention to develop the 21st century skills: digital literacy, inventive thinking, effective communication, and high productivity which are all essential for the students of the primary stage. It may also draw EFL textbook authors to provide primary teachers with readymade digital stories appropriate to the age and culture of Egyptian primary pupils.

- EFL researchers:

The study is hoped to provide EFL researchers with a theoretical and empirical foundation that they can build on for further research.

- EFL teachers:

It may help in making teachers' pay attention to the effectiveness of technology as a very useful tool in a classroom environment. Also, it can provide the teachers of EFL with a variety of suggestions and activities that they can effectively implement to enhance their pupils' speaking skills.

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