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Using Digital Stories for Developing Reading Skills of EFL Preparatory School Pupils

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of digital stories in developing some reading comprehension skills of the preparatory school pupils. To achieve the study purpose, research instruments were developed after adjusting their validity and reliability. Researcher prepared two instruments. First, the researcher prepared a questionnaire to determine the appropriate reading comprehension skills for the preparatory school pupils. Second, the researcher prepared a pre-post reading comprehension test. This test was used for measuring the pupils' reading comprehension skills. This study adopts the descriptive method. The participants were divided into two groups. The researcher presented digital stories for first group. The researcher also presented traditional method of teaching for second group. Each group consisted of 40 pupils. The data obtained from this study is analyzed statistically by SPSS program. The results revealed effectiveness of adopting digital stories in developing pupils' reading skills among first year preparatory school pupils.

Key words: Digital Stories, Digital storytelling, Reading Comprehension Skills.

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1. Introduction

Over last three decades, information technology has centered on the Internet and the World Wide Web (Robin& Pierson, 2005). Instructional institutions do its best for acquiring the computer skills that are important for pupils and teachers to get the web resources. According to Assia(2012), using multimedia technologies can be used all over the world. Using technology in education, for example, should be well-prepared. Chen, Hsu and Hung (2008) assured integrating technology in classroom demands teachers' attitudes and willingness.

Also, stories are still used to educate learners, just as they have been used throughout history. Oral and written stories are used as teaching and learning tools. As Burmark (2004) stated combining images and written text improve pupils' comprehension. Also, he affirms, digital storytelling is useful for creating, analyzing, and combining images with text.

Tsou, Wang and Li (2006) recommended that teachers could use digital storytelling in learning. It also improved pupils' language performance. Developing reading skills using digital stories is the main concern of the present study. According to Berardo (2006), there are three purposes for reading. These purposes are for survival, learning or pleasure. The first type is related to environment. The second purpose is goal-oriented. It is the type of reading which is practiced in the classroom. The third type is for enjoyment.

According to Robin (2008), teachers could design digital stories find them helpful and facilitating discussion. They also help making content more understandable. Robin (2011) stated that adopting digital stories may be used for enhancing lessons within a larger unit. This facilitates discussion of the story topics.

According to Robin (2006), digital stories could be personal stories, informing or instructing stories, and re-telling historical events stories. Personal stories deal with

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author's life. The second type is used for convey the instructional material in various fields. This type could be used by teachers and pupils. The third type is about events from history.

According to Signes (2008), the main difference between digital stories and traditional stories is the nature of medium and tools that are used in contrast with those of the traditional stories. Holtzman (1997) affirms the main differences are "nonlinearity, discontinuity and autonomy" In the same context, Handler Miller (2008) added digital stories encourage the use of various media, all tied together to serve the core story".

Lambert (2007) identified elements of effective digital stories. These elements include: "a point of view, a dramatic question, emotional content, economy, pacing, the gift of your voice and an accompanying soundtrack". Moreover, Robin (2006) has classified three types of digital stories:

1) "personal narratives: stories that contain details of one's life".

2) "historical documentaries: stories that present dramatic events to understand the past".

3) "Stories designed to inform or instruct a concept ".

The Researcher uses the digital stories that are designed to instruct for developing reading comprehension skills.

Digital stories have several advantages and can be summarized in these points:

1) Variation: every digital story has a scenario differs from the others.

2) Personalization: the digital story can be created according to the pupils' level.

3) Engaging: Teachers can engage pupils by using digital stories. Pupils can be motivated by the stories they have heard or seen.

4) Active learning: systems of digital stories can present various interactive learning systems. Pupils learn better by doing.

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5) Discussion: digital stories allow collaboration with the teachers.

The University of Houston (2009) explained uses and procedures of digital stories in education. First, the teacher presents the definition of story parts, selects a message of story and determines purpose of the story. Next storyteller looks for content, visual and audio resources for the story. Second, the storyteller presents content, audio and images, in an attractive way. The storyteller can organize the order of the resources. Third, the storyteller creates the story. He should determine the point of view of the story. Finally, the digital story is saved in video presentation. Fourth, the storyteller shows the story and gets feedback.

Reading is considered a complex process as it involves sub- skills. Reading is a necessary skill for many foreign language learners. Moreover, Reading in the foreign language is important because it shows the written form in action. Reading comprehension skill is defined as "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction, and involvement with written language (Snow, 2002, p. 7) ".

Using Digital Stories in education

There are various methods of using digital stories in education. First, instructor decides creating them or having pupils create. Burmark (2004) found out combining images with text enhances learning process. Teacher-created stories can make use of presenting lessons in larger unit. This makes discussion easy. Researchers affirm teachers can use stories for recalling and understanding information. Although educational digital story shares digital storytelling in various characteristics, the difference is in purpose.

For pupils today, digital tools open a world of creativity and expression that is unique and ever broadening. Pupils can reach a wider audience than ever before. The ease of access to these technologies presents new challenges and expanding opportunities for K–12 pupils and teachers (Frazel, 2011). Pupils need to participate

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in reading process. They should read and find out meanings of texts. Pupils should be active organizers, not passive recipients.

Teacher's role while using digital stories

Nowadays, teacher becomes facilitator, a coach and a trainer who trains learners to develop a large number of cognitive, intellectual and affective skills. To do this, learners need to use technology – mediated instruction. Teachers still play a vital role in this digital age. According to Bull and Kajder (2004) state that in this world of technology teachers of English language should investigate that interconnect pupils´ digital knowledge with storytelling because "technology offers a number of opportunities for connecting classrooms with the world".

Ohler (2008) affirms that teacher is as a guide than the technician magician. It is important to focus on the story and not the technology. Using technology will not turn the role of the tutor upside down. In e-learning, the teacher is a facilitator; so, he or she must should encourage and support pupils.

Definition of terms

Digital stories

Snow (2002) defined the digital story as "a short (usually between 3 to 5 minutes) clip, which consisted of a series of still images, combined with oral and/or written text".

Digital stories are "a contemporary form of traditional storytelling". Digital stories can be funny, informative, analytical, or thought provoking (University of Houston, 2009).

In the current study, the researcher defined digital stories as "multimedia movies that combine photographs, video, animation, sound, music, text, and often a narrative voice".

Reading

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Mikulecky (2008) defined reading as a thinking process where the reader consciously and unconsciously applies some strategies in order to understand the meaning which the author intends to convey through his writing. The reader compares information in the text to his prior knowledge and background information.

Reading comprehension

Snow (2002, 11) added it could be defined as "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language". Snow, also, proposed reading comprehension included three elements: "the reader who is doing the comprehending, the text that is to be comprehended, and the activity in which comprehension is embedded"

Deutsch (2005) configured as "the process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language".

The researcher defined reading comprehension as process in which the pupil passes the level of merely identifying letters and words to interaction between text and meaning.

2. Research problem

Several studies revealed that preparatory school pupils had difficulties in reading comprehension skills.

It is also important the value of integrating technology in classes specifically to promote language skills. Researchers (e.g. Haroun, 2012; Sadik, 2008) affirmed its value and usage.

The researcher stated the problem of the study as the following:

Pupils at the preparatory school faced difficulties in skills of reading.

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The researcher conducted a pilot study to estimate pupils' levels in the required skills. The researcher conducted a pilot test in the school year 2018/2019. It was found out that the percentage of pupils who scored less than 50% of the total mark of each skill was very low. So, pupils' performance in required skills was not satisfying and that they were inefficient in required skills.

3. Research Questions

The study problem was formulated in the following main question:

How far are digital stories effective in developing EFL preparatory school pupils' reading skills?

This main question can be classified into these questions:

1) What are the EFL reading skills necessary for preparatory school pupils?
2) How far do preparatory school pupils acquire the required EFL reading skills?
3) What are the characteristics of a suggested treatment based on digital stories to develop preparatory school pupils' English reading skills?
4) What is the effectiveness of using digital stories in the developing preparatory school pupils' English reading skills?

4. Research purposes

The purposes of the study are:

1) determine appropriate skills for EFL preparatory school pupils.
2) develop selected reading skills suitable for EFL preparatory school pupils.
3) determine how far digital stories can develop the reading skills of EFL preparatory school pupils.

5. Research significance

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This study is expected to be beneficial in the following aspects:

1) helping teachers to use digital stories for developing EFL preparatory pupils' reading comprehension skills.

2) providing a checklist of EFL reading comprehension skills that can be helpful for teachers of English language in constructing different reading comprehension tests.

3) Providing curriculum planners with a non- traditional way of teaching lessons that may enhances teaching as a whole.

6. Review literature

The following review shows a number of researches on the reading skills in general and the usage of digital stories.

Studies about developing EFL reading skills

Yasin (2002) examined the reading skills required for third prep pupils to read "The Reader". The results of the study showed the importance of the treatment in handling "The Reader", the short story associated with the third year prep stage textbook. Pupils' reaction and participation in the experimental treatment showed satisfaction and enthusiasm. In spite of the positive findings, few pupils expressed that they were not interested in the activities because they were not going to be tested in them.

Ibrahim (2007) conducted a study aiming at designing project for improving reading and writing skills for secondary school first graders. The design utilized in this study was two control-experimental group pre-post test study. The method followed in performing the experiment was task-based oriented method. The subjects of the study were one hundred secondary stage pupils classified into 2 groups. The study revealed that there is a need for utilizing such program for developing reading and writing skills for secondary stage first graders.

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Mohamed's research (2008) was about interactive storytelling techniques in teaching English short stories upon first year secondary school pupils' English and writing skills. Tools of study included a listening test and a writing test. Analysis of data using t-test showed the group that used digital story surpassed the group that used traditional method on the tests of the listening and writing skills.

Ezz El-Arab (2012) investigated extended reading for improving the EFL reading ability and vocabulary acquisition of first year secondary pupils. The sample for this study origina1ly included 80 female pupils who were enrolled in the first year secondary stage during the academic year 2011/2012 in the first term. The researcher excluded pupils who didn't attend the post test and only counted in her statistics pupils attended both the pre and post test. This study revealed the effectiveness of the treatment.

Studies related to digital stories and instruction

Sadik (2008) carried out a study on digital stories for engaging pupils' understanding. Pupils were motivated to create their digital stories. He found out pupils designed the digital stories did perfectly in their projects. Also, their stories were designed according to the technical and pedagogical attributes of digital stories.

According to Alameen (2011), presented a project for pupils to design digital stories, shared and evaluate them by Voice Thread. Digital stories encourage learners to work with each other.

Studies related to digital stories and developing EFL skills:

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Dadour (2004) presented a proposed interactive-reading program. It was for developing the reading skills and the empathic feelings of prospective EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers. The participants were a group of 70 prospective teachers of English. They were classified into 2 groups (n=35): experimental and control. It was concluded that the proposed program proved to be effective for reading skills and empathic feelings, in favor of the group that studies the program.

Verdugo and Belmonte (2007) carried out a study for improving listening skills by using digital stories. Findings indicated the group that used digital stories surpassed the control group in post administration.

Darwish's study (2011) investigated the effects of using a story- based program taught through the discussion method on improving the first year faculty of arts pupils reading skills. There was evidence of superiority of the group that handled the treatment in comparison with the group that used a traditional mode of teaching.

Vinogradova, Linville and Bickel (2011) investigated digital stories as pupil-centered projects and offered applicable recommendation. Researchers concluded that pupils can create the project, determine the subject.

Haroun (2012) presented a study to determine effectiveness of teaching digital stories on primary pupils' speaking skill. The researcher depended on applying eleven digital stories downloaded from the British council website. . The administration was in second semester, in a governmental school, on one class of grade primary five. This study revealed a development in the pupils' EFL speaking skills. Thus, the use of digital stories was effective for teaching speaking skills.

Rosalia and Artigliere (2012) studied the effects of pupil learning when pupils created the digital stories EFL classroom in the middle school. Rosalia and Artigliere created five digital story projects for seven months. Sixteen pupils participated in this project. The findings indicated that the pupils made significant and measurable

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improvement in their writing, reading, speaking self- confident and self-assess skills. It was concluded that supporting the project-based learning shows the effectiveness in reading and writing skills.

It can be concluded that digital stories have been improved comprehensive literacy skills of pupils.

7. Research method

7.1 Participants

The participants of the main study were divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The first experimental group was taught using digital stories. The control group was taught using the usual method. Each group consisted of 40 pupils.

7.2 Design

The researcher adopted the quasi-experimental design for administering the digital stories and testing the effectiveness in developing the pupils' reading comprehension skills. The researcher used experimentation to administer the proposed treatment. It was used to test the effectiveness of the suggested treatment in developing the participants' reading performance. Experimentation in the current study went as follows:

Two intact groups were randomly assigned. The first group pupils were presented digital stories. The second group used the regular way of teaching. The pre-test was presented to the two groups before the treatment. The researcher used One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to compare the results of the two groups.

7.3 Instruments

The following instruments were designed by the researcher:

- Reading comprehension skills questionnaire.

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- A pre-post test of EFL reading comprehension skills.

8. Analysis & discussion

Concerning the participants of the studies, the previous studies were applied to all ages. Some of them were conducted for preparatory stage such as Yasin (2002). Other studies were conducted in the middle school such Rosalia and Artigliere (2012). Other studies were conducted in Junior Secondary schools such Ibrahim (2007) and Ezz El-Arab (2012). Thus, Digital stories are effective.

Different tools were used in these studies, which helped preparing instruments. Some tools used in the mentioned studies include reading test as in the study of Ezz El-Arab. The Test of Reading Skills was used in Dadour's study to check effectiveness to proposed interactive-reading project.

8.1 Procedures

To answer the study questions, the researcher adopted the following steps:

To answer the first question which is "**what are the EFL reading skills necessary for the preparatory school pupils?**", the researcher followed these steps:

- reviewing of literature and previous studies related to this study.

- reviewing of the EFL objectives to identify the reading skills appropriate to preparatory school pupils.

- preparing a list and designing a questionnaire given to the jury members.

To answer the second question which is **"how far do the preparatory school pupils have the required EFL reading skills?"**, the researcher followed these steps:

- preparing a pre-reading comprehension test to measure the pupils' reading comprehension skills.

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- presenting the pre-reading comprehension test to a panel of jury and modifying it according to their guidance.

- applying the pre-reading comprehension test on the study's group, extract the results and doing the statistical analysis for the data.

To answer the third question which is "**what are the characteristics of a suggested treatment based on digital stories for developing preparatory school pupils'EFL reading skills?",**the researcher followed these steps:

- reviewing of literature and previous studies related to this study.

- preparing the digital stories that develop the selected reading comprehension skills.

- Presenting the digital stories to the experimental group.

To answer the fourth question which is "**What is the effectiveness of the suggested treatment in developing the preparatory school pupils' EFL reading skills?"**,the researcher followed these steps:

- preparing a reading test to measure the pupils' reading skills, presenting the test to a panel of jury and modifying according to their guidance.

- applying the pre-post test on the study's groups, extracting the results and doing the statistical analysis for the data.

- extracting the results, giving suggestions and proposing recommendations.

The study results showed the superiority of the second group who used digital stories in comparison to pupils who received a regular teaching mode. This was reflected in the high score of the pupils of the second group obtained in the post-administration. Therefore, this study concluded the effectiveness of using digital stories for developing pupils' reading comprehension skills.

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It can be concluded that digital stories have been improved comprehensive literacy skills of pupils. The field of research in reading is still open to further studies. Researcher benefited from the review of literature and the findings of the previous studies in formulating the hypotheses, procedures and recommendations.

8.2 Assumptions of the treatment

- Reading skill, not technology, is the focus of the treatment. Nevertheless using computers have obvious advantages over the traditional method.

- The treatment ensures the pupils feel responsible for their study and confident of the progress they are making. The pupils could loop backwards and forwards to whichever they wanted by clicking the button "back" and "previous" for the activities used in the sessions.

- The learner should be the center of the learning process. The learner-centered approach supposed that the pupils are not identical passive containers to be filled with knowledge. Thus, the individuals were assumed to be capable of active and independent learning.

- Therefore, teachers are not just transmitters of knowledge, but rather providers, facilitators, assistants, helpers, promoters, simplifiers of knowledge. Hence, the more interactive the instruction, the more effective the learning outcome is likely to be.

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8.3 The lesson plan followed thorough the treatment

Major steps were used in every lesson for both the first and the second experimental groups. The researcher designed a plan for each lesson. The main steps followed in each lesson were:

- Identify the objectives of each lesson

In each lesson, the researcher determined what pupils should learn.

- Warm up activities:

The researcher used various activities to prepare the pupils for the lesson and attract their attention.

- Pre-reading the story:

The researcher discussed the meaning of the new vocabulary and the new structure with the pupils. The most important thing about this stage is to be confident in handling the task. This, in turn, gives pupils exposure and above all, creates interest in doing the task.

- Reading the story:

Pupils were asked to read the story.

- During reading the story:

The pupils answered questions that arise as they read the text. They also predicted the conclusion of the story.

- Post-reading the story:

Pupils were asked questions related to the story.

- **Evaluating:**

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The evaluation techniques used in the treatment consisted of both formative evaluation and summative evaluation.

8.4 The Treatment and the procedures of the study:

The following is a description of the steps followed by the researcher in designing the current treatment.

1- Reviewing the previous studies concerning with developing reading skills,

2- Reviewing the previous studies associated with designing digital stories,

3- Surfing various educational web sites specialized in teaching and learning English using digital stories,

4-Determining the purpose and rationale of the treatment,

 5-Stating the aims and the objectives of the treatment,

6-Determining the assumptions of the treatment,

7-Determining the duration of the administration,

8-Describing the digital stories treatment,

9-Describing the content of the treatment,

10- Illustrating the sessions of the treatment, and

11-Describing the activities, the procedures the questions, evaluation followed in the treatment.

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9. Conclusions

It is important for the teacher to select stories that grasp pupils' attention and involve them in the action of the stories. In addition, the teacher should plan out well-organized steps in presenting stories and follow-up activities that focus on developing reading skills. The present study reached the following conclusions:

Adopting technology**,** in teaching English, needs human-ware more than hardware or software. Technology and web-based learning should be driven by the actual, real and suitable for pupils' needs not vice versa.

In adopting digital stories in learning process, the role of both the teacher and the learner has changed. In other words, the teacher's role is to facilitate, present questions and give comments. The teacher's role as a guide, manager, motivator and feedback-provider increased in importance. Nevertheless, learners are no longer dependent or passive recipients in their learning.

Digital stories are considered flexible tools because teachers can use a range of tools from the simplest to the most complicated ones. They can fit most teaching purposes. This depends on purpose and level of the pupils.

It was concluded superiority of the two experimental groups who used digital stories in contrast with the control group pupils who received a regular teaching mode. Therefore, this study concluded that using digital stories is positive in developing pupils' skills.

The field of research in reading is still open to further studies. The review of literature and the findings of the previous studies were helpful in formulating the hypotheses, procedures and recommendations.

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