Using Digital Stories for Developing Reading Skills

By

Fatma Mohamed El Sayed El Dweil

Dr. Aly Abd-Elsamei Qoura **Dr.Moataza Muhammad Dadour**

Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of digital stories in developing some reading comprehension skills of the preparatory school students. To achieve the main purpose of the present study, research instruments were developed after making sure of their validity and reliability. Three instrumentations were prepared by the researcher. First, content analysis to develop the reading skills through the stories of second year preparatory stage. Second, a questionnaire to determine the most appropriate reading skills to the preparatory school students. Third, a pre-post reading test was prepared to assess the students' reading comprehension skills before and after the experimental treatment. The present study adopts the quasi-experimental method. The subject for the main study was divided into three groups. The first experimental group was taught using ready-made digital stories downloaded from instructional sites in the internet. The second experimental group was taught using digital stories designed by the researcher. The control group was taught using the predetermined method mentioned in the Teacher's Guide. Each group consisted of 35 students. . It was concluded that the present study provided evidence for the effectiveness of using digital stories in developing students' reading skills among second year preparatory school students.

Key words: Digital Stories, Reading Comprehension Skills

1.1 Introduction

Combining the tools of today's electronic media with great teaching methods has given educators a whole new way to give wings to a child's learning (Standley, 2003, 17). 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. 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 (Robin, 2008, 222).

Tsou et al. (2006) found that integrating digital storytelling into the language curriculum is a creative language learning technique that can improve student's level of learning in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Developing the reading skills using digital stories is the target tackled in the present study.

Jonassen and Hernandez-Serrano (2002) suggested three ways to support learning using stories. First, they can be used as exemplars of concepts or principles being taught by direct instruction. Second, they can be used as problem cases to be solved by students. Third,

stories can be used as advice for students, for helping them learn to solve problems.

Digital stories are flexible and adaptable tool which can fit most purposes and can be used in almost all the subjects we teach. Its flexibility comes from the fact that, in order to elaborate a digital story writers can use a range of tools from the simplest (e.g. digital images and Photostory) to more complicated ones (e.g. Flash to create their own animations etc.), depending on the purpose of the activity, and the level of computer literacy of the students.

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 serve as an anticipatory set or hook to 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, as a way to facilitate discussion about the topics presented in a story and as a way to make abstract or conceptual content more understandable (Robin, 2008, 222:224).

Digital stories can be classified into three major categories: personal or narrative stories, stories that inform or instruct, and stories that re-

tell historical events. This type of digital story is used primarily to convey instructional material in many different content areas. Teachers can use this type of digital story to present information to their students on subjects ranging from math and science, to art, technology, and medical education. (Robin, 2008, 224-225).

Signes (2008) reported the differences between the classical and digital form of storytelling as nonlinearity, discontinuity and autonomy.

Lambert (2002) identifies seven elements of effective digital stories. The seven elements of digital storytelling include: a point of view, a dramatic question, emotional content, economy, pacing, the gift of your voice, an accompanying soundtrack (Bull& Kajder, 2005, 47).

Darwish (2011) presented a study was to investigate the effects of using a story- based program taught through the discussion method on improving first year faculty of arts students reading comprehension skills and their attitude towards learning English as a foreign language. The study used a pre-post control group design fifty students were randomly assigned to either a control or an experimental group students of the experimental group were instructed using a suggested challenging short story-based program whereas the control group received traditional treatment a pre-post reading comprehension skills test and an attitude scale towards

learning English as a foreign language were the tools of the present study the results of the present study showed two main categories of findings compared to the students of the control group the students of the experimental group showed significant differences in their acquisition of reading comprehension skills second there was evidence of an improvement in the experimental group students positive attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language based on the results of the study recommendations and suggestions for further future research were presented.

Kimura (2012,) presented a study is to examine the effectiveness of digital storytelling (DST) in improving oral reading fluency by using the preview function of the software Photo Story 3. This application easily handles the recording and revising of a narration, which is an essential part of oral reading. DST is the art of telling stories through the use of various multimedia, such as text, still images, audio, and video. DST combines the functions of visualizing and verbalizing, which are essential for language comprehension and thinking from the perspective of cognitive neuroscience. The participants were 35 Japanese nursing students in Japan, who carried out DST utilizing nursing episodes from a textbook. Undertaking DST enabled the participants to learn to read deeply, visualize the story, and enjoy verbalizing their interpretation

of the context, which is a skill lacking in most Japanese students due to the reading/translation teaching method.

Thus, based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the possibilities offered by the multimedia tools that are used in digital stories certainly invites students to be more creative and thus may help introduce and encourage different ways of learning/teaching English.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The previous researches and the results of the preliminary test revealed the following problem of the study:

Students at the preparatory schools suffer from inefficient reading skills.

Thus, the present researcher tries to investigate the effectiveness of using digital stories in developing the reading skills of EFL preparatory school students.

The pilot study

The researcher conducted a pilot test to determine how far second year preparatory school students acquire reading comprehension skills. The pilot study sample consisted of 100 students in the second year preparatory school at Faraskour preparatory school for girls. The researcher conducted a pilot study to determine how far

second year preparatory school students acquire reading comprehension skills. The results of the pilot study indicated that the students' performance in reading comprehension skills was not satisfying and consequently they suffered from being inefficient in EFL reading comprehension.

1.3 Questions of the study

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the EFL reading skills necessary to the preparatory school students?
- How far do the preparatory school students acquire the specified EFL reading skills?
- What are the characteristics of the suggested program based on digital stories in developing preparatory school students' English reading skills?
- What is the effectiveness of digital stories in developing preparatory school students' English reading skills?

1.4 Purpose of the study

- This study aims at identifying the reading skills in English language appropriate for preparatory school students.

- This study aims at evaluating the skills of reading appropriate for preparatory school students.
- This study aims at developing some reading skills in English language suitable for preparatory school students.
- The present study is intended to determine how far digital stories can develop the reading skills among preparatory school students.

1.5 Significance of the study

The following points represent the rationale for the present study:

- There is a recent interest directed toward integrating the use of digital devices with traditional storytelling methods.
- The Egyptian National Program *Reading for All* represents a local interest in developing the Egyptian community through reading.
- Research findings indicate that people on the present age have low level in reading skills (Tawfeek, 2009; Dadour, 2004).
- This study could be contribute positively to the general context of TEFL by using enjoyable teaching techniques

and in showing teachers how to use digital stories in developing the reading skills.

1.6 Hypotheses of the study

- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the first experimental group (students who are taught using ready-made digital stories) on the reading comprehension in the pre-test and their scores in the post test, in favour of the latter.

- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the second experimental group (students who are taught using digital stories designed by the researcher) on the reading comprehension in the pre-test and their scores in the post-test, in favor of the latter.

- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the first experimental group (students who are taught using ready-made digital stories) and the mean scores of the control group (students who are taught by the traditional method of the Teacher's Guide) in the post application of the reading comprehension test, in favour of the former.

- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the second experimental group (students who are taught using digital stories designed by the researcher) and the mean scores of the control group (students who are taught by the traditional method of the Teacher's Guide) in the post administration of the reading comprehension test, in favour of the former.

- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the first experimental group and the mean scores of the second experimental group, in the post application of the reading comprehension test.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The study is limited to the following:

- A group of preparatory school students which are randomly selected.

- The study is limited to reading skills that can be appropriate for preparatory school students.

1.8 Methodology

1.8.1 Subjects of the study

The subject for the main study was divided into three groups. The first experimental group was taught using ready-made digital stories downloaded from the internet. The second experimental group was taught using digital stories designed by the researcher. The control group was taught using the predetermined method mentioned in the Teacher's Guide. Each group consisted of 35 students.

1.8.2 Design of the study:

The researcher in this study adopts the descriptive and the quasi-experimental design:

Descriptive method:

- The researcher in this study adopts the descriptive method in order to present and describe the review of literature and prior studies relevant to the study variables of the present study.

Quasi-experimental method:

- The researcher adopts the experimental method for the sake of administering the digital stories and testing the effectiveness in improving the students' reading skills (based on the instruments prepared in this respect).

1.8.3 Instruments of the study

The research instruments used are as follows:

- a questionnaire to prepare a list of EFL reading skills that can be appropriate for preparatory school students and prepared by the researcher.
- a pre-post test designed by the researcher to measure preparatory school students' reading skills and prepared by the researcher.

1.8.4 Procedures of the study

To achieve the aims of the study, the researcher followed these procedures:

1. Reviewing the educational literature and previous studies related to the digital stories and reading comprehension skills.
2. Reviewing the EFL objectives to identify the reading skills appropriate to preparatory school pupils.
3. Constructing a list of reading comprehension skills.
4. Validating the reading comprehension skills list.
5. Constructing a reading comprehension test to measure EFL preparatory school students' reading comprehension.

6. Validating the reading comprehension test by submitting it to a jury of specialists.
7. Choosing four educational digital stories from the internet according to certain criteria to develop the identified reading comprehension skills of the preparatory school students in the first experimental group.
8. Designing four educational digital stories by the researcher to develop the identified reading comprehension skills of the preparatory school students in the second experimental group.
9. Selecting at random a sample of three classes of the second year in Fareskour preparatory school for girls in Damietta and assigning them at random as the first experimental group (class 1), the second experimental group (class 2) and the control group (class 3).
10. Administering the reading comprehension test to the two experimental groups and the control group.
11. Implementing the digital stories to the two experimental groups.
12. Administering the reading comprehension test to the three groups to investigate the effectiveness of the digital stories in developing the reading comprehension skills.
13. Analyzing the results statistically.

14. Interpreting the results in the light of the research hypotheses.
15. Providing summary, recommendations, suggestions for further research and conclusions.

1.9 Definition of terms

1.9.1 Reading

There are many definitions of reading depending on the stand point from which we look at it. Baudoin et al. (1994) define reading as follows:

> Reading is a complex activity that involves both word recognition, the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language; and comprehension, the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected paragraphs (Baudoin et al., 1994, p.I).

Alderson defines reading as "…an enjoyable, intense, private activity, from which much pleasure can be derived, and in which one can become totally absorbed (2000, 28)."

Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (p.11). Snow also proposed that reading comprehension includes three elements:

"the reader who is doing the comprehending, the text that is to be comprehended, and the activity in which comprehension is embedded."

1.9.2 Digital story

There are many definitions of what a digital story is, but they all coincide in pointing out that digital stories combine traditional means of telling a story with different types of digital multimedia: images, audio, and video (graphics, text, recorded audio narration, video and music to present information on a specific topic). As stated by Robin (2006, 24) "the stories are typically just a few minutes long and have a variety of uses, including the telling of personal tales, the recounting of historical events, or as a means to inform or instruct on a particular topic".

Snow (2002) defines digital stories as "A digital story is a short (usually between 3 to 5 minutes) clip, which consists of a series of still images, combined with oral and/or written text. Additional music is sometimes used to invoke emotion or induce other effects".

1.10 Findings

1. There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the first experimental group on the reading

comprehension in the pre-test and their scores in the post test, in favor of the latter

2. There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the second experimental group on the reading comprehension in the pre-test and their scores in the post-test, in favor of the latter.
3. There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the first experimental group and the mean scores of the control group in the post application of the reading comprehension test, in favour of the former.
4. There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the second experimental group and the mean scores of the control group in the post administration of the reading comprehension test, in favour of the former.

1.11 Recommendations

In the light of the results of the present study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. It is important to use digital stories in teaching reading in different educational stages so as to enhance students' reading skills.

2. Digital stories are recommended in teaching different aspects of the English language, such as grammar, listening, speaking and writing.
3. Teachers should change their role from being the main source of knowledge to being guide, facilitator and helper.
4. EFL teachers should be trained on designing different computer software programs to serve their different learning objectives.
5. EFL teachers should design appropriate techniques for evaluating reading comprehension skills for each stage.
6. Curriculum designers should provide diverse activities at all levels of instruction for the students to improve their reading skills.
7. Course designers should provide teachers with software programs in teaching the textbooks.

1.12 Suggestions for further studies:

The researcher suggests the following topics for further research:

1. Using digital stories to teach English as a foreign language to primary and secondary stage students to develop their reading.

2. Using digital stories to develop the speaking, writing and listening skills of the preparatory stage students.
3. Using digital stories to teach students with learning disabilities.
4. Using digital stories to support assessment for learning.

1.13 Conclusion

The findings in this study indicate the effectiveness of the proposed program on developing reading comprehension skills of the experimental group, compared to the control group who was taught in the traditional method of teaching.

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