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DIGITAL STORYTELLING: AN ACTIVE LEARNING TOOL FOR IMPROVING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract

Storytelling method is an inevitable part of English Language classes. Stories are always an inspiring pedagogical tool to develop different language skills and to inculcate values and culture. In the present technological world, students lack the initiative to read stories and improve their reading skills. They lack interest in reading which has resulted poor reading and writing skills. Thus, a case study was done by integrating a technical tool to motivate students to read and improve their language skills and creativity. The study also aims to give a better understanding of the usage of multimodal approach like Digital storytelling in language learning classrooms. Microsoft photo story 3 was chosen to develop the stories into digital and 24 students of English Foundation level 2 were selected for the study. An evaluation rubric was developed to assess student's digital story together with a survey to get students' perception about the digital storytelling device in English classrooms. The study found the effectiveness of Digital story as a tool in enhancing their involvement in learning process and improving their reading, writing and creative skills. The findings of the study on Digital Story prove that it is a highly recommended tool for English Language students. Students enjoyed it as it demands technical and artistic involvement of the students. Students who participated in the study were engaged and improved

their reading and writing skills by the end of the project. Throughout the process of story building, they developed how to organize, cooperate and collaborate to reach their goal. The tool can be implemented for blending learning purposes where the teachers or the students make their own contents and share to others.

Keywords

Storytelling, Digital Stories, Learning Tool, English Language Students

1. Introduction

From ages story telling method has been a good pedagogical tool to inculcate values, love and respect towards others' culture. It is also an instructional strategy to develop language skills among students (Wang & Zhan, 2010). It encourages students use of imagination and creativity and enhances their reading, writing and verbal proficiency. In the present technological world, language teachers face big challenges to motivate their students' reading skills due to their obsession towards technology. Students are digital natives due to their over immersion into the digital world. Thus, teachers thrive to accommodate latest technical tools to replace their conventional pedagogical tools for improving their students' language skills (Morgan, 2012).

This paper aims to describe a project of "Digital Story Telling" done by foundation students at Arab Open University. Educators involved in Digital storytelling projects with students agree to the fact that students gain the skills of transforming information to knowledge through technical and research skills (Robin, 2008). Digital storytelling is one of the 21st century emerging tools, that enables students to approach their content critically and present the matter technically (Shelby-Caffey, Úbéda, & Jenkins, 2014). Digital story telling involves combining narrative with digital content to create a short movie. It is a powerful multimedia technology which provides rich opportunity for collaboration, personal reflection and technical accuracy in converting traditional stories to digital. It is a creative way to get students involve actively in language skills through the process of reading, plotting, writing, revising and narrating through their stories(BBC Capture Wales, 2008). Language learning itself being an art can be improved through digital storytelling device which demands creativity and language skills.

2. Review of Literature

This study considers the efficiency of digital storytelling project in English classrooms while many studies have shown positive results and benefits in various educational contexts.

The digital story is one genre that has been promoted in language and literacy instruction. According to the instructor, students improve their computer skills and language proficiency (Yit, Siew, & Hazita, 2015). Digital Storytelling was implemented as a project-based task for 12 weeks, which benefitted not only improving students' skills but also cultivating personal skills like cooperation, collaboration, leadership and self-management (Brenner, 2013). (Sepp & Bandi-Rao, 2015) reported in their study that Digital storytelling is a viable tool for English Language students. It is technically accessible, and students enjoy it. Students who participated in the study were engaged and gained confidence in their communicative skills by the end of the project. While active involvement of students to work together for a project can be achieved by integrating technology into curriculum (Sadik, 2008). This is confirmed in the study of (Smeda, Dakich, & Sharda, 2014) where they proved that digital storytelling is a powerful tool to integrate instructional messages with learning activities to create more engaging and exciting learning environments. It is an approach for creating a constructivist learning environment. Whereas (Wang & Zhan, 2010) claim in their study that digital storytelling can be used by the students to share their learning experiences, report their findings, reflect on their findings in an innovative way. (Moore, 2009) strongly believes that the digital storytelling is a perfect mechanism for all skill areas of language production as it is an engaging, motivating and creative tool for learners. As an activity, digital storytelling provides engaging and intellectually rich learning environments through creativity, diverse forms of literacy, and multiple modalities. Digital storytelling projects respond to kinesthetic, auditory, and visual learning styles (BBC Capture Wales, 2008). (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2011) report that Digital Story projects also help struggling writers compose more strategically and develop an awareness of audience, purpose, and form. Use of technology at the forefront of Digital Story projects makes participation more attractive and allows students to "reposition themselves from struggling writers to competent writers" (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2011, p. 291). Digital stories have been successful in improving students' linguistic routine such as greetings and leave taking through a series of workshops in English as a Foreign Language context (Reyes Torres, Pich Ponce, & García Pastor, 2012). Students in technical-scientific contexts of English for Specific Purpose also had a positive experience in improving their

linguistic, personal and research skills (Sevilla-Pavón, Serra-Cámara, & Gimeno-sanz, 2012). (Korina M. Jocson, 2016) echoes the importance of Digital storytelling as an opportunity for identity construction of her students through their art of digital stories. The stories reflected the explicit understandings of the productions and learning process which would haven't happened through conventional methods of teaching and learning process. (Yuksel, Robin, & McNeil, 2010) conducted a survey in 26 countries to get a general framework about educational usage of Digital storytelling in these countries. The results demonstrate that digital storytelling supports students' understanding of subject area of knowledge, overall academic performance, technical, presentation, research and artistic skills.

Digital stories can also be a good instructional tool where teachers can make different contents and relevant topics for students to access from different places. Students would be accustomed to get information from digital stories in ways they are used to get from other sources(Dreon, Kerper, & Landis, 2011). Implementation of Digital stories as a distance education tool proved to be significant in physics instruction which were accessible to the students without any restriction of space and time (Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2016). Using digital stories for flipped classrooms succeeded in demonstrating reform-based teaching for MBA students(Bechter & Swierczek, 2017). The students considered the approach exciting, dynamic and insightful which gave them a better understanding of the theories, techniques and theories. Digital storytelling is also a powerful learning tool for students as they can make their own digital stories related to their content which enhances their comprehension of the content(Hur & Suh, 2012). Digital storytelling has the potential to engage students globally and enable them to learn and share about different topics which would transform the local education pattern to Global Citizen Education ship(Truong-White & McLean, 2015).

3. Background Of The Study

AOU provides importance for blended learning and has taken various measures to integrate technology in teaching and learning process. Research papers at AOU have proven the efficiency of technology in motivating students to involve actively in learning process and construct their knowledge through critical and reflective thinking. However, a few studies have made in integrating technology to foster student's language skills especially reading and writing.

4. Research Questions

The investigation aims to answer the following questions:

1. Is digital storytelling, an efficient tool to foster student's language skills?
2. How effective is Digital storytelling approach in engaging students in their learning process?

5. Objectives of the Study

The main intention of the study is to integrate technology to develop student's language skills and creativity. In addition, the study also aims to give a better understanding of the usage of multimodal approach like digital storytelling in language learning classrooms.

6. Significance of the Study

This study may help other teachers by providing them a new perception about the integration of technology in fostering language skills among students and promote using technology for engaging them in their learning process.

7. Methodology

7.1 Tools

7.1.1 An evaluation rubric was developed to assess student's digital story. It was a guideline to measure the determined criteria of the work done by the students and to provide feedback based on the attributes in the evaluation rubric. They were on a scale of 1-5 in five domains:

- a) Story Board
- b) Narration
- c) Images
- d) Grammar usage
- e) Technical competency.

7.1.2 A survey was conducted to evaluate the efficiency of the digital storytelling device in English classrooms. It was conducted at the end of the project to assess the efficiency and practicality of digital storytelling device from students' perspective. Practicality of digital storytelling device from students' perspective.

7.2 Participants

24 students of English Foundation level 2 were selected for the study. The students were divided into 4 groups consisting of 6 members.

7.3 Software

Microsoft photo story 3 was chosen to develop the stories into digital. The free version of photo story 3 is easy to use and has recording feature with slide effects and background music option. This program brings new life to traditional picture slideshows by allowing users to customize motion, include voice narration and add music. The final product can be saved as a video. The students can scan their writings into the computer and import into Microsoft Photo Story. The students then develop and record the narration to accompany the story. The final project includes the Microsoft Photo Story as well as a transcript of the narration.

8. Implementation

The study was undertaken as a project for the students to be done as a part of their portfolio task. The project was to select a story and convert the story into digital one. The selection of stories for digital story was to make students read stories voluntary for a specific purpose rather than creating stories by themselves. Digital storytelling was implemented as an intervention strategy to motivate students to read (Morgan, 2012).

5 weeks were allotted for completing their project. Students were taken to the resource center and the task was done under the supervision of the tutor.

1st week

Each group was asked to select a story and read the story to write the summary of it.

2nd week

Students were asked to write the summary of the story as a first draft. The evaluation of the summary was done, and students were asked to prepare the story board.

3rd week

Students were encouraged to develop the story board with text and pictures and arranging them into sequences according to the flow of the story. Groups were advised to cooperate in all aspects of the design process and each member was designed to do different tasks (like script writing, making pictures, internet sourcing, background music, oral narration, technical assistance, etc.). Collaboration among groups was emphasized to share knowledge and improve the quality of the design.

4th week

Microsoft Photo story software was downloaded on 4 computers at the resource center and students were encouraged to develop their story into digital one. A headphone was used for narration and the students were completely engaged in sequencing the story with colorful pictures and background music.

5th week

All groups were scheduled to submit their project and to get the feedback of their project. When the stories were completed, it was attached to the computer to a LCD projector, so groups could present their project, reflect and get feedback from the tutor and their peer groups.

9. Analysis

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of digital storytelling in improving students' language skills and to explore the usefulness of a multimodal approach in engaging students in their learning process.

A scoring rubric was developed to assess students' digital stories. Scoring rubric is one of the instruments that are found to be appropriate in evaluating ICT based learning projects for both individual and group presentations (Sadik, 2008). Students submitted their digital stories in different stories as a group work. The link to each digital story is given under the analysis of the story. As per the instruction, the students submitted the story board prior to their digital story. The story boards gave a clear picture of their digital stories and lead them to get the skill of paraphrasing and summarizing a story with suitable plot and pictures.

The first group developed the fairy tale of Cinderella. The story was summarized with proper plot and characters. The narration was short with suitable pictures but tried to include the whole plot in a capsule form. The pictures were downloaded from the internet and the pictures perfectly suited the narration of the text. The narration of the story was in simple past and no errors in terms of grammar. The video slides were colorful with background music.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zZT1reGwV-MEJf5bjmTjPz2S7DFYIr8f/view?usp=sharing>

The second group developed another fairy tale called "Snow White and Seven dwarfs". The story was summarized well but some parts of the story lacked coherence in terms of plot and characters. The narration was done with beautiful drawn pictures. It was in simple past and was perfect in terms of grammar. No additional sound effects to the slides.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UHMggpFQX6NdySmi5np-OHDSZ2anaj_D/view?usp=sharing

The third group developed an adventurous story of sea pirates namely” Black Beard”. The summary was well summarized, and the narration was long with colorful pictures. The photos are taken from the original story book. The narration was in simple past but had some direct speeches to show the dialogues between the characters. The structure was perfect despite some mistakes identified in direct speeches of the dialogue. The narration was not audible due to the high volume of the background music.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M3oJZbMkz14g3KgGYRjgGLLLkgfYCNE/view?usp=sharing>

The fourth group developed a story which included half story of the original one namely “the secret garden”. The story was well summarized with a moral lesson. The narration was short with beautiful drawn pictures. It was narrated in simple past without grammar mistakes. The video was simple with few slides.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1o4nwqb_Pq20fO4mWRsEFaTPvgv8-Mka-/view?usp=sharing

9.1 Students’ digital stories were assessed using an evaluation rubric on a scale of 1-5 in five domains. The digital stories were small which lasted for 3-5 minutes but students tried to capture the message of the stories properly. Each story was graded according to the criteria mentioned below in the rubric.

Table 1: Evaluation Rubric for Digital Stories

GROU P	STORY BOARD CONTENT PLOT STORY- SEQUENCE	IMAGES STILL-PHOTOGRA PHS APPROPRIATENES S ORGANIZATION	NARRATION PRONUNCIATI ON FLOW OF NARRATION SOUND CLARITY	GRAMMA R ACCURA CY	TECHNICAL ACCURACY TECHNICAL- SKILLS COORDINATI ON OF IMAGES AND STILLS	TOTA L
	5	5	5	5	5	25
1	CINDEREL LA 3	4	3	3	4	17
2	SNOW WHITE 4	4	5	4	5	22

3	BLACK BEARD 4	4	2	3	3	16
4	THE SECRET GARDEN 4	4	4	4	3	21

Note: the data for the rubric is partially taken from Brenner, K. (2013). Digital Stories: A 21st-Century Communication Tool for the English Language Classroom. English Teaching Forum, 52(1), 22–29. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?q=storytelling&id=EJ1029170>

9.2 In terms of evaluating the efficiency of digital Story telling in English classrooms, a post-task survey was conducted at the end of the project to analyze the effectiveness of Digital storytelling from students’ perspective. Students had a positive experience in using digital storytelling in their learning process. All of them like to have Digital storytelling technology in their future projects. The analysis of the survey is given in the figures below.

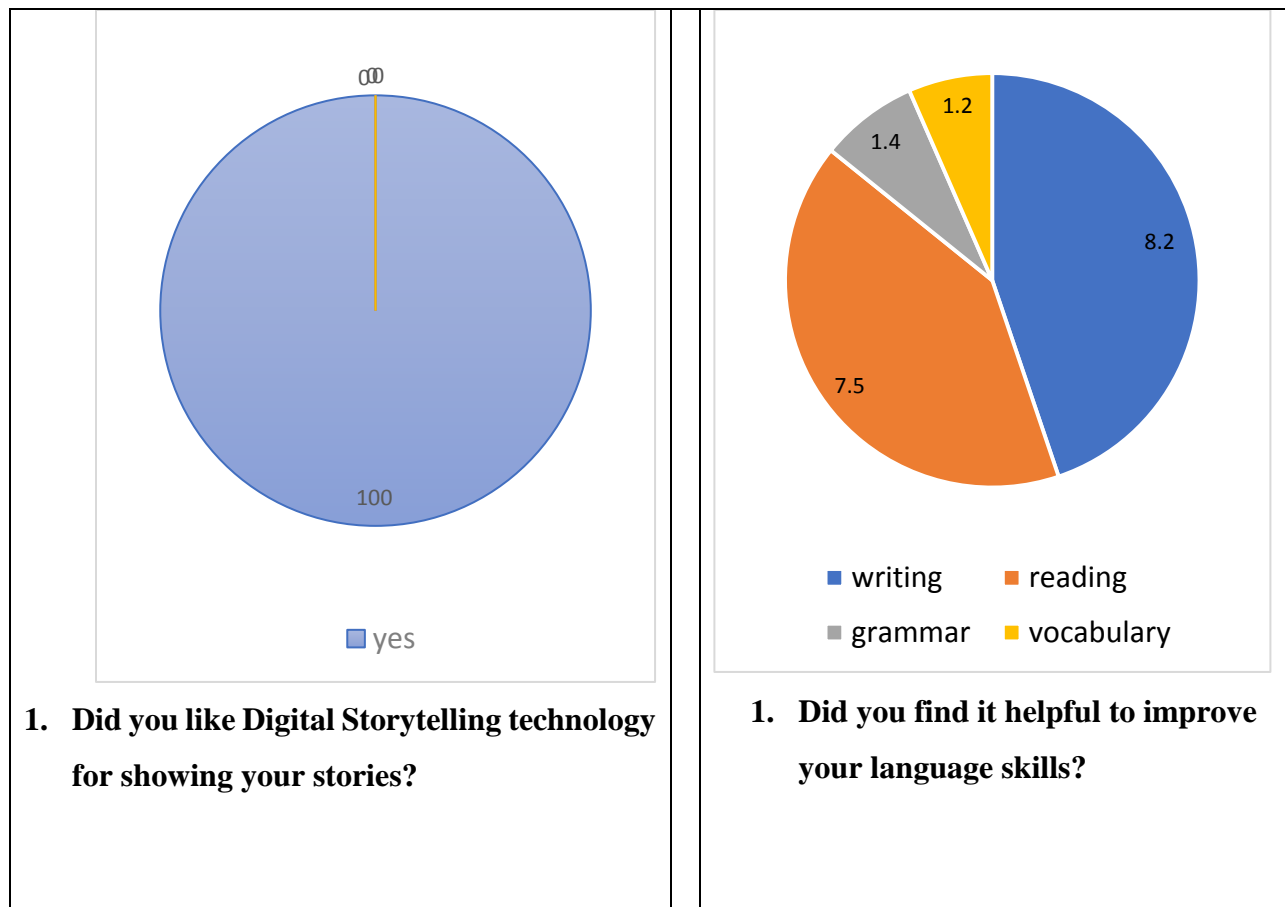


Figure 1: Results of Survey Q1

Figure 2: Results of Survey Q2

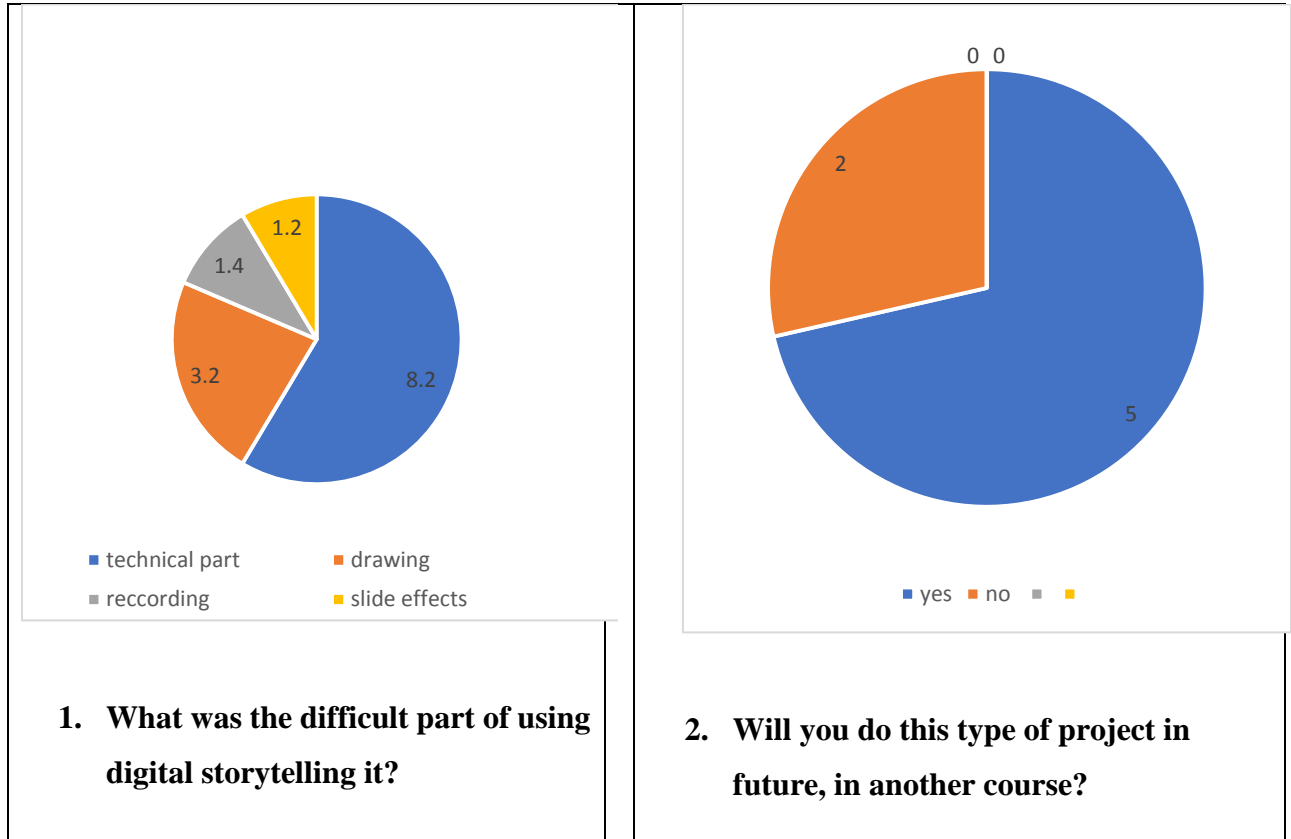


Figure 3: Results of Survey Q3

Figure 4: Results of Survey Q4

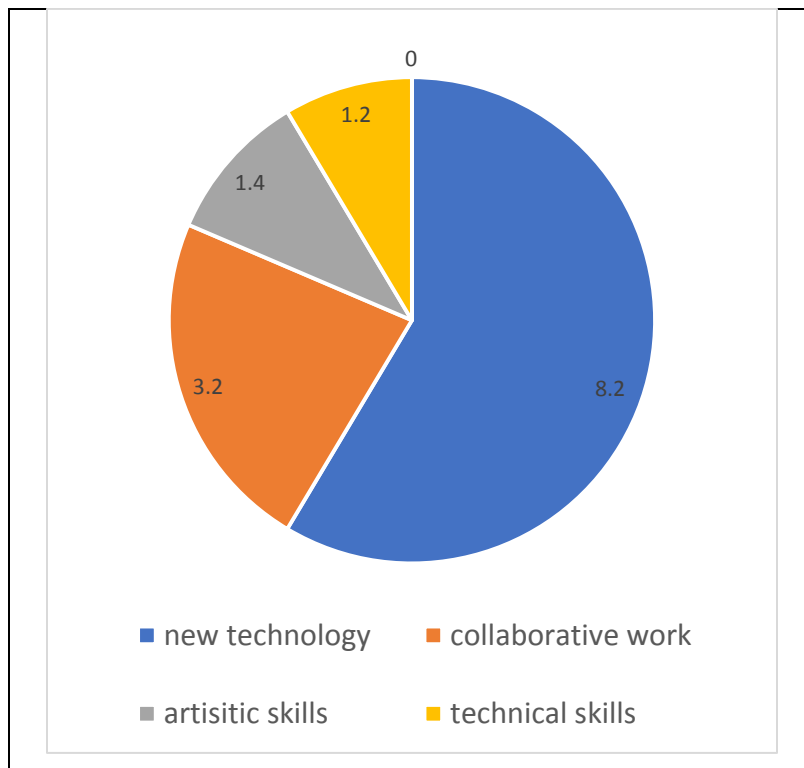


Figure 5: Results of Survey Q5

10. Discussion

10.1 Efficiency of Digital Storytelling as A Tool to Foster English Language Skills.

The aim of this study is to assess student's performance in digital storytelling and to evaluate their progress in language skills. A marking rubric was constructed for marking their digital stories which helped to identify the extent of their progress. Findings of this study reflect that students have improved their language skills specifically reading and writing. They have read the stories several times to get the story for summarizing it and later to write the script for the story board. Their reading has improved their vocabulary, sentence structure and spelling mistakes though a few were found. They also improved in using simple past tense in practice by writing the story board in tense. The students got the skill of paraphrasing stories into short texts and gained confidence in oral reading with proper pronunciation after practicing a lot for narrating their story.

10.2 Efficiency of Digital Storytelling in Engaging Students in Their Learning Process.

The further aim is to examine whether Digital Storytelling can engage students in their learning process. A survey was conducted to get student's perception about the tool used in their classrooms. Tutor's observations were considered to get their perception about the study. The results from the survey indicate that the students enjoyed the project and they could learn a lot from it. It provided them a new learning experience unlike the conventional style of reading and writing the story. Collaborative learning was enhanced through this project as each student was depended for various purposes which made them engaged in producing a work of art of their own. Group discussion, co-operation, peer correction, self-learning was all entertained during the process. The response of the survey reflects that the students developed their reading and writing skills and improved their grammar usage and word spellings. They faced technical challenges while recording and formatting the story, but it provided them a space to develop their technical skills. Students also proved their talents through their creativity, artistic skills and music selection. Each group had their own way of story board which was different from each other. The students were excited to see their piece of art displayed to the whole class which boosted their confidence and provided motivation to do more projects in future by using Digital Storytelling technology.

11. Conclusion

The emerging technologies above provide nontraditional means by which literacy and language skills can be developed through authentic communication, collaboration, networking and

scaffolding. The findings of the study on Digital Storytelling prove that is a highly recommended tool for English Language students. Students enjoy it as it demands technical and artistic involvement of the students. Students who participated in the study were engaged and gained confidence in their communicative skills by the end of the project. Throughout the process of story building, they developed how to organize, cooperate and work together to reach their goal. As the project was added to the portfolio tasks, the students did their project seriously. Students faced some technical challenges related to the use of digital software. But students overcame the difficulties gradually and succeeded in uploading their pictures, recording their narration for each slide and adding additional effects to customize it. This shows that the technical learning process should be added to the curriculum to expose students to unravel different ways to integrate language skills with technology. Students should have a goal to achieve which would inspire them to exploit their talents and gain proficiency in their language skills. The implementation of Digital storytelling applies all learning theories where students construct their knowledge through practice and experience by cooperating with their peer members to produce a social relevant piece of work. Due to time constraints, the study was done from a specific level with less number of students. Thus, the result cannot be generalized for the entire language students at AOU. The survey questions were also less as the students were new to such technical studies, they were reluctant to provide the actual challenges they faced during the process.

Future Recommendations: Digital stories can be widely used in Arab Open University for blending learning purposes. Teachers can make contents and share the videos to their students to watch, share and comment about it. This type of making and sharing videos can be done for students who live at distant places and are unable to attend the classes regularly. The digital stories can also be used for flipped classroom purposes where teachers can deliver the contents as digital stories and use normal classroom hours for practice and interactive communication. Students can also create digital stories based on their topics and share the videos to other students which would encourage collaborative learning atmosphere for students staying at distant places. Teachers also should be proper trained to integrate digital storytelling technique to their teaching sessions as it is becoming more common in classrooms across the world (Brace, Finkelstein, & Sealy, 2015).

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