

Pedagogic Effectiveness of Digital Storytelling in Improving Speaking Skills of Saudi EFL learners

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find why adult learners are unable to speak English as Foreign language (EFL) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it tests the pedagogy of adopting the strategy of Digital Story Telling (DST) in teaching English as a foreign language. The study is applied on Northern Boarder University as a case study. The first question raised in this study is whether the conventional methods of teaching are the reason behind their failure of speaking the English language and whether the modification in the pedagogy of teaching affects the learners' speaking skill. To this end, data are collected through a questionnaire. Furthermore, a model of a teaching program, based on using DST strategy, is improved and tested with a group of learners at the chosen university in Saudi Arabia. The findings reveal that the learners at the selected university find difficulty in speaking English, and that applying DST as a pedagogy help the students to develop their overall speaking skill. These findings assist EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia in creating a conducive atmosphere in and out their classes, which will motivate the learners a lot to speak English fluently. The conclusion of the research recommends that EFL teachers should modify their conventional methods of teaching English as a foreign language; they may apply the strategy of using DST on their students to test the competence of the hypothesis.

Keywords: digital storytelling, English as a foreign language, fluency and performance, grammar, language teaching strategies, pronunciation, stress and intonation, vocabulary choice

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Introduction

According to Northwest Regional Education, the word “voice” refers to:

The writer coming through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to us and cares about the message. It is the heart and soul of the writing, the magic, the wit, the feelings, the life and breath. When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, he or she imparts a personal tone and flavor to the piece that is unmistakably his/her alone. (2012, para.3)

Fisher (2007) adds that speaking refers to the distinctive human use of oral language in exchanging and sharing his/her opinion, information and feeling. Such process of speaking aspires to attain a mutual communication between both the listener and the speaker. Speaking is, in fact, a bilateral process that includes generating, processing and getting information. Speaking is reported by Second-Language (SL) students as the hardest skill to be proficient in. To be fluent in speaking as a foreign language, students should have full knowledge in vocabularies, grammar and pronunciation. Thus, speaking is the skill of putting the correct words in the right order with the proper pronunciation and function (transaction and interaction). It is also the skill of knowing when the accuracy of the message is essential (transaction/information exchange) and when précised understanding is unnecessary (interaction/relation building).

Moreover, speaking addresses the social and cultural convention and standard. This study tries to prove that the implementation of the pedagogy of digital storytelling will be helpful in improving the students’ speaking ability for two reasons. The first reason, as indicated by Indrewan (2013), is that a proper speech requires many elements, such as the language of speaking, vocabulary profanity, the tone of voice, syntax, and self-development recommendation. The second reason, on the other hand, is the critical requisite to examine the impact of using DST on improving speaking skill. DST refers to the amalgamation of interactive media (such as video, images, and audio) and storytelling to enhance the written and spoken phrases and to digitally introduce stories to others (Meadows, 2003). Our emphasis is on proving that using DST as a pedagogy improves speaking competence, critical thinking, performance and fluency.

Research Background: Literature Review

Speaking is the essence of communication. It is considered an interactive skill of forming meaning which includes generating, getting, and processing information. Unfortunately, the conventional method of teaching in Saudi Arabia is not a fruitful one. Students’ role is only restricted to receive information. Consequently, students are not able to either speak or communicate in English properly. Storytelling as a pedagogy can be used to develop the skill of speaking. Ahmed (2014) assures that DST is the story that is told to either one or more listener via speech and body language in the verbal telling. It serves as an active and coherent medium to convey the meaning. Zaro and Saberri (1998) add that the activity of storytelling needs definite levels of communication between listener and speaker or between storyteller and audience.

Alcantud-Dyaz, Ricart-Vayl, and Gregori-Signes (2014) conduct a research about the probability of integrating digital storytelling into educational system for teaching particular concepts and syllabus. It develops the students` level in various skills of learning including

teamwork, critical thinking, self- management, comprehension, reflection and fluency. In the same year, another study has been carried out by Weigle (2014) who observes the deteriorated level of the students due to the very limited chances to practice English. Their stress, excitement and lack of confidence during speaking in class time have indicated the existence of problems in teaching and learning English as a second language. Ratanapinyowong, Pooapon, and Honsa (2007) recommend the need for English curriculum to primarily focus on the listening and speaking skills. This can be preceded by integrating activities in the classroom. Another good solution is suggested by Burmark (2004). He finds that the integration of visual images with written text accelerates and increases students' ability of understanding. Another study by McHugh (2013) attributes the low level of students to the gap that exists between the expectations of the students and the methods of language acquisition. He assures that language learning can only occur through communicative and implicit approaches. He recommends other methods such as TPR(Total Physical Response) storytelling. Another solution is suggested in Bladick's (2008) research that recommends short story as a key element in motivating writing either as a model or as a subject matter. Arikani (2005) points out that short stories with its setting, characters and compiling plot catch the attention of the learners.

According to the Digital Storytelling Association (2002), digital storytelling adds contemporary idioms to the earliest forms of storytelling. It is referred to as latest variation to storytelling. It maintains peoples' perception, principles, and knowledge by narrating stories, whereas new technologies are currently facilitating presenting and watching stories on both T.V and computer screens (Digital Storytelling Association, 2010). Furthermore, digital storytelling gives each person the chance to share his/her experiences with others and produce a social group of people by narrating their personal stories (Meadows, 2003).

The Objectives of the Current Research

Speaking is the second skill of language, after listening, that requires a great deal of practice including the way of pronouncing the sound; it is considered a direct tool to the listener whether he gets the pronunciation or not (Tarigan, 1986). Based on this opinion, this research aims to use storytelling as a means to integrate almost two communicative skills in each activity. It is regarded a focused method to learners as it takes into account their experience, age, level, requirements and motives (Doglas, 2004). Storytelling makes some remarkable pauses which occur in definite times followed by body gestures and voice shifts to let a character practices vocalization, gestures manners and pronunciation (Alkaaf, 2017).

DST can be simply defined as “the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination” (Barrett, 2005, p .1). This study proposes that DST can help in solving learners' problems by:

- a) Improving students' language practices through making language more ideal to message-based communication and focusing on meaning, interaction and self-confidence.
- b) Motivating students to be more confident.
- c) Providing proper feedback and pronunciation.
- d) Exploiting the natural tie between listening and speaking.
- e) Giving students the opportunities to initiate oral communication.

- f) Helping students to be aware of themselves and their world.
- g) Providing natural connection between events and concepts.
- h) Telling stories through images.

The researcher finds that the problems of the learners at the selected university are technical ones that are primarily concerned with techniques and teaching strategies. These techniques are the chief reason behind the failure of speaking EFL due to less practice and motivation. The major aim of this study is to find out the potential relationship between learners' inability of choosing vocabularies and grammar and even speaking in English on the one hand, and the strategy of teaching on the other hand. If this relationship is found, a relevant question will be raised as follows: Are there any possible strategies and pedagogies, related to the field of English language teaching style, which can assist EFL teachers to adopt new strategies and methods in improving students' speaking ability?

Hypotheses

The observed failure of speaking English at the selected university in Saudi Arabia, as well as the variance between the input and desired result, lets the researcher hypothesize that:

H1: Many adult EFL learners are unable to adopt English as a spoken language; they instead use their mother- tongue language.

H2: The most important reason behind the inability of speaking is the failure in producing EFL because of the limitation in using, pronunciation, stress and intonation, vocabularies, grammar and fluency.

H3: There is an explicit correlation between speaking EFL and the methods and approaches of teaching English.

H4: Employing DST pedagogy and strategy helps in bridging the gap (between the student and the teacher) and developing speaking skills.

Research questions

To examine the validity of each hypothesis, the present study has been designed to answer the following questions:

R1 : Do some adults of EFL learners in English majors in Saudi Arabia suffer from speaking skills problem due to the lack of vocabulary and unawareness of grammar and proper pronunciation.

R2 : Are there any relationship between the learners' deficiencies and the methods of teaching.

R3 : Is there a direct relationship between strategies of teaching and adult learners' speaking competences.

R4: Can the use of DST pedagogy help learners develop their ability to speak English.

Methodology

The present research investigates all of the above-mentioned issues, i.e., digital storytelling tools and steps and the effect of applying DST as pedagogy. Quantitative and qualitative data have been collected through (i) pre and post-tests (ii) a questionnaire. Quantitative data are generated by the examination and interpretation of the statistical data. Integration of methods appears at certain levels of data examination and interpretation. A questionnaire is designed to collect data from learners regarding their feeling of self-confidence and the improvement of their speaking skills. This questionnaire is administered after applying DST as pedagogy and how it motivates them to speak more fluently. These data are analyzed to find out to what extent the learners' speaking of English is improved on the basis of the obtained results. The tentative usage of DST as pedagogy is performed, applying the measures and strategies to help the learners improve their deficiencies in speaking EFL.

Research Setting and the Participants

The study is conducted on participants from English-major students at a selected university in Saudi Arabia. The participants are only girls. Their ages range from 18 to 22 years old. They have undergone four years of training in English. English is taught as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. It is not expected to use spoken English anywhere except in their department with the non-Arabic teachers.

Implementation Procedure

The experiment is carried out during six months. A meeting is held to the concerned students twice a week; each session lasts for 90 minutes. At the beginning of the study, the students' entry-level English and computer literacy are evaluated. Then, the processes of making DST are explained by the teacher. Furthermore, the students are trained to use computer programs related to DST. The instructor herself gives a sample, applying the stages and processes of making DST to her learners.

Stages of Digital Storytelling strategy:

DS has four stages: preproduction, production, postproduction and distribution (Yang & Wu, 2012) Pre-production comprises five stages as follows: a) Begging questions in certain situations, b) Examining relevant information, c) Writing the dialogue and evolving peer review, d) Performing spoken storytelling, and e) Drawing a story diagram and storyboard. (Park & Baek, 2011) elucidates the stages of DS as it encompasses both Storybird and Storyboarding as follows:

1. Storybird: It is a very attractive mutual story writing website which includes creating, reading, and sharing. Moreover, it is a collaborative DS instrument which lets students concentrate more on the content of their script instead of drawing pictures.
2. Storybird: It lets the user design pictures, manuscript, action, music and interviews prior to making his/her digital story. Furthermore, it gives the user the opportunity to think about how the narrative will be composed

Process of Digital Storytelling

Frazel (2010) divides the development of DS into three phases: preparation, production, and presentation.

1. Preparation Phase: Throughout this phase, it is possible for the learners to establish a concept map, make storyboards, and form a script for printed manuscript or narration. The instructor has to make a formative assessment rubric to aid in directing the learners all throughout action. The instructor and learners identify their audience and decide their preference of the final product (podcast or video) and the way in which it will be accessible (i.e., in class or uploaded to the website). They arrange the materials and feature the DS project/task. The instructor will choose at this moment whether to have learners work as persons in small groups, or as an entire group of students. Moreover, the instructor has to make a formative assessment. As part of the preparation of the task, instructors may prefer to make a preliminary DS regarding the theme and let the learners come up with ways to find connotation, viewpoint, or touching links of their own.
2. Production phase: As soon as the entire resources and storyboard are prepared and directed by a partial script and formative assessment rubric, the learners will start producing the work. The learners choose audio and visual aspects of the DS. If they make a video product, they may use a power point presentation. Directed by script and storyboard, the learner gets ready for the narration. The instructor's role is to guide, depending on grade level. He also helps in managing the activities such as ordering and timing the slides. It is also possible to use sound effects and music.
3. Presentation Stage: DS ought to be either archived onto a CD or saved onto a file-sharing site. It is either played for the students in the class or uploaded to the website. There are numerous kinds of applications that are designed for digital stories and digital story-making. There is traditional DS; there are also Weblogs, e-Portfolios and photo essays. Thus, DS usually launches with a script. The storyteller puts prosperous media together to support the themes and feeling in that script, such as personal or public domain images, music or other audio effects, animations or video, and further electronic features. The storyteller makes, organizes and edits DS, producing a short film whose duration typically ranges between two and four minutes, in one of the different file formats (Lambert, 2002, 2009; Meadows & Kidd, 2009).

After the instructor finishes her explanation, she asked the learners to select a topic on which they can apply DST. She divides them into groups; each group select an exciting theme according to their point of views. They begin immediately to form questions, brainstorm and watch movies, slide shows, and YouTube. Subsequently, they begin to write the first script and arrange their clipboard. They make up their stories and revise them. The instructor discusses what they finish and give them the necessary feedback. They know what to change regarding word choice, spelling, capitalization, punctuations and the structure of the sentence. After revising their mistakes, the learners put the second script in order; at the same time, they work on the storyboard in which the graphic presentation of the script with particular characters is selected. They begin to select the effectual music and tones. They record their voices in accordance with their selected characters in the narrative. After the instructor gives them the second feedback, they correct their mistakes in pronunciation and performance. They choose the appropriate program through which they can publish their digital storybooks. In the end, the instructor and all the groups listen to the stories and tell the writer their feedback.

Findings of the Present Research

The quantitative findings of the current study are presented, according to the hypotheses of the study using the statistical package sciences (SPSS), as follows:

Finding of the hypothesis (1)

The first hypothesis states that there is a statistically considerable distinction between the mean scores of pre and post assessment of the study sample in the general EFL speaking skill in favor of post assessment. Table 1 presents the students mean scores, standard deviations, t- value and level of significance of the pre and post assessments of the study sample. As shown in table 1, there is a statistically considerable dissimilarity between the mean score of the pre and post assessment of the study sample in overall EFL speaking skills in favor of post assessment in which "t" value is (27.595) which is the significant at the (0.01) level of significance. Thus, the first hypothesis is supported.

Table 1. "T" test between the pre and post assessment of the study sample in the overall EFL speaking skills

Skills	Measurement	N	Mean	S. D	"T" value	Df	Sig.
Overall EFL speaking Skills	pre	40	26.05	2.708	27.595	39	0.01
	post	40	49.00	4.000			

Finding of the hypothesis (2)

Table 2. "T" test between the pre and post assessment of the study sample in the EFL speaking production Sub-skills

Speaking production sub-Skills	Measurement	N	Mean	S. D	"T" value	Df	Sig.
Vocabulary Choice	pre	40	.475	0.597	14.967	39	0.01
	post	40	7.050	1.085			
Correct grammar	pre	40	3.750	0.669	13.572	39	0.01
	post	40	6.900	0.871			
pronunciation	pre	40	3.925	0.829	16.765	39	0.01
	post	40	7.175	1.299			
Fluency and performance	pre	40	3.625	0.774	22.182	39	0.01

	post	40	6.900	1.236			
stress and intonation	pre	40	4.125	0.883	18.575	39	0.01
	post	40	7.125	0.992			

The second hypothesis states that there is a statistically major distinction between the mean scores of pre and post assessments of the study sample in EFL speaking production process in line with the followings:

- There is a statistically major distinction between the mean scores of pre and post assessments of the study sample in vocabulary choice in favor of post assessment.
- There is a statistically major distinction between the mean scores of pre and post assessments of the study sample in correct grammar in favor of post assessment.
- There is a statistically distinction between the mean scores of pre and post assessments of the study sample in correct pronunciation in favor of post assessment.
- There is a statistically major distinction between the mean scores of pre and post assessments of the study sample in fluency and performance in favor of post assessment.
- There is a statistically major distinction between the mean scores of pre and post assessments of the study sample in stress and intonation in favor of post assessment.

As shown in table 2, there is a statistically major distinction between the mean score of the pre and post assessments of the study sample in EFL production speaking process in favor of post assessment in which "t" value is (14.967) for vocabulary choice, (13.572) for using correct grammar, (16.765) for pronunciation, (22.182) for fluency and performance, (18.575) for using stress and intonation which is significant at (0.01) level of significance. Thus, the second hypothesis is supported.

Findings of the hypothesis (3) and (4)

The third hypothesis states that there is a direct connection between the failure of speaking EFL and the strategies of teaching, whereas the fourth hypothesis affirms that using DST pedagogy helps in improving the speaking skill of the students. A questionnaire is designed so as to prove the validity of these two hypotheses according to the learners' comments that are analyzed to support the research findings. This questionnaire is administered to learners (N = 40), after the strategy is implemented to examine the learners' opinions of applying DST as a pedagogy. The participants are asked to rate 19 items on a four-point likert scale (i.e. 4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = neutral 1 = disagree). The items are divided into two sections:

- (1) The learners' estimation about DST and how it is considered different from the traditional methods of teaching.
- (2) How the phases and processes of DST enable the learners to improve their general speaking skills.

All the analyzed responses are used for reporting the learners' perceptions so as to support the third and fourth hypothesis. Generally, on account of using DST strategy, the majority of learners felt excited when narrating their stories. Thus, the third and fourth hypotheses are supported.

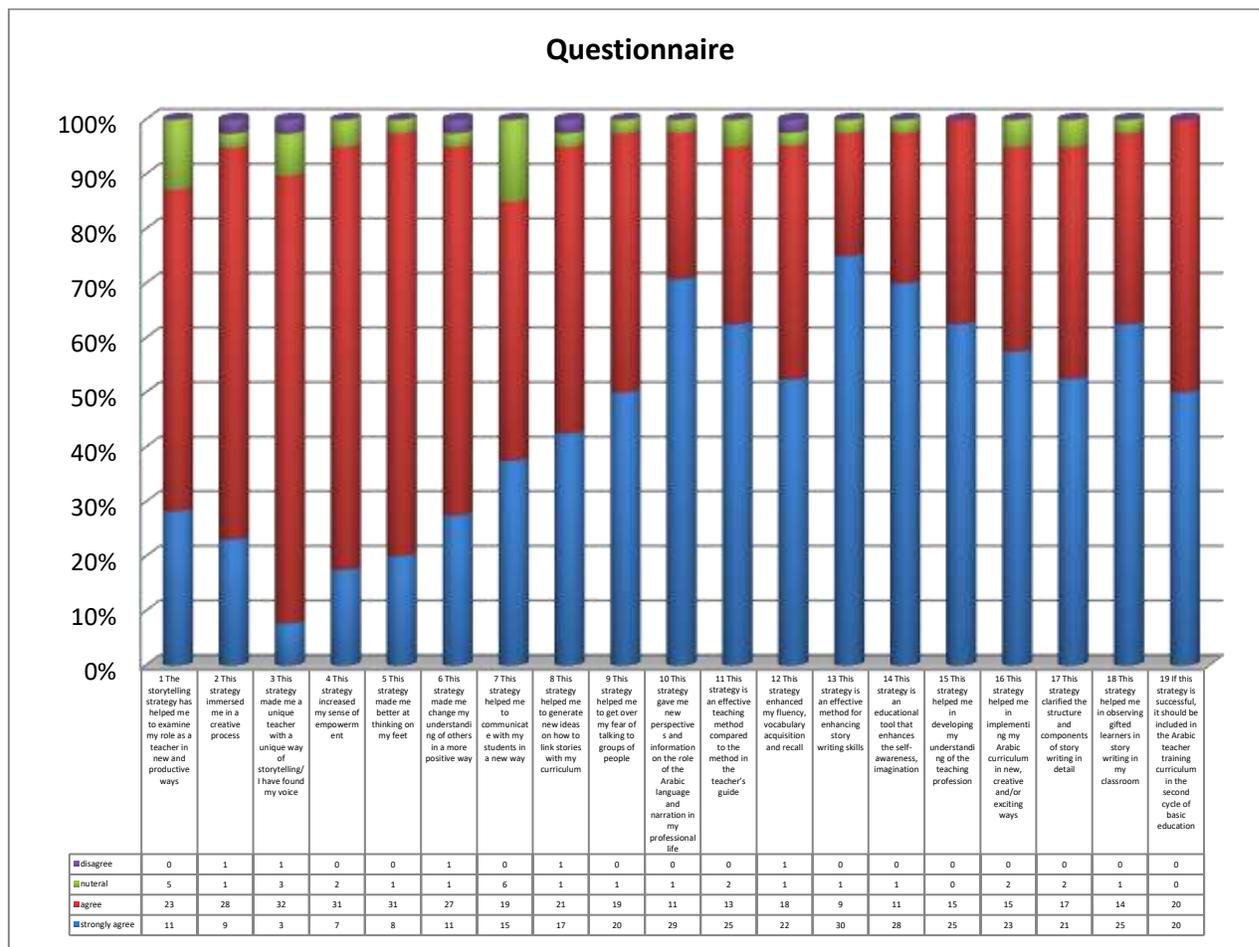


Figure 1. Questionnaire responses, Section 1,2: learners’ opinion regarding the storytelling strategy and how it helped them in improving their overall speaking skills.

Figure 1 points up that 92.5% of the learners report that they have benefited from using DST as a strategy in general. They mention that the strategy enables them to choose the proper vocabulary and to use the correct structure. Figure 1 of the questionnaire represents the analysis of the answer of 19 items, to find whether there is a relationship between the ability of speaking English as a foreign language and the ways of teaching or not. In general, about 90% of the learners’ answers assure that DST strategy prompts them to draw on spoken English. Moreover, it helps them be aware of the distinction between vocabulary practice and correct grammar; the matter that is different from the traditional methods of teaching that relies on just memorizing and receiving information without any participation. In addition, during the administration of the questionnaire, the learners orally remark that they have discovered that the application of DST is very pleasant and help them a lot not only in mastering the English language, but also in overcoming all psychological difficulties that previously make them incapable of speaking English as a foreign language. It enables them to voice their thoughts, get over hesitation, be full of energy, have a proper communication skill, convey their views, form their imagination, have a good performance and use eye contacts. A total of (93.1%) enjoy the strategy, for the reason that they preferred to

work cooperatively. Furthermore, (89%) of the learners state that this strategy help them developing the general speaking skills. In addition to that, (95%) of them believe that it will improve their performance in speaking language.

What is more, (90%) of the learners have mentioned that DST strategy effectively assess them, and (87%) of them share what they have visualized during storytelling with other students. Egan (2005) confirms that DST facilitates the oral presentation and correct vocabulary usage in the production phase of the story creation. Colon-vila (1997) adds that it helps in developing the ability of written and oral communication, since comprehension of the narrative schema has been improved.

It is commonly acclaimed that the strategy of cooperative learning is one of the most helpful ways in the process of education (Ellis, 2009), because the students have the opportunity to communicate effectively and employ new vocabularies. (92%) of the learners have agreed that they choose visual and audio elements of their DST; the matter that improve their ability of choice and listening properly. (94.3%) of them have concluded that the storyteller collects rich media to sustain their thoughts and feelings; he/she selects the proper tone and music cautiously to assist him/her in expressing the characters of the tale. Doquili (2000) mentions that the author or the storyteller is supposed to become skilled at different rules that are related to the skills of language; for instance, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary. Consequently, the storyteller is required to be able to express the current mood through movement, tone, stress and intonation.

Conclusion

The present study seeks to prove that combining digital storytelling strategy with the traditional ways of teaching adult EFL learners in Saudi Arabia at the particular university gives these learners the opportunity to be provided with many vocabularies and motivates them to work cooperatively. Moreover, this combination enables them to learn how to use proper grammar and enriches them with new vocabularies. It has also improved their speaking skill by mastering stress, tone and intonation. This research can help learners change their pessimistic view about their inability to communicate in English. It recommends that EFL instructors shall replicate the experiment by modifying the conventional techniques of teaching to create an amusing atmosphere among learners.

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