The Effect of Using Interactive Digital Storytelling on Developing some Listening Comprehension Skills for Preschool Children

A thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master’s Degree in Education (Curriculum and Instruction, TEFL)

By

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Abstract

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of using interactive digital storytelling on developing some listening comprehension skills for preschool children. Based on reviewing literature and related studies, the researcher investigated the theoretical framework of interactive digital storytelling and of the listening comprehension skills. This study followed the quasi-experimental method where one-group pre/post design was randomly selected of 38 children from the preschool stage (kG 2) at Al Emam Al Shafie Official Language School in Tanta in 2015/2016. The instrument of the study is: an electronic pre-posttest. Five on line interactive digital stories were adopted. The group has taken a pre/posttest and the results were statistically analyzed using t-Test and the effect size was calculated. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference at the level of (0.05) between the mean scores of the participants on the listening comprehension pre and posttest administrations in the listening comprehension skill as a whole and in each listening sub-skill in favor of the post test scores. According to these results, the study presented several recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Key Words: Interactive digital storytelling & listening comprehension skills
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Chapter one
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1.1. Introduction

Listening comprehension (LC) is an important area in language learning and the basis on which the other language components can be developed. Moulic (2012) views listening, as an active process of receiving aural stimuli. It involves attention, reception, comprehension and retention of the message or intention of the speaker. In other words, listening is receiving language through the auditory system. It involves receiving of the sound waves, identifying the language (both the segmental and supra – segmental elements), processing them into appropriate understanding of the speaker’s intentions and retaining the message for future use.

According to Thomas & Dyer (2007), LC is a process which involves meaningful interactive activity for an overall understanding of the text. LC refers to the way listeners select and interpret information that comes from auditory and visual clues in order to come to a better understanding of what speakers say. This is mentioned by Wallace et al. (2004). They view LC as essential for learning since it enables students to acquire insights and information, and to achieve success in communicating with others.

Moreover, LC plays an important role in the process of language learning and facilitating the emergence of other language skills (Martinez, 2010) and (Kurita, 2012). Vandergrift (2007) affirms that LC is crucial to language learning, so having good LC is a key for non-native English speakers who study English.
According to Fang (2009), language learning relies on trying to understand what other people are speaking. If the learners hear meaningful speech and try to understand it, learning will occur. Language acquisition occurs through understanding messages, that is to say, through comprehensible input. Nunan (2002) asserts that without language input, language learning or acquisition cannot take place. Therefore, listening is a fundamental and vital language component in the acquisition of language as it provides input for the learner.

LC has been regarded as the long neglected language area due to the oversimplified assumption that it is acquired automatically and naturally. Sadighi and Zare (2002) assert that LC has been the neglected area in foreign language acquisition, research, teaching and assessment. However, in recent years, as mentioned by Vandergrift (2004), there has been an increased focus on L2 listening ability because of its perceived importance in language learning and teaching. LC has gained much attention both in research and in language pedagogy as it has changed its role from a passive activity which deserved less class time to an active process through which language learning takes place.

The early-childhood-education stage, as mentioned by Taylor (2010), is a time to build listening skills in children. However, a child is not going to be able to build these listening skills on his/her own. It is the responsibility of the teacher to present children with activities that help build and enhance LC.

At the preschool level, children love to learn things through storytelling. Tales and stories are effective listening materials for children to develop LC in the foreign language. At an early stage of language learning, stories can offer a valuable way of introducing new language, making it meaningful and memorable (Wasik & Bond, 2001). Stories present linguistic
forms, grammar, phrases, vocabulary, and formulaic speech within a meaningful and structured context that supports comprehension. Barzaq (2009:20-21) asserts that storytelling as an art can be an enjoyable tool for practicing LC sub-skills and verbal expression. Frequent listening to stories develops the students’ listening comprehension. Isbell et al. (2004: 157) concluded that storytelling can help preschool aged children “produce positive gains in oral language "and is considered an effective strategy for developing listening skills and keeping students engaged.

Signes (2008) stated that digital stories combine traditional means of telling a story with different types of digital multimedia: images, audio, and video (graphics, text, recorded audio, and music) to present information on a specific topic. Robin (2006) stated that 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. Compared to conventional storytelling, digital storytelling audiences are viewed not only as listeners but also as learners who can interact and shape the story (Dorner et al. 2002)

Lambert (2010) and Robin (2008) identified seven elements of digital storytelling. Robin and Pierson (2005) presented an expanded and modified version of the seven elements of digital storytelling. The expanded elements, combined with the traditional seven elements are shown below:

- The Overall purpose of the story.
- The narrator’s point of view.
- A dramatic question or questions.
- The choice of content.
- Clarity of voice.
- Pacing of the narrative.
• Use of a meaningful audio soundtrack.
• Quality of the images, video & other multimedia elements.
• Economy of the story detail.
• Good grammar and language usage.

Digital storytelling has these key characteristics: Flexibility, universality, interactivity and community formation (Park & Seo, 2009). Flexibility in digital storytelling refers to the creation of a non-linear story using digital media technology (Gregori-Signes, 2008). Universality means that anyone can become the producer of digital stories. Interactivity refers to the participation of users in the development of the stories (Xu, Y., Park, H., & Baek, Y. 2011).

Using digital storytelling in education, as Gils (2005) suggested, can provide more variation than traditional methods in current practice. It can personalize learning experience, create real life situations and improve the involvement of students in the process of learning.

Moreover, and as mentioned by Pelin et al. (2011), digital stories are very useful in developing children's listening skills. They tend to be visual, interactive and repetitive. Generally, learners have to listen to and understand a simple order, to proceed with the story by clicking on parts of the screen or the picture (Sourashjani, 2012). Verdugo & Belmonte (2006) explained that the animated pictures of the digital story immediately involve children in the development of the story and create curiosity leading to concentration. By catching their attention, the story motivates them to watch, listen, understand and react. Verdugo & Belmonte (2007) added that the interactive and multi-sensory character provides an immediate context which facilitates vocabulary learning and oral language understanding.
Burmark (2004) stated that multimedia-rich Digital Story can map a more realistic picture of the new language and culture into the classroom including not only linguistic but also paralinguistic features such as body language, gestures, prosody, etc. which helps to convey meaning to the learners. Jawker& Dehghani (2012) also added that the use of video in the digital storytelling allows listeners to utilize the non-verbal components of communication that can assist them in processing and comprehending oral input.

In the light of the literature review, it is clear that the majority of the studies showed positive effects of interactive digital storytelling (Jawker&Dehghani (2012); Burmark, (2004); (Soureshjani, 2012); Erin,2009; Pelin et al ,2011;Verdugo&Belmonte,2007; Verdugo&belmonte,2006).This makes the researcher adopts interactive digital storytelling to develop some LC skills.

1.2. Context of the problem

In spite of the importance of LC, it has long been the neglected area. In the Egyptian context where English is taught as a foreign language, El-Neguly (2006) stated that many EFL students at all stages suffer from being so embarrassed and tense in the act of communication and this results in poor comprehension of the oral message. Shams &Elsaadany (2008) explained many reasons for this status- quo such as lack of emphasis on teaching LC in the language textbooks in general and in the lack of appropriate material specifically developed for and focused on the teaching of LC in EFL classrooms. Additionally, even if materials are available, little is offered in terms of practical application for aiding the EFL students in developing their LC.
Radwan (2010) and El-Tokhy (1999) also emphasized the fact that EFL LC is neglected in the Egyptian classes, despite its importance and relevance to other skills. In addition, these studies highlighted the need for adopting better teaching strategies to enhance EFL learners' LC. The researcher thinks that this problem starts in early childhood; in the preschool stage.

1.3. The pilot study

To investigate this problem, the researcher conducted a pilot study in which she made an oral test. The test aimed at assessing children LC performance (See Appendix A). Thirty three Children were required to answer some LC activities. Children were requested to perform two different types of tasks. First, they were asked to follow the teacher's instructions and reacting to commands. And then, they were requested to respond to simple questions such as: What do you think is it? Is this a pen? . Also the researcher made class visits for some teachers of English and interviewed them for their teaching methods of LC through some questions. They were asked:

- How they usually teach listening comprehension to the preschool children?
- What are the technological strategies they make use of to increase their learning motivation?
- What are the causes that lead to the children' poor performance in listening comprehension?

Results of this pilot study revealed that:

- The children were unable to recognize certain sounds and discriminate between sounds.
- They had problems with identifying words even though they were familiar with them.