



Incorporating digital storytelling in an EFL classroom and its effects on students' language proficiency, motivation, and self-reflection.

A thesis presented to the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications of the South-East European University for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

The advancement of technology has a profound impact on our everyday life. The basic purpose of all the technological expansions is to facilitate the way we communicate, learn, and have our work done. With it, the traditional classrooms as we know them are changing gradually as well. Nowadays, the students in the schools are 'digital natives' and technology is the language they speak outside of the classroom, so incorporating it within the learning processes taking place inside the educational institutions is a challenge teachers have to answer to.

One of the new emerging tools that combines the modern and the traditional is ***digital storytelling***. Digital stories are short stories, 2 to 4 minutes long, created using different media and technology. The storyteller uses their own voice to tell their own story with the help of digital media, which includes images, graphics, audio and sound, voice-over, video, and animation. This means of instruction increases students' motivation for gathering knowledge on different subjects as it lets them be in the center of the process of learning and self reflect throughout the process of creating their stories.

However, until recently, little attention has been paid to the theoretical framework of this method regarding acquisition of English in an EFL classroom, so this study aims to highlight the educational purposes of using digital storytelling as a tool for learning a second language and help educators perceive the pedagogical potentials it holds.

The research was conducted at the Private "Yahya Kemal" College, with 30 students grades 2nd, 3rd and 4th, as well as 10 English language teachers from the same institution. Data was gathered qualitatively and quantitatively through analyses of Google Form questionnaires consisting of multiple-choice and open-ended questions and online discussions using the teaching and learning platform Zoom.

The findings from the study suggest that digital storytelling is a significant teaching and learning tool that improves students' overall proficiency in the English language and helps them acquire valuable life skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and analysis of the findings. It is also a tool that helps increase students' motivation for learning and self-reflection.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, Student Motivation, Using technology in the EFL classroom, Multiliteracies, Language education.

Апстракт

Развојот на технологијата има значително влијание врз нашиот секојдневен живот. Основна цел на технолошките експанзии е да го олеснат начинот на кој комуницираме, учиме и работиме. Со тоа и процесите на учење се менуваат. Денес, учениците се “дигитални домородци” и јазикот на технологијата е јазик кој го зборуваат надвор од училниците, па со самото тоа, вклучување на технологијата во процесот на учење претставува предизвик на кој наставниците мора да одговорат.

Една од новите алатки на учење која ги комбинира модерното и традиционалното се дигиталните приказни. Дигитални приказни се кратки приказни со должина од 2 до 4 минути креирани користејќи различна технологија. Со нивна помош раскажувачот ја раскажува својата приказна користејќи го сопствениот глас. Истовремено, приказната е поткрепена со слики, графички прикази, аудио и звук, видео и анимација. Преку овој начин на учење мотивацијата на учениците за добивање знаења од различни области значително се зголемува затоа што тие се во средина на процесот на учење и прават проценка на наученото за време на целиот процес на креирање на нивната приказна.

До неодамна, недоволно внимание беше посветено на дигиталните приказни и нивната улога во учењето на англискиот јазик како странски јазик. Во однос на тоа, ова истражување има за цел да ги нагласи едукативните цели кои произлегуваат од користењето на оваа алатка за учење на втор јазик и да им помогне на наставниците да ги препознаат педагошките потенцијали кои ги овозможува.

Одговорите од прашалниците кои се состоеја од прашања од отворен и затворен тип како и онлајн дискусијата со наставниците беа анализирани квалитативно и квантитативно.

Заклучокот е дека дигиталните приказни претставуваат значајна алатка за предавање и учење која значително влијае во унапредување на вештините на англискиот јазик и истовремено го помага совладувањето на суштински животни вештини како што се критичко размислување, решавање на проблеми, барање на информации и анализа на истите.

Клучни зборови: Дигитални приказни, Мотивација, Користење технологија на часовите по англиски јазик, Мултивештини, Јазично образование

1 Introduction

Stories have been part of peoples' lives for as long as we remember. They have served the purpose of conveying messages across the years and turned to be an effective tool that enhances communication as it allows both the speaker and the listener to express themselves in ways that suit them best.

When it comes to using stories in the classroom a lot of research has been done and the final thoughts are that learning tool helps students combine their prior knowledge with new topics and elements that are about to be conquered. In the endless search for new methods that would allow students to learn both in and outside of the classroom, teachers explore various methods, tools, and techniques. Despite what they choose, however, they all agree that involving technology is the best way to “extract” from the students the best of their abilities. By using technology, students construct their own knowledge and share it with their teachers, their peers, and the rest of the world. Digital storytelling is a perfect combination of traditional storytelling and digital media, and as such, it explores the best of both the traditional and the modern and blends them in a way that increases motivation, prompts critical thinking and analytical skills, and leads to deep learning.

Using technology for educational purposes can be of great value but only if applied in the right way. Many students see computers, tablets, and other software and digital platforms as a chance to have fun during lesson time. They have to understand, however, that the primary goal of technology integration in the learning processes is exactly that, to learn, but in an entertaining way. A positive aspect is that nowadays, compared to the past, technology, computers, and devices are easily accessible in the classroom and students love working with them. Potentials are endless.

1.1 Digital Natives versus Digital Immigrants

The advancement of technology that is taking place with astonishing speed affects the way young people interact, create, reflect, and acquire knowledge.

Computers and the Internet made an impact on the way we search for information as the technology devices and the World Wide Web have become the first thing we reach for when we need instruction.

These modern times led to the construction of the terms *Digital Natives* and *Digital Immigrants*. Both these terms have been extensively used to make a clear distinction between those born in the digital era (somewhere after the year 1995) and those born before that period respectively. Digital immigrants came into the world prior to the existence of the World Wide Web and much of the digital technology that we use on a daily basis.

Marc Prensky (2001) who is believed to have coined these terms, says, “Our students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach” (p. 1). What that means is that educators, no matter how they feel about incorporating technology in their classroom, should do their best to keep track with their students’ needs. Further, Prensky (2001) says how digital natives spend hours on their computers and as a result, they think and process information fundamentally differently.

While digital natives tend to process information quickly and are great at multi-tasking, digital immigrants, on the other hand, take things slowly and believe step-by-step is the only way to acquire knowledge. They also believe that studying and learning are not supposed to be fun but serious and complex processes divided into chunks. However, that is profoundly different from what students nowadays feel about gaining knowledge on different subjects. Digital natives have hypertext minds and are not afraid to cross boundaries and share with each other.

1.2 Digital Storytelling as a new pedagogical tool

Nowadays, many educators recognize digital storytelling as a valuable pedagogical tool which helps enhance both teaching and learning in an effective, enjoyable, and meaningful way (Abrahamson, 1998). It emerged from the need of making the classroom more ‘native like’ environment for the 21st century students who are digital natives.

Many researchers who study the field of education have coined definitions of what digital storytelling represents. Normann (2011) defines digital storytelling as:

A short story, only 2–3 minutes long, where the storyteller uses his own voice to tell his own story. The personal element is emphasized, and can be linked to other people, a place, an interest, or to anything that will give the story a personal touch (p. 2).

Dewey (1944) pointed to storytelling as an important piece within a constructivist pedagogy that allows learners to build meaningful connections between their previous and their newly acquired experiences and knowledge, which allows for synthesis and learning to occur.

Basically, digital storytelling is a combination of a personal story told with the help of digital media which includes images, graphics, audio and sound, voice-over, video, and animation.

Ohler (2008) states:

Digital stories in education are typically driven by an academic goal, use low-end technology that is commonly available to students, and usually are in the form of short (two-to-four minute) quasi movies that an audience watches via computer or other digital means (p. 15).

As something new and refreshing within the classroom, digital storytelling covers four strategies that help students learn better and combine what they know with what they need to acquire. It is a mean of learning, but mostly a process of acquisition as it allows students to gather new information in a natural and meaningful way. According to Barrett, (2005) those strategies are student engagement, reflection for deeper learning, project-based learning, and the effective integration of technology into instruction.

Taking into consideration the potentials for reflective and active learning, digital storytelling serves two purposes, that of teaching and that of learning. What this means is that teachers may find it useful when they need to deliver instructions, demonstrate a procedure, reinforce understanding, and review the material. Students, on the other hand, can use the stories they created themselves using any digital tool they felt most comfortable working with for reporting

their findings, reflect on their understanding, and connect to their audience (Alexander & Levine, 2008).

1.3 Characteristics and elements of digital storytelling

Turning traditional storytelling into digital took place in the 1990s when the Center for Digital Storytelling allowed people to share their stories using digital media, which gave them the chance to preserve what they had to say in a format that they could go back to whenever they felt the need for that. The founders of this center, which was initially known as the San Francisco Digital Media Center, are late Dana Atchley and Joe Lambert.

Given the chance 'to save' their life mementos which they could share with the rest of the world, the digital story workshops organized at the center gained huge popularity. Participants weren't required to possess any background knowledge of using computers or any other form of modern technology in order to take part in the workshops because they were offered lessons of how new media worked.

Based on what he observed during the years, Lambert (2007) created seven elements to be taken into consideration when creating digital stories. Those elements are:

1. **Point of view** - The *point of view* is one of the most important components of a digital story as it gives the whole experience a personal touch. The emotional moment arousing from it is what makes this mix of technology and narrative a unique means of both teaching and learning. Presenting the story using the personal narrative "I" allows for the creator of the story and his/her audience to connect on a deeper level. The digital story 'reveals' the writer as opposed to offering facts regarding the chosen topic.
2. **Dramatic question/s** - The *dramatic question* is the element around which the ending of the story revolves. It helps keep the listeners' attention.
3. **Emotional content** - Well-written stories presented using media tools are likely to evoke emotions at the audience.

4. **The gift of your voice** - Digital stories use voice-over, or the presenter's personal voice when getting the story across. The storyteller's voice (the pitch, timbre, and inflection) results in conveying meaning and intent in a very personal manner.
5. **The power of soundtrack** – For one, background music makes the story more attractive. Second, it helps support, contrast, and emphasize the spoken narrative.
6. **Economy** – This element of digital storytelling refers to the length of the script. Lambert suggests it should not exceed 375 words. The narrative should be between 2 and 4 minutes long.
7. **Pacing** – This is related to the rhythm of the narrative, or how fast or slow it progresses.

Although these elements are somehow accepted as the basis for Creating Digital Stories (CDS model) other scholars extend this model and believe it should be more flexible and adjusted to teachers' and students' individual needs. The purpose of incorporating this tool within the classroom isn't a digitalization of the traditional paper, but "mediatization" of the materials involved, both old and new, textual and multimodal (Lundby, 2008).

Tolisano (2015) makes a clear distinction of what digital storytelling really is and what it is not and goes on saying that this means of learning

- **is NOT about the tools, but IS about the skills.** Here, she argues that the choice of tools used for creating the story is not crucial because any media-making tool will play its role of developing the skills involved in the process of creating the story. Some of the skills she mentions are writing, speaking and communication skills, oral fluency, visual and media literacy, presentation skills, publishing skills, and more.

- **is NOT about creating media, but IS about creating meaning.** Creating different forms of media is relatively easy as most of us have approach to the Internet at any time and own multiple smart devices. Digital stories, however, serve the purpose of creating meaning and sharing that meaning with others.

- **is NOT only about telling a story, but IS about contributing and collaborating.** She best describes this by saying that students or teachers who create the story should ask themselves, "How does my story fit in and add value to the stories of others?"

- **is NOT about telling an isolated story but IS about sharing and connecting.** The process of digital storytelling allows our story to be heard by larger audiences instead being kept it inside our head only.

- **is NOT only about the transfer of knowledge but IS about the amplification.** Although sharing and gaining knowledge has always been the primary goal of the various learning tools we use, Tolisano here emphasizes the importance of amplification, or the reach of the presenter’s voice. She says that what matters most is the number of people our story and our voice touch.

- **is NOT about substituting analog stories but IS about transforming stories.** Tolisano believes that the processes and the final products of working with digital stories are beyond turning text from a piece of paper into images and sounds. The core purpose of our story should be engaging the audience on multiple layers. This leads to an observation that Ohler (2005/2006) discussed which states, “through creating electronic personal narratives, students become active creators rather than passive consumers of media” (p. 44).

1.4 Hypothesis

Hypotheses emerging from this research are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Digital storytelling involves the usage of the four skills.

Hypothesis 2: Being given the chance to express themselves in their “own” language, that of technology, students’ motivation for learning through digital storytelling is significant.

Hypothesis 3: Digital storytelling puts students in the center of the learning processes and gives them opportunities to be creative and reflective in the process of achieving language proficiency.

Hypothesis 4: This mean of learning helps students apply the skill of writing in a nonconventional manner.

2 Review of the literature

Literature that examines the creation and the use of digital stories in the process of learning English as a second language is relatively new. So far, most of the related research has been done on using digital storytelling as a tool that enhances the educational processes in general. Little has been said about incorporating it within the EFL classroom, although studies suggest it is of great significance when it comes to excelling the four skills of English.

Digital storytelling, as a form of project-based learning, allows the students to get involved in a unique process that helps them blend their background knowledge with their creativity and their analytical thinking skills. Anderson (2010) argues that project-based learning is “a comprehensive approach to instruction” that allows students to learn through real-world experiences and hands-on discovery (p. 20). This means they are given the chance to be in the center of the learning processes, which affects their motivation and their ability to self-reflect.

2.1 Types of digital narratives

When it comes to the kinds of stories students digitalize, there are a couple of types to choose from. According to Robin (2008), when students are involved in creating digital stories, they learn how to conduct research on a given topic, how to ask questions, how to organize their ideas, how to express their opinions, and how to construct a meaningful narrative. It means that through the actual process of creation students are able to reflect on what they have done until a certain point and see how satisfied they are with their work. They reflect on their product and make changes if necessary. Knowing that the digital story, which is a representation of their final product, would be heard by chosen audience, most likely their classmates, makes students put some extra effort in the process. This helps facilitate social learning and emotional intelligence and takes the process of acquisition of the language to a deeper level.

Further, Robin (2008) differentiates between three main groups of narratives that are used to create digital stories for the purpose of learning. Those narratives are as follows:

1. **Personal Narratives** are stories that revolve around personal experiences. They may be related to the student's life and thus describe events that are memorable, or they may be related to other people who had certain influence on the narrator's life.
2. **Digital Stories which Examine Historical Events.** These stories depict important events that took place at certain points in the past and students find fascinating or worth sharing.
3. **Stories that inform or instruct are** mainly stories that are of informative character.

2.2 Digital Storytelling genres

Working on the research about digital storytelling as an emerging tool for student and teacher learning, Garretty (2008) made a distinction of the different genres arising from working with digital stories. As she argues, the core purpose of traditional storytelling hasn't changed much but only reached higher levels after the use of technology came into the picture. However, this only refers to general storytelling, as when it comes to using it for educational purposes the change can be both felt and seen. Some of the genres she lists are traditional stories, digital stories of learning, digital stories of social justice, and digital stories of personal reflection. We should keep in mind that despite the genre, the seven elements of Lambert discussed above are followed.

2.2.1 Traditional digital stories

Garett (2008) defines traditional digital stories as stories "that connect students with personal events or stories from life experience." (p.15)

According to Davis (2004, as cited in Garett 2008), traditional digital stories improve students' writing, language and literacy skills, but the main goal here is for them to be challenged to understand more about themselves and their life.

2.2.2 Digital stories of learning

When digital stories are used for conveying the content of the course material along with the development of the skills of writing, listening, speaking, and reading, as well as the literacies, then digital stories of learning are incorporated within the curriculum. When using this genre, as opposed to the traditional digital stories, the focus changes from the personal to the process. Garetty (2008) concludes, “Many educators have used digital storytelling to address content and pedagogical knowledge related to specific learning tasks” (p. 18)

2.2.3 Digital stories of social justice and culture

As the name itself suggests, digital stories of social justice and culture deal with topics related to the social justice and the cultural elements. Again, despite the topics they cover, the purpose of this type of digital stories, as of any other, is to develop students’ skills and literacies and teach the content material by dealing with real life issues. Covering stories of social justice and culture leads to authentic learning (Garetty, 2008).

2.2.4 Digital stories of personal reflection

These types of digital stories allow both the students and the teachers to reflect on the development of their learning processes and the skills emerging from that learning.

2.3 How to construct a digital story (steps)

Whenever new technology is implemented in the classroom, it goes through a number of testing stages. Hall (2010) says that the first stage has to do with creating awareness. The next stage deals with creating functional dimensions of administrative policy and maintenance. The final stage expresses the positive outcomes coming from that new technology.

Digital storytelling proved to be a useful tool that helps students acquire the English language in a natural and an entertaining manner. The creation of a digital story is a process that goes through several stages itself. Lambert (2010) described seven steps storytellers follow until they get to their final product. The first step as described in his “Cookbook” is ***owning your***

insights. During this stage, the storytellers determine what their story is really about as they try to recall moments and memories that matter to them and then pass their feelings and emotions to the chosen audience, even if that audience consists of a single person only. By asking the question of why the story they chose to share is important to them the storytellers understand the context of their own lives. The second step is about **owning your emotions** and helps the storytellers “become aware of the emotional resonance of their story” (p. 12). This leads to a connection on a deeper level between the narrator and his/her listeners. Step three comes as a result of the first two steps and is all about **finding the moment**. Once the storyteller becomes aware of his/her insights and emotions it is easier for them to discover those moments in their life that triggered certain change. **Seeing your story**, the fourth step described by Lambert is when the digital media, the images, and the music come into play. The storyteller has found their moment and now they search for visuals that connect to the story they want to tell and help clarify it even further. Step five, **hearing your story**, is related to the narration or the voice-over. According to Lambert, this is what truly makes one’s story digital, not the media tool used, not the images and the music, but the recorded narration of the storyteller. He writes, “One’s voice is a truly great gift as it is a testament to one’s fragility and strength” (p. 18). **Assembling your story** is the sixth step described by Lambert. After completing the first five steps, it is now time for the storyteller to assemble the story or decide on the structure, the scripting, and the storyboarding. The final step of creating a good digital story is **sharing it** with the audience.

Similar to what Lambert describes in his “Cookbook,” Kajder (2004) speaks of the six steps she led her students through while they worked with digital stories in the period of five sessions of ninety minutes. The first step Kajder discusses is **What to Say?** During this step she explained to her students how the story they would choose to share with the rest of the class, and even wider audience, should be worth sharing. To her surprise, they understood the core purpose of the activity and opted for stories that were “self-contained and set in one particular place and time” (p. 66). One example she lists is that of a Somalia immigrant student who wanted to speak of the first time she wore pants after she moved to America. She said that her story was in fact about the freedom she experienced and what it meant to her. The second step of the

process of creating a digital story according to Kajder is **Artifact Search**, which corresponds with Lambert's fourth step. Here, students were asked to find images that will help visualize their story. Kajder believed this would be done with ease, but her students struggled to find appropriate images on the web, as they believed nothing they stumbled upon really expressed their feelings so they took images on their own using cameras. **Storyboard**, the third step described by Kajder, asks from the students to map their story with images and techniques using a template provided by Lambert and his Center for Digital Storytelling. Here, students also "consider how effects, transitions, and sound would be sequenced" (p.66). Once students decide on the overall structure they move on to the fourth step, **Revision**. During this step, it is very likely for students to "catch" their mistakes and do a rewriting. Step five, **Construction**, is about digitalizing the story. Students upload their images, record their narration, and add music. The last step described by Kajder is **Screening**. Here, the participants in the project of creating digital stories screened their work and took active part in the discussion about what they had to share with one another. Kajder states that the conversations between the students regarding their attempts to add meaning to past events from their life "marked the start of a collaborative interpretive community that was a safe, supportive structure for their talk and interaction as readers and as writers" (p. 67).

2.4 Tools for creating Digital Stories

Since digital storytelling, as a new teaching tool, requires the use of technology and media in order for the students to turn their stories into a movie, here, I will speak of some of the user-friendly software, apps, and tools that can be of great use. What we as teachers should be aware of when assigning our students with projects such as that of creating digital stories is their technical background. As a result, we need to provide them with lessons on how to use certain technology if we feel there is need for that. Ohler (2008) writes that the tools of the digital age are "assistive technology for the artistically challenged" (p. 4). He believes that these tools allow everyone to tell their story. Whereas artists such as pianists use the instrument to share their emotions, teachers and students use these tools for the same reason. The good thing is that most of the tools and apps available are simple to use and do not require any

special skills. However, besides these apps, students need to have access to a microphone and a recording device, as well as hardware and software for working with the videos, the graphics and the images, and perhaps a digital camera if they choose to take their own photos and videos instead of using the ones from the web.

One of the software I have used with my students in the past is *Photo Story 3*. It is a free program and very easy to navigate through. It allows students to upload images and videos and add recording to each slide that turns into a movie segment. One drawback might be that it only works with Microsoft Windows XP Operating System. Uploading images, editing them, and adding effects is entertaining and students love it. *Windows Movie Maker* is another user-friendly editing software that students love working with. Once the story is complete and all the edits are done it can be easily shared on OneDrive, Facebook, Vimeo, YouTube, and Flickr. *Apple iMovie* is quite similar to Windows Movie Maker with the difference that it cannot be downloaded free.

Various websites about teaching provide lists and short descriptions of many other apps used for creating digital stories. Some, which I have tried myself before creating this list, are as follows:

1. ACMI Generator – a creative space that allows students not only to create a movie, but provides them with short lessons on screenwriting, cinematography, storyboarding, sound recording, visual effects, and editing too.
2. Slidestory – another user-friendly app that lets students create their story using visuals and voice narration with text captions.
3. 30 hands Learning – is an iOS app students can use to add narration to their photos. It provides a number of readymade stories students can watch and get inspired by before writing their own story.
4. Little Bird Tales – is a popular site for creating digital stories. It comes with a mobile learning app.

5. My Story – is an iPad app easy to navigate through used for creating digital stories and books. All students need to do is add the images they chose, add text if they want to, and record themselves narrating what they have written before.
6. Voice Thread – another popular app used by many teachers and students. A finished story on this app can be easily embedded onto a website or a blog.

The list is endless. All teacher and students need to do is choose the software and the app that suits them best. Except for the tools listed above, and the number of others out there, students can choose to create and share their story using Microsoft Power Point and save their work as a Power Point Show instead of a Power Point Presentation.

What is interesting about these tools and apps is that most of them allow the final product to be shared on the Web where people who stumble upon it may add comments and suggestions. This is a great opportunity for students to receive useful feedback from others besides their peers and their teacher.

2.5 Blending the old and the new

In the past, when technology was not incorporated in the learning processes most of the students' ideas and thinking were only heard by their teachers and their peers. Nowadays, however, with the use of different multimedia tools those ideas can be shared on the web and spread across the world.

The process of creating digital stories requires from the students to follow certain steps such as script development where they are asked to write a text which calls for linguistic and literary instruction to be applied, voice record, scan and editing of images, combining different types of audio and media, and finally, presentation of the final version of their story (Gregori-Signes, 2008).

Gregori-Signes (2008) discusses the implementation of digital story in an EFL classroom and believes that the fact it is something relatively new leads to students' curiosity and motivation regarding the usage of this teaching and learning tool to be high.

The first element of a digital story, as discussed by Lambert (2007), is the point of view. In terms of EFL, this element means that the student is not required to include and present simple facts about the language, but incorporate their personal attitude regarding different aspects of it. An example of that can be a personal representation of a novel or a poem or an analysis of different grammar aspects. Let us say, a student finds it difficult to use tenses of English that have no counterparts in their mother tongue, so they write a text that examines the possible reasons that stand on their way of overcoming those grammar structures. Here, they can incorporate images as well as music that will help the listener understand the problem presented better.

One example Gregory-Signes (2008) lists is that of using an interpretation of a poem written in English. Given the chance to use digital media, audio, video, and sound, students can express themselves in a completely different and quite deeper level. That means that besides words, they can use images that would match the feeling the poem triggered at them and use background music that will help convey the impact the author's words had on them. Their voice, on the other hand, can express their mood (anger, happiness, sadness, and other.)

Digital story can be applied on any given topic incorporated within the curriculum of English as a second language. If students, for example, are about to learn how a job interview is conducted in English or they are about to master the phrases used in a restaurant they can do it using multimedia tools and create an actual story where they will play the role of the interviewer/ interviewee and/or that of the customer/waiter. Simple reading will not get as strong effect as watching the conversation taking place in front of the audience's eyes. The background music and the images used can be related to different outcomes of the conversations presented. One example would be that of cheerful music if the person gets the job and a sadder one if they are turned down.

So, blending the old, traditional, learning strategies with technology tools such as Slidestory, Storybird, WeVideo, Movie Maker, and similar, even Power Point presentations, can allow deeper learning to occur. The list of media used is endless and comes in many forms, including creating stories, podcasts, virtual tours, and even publishing multimedia eBooks.

2.6 Digital storytelling as a constructivist approach to learning

The process of learning is a complex one, so in order to better understand how knowledge is acquired and how the vast amount of information students come across with on a daily basis is organized within the intellectual framework in their brain, few learning theories have been developed throughout the years.

Among the most influential ones are the theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Below, I will provide a brief overview of the perspectives each of these theories holds regarding the learning methods they support.

As discussed by Kelly (2012), the theory of behaviorism that stems from the work of Thorndike, Pavlov and Skinner allows learning to occur when certain stimuli and the responses emerging from them lead to the acquisition of new behaviors or changes in already existing behaviors. These newly obtained patterns are later on repeated enough times so they become automatic. Most common applications/activities of this theory are drill and rote practice, repetitive practice, and verbal reinforcement.

The theory of cognitivism, as opposed to behaviorism, states that learning occurs because of internal processing of information students receive and has little to do with the external circumstances. Anderson (2008) argues that this theory's focus is on the construction, the organization, and the arrangement of the educational content that allows optimal management of information (including remembering, storing, and retrieving it) to happen. Further, he says that the usage of the tools and activities under this particular theory make the process of learning a dynamic one. Some of the applications of cognitivism are chunking information, providing structure, real-life examples, problem solving, discussions, analogies, and similar.

Finally, the theory of constructivism, under which digital storytelling falls, sees the process of learning as a completely individual process as it depends on how different students perceive the information they receive. Here, students construct new ideas and concepts based on their prior knowledge and experience, and since each person possesses different levels of it the learning that occurs is different for each individual.

Wilson (1996) defines it as “a place where learners may work together and support each other as they use a variety of tools and information resources in their guided pursuit of learning goals and problem solving activities” (p. 5). Thus, this approach goes beyond teaching and learning and prepares students to solve problems using the knowledge they possess and upon which they interpret new information. The outcomes that emerge from this type of learning are neither unique nor predictable because each student is constructing their own knowledge. Tools used are brainstorming, case studies, research projects, discovery learning, simulations, and more.

The role of the teacher in constructivist learning is that of a collaborator or co-creator. Students are guided, but are allowed to self-reflect during the process of knowledge acquisition. Digital storytelling is a project-based learning strategy that facilitates a constructivist approach to learning and as such, it enhances learners’ motivation. In the process of creating the digital story, students are faced with problem-solving activities that they deal with through collaboration and peer-to-peer communication. At the same time, they are engaged in higher order thinking and deep learning (Dakich 2008).

In order to be able to utilize all the benefits emerging from using digital storytelling in the classroom, Smeda, Dakich, & Sharda (2014) presented a new e-Learning Digital Storytelling (eLDiSt) framework that allows for the digital storytelling to be used as a pedagogical tool that will lead to constructivist learning. This framework can be applied at different stages of learning and with students possessing different level of knowledge. As presented by Sharda et.al (2014), it consists of thirteen storytelling aspects with five levels each. The complexity of the aspects depends on the level of knowledge of the students. Here, I will only analyze the learning aspects of his framework in terms of their application in an EFL classroom.

Sharda’s learning aspect consists of purpose and language usage. The five levels of purpose are as follows: 1. to send an educational message; 2. to explain a specific lesson; 3. to present a specific theme via a story; 4/5. To present a specific theme or lecture;

The five levels of the aspect of language usage refer to the complexity of the language individual students possess and are listed as follows: 1. plain grammar and language; 2. simple

grammar and language; 3. moderately complex language and grammar; 4. intricate grammar and language; 5. multilingual

The goal of the teacher would be to lead the students from stage to stage by putting them in the center of the learning process. This can be best achieved by assigning them with the task of creating their own stories that deal with certain aspects of the language or particular lesson but yet incorporate their personal experiences. Being given the chance to work on their stories in their own pace and reflect on their work throughout the process of creation, students learn by doing. As the teacher follows the work closely and provides students with feedback, it helps them improve during each step of the way. Unlike simple writing tasks where students get the mark and go through their teacher's comments about the mistakes they made, writing the story which would later be read with their own voice and heard by wider audience gives students the chance to get to their writing over and over again until it's free of grammar errors and until they achieve certain level of language excellence.

The digital presentation tools used to construct the story are of great significance for modifying the traditional learning process into one that incorporates collaboration, production, project management, and critical thinking that challenges students to merge between numerous combinations of content material (included in the content of the course) as well as multimedia components while thinking of the audience that will hear and see their final product (Hughes, 2005).

2.7 Theories supporting educational use of digital storytelling

One of the theories supporting the use of digital storytelling in education is Fisher's theory of "narrative paradigm." Communicationtheory.org provides a short analysis of Fisher's theory that holds the belief that all the meaningful communication that takes place between people is in a form of storytelling. Fisher (1985, as cited in Wang and Zhan 2010) believes that the communication through stories shared between the listener and the speaker does not only happen in a form of shared personal experiences, but interpretations of the world which are shaped by time, history, character, and culture. Further, he states that this form of

communication involves certain steps such as creation, composition, adaptation, presentation, and reception.

Based on this, we can conclude that when it comes to applying the narrative paradigm in the classroom digital storytelling is the tool to opt for. Some of the reasons are that this educational tool lifts the narration and the communication to a higher level because it incorporates media, images, graphics, and voice-over which makes it easier for the students to listen to and follow the story, as well as to better remember what was presented. Using digital stories lets students learn from and through the story in a natural manner.

Another theory in support of digital storytelling is that of Lave and Wenger (1991). According to them, social interaction is a vital component of *situated learning*. They argue that learning is a function of the activity, the context, and the culture in which it occurs. Thus, students being exposed to their teachers' and their peers' projects and presentations activates the process of learning. The theory of situated learning is closely related to the use of technology in the classroom where students are part of "a community of practice" and supports activities that focus on problem-solving skills.

2.8 Digital storytelling in relation to students' engagement and motivation

Motivating students is as important as the content we teach. Many researchers agree that motivation can be best triggered at students if they are placed in the center of the learning processes and actively involved in the tasks set by their teachers. Being digital natives, the students of the 21st century rebel the traditional classroom and ask to be challenged. Digital storytelling is a tool that engages them in processes and projects involving the use of many different media and technology tools and that increases their motivation about the subjects taught.

Foelske's (2014) research on students' motivation and engagement for learning through digital storytelling that consists of in-depth analysis of other authors' papers, most of which are peer-reviewed, has presented some outcomes that clearly show the relationship between motivation and engagement and project-based learning. Among the rest, she discusses

Campbell's (2012) research on long term-effects of digital storytelling. His two-year study with 25 5th and 6th graders using iMovie to create digital stories found that the project completion was 100%. It showed significant relation between this learning tool and students' engagement and motivation, as well as improvement of the writing skills of the participants. The results of the observation and the interviews showed that the high levels of engagement and motivation were mainly a consequence of students being confronted with a task that required from them to use media and technology, something they are comfortable with, along with the knowledge of the fact that their voice will be heard beyond the classroom walls. Of course, teachers' guidance is crucial in this process of learning, as students, despite the fact they are digital natives, cannot be left to themselves completely. What makes them successful and able to connect the course content with their previous knowledge is the constant feedback they get on the work they do until they get to their final product.

A research done by Warren & Dondlinger, (2008, as cited in Foelske 2014) argues that another factor that increases students' engagement and motivation during the process of creation of their own, personal digital stories is the peer collaboration, teacher-student collaboration, and peer editing. This leads to the creation of more reflective stories. Further, this sort of collaboration prompts a community of learners who support each other in the process of learning.

In addition to this, in her "Reflections" on using digital stories as a tool that increases students' motivation in the process of acquiring knowledge, Kieler (2010) concludes that it leads to deep learning. She emphasizes that in order for the level of engagement of the students to be higher, none of Lambert's elements for creating digital stories discussed above should be omitted. She believes that understanding the point of view and being able to communicate it makes the creator of the digital story a better storyteller who triggers different emotions at his or her listeners. Sometimes, it is not about the story itself, but about "understanding the forces that shaped the event or that person's story" (p. 52). Further, she states that in addition to improving their speaking skills, digital storytelling makes students great listeners, too. All the skills they develop or broaden will prepare them for the real world and their future.

Carr and Jitendra (2000, as cited in Shields, 2014) observed that the meaningful and authentic situations such as real-world problems and social learning that digital storytelling is based on make students actively use and improve their basic skills and that affects the levels of motivation and engagement. What is interesting to note is that according to Kajder (2004), digital story telling “assigns” students with roles they are eager to answer to, such as those of screenwriters, producers, artists, designers, and moviemakers. Further, they are given the freedom to make decisions as to what to write about and which story from the history or from their personal life to bring to life by answering to the content material from the curriculum.

When dealing with digital stories, students’ voice can be heard and that makes them feel important.

2.9 Developing *Multiliteracies*

Literacy is simply defined as one’s ability to read, write, speak, and listen in a way that allows them to understand and to be understood by others. Nowadays, however, with the advance of technology, this term goes way beyond this definition.

Sylvester & Greenidge (2009) speak of the multiliteracies developed throughout the years among which:

- **Technological literacy** which refers to the skills students need to possess in order to be able to adequately approach the technology used.
- **Visual literacy** which is believed to be one of the oldest literacies that even pre-historic people used in order to decode cave writings. Today, this literacy refers to “decoding and comprehending tool bar icons, navigating the Web, and encoding images in multimedia projects” (p. 284).
- **Media literacy** is related to “the skills needed to access, evaluate and create messages in written and oral language, graphics and moving images, and audio and music” (p. 284).

- **Information literacy** means that by incorporating media tools within the classroom, students analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and create as means to understand and navigate complex information.

They agree how digital storytelling covers all these literacies and that makes it a valuable learning tool especially when it comes to classes with students who struggle with the skill of writing which I will discuss more thoroughly in a separate chapter.

The topic of what literacy is in the modern world is further discussed by Ohler (2009) who states that being literate means being able to read and write using different media which is nowadays easily accessible to most of us and can be without much effort brought inside the classroom. He states that the literacies digital story telling helps students acquire can be used way beyond the classroom and can be of great use at various stages of their life. Here, students realize that the knowledge and the skills they gain won't only help them pass the course with a good mark, but will prepare them for the real-world problems they will eventually encounter, which motivates them further to be successful within the classroom. In addition to what has been presented above, Anstey and Bull (2006, as cited in Shields, 2014) note that the learning that takes place is different for each individual as they approach the task and the content of the course with different experience they build new information and knowledge on. What is most; the same individual may approach and understand the same content and text differently at different periods of their learning processes. They put an emphasis on intertextuality and define it as a phenomenon where one text resembles another, so students who possess various literacy skills are likely to make connections between these two texts. Anstey and Bull believe all teachers should work towards creating multiliterate students.

Digital storytelling, as a new tool that includes video, images, and various other media, along with the students' personal point of view and the power of their own voice, leads to the acquisition of the literacies discussed above along with the acquisition of the content of the course taught. If done the right way, digital storytelling offers endless opportunities for learning and development of crucial life competences such as those of in-depth analysis of information, critical thinking, and the rest of the 21st century skills discussed below.

2.10 Digital storytelling and 21st century skills

Great School Partnership, a nonprofit school-support organization, discusses the importance of the 21st century skills and provides the following definition:

21st century skills are a broad set of skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed—by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and others—to be critically important to success in today’s world, particularly in collegiate programs and contemporary careers and workplaces (2006).

Besides the skills that fall under the multiliteracies (literacy skills) discussed above, Stauffer at AES Education (2020) states how the 21st century skills consist of learning skills and life skills. The learning skills include the four C’s, or Critical thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication. Life skills, or FLIPS, deal with Flexibility, Leadership, Initiative, Productivity, and Social skills.

Critical thinking is one’s ability to solve problems, question what they read or hear, analyze, interpret, and synthesize information. Creativity is a skill that allows students to think outside the box and approach the course content material in unique ways. Gakhar & Thompson, (2007, as cited in Shield 2014) have stated that students’ success, both personal and professional, depends a great deal on giving them the freedom to be creative through the process of learning. Collaboration, as opposed to individual work, allows students to work together and share concepts and ideas. Developing this skill might be a challenge because students might be forced to give up on their own thinking and accept other’s concepts for the sake of the final product of the group work. Communication is a skill that helps students understand and be understood better. All these skills can be acquired when working with digital stories. During the process of creation of the story of their personal interest, students analyze the information they will use and synthesize it with what they already know. The freedom of choice regarding the media used, the sound, the video, the images, and the plot (based on personal experience, historic event, or informative) boosts students’ creativity as it does not limit any of their choices. Collaboration and communication are emphasized with digital storytelling in a way that

is hardly reachable with the traditional teaching and learning processes. Based on this, we can agree with Robin (2008) who states that digital storytelling provides students with opportunities to produce unique and specific products creatively.

Once these skills are acquired, teachers should create conditions that will let their students upgrade them and use them whenever possible (Anstey and Bull (2006, as cited in Shields, 2014). One example would be to allow them to interact with different types of texts in multiple ways as a starting point for making meaning using the literacies and their personal experiences. This will certainly lead to students searching for knowledge and solutions. In the process of creating digital stories, students self-reflect and evaluate the information they come across. They build the ability to distinguish of what is useful and what is not with the goal of choosing information that would best portray the message they try to pass on to the audience watching and listening to their story.

2.11 Digital storytelling and the development of the linguistic skills

Noam Chomsky, Western society's most renowned linguist, in his book titled "On Nature and Language" writes that language is a function of knowledge attained. Further, "the father of modern linguistics" argues that language is a tool humans use to relate to the world that surrounds them, to each other, and even to themselves. Linguist John McWhorter (as cited in Nordquist, 2019) defines language as a set of grammar and other rules and norms that help people create meaningful utterances and sounds that allow them to communicate with others.

Learning a new language takes time and today's students, as discussed above, need to be challenged and engaged in manners that match their interests and forms of communication with those they use outside of the classroom, and that certainly involves the usage of technology which later triggers numerous learning outcomes. As Ohler (2008) argues:

Digital story as a final product is just a tip of the iceberg, bellow which are a number of artifacts for the assessment of literacy, including planning documents, scripted narratives, treatments, storyboards, and self-assessments, as well as music, art, taped oral presentations, and other prized examples of student word (p. 10).

Digital storytelling, as a relatively new educational tool, has found its way in the EFL classroom and both teachers and students understand and feel the benefits it offers when it comes to acquisition of the linguistic skills. Most of the research related to digital storytelling is done on its effects on education in general, but the researches done on digital storytelling and acquisition of English as a second language are of great value and a solid base for further studies to be built upon.

Although making a clear distinction between the skills is practically impossible because of the way they are interconnected and influence one another, I will try to present studies done on the effect of digital storytelling on each of the skills in separate sections.

2.11.1 Digital storytelling and writing

From my personal experience as a teacher of English as a second language both in elementary and secondary educational institutions, it is safe to say that the skill of writing is the hardest to master. I have noticed throughout the years how even great speakers of the language struggle to put their thoughts on paper. However, the use of technology and media seems to facilitate the enhancement of this skill.

As defined in the previous chapters, the digital story is a multimedia text enriched with images and the presenter's own voice. However, one of the most important processes that precedes the final product the audience gets to see and listen to is the writing of what is being put on screen. Banaszewski (2002, as cited in Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009) argues in favor of using media in the classroom as it gives students the unique opportunity to discover their voice, build their confidence, but most important of all, to structure their writing. In fact, the whole story is based on the student's writing and "successful digital storytelling depends upon traditional writing and the literacies associated with it in the development of scripts, narrative, and other planning instruments" (Ohler, 2008, p. 44). What this means is that no matter what type of media and technology will be used for the digital story to be constructed, the writing of the text still keeps, more or less, the traditional form of paper-and-pencil. However, the fact that what students put on that piece of paper will be heard by audience beyond the classroom walls

affects their writing in many ways. Ohler (2008) says how many of the teachers who have used digital storytelling during their English language classes say how this tool helps “to sneak writing in under the radar” (p. 10). Further, he argues that digital stories are “events” shown on screens, but it’s the writing of the narrative that gives these stories life. In the process of writing their story, students apply understanding of language structures that are further improved with the help of the teacher’s continuous feedback. As such, stories are expected to be written in a clear manner.

Many other researchers and educators argue that digital storytelling facilitates the writing skills of the students. In her foreword for Miller’s book “Make Me a Story: Teaching Writing through Digital Storytelling,” Rief (2010) writes that we as teachers should never forget that the focus in our classroom is the acquisition of the linguistic skills and that technology is only a *tool* that helps enhance meaning and make it more engaging, but it certainly doesn’t deliver the meaning all by itself. Having that in mind, we should not allow the technology to be the message. The skill of writing is, however, a great deal strengthened when it is delivered through any type of digital medium. Miller (2010) says that when students are given the chance to work with digital stories, they are in fact working with writing and this teaching tool affects reluctant readers and writers in such ways that at the end of the day many of them do want to write.

One significant research about the effects of digital storytelling on struggling writers is that conducted by Sylvester & Greenidge (2009). They came across three types of students who experience difficulties composing a nice piece of writing because of different reasons. One of them, Kyle, is eager to start the writing task but soon loses interest and refuses to revise his work although the teacher assigns time of the lesson for that particular purpose. He, however, is good at drawing. Ray, on the other hand, has troubles start writing. The lack of ideas is not an issue here as his teacher asks the class to brainstorm ideas before students do their writing task. Those times when Ray does manage to compose a piece of writing is when he has given a deadline. The third student, Colleen, has vivid imagination and possesses creativity that she expresses during the pre-writing process, but when it comes to her final product, it often lacks details and shows her obvious inability to connect those ideas so she ends up with a story of

just a few sentences written in an illegible handwriting. Of course, they say other students struggle to succeed with their writing because of other reasons, too. Further, Sylvester & Greenidge (2009) have done a research with around 100 students who were struggling writers with same or similar behaviors as those of Kyle, Ray and Coleen and explored the potentials of digital storytelling on turning these students into competent writers. Some of the students taking part in the research who shared Kyle's struggles succeeded in finishing their stories because they knew the final draft of their writing (checked for spelling errors, punctuation, and grammar) would turn into a movie seen by their classmates and not only their teachers so being aware of their audience made these students write more clear texts involving more details. Other students like Kyle who struggled to find appropriate images matching their writing were provided with the freedom to create the images themselves. This enhanced their willingness to engage in finishing their projects. Students like Ray who were unwilling to start writing in the first place were also presented with digital storytelling. Being given a time limit, as well as limiting the websites available to choose information, images, and graphics from, helped reduce these students' disengagement and distractibility. Working with digital media promotes active learning and collaboration between students, which are two learning approaches that help students stay on track and be less distracted. When students like Colleen who fail to add details and have poor handwriting are presented with digital storytelling, they are given the chance to visualize their story once they create the storyboard. This helps them "catch" the omissions of details that are crucial for plot development. Once they become aware of the lack of details that make their story poor, they add some. The issue of illegible handwriting is resolved by replacing the written narrative with oral, consisting of students' timbre, pitch, and inflection.

This all suggests that digital storytelling as a tool for teaching English improves the skill of writing in many useful ways as it blends the traditional and the new literacies in a coherent manner. When dealing with digital stories, students are in the center of the learning processes and have control of all the steps that eventually lead to their final product. They choose a genre and topic of their own interest, which is at the same time closely related to the content

material of the course they attend. This way, they feel important and as though they have control on their own learning which leads to increased learning motivation.

2.11.2 Digital storytelling and reading

To know how to read does not simply mean to be able to identify and understand symbols and words. Instead, reading is an active and a cognitive process that leads to discovery of meaning. People read for pleasure or for particular purpose that helps them gather information for a specific goal. As a process that involves thinking, reading allows readers to build the new information on what they already know, which allows synthesis to occur.

Many teachers will agree that students who are forced to read express negativity regarding this skill and those who read voluntarily extend their reading competences further and become even better readers in the future. I believe the first step teachers should undertake is to try to install the love for reading in students. One way to achieve this is to let them read texts and stories of their own interest and present them with various genres from very early age. Most teachers put the emphasis on the various texts found within the schoolbooks and few extend the options of reading by reaching for other materials. Another useful tip for teachers would be to encourage students to share what they read with their classmates and make them socialize around reading.

Digital storytelling plays valuable role when it comes to extending language arts in a natural way. This, of course, includes the skill of reading. Before students approach to writing their script and find images and music for their digital story, they have to do a thorough reading in order to get information that would help them construct their story. When they approach the project of creating a digital story, they know it will reach many listeners, so that adds to their motivation of doing extensive research on what they want to present to their audience. Ohler (2008) discusses the importance of preparing our students for the world that awaits them outside the classroom. When they finish their formal education, we want to see them as people who have acquired skills and knowledge that fit the job market. This corresponds to the belief of Redmond (2012, as cited in Churchill, 2016) that digital storytelling as a tool that promotes

media literacy “extends knowledge and skill competencies from reading and writing print texts to include analysis of texts in all forms” (p. 18). This means that when media and reading are blended, students learn not only to read simple texts, but they learn to critically analyze what they read and build their general knowledge. Through the process of creating digital stories students also acquire the skill of “reading” images and deciding how they fit within the texts they are writing and working with.

Research conducted by Hagood and Skinner (2008) on developing literate identities with English language learners through digital storytelling proves what was said above to be true. They observed two students, a 7-year-old Mexican-American kindergartener, and a high school Chinese immigrant. They explored the intersection of cultural identities, foundational literacies, and new literacies practices through the digital stories they created. After the observations and the interviews conducted once the stories were finalized into a product ready to be seen and heard by the chosen audience of the students, Hagood and Skinner drew numerous conclusions. They discovered that incorporating digital storytelling from an early age offers “possibilities for coaching children in early childhood settings in important foundational literacies including story comprehension, decoding of print-based texts, reading fluency, oral and written vocabulary, and writing process” (p. 17). Further, this study implies that digital storytelling not only helps learners of the English language become better readers, writers, speakers, and listeners of the language, but also to use the language to make sense of their cultural identity.

2.11.3 Digital storytelling and oral proficiency

Lee and Van Patten (1995, as cited in Benati, 2020) state that the “communication act involves expressions, interpretations, and the negotiation of meaning in a given context” (p. 69). Teaching speaking improves students’ communicative competence and allows them to be able to express themselves clearly in different situations. Hymes (1972), who introduced one of the earliest concepts of communicative competence, believed that the ability to communicate properly has to be cultivated in the language classroom. This is something most teachers of English as a second language agree with and that is why the skill of speaking is given that much

attention during lesson time. The process of learning a language using digital media, as stated before, plays valuable role in creating competent speakers of the language. According to Ohler, (2008) as much as rewriting, as a form of self-reflection and self-correction, improves the writing skill, the renarration helps students become more confident in their speaking skills. When their story reaches the step of voice recording of what has been written students are encouraged to do it repeatedly until they are certain it sounds the way it should. When they hear their own voice, they decide on what sounds good and what not and that includes the sentence structure and the choice of vocabulary. This allows them to practice pronunciation, intonation, stress, rhythm, and pacing, and to upgrade their fluency and accuracy. Listening to how they sound make students aware of their speaking skills and each speech draft allows the opportunity for further improvement. What is most, it positively affects their public speaking skills and helps them develops autonomy.

One of the many researchers conducted on the relation between digital storytelling and reading was done by Razmi, Pourali & Nozad (2014). It explored the effects of digital storytelling on the oral proficiency on sixty Iranian students studying English as a second language. The students were divided in groups of two, a control group and a group given training on how to use media for the purpose of creating a digital story. The study lasted for a period of one semester through which each of the participants presented two stories. Their oral proficiency was graded according to the use of vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. The observation and the interviews showed significant difference between the narrative skills of the participants of both groups. Those students working with digital stories showed greater competence and confidence and less grammar and pronunciation mistakes. The results also showed that the Digital Story group not only showed considerable interest in the learning process but took greater responsibility of their own learning too. Further, Razmi et al. (2014) suggest that using digital storytelling as a means of learning English as a second language turn students into creative storytellers and engages reluctant learners into learning in an enjoyable and attractive manner.

2.11.4 Digital storytelling and listening

Zaytoun (1988, as cited in Abdolmanafi-Rokni and Qarajeh, 2014) states that high level of comprehension can be best achieved if students are provided with real-life situations which involve listening to native speakers using the language in a conversational, spontaneous, and communicative way, and providing them with stories about personal experiences, current events, and controversial issues. This way, teachers provide students with unique opportunities to be exposed to endless variety of structures, new words, and idiomatic expressions, which leads to meaningful cultural exchanges. When assigning the task of creating digital stories, teachers do exactly that. They provide students with books, websites, and materials of their own interest, or give them the opportunity to look for information from sources they choose themselves instead of sticking solely to what is in the schoolbooks. In his “Cookbook” Lambert (2010) writes:

In a speech, for example, we are listening for an applause line. In a lecture, we are listening for the major points, or an outline of information. But in a story, we are listening for the shape of an organic, rhythmic quality that allows us to drift into reverie. Here we have a complex interaction between following the story and allowing the associative memories the story conjures up to flow around us (p. 18).

Stories are likely to stimulate our imagination and our ability to construct knowledge as we are exposed to utterances of various grammar constructions and words. Norman (2011) argues that listening to their own voice helps students “catch” their mistakes better, which leads to improvement of their writing skills. Further, she says that through listening to their teachers’ and their peers’ stories, students are exposed to many forms of language output. In addition, as talk inside the classroom is an important instrumental tool that facilitates students’ learning, students listening to those talks can play a role just as significant. This is related to the theory of situated learning developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) discussed in a previous chapter that states how students’ listening skills along with the rest of the linguistic skills develop naturally when they are witnessing their teachers and their peers speak during lesson time.

2.12 Authentic Learning Experience

In her book “Authentic Learning Experience: A Real-World Approach to Project Based Learning,” Laur (2013) writes that one of the approaches teachers use in order to motivate and engage their students is simulating the real world while delivering lectures on different subjects. Although this attempt is more motivating for the students than teacher-centered lectures, she asks what would happen if teachers actually bring the real world into the classroom instead of simulating it. According to her, that leads to *Authentic Learning Experiences* that are student-centered. She further argues that the tasks, which are related to real life experiences, assigned by the teachers should be challenging but not to the extent that would lead students to feeling frustrated. Definitions of what authentic learning experience is revolve around the thought that it is a form of learning that includes solving real life problems based on real life experiences. Lombardi (2007) provides the following definition:

Authentic learning experience is a type of learning that focuses on real world, complex problems, and their solutions, using role-playing exercises, problem-based activities, case studies and participation in virtual communities of practice (p. 2).

Other researchers also believe that this type of learning gives students unique opportunity to work on real-life problems within the classroom and that way become aware that what they are taught at school is not something superficial, but instead, knowledge they can later apply in their life. Pearce (2016) says:

Authentic learning is learning designed to connect what students are taught in school to real-world issues, problems, and applications; learning experiences should mirror the complexities and ambiguities of real life (p. 1).

Traditional classrooms, as they are, present the world to the students as perfectly organized floats of events, which is far from the reality. Wornyo, Klu, & Motlhaka (2018) say that in our everyday life, we stumble upon different problems and obstacles that require high thinking

skills in order to be overcome. Authentic learning experience prepares students for such situations and requires from them to use their previous knowledge and experience in order to build a step-by-step plans and actions they would apply on the spot. Further, they add how authentic learning experience “gives students the opportunity to attain all the three goals of learning: acquisition of skill, understanding of concepts and the application of knowledge” (p. 57). Pearce (2016) on the other hand lists the elements every authentic learning experience should have: “real life relevance, an ill-defined problem, sustained investigation, multiple sources and perspectives, collaboration, reflection, an interdisciplinary perspective, integrated assessment, polished products, and multiple interpretations and outcomes” (p. 1-2). What is interesting about this type of learning is that it is unique for each student. Laur (2016) has come to the conclusion that implementing the same task carrying an authentic learning experience with different groups of students may likely lead to very much different results. This is like that because every individual student approaches the task assigned with his or her background knowledge and previous experiences. What is shared, however, is that no matter the individual learning styles and the experience they possess, all students approach the process of solving and finding solutions using high orders of critical thinking.

From what has been said above, it is safe to say that digital storytelling is a form of project-based learning that offers authentic learning experience. It involves usage of creative skills and critical thinking and places the student in the center of the learning process. When choosing what to write about, students choose topics of their own interest such as personal experiences or historic events that left mark in their life because of one reason or another. Creating the story is a challenge all by itself. It is not a simple task that can be completed in an hour or during a single lesson but consists of “layers of tasks that need to be completed in order to solve the problem” (Pearce, 2016, p.1). When looking for content to base their writing upon, students stumble upon plenty of information. Using critical thinking and their analytical skills they manage to distinguish between what is useful and what is not for their project. These projects ask for collaboration with both their teacher and their peers, as well as continuous feedback that leads to improvement of their literacy and linguistic skills. What is most, working with digital stories allows learners to reflect on their own learning and become aware of their

mistakes. This, of course, leads to even deeper learning and improvement. Digital stories cover what Pearce (2016) calls an interdisciplinary perspective. That means students are not limited to a single set of knowledge when creating their stories, but “make use of knowledge and skills from across the subjects” (p. 2). Additionally, students are not assessed based on their final product but all the steps that lead to it, meaning the assessment is formative. Finally, these tasks of creating digital stories result in a final product students learn from. What is important to highlight is that digital storytelling is a modern tool and a form of authentic learning experience but has in its core traditional learning goals and the course content.

2.13 The role of the teacher in the world of digitalized education

With the emergence of new technologies used within the classroom, teachers may feel like their role in the teaching processes is somehow minimized. Students, who are digital natives, feel comfortable using technology and in many cases are even better at that than their teachers who are very likely to be digital immigrants. As discussed above, the technology is just a tool that facilitates the learning and makes it more engaging and fun, whereas what is learned is still in the center of the learning and the teaching processes. That means that the role of the teacher not only is not diminished, but on the contrary, it's increased and more valuable than ever.

Back in the day, teachers were seen as central figures whose job was to distribute knowledge through direct instruction while students' job was to take notes and memorize a bunch of information by heart for the goal of getting higher grades. With the advance of technology, the role of the teacher is evolving as well. They are changing their teaching methods so that they suit the students' needs, but this time, they prepare them for the world that awaits them outside, not only for the world that “happens” inside the classroom, because classrooms are no longer limited to a physical space. It is on the teacher to create a dynamic learning environment that will be at the same time flexible and will provoke students' interest in the curriculum. They need to teach students how to learn, and that learning should not be limited to the classroom only, but to their homes and the outside world. In the past, the relationship between teachers and students consisted of one-way communication, but today, they complement each other

and learn from one another. The web offers endless sources of information and if students are left to learn from there on their own without any guidance from the teacher, they are likely to get lost among the pile of data handed to them on a plate with a single search. Speaking to EdTechReview, the Chief Executing Officer of TheHubEdu Tiffany Reiss (2014) says:

We are no longer the primary sources of information for our students (and maybe we never were) but our jobs have now become about contextualizing that information and guiding students in the practical application and use of the information.

Of course, teachers should work on their professional development as well and keep up with the newest teaching tools and platforms all with the purpose of better assisting the students with their digital learning. The skills they try to implement at the students, such as critical thinking and critical analysis should be highly developed in them as instructors and facilitators of the learning and the teaching processes. It is safe to say that these processes transitioned from teacher-directed to student-centered throughout the years. What that means is that the students take greater responsibility for their own learning and it is up to their teachers to create perfect conditions and arrangements for the learning to take place, to reflect on the processes together with the students, and offer tutoring and guidance instead of concentrating solely on the lectures. Sharma (2017) writes, “Teachers in this ever changing digital era need a good balance of theoretical and practical knowledge to provide a solid foundation for their teaching” (p. 2). She says that the greatest change in the last years is seen in the students themselves. Thus, nowadays, they are “more knowledgeable, more interrogative, more competitive, and more demanding from their teachers” (p. 2). The thing is that average teachers who are not interested in taking advantage of technology will fail in recognizing these new characteristic in their students and that way they won’t let them thrive within the classroom they run.

One of the greatest advantages of using technology for teaching and learning purposes is that it fits each student, more or less, in the same manner. We are aware that each student has different needs and practices different learning styles, so choosing what suits them best in terms of apps, tools, and media, they become more motivated, and with that, better learners

who show better results in the subject. Sharma (2017) further states that in this new era, which is undoubtedly dubbed digital, teachers should possess some special skills in addition to their teaching skills. Some of those skills are as follows:

- Networking skills - These skills refer to the teacher's ability to facilitate cooperative learning and create a network between the students within which they will help each other and learn from one another.
- Communication skills - Here, Sharma doesn't speak of the traditional skills of being able to read, write, speak, and listen in order for communication to take place, but puts an emphasis on the communication done using media. So, teachers should know how to communicate with their students using videos, by creating online digital libraries, by conducting webinars, and many more.
- Thinking skills - "Education is increasingly becoming dependent on the creation of new knowledge, new services, and new processes to increase competitiveness and generate knowledge" (p. 3). That is why it is of great importance for teachers to be able to apply creative, as well as critical thinking, problem solving, strategizing, and originality when creating the lesson plans.
- Nurturing skills - Here, nurturing skills refer to teacher's approach to sharing and transfer of knowledge. Namely, Sharma (2017) believes that teachers should only transfer the knowledge when they are completely certain students are ready to accept it and to connect it with the outside world.
- Management of knowledge - Today, as we discussed above, the sources that lead to information are limitless. This opportunity for students to access knowledge easily only makes sense if the teacher knows how to manage that knowledge and correlate it in the direction of students' learning needs and the content of the curriculum.

When it comes to digital storytelling in particular, students depend heavily on their teacher during the process of writing, scaffolding, mapping, choice of media, and taping their narration.

Kost (2003, as cited in Norman 2011) argues that when the role of the teacher is that of facilitator and guide, or better said a supportive teacher, students' level of performance and learning depends a great deal of the precise instruction delivered throughout the activity of creating the digital stories. Another aspect of the supportive teacher that facilitates the student-centered learning is modeling of the activity and the task assigned. Ohler (2008) believes that teachers can create opportunities for digital stories to take place, but first and most important of all, they should be willing to do so and have in mind that this activity takes time to be accomplished.

2.14 The importance of continuous feedback

No matter the activity students are working on, the feedback they receive by their teacher, or by their peers, is what keeps them going and motivates them to improve and be better with each try. When giving feedback, teachers should not only concentrate on what students are doing wrong; instead, they should always praise them for what they do right. When working with digital stories, students receive plenty of feedback during each stage of the process of creation. This feedback is constructive, timely, and meaningful. It starts with the students' writing task, and continues up until they get to the final product. Green (2013) believes that the continuous feedback is crucial in creating a digital story as students collect suggestions and advice for improvement through class discussions and instructional conversations. Here, the role of feedback is even of greater importance for the students and they embrace it with arms wide open because they know it will positively affect the "look" of their story that is later seen by wider audience.

2.15 Assessing students ' progress

Teachers and researchers argue of the importance of teaching and learning using technology and media both inside and out of the classroom, so it is clear that the assessment of such learning and teaching gradually differs from what we know as traditional grading. Digital storytelling, as a project based learning activity that places the student in the center of the learning processes, requires certain methods of assessment that will not only assess the final

product of the students but their activities throughout the whole process of creation. Sadik (2008) believes that when dealing with digital stories, besides the quality of the story itself, teachers should also assess students' level of engagement in the completion of this authentic learning task. Having in mind that digital storytelling is a form of authentic learning experience, the instruments assessing students working with it have to be authentic as well. One of the assessment instruments Sadik mentions is the scoring rubric. Here, she does not speak of a simple scoring rubric but one adjusted based on students and teachers' expectations of students' engagement, learning, and progress. Or, in her own words, "scoring checklists with extensive definition and description of the criteria of quality that characterize each level of accomplishment" (p. 495). Of course, observation plays vital role in assessment of students here as teachers get to see how students work, how engaged they are and how much knowledge they acquire. In her own research about students' engagement and progress when working with digital storytelling, Sadik used a scoring rubric and observation herself and that helped her better understand and analyze the results of the students regarding various components of their learning.

2.16 Challenges in using digital storytelling in the classroom

As every educational tool, incorporating digital storytelling in the classroom as a mean of learning has its challenges. One of the obstacles that stands on the way of using this activity is the lack of technology equipment in the schools. Most state schools, not only in my country but also practically worldwide, have computer labs where students have their IT classes. Getting access to these particular classrooms where all of the computers are is pretty hard because of the great number of teachers and classes. In the last school where I worked, the state Medical High School, besides the computer lab, there are two projectors that students use for presenting projects or watching movies and that is all. Another challenge would be teachers' lack of technology background, so for implementing digital stories they have to attend courses and seminars on how to manipulate the newest platforms and software which would be of use during the process of creating the stories. Third challenge would be the time it takes for the activity to be implemented from start to finish. The curriculum created by the

government in my country required for three lessons of English language per week to be implemented in the secondary education. As of last year, the number was reduced to two lessons per week. The duration of the lessons is 45 minutes, and if we take into consideration the time it takes for students to go through the processes of creating digital stories, we will see that implementing it is hard in terms of managing the time.

3 Methodology

The aim of this research project was to examine the effects of digital storytelling on students' language proficiency (with a special emphasis of the skill of writing), motivation, and self-reflection within an EFL classroom. Further, it aims at helping educators perceive the pedagogical potentials this new teaching tool holds.

As a teacher of the English language with eight years of experience in the field, I have used digital storytelling in the past with some of my students and realized it is valuable as it is not only fun and engaging, but affects the acquisition and the improvement of the linguistic skills, as well as many literacie skills too. This time, however, I had the role of an outsider researcher and I believe that helped me be more objective in both gathering and analyzing data and results. In order to add value to the reliability and validity of the research, I have used both qualitative and quantitative approach in forms of questionnaires with closed questions, multiple-choice questions, interviews in a form of open-ended questions, and discussions. Both these approaches were expected to provide me with an in-depth understanding of individual experiences, thoughts, and opinions that would allow me to collect data as accurately as possible. Data gathered from the interviews and the discussions will be analyzed qualitatively and that of the questionnaires will be processed quantitatively, in percentages, tables, and graphs with comments.

3.1 Research questions

Throughout the study, I was guided by four research questions:

1. What are the potentials of achieving language proficiency when digital storytelling is applied in an EFL classroom?
2. Is there a noticeable connection between motivation and language proficiency when working with digital storytelling?
3. To what extent, if any, does the students' self-reflection enhances language proficiency throughout the process of creating digital stories?

4. Is writing applied in a nonconventional manner through the process of creating digital stories?

3.2 Participants of the study

Participants chosen to take part in this research are 30 students attending Private “Yahya Kemal” College in Tetovo, grades 2nd, 3rd and 4th. Why I chose this particular educational institution is because the classes there constitute of students whose mother tongue is not shared, thus we have students speaking Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish as their first language and are learning English as a second language in a shared classroom. What is important to note is that all the subjects are delivered in English, and that includes both social and science lessons. Another reason why I believed this educational institution would be most suitable is that the number of lessons of the subject English language is eight per week, as opposed to the number of English language lessons delivered in the public schools, which is two per week. Additionally, these students attend out-of-the-curriculum lessons related to English language, such as drama, creative writing, SAT preparation lessons, TOEFL preparation lessons, as well as public speaking. The school is well equipped with computers, smart boards, projectors, and much of the latest technology. Teachers attend various seminars as part of their job requirements where they are presented with numerous latest teaching strategies, most of which include use of technology. In fact, it was during one of those seminars I took part at while I was teaching in this school that I got familiar with digital storytelling as an innovative teaching and learning approach.

During the collection of information, students were asked to recall their involvement in digital storytelling activities as it is something they are very familiar with. They shared some of their latest digital stories with one another through the teaching platform Zoom and discussed the processes they went through while writing, scaffolding, and recording voice-over narrations.

Ten English language teachers who have used digital storytelling as a teaching tool took part in the study. They were handed multiple-choice questionnaires and were asked to share their

personal experiences. Once they filled-in the questionnaires all the teachers took part in an online discussion.

3.3 Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews

The questionnaires for both the teachers and students were delivered through Google Forms. Students' questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions, questions requesting clarification of some of their choices, and eight multiple-choice questions. The questions were constructed in a way that allowed me to gather data about students' feelings regarding the use of technology during their English lessons, effects of teacher's continuous feedback on their writing, the level of motivation that arises from using digital storytelling, if any, and the extent of self-reflection during the process of using this learning tool. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of fourteen multiple-choice questions, as well as an open-ended question asking to share their thoughts about using digital storytelling in their classroom. This final question triggered multiple other sub-questions teachers spoke about during the online discussion.

4. Findings and discussions

The purpose of my research was to evaluate the effects of digital storytelling on education, more precisely on the language proficiency, motivation, and self-reflection of students studying English as a foreign language. Further, it served the goal of better understanding teachers' thoughts and experiences about using digital storytelling in their classroom. Therefore, this research is not of comparative nature. Consequently, the discussions emerging from the findings will deal with students' learning outcomes and teachers' perceptions of using digital storytelling as learning and teaching tool.

4.1 Teachers' perceptions about using digital stories during English language classes

As stated above, 10 English teachers who have used digital storytelling in their classroom were asked to take part in this research. First, they were given a questionnaire with 14 multiple-choice questions and an open-ended question asking to share their experiences regarding digital storytelling. Once the answers were gathered and analyzed, the teachers took part in an online discussion using the teaching and learning platform Zoom. This particular platform is what these teachers use to conduct their online lessons during the coronavirus pandemic so they are all very comfortable working with it.

Below, I will present the results emerging from the questionnaires.

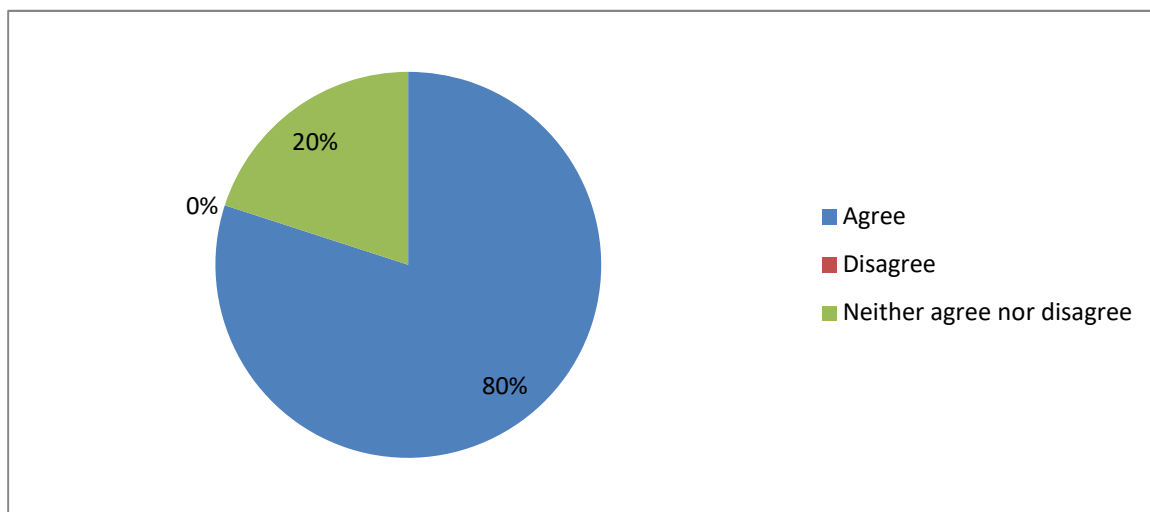


Figure 1. Digital stories captivate students' interest and attention

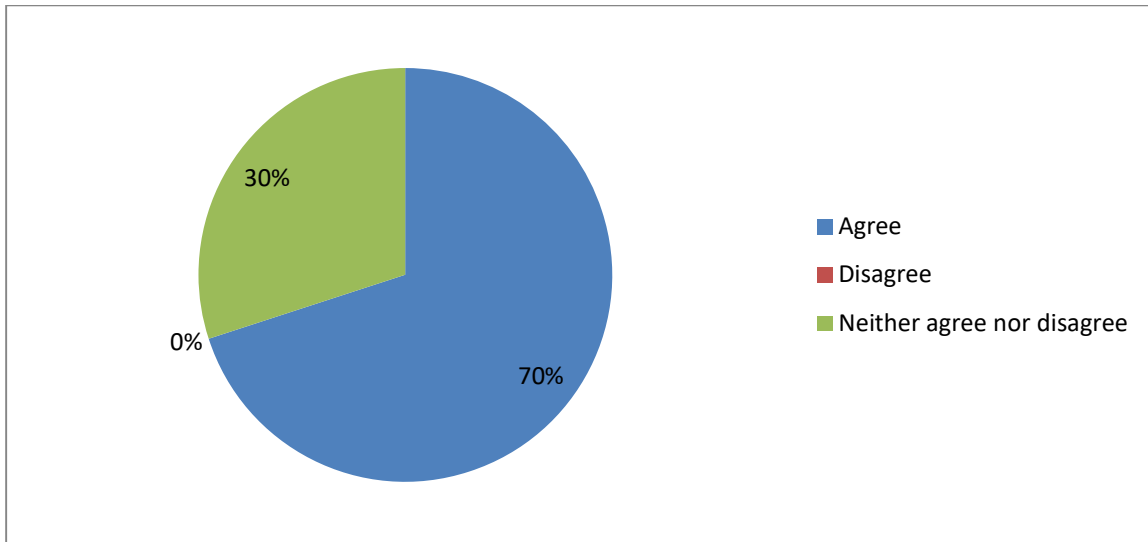


Figure 2. Digital stories increase students' motivation for learning

Keeping students motivated is of crucial importance if we as teachers want to see them succeed, both in and out of the classroom. Based on the numerous researches done regarding motivation as a vital component of the learning processes, it is of great importance for educators to find ways to keep students' motivation and attention high. This can only be achieved if students are challenged every step of the way. Digital storytelling is a teaching tool that helps keep students' interest on a level that allows them to become curious about the content material. The questionnaire shows that 80% of the respondents believe digital storytelling helps keep students' attention and interest high, and 70% agree it goes the same for motivation. The rest of the respondents, 20% and 30% respectively, neither agree nor disagree with the statements presented in the questions.

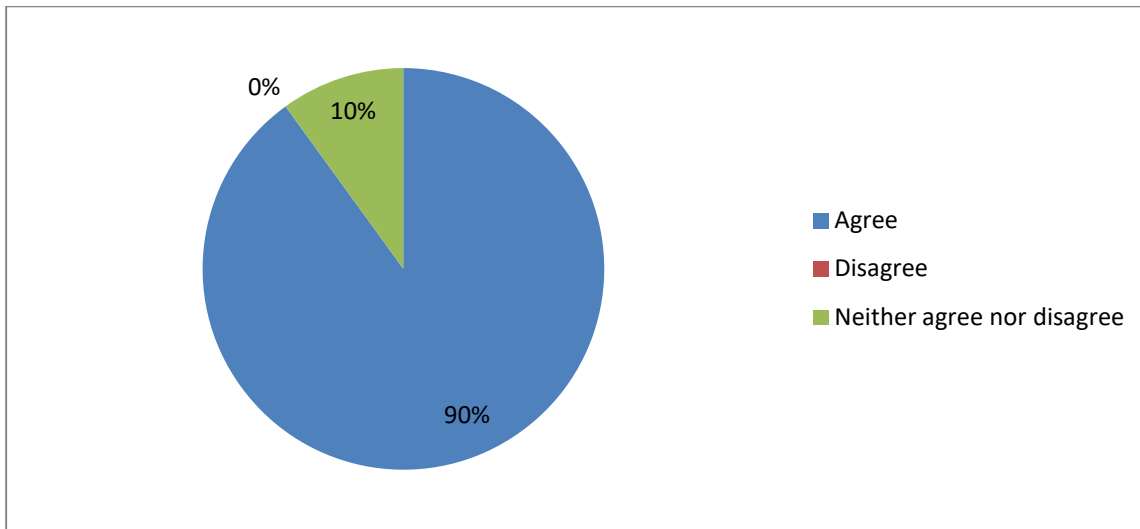


Figure 3. Digital stories help improve students' overall linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing)

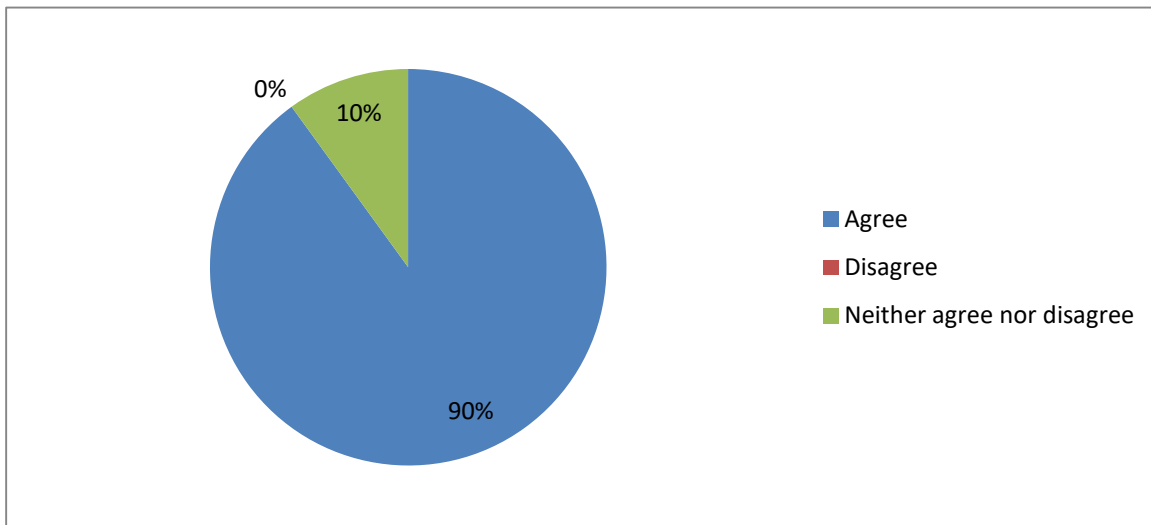


Figure 4. Digital stories help improve students' literacy skills (creativity, collaboration, media literacy, visual literacy, etc.)

To be literate doesn't only mean to be able to read and write but to possess many of the 21st century skills and multiliteracies discussed in the previous chapters. Educators from all over the world are becoming aware of the importance of preparing their students for the real world that awaits them outside of the classroom, so finding ways of developing these various literacies and skills is crucial for students' future professional development. Researchers proved digital storytelling to be an effective tool that helps teachers achieve these goals, which is confirmed here once again. Figures 3 and 4 show that 90% of the respondents said digital storytelling

helped their students improve their linguistic skills, and the same percent agrees that this tool led to acquisition and the development of literacy skills at the students in their classroom. The rest of the respondents neither agree nor disagree.

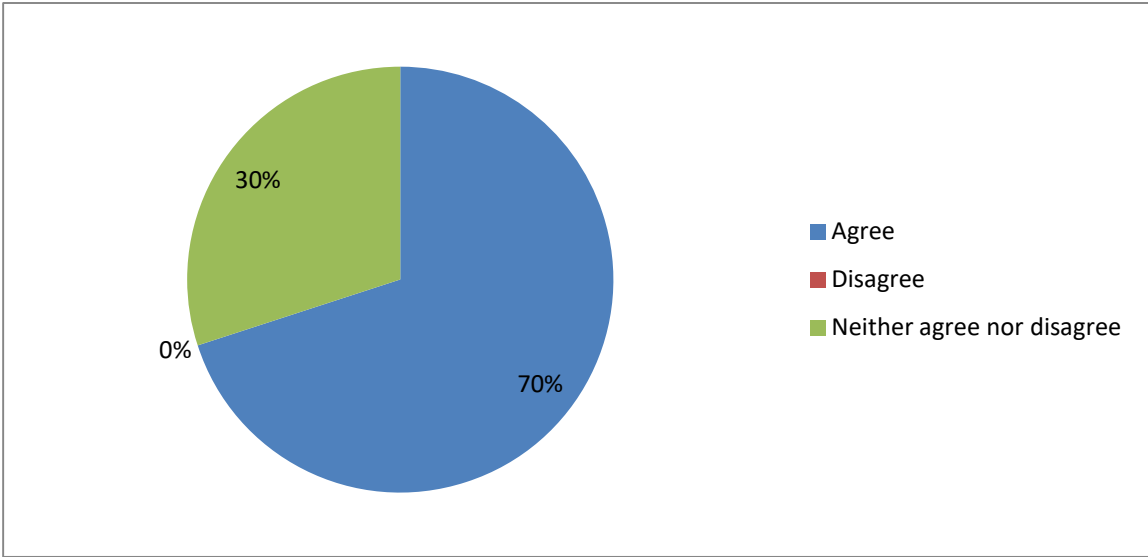


Figure 5. Digital stories help teachers convey abstract concepts (honesty, love, appreciation, compassion, etc.)

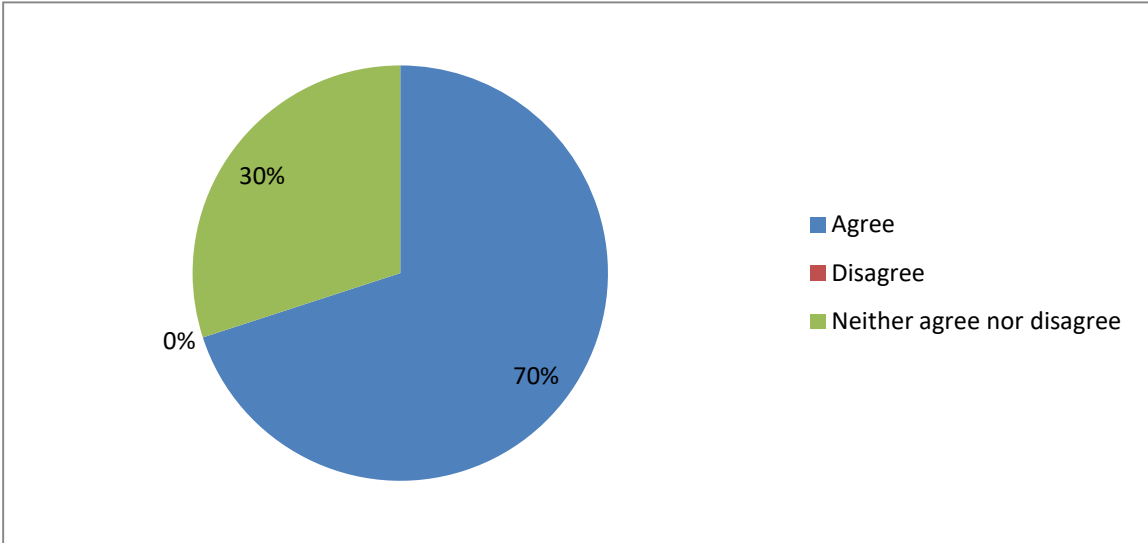


Figure 6. Digital stories help elicit numerous teaching points

Teaching abstract and many times confusing concepts and ideas can be challenging for many teachers. Digital stories are of great value when it comes to helping students better understand these elements of the content material because of the images and the music used. 70% of the respondents say digital storytelling is a useful tool when it comes to conveying abstract

concepts and eliciting numerous teaching points. 30% of the teachers answered they neither agree nor disagree that digital storytelling helped them teach their students abstract ideas or elicit certain teaching points during their lessons.

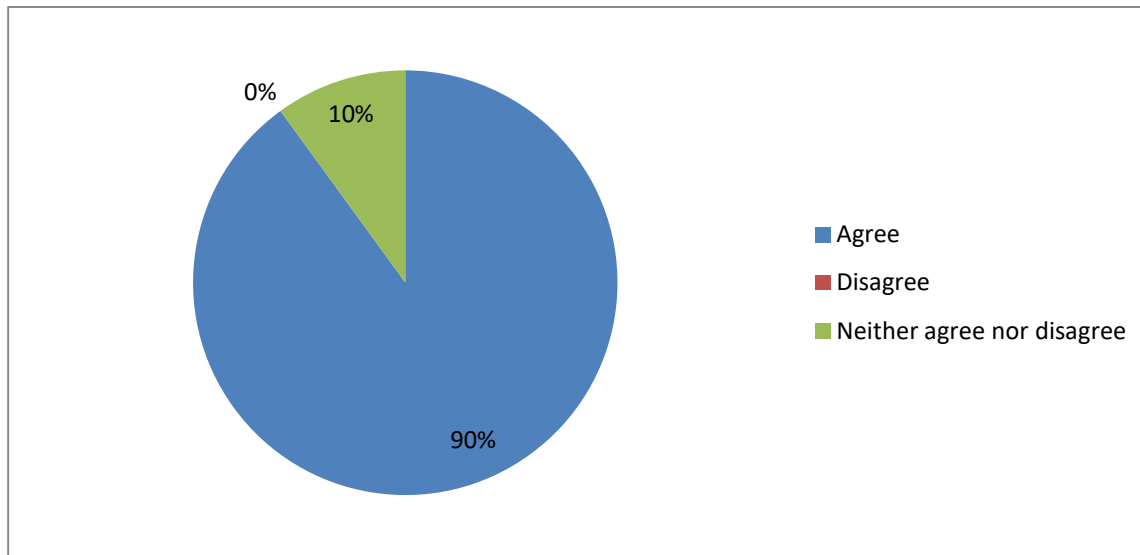


Figure 7. Digital stories allow applying writing in engaging and unconventional manner

Most English teachers will tell you how writing is one of the skills that is hardest to master. Somehow, students are reluctant to practice this particular skill. When they are writing essays, let's say, students get marks based on the sentence structure, grammar, use of words, coherence and cohesion of the text they created. Their errors are usually corrected with a red pen and teachers can only be optimists that students go through the remarks and hopefully learn something from them. However, the continuous feedback on students' writing during the project of creating digital stories plays vital role and is of greater importance than that given in situations such as the one mentioned above. When writing a story students know will be later heard by many people, including their teacher, their schoolmates, and many more in case they opt to share it online, they pay more attention and take all of the teacher's remarks into consideration, thus apply the changes in each following draft until they reach error free text. 90% of the teachers who took part in this research say digital stories helped them apply writing in an engaging and an unconventional manner with their students. 10%, or one of the respondents said they neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

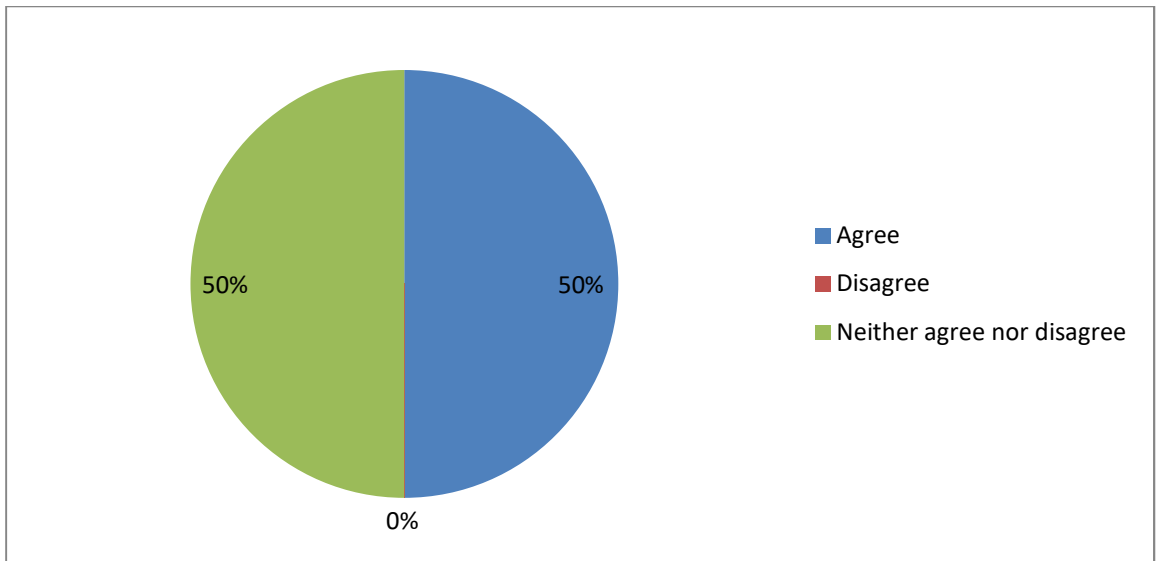


Figure 8. Digital stories instill the love of language in students and motivate them to read

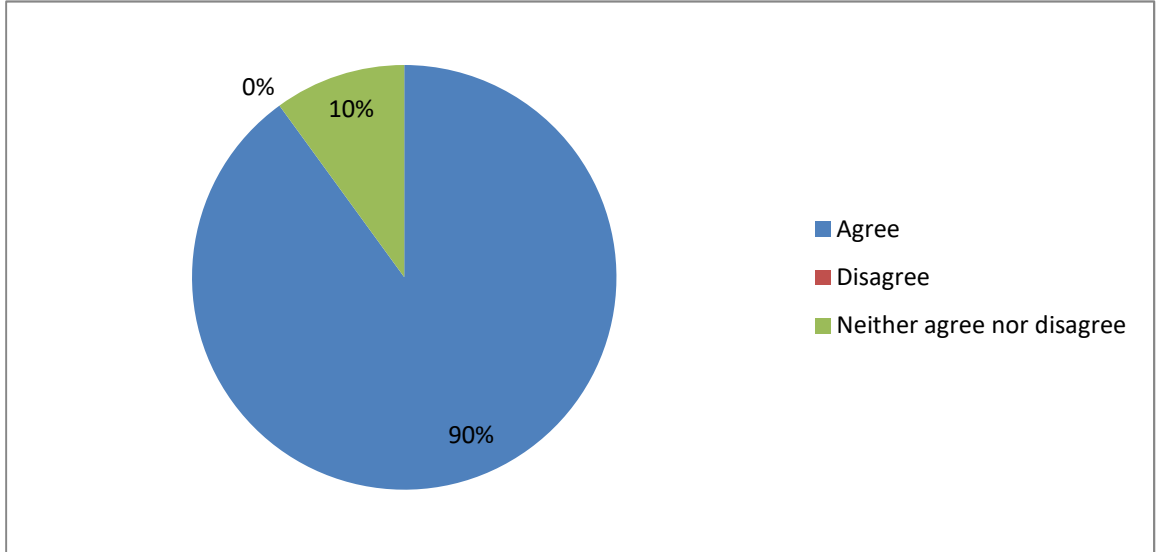


Figure 9. Digital storytelling encourages students to see there is logical sequence in stories, which is knowledge they will later use in creating their own stories

Chapter two from the research, the review of the literature, suggested that digital storytelling is a tool that positively affects the acquisition as well as the improvement of the four linguistic skills, including reading. My research, however, suggests that only 50% of the teachers questioned believe digital storytelling made their students better readers or made them love reading more than before. The rest of the respondents did not make direct connection between the love for reading and the usage of digital storytelling as a new teaching and learning tool. On

the other hand, 90% of the teachers who responded the questionnaire believe this tool helped their students see logical sequencing of stories that they later applied in their own story. The rest, 10%, neither agree nor disagree there is connection between digital stories and students' awareness of logical sequencing.

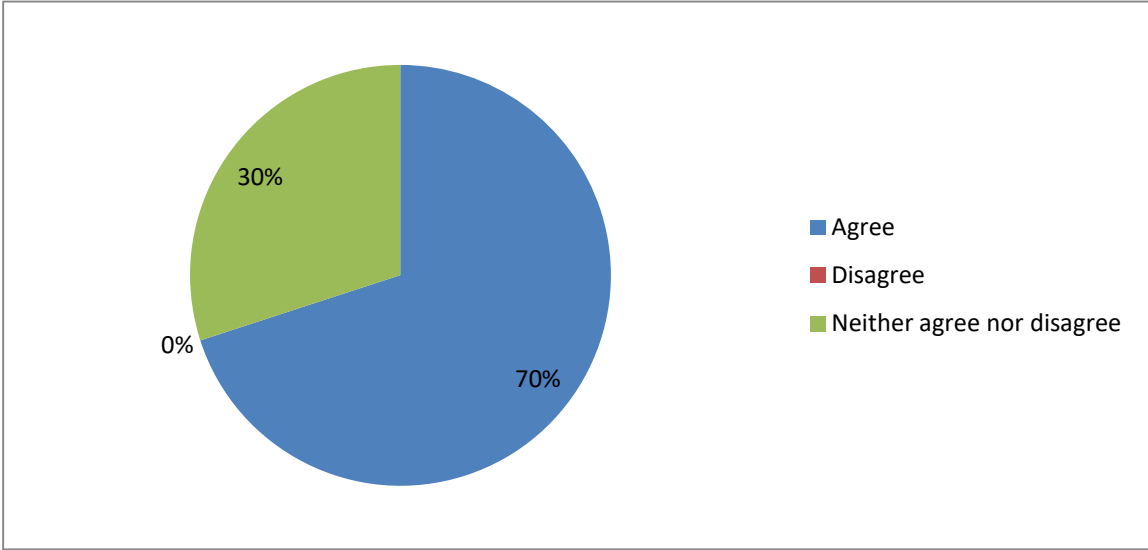


Figure 10. Digital storytelling promotes critical and higher order thinking (analysis and evaluation)

70% of the respondents say they agree digital storytelling promotes critical and higher order thinking skills at their students. 30% said they neither agree nor disagree this tool promoted these skills.

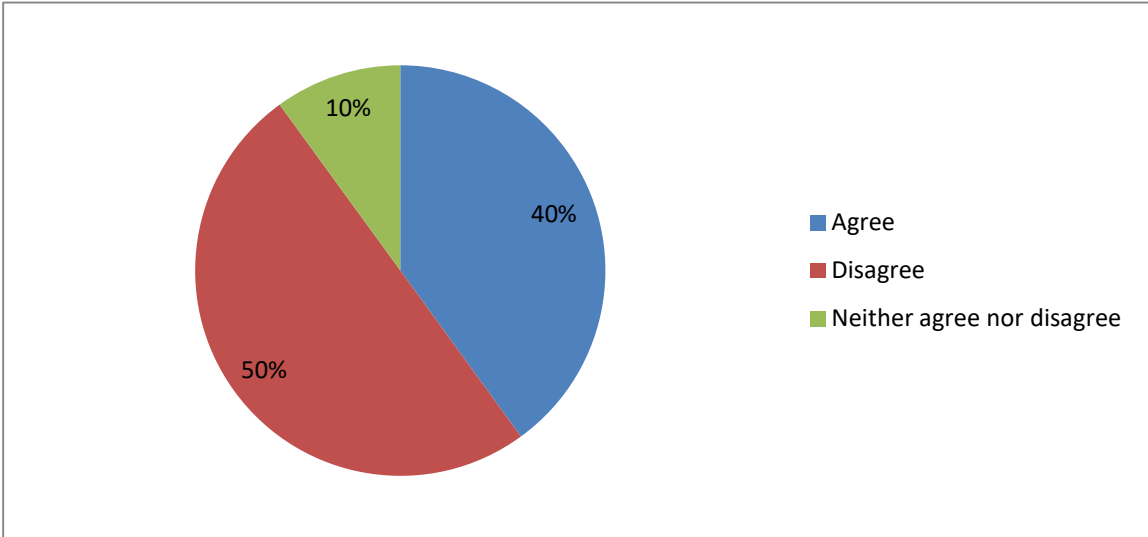


Figure 11. Digital storytelling is time consuming

One of the challenges of using digital storytelling in an EFL classroom is the time it takes for the projects to be completed from start to finish. This would be even harder to manage in a public school where the number of English lessons is two per week. The teachers from “Yahya Kemal” can manage the timing better because they have eight English lessons per week with their students. Still, 40% of them believe digital storytelling is time consuming, whereas 50% disagree with this statement. 10% neither agree nor disagree.

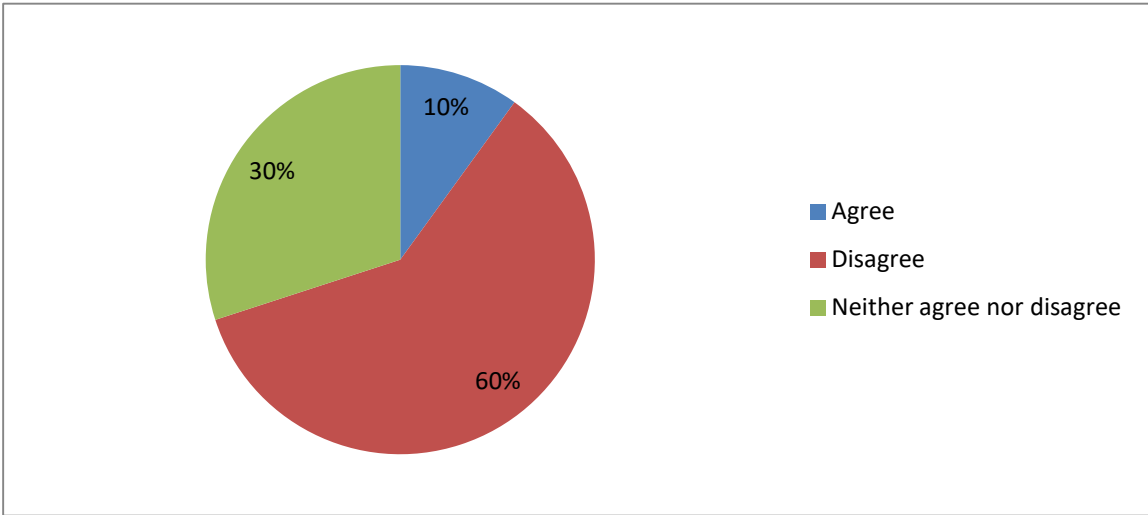


Figure 12. Teaching English skills through digital storytelling is hard

60% of the respondents disagree with the statement that teaching English skills through digital storytelling is hard, whereas 10% agree with it. 30% chose neither agree nor disagree.

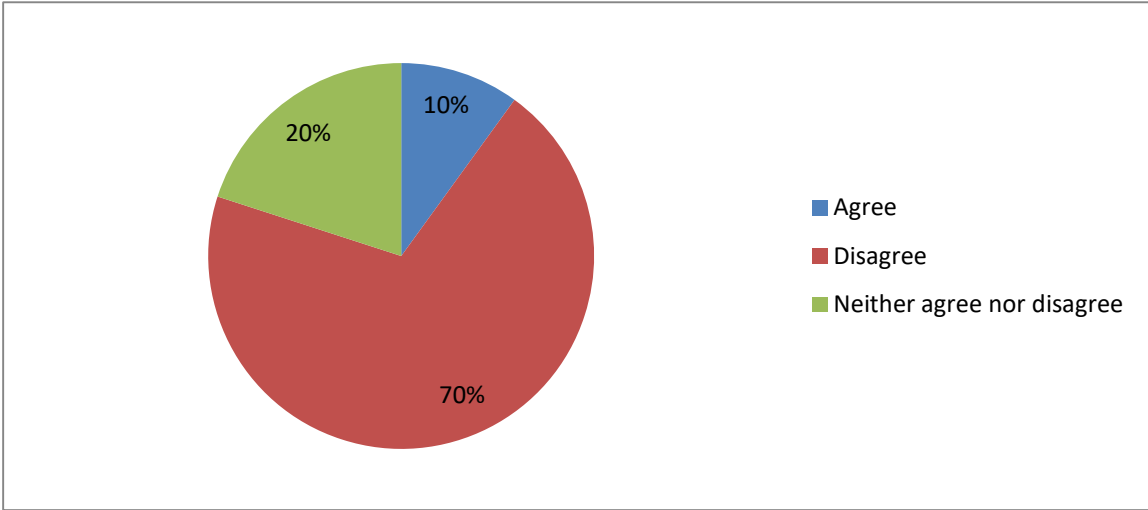


Figure 13. Students are reluctant to listening to and sharing stories during lesson time

Most teachers agree that digital storytelling not only serves the purpose of learning but it allows students to be engaged and have fun while working with it. The final product is the complete story presented in a form of a movie with voice-over narration. Later, in the section of analysis of the discussions I will speak of students' reluctance of listening to their own voice in a recorded form. However, when it comes to students' reluctance of listening to other students' or their teacher's stories and sharing theirs with the rest of the class and beyond, 70% of teachers disagree there is any form of reluctance, 10% believe their students do feel it, and 20% neither agree nor disagree.

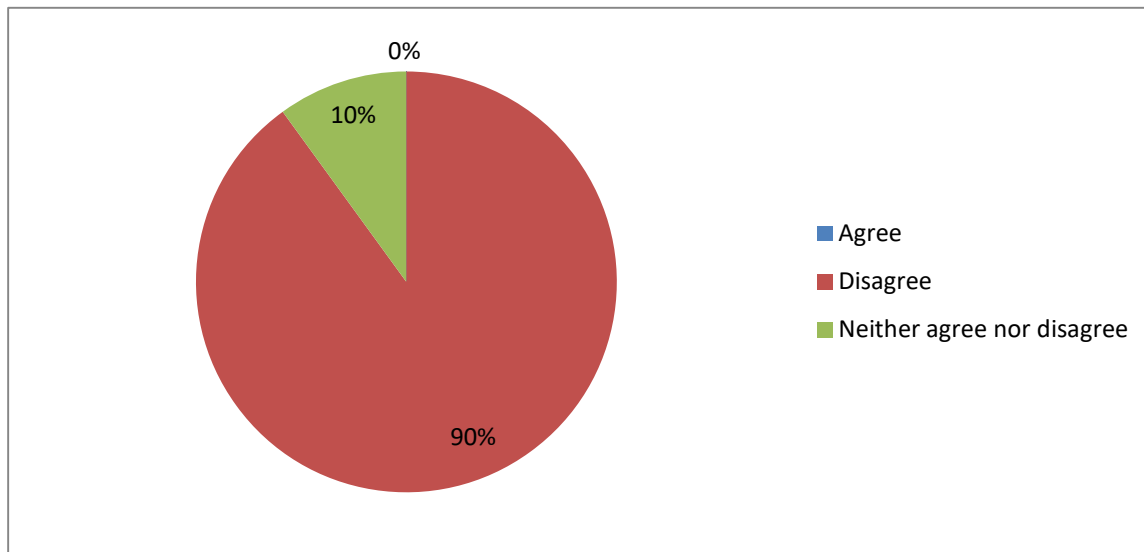


Figure 14. Listening to and/or working with digital stories doesn't improve students' English skills a great deal

Similar to questions 3 and 4, teachers were asked to determine the extent of improvement of their students' skills when it comes to listening to and/or working with digital stories. 90% disagree with the statement that this tool doesn't improve the overall skills a great deal and 10% feel neutral.

The last question was open-ended and asked from the teachers to add comments. The discussion that took place via Zoom was related to their answers and led to sub questions and certain clarifications. One of them said that she used digital storytelling a few times and believes it attracts her students' attention. Those lessons were fun, pleasant, and fulfilling, and students loved them. She added how she feels that through this tool students do not really learn the language but acquire it the way little children do. She also believes the language

structures acquired through digital storytelling do not fade away. Another teacher added how what he loves about digital stories is that his students “don't get grumpy when asked to write the story as they know it will turn into something fun at the end!”

One thing I believe we should have in mind when assigning digital stories, and was not mentioned or covered with the questionnaire, is students' reluctance to hearing their own voice being recorded. Many teachers said a great number of their students hated how they sound and for that reason they either didn't want to take part in the projects or failed to get to the final product, which is the voice-over narration.

In general, they agree this tool is useful as it helps students acquire the language using media and technology in a natural way. The feedback students get showed significant improvements of their writing and reading skills and kept them motivated way more compared to more traditional classes.

4.1 Students' perceptions about using digital stories during English language classes

Students taking part in my research are attending the Private “Yahya Kemal” College and have eight English language lessons per week, which provides them with enough time to be engaged in activities such as creating digital stories which take time to be completed. They have all created a digital story at some point, as it is a tool their teachers use very often. Some worked on their stories individually and others worked in groups. Regardless, they are all very familiar with the steps and the processes of creation from start to finish. This time, some were asked to create stories, and others filled in the questionnaires based on their experiences with using this learning tool.

Students were given a questionnaire consisting of two open-ended questions, eight multiple-choice questions, and one question asking for clarification of their answers. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms during their online English language lessons via the teaching platform Zoom. It was there where the new and some older digital stories were shared. Because of the pandemic currently affecting the whole world, the actual classrooms are now replaced with online classrooms, and it is just another proof that the digital world is an

inseparable part of our lives whether we like that or not. Some of the questions, for both the teachers and the students were adapted from Connie (2017).

The first question asked students to share their thoughts on using technology during their English language classes. The answers are presented in the table below.

It's practical and until now it has had a great impact on the way of understanding things by ways that we use everyday, which is technology.
I enjoy the lessons involving technology
It is very necessary and useful.
It helps up learn more that language and to communicate easily with others because we listen and we understand something.
I believe it helps with the learning process greatly, is incredibly useful and even necessary considering how often it's used daily. It is also very engaging and interesting.
I love it
I think that using technology during English is good for all the students in the class to learn
I think that using technology and media during English lessons would be helpful to the students.
I think using technology makes the lessons more fun
I think it is more helpful and less boring.
To me, the usage of technology and different media formats during English lessons is exceptionally important as it makes sure that the students engage way better by teaching them using devices that are very familiar to them. They feel related to and understood much better and besides, the possibilities that the internet offers to teaching are endless.
It can help us learn.
As far as I am concerned, technology and media are really helping us during the lessons. The explanation of the teacher is always best but with the help of smart boards, we can listen to videos and search for information on the topics we are studying about. Additionally, we hear other people's opinions and learn more.
I enjoy it quite a lot as it helps me visualize and understand the material more clearly.
I think it makes us understand the lesson better by practicing and solving the questions.
I believe that technology and media have immense potential when it comes to improving the quality of lessons, if done correctly
I like it.
It helps us get rid of boredom and makes the lesson more interesting.
For me I think it's ok to use technology during English lesson but being at school it's way better because you are more focused on lesson and what teacher is explaining about.
I think it is a huge advantage
I think that this is a great idea on using technology and media, because students need to know more about what they are studying.
I think it gives a lot of benefits, for example like watching movies, seeing things that we learn etc.
I think it helps me learn the language better because all the devices use instruction in English. Plus the internet is full with fun stuff
They should be medium, like playing kahoot, once in a while is a good idea to make ur mind play tricks and have fun at the same time
I believe that the best way to learn a language is through multimedia and experience. I've personally improved much more in the language subjects where the lecturers actively used digital games, played movies or music, prepared presentations or read stories as opposed to the traditional and somewhat

passive lecturers who only rely on textbooks and piles of impractical homework. In my opinion technology and media are essential for language studies and I'd like to see more teachers who rely on them.
It does clearly help a lot , because human species as a whole are visual creatures so implying that during lessons would increase productivity and understanding
It would be quite interesting, while at the same time it would open a whole lot of other opportunities and new ways for learning English

Table 1. Student's thoughts on using technology during English Lesson classes

From what we can see from *Table 1*, almost all of the students feel positive about their teachers using media and technology. They believe it helps them learn better, and many even say that incorporating technology is not only useful but necessary. One student said humans are visual creatures so seeing the things they learn increases understanding and creativity. Another student said how they improved a great deal only because their teacher used media during lesson time and added that the traditional lessons are passive and not much can be learned during them. They wish more teachers rely on technology in the future. A respondent said how the instructions of most of the programs and software are in English so it helps them realize that English is essential and that increases their motivation for learning it. In general, comments are that technology and media are beneficial, engaging, fun, and enjoyable and offer limitless learning possibilities. One student out of 30 that took part in the study said how they learn best from their teacher's direct instructions when they are not using any technology.

The second question asked students what form of technology their English teachers used so far. The answers included YouTube videos, Power Point Presentations, Digital Stories, online quizzes, E-books, Movies, Schoology (very useful tool for uploading books and short movies, assigning tests and quizzes), Kahoot, and Flipped Classroom. All of the students said how most of their English Lessons are conducted using a smart board as there is one in each classroom. Therefore, these students are used to using technology at school on a daily basis.

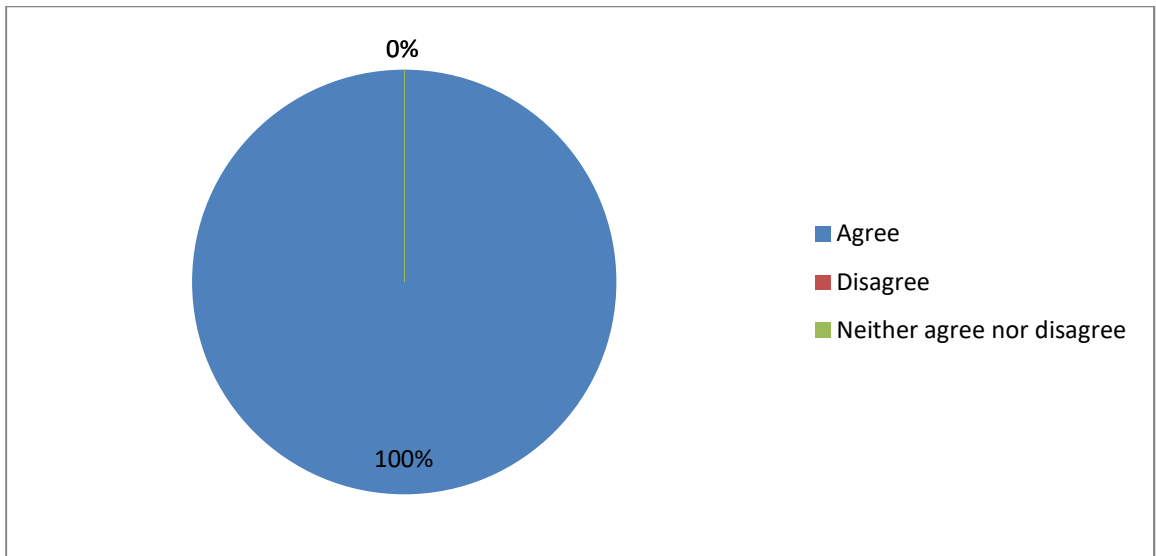


Figure 15. I enjoy listening to stories during my English lessons

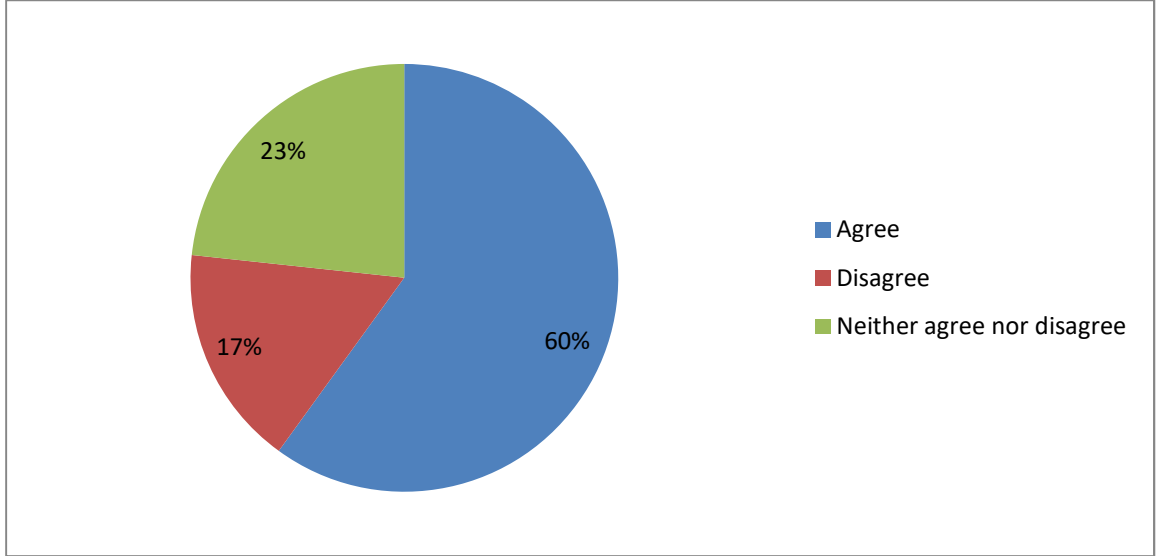


Figure 16. I enjoy acting out stories during my English lessons

The figures above show that 100% of the respondents enjoy listening to stories during their English language lessons, whereas only 60% of them enjoy acting those stories out. 23.3 % do not like acting out stories and 16.7 % are not sure whether they like it or not.

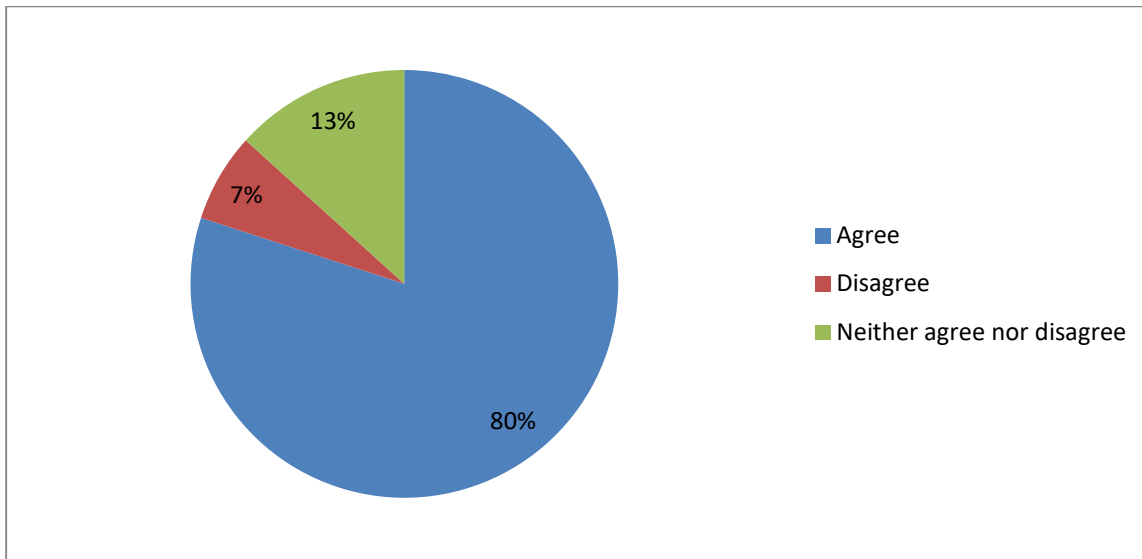


Figure 17. I want my teacher to use digital stories to teach me English

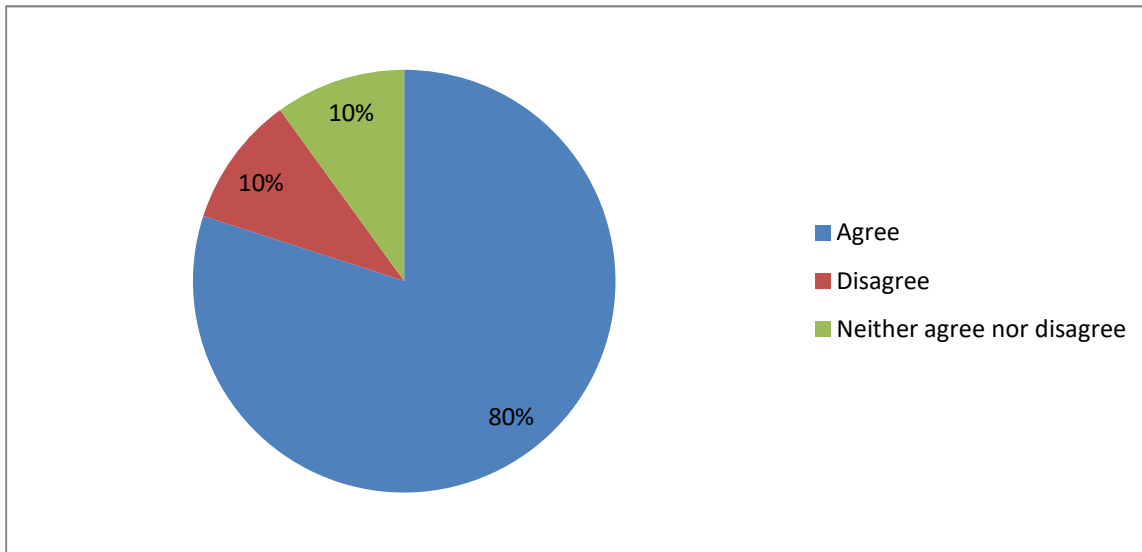


Figure 18. Lessons involving technology and media are more engaging than “usual, traditional” lessons.

What we could see from students’ answers of question one of the questionnaire is that all of them, except for one student, believe that media and technology are useful in the context of learning English. Asked, however, whether they want their teachers to use digital stories in particular (Figure 17), 24 of them, or 80%, answered positively, 2 students, or 7%, said they don’t want their teacher to use this learning and teaching tool, and 4 of them, or 13% said they weren’t sure whether they want their teacher to use digital stories as a mean of teaching and learning. Figure 18 shows that 80% of the respondents believe lessons involving technology

and media are more engaging than traditional lessons. The percentages of those who believe media supported lessons are not significantly more engaging than traditional lessons, and those who don't have an opinion regarding this are 10% in both cases.

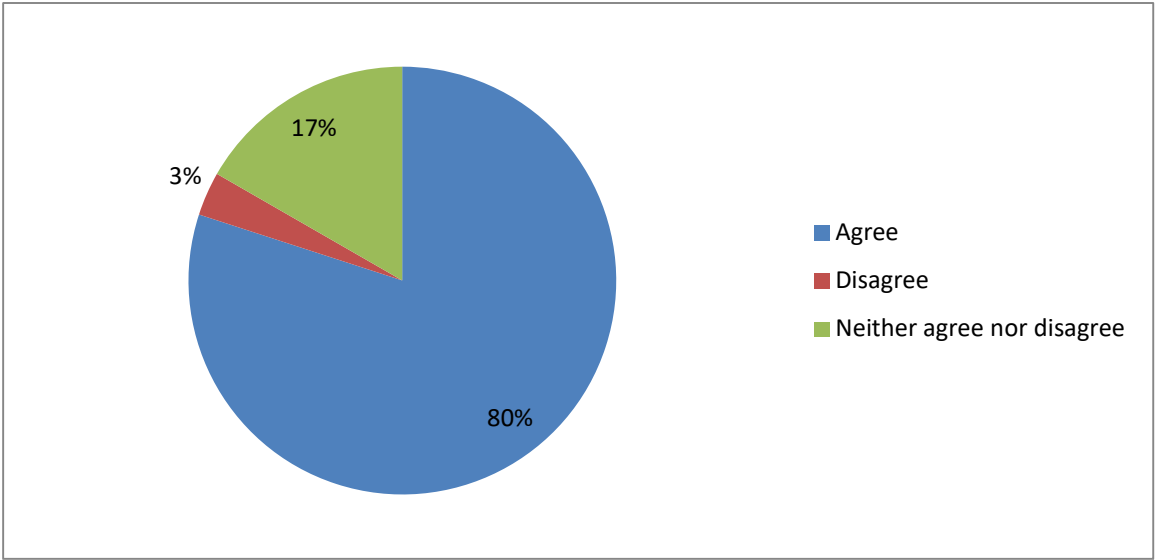


Figure 19. In-class technology positively affects my learning motivation

Many researchers are convinced that in-class technology has a positive impact on students' learning motivation and digital stories are believed to increase the levels of motivation even higher than other technology related means of teaching and learning. The same can be seen from my research. 80% of the students agree that in-class technology, precisely digital stories, positively affect their learning motivation. 3.3%, or 1 person out of 30, disagrees with the statement whereas 16.7% neither agree nor disagree.

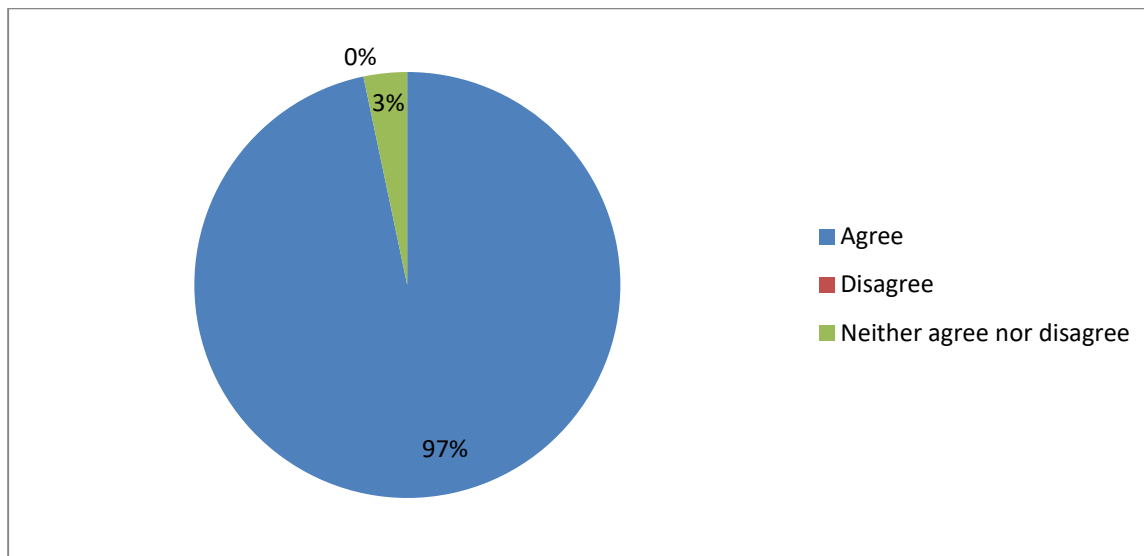


Figure 20. My teachers' feedback during the process of writing my story is of great value and helps me improve and realize my mistakes

One of the hypotheses of this research is that digital storytelling helps teachers assign writing in a nonconventional manner, and students accept it as such, meaning they do not show reluctance towards the writing of their story, as they know it will result in a project seen and heard by many. It is not a simple essay written for the sake of getting a higher grade, but a basis of their personal story which later turns into a movie. Here, the continuous feedback students get from their teachers influences their writing and improves it a great deal. In fact, 96.7% of the respondents agree with the fact that the teachers' feedback provided throughout the creation of their digital stories is of great value and helps them realize their mistakes. The rest, 3.3% neither agree nor disagree. Being aware that their stories are often heard not only by their educators and classmates, but also beyond, additionally improves students' writing skills. The chart below provides more details on this matter.

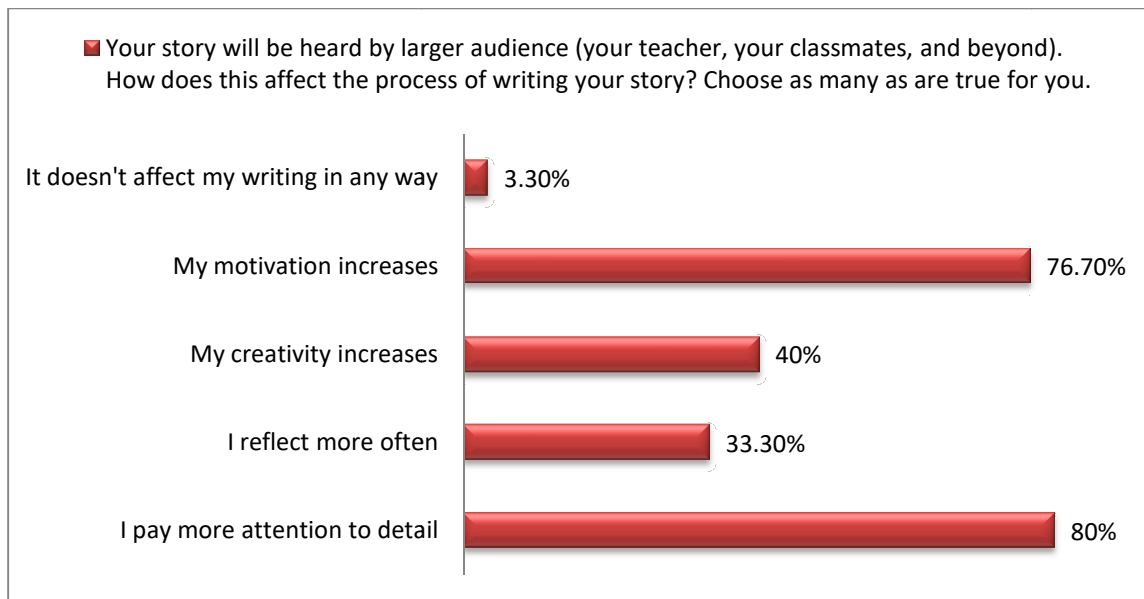


Chart.1 Effects on the process of writing the story

Here, students could choose as many options as are true for them. 24 of them, or 80%, said that knowing their story will be heard by larger audience they pay more attention to details, 10, or 33.3%, said they reflect more often because of the same reason, 12, or 40% said this increases their creativity, and 23, or 76.7% said it increases their motivation. One person said it doesn't affect their writing in any way.

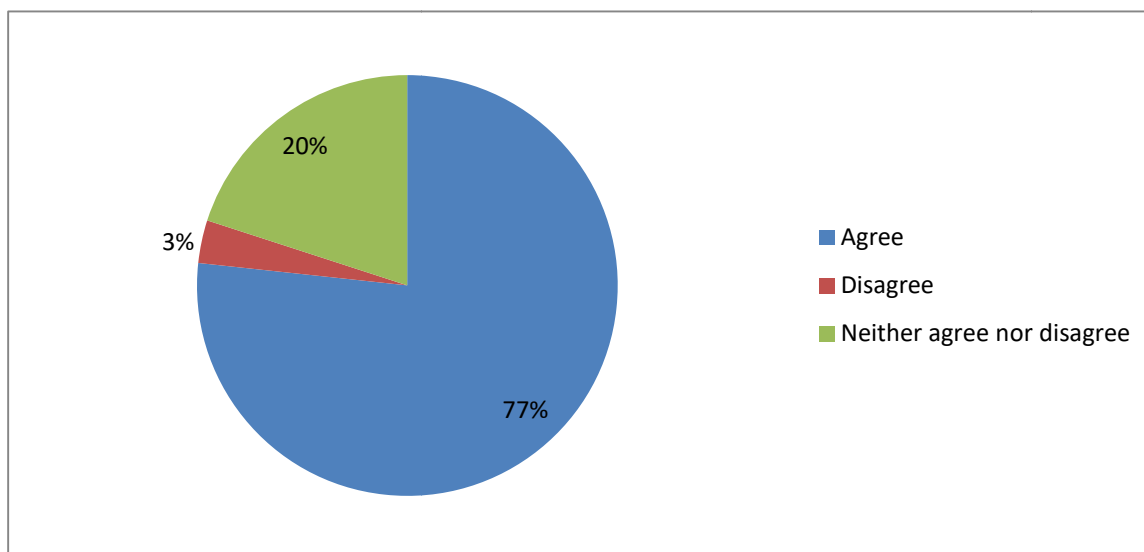


Figure 21. Digital storytelling (whether you were a listener or a narrator) helped me improve my speaking and listening skills

The benefits and the positive effects of digital storytelling on the acquisition and improvement of the English skills have been thoroughly discussed in chapter two of my research. Whether they were listeners or narrators of their own story, 76.7% of the students said digital storytelling helped improve their speaking and listening skills. 3.3% disagree and believe it did not help them with these skills. 20% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree. Those who believe their speaking and listening skills got better were asked to explain in what manners. The answers are presented in the table below.

Because you get an idea how those things that you read really sound and what's the variety of accents you have to kind of understand and choose.
That has helped me immensely much with my ability to express myself in English and has significantly helped me improve my vocabulary. It has also affected my self confidence in expressing ideas in a foreign language and has motivated me to work harder on my proficiency so I can be better at sharing my ideas during the discussions.
The usage of the language in such context has further enhanced the way I think in English, it has allowed me to see things in a much more detailed view and it's helped me form a better understanding of the way it is meant to be spoken, to allow for the most efficient and clear transmission of thoughts towards the person I'm talking to.
Digital Storytelling they are always an inspiring way to develop different language skills. Also it encourages student to use the imagination, creativity and increase their reading, writing and verbal proficiency. And also language learning itself it is an art which can be improved through digital storytelling!
Personally I think that to learn a language your ears need to be adapted to that language. You cannot fully learn it from a book. You can learn the grammar but in order to fluently speak it and express yourself you should listen to it and interact (communicate).
By narrating, you get to test out your speaking skills, use strong vocabulary, see how you can carry a story. As a listener, you see the length of your understanding of the language and learn new phrases and words.
Yes digital story helped me improving my language and the teacher tried to do his best for us to study and to understand the lesson, we talk a lot, write, tell stories and I think that we are improving our language.
Well neither by listening or telling, I was practicing the language and I was realizing my mistakes. Step by step I started to get better in language by storytelling.
I want my story to be perfect so I read a lot and rewrite a lot. And I love listening to my friends because I learn lots of catchy phrases from them.
Listening to other people speaking English has helped me improve my accent and also I have learned how to form the sentences grammatically correct.
It helped me because I got to take action in the exercises and make my own mistakes, and the teacher helped me correct them.
The digital storytelling helped me to improve my language, helped me to have a good pronounce and to be a good listener.
I learned a lot of new words in context, expressions and helped me practice grammar we studied at school.
It helped me with the spelling of words; I learned to spell many things better by listening to them.
We can listen to how the words are pronounced correctly and the beauty of the English langua

I don't think that it helped too much improving my proficiency in the English language.
It is more catchy and more fun and gives you more motivation to learn.
I learn how to write better and how to look for useful information.
We listened to it and then write and we know to pronounce it well.
I read more thoroughly and it especially improved my writing.
I've become more communicative person I think.
I feel more free to speak my mind.
Helps me learn new words.

Table 2. Students' overall proficiency in the English language

What students had to say is both interesting and impressive. Most argue how digital storytelling led to excelling their accent, and it seems they find this aspect of the language important. Further, digital storytelling helped many of them build their self-confidence while expressing themselves in a foreign language and that motivated them to work even harder. One student said that being able to use English in such contexts as provided by digital storytelling enhanced how they form and transmit their thoughts when using English. Others spoke of the opportunity to use their imagination and creativity in addition to becoming more proficient regarding the usage of the linguistic skills. Students believe that narrating their stories and later listening to them improve their speaking skills a great deal and they learn how to carry a story the proper way. As listeners, they check their understanding and pick up many new and useful words and phrases along the way. Students said how they always want their story to be perfect and as a result, they read extensively and rewrite a lot. One interesting notion a student mentions is that digital stories help them learn from their own mistakes as well as learn how and where to look for useful information. Other students believe this tool made them better communicators and allowed them "to speak their mind" as the stories they write or elaborate are of their own interest. The conclusion would be that digital storytelling is indeed a tool all teachers and students should give it a go. The benefits regarding the acquisition of the English language through it are numerous.

5. Conclusion

This chapter aims to finalize the conclusions of the results emerging from this research regarding the research questions and the hypotheses set at the beginning of the process. It will provide a section about the significance of the study, as well as limitations and recommendations for further research regarding the topic of digital storytelling in the EFL classroom.

5.1 Summary of the results in addition to the hypotheses emerging from the research

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of digital storytelling on student's outcomes in an EFL classroom. Based on what has been said in chapter two about the importance and the various benefits this new and modern teaching and learning tool offers, and based on the findings discussed in chapter four, we can draw the conclusion that digital storytelling contributes to creating authentic and constructivist contexts that enhance the acquisition of students' learning skills.

The first hypothesis emerging from this research states that *digital storytelling facilitates and involves usage of the four skills*. The students' and the teachers' who were part of this research confirmed this multiple times both through the questionnaires and the discussions. Results show that numbers as high as 80 and 90% are convinced this tool positively affects and impacts achieving language proficiency when digital storytelling is applied in an EFL classroom. Results show that most of the reading is done before students start working on their story. These stages of reading are extensive and ask from the students to use their critical and analytical skills in order to distinguish from what is useful for their story and what they should avoid. The writing goes through several stages as well. Here, the continuous feedback by the teacher proved to be of crucial importance for developing participants' skill of writing. Narration and listening to what is recorded proved to facilitate the acquisition of these skills as well in a great number of the participants in this research.

Being given the chance to express themselves in their "own" language, that of technology, students' motivation for learning through digital storytelling is significant. This is the second hypothesis emerging from this research. Motivation is a vital component for students' learning

and educators should go above and beyond to keep it high. Results clearly show that digital storytelling increases students' motivation for learning English language. First, because they are given freedom of choice (they get to choose the story they will be working on), they take responsibility for their own learning, and finally, use technology, or as stated in the hypothesis above, their "own" language, and feel comfortable inside the classroom. Teachers were positive that digital storytelling significantly affects their students' motivation and it leads to more profound learning.

Further, the results provided above are in favor of the third hypothesis, that *digital storytelling puts students in the center of the learning processes and gives them opportunities to be creative and reflective in the process of achieving language proficiency*. More than 80% of the respondents say that they feel important when digital storytelling is applied in the classroom as a teaching and learning tool because they have control over what they learn. The same percentage agrees that this tool makes them reflect more often than any task that does not involve the usage of technology to the extent digital storytelling does. Besides the possibilities of achieving language proficiency, most of the students spoke of the opportunities to express their imagination, creativity, and their analytical skills. They believe digital stories challenge them in unique ways and it leads to deeper learning.

As discussed in the previous chapters, many students seem to be reluctant when it comes to practicing writing. This skill is hard to master and many times students feel pressured when they are given deadlines for an essay they have to hand in. Hypothesis four of this research implies that *this mean of learning helps students apply the skill of writing in a nonconventional manner*. As Ohler (2008) stated, teachers use digital storytelling to sneak writing under the radar. Students are offered to reflect on what they have written and are encouraged to rewrite their story taking into consideration the peers and teacher's feedback during the stage of writing. Results indicate that students see the writing of their story as part of something bigger and know it will fit the bigger picture, so it leads to minimizing the reluctance towards the skill of writing. Therefore, it is safe to say that this mean helps students improve this skill in a nonconventional manner.

The final thoughts would be that digital storytelling is a useful tool to be used in an EFL classroom as it incorporates the use of technology, something students love working with both in and out of the classroom, it plays significant role in achieving language proficiency and developing the four linguistic skills along with the 21st century skills important for students not only in the classroom but further in their life, it significantly increases their interest and motivation for the subject and places them in the center of their own learning. They reflect, make decisions, use creativity, use critical and analytical skills, develop visual and technical literacies, and become better learners.

5.2 Significance of the study

Internet and the various technology tools have impacted our lives a great deal. Young people spend most of their time on their phones, whether they are listening to music, watching movies, playing games, or read something, it seems like they don't hesitate to grasp everything this new way of living offers. Having this in mind, we cannot help but wonder how successful these same students would be when placed in a classroom that offers nothing of what they are used to using every single day? Traditional classrooms, of course, have served their purpose, but transition from traditional to modern is a must. Various researches suggest that technology should be part of the learning processes. However, letting students simply learn on their own by providing them with computers and Internet access is not what they all have in mind. The use of the Internet and the numerous technology and digital tools should be closely observed and guided by the educators. Digital storytelling as a relatively new teaching and learning tool has found its place in the curriculum. It offers possibilities both teachers and students are aware of. This study shows that the creation of digital stories within the EFL classroom transforms the learning from teacher-centered to student-centered. Further, it enhances engagement and fosters collaboration, builds linguistic skills, numerous literacies and digital skills, and offers personalized learning experience students adjust to their individual needs. The results from this study will help teachers better understand the processes of creation of the stories and the positive learning outcomes.

5.3 Limitations of the study

My initial plan was to conduct this research in the actual classroom of the students who participated in it. The coronavirus pandemic that is still shaking the world has changed the way we live during these last couple of months. With the lock-downs and curfews, people are forced to stay home and socially distance from one another. That affected the way schools work as well and forced teachers to replace the physical space of the classrooms with virtual. So, the entire research was conducted through the teaching platform Zoom. I did not get to meet the students in person, and I could only observe their work online. Another limitation would be that the research was conducted at a single educational institution, the Private “Yahya Kemal” College. As discussed in the previous chapters, this school differs a great deal from the state schools in my hometown and my country. It is well equipped with modern technology devices and there is a smart board in each of the classrooms, so working with digital stories there is somehow easier than in the rest of the schools, in terms of technology available. Unlike the rest of the schools, students here have six more English lessons per week in addition to the various English language related classes, drama, public speaking, and more. It means that the time needed for the digital stories to be created and presented was not big of an issue. I guess this will be significant obstacle if English teachers from public schools would opt to use it with their students. Further research can be done with students from any of the state schools and see whether the results would be the same or timing and lack of technology would lead to completely different findings.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

I am convinced this study can serve as a solid base for further research to be done upon. As mentioned in the limitations part, this research could be conducted at a public school in a form of comparative analysis between private and public schools. Further, the technical capacities of teachers incorporating this tool in their teaching processes have not been fully analyzed. So further research could be done on educators’ abilities of accessing multiliteracies and skills believed digital storytelling helps acquire such as problem-solving, teamwork, interpersonal qualities, collection and interpretation of data, synthesis and analysis of texts and images, and self-reflection and self-evaluation.

Appendix

Digital Storytelling in the EFL Classroom

Digital stories represent short stories, 2 to 4 minutes long, created using different media and technology (PhotoStory 3, MovieMaker, Power Point Presentations and similar) where the storyteller uses their own voice to tell their own story. Digital storytelling is a combination of a personal story told with the help of digital media which includes images, graphics, audio and sound, voice-over, video, and animation.

1. What are your thoughts on using technology and media during English lessons? *

Short answer text

2. What sort of technology or media have you/ your teacher used during English lessons so far? (Power Point presentations, YouTube videos, Digital stories, SlideStory, MovieMaker, Online testing, and other) *

Short answer text

3. I enjoy listening to stories during my English lessons *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

4. I enjoy acting out stories during my English lessons *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

5. I want my teacher to use digital stories to teach me English *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

6. Lessons involving technology and media are more engaging than "usual, traditional" lessons. *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

7. In-class technology positively affects my learning motivation. *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

8. My teachers' feedback during the process of writing my story is of great value and helps me improve and realize my mistakes. *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

9. Digital storytelling (whether you were a listener or a narrator) helped me improve my speaking and listening skills. *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

10. If you agree with the above statement, explain how digital storytelling helped you improve your proficiency in the language.

Long answer text

11. Your story will be heard by larger audience (your teacher, your classmates, and beyond). How does this affect the process of writing your story? Choose as many as are true for you. *

- I pay more attention to detail
- I reflect more often
- My creativity increases
- My motivation increases
- It doesn't affect my writing in any way

Appendix 1. Students' questionnaire

Digital Storytelling in the EFL Classroom

Digital stories represent short stories, 2 to 4 minutes long, created using different media and technology (PhotoStory 3, MovieMaker, Power Point Presentations and similar) where the storyteller uses their own voice to tell their own story. Digital storytelling is a combination of a personal story told with the help of digital media which includes images, graphics, audio and sound, voice-over, video, and animation.

What are your perceptions about using digital stories as a tool for teaching English?

1. Digital stories captivate students' interest and attention *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

2. Digital stories increase students' motivation for learning *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

3. Digital stories help improve students' overall linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

4. Digital stories help improve students' literacy skills (creativity, collaboration, media literacy, visual literacy, etc.) *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

5. Digital stories help teachers convey abstract concepts (honesty, love, appreciation, compassion, etc.) *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

6. Digital stories help elicit numerous teaching points *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

7. Digital stories allow to apply writing in engaging and unconventional manner *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

8. Digital stories instills the love of language in students and motivates them to read *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

9. Digital storytelling encourages students to see there is logical sequence in stories, which is knowledge they will later use in creating their own stories *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

10. Digital storytelling promotes critical and higher order thinking (analysis and evaluation) *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

11. Digital storytelling is time consuming. *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

12. Teaching English skills through digital storytelling is hard *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

13. Students are reluctant to listening to and sharing stories during lesson time *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

14. Listening to and/or working with digital stories doesn't improve students' English skills a great deal *

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

Add your comments about using digital storytelling within the EFL classroom from your personal experience.

Long answer text

Appendix 2. Teachers' questionnaires

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