



Using Plotagon for Developing EFL Writing Skill Among Secondary Stage Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at developing EFL writing skills among first year secondary stage students by using plotagon. The study followed the one-group pre-post-test design. The participants of the study consisted of 30 first year secondary stage students at Abel Moneim Riad secondary school, Shebin Al-Kom Educational Administration, Al Menofyia Governorate, during the first term of the academic year 2023- 2024. The instruments and materials of the study included: a checklist of EFL writing skills, a pre-posttest for EFL writing skills and with a rubric. The pre-post writing tests were administered to the study group. The students were taught using plotagon. Then, the test was re-administered. A t-test was used to compare the mean scores of pre-test and post-test. Results of the study revealed that the study group showed a great development in EFL writing skills with their five main skills: content, accuracy, organization, mechanics and stylistic skills.

Keywords: *EFL writing skills, plotagon.*

استخدام بلوتجن لتنمية مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الانجليزية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية

اعداد

ساره عادل محمد

المستخلص باللغة العربية

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى تنمية مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب الصف الأول الثانوي باستخدام برنامج بلوتجن. اتبعت الدراسة تصميم المجموعة الواحدة قبل وبعد الاختبار. وتكونت عينة الدراسة من ٣٠ طالباً من طلاب الصف الأول الثانوي بمدرسة عبد المنعم رياض الثانوية بشبين الكوم إدارة شبين الكوم التعليمية بمحافظة المنوفية خلال الفصل الدراسي الأول للعام الدراسي ٢٠٢٣ - ٢٠٢٤. وأشتملت أدوات الدراسة على قائمة بمهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية اللازمة للصف الأول ثانوي، و اختباراً للكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (بتطبيق قبلي و بعدي) ومقياس أداء متدرج لتقديره. تم إجراء اختبار كتابي قبلي وبعدي على مجموعة الدراسة. وتم تعليم الطلاب استخدام القصص الرقمية لتطوير مهاراتهم في الكتابة. ثم تم إعادة إجراء الاختبار. تم استخدام اختبار T لمقارنة متوسطات درجات الاختبار القبلي والاختبار البعدي. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن مجموعة الدراسة أظهرت تطوراً كبيراً في مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية بمهاراتها الخمس الرئيسية؛ تم تحسين المحتوى والدقة والتنظيم والمهارات الأسلوبية بشكل كبير نتيجة لاستخدام برنامج بلوتجن.

الكلمات الأفتتاحية: مهارات الكتابة بلغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، بلوتجن

Introduction

English is used by millions of people around the world for communication purposes. Nowadays, English is also considered a mainstream and accepted tool for global communication. Communication is the process of exchanging information between individuals, groups, institutions, and/or organizations in oral, written, or signed form through all available media.

One of the most important productive skills for learners is the ability to write. Richard and Renandya (2002) state that writing is the most difficult skill for second and foreign language learners. Furthermore, they argue that writing is not only about generating and organizing ideas in our mind. Writing is considered one of the four core skills of language and a means of communication that includes sub skills such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar (Harris, McKenzie, Fitzsimmons, & Turbill, 2003).

Urquhart and McIver (2005) state that writing is a recursive process. This means that students iterate throughout the process and often move back and forth between stages. It also states that all types of writing are determined by the audience, purpose, and occasion, and that effective writing is one that fulfills the author's intent and meets the needs of the reader. Moreover, writing is a complex process that requires many skills. Additionally, students also need to learn some concepts such as rules for composing paragraphs.

Harmer (2004:4-5) says that writing process has four main elements, they are:

a) Planning: some people may find difficulties in generating and exploring their ideas at the beginning, so that, having plan before writing is needed to define the first action before writing.

b) Drafting: a number of drafts may be produced on the way before the final version. We may find many mistakes, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Because of that, we need other actions for the betterment.

c) Editing: when a writer reread her or his writing and finds mistakes such an ambiguous. Then, the writer tries to edit their writing into a good sentence.

d) Final version: when the writers have edited their draft, making the changes they consider being necessary they produce the final version. These stages represent in the following

Brown (2001:335) says that “writing needs a process of thinking, drafting and revising that requires specialized skills”. Al-Jumaily (2015:29-35) says that: Writing is the process of using symbols to communicate ideas. Writing is the 4th language skill that learners need to work hard on to master. It is the mirror that reflects/shows one’s knowledge about a language. Writing is the process of using symbols to communicate ideas.

Bello (1997) found that writing facilitates language acquisition when learners experiment with words, sentences, and large texts to effectively communicate their ideas and reinforce the grammar and vocabulary learned in class. Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation are important elements in the written communication system. This is a continuous process in which learners find the most effective and appropriate language to express themselves. Therefore, writing is a process. The more you practice, the better your writing will be.

According to Kirschner and Woperies (2003), Yusuf and Onasanya (2004), and Yunus (2007), ICTS can be seen as an important tool for improving writing instruction, for example. Therefore, a teacher must be ready to face the challenge of using her ICTS tools in school. Information and communication technologies can increase the efficiency and productivity of schools by creating a variety of tools to improve and facilitate teachers' professional activities. ICT enables schools to communicate with each other through e-mail, mailing lists, chat rooms, etc. It also provides researchers with a powerful way to disseminate research reports and results.

According to Indriani (2015), the writing teaching and learning process has media: visual media, audio media, and audiovisual media that are used to improve students' writing skills. Therefore, digital stories in English foreign language lessons promote expressive and receptive language development. When students take on the role of storyteller using digital tools, this learning opportunity is expanded and students can engage in deeper, more meaningful learning. According to current research findings on digital stories (Smeda, Dakich, & Sharda, 2014), digital stories are a powerful pedagogical technology approach that integrates educational messages and learning activities to create a more engaging and exciting learning environment.

Creating digital stories is a great opportunity to engage students in media literacy and learn how media influences our perceptions of the

world (Tyner, 1998 & Goodman, 2003). Stories are fun because we surrender to them and this also makes them dangerous (Kay, 1996). Barrett (2006) also argues that stories combine different aspects of learning pedagogy. This includes student engagement, reflection for deep learning, technology integration, and project-based learning. Obviously, all areas that many teachers are interested in promoting.

Many studies have long emphasized the importance of using digital stories in language teaching and learning (Robin, 2006 & Gregori, 2008). We have also highlighted the need for further research into learning outcomes from the use of digital stories in education settings (Barrett, 2005; Yuksel, Robin & McNeil, 2010). Digital Story not only offers language teachers the opportunity to work on all four language skills from the beginning, but also combines the art of storytelling with a variety of digital multimedia content such as images, recorded audio commentary, and videos. It also combines ideas such as music (Robin, 2006). This allows instructors to teach each topic in a way that captures interest and attention.

Digital storytelling emerged in the late 1980s at California's Digital Story Center as a method used by community theater workers to enable the recording, production, and distribution of stories (Lambert, 2009). According to Normann (2011), digital stories are short stories, only two to three minutes in length, in which personal elements are emphasized and the narrator uses his own voice to tell his story. Personal elements are emphasized and can be linked to other people, places or interests, or anything that adds a personal touch to the story.

According to Benmayor (2008:188-204), digital story is “a short multimedia story that combines voice, image, and music”. There are many different definitions of digital story, but most focus on using multimedia tools such as graphics, audio, video, and animation to tell a story (Smeda, Dakich, & Sharda, 2014). Digital stories have been shown to provide opportunities to improve students' skills such as problem solving, collaborative learning, motivation, a sense of accomplishment, and critical thinking in the context of formal education (Belet & Dal, 2010; Frazel, 2010; Hug, Malita & Martin, 2010; Huang and Fan, 2012; Yang and Wu, 2012 & Ohler, 2013).

Digital stories allow students to learn the art of writing good stories, how to integrate text and art, and how to use technology creatively (Miller, 2010). Additionally, when students are fully involved in the

writing process, they are able to embrace their stories and participate more effectively in the digital story creation process by creating good scenarios (Xu, Park, & Baek, 2011).

Every digital story platform has unique affordances which range from combining text, images, sound, and video, to create a short movie or presentation. In this talk we will demonstrate how Plotagon, a dynamic digital story software makes it possible for students and teachers to express themselves in English in the form of animated characters (Eini & Levy. 2017).

Plotagon is a very intuitive content creation software (<https://plotagon.com>) that can be used in education due to its text-based movie creation interface, as a storytelling tool for creating short or longer films. Plotagon has been an educational software that allows students to create instant animated videos. Students can create their own characters, choose scenes, write dialogs, and add emotions, sound effects, and actions. This software offers a free trial option for individual storytellers, a licensed version for students and educators, and another one for designers and professional users (Plotagon Education, n.d).

According to Love (2013), Plotagon can produce animated movies from text dialogues. Its use in the classroom is practically endless; students can use it to write short scripts that can become movies as can be seen in Figure 1. It can be used in different ways: for writing, report back situations (feedback), and to provide creative ways of adding to presentations. Besides, Love states that Plotagon is quite valuable pedagogically because it produces graphic output from a text-based input, which is useful for a foreign language classroom.

Previous studies have shown that digital story develops student's writing skills and can be used as an effective learning tool, particularly in computer-assisted language acquisition (Abdel Hack & Helwa, 2014; Seifeldin & Ahmed, 2015; Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2017; Laina & Marlina, 2018 & Sabha, 2010).

2. Context of the Problem

Despite the importance of EFL writing skills, there is still a lack in them among the first secondary stage students. The problem of this study is derived from several resources:

First: The importance of the first secondary stage students' EFL writing skills revealed by the directives of the Ministry of Education and

the National Curriculum Framework for English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Second: The review of some related studies which tackled the EFL writing skills concerning the Egyptian context. Previous studies revealed that there are varied problems in teaching and learning writing. Abdel Fattah (1994:8), Aly (2001:8), Abdel Aziz (2003:9), Abdel Razik (2006:4-5), Abdel-Maksoud (2007:5-7), El-Serafy (2008:8), Abdel Hack (2009:333-367), El-Marsafy (2009:161-210), Al Saleem (2014:126-134), Abdel Samad (2016:8). Supported the problem of the research as they assured that there was a lack in the secondary stage students' EFL writing skills because of the weakness and shortage usage of EFL writing skills and relying on traditional methods during teaching . This research addresses the question of whether the first secondary stage students' EFL writing skills will develop by digital stories.

3. Statement of the Problem

The problem of the research can be stated in first secondary stage students' poor level in EFL writing skills needed at this stage. The current research aimed at investigating the effectiveness of using digital stories on developing EFL writing skills among the second secondary stage students.

4. Questions of the Research

- 1) What are EFL writing skills required for the first secondary stage students?
- 2) What are the features of digital stories to develop EFL writing skills among the first secondary stage students?
- 3) What is effectiveness of digital stories in developing EFL writing skills among first secondary stage students?

5. Hypotheses of the Research

Based on the theoretical background and the results of the relevant studies, it is hypothesized that:

- 1) There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre- posttest of the overall EFL writing skills in the favor of the posttest.
- 2) There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre- posttest of the EFL writing main skills in the favor of the posttest.

- 3) There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre- posttest of the EFL writing sub skills in the favor of the posttest.

6. Purpose of the Research

The current research aims to enhance EFL writing skills among the first secondary stage students by using digital stories.

7. Participants of the Study

The participants of the present study consisted of 30 first secondary stage students at Abel Moneim Riad secondary school, Shebin Al-Kom, Shebin Al-Kom Educational Administration, Al Menofyia Governorate.

8. Instruments of the Research

To achieve the aim of this research, the researcher prepared a pre post EFL writing skills.

8.1 The EFL Writing Skills Test

A writing skills test was used to assess the students' EFL writing skills' level before and after the intervention. An EFL writing skills pre-posttest involved five questions e to assess the participants' EFL writing skills. Consequently, there were 14 questions in all in the test.

Validity of the EFL Writing Skills Pre-Posttest

To test the validity of the EFL writing skills test, the researcher submitted the first form to a group of EFL specialists; professors, experts and supervisors of TEFL (N=11). They were asked to validate the test in terms of clarity and whether the test items assess the assigned strategies or not. The test was reconstructed in the light of the jurors' valuable notes.

The reliability of the test

The reliability of the test was measured by the test- retest method. The test was applied to (30) group of the first year secondary stage students. After two weeks, it was applied again to the same participants.

The reliability of the test was computed by calculating the correlation coefficient between the two administrations. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated using the SPSS program (V. 18). The result of the test-retest method is shown in the following table:

Table (1): The Pearson correlation coefficient between the degree of each of the test skills and the total score of the test.

Main- skills	Content	Organization	Accuracy	Mechanics	Stylistic skills
Correlation	0.522**	0.573**	0.531**	0.428*	0.640**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level & **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

It is clear from table (1) that the values of the Pearson correlation coefficients are significant at the level of (0.0) or (0,05). It can be concluded that the EFL writing skills test was highly reliable and valid to be used as a tool of the research.

8.2 The Implementation of Digital Stories

The Content:

There were 9 sessions during the implementation. It had three sessions per week for three weeks, with each session lasting 90 minutes. Instructional and application sessions were separated during the sessions.

The Procedures of Experimental:

The phases of digital stories sessions have been as follows:

Preparation stage:

The researcher had the biggest role in explaining what digital story is. The researcher chose the topics for digital stories. She made digital stories, each digital story covered main topic and she prepared some of activates that the students ask to answer it after the digital stories. It is for evaluating the student's progress in achieving the learning objectives throughout the lesson by immediate feedback. Then she prepared worksheets that relate to topics to help the students practice and master EFL writing skills.

2-Production stage:

The researcher involved different communicative activities such as informing the students about role of the teacher, the role of the students, and the materials. Producing some digital stories about the topics of each lesson and warming up the students at the beginning of each lesson and asked them questions about the topics. Presenting the digital stories and organizing the discussion. And playing the digital stories more than one time and asked the students to answer the activities in pairs then she elicited the answers. Then asking the students at the end of each lesson to answer the worksheets individually to ensure that they master the objectives of each lesson.

3-Presentation Stage:

The researcher chose different topics by the students for their stories such as my favorite technology are, technology is great and what does technology do? She asked them to write the stories according to what they planned and the ideas that they wrote and Check their work by making sure they followed the guidelines given and correcting the spelling errors, grammatical errors as well as checking for any layout errors before asking them to publish the work. The students shared the students' stories by presenting them in class. Evaluating, making corrections and giving feedback of their friends' work by other peers.

9. The Findings of the First Hypothesis

9.1 Findings of the First Hypothesis

The first hypothesis in the study stated that "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre- posttest of the overall EFL writing skills in the favor of the posttest".

Table (2): Results of t-test between the mean scores of the study group in the posttest of EFL writing skills

Main Skills	Full Mark	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	A Sig	η^2
EFL Writing	40	Pre	17.13	4.81	18.580	0.01	0.923
		Post	32.87	3.54			

The findings in table (2) showed that t-value was (18.580) which is significant at (0.01). This means that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the overall EFL writing skills posttest in favor of the posttest.

9.2 The Findings of the Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis in the study stated that "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre- posttest of the EFL writing main skills in the favor of the posttest".

Table (3): Results of t-test between the mean scores of the study group in the pre posttest of EFL writing main skills

Main Skills	Full Mark	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	A Sig	η^2
Content	4	Pre	1.93	1.34	7.720	0.01	0.673
		Post	3.83	0.38			
Organization	8	Pre	3.23	1.78	5.540	0.01	0.514

		Post	6.17	2.63			
Accuracy	8	Pre	3.97	2.06	6.940	0.01	0.624
		Post	6.93	1.14			
Mechanics	9	Pre	3.63	1.43	12.301	0.01	0.839
		Post	7.63	1.35			
Stylistic skills	11	Pre	4.37	2.17	11.276	0.01	0.814

The findings in table (3) showed there is a statistically significant at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.01$) between the mean scores of the study group in the overall EFL writing main skills posttest in favor of the posttest.

9.3 The Findings of Third Hypothesis

The third hypothesis in the study stated that "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre- posttest of the EFL writing sub skills in the favor of the posttest".

Table (4): Results of t-test between the mean scores of the study group in the pre posttest of EFL writing sub skills

Sub-Skills	Full Mark	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	A Sig	η^2
Write appropriate title that relate to the content	2	Pre	0.93	0.83	5.635	0.01	0.523
		Post	1.87	0.35			
Write a clear related main idea	2	Pre	1.00	0.83	6.227	0.01	0.572
		Post	1.97	0.18			
Use an appropriate beginning, middle and end of each paragraph	2	Pre	0.87	0.82	3.072	0.01	0.246
		Post	1.50	0.73			
Write cohesion and cohesive devices that include a clear introduction and conclusion	2	Pre	0.90	0.80	3.181	0.01	0.259
		Post	1.40	0.77			
Use logical transition to ensure that ideas flow smoothly and sentences or ideas progress	2	Pre	0.83	0.75	3.584	0.01	0.307
		Post	2.00	1.82			
Combine paragraphs to produce effective	2	Pre	0.63	0.77	3.739	0.01	0.325
		Post	1.27	0.83			

essays							
Use grammatical rules precisely	2	Pre	1.23	1.01	3.427	0.01	0.288
		Post	1.93	0.37			
Apply proper sentence construction	2	Pre	1.17	0.95	3.252	0.01	0.267
		Post	1.87	0.51			
Use vocabulary that is acceptable and clearly communicate the purpose	2	Pre	0.97	0.96	3.516	0.01	0.299
		Post	1.73	0.69			
Make suitable idioms and expression	2	Pre	0.60	0.89	3.607	0.01	0.310
		Post	1.40	0.93			
Apply punctuation correctly	3	Pre	1.33	0.92	7.021	0.01	0.630
		Post	2.70	0.53			
Follow capitalization rules correctly	3	Pre	1.40	0.97	6.837	0.01	0.617
		Post	2.60	0.67			
Pursue correct spelling	3	Pre	0.90	0.85	6.420	0.01	0.587
		Post	2.33	0.80			
Write different forms of writing (narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative)	11	Pre	4.37	2.17	11.276	0.01	0.814
		Post	8.30	1.37			

The findings in table (4) showed there is a statistically significant at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.01$) between the mean scores of the study group in the overall EFL writing sub skills posttest in favor of the posttest. This led emphasizing the educational importance of digital stories on developing the first secondary stage students' EFL writing skills.

10. Discussion and Interpretation of the Research Results:

The results of the study confirmed that the use of digital story was effective on developing first secondary stage students' EFL writing skills and these results are consistent with the previous related studies. The researcher observed that most of the students found that digital story is very important during applying different skills when writing. Additionally, they were confident at writing process and they felt that they are a good writer.

These results can be interpreted in the light of the following the use of digital stories almost throughout the session through, videos, titles, images, and a few phrases was an influencing factor on the development EFL writing skills and transform the classroom environment into an active environment after silence and boredom. As well as, students' writing skills improved after viewing the digital stories. They became a self-independent in their writing. This led to achieve the purpose of digital stories. All the skills made the students have more self-confident in writing skills; they got more and more motivated to understand text.

The implementation of the digital story was conducted through nine sessions. These sessions covered the students' opportunities to view and use digital stories and work on a variety of EFL writing skills. Through interaction and individual phases. These sessions aimed at developing writing skills by using digital stories and training sessions were conducted. As a result, each student is now able to write, ask questions, answer questions, and connect prior knowledge with the text presented, considering the usual method of just passively receiving information they became more effective and active in the learning process.

In addition, the delivery of the information and the procedures of digital stories during the sessions through viewing videos were effective factor that led to the positive results especially, during the first stage. The participants needed to see how digital stories can affect their writing skills. Therefore, the presentation of the researcher played an essential role in results.

The researcher presented writing skills to students by digital stories through presented the content by viewing some digital stories in the first step and this led to raising their awareness to be good writers. Through presentation, students could listen to the researcher's mind at work, ask questions, form images or infer .Therefore; they became more aware of their own use of key comprehension stages and skills. Then, digital stories helped the students to comprehend that writing should make sense, they move to comprehend the whole meaning of text, they learn how to write by using many different skills and use particular stages and procedures when writing particular types of text.

In summarizing all of the above, the researcher concluded that the use of digital stories produced positive and high results in EFL writing

skills due to several factors including researcher presentation, learners' monitoring, verbalization, readiness and , motivation ,the activities and the tasks, the teamwork, learners' self-evaluation to themselves within one group and the researcher's evaluating and giving appropriate feedback , the contents and information were familiar, a transforming the learner into a leader , the desire to write on his own and answer the questions after viewing digital stories whether alone or with their peers and a successful classroom management . Therefore, all these factors helped to make the learners good writers.

11. Conclusion

The present research aimed to investigate the impact of applying digital stories on the secondary students' EFL writing skills. The results revealed that digital stories had a confirmed and significant role in improving the participants' EFL writing skills .Consequently, using digital stories has its educational importance and it is recommended to be used in the EFL classrooms.

12. Recommendation of the Study

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

- EFL writing skills should be a major concern in teaching EFL in our classes.
- Digital stories should be adopted in teaching EFL writing skills at the secondary stage.
- EFL teachers should be encouraged to apply digital stories effectively at different educational levels to enhance learners' academic achievement.
- Due to the advantages of digital stories with partners, in the future use of the strategy, learners should be provided with a chance to write with partners of their choice.

13. Suggestions for Further Research:

Based on the results of the research, the following are suggestions for further research:

- Examining the effect of using digital stories on improving EFL writing skills among the primary, preparatory and faculty students.
- Investigating the effect of using digital stories on improving other language skills: listening, reading and speaking.
- Investigating the effectiveness of using digital stories on improving varied psychological variables among the students of

different educational levels such as attitudes, self-efficacy, engagement, apprehension, ..etc.

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