

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF STORYTELLING ON 21ST CENTURY SKILLS: A STUDY WITH SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS AT ENS LAGHOUAT

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Received: 30/10/2023

Published: 19/05/2024

Abstract:

The focal point of every nation's educational concerns is the integration of suitable methods and techniques to prepare students for life beyond the conventional classroom environment. Pedagogues and curriculum designers are urged to broaden their perspectives in establishing teaching objectives, emphasizing the impartation of key competencies and skills essential for academic success and subsequent endeavors outside school premises. This study specifically explores the impact of storytelling on the development of 21st-century skills among EFL students, addressing three primary inquiries. The first query seeks to unveil the role of storytelling in enhancing 21st-century learning skills, while the second delves into the influence of digital storytelling on innovating students' learning experiences within English module sessions. The third question assesses whether storytelling equips students with life skills relevant beyond traditional classrooms. Employing a mixed-method approach, the study administered questionnaires and conducted a quasi-experiment with the second-year students at ENS Laghouat. The findings suggest that when implemented effectively, the storytelling method promotes 21st-century learning and life skills, fostering an innovative learning experience through digital storytelling.

Keywords: Storytelling, 21st-century skills, Digital Storytelling, EFL students.

Introduction

The historical roots of storytelling extend deep into human civilization, serving dual roles in both entertainment and education. While the utility of storytelling in language teaching has gained broader acceptance, there were initial reservations among educators, including concerns about a lack of confidence, unfamiliarity with storybooks, and challenges posed by complex language. Educators, exemplified by Ellis and Brewster (2014), have gradually overcome these reservations, recognizing storytelling's potential as a foundational pedagogical tool.

1. Educational Merits of Storytelling: Impact on Language Skills and 21st-Century Skills

Wajnryb (2003) accentuates storytelling's positive impact on language skills, engaging students in listening, reading, speaking, and writing. This engagement not only contributes to language proficiency but also fosters the acquisition of essential 21st-century skills, such as

critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. The recognition of storytelling's power underscores its role in developing skills vital for success in the modern world, encompassing learning, life, and digital literacy.

2. Defining Storytelling and Its Historical Significance

Storytelling is not only one of the earliest forms of written and oral literature but also one of the oldest educational methods, as highlighted by Abrahamson (1998). He underscores storytelling as a crucial technique for learning and understanding, forming the foundation of the teaching profession. In the realm of language teaching, storytelling is a versatile pedagogical strategy applicable at all learning levels, enhancing motivation, fluency, language awareness, and communication.

3. Storytelling as a Language Teaching Method: Enhancing Language Experience

Storytelling, defined as the "activity of writing, telling, or reading stories" (Soltani & Wright, 1997), is lauded as an effective language teaching method. It provides a rich language experience, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and other language components. Empirical studies, such as Li and Seedhouse's (2010) research in Taiwan, support storytelling's effectiveness in promoting social interactions and language development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

4. Digital Storytelling: A Comprehensive Approach for Language Learning

Digital storytelling, originating in the late 1980s, has evolved as a comprehensive approach to teaching language skills and promoting 21st-century skills. Chung (2006) and Kearney (2009) propose a structured four-phase process for structuring digital storytelling sessions, emphasizing pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution. This approach integrates technology seamlessly into language learning, fostering creativity and engagement.

5. Benefits of Storytelling: Multifaceted Advantages in Language Teaching

Brewster et al. (2004) assert that incorporating stories into the pedagogy of teaching English to young learners yields manifold advantages. Stories not only make the process of language learning enjoyable, stimulating, and captivating but also serve as a catalyst for creativity by enabling students to establish connections with characters. Story-based learning, as supported by various researchers, proves effective in reinforcing vocabulary, grammar, and linguistic functions while accommodating diverse learning styles and strategies. Ultimately, storytelling bridges traditional language teaching with the development of crucial 21st-century skills, making it a powerful educational tool.

II. Research Methodology

2.1 Introduction

Ensuring a systematic and scientific study requires a specific methodology (Kumar, 2011). This study on the impact of storytelling techniques on promoting EFL 21st-century skills adopted a quasi-experimental design and a mixed methods approach, incorporating questionnaires. This section provides a comprehensive overview of the research methods, research setting, sampling, population, research design, and various data collection tools.

2.2 Research Methods

The selection of research methods is crucial for data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Brushan et al., 2018). In this study, a mixed-method design was deemed appropriate, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to validate hypotheses about the storytelling method's influence on EFL learners' 21st-century skills. The study utilized pre-experimental and post-experimental questionnaires, each comprising quantitative and qualitative questions.

2.3 Research Design

A quasi-experimental design was employed, where individuals were not randomly assigned to groups (Creswell, 2017). Ethical and practical considerations led to this choice, with the experiment conducted during regular English class sessions for second-year students in three sessions.

2.3.1 Research Setting

The research took place at ENS Laghouat during the academic year 2023/2024, providing a contextual foundation for exploring the effectiveness of the storytelling method in language education. This setting allows for an examination of the practical application and impact of storytelling within a specific educational environment.

2.3.2 Population and Sampling

The study targeted 88 second-year students at ENS, with a sample of 26 students from the first group. The selection aimed to mirror the characteristics of the broader population, considering factors such as motivation, collaboration, and existing 21st-century learning skills.

2.3.3 Data Collection Tools

Various tools were employed, including pre and post-experiment questionnaires and video recordings. These tools align with Singh's (2006) perspective on addressing research problems through effective data collection.

2.3.4 The Experiment

The experiment unfolded in two phases, incorporating traditional teaching in the pre-intervention phase and introducing the storytelling method in the intervention phase.

2.3.4.1 Pre-intervention Phase (Session One)

During this phase, a lesson was taught without innovative methods. A pre-experiment questionnaire was distributed.

2.3.4.2 Intervention Phase (Sessions Two and Three)

The storytelling method was introduced in the second session, emphasizing student involvement. The third session focused on digital storytelling to enhance digital literacy skills. Feedback was collected, and a post-experiment questionnaire was distributed to assess the method's effectiveness.

2.3.5 Questionnaires

Questionnaires, distributed on October 8th and 11th, 2023, collected data on the development of 21st-century skills among second-year students. The pre-experiment questionnaire focused on general information and 12 Yes/No questions, while the post-experiment questionnaire added a storytelling variable and qualitative open-ended questions.

Section Two: Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section involves the interpretation and analysis of data from pre-experiment and post-experiment questionnaires. The analysis, presented through pie charts and tables, aims to confirm or refute research hypotheses, providing valuable insights into the impact of storytelling techniques on EFL learners' 21st-century skills.

Part One: General Background

Item 1: Gender

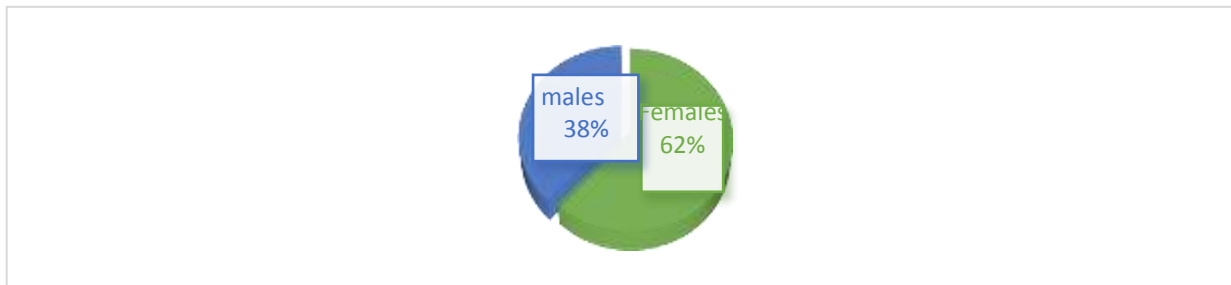


Figure 1. Gender of Students

This figure indicates that the number of male students represents (38%) while female students represents (62%) of the whole number of participants. Thus, the predominant gender is female students. This shows that the majority of second-year students group 02 at ENS are females.

Item 2: Age

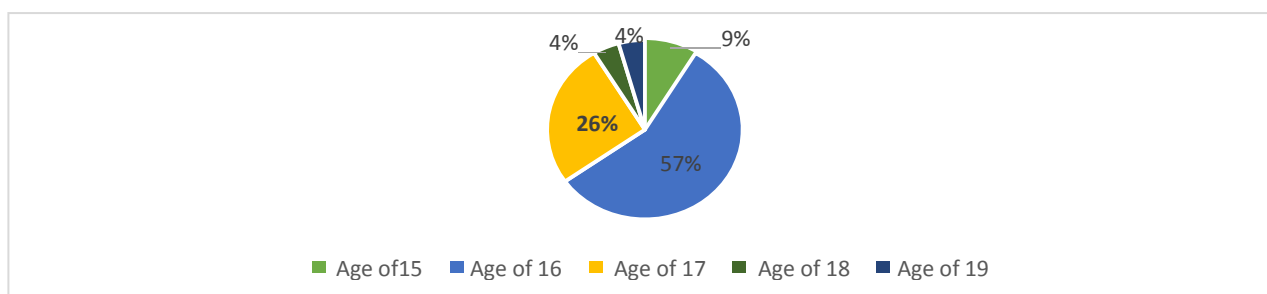


Figure 2. Age of Students

Part Two: Students' attained 21st century skills during the Session

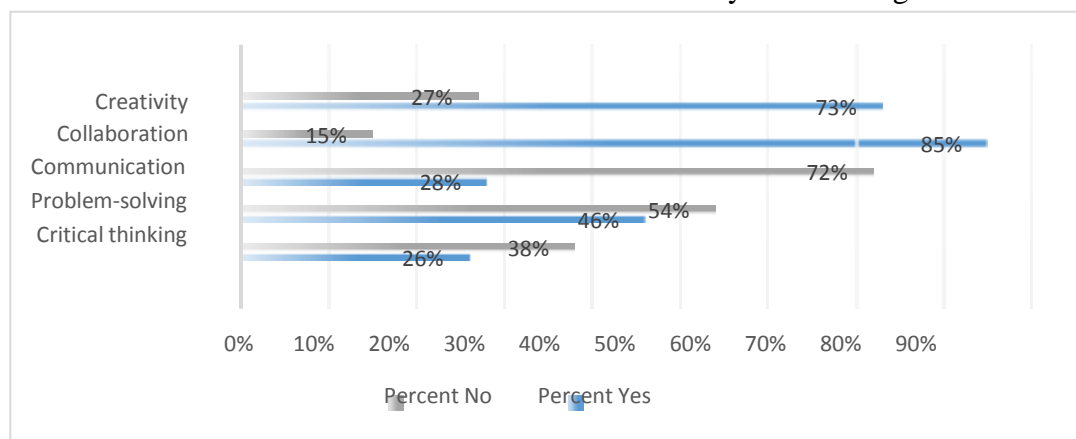


Figure 3. 21st Century Learning and Innovation Skills

The accompanying figure presents outcomes pertaining to 21st-century learning and innovation skills, segmented into five options. The data, aimed at confirming the initial hypothesis, underscores collaboration and creativity as the predominant skills among second-year students in group 01 during the oral session. The results reveal that 85% of students favor group learning, with 73% displaying creativity skills, showcasing their imaginative abilities. The second option examines students' use of problem-solving skills, indicating that only 46% possess such skills, suggesting a lack of challenging tasks. Moreover, 54% feel constrained in participating in class discussions, impacting their communication and public speaking abilities. Only 26% claim proficiency in critical thinking, indicating a gap in discerning essential information in a reading passage.

2. 21st Century Learning Experience

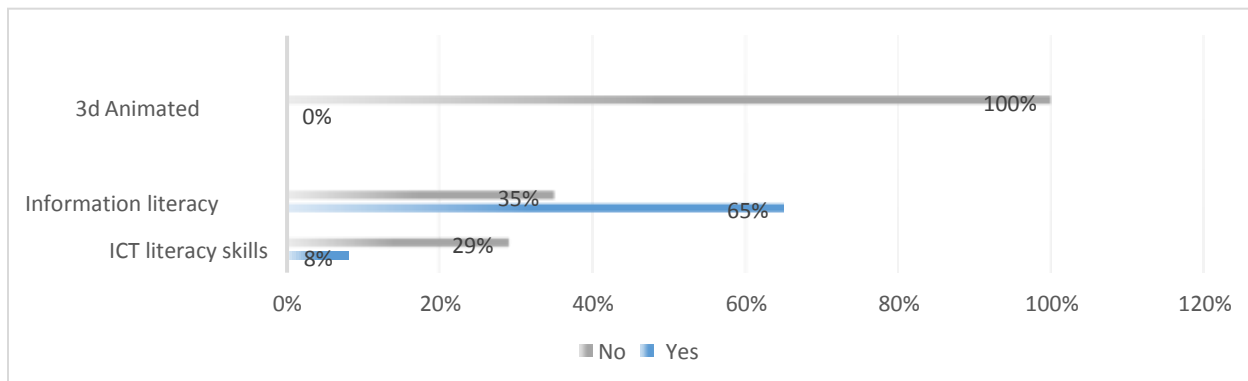


Figure 4. 21st Century Learning Experience

Given the outcomes displayed in the corresponding figure, presenting three options related to certain aspects of the 21st-century learning experience that advocate for the utilization of contemporary technologies and the sharing of information, it is evident that 65% of second-year students at ENS, group 01, exhibit a proclivity towards acquiring information literacy skills. This suggests that students actively use the internet outside the classroom for study purposes, with 35% indicating otherwise. Conversely, all students affirm that they have never watched an animated video for educational purposes during their English class. Furthermore, a substantial 92% of students have not been sufficiently exposed to the use of Information Communication Technology in this class, despite using these tools for story transmission or creation. In conclusion, this depiction highlights that students possess some information literacy skills, such as searching for, organizing, and evaluating researched information.

3. 21st Century Life and Career Skills

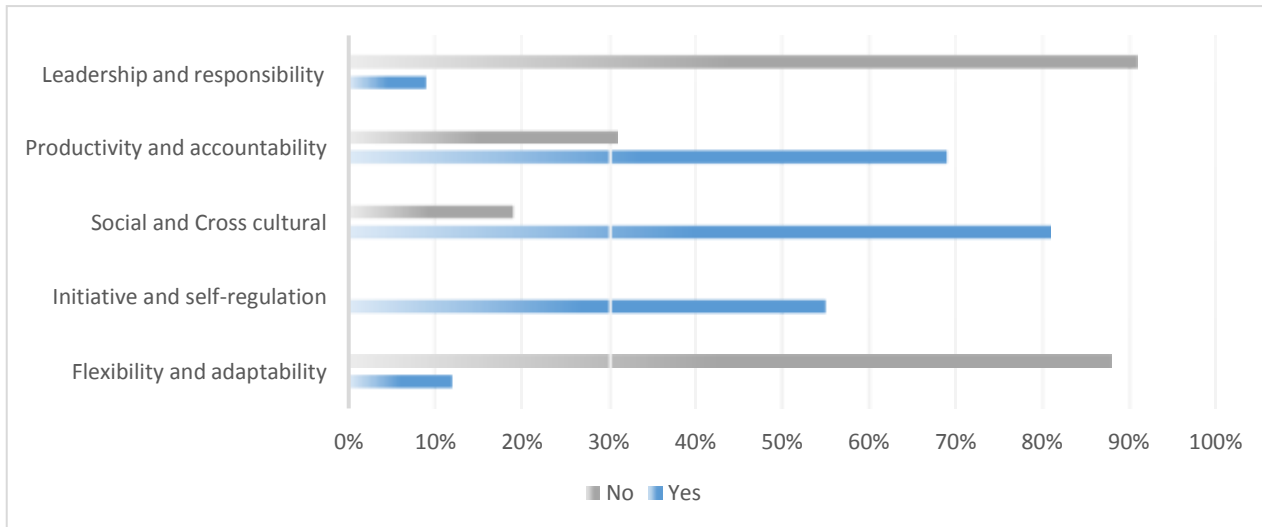


Figure 5. 21st Century Life and Career Skills

In the instances described above, the predominant sentiment among students, representing 81%, is in favor of fostering respect and appreciation for each other, while 19% express a contrary view. This signifies the existence of a positive learning environment that cultivates empathy and mutual understanding among students. Regarding productivity and accountability, 69% of students acknowledge being accountable and productive learners. They maintain an organized physical learning space and actively plan to enhance their knowledge of the English language. In contrast, 31% of students exhibit disinterest in maintaining such aspirations. Out of the total of 26 students, 16, or 55%, demonstrate self-direction and initiative, indicating a majority with a strong sense of self-esteem, confidence, and a willingness to take risks by expressing their thoughts without hesitation or shyness in seeking information. Conversely, 88% of students do not believe they possess the ability to resolve problems without seeking assistance from the teacher, and they express a lack of openness to innovative learning methods in the classroom. This suggests that students may struggle to respond promptly and energetically to challenges encountered during their learning process. In summary, the prevalent skills shared among learners encompass social and cultural skills, as well as productivity and accountability skills.

Post- experiment questionnaire

Part one: General

Information

Item 1: Gender

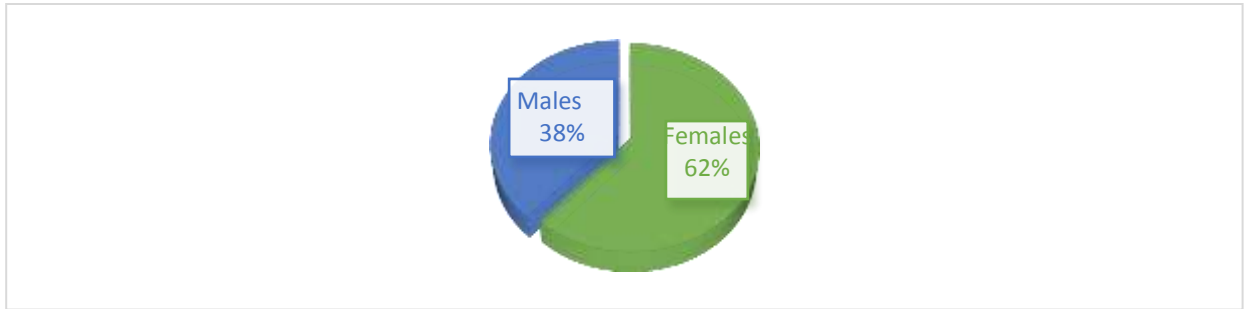


Figure 6. Gender of Students

This figure indicates that the number of male students represents (38%) while female students' represents (62%) of the whole number of participants which 26. Thus, the predominant gender is female students. This shows that the majority of second-year students group 02 at ENS are females.

Item 2: Age

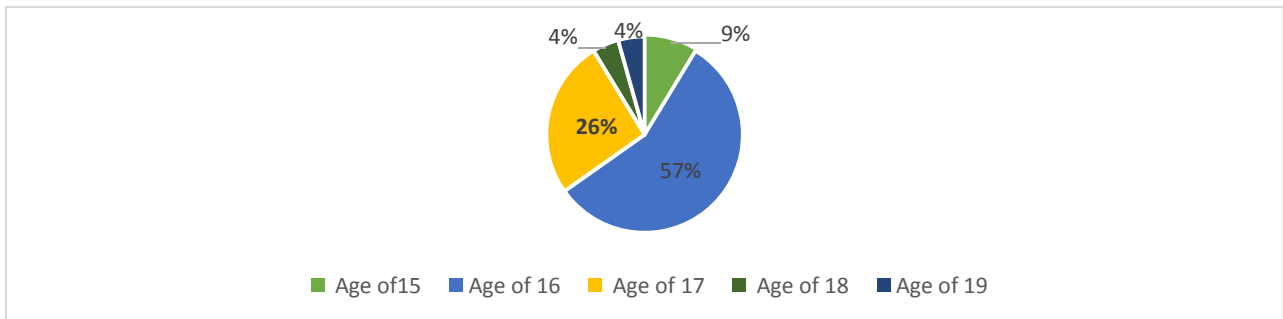


Figure 7. Students' Age

Part two: Learning through Storytelling

Item 01: I have attended English storytelling lessons before

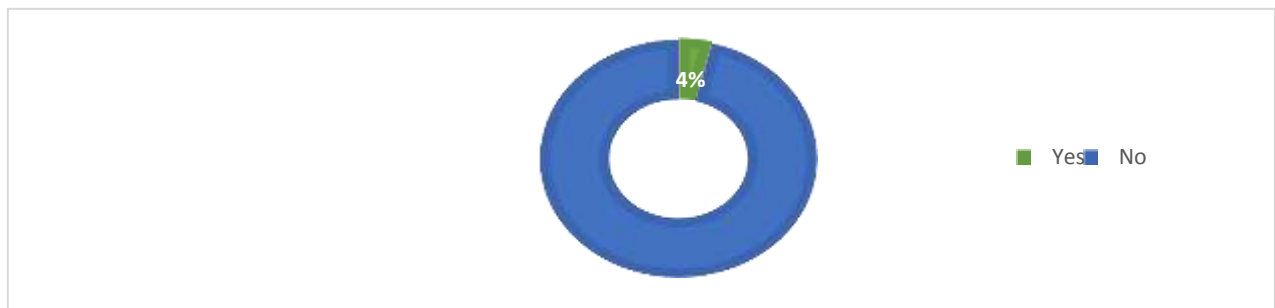


Figure 8. Relevance of Storytelling Method

The above figure indicates that only 4% of the students to have experienced the storytelling method in the English class. To obtain further details, the targeted participant answered to have

experienced the storytelling method once in a private school in Djelfa during an English session workshop. The participant further said that the storytelling session was exciting to him. While the rest of the students disapproved to have experienced this method before.

Part three: Students tick the relevant box.

Item 1: I can link events to create a story

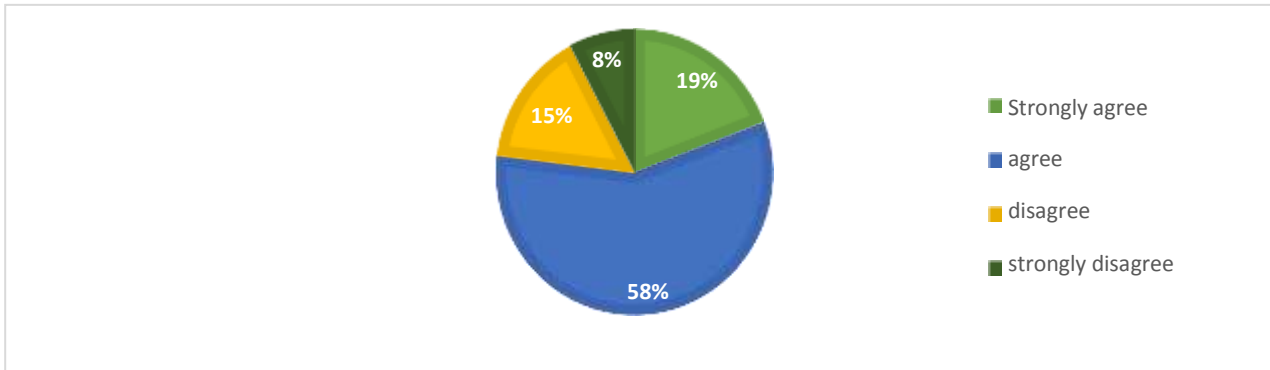
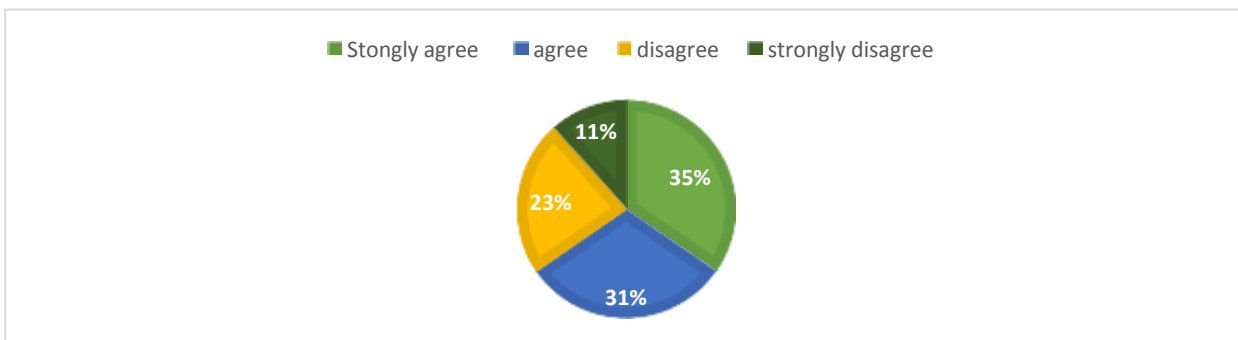


Figure 9. Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills are usually developed through activities like open-ended questions, exploring diverse perspectives through classroom discussions and reflecting upon one's own learning experience. In this regard, the above figure indicates that the majority of the students agree that story creating allows them to link events; this process requires the use of memory processing like analysing, and evaluating surrounding events in order to create a story. This can be remarkable through the second session of the storytelling method when the researcher asked students to narrate what they watched in a series of connected events that describe the happening of the story thus (77%) of the students were able to tell the story without any interference from the teacher. While (23%) disagreed with having the ability to link the events of the story and narrate it.

Item 2: I can solve challenging language tasks and summarise what I have learned

Figure 10. Problem Solving Skills



The above pie-chart identifies that (66%) of the students agree that they could solve challenging language tasks and summarise what they have learned. The aim of this statement was to know to what extent students can solve tasks, which they often see as boring and without repeatedly asking for the teacher's help and explanation (34%) of the students assumed the opposite.

Item 3: Storytelling gave me the chance to act and speak spontaneously and freely

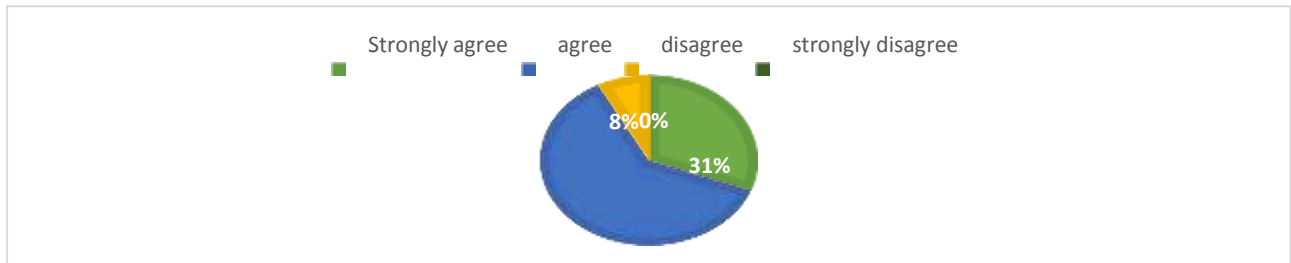


Figure 11. Communication Skills through Storytelling

Communication skills can be developed through interactive class discussions activities like role-play activities or narrating and reporting events. The aim of the above item is to know whether students are able to develop public speaking skills through the storytelling method. Thus, the above pie chart shows that (92%) of the students admitted telling stories was an enjoyable experience as it allowed them to act and speak deliberately in a relaxed learning environment. However, 8% of the students disagreed.

Item 4: I enjoyed group work activities

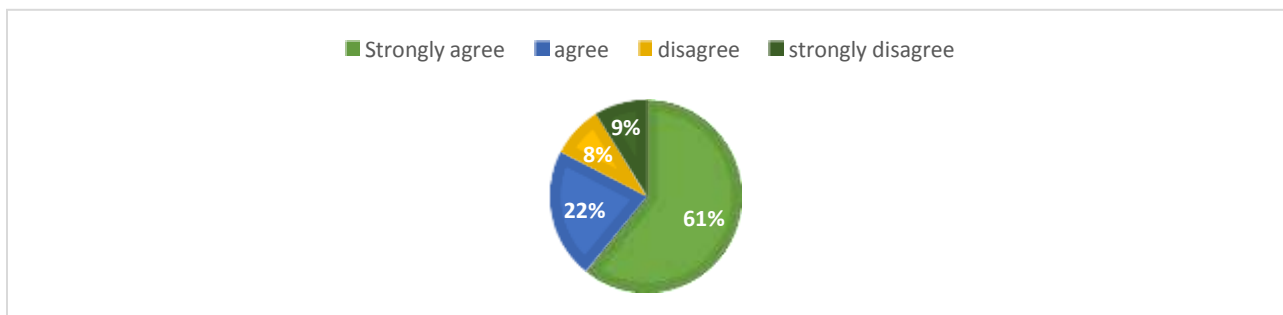


Figure 12. Collaboration through Storytelling

Collaboration refers to a process in which students work together, often in small groups or teams, to achieve a common learning goal or complete a specific task. It involves students actively engaging with their peers, sharing ideas, resources and responsibilities and contributing to their own and their group's learning. In this fashion, the above figure represents students' perspectives on collaborative tasks like enacting assigned parts of "The Giving Tree" story by Shel Silverstein (1964) during the post-storytelling phase. Accordingly, (83%) of the students enjoyed working with teammates in solving the assigned tasks while (17%) did not like taking part in such activities.

Item 5: Now I can tell a story about anything as my imagination grew bigger

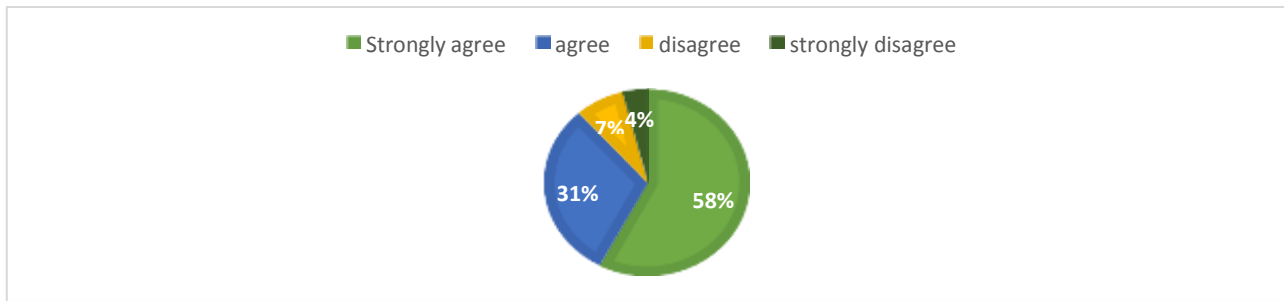


Figure 13. Creativity and Innovation

The researcher chose this item to know to what extent does telling stories or listening to them promotes learners' creative thinking and imagination. Thus, 98% of the students agreed that engaging in a storytelling session expanded their imagination and ability to develop different perspectives on the world. While only (11%) disagreed. Eventually, inviting students to create stories allows them to be creative in many ways, whether in creating tangible storyboards or designing books, or intangible ideas.

A modernized learning experience to promote literacy skills

Item 6: I leaned to use technology for study aims through storytelling

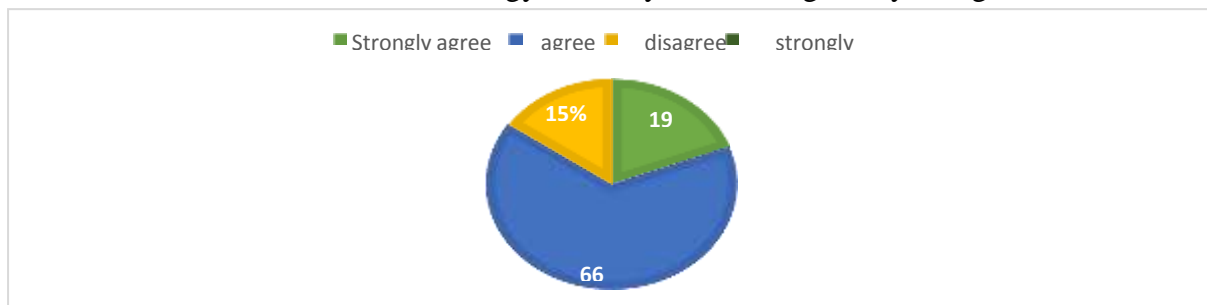
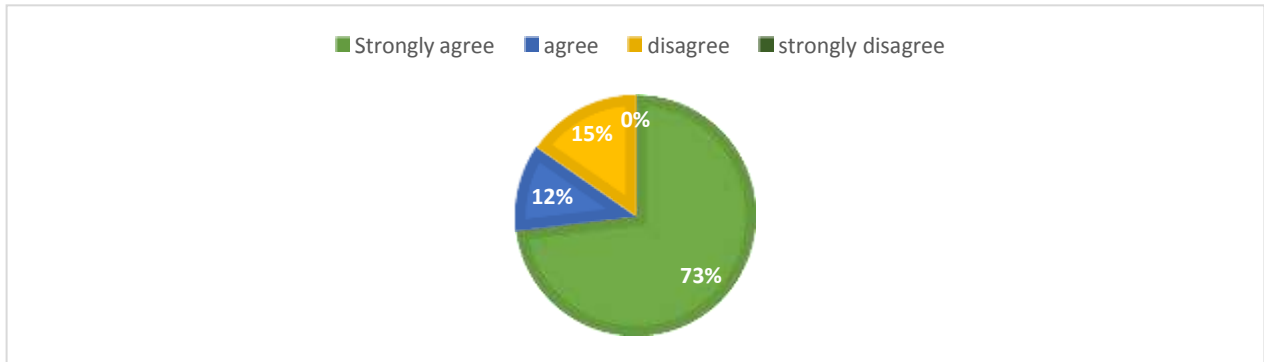


Figure 14. 21st Century Innovative Classroom

The above pie-chart mirrors students' perceptions on the use of Information and Communication Tools in the classroom (ICT). The majority of the students with (85%) became more aware on using ICT) through storytelling activities for learning aims both inside and outside the classroom setting. In addition, (15%) of them disagree. This indicates that few of the students already have knowledge on using (ICT) for learning aims while the rest were able to develop more (ICT) literacy skills.

Item 7: I want to watch more animated stories on YouTube

Figure 15. Animated Stories



This pie item aims at identifying the efficiency of using audio-visual storytelling and technological aids in innovating the Algerian classroom and equipping students with key competencies need to excel in the current century. Thus, (85%) of the students would like to experience more animated stories sessions while (15%) of the students disapproved to explore similar sessions in the future.

Life skills and Career Skills

Item 8: I liked helping in cleaning the class

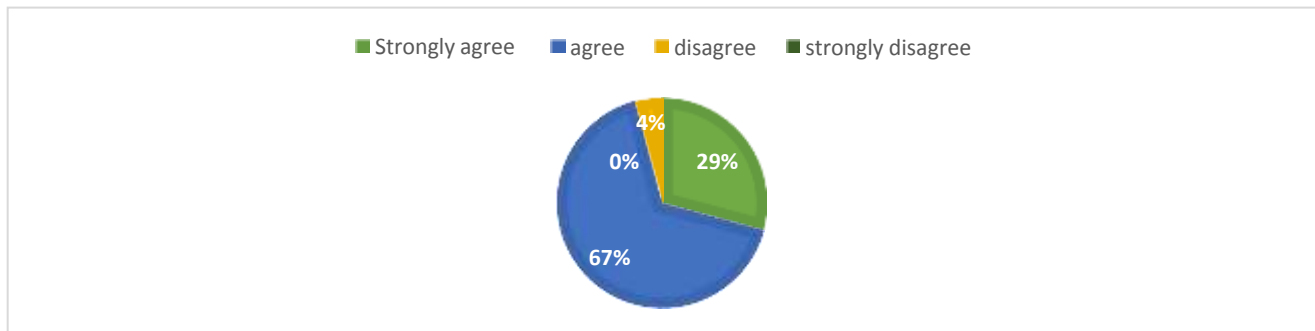
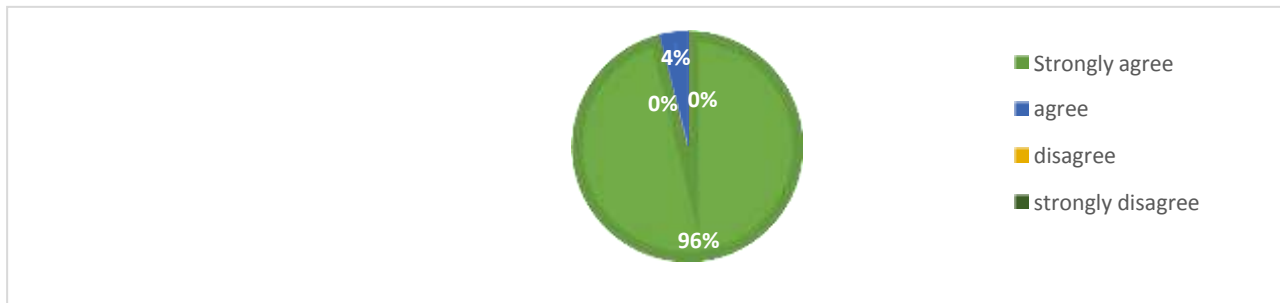


Figure 16. Productivity and Accountability

The above item aims to collect data on students' active and effective involvement during the classroom and accountability in taking a helpful role and charge of their own learning environment through the pre-storytelling phase. Thus, (96%) of the students admitted to have enjoyed taking part in preparing for the story-time and organising and cleaning the classroom's physical space. While (4%) of the students seemed to not enjoy such involvement. This indicates that the majority of the students welcomed such an inclusive and vivid learning experience and could develop more productivity and accountability skills by taking active roles while the rest of the students did not like such activities and hence exhibited some passive traits.

Item 10: Now I appreciate my teacher, classmates and learning more

Figure 17. Social and Cross-cultural Skills

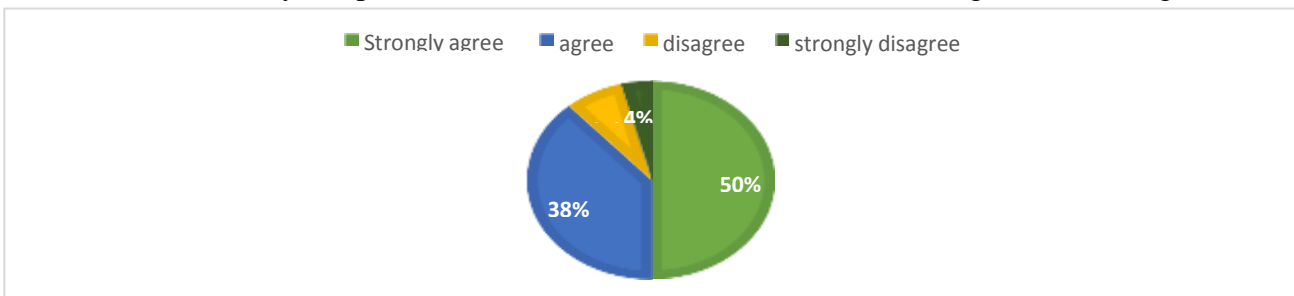


This pie chart mirrors students' empathy, respect and understating towards their classmates and teacher's cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Interestingly, all of the students agreed that they could develop these values through the storytelling sessions. This illustrates that storytelling sessions altered the classroom-learning environment and enabled them to develop social and cross-cultural skills by learning new morals at the end of each story session and showing respect to each other's perspectives and experiences including appreciating their learning experience.

Item 11: I became more active during the English class

Figure 18. Initiative and self-Regulation

The above item aims at measuring students' active engagement through the storytelling method and ability to promote initiative skills and maintain self-regulation throughout the



process. (88%) of the students approved to become more active during the session as the storytelling method required constant interaction with the story, targeted lesson points including taking part in telling stories during both experienced storytelling sessions and regulating emotions like stress and self- doubt. However, (12%) of the students disagreed to be more engaged during the session despite being constantly encouraged to take part in storytelling activities.

Item 12: I could solve problems without the teacher's help

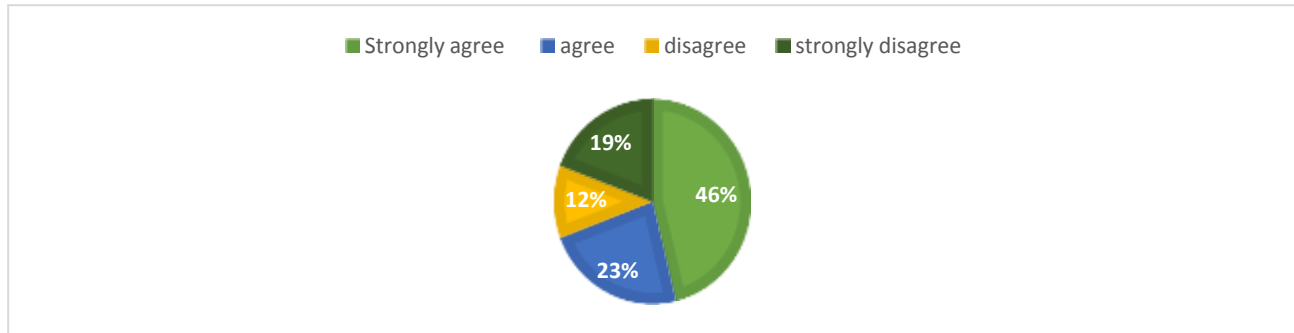


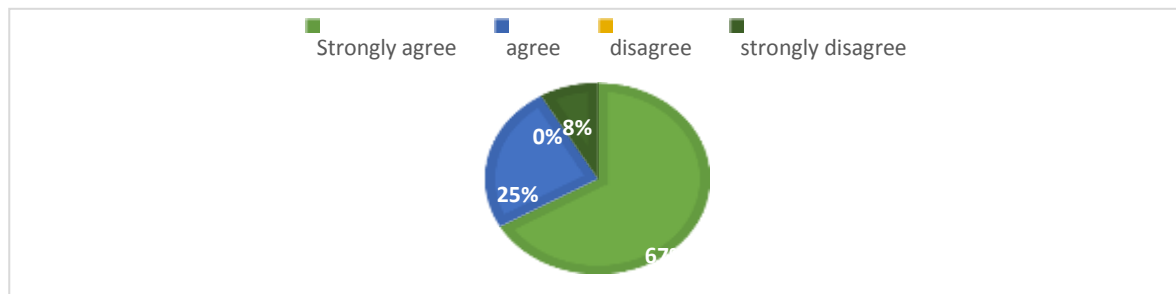
Figure 19. Flexibility and adaptability

The aim of the above item was to know to what extent students could solve occurring problems without asking for the teacher's help. Accordingly, (69%) of the students agreed that the storytelling method allowed them to discover new realities, accept their differences and change perspectives when concluding the morals of the stories, figuring out solutions to start the digital storytelling session like looking for curtain in order to display the slide-projector and adjusting the speakers. However, (31%) of the students found it hard to adapt to these changes because of unfamiliarity to such learning environments.

Leadership and Responsibility

When taking charge of storytelling all my classmates listened to me

Figure 20. Leadership and Responsibility



This figure entails the percentage of students' leadership and responsibility skills, which require taking part in storytelling roles representing the group members and taking the responsibility of telling the created story to the rest of classmates a in meaningfully way. Thus, the majority of the students (67%) strongly disagreed to the above statement while only (25%) of the students agreed to successfully excelling in the assigned task and responsibility.

Part Four: This part of the questionnaire contains five open-ended questions that investigate learners' attitudes and impressions about the storytelling sessions.

Question 1: What was your general impression of the session?

The majority of the students with twenty-six answers answered this question. Eighteen students answered very well, five answered with excellent and perfect while only three answered with normal. Learners' general impressions of the session and the new teaching method were mainly

positive; three students provided complete answers. They believed that through storytelling they had the chance to explore new roles. For example, one of the students indicated that, "I could act spontaneously and freely, I really enjoyed the stories". While the other students expressed that they could experience the language in different ways and enjoyed the sessions much more than traditional ones, as one of the students thought to be easy to comprehend and not boring or complicated as it used to be before.

Question 2: What part of the story did you like the most? (Preparation, beginning of the story the block or the end)? Why

Twelve students, constituting 46% of the total, favored the endings of the stories, appreciating the reflective opportunities, unexpected scenarios, and moral lessons they provided. Five students preferred the climax, expressing enthusiasm for guessing and imagining scenarios before discovering the story's conclusion. Four students liked the preparation phase the most, enjoying spontaneous collaboration and taking initiative in class activities. The beginning of the story, where the teacher exemplified storytelling skills, was the least favored, although some students appreciated the innovative approach to understanding new vocabulary. Overall, students valued different aspects of the storytelling method, emphasizing its impact on reflection, curiosity, collaboration, and engagement in the learning process.

Question 3. What was the percentage of class participation and engagement?

Students reported varying levels of participation and engagement during storytelling sessions, with the majority (twelve responses) indicating active involvement between 90% and 100%. This highlights the significant impact of the storytelling method on fostering engagement and participation in the classroom. The compelling content and progression of the stories motivated students to process, analyze, and communicate their understanding effectively. The pre-storytelling phase, involving student preparation, contributed to an inviting classroom environment, and the teacher's role modeling during the storytelling phase further enhanced engagement. The post-storytelling phase, including retelling the story and role-play activities, emphasized the method's role in fostering interaction and encouraging students to develop new perspectives. Overall, the results suggest that storytelling positively influences students' involvement and competency development in the learning process.

Question 4: What was positively special about the session?

Students provided diverse perspectives on the benefits of the storytelling method. Half of the students praised the dynamic and enjoyable learning experience, emphasizing the effective integration of grammar lessons and engaging character portrayals. They also expressed respect, empathy, and appreciation for the teacher and classmates. The remaining students appreciated various aspects, such as the opportunity to enhance communication skills through speaking, the integration of technology with animated videos, and the collaborative nature of group work. Overall, the storytelling method was acknowledged for fostering language skills, life skills, communication skills, and creating a positive and engaging learning environment.

Question 5. What you did not like during the session?

The aim of this question is to reveal the shortcoming of the storytelling method in order to provide insightful information to bridge its gaps. In this regard, the majority of the students said that the storytelling sessions were enjoyable and encouraging to learn and experience it again, among their answers “I hated it when the stories ended, time passed very fast”. This indicates that students enjoyed the storytelling session to the extent that they were asking for extra storytelling sessions. However, 10 students said that there was a little bit of noise during the digital storytelling session, this latter might be due to unfamiliarity with such learning environments and the further need for more classroom management by the teacher.

Interpretation of Results

After displaying and analysing all the data the researcher used in the present study in order to reach answers to prove the three-claimed research hypothesis. The storytelling method allowed second year students at ENS, Laghouat to explore an innovative way to develop most 21st century learning and life skills during their English module session.

The storytelling method helped develop students’ 21st-century learning skills, including communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking skills. Before the storytelling method, students developed only (26%) of critical thinking skills, (46%) of problem solving skills, (28%) of communication skills, (73%) of creativity and (85%) of collaboration skills, this indicates that students already develop creativity and collaboration skills during their traditional sessions of the English module. However, in post storytelling experiment, storytelling raised students’ skills into (77%) of critical thinking skills, (66%) problem-solving skills, (92%) for communication skills, (83%) collaboration skills and (73%) creativity skills. In this regard, student at ENS Laghouat were able to develop most of the leaning skills with a slight difference concerning collaboration skills due to some limitation and need for more sessions through the collaborative group works during the storytelling method. As such, according to students’ responses to the positive aspects of the method, storytelling allowed them to express their options deliberately, develop creative thinking and enjoy working in collaborative groups.

Using Digital storytelling through audiovisual platforms and aids changed students’ perspectives towards learning. After collecting and interpreting data, results show that students were not used to the integration of information and communication technology mediums inside and outside the classroom that much nor used to learning English through animated stories using platforms like YouTube. Before the storytelling method, students had 73% of ICT literacy knowledge and information literacy skills inside and outside the classroom while in post storytelling, this latter changed. 84% of the students had the opportunity to witness a learning experience, where information and communication technology has been interactively implemented in the classroom and developed more knowledge on this latter and became more aware on how to search and use newly learned information in order to express idea. In addition, 10

of the students further explained that the only negative aspects of the Digital storytelling session was noise. This latter might be due to students' unfamiliarity to such learning environments and the further need for more classroom management by the teacher.

In terms of life skills, the storytelling method allowed students to develop key skills to excel outside the classroom setting. In this regard, respect among classmates, teacher and appreciation of the learning process increased from 81% to 100% after exploring the storytelling session. For example, one of the students said, "I loved how the teacher explained the lesson, you deserve a clap", "I liked how my classmates acted out the story". Besides when concluding the moral of the story students also "learned to be helpful for the needy" and could reflect their life experiences to the story of "The Giving Tree" and sympathize when hearing their classmates' personal stories. Storytelling enabled six students who took charge of telling stories to possess leadership and responsibility skills. This can be concluded when the number of 9% representing leadership and responsible skills in pre-experiment increased to (22%) during the storytelling sessions. In addition, Storytelling could raise students' flexibility and adaptability skills from (12%) to (69%) and (31%) found it hard to adapt to the newly learning environment. Moreover, before storytelling students showed (55%) of initiative and self-regulation skills by controlling anxiety and shyness and participating actively during the lesson time, this number augmented up to (88%) while the rest did not show such skills. Similarly, before storytelling (31%) of the students answered that they were not used to an organised learning environment nor had goals to learn English. On the other hand, through the storytelling method, (96%) of the students had the opportunity to take active roles and only (4%) were passive which might be because of their learning styles or personal qualities despite that the storytelling offered a relaxing learning experience. To sum up, the storytelling implementation in the oral session allowed students to explore a new way of learning that celebrates the use of (ICT) tools for study aims like the use animated, audiovisual stories, which altered the learning experience into an enjoyable motivating one; thus, boosted students' 21st century life and career skills and prepared them to excel outside the classroom setting. In conclusion, the interpretation and analysis of the research data showed that the storytelling method boosts students' 21st century skills.

General Conclusion:

In the dynamic realm of 21st-century English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, educators seek methodologies aligned with modern learner needs. This study delves into the potential of storytelling as a pedagogical tool to enrich students' 21st-century skills, fostering an innovative learning experience. Formulated hypotheses, tested through a mixed-method approach involving a quasi-experiment and questionnaires, substantiate the positive impact of storytelling on promoting crucial life skills and preparing students for the challenges of the contemporary world.

The theoretical foundation explores the evolution of EFL teaching methods, emphasizing the contextual dependence of methodology on learner needs and available resources. The practical

aspect delves into the research design, tools, and data analysis, revealing obstacles encountered during the process. Despite challenges, the findings affirm that integrating storytelling into EFL instruction effectively contributes to students' 21st-century learning and life skills, underlining the significance of adopting dynamic methodologies for a progressive and innovative educational experience.

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