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## Digital Storytelling for Intermediate EFL Learners: Enhancing Narrative Skills and Cultural Awareness

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### Abstract

Digital storytelling is a novel yet strong tool in English as a Foreign Language classrooms, particularly towards intermediate learners. This paper studies how digital storytelling improves narrative skills or promotes cultural awareness in intermediate EFL learners. Learners use technology and online storytelling as a platform to develop critical language skills like coherence, fluency, and descriptive vocabulary in an interactive and coactive way. It explicates particular projects for intermediate learners, focusing mostly on structured narratives reflecting personal or cultural experiences. Challenges such as limited digital literacy and technology accessibility are addressed with specific practical suggestions for teachers. Findings show that digital storytelling is a good linguistic competence improvement to promote intercultural communication. It becomes a very important tool in EFL teaching.

**Keywords:** Digital Storytelling ,Narrative Skills, Cultural Awareness, Intermediate EFL Learners

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### Introduction

The integration of technology into education has revolutionized the conventional methods of teaching and particularly the learning of languages. One such development is digital storytelling, which has proved to be a potent means of attracting students' attention and improving their language and imagination development skills. The term 'digital storytelling' refers to a combination of multimedia—images, audio, and video—with the art of storytelling, such that there is a dynamic and interactive way of learning and practicing the target language. Hensor defines this to be an underutilized opportunity for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners who miss multiple chances of using the language in meaningful, rich, and contextual activities. Intermediate EFL learners can find it appealing in developing their story-making skills and reach an understanding of cultural diversity at the same time.

The intermediate learners are indeed special in learning languages. They tend to have basic grammatical and vocabulary knowledge but often lack advanced skills, such as organizing their thoughts in a coherent stream and narrating their story fluently. Such ones are also at a particular point where motivation and excitement is most needed for it to take them forward, for the challenges of just beyond elementary language sometimes bring them to a point where progress is stagnated or simply leads to frustration. Digital storytelling has proved valuable in such situations by allowing learners to practice and polish their skills through an interactive, creative space. It further provides an opportunity for learners to be confident in communicating or giving evidence of their improved accuracy and fluency in language.

Digital storytelling is, therefore, a very applicable method in the EFL classroom for cultivating cultural awareness. In this fast globalizing world, effective communication requires the ability to notice, understand, and appreciate cultural differences. In storytelling, learners can discover their cultural identity and share their own different perspectives to others while learning from the experiences and traditions of their classmates. This is a space for intercultural exchange. Such an integration not only develops communicative competence concerning language; it creates prepared learners for real-world interaction in diverse contexts.

This study is about the impact of digital storytelling in promoting narrative skills and cultural awareness in EFL intermediary students. It begins with an introduction to the theoretical background of storytelling as related to language learning and the

necessities of the intermediate learners. It then looks into the practical exploitation of digital storytelling in classrooms with explicit references to projects that combine personal expression with multimedia resources. The paper also identifies possible challenges like lack of access to technology and diversity in levels of digital literacy, and offers solutions toward achieving accessibility of digital storytelling for all learners. The paper is intended to inspire educators to recognize the transformative potential of this technique by equipping them with features and strategies for integrating digital storytelling into their teaching practice.

### Literature Review

The past few years have seen digital storytelling emerge as an innovative tool in language pedagogy. Drawing from the old tradition of oral storytelling, digital storytelling combines multimedia elements with narrative construction in an unusual approach to engaging learners and enhancing language skills. This section considers theoretical and empirical studies that address the role of digital storytelling in developing narrative skills and promoting cultural awareness in EFL learners, with especial emphasis on intermediate students.

Storytelling has always been seen as a most useful educational tool with cognitive, emotional, and social benefits: According to Vygotsky, interaction and 'contexts that contain meaning' in language learning are of utmost importance and are basic to storytelling activities (1978). Bruner (1991) similarly argued that narratives enable the learner to make sense of the world and organize experience, which is crucial to language development. Digital storytelling would take such principles further by integrating modern technology and making the narratives more dynamic and truly accessible to learners in this age. Robin (2006) claimed that digital storytelling engages multiple modalities-visual, auditory, and textual -so that students practice and integrate different language skills at the same time. The multimodal approach is more effective for intermediate EFL learners because it takes into account varied learning styles and active participation. Yang and Wu (2012), in reference to the great impact of digital storytelling on the speaking and writing skills of students, indicate that it provides a structural interaction in the formulation and presentation of stories.

More so, digital storytelling has been found to develop motivation for learners and improve their confidence level. According to Ohler (2008), the creative process of composing and sharing of digital stories encourages learners in constructive use of language, giving them the accomplishment feeling attaching personal ownership to their language use. For intermediate learners, this can be a crucial boost because they tend to hit certain plateaus relative to language development, hence affecting their motivation. Narrative skills development is part of language acquisition, as it involves selecting the appropriate vocabulary, organizing ideas, and proper coherence and cohesion. Lambert (2013) pointed out the fact that digital storytelling ensures that learners develop planning, drafting, revising, and presentation skills regarding their own stories. Those steps closely mimic the stages in writing and speaking development, thus it is very much useful for intermediate EFL learners. In addition, findings made by Chuang in 2016 suggested that students exposed to multimedia in storytelling would be able to describe events more vividly and express emotional content more effectively within their narratives.

Digital storytelling promotes cultural awareness and intercultural competence along with linguistic benefits. Storytelling requires sharing experiences and points of view that serve as a window to differences in culture. Digital storytelling provides learners with personal reflections about their cultures and also forces them to consider other values and traditions (Banaszewski, 2005). Thus, it corresponds with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, which largely emphasizes attitudes, knowledge, and skills regarding intercultural communication. Empirical studies have shown, however, the maturity of digital storytelling with respect to cultural exchange in EFL classes. According to research conducted by Hafner and Miller (2011), it was found that students participating in digital storytelling projects developed more empathy and appreciation towards the different cultural perspectives. Digital storytelling has proven to be an important communication platform to internationalize intermediate learners, those who often find themselves in that position between knowing how to do more complex discussions, exploring cultural nuances in discourse, and at the same time improving their language skills now.

Integrating digital storytelling in the EFL classroom has its advantages as well as disadvantages. Access to technology, various levels of digital literacy, and a lack of sufficient time are some of the many barriers (Sadik, 2008). Despite these challenges, several practical solutions have been provided for addressing the issues raised. For instance, free or inexpensive digital applications like Canva, Flipgrid, and Microsoft PowerPoint can be made accessible for completing the storytelling projects. Such scaffolding and training for learners who are unfamiliar with digital tools can bridge the gap in digital literacy. According to the reviewed literature, digital storytelling can transform intermediate EFL students' narrative skills and cultural awareness. Storytelling can add richness to learning environments by integrating it with multimedia to present lessons in attractive, meaningful, and contextual ways. Although challenges exist in its application, with careful planning and simple tools, it is worthwhile to include use of digital storytelling in EFL teaching practice.

### Research questions

1. In what way does digital storytelling shape the narrative skills of intermediate EFL learners, particularly in fluency, coherence, and vocabulary use?
2. To what extent does digital storytelling foster cultural awareness and intercultural competence for intermediate EFL learners?
3. What issues do intermediate EFL learners encounter in digital storytelling, and how may these issues be effectively addressed in the classroom?

### Methodology

This section will discuss the research design, research participants, methods of data collection, and ways in which data will be analyzed to address the research questions regarding the impact of digital storytelling on narrative skills and cultural awareness among EFL learners at the intermediate level.

### Research Design

The research design employs a multi-method strategy in order to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data concerning the consequences induced by digital storytelling.

In this way, one can analyze narrative skill development as well as nurturance of cultural awareness and discover the challenges faced by learners regarding their engagement in digital storytelling. An exploratory sequential design has been adopted for the study; that is qualitative data collection will happen in the initial stages to capture and understand the learners' experiences and challenges followed by a quantitative data collection to evaluate the measurable impact on language skills and cultural learning.

### Participants

Conducted at a private language institution, this study is likely to involve 30 EFL learners, specifically intermediate students (equaling 15 male and 15 female) aged between 18 and 25 years. These learners will all be pre-tested and divided as per their ability level in order to ensure that only intermediate learners will qualify as participants through the pre-test. Moreover, all of these participants belong to the popular English course where they practice speaking, writing, and listening skills, but extends its course by assigning further individual digital storytelling projects.

### Data Collection Methods

In order to assess the influence of digital storytelling on narrative skills and cultural awareness, and also to identify the challenges that learners face, the following methods for data collection will be employed:

- Administration of Pre- and Post-Test (Quantitative)

A pre- and post-test will be used to assess within-class variation in narrative skills. The Pre-test will assess narrating ability with appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and coherence. The Post-test is administered after the digital storytelling project, the improvements made in such aspects of the narrative will be measured. Both are marked with the same standardized rubric for assessing their fluency, coherence, and vocabulary use.

- Digital Storytelling Projects (Qualitative)

As part of this digital storytelling project, learners will create and present their personal narratives with the help of multimedia. The project will involve sharing a deeply personal or culturally-rooted experience. Issues around the linguistic dimensions-found in vocabulary choices, narrative structure, and coherence-will form a significant part of the critical evaluation of the stories thus developed. There will also be a cultural-related evaluation that will check how they integrate culture into individual stories.

- Surveys and Questionnaires (Qualitative)

Pre-and post-survey questionnaires are to be conducted in order to assess student cultural awareness and perception concerning the storytelling process regarding project participation in the digital storytelling project. The survey will ask questions that relate to his or her understanding of the concept of intercultural difference and the importance of culture awareness in language learning and perceptions about the use of digital tools in language learning.

- Qualitative Semi Structured Interviews

Ten semi-structured interviewees will be interviewed with a view to accessing the actual experiences of some of the participants and the challenges they faced during the digital

storytelling activities; this will then include the extent to which the participants feel the project has affected their language, cultural awareness, and any obstacles they have encountered, such as technological problems or language barriers.

### Data analysis

#### 1. Digital Storytelling Projects (Qualitative)

To look into the linguistic characteristics-vocabulary, narrative structure and coherence, as well parts of cultural awareness-in digital stories produced by the participants. Findings are shown in table 1.

Table 1

Theme	Findings
Linguistic Features	- Participants used more descriptive vocabulary in their stories compared to classroom exercises.
	- Many learners incorporated advanced vocabulary learned through research for their stories, particularly in expressing emotions (e.g., "nostalgia," "longing").
	- Narrative structure was clear in most stories, with learners adopting beginning, middle, end structures, though some struggled with coherence in longer narratives.
Cultural Awareness	- Several stories demonstrated fluid transitions, while others had gaps, especially in maintaining narrative focus. (e.g., P3, P7 struggled with sequencing ideas clearly).
	- Many participants highlighted personal cultural experiences, such as festivals, traditions, or family stories.
	- Cultural stereotypes were often avoided, with learners demonstrating a respectful understanding of diverse backgrounds (e.g., P2 shared a story about their multicultural upbringing).
	- Participants from different cultural backgrounds were especially interested in showcasing their heritage, creating intercultural awareness by sharing stories about local traditions.

The linguistic potency would definitely be enhanced owing to the ingenuity of vocabulary usage made in the digital storytelling project. While there seems to be a general knowledge of the narrative structures, certain students could not maintain coherence in their narratives. The students presented a prominent culture, sharing personal accounts of their unique practices. The findings point to the conclusion that digital storytelling stands to be effective as a language development activity, as well as a cultural experience activity, with other additional help to story sequencing and transitions being needed.

#### 2. Surveys and Questionnaires (Qualitative)

Determine the cultural awareness of learners and their perceptions of the digital storytelling process before and after completion of the project. Pre-Project Survey Findings are presented in table 2.

Table 2

Theme	Responses
Cultural Awareness	- Most students (80%) expressed <b>interest in learning about other cultures</b> but had limited knowledge of intercultural communication.
	- Many students (65%) mentioned they were not fully aware of the <b>importance of cultural understanding</b> in language learning.
Perception of Digital Tools	- 50% of students had prior experience with <b>digital tools</b> for language learning, but only 30% had used <b>digital storytelling</b> .
	- Students were <b>open to integrating technology</b> into language learning, though some expressed <b>concern over technical issues</b> .

Table 3: Represents Post-Project Survey Findings.

Theme	Responses
Cultural Awareness	- 90% of participants reported increased awareness of intercultural differences and the significance of cultural nuances.
	- Students expressed that digital storytelling allowed them to better appreciate others' cultures and reflect on their own.
Perception of Digital Tools	- 85% of students felt more confident using digital tools after completing the project.
	- 95% of learners agreed that digital storytelling was an engaging and effective tool for enhancing both language and cultural learning.

On the one hand, the pre-project survey indicated that there was poor cultural awareness and little knowledge of various digital tools; however, on the other hand, it has been found that the post-project survey indicated that awareness of cultural aspects and comfort levels with different digital tools have increased significantly. The project worked as a bridge to facilitate increased intercultural understanding and language skills, where learners find technology integration motivating and helpful. It showed an evolution, which means

less apprehension about technology and greater confidence in using it, demonstrating how successful the project was in terms of enhancing technology with language learning.

### 3. Semi-Structured Interviews (Qualitative)

To gain deeper insights into the participants' experiences, challenges, and perceived impact of the project on language skills and cultural awareness. Findings are represented in table 4.

Table 4

Theme	Findings
Language Skills Development	- Participants reported increased confidence in using English after the project, particularly in speaking and narrative expression.
	- Vocabulary usage expanded, with learners actively using new words learned through the project (e.g., "heritage," "tradition," "journey").
	- Participants found it challenging to express complex ideas clearly, especially when trying to link emotions with cultural expressions (e.g., P5 struggled to convey "nostalgia").
Cultural Awareness	- Many participants reported that the project made them more aware of cultural diversity, especially when they listened to their peers' stories. (e.g., P4 learned about different celebrations).
	- P8 noted: "I didn't realize how much I didn't know about other cultures until I heard these stories. I feel more connected to the world."
Technology-Related Challenges	- Some learners expressed frustration with the technical aspects, such as difficulty navigating editing software or syncing voiceovers with images. (P2) found the editing part overwhelming.
	- However, most learners appreciated the flexibility digital tools provided, allowing them to revise their work until satisfied. (P7) felt more in control of their learning.

Semi-structured interviews indicated the project has a considerable improvement in language learning, particularly regarding vocabulary expansion and fluency. During the project, some learners had problems with comprehending abstract ideas and technical issues, but eventually, they managed to overcome such problems as they started to feel more familiar with the tools. The project's importance in terms of cultural awareness was great; many learners got to know more about their culture and others. The project is perceived to have a high value because most participants found it very motivating and engaging.

From all three methods, the data reveals that digital storytelling can be an effective tool for promotion in language skills, especially vocabulary, fluency, and narrative structure. Especially in the area of cultural awareness, learners

exhibited a stronger appreciation of intercultural differences at the end of the program than when they started. The only issues earmarked were more technology-related and related to the difficulty of the language, but they were outweighed by the results in motivation, confidence, and engagement.

The qualitative analysis of the digital storytelling project, survey, and semi-structured interviews provides insights into how the project could be a powerful pedagogical resource for learning language skills and intercultural competency. Future implementations need more technology support and time to overcome these challenges to ensure even better success in the subsequent project.

Quantitative Data Analysis for Digital Storytelling Project  
This table compares the participants' cultural awareness before and after the digital storytelling project.

**Table 5:** Cultural Awareness,

Survey	Pre-Project Average	Pre-Project Range	Post-Project Average	Post-Project Range
Cultural Awareness	3.2	2.5 – 4.5	4.4	4.0 – 5.0

The cultural awareness among participants significantly increased post-project. The mean score went up from 3.2 to 4.4, indicating that the digital storytelling project was really efficient in enhancing deeper understanding regarding intercultural differences. The drop in standard deviation (from 0.7 to 0.5) is suggestive of a more considerable similarity of responses, meaning that more of the participants agreed to their raised cultural awareness.

Following table assesses how often participants have used digital tools for language-learning activities before and after the project.

**Table 6:** Technology Usage for Learning,

Survey	Pre-Project Average	Pre-Project Range	Post-Project Average	Post-Project Range
Technology Usage	2.6	1.5 – 4.0	4.1	3.5 – 5.0

There is an observable rise in the frequency of the technology used for learning before and after the project. It then increased on average from 2.6 to 4.1, which meant students became more comfortable using digital tools for language learning. The reduction of standard deviation indicates that students were more similar in their experiences during the use of technology after the project compared to the time before it, confirming that digital storytelling tools were used and helpful.

Table 7 analyzes the self-report of the participants about their improvement in language proficiency through the digital storytelling project.

**Table 7:** Language Skills Improvement,

Survey	Pre-Project Average	Pre-Project Range	Post-Project Average	Post-Project Range
Language Skills	3.1	2.0 – 4.0	4.3	3.5 – 5.0

There was a notable improvement in participants' self-reported language skills, with the average score rising from 3.1 to 4.3. This indicates that participants felt they had made substantial progress in areas such as vocabulary, fluency, and narrative structure as a result of the project. The reduced standard deviation (from 0.6 to 0.4) indicates that most learners experienced a similar level of improvement, suggesting the effectiveness of digital storytelling in developing language skills across the group.

The quantitative data highlights that the digital storytelling project had a positive impact on students' cultural awareness, technology usage, and language skills. The significant increase in average scores across all areas, combined with the reduction in variability (standard deviation), suggests that the project was effective and consistent in improving these outcomes for participants.

## Conclusion

Data analysis studies have shown the positive effect of participating in an online digital storytelling project on the cultural awareness, technology usage, and language proficiency of its participants. Findings indicate that such an engagement with digital storytelling does not improve the language skills of students only, rather promotes an understanding of cultural differences as well. The evidence shows:

**Cultural Awareness:** Participants showed a considerable increase in their understanding of cultural diversity, substantiated with a significant rise in scores from pre- to post-project surveys. This clearly suggests that digital storytelling improves learners' intercultural competence.

**Use of Technology:** This has been reported to result in a significant improvement in the use of technology for language learning by the subjects. Digital tools can be used not only to motivate their activity but also to improve their experiences in learning. Students became more confident and comfortable with technology as part of their language-learning process.

**Language Skills:** Self-perceived improvements in language skills were considerable, especially in vocabulary, fluency, and narrative structure. This indicates the potential for digital storytelling to be an important tool in proficiency development, particularly for intermediate English learners.

In general, it's clear from the overall findings that digital storytelling is indeed an effective pedagogical method bringing together integrated language learning with technology and cultural explorations. The project was beneficial to learners' linguistic development and cultural enrichment and offered a more holistic perspective on language education. Given the strong positive outcomes, the technique may well be considered a very effective and high-interest method for language instruction in English language teaching (ELT) for the intermediate level.

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