

Using Digital Stories to Improve Faculty of Education English Majors' Cultural Awareness

Heba Zayed Hamdy Abdelwakeel

Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of using Digital Stories (DS) to enhance cultural awareness among second-year English majors at the Faculty of Education. A total of 41 students were randomly selected to form a one study group, which was taught using digital stories during the second semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. The study adopted the pre-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test design. The instruments of the study included a needs assessment questionnaire and a cultural awareness test, covering knowledge, attitude, and behavior dimensions, which were administered before and after the intervention. Statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement in the participants' post-test scores across all dimensions, indicating that digital stories were effective in improving cultural awareness. Analysis of the results highlighted the value of integrating digital stories into EFL instruction to support students' intercultural competence and engagement with cultural content. In the light of these results, it was concluded that digital stories were effective in improving second-year faculty of education English majors' cultural awareness skills.

Key words: Digital Stories - Cultural Awareness.

استخدام القصص الرقمية لتحسين الوعي الثقافي لدى متخصصي اللغة الانجليزية بكلية التربية

هبة زايد حمدي عبدالوكيل

مستخلص البحث

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى قياس فاعلية استخدام القصص الرقمية في تحسين الوعي الثقافي لدى طلاب الفرقة الثانية بشعبة اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية. تم اختيار 41 طالبًا بشكل عشوائي لتكوين مجموعة دراسية واحدة، وقد تم تدريسها باستخدام القصص الرقمية خلال الفصل الدراسي الثاني من العام الأكاديمي 2024-2025. وقد استخدمت هذه الدراسة التصميم شبه التجريبي لمجموعة الواحدة باختبار قبلي-بعدي. وشملت أدوات الدراسة استبيانًا لتحديد الاحتياجات واختبار للوعي الثقافي يغطي أبعاد المعرفة، والاتجاه، والسلوك قبل وبعد التجربة. وكشفت التحليلات الإحصائية عن تحسن ملحوظ في درجات الطلاب بعد التطبيق، في جميع الأبعاد، مما يشير إلى أن القصص الرقمية كانت فعالة في تحسين الوعي الثقافي. ابرزت هذه النتائج أهمية دمج القصص الرقمية في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدعم كفاءة الطلاب بين الثقافات وتعزيز تفاعلهم مع المحتوى الثقافي. وفي ضوء هذه النتائج تم التوصل الي أن القصص الرقمية كانت فعالة بشكل واضح في تحسين مهارات الوعي الثقافي لدي متخصصي اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوعي الثقافي – القصص الرقمية.

Introduction

Language is a significant part of human communication. It is the cornerstone of civilization, enabling the preservation of history, the transmission of knowledge, and the development of complex societies. It allows us to innovate, collaborate, and progress as a species. Through language, we can share ideas, pass down traditions, and build upon the collective wisdom of our ancestors. It empowers us to connect with others profoundly, fostering empathy, understanding, and cooperation. Language and culture are deeply connected. Language is not just a tool for communication; it also reflects the values, beliefs, and traditions of a culture.

Yurtsever and Özel (2021) clarified that language learning involves four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which learners should practice inside and outside the classroom. While classroom interaction may be confined to its members' backgrounds and shared values, learners need pragmatic skills to navigate social and cultural aspects once they are outside the classroom. Language consists of linguistic expressions, such as words and phrases. Understanding cultural knowledge is necessary to use these expressions correctly and appropriately. Additionally, since cultural and social values, as well as language choices, are influenced by societal and geographical contexts, teaching culture is essential for acquiring communicative competence to interact with native speakers of the target language. To comprehend the values of native speakers, culture should be taught. Considering these points, it is recommended that culture and language be taught together (Çalışkan, 2009).

The current era is marked by an explosion of knowledge and the advent of innovative technologies to enhance the educational process. Due to these swift and ever-expanding advancements in the realm of knowledge, which often exceed the capacity of modern individuals to grasp fully, it has become essential to prioritize cultural awareness overall (Hamidan, 2020). Culture refers to the region where a group of people lives, their shared social environment, and their ethnic background. It is crucial to determine whether factors such as birthplace, experience abroad, gender, and the type of high school attended impact their attitudes toward learning about the target culture (Belli, 2018).

A lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity has impeded learners from effectively mastering foreign languages. This deficiency has caused students to face substantial challenges in confidently learning new languages, including difficulties in using appropriate terms and pronouncing them correctly. Engaging in cultural activities and receiving training in intercultural communication could help alleviate cross-cultural issues in language learning. Cultural awareness is regarded as a crucial element for personal and professional growth, defined as an individual's understanding and attitude towards other cultures and communities. Consequently, individuals with cultural awareness can comprehend and respect the beliefs, values, and decision-making processes of different cultures (Brainee, 2024).

Developing cultural awareness is one of the key aspects that students need to focus on. Addressing the challenge of fostering students' cross-cultural awareness and improving their cross-cultural communication skills is essential. Cross-cultural competence is a fundamental skill for modern youth and serves as the foundation for meaningful dialogue between civilizations. Understanding is key to fostering empathy, mutual appreciation, and respect, while actively resisting cultural dominance or tribalism. This competence helps in cultivating a genuine sense of global awareness and a shared sense of human destiny (Jin & Song, 2024).

Haris (2019) stated that some benefits of integrating cultural teaching into an English language program. Firstly, culture teaching enhances language acquisition. English structure and expression are closely tied to cultural contexts, so incorporating culture into language instruction serves as a valuable complement to teaching English. Learning about culture occurs alongside the development of language skills. Secondly, culture teaching addresses students' curiosity about the distinct environment of another country. English learners are interested not just in the language itself but also in the people and the nation where the language is spoken. By increasing learners' sensitivity to cultural factors, educators can leverage their curiosity and motivation to achieve language learning goals. Lastly, acquiring a new language involves more than understanding the meanings of words, sentences, and texts; it also requires engaging with new knowledge, experiences, and concepts

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The Cultural elements were categorized into 13 distinct categories, each with definitions and examples (Estrada-Chichón & Sánchez-Cabrero, 2023).

1. **Activities:** Elements related to indoor and outdoor activities and games, excluding food and beverages. Examples include reading a newspaper, ball games, hide and seek, draughts, and secret boxes.
2. **Items:** Elements about clothing, apparel, gadgets, devices, and machines. Examples include top hats, telephones, raincoats, greeting cards, and newspapers.
3. **Food:** Elements related to food and beverages, excluding activities involving food. Examples include biscuits, Cullen Skink soup, pumpkin pie, custard doughnuts, and picnics.
4. **Language:** Elements related to the English language, such as words, phrases, idioms, expressions, and forms of address. Examples include “Oh dear!”, “aye aye, captain!”, “Goodness me!”, courtesy titles, and idioms like “easy as pie.”
5. **Personality Traits:** Elements concerning people’s characteristics. Examples include shyness, self-sufficiency, gender stereotypes, minimal physical affection, and male embarrassment.
6. **Traditions:** Elements related to customs and behavioral patterns. Examples include preparing lunch, tea parties, steering wheel positions, home visits by doctors, and brick houses.
7. **Time:** Elements related to parts of the day and when activities occur. Examples include tea time, breakfast time, dinner time, sleeping time, and dawn.

Byram and Planet (2000) identified three main components commonly recognized in the field: Knowledge, Socio-cultural competence, and Attitude.

1. Knowledge:

The concept of 'Knowledge' refers to the idea that cultural awareness stems from understanding the foreign culture, ideally across various areas of life. This encompasses traditions, history, literature, and politics, as well as an understanding of one's cultural heritage. Knowledge also involves factual content, highlighting the importance of integrating facts into language education a practice that was often overlooked in communicative language teaching.

2. Socio-Cultural-Competence

The second element, known as Socio-Cultural Competence, refers to

the practical skills that language learners need to effectively navigate and adapt to life in the target culture, essentially, understanding how to act appropriately within a foreign cultural context.

3. Attitude

The third element, known as Attitude, focuses on fostering greater understanding and tolerance of others. It emphasizes that interaction is a dynamic process requiring participants to constantly adapt and reconsider their perspectives.

These elements of Intercultural Awareness outline the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication in complex contexts where English serves as a global lingua franca. The elements are organized progressively, starting with a foundational understanding of cultural contexts in communication, especially about one's native language (**Level 1: Basic Cultural Awareness**). This evolves into a more nuanced grasp of language and culture (**Level 2: Advanced Cultural Awareness**), and ultimately leads to a dynamic, hybrid, and evolving understanding of cultures and languages necessary for successful intercultural communication in global English contexts (**Level 3: Intercultural Awareness**) (Baker, 2012).

Level 1: Basic Cultural Awareness:

1. Recognizing culture as a collection of common practices, beliefs, and values that a group shares.
2. Acknowledging how culture and context influence the interpretation of meaning.
3. Identifying our behaviors, values, and beliefs shaped by our culture and being able to express this understanding.
4. Recognizing and articulating the behaviors, values, and beliefs of others shaped by their culture, and comparing these with our cultural influences.

Level 2: Advanced Cultural Awareness:

5. Understanding that cultural norms are not absolute but vary from one culture to another.
 6. Recognizing that cultural knowledge is tentative and subject to change as we gain new insights.
 7. Acknowledging the presence of different viewpoints and voices within any cultural group.
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8. Understanding that individuals belong to various social groups, including cultural ones, and that their identity is shaped by more than one group.
9. Identifying areas of shared values between cultures while also being aware of the potential for misunderstandings or miscommunication across cultures.

Level 3: Intercultural Awareness:

10. Understanding that communicative styles and cultural frameworks are linked to specific cultures but can evolve and blend in intercultural exchanges.
11. Recognizing that initial encounters in intercultural communication may rely on stereotypes or generalizations, but having the ability to go beyond these superficial assumptions.
12. Developing the skill to navigate and bridge different culturally rooted communication methods and perspectives, using an understanding of the complexities of intercultural interaction.

Digital storytelling is one of the most powerful methods for language learning. For thousands of years, stories have served as a means to convey morals, share information, spark ideas, and accomplish both social and educational objectives compellingly and engagingly. Whether aimed at children or adults, storytelling captivates attention by unfolding events in a way that builds anticipation and keeps listeners engaged, ultimately delivering its moral message effectively. It is deeply rooted in our customs, traditions, and heritage. In the past, people shared stories through traditional means, but with the advent of modern technology and media, these stories are now presented with added suspense and excitement. Digital storytelling blends the traditional art of storytelling with the advantages of modern technology, creating a unique and engaging experience (Abdel Maged, 2022).

Advantages of Digital Stories

- 1) Digital storytelling has impacted information-gathering skills, problem-solving abilities, and attitudes toward teacher-student collaboration. Educators also use digital stories as a motivational tool to capture students' attention and provide guidance (Cetin, 2021).
- 2) Digital short stories allow students to practice narrative skills by enabling them to imagine and create characters and settings. Through digital storytelling, students develop a range of abilities, including

oral storytelling, writing, visual literacy, media literacy, and an awareness of film techniques (Akar, 2020).

- 3) Digital storytelling aligns with the principles of active learning by fostering student-centered approaches and interactive learning in technology-rich environments. It engages students actively in the learning process, enhancing their involvement and participation (Smeda, Dakich & Sharda, 2014).
- 4) Foelske (2014) highlighted that digital storytelling enhances students' engagement and motivation in the classroom by fostering a student-centered learning environment.
- 5) Robin (2014) emphasized that digital storytelling enhances students' ability to develop "21st century skills." By utilizing multimedia technology, students can create their own digital stories, thereby acquiring essential skills for the modern era.

Previous Studies

Some studies explored the effect of using digital stories to improve students' cultural awareness, such as Dziri and Ghaloussi (2023) examined using digital storytelling to enhance students' cross-cultural competence in learning a foreign language: teachers' and students' perspectives. This study aimed to increase awareness among teachers and EFL learners about the significance of incorporating digital storytelling to improve EFL learners' cross-cultural competence. The participants were fifty first-year master's students and fifteen instructors. The instruments were two questionnaires were conducted. The findings revealed that both educators and students recognize the importance of developing cross-cultural competence. Additionally, the participants emphasized the crucial role of digital technology in teaching cultural aspects of the target language. Therefore, it was suggested that teachers should incorporate more technological tools into their lessons and encourage students to utilize digital storytelling to improve their cultural and communicative skills.

Solomon (2019) utilized digital storytelling to foster intercultural awareness at Eastern Illinois University. The study aimed to enhance college-wide understanding of the lived experiences of international students. This study used photovoice as a form of digital storytelling to

highlight the experiences of international students. Over eight weeks, seven international students from Cameroon, India, Ghana, the Philippines, South Korea, China, and France, along with the researcher, captured images depicting their journeys of acculturation and socio-cultural adjustment at EIU.

PM Ribeiro (2016) developed intercultural awareness using digital storytelling. The study aimed to encourage educators to explore and implement technology-driven strategies for teaching and learning. The participants were in a bachelor's program in Business Communication, where students engage in discussions and reflections on essential topics in Intercultural Communication. The instrument was a case study based on a qualitative analysis of a questionnaire designed to explore students' perceptions of an assignment involving the creation of digital Stories. The study focused on their reflective process regarding intercultural differences and effective communication across cultures. The findings showed that digital storytelling effectively engaged students in meaningful and productive discussions about technology-enhanced learning and cultural differences. This process empowered them to develop new personal and collective understandings while enhancing their intercultural awareness.

Digital Stories and Cultural Awareness

Technological advancements have led to the creation of teaching materials that enhance both learning and teaching, offering teachers greater opportunities to be creative in helping students master a foreign language and gain a deep understanding of its culture. Cross-cultural competence (CCC) enables foreign language (FL) learners to communicate effectively with native speakers. Additionally, digital storytelling (DST) is a technological tool that allows learners to use images and videos to tell stories (Dziri & Ghaloussi, 2023).

Digital storytelling is a powerful method for presenting cultural content, enabling instructors to creatively design and deliver lessons on foreign cultures. It also encourages discussions on various topics, such as language and culture. Digital stories serve as a means to preserve and pass down cultural knowledge across generations. As a result, digital storytelling helps keep cultures vibrant by aiding learners in understanding the values of the target culture and promoting cross-cultural interactions. In this way, it is an effective tool for exploring cultural issues and enhancing students' understanding of other cultures.

Stories hold the world's wisdom, impart cultural values, foster a sense of community, celebrate diversity, and preserve cultural identity. In situations where truth is silenced, stories serve as a tool for revelation, enhancing metaphorical comprehension (Baldasaro, Maldonado & Baltes, 2014). Fokides (2016) found that digital storytelling improved the ability to visualize ideas effectively, facilitating the sharing of perspectives and opinions. Additionally, it provided a secure and empowering platform for intercultural collaboration and learning.

Nguyen (2011) found that storytelling enables individuals to share personal stories that reflect their culture, ethnicity, attitudes, customs, and social standing. Similarly, Yang (2011) highlighted that digital storytelling helps students convey their knowledge, skills, and culture as part of their cognitive process, while also boosting their confidence, making it an effective educational tool for teaching and learning. For instance, fairy tales featuring the mischievous Kancil, the race between snails and rabbits, or stories of red-haired characters can serve as ethical examples for students and teach valuable lessons.

Commentary

Reviewing literature and related studies allowed the researcher to gain a clear understanding of the scope and dimensions of the current study. Some of the reviewed studies, such as Dziri and Ghaloussi (2023), Solomon (2019), and PM Ribeiro (2016), aimed at investigating the effective role of Digital Stories for Cultural Awareness. Based on the previous studies, the researcher was strongly encouraged to examine the use of the Digital Stories Strategy to develop cultural awareness and vocabulary learning skills among second-year English majors.

The findings of these studies showed that EFL students who learned content through the digital stories' strategy did better in the post-test than pre-test in their cultural awareness skills. Therefore, the researcher used the digital stories strategy to improve second-year Faculty of Education English majors' cultural awareness.

The present study is different from the other studies as it discusses different topics, such as

- The influence of history, religion, and politics on cultural development.
 - The role of language in shaping cultural identity.
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- Cultural taboos, sensitive topics, and behaviors.
- Global issues and their impact on different cultural groups
- Non-verbal communication varies across cultures
- The cultural significance of food, dress, music, and art in American culture.
- High-context vs. Low-context communication styles
- Cultural views on time (monochronic vs. Polychronic orientations).
- Cultural differences in family dynamics and gender roles.

Context of the Problem

Based on the literature review and the observation of the researcher as a demonstrator in the Faculty of Education, and throughout attending the methodology class, most students demonstrate limited cultural awareness, which is crucial for effective language instruction and intercultural communication. This shortcoming often results from conventional teaching approaches that emphasize specific skills rather than others while neglecting cultural context, leading to a superficial understanding of the language. Therefore, there was a clear need to enhance cultural awareness training.

To deeply investigate the problem, the researcher administered a cultural awareness test to the second-year English majors of the Faculty of Education. The purpose was to know if the students have problems with cultural awareness. The results of the cultural awareness test revealed that about 80% of the sample got below the average scores in the test. which confirmed that they have problems with cultural awareness. Their scores were very low. They have limited cultural awareness. A large number of students find difficulty in cultural awareness.

The researcher also administered a questionnaire to determine the most needed cultural awareness sub-skills for second-year English Majors. Therefore, the researcher wanted to know if digital stories affect the development of second-year English majors' cultural awareness skills.

Aim

The current research aimed to identify the effectiveness of using digital stories in improving second-year English majors' cultural awareness.

Hypothesis

Based on both the context of the problem and the review of literature, the current research tried to verify the following hypothesis:

-There would be a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental group in the cultural awareness test, in favor of the post-test.

Significance

For EFL students:

The study would:

- develop some cultural awareness domains and some vocabulary learning skills.

For EFL teachers:

The study would:

- prove beneficial by enhancing awareness of the significance and advantages of digital stories, as well as their effective application in EFL classrooms.
- offer English language Teachers valuable insights into digital stories as a tool to improve cultural awareness and vocabulary learning.
- emphasize the importance of using digital storytelling-based instruction, encouraging both teachers and EFL supervisors to prioritize the development of cultural awareness.

For EFL curriculum designers:

The study would:

- offer curriculum designers a list of cultural awareness domains and encourage the integration of digital storytelling-based instruction to enhance English language learning.

Delimitations

The current study was delimited to:

Participants:

Forty-one second-year English majors acting as one group participated in the study. These participants were selected because they are at a critical stage in their language and cultural learning. They have learned foundational language skills and are ready to engage with more complex cultural content.

Time Duration: The experiment lasted for 6 weeks in the second semester of the academic year 2024-2025.

Place: Faculty of Education, Minia University

Cultural Awareness Domains: The researcher developed an initial questionnaire for the sub-skills of cultural awareness, modified by the jury members of the Curriculum & Instruction Dep, Faculty of Education, Minia University. Through these domains, the researcher conducted a cultural awareness test. The domains were:

Part 1: Knowledge Domain

1. Cultural Foundations and Social Structures

- Describing diverse cultural traditions, customs, and rituals.
- Distinguishing the influence of history, religion, and politics on cultural development.
- Specifying cultural dimensions like power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, and uncertainty avoidance.
- Distinguishing specific cultural taboos and sensitive topics.
- Classifying cultural differences in family dynamics and gender roles.
- Explaining cultural views on time (monochronic vs. polychronic orientations).

2. Cultural Expression and Communication

- Distinguishing the role of language in shaping cultural identity.
- Clarifying how non-verbal communication (gestures, eye contact, etc.).
- Analyzing the cultural significance of food, dress, music, and art.
- Explaining how global issues impact different cultural groups.
- Comparing high-context vs. low-context communication styles.

Part 2: Attitude Domain

1- Cultural Diversity

- Demonstrating openness and willingness to learn about other cultures.
 - Valuing diversity differences.
 - Adjusting personal behaviors with cultural expectations when necessary.
 - Maintaining a non-judgmental approach when encountering unfamiliar practices.
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2-Enhancing Intercultural Empathy

- Showing empathy towards individuals from different cultural backgrounds.
- Practicing patience with communication barriers and misunderstandings.
- Practicing tolerance for cultural ambiguity and uncertainty.

3-Promoting Cultural Appreciation

- Respecting cultural beliefs, even if they differ from your own.
- Appreciating the contributions of various cultures.
- Identifying that no culture is superior to another.

Part 3: Behaviors Domain

- Engaging in effective cross-cultural communication (verbal and non-verbal).
- Observing cultural behaviors without making assumptions.
- Developing some problem-solving strategies in multicultural contexts.
- Demonstrating flexibility in adjusting communication styles for different audiences.
- Maintaining positive intercultural relationships.
- Engaging in reflective thinking to evaluate intercultural experiences.
- Using technology to connect with people of other cultures.
- Demonstrating cultural sensitivity in digital communication (e.g., emails, social media).
- Applying cultural knowledge to real-world scenarios.

Definitions of Terms

Digital Story is the integration of stories with digital multimedia elements such as audio, images, and videos. This method of storytelling has been utilized in English language education as an instructional approach (Robin, 2014).

Alexander (2011) presented a five-part definition of digital stories, as outlined by California State University, which states that they should: (1) feature a captivating narration of a story; (2) offer a meaningful context for understanding the narrative; (3) use images to enhance or evoke emotions in the story; (4) incorporate music and sound effects to reinforce key ideas; and (5) encourage thoughtful reflection from the audience(s).

Digital stories are **operationally** defined in this study as stories that are combined with multimedia, such as cameras, photos, videos, audio, and

animations, used to help the Faculty of Education second-year English majors gain a deep understanding and effective information.

Cultural awareness (CA) refers to the ability to comprehend and appreciate both the similarities and differences between various cultural groups. It involves being open-minded, inquisitive, and eager to learn about different cultures while also acknowledging one's own biases (Cherry, 2023).

Cultural awareness can be defined as a conscious recognition of the role culture plays in language learning and communication, whether in one's first language or a foreign language (Baker, 2012).

Cultural awareness is **operationally** defined in this study as understanding and respecting that other people have different backgrounds, beliefs, behaviors, customs, and ways of thinking and living to learn Faculty of Education second-year English majors how to deal with other cultures

Method

Research Design

The study adopted a pre-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test design to examine the effectiveness of digital stories in improving cultural awareness among second-year English majors. The chosen design was appropriate for assessing the changes in the participants' cultural awareness after the intervention.

Participants

The participants were 41 students randomly selected from second-year English majors at the Faculty of Education at Minia University. The study group students were taught using the digital stories strategy.

Designing the Digital Stories Strategy

The researcher developed the Digital Stories program by reviewing relevant literature and previous studies related to digital stories. The program was created to support the teaching of cultural awareness skills to second-year English major students. It effectively aided students in enhancing their understanding of cultural awareness and improving their vocabulary learning skills. The researcher proposed lesson plans for teaching four units, comprising a total of 12 lessons. Each unit's lesson plan included key components such as behavioral objectives, new vocabulary, time allowed, educational resources, instructional methods, warm-up activities, teaching aids, step-by-step procedures, practice exercises, assessment methods, and homework assignments. The implementation process was documented through photographs and recorded videos.

Designing the digital stories using the **Mootion** website because it is easy to use and has a lot of advantages, and provides a variety of native speakers.

Instruments:

To assess cultural awareness, the researcher designed a cultural awareness test, which was administered both before and after the intervention.

The Pre-Post Cultural Awareness Test

The pre-post-test on cultural awareness was prepared by the researcher. The test was designed to assess the cultural awareness of second-year English majors cultural awareness:

- assess their knowledge about the American culture
- assess their behaviors in life situations in the American culture
- assess their attitude towards American culture

The test consisted of three components:

1. **Knowledge domain** consisted of 50 items, 30 MCQ, and 20 True and False questions.
2. **The behavior domain** consisted of 20 items (MCQ and yes/no questions) for 9 situations.
3. **The attitude domain** consisted of a scale of 20 phrases.

The total score computed by the first part had a score of 50, the second part had a score of 20, with one point awarded for each correct response, and the third part had a score of 100, with 5 points awarded for each phrase.

Statistical Validity

After piloting, the internal consistency of the cultural awareness test was verified using the statistical package IBM SPSS 25.0 (IBM Corp, 2017) to calculate Pearson correlation coefficients between each of the dimensions and the total score of the test.

Table (1): Pearson correlation coefficients between each dimension and the total score of the test.

Cultural Awareness	Knowledge domain	Behavior domain	Attitude domain
Correlation coefficients	0.338*	0.400*	0.788**

The value of (R) at the 0.05 significance level = 0.304

The value of (R) at the 0.01 significance level = 0.393

Table (1): The three dimensions of the cultural awareness test were statistically significantly correlated with the total test score. This indicates that the content of the dimensions is aligned with the intended purpose of the test, thereby ensuring the consistency of the cultural awareness test used in the current study.

Reliability

To assess the reliability of the cultural awareness test, the researcher employed the Cronbach's Alpha method. The analysis yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.90, indicating a high level of internal consistency and statistical significance.

Table (2): Alpha-Cronbach's Reliability Value of the Cultural Awareness Test

Cultural Awareness	Knowledge domain	Behavior domain	Attitude domain	Total
Alpha-Cronbach's value	0.80	0.72	0.95	0.90

Table (2): All dimensions of the cultural awareness test exhibited a high reliability coefficient. This indicates that the test demonstrates a high level of reliability.

Material: The Digital Stories Strategy

The following procedures were used to construct the program:

1. Reviewing literature and previous studies related to:
 - Digital Stories Strategy
 - Cultural Awareness
2. Designing the instruments and the framework of the program, which was assessed by a panel of TEFL staff members.
3. Establishing the validity, reliability, and time duration of the instruments by conducting the pilot study before the experiment.
4. Randomly selecting the participants of the study.
5. Pre-testing the experimental group on cultural awareness.
6. Experimenting using the digital stories strategy for the experimental group.
7. Post-testing the experimental group.
8. Analyzing the data using appropriate statistical methods.
9. Presenting the results, recommendations, and suggested research.

Procedures

The intervention took place over six weeks (March 12- April 26, 2025) and included a total of 22 instructional hours.

1-Pre-testing

A pre-test was conducted on the participants to measure their prior knowledge or skills before the intervention, ensure group equivalence, reduce the impact of outside factors, provide diagnostic information, and assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

2-Experimentation

Stage One: Before Presenting the Story

- Preparing a calm environment for the students during the story presentation.
- Introducing students to the topic of the story by:
 - ❖ Giving a brief overview of the story's topic.
 - ❖ Showing some of the images used in the story.
 - ❖ Presenting a short excerpt from the story.

Stage Two: During the Story Presentation

- Observing the students while they watch the story.
- Conducting a set of activities accompanying the story presentation.

Stage Three: After the Story Presentation

- Discussing the story with the students and asking questions about its events.
- Having the students complete the activities related to the story.

3-Post-testing

After the intervention, the cultural awareness test was re-administered

Results

The research hypothesis predicted that “There would be a statistically significant difference (favoring the post-test) between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental group students in the cultural awareness test.”

To test the validity of the first hypothesis, the mean and standard deviation of the research group students' scores were calculated for the pre-test and post-test administrations of the cultural awareness test, both for its three dimensions and for the overall test. This was done to compute the **T-test values** for the paired means. The results are presented in Table (3) below.

Table (3): T-value of pre-test and post-test scores of the cultural awareness test (N=41)

Dimensions of Cultural Awareness Test	Application	Mean	S.D.	t. value	DF	Sig
Knowledge Dimension	Pre-	23.63	6.79	10.152**	40	0.01
	Post-	38.49	6.07		40	
Behavior Dimension	Pre-	9.09	5.80	6.37**	40	0.01
	Post-	16.29	4.20		40	
Attitude Dimension	Pre-	57.70	19.32	6.24**	40	0.01
	Post-	76.51	6.65		40	
Total	Pre-	91.29	27..4	8.99**	40	0.01
	Post-	130.85	9.36		40	

**Significant at (0.01) level.

Table (3) shows that there is a statistically significant difference at the significance level (0.01) between the mean scores of the research group students in the pre-test and post-test administrations for each dimension of the cultural awareness test: knowledge, behavior, and attitude, as well as for the overall test. The difference is in favor of the post-test. The calculated t-values for each dimension of the cultural awareness test ranged between (6.24 and 10.152), and for the total test score, it was (8.99), which is statistically significant at (0.01). This indicates that the use of digital stories was effective in enhancing the cultural awareness of the research group students. Therefore, the first research hypothesis was accepted, and there is a statistically significant difference (favoring the post-test) between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the research group students in the cultural awareness test.”

To ensure the impact of the digital stories program on the cultural awareness skills of second-year English majors, the effect size was calculated using the Eta squared (η^2) formula. As presented in Table (4), the η^2 value was found to be (0.67), indicating a high level of effectiveness. This suggests that the program had a meaningful impact and contributed to the development of students' cultural awareness skills.

Table (4): Eta Squared (η^2) Value and Effect Size (d) of Digital Stories to Improve Cultural Awareness Skills (N=41)

Dimensions of Cultural Awareness Test	t-value	η^2	d-value	The effect size
Knowledge Dimension	10.152	0.72	1.60	high
Behavior Dimension	6.37	0.50	1.00	high
Attitude Dimension	6.24	0.49	0.98	high
Total	8.99	0.67	1.42	high

A value of ($\eta^2 \geq 0.14$) indicates a high effect.

A value of ($d \geq 0.8$) indicates a high effect.

Table (4) shows that the effect size of the independent variable (Using Digital Stories) on the dependent variable (improving cultural awareness) is ($d = 1.42$), which indicates a **high effect size**.

Moreover, the Eta squared value for the overall cultural awareness test is ($\eta^2 = 0.67$), which means that a portion of the total variance in the dependent variable (development of Cultural Awareness) is attributed to the effect of the independent variable (Using Digital Stories). This indicates the impact of teaching using digital stories to improve the faculty of education English majors' cultural awareness.

Discussion

The study's results supported the hypothesis that digital stories significantly improve cultural awareness among second-year English majors. The research group participants who received instruction through the DS program showed improved performance in the post-administration of the cultural awareness test compared to their pre-administration results. The use of the digital stories program had a positive impact on students' cultural awareness skills.

The hypothesis proposed that there would be a statistically significant difference (favoring the post-test) between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the research group students in the cultural awareness test. The findings supported this hypothesis. A comparison of the two test administrations revealed that the research group scored higher on the post-

test than on the pre-test. These results suggest an enhancement in students' cultural awareness skills, which can be attributed to the digital stories program.

This program was designed to enhance the cultural awareness of second-year English majors through the use of digital stories. It featured a variety of activities, including brainstorming, think-pair-share exercises, individual tasks, and group collaborations. To effectively present the content, the digital stories strategy incorporated a range of engaging and enjoyable tools and methods, such as presentations, videos, websites, PowerPoint slides, PDFs, and YouTube resources. Cultural awareness concentrate on three dimensions:

The digital stories strategy helped to create a learning environment that promoted learning opportunities for English language learners. Participants watched the stories, they had to listen attentively to answer the activities, and to acquire specific information about the content. Digital stories are effective tools for developing cultural awareness skills of the participants for different reasons. Firstly, digital stories often reflect real-life experiences, making cultural content more authentic and relatable. Secondly, by listening to and creating digital stories, participants enhance their ability to interpret cultural cues, understand intercultural communication. Thirdly, digital stories foster critical thinking and self-reflection about one's own culture and the cultures of others.

Some studies investigated the effect of using digital stories to improve students' cultural awareness, such as Dziri and Ghaloussi (2023) revealed that both educators and students identify the importance of developing cross-cultural competence. Additionally, the participants emphasized the crucial role of digital technology in teaching cultural aspects of the target language. PM Ribeiro (2016) showed that digital storytelling effectively engaged students in meaningful and productive discussions about technology-enhanced learning and cultural differences. This process empowered them to develop new personal and collective understandings while enhancing their intercultural awareness.

Challenges

- Representing diverse cultural elements was challenging, so the researcher consulted with the jury members to identify and determine the important domains.

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- Students may struggle with vocabulary or complex expressions in the digital stories. The researcher simplifies language and uses subtitles and visuals to support understanding.
 - There was difficulty in designing the digital stories and finding suitable tools to make them. The researcher researched websites and previous studies, and asked other researchers who worked on the digital stories.
 - Creating digital stories was challenging; the researcher scripted the stories in advance with clear objectives.
 - Some students may not interact actively with the stories. The researcher designed interactive follow-up activities (e.g., quizzes, group discussions, role-plays), and encouraged students to create their own digital stories.
 - The smart board malfunctioned, so the researcher turned on the laptop and used a headset to transmit the sound to the students.
 - The electricity was cut off, so the researcher turned on the laptop.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings from the present study, several recommendations should be considered moving forward:

1. Focus should be placed on integrating digital stories into the learning process.
 2. Digital stories should be utilized to enhance EFL learners' cultural awareness.
 3. EFL learners should be provided with real opportunities through digital stories to develop both their cultural awareness.
 4. Encouraging students to adopt the digital story strategy, where technology acts as a facilitator, can help maximize their language learning opportunities.
 5. Cultural awareness should be prioritized in the EFL syllabus for education faculty students.
 6. Appropriate teaching tools and aids should be selected carefully to support the development of these skills.
 7. The teacher's role should shift from being the only provider of information to a guide, facilitator, and monitor.
 8. EFL instructors should receive training on how to implement digital stories.
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9. Class time should be used for active learning rather than traditional lecturing.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings of the current study, the following topics are recommended for future research:

1. EFL teachers should be encouraged to place greater emphasis on integrating modern technology and innovative strategies to enhance students' cultural awareness skills.
2. The current study could be repeated with a larger sample of second-year English majors to validate the findings.
3. Implementing the digital stories across various educational levels, such as primary, preparatory, and secondary stages.
4. Applying the digital stories to students in different academic years at the university level.
5. EFL learners' attitudes towards using digital stories in education.
6. Using digital stories for enhancing EFL teachers' oral communication and higher-order thinking skills.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that the use of digital stories as an instructional strategy enhanced the cultural awareness of second-year English majors at the Faculty of Education, Minia University. The integration of digital stories into the learning process of cultural awareness fostered students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to cultural understanding. This confirms the value of digital stories as an active and engaging tool for promoting cultural awareness in EFL contexts. Accordingly, incorporating digital stories into English language teaching is recommended as an effective means of developing students' cultural awareness alongside language skills.

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