
**“A Suggested Strategy Based on the Interactive Literature
To Develop Reading Comprehension Skills in English
For Preparatory Stage Pupils”**

**إستراتيجية مقترحة قائمة على الأدب التفاعلي لتنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي
في اللغة الإنجليزية لدى تلاميذ المرحلة الإعدادية**

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of suggested strategy based on interactive literature to develop literary (poetry and novel) reading comprehension skills among preparatory school pupils. The participants were 38 pupils chosen randomly from the first-year preparatory stage pupils in Future 1 school. The Instruments of the study include literary reading comprehension checklist (novel and poetry) and a literary reading comprehension skills test. An online literature course was administered to the participants. The researcher who used the proposed strategy that is based on interactive literature characteristics and tools such as interactive novel and poetry program to teach novel and poetry for the first year preparatory pupils during the summer vacation of 2020 academic year because of COVID 19 circumstances. The results showed that the proposed strategy based on the interactive digital literature had a large positive effect on developing both novel and poetry reading comprehension skills; regarding the mean differences, they showed also that novel reading comprehension skills (MD=5.026) outperformed those of poetry (MD=2.289).

Keywords: literary reading comprehension skills, novel & poetry reading

comprehension skills, interactive digital literature (poetry and novel) & preparatory stage.

المستخلص: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من مدى فعالية إستراتيجية قائمة على الأدب التفاعلي لتنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي الأدبية في محتوى الرواية والشعر في مادة اللغة الإنجليزية لدى تلاميذ الصف الأول الإعدادي، وقد تم التطبيق أونلاين خلال فترة الأجهزة الصيفية لعام 2020\2021 على مجموعة واحدة عشوائية مكونة من 38 تلميذاً من تلاميذ الصف الأول الإعدادي بمدرسة المستقبل؛ والتي تم تدريسها باستخدام إستراتيجية الأدب التفاعلي متضمنة القصيدة والرواية التفاعلية، وقد اشتملت أدوات الدراسة على قائمة بمهارات الفهم القرائي الأدبية واختبار لمهارات الفهم القرائي الأدبية، والذي تم تطبيقه قبلًا وبعدياً على عينة الدراسة بنظام أونلاين. وقد أتضح من نتائج الدراسة أن مدى فعالية إستراتيجية قائمة على الأدب التفاعلي في تدريس الأدب لتنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي كان أكبر في مهارات الرواية عنه في الشعر، حيث أشارت النتائج أن الفروق بين المتوسطات في إجمالي مهارات الفهم القرائي في الرواية كانت (5.026) بينما وصلت (2.289) في مهارات الفهم القرائي في الشعر، أما فيما يتعلق بمستويات مهارات القراءة في الرواية فقد كان للاستراتيجية الأثر الأكبر في تنمية مهارات الفهم الاستدلالي عنه في مهارات الفهم الحرفي والتقويمي، على التوالي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (الأدب التفاعلي، مهارات الفهم القرائي، القصيدة والقصة التفاعلية).

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Introduction

Not only Language is a method of communication between people; but also, a part of the cultural richness of our society and the world in which we live and work. Learning languages contributes to a mutual understanding, a sense of global citizenship, and personal fulfillment. Thus, learning a foreign language in the early years of pupilhood helps to increase pupils’ linguistics vocabulary and also to enhance their language abilities and awareness. Countries, associations, and people devote much of their time and effort for learning and teaching English; since it has become dominant in many different fields. English also has become an urgent necessity and need for people if they want to enter a global workforce, access to a great wealth of entertainment, be able to have a greater cultural understanding, communicate with people from any country in the world and create many opportunities that surly change matters for better.

Sacks (2014, p.130) stated that “Literature asks questions and makes statements about the real world.” Also, literature is an authentic material that helps to improve different English language abilities for pupils. Moreover, Literature encourages interaction. literary texts are often rich in multiple layers of meaning and can be effectively mined for discussions and sharing feelings or opinions. Literature expands language awareness. Also, literature is often more interesting than the texts found in coursebooks .

However, teaching English literature is not that easy task especially teaching reading novels that require from pupils to analyze the contents of the novel including the moral value, plot, setting, and characters. “Several studies claimed that teachers focus more on answering reading comprehension worksheets than allowing pupils to explore and explicate the literary texts” (Lee & Wong, 2019, p.18). He also added that the traditional way of teaching literature like novels in EFL classrooms forces pupils to read the summary with avoiding literary comprehension skills by mentioning “Instead of reading the story, pupils were encouraged to read the summary of each chapter or notes provided by their teacher”. Besides, Towndrow & Kwek (2017, p.12) stated that “the approach used in teaching literature was centered

around content knowledge and task completion”; yet the main focus of teaching literary texts was to prepare the pupils for assessment.

Poetry can be a valuable pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms, one that introduces the creative language and allows the combined teaching of form and content. Moreover, teaching poetry allows for multiple methods of engagement; pupils can read poems aloud, translate poetry, or write responses to poetry, to name just a few simple activities. All such exercises encourage active engagement with language, form, and content .

Several developments have brought about new approaches to the teaching process of developing skills including comprehension and developing specific skills in reading literature. These skills are found in the teaching process of ideas such as finding the main idea, noting details, following sequence of events, predicting, evaluating outcomes, and other comprehension skills. Comprehension, or extracting meaning from what you read, is the ultimate goal of reading.

Also, transition in the first-grade preparatory stage is typically a pivotal year where many pupils shift from picture books to reading chapter books. They are eager to explore the world of more complex stories and ongoing series. Teachers sometimes assume that this is a natural transition, but that is not always the case as many pupils have difficulty making this transition. A deep hope of elementary teachers is for their pupils to fall in love with books and learn to read well. Yet reading proficiency remains a complex task to teach pupils, especially with those who found reading a chore and struggle to understand grade-appropriate material, so “For reading to become a lifelong habit and a deeply owned skill, it has to be voluntary, anchored in feelings of pleasure and power” (Daniels, 2002, p.19). Elementary literacy programs need ways to equip pupils, serve those who are often left behind, encourage those too shy to participate in class discussion, and bring that joy of learning to read at the next level.

Ihejirika (2014, p.85) stated that a myriad of reasons has been advanced by scholars for the poor performance in English language among pupils; such as “the educational setting, the educational system, teachers’ motivation, the examination pattern, the learning environment, teaching strategies, teacher preparation, and language philosophy”. The way teachers present English literature as a rich material to their pupils plays a great role in their development. So, teachers should create new ways and methods that enhance the acquisition of literature by avoiding the traditional ways which may impede the desired goals .

Additionally, using the traditional way of teaching literature in our Egyptian elementary schools EFL classes means to depend on reading novel or poem for the pupils, translating it and answering some questions, then the pupils have to memorize these questions to answer literature questions in the final exam. “Also, pupils read the book meticulously by internalizing it, discussing small details, and correcting misunderstandings through peer discussion” (Avci & Yuksel, 2011, p.1298); while an individual pupil may read a page and move on without understanding all or part of the content. Therefore, the insufficient teaching method for literary genres, the lack of using digital tools in schools, and all the previous reasons may cause weakness in literary reading comprehension skills for Elementary pupils .

To improve this weakness, teachers should always be updated with new technology, strategies, techniques, and tools that their pupils would prefer much as Hall (2015, p.13) stated that digital learning is a worldwide phenomenon in the teaching of English in EFL classes; “Moreover, pupils live in a digital world, which is changing the uses and users of language and the ways we relate to language and each other”. Another important point, that is now clear, is the increasing diversification of creative uses of language and literature into new modes and forms, with the internet and the multimodal possibilities for enhancing learning offered ever more democratically to users of expanding new technologies such as interactive literature which is considered one of the creative merged genres of literature and digital technology.

Moreover, the acquisition of literary reading comprehension skills is considered a priority by many EFL pupils in our Egyptian schools, in addition to some English teachers, scholars, and educationalists. Nasu mentioned in (2015, p.229) that “Curricula, teaching methods, and materials have been updated to meet their needs”; yet, teachers should use the new strategies that involve the digital technology which meets the needs of our digital world. Interactive literature is considered one of the best bases that can serve the learning process inside EFL classes .

Also, Urlaub (2011, p.98) stated that “pupils need strategies that prevent them from the uncritical application of L1 socio-cultural background In addition, the characteristics of the first-year preparatory stage in Egypt are appropriate for using IDL because they study different genres of literature like poetry, story, drama for the first time. Therefore, to avoid pupils’ negative feeling about literature, we should depend on interesting and creative resources such as interactive literature that helps

pupils to acquire all literary elements that were embedded in their material and develop their comprehension skills; yet there is a critical need for using dependable digital strategies for teaching and developing literary reading comprehension skills that contain various activities inside and outside the classroom .

The use of interactive digital strategies in teaching enjoys, motivates, and facilitates the pupils in learning English. Anggeraini and Afifah (2017, p. 83) mentioned that “In teaching reading of short stories, the teacher should find more digital interactive strategies, techniques, and activities that dealing with technology to make the classroom more meaning full and joyful. It deals with the literature class such as English drama, English prose, and literary appreciation”. Generally, the word digital itself means the computerized way of dealing with data; which consists of two digits (0,1), but in this quote, they mean the way we present the content of literature via all the interactive digital programing while keeping all the characteristics and elements of literature, for instance, theme, plot, characters, climax and figures of speech.

Therefore, the researcher conducted this study to investigate the effectiveness of using the interactive literature strategy on developing Egyptian first preparatory graders' literary reading comprehension skills .

Context of the problem

The general aims of teaching English in the elementary stages in Egypt are: to help pupils to acquire and use the main language skills especially literary reading comprehension skills. Also, according to the directives from the Ministry of Education (2020\2021), the objectives of the preparatory cycle are intended to familiarize the pupils with the language in a stress-free and fun loaded atmosphere to prepare them for more demanding tasks in the subsequent stages. Despite the importance of literature in the language learning process, many pupils could find it a problem to comprehend literary reading since there is little attention to overcome it .

The researcher observed the problems that pupils face during comprehending a literary text especially in the first year of the preparatory stage, through her work as teacher and instructor of English language for 11 years, such as they don't know how to follow the plot actions, extract the supporting details (setting) from a novel or poem, distinguish between different use of figures of speech in poetry or a novel chapter or compare the different themes or ideas .

Moreover, previous local studies have shown that there is a problem in comprehending texts for the pupils of the preparatory stage such as Ahmed (2019, p.5) revealed that pupils suffer from weakness in reading comprehension skills in the secondary stage especially in identifying the main idea or themes, inferring implied meaning and evaluating some points in the text. Also, Nageeb stated that “the problem of the study is that pupils at the preparatory stage encounter many problems which are related to reading comprehension. It is obvious that reading comprehension competence is very important for pupils in preparatory stages of learning; this underachieving may be due to the lack of required skills in reading” (Nageeb,2019, p.10). To improve this weakness, Nageeb suggested that using picture-cued text can develop reading comprehension skills for the pupils of the third-year preparatory stage .

Moreover, Zahran (2019, p.20) confirmed that the problem of her research is defined in the second year prep stage pupils’ inefficient reading comprehension skills such as extracting the main idea and details and inferring the implied meaning of the writer.

Eltounsiy (2018, p.10) revealed that pupils at public primary schools suffer from weaknesses in mastering some reading comprehension skills such as identifying main ideas and details, thus he investigated the effectiveness of dynamic assessment to develop primary school pupils' EFL reading comprehension skills. Also, Elmongy (2014, p.7) confirmed that pupils have weaknesses in reading and are poor in vocabulary acquisition so they need new strategies to develop their reading comprehension skills.

Besides, Abdelaziz (2013) asserted that her research aimed at investigating the effectiveness of a mind map strategy on developing the third year preparatory stage pupils' reading comprehension skills in novel such as identifying the main idea, making inference about character traits, setting and events and reading between lines.

Elhadad (2012, p.8) mentioned that “Through studying the previous studies, the researcher noticed that teachers do not teach pupils how to comprehend the text but just measure comprehension and pupils responses through direct questions that pupils can answer easily”; she stated that the weakness of reading comprehension skills for the preparatory stage due to deficient of teaching methods, strategies or techniques that help pupils to learn how to comprehend not just measuring their comprehension via questions only .

Moreover, Aladel (2008) and Nazir (2007) confirmed that during literature classes, teachers neglect to teach some literary elements which impede their literary comprehension for the literary text. Also, Turkey (2002, p.15) confirmed that the pupils of the preparatory stage suffer from weaknesses in reading comprehension skills.

Statement of the problem

The problem of this study can be expressed in first-year preparatory stage weakness in Literary reading comprehension skills in novel and poetry. So, the researcher suggests a strategy based on the interactive literature to improve this weakness and develop literary reading comprehension skills for first-year pupils of the preparatory stage in English in Egypt.

Research questions

The current study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the literary reading comprehension skills needed for first-year pupils of the prep stage in novel and poetry?
2. What are the actual state of literary reading comprehension skills for first-year preparatory stage pupils in novel and poetry?
3. What are the features of the Interactive Digital literature strategy in teaching novel and poetry for developing the first-year preparatory stage pupils' literary reading comprehension skills?
4. What is the effectiveness of using the Interactive Digital literature strategy in teaching novel and poetry for developing the first-year preparatory stage pupils' literary reading comprehension skills?

Research hypotheses

The current study hypothesizes the following :

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group pupils in the pre-post literary reading comprehension test in the novel reading comprehension skills part.
2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study groups in the pre-post literary reading comprehension test in the poetry reading comprehension skills part.

3. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group pupils in the overall literary reading comprehension skills pre-posttest.
4. Significance of the study.

The significance of the current study is represented in what it may offer to the following groups:

1. EFL pupils: This study helps in developing literary reading comprehension in English for the first preparatory graders in Egyptian schools. It also helps to make pupils independent pupils. Moreover, using interactive digital strategy creates an interesting class for the pupils.
2. EFL staff members: This study helps teachers to identify the importance of using interactive digital literature in teaching English and literature. It helps them in teaching literary reading skills for comprehension of the preparatory graders. Also, it makes the process of teaching literature more easy, interactive, and productive .
3. Curriculum designers: by providing them with a new interactive digital literature strategy that helps them in preparing curricula and material for other grades in the Egyptian Educational System.

Delimitation of the study

The study has been confined to the following:

1. Novel reading comprehension skills were delimited to nine sub-skills: including identify the plot actions and supporting details (setting), recognize character traits, infer the different themes or ideas and implied meaning from the writer or poet figurative use of language, guess the meaning of new words through the text, predict some events or ideas in a context based on contextual clues and indicators. In addition to mastering novel elements such as setting, conflict, characters, plot, theme, symbolism.
2. Poetry reading comprehension skills were delimited to three sub-skills including infer the main idea, the different themes of stanzas and interpreting figurative language in Tiger Poem.
3. The interactive digital literature strategy was delimited to the interactive novel (IDN) and the interactive poetry (IDP) .
4. The study was applied during the summer vacation from July 2020 to the end of September because of Covid 19 Suspension.

5. The study population consists of 38 pupils (boys and girls) selected from Elfutur 1 (EL Shaheed Rami Mohamed) experimental school in Nasar City.

Definitions of terms

Literary reading comprehension skills

Urlaub (2011, p.99) defines literary reading comprehension skills as “declarative knowledge based on the pupils’ ability to recognize, describe, and attribute meaning to a text’s literary elements, such as setting, plot, characters, theme, figurative language and style” that pupils would need to be equipped with .”

According to Sacks (2014, p.216), Literary reading comprehension skills means “a kind of literary elements exploration in the literary text such as understanding of plot, setting, analysis of figurative language, character, and the perspective in the text.

The researcher defines the literary reading comprehension skills operationally as “the abilities that enable the pupils to interact with the literary text to achieve complete comprehension for the literary work and its elements. In novel, these abilities are in three levels: the literal level which includes the ability to identify plot actions, supporting details (setting), and character traits, the inferential level which includes the ability to infer different themes, implied meaning from the writer figurative use of language, and predict some events, and the evaluative level which includes comparison between different figures of speech and judge characters’ actions. In poetry, these literary abilities in inferential level which includes the ability to infer different themes of stanzas and interpret figurative language.

Interactive literature

Unsworth (2006, p.18) defines Interactive literature as “New editions of classic literature relating literary narratives or texts to electronic or digital interactive formats to create digitally originated literary texts ”.

Alburiky (2006, p.49) defines Interactive literature as “the type of literature that utilizes the modern digital technology in presenting new literary genre; which merge between literature elements and digitalization; it is presented to the pupils in an electronic or digital medium, so it is also called interactive digital literature or electronic literature, and interactivity is the main feature of it; yet it could not be interactive without allowing them to navigate, edit, add, delete or modifies the digital literary text .”

The researcher defines interactive literature operationally as it is a new digital interactive literary genre; formed from utilizing digital technology in presenting and teaching literature and its elements in EFL classes by using digital or electronic medium programs such as Flash and Storyline. Its main feature is Interactivity which gives EFL pupils the ability to navigate, add, extract, infer, identify, modify, delete, edit in the digitalized literary text .

Design of the study

The current study is a quasi-experimental with its one group pre –posttest design. A class of 38 pupils was chosen randomly from the Elfutur1 school Facebook page after the researcher advertised for a free online literary course on the same page at the beginning of summer vacation. The study was conducted online via zoom platform during summer vacation from July 2020 to the end of September because of Covid 19 Suspension .

Participants of the study

One group of 38 pupils (boys and girls) was randomly selected from Elfutur1 (EL Shaheed Rami Mohamed) experimental school in Nasar City. Their ages ranged between eleven and twelve years. They have been learning English for six years, at the primary stage, and now they are in the first year of the preparatory stage .

Study instruments

The following instruments were designed for the present study as follows:

- A Literary reading comprehension skills checklist.
- A Literary reading comprehension test.

Results of the study

In overall novel reading comprehension skills, All t values are statistically significant at 0.01 level which means that the suggested strategy based on the interactive literature was effective in developing novel reading comprehension subskills; also, the largest effect of using the interactive digital literature strategy in teaching Black beauty novel is on the first sub skill of the inferential level “Infer the different themes or ideas” which has (1.52) that is above the high level (0.8) according to Cohen’s d; followed by “recognize character traits” in the literal reading comprehension level; which has (.97);this high improvement in these two sub- skills and other literary reading comprehension sub-skills happened because of using the

interactive digital literature tools (IDN, IDP) and characteristics in teaching literary elements and novel for the first year preparatory stage that allows the pupil to follow and judge the character actions through all the chapters of the story, and infer different themes.

Discussion of the study results

As indicated statistically, a strong correlation exists between study variables. The results indicate that there is a correlation between pupils' improvement in novel and poetry reading comprehension skills and their practice of interactive digital literature strategy activities and tools. Statistical analysis has indicated that there is a significant positive linear correlation between the pupils' interactivity during teaching novel and poetry processes and mastering their novel and poetry learning .

On the other hand, the only skill that using interactive digital literature strategy has no effect on it, is the third skill "Infer implied meaning from the writer or poet figurative use of language."; as there is no statistically significant difference between participants' pretest and posttest scores ($t=0.158$; Sig, 0.875). Other t values were statistically significant at 0.01 level which means that the suggested strategy based on the interactive digital literature was effective in developing novel inferential reading comprehension subs kills except inferring implied meaning from the writer or poet figurative use of language; that's because this is the first time to the participant pupils to study literary elements, and they may feel a little bit confused on describing the figurative language like simile and metaphor.

The t value is statistically significant at 0.01 level, which means that the suggested strategy based on the interactive digital literature was effective in developing poetry reading comprehension skills

The t value is statistically significant at 0.01 level, which means that the suggested strategy based on the interactive digital literature was effective in developing overall literary reading comprehension skills as well .

Conclusion

Based on the above findings and the theoretical background of study related literature, the following conclusion can be drawn:

The present study provides evidence for the effectiveness of using interactive digital literature strategy in teaching novel and poetry on developing literary reading comprehension skills for the first year preparatory stage.

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Creating an authentic digital environment of learning throughout using digital programs like articulate storyline adds excitement, enthusiasm, and interactivity in the learning process. Also, using Zoom platform for online learning facilities the teaching and learning literature process during the hard circumstances of the Covid 19 suspension.

Interactive digital literature strategy has been proven to be very efficient in saving time and efforts in teaching literary elements skills because it helps pupils to master the literary elements skills effectively as they use more than one sense like sight, hearing, touch during interacting with the interactive digital literature text throughout all stages of the lesson. IDL provides pupils with an opportunity to view real objects and actual scenes, to see sequences in motion, and to listen to the narration

Using IDL provides location and time flexibility, so EFL teachers have their own choice to teach the literature class either online via educational platforms such as zoom or face-to-face in a class or a computer laboratory.

IDL encourages EFL pupils to think more actively about what they are reading and, therefore, improve their comprehension abilities in general and perhaps learn more about what they are reading. Also, it helps teachers to activate a learners' prior knowledge concerning a topic or subject and it promotes research, active reading, and inquisition.

The pedagogic framework of using IDL as an educational environment involves the strategic use of student-centered, discovery learning as well as teacher-directed, overt teaching and intermediate, guided investigations of various kinds. Managing classroom learning also includes designing learning experiences based on collaborative small group activities, individual independent work, and common whole class tasks. The teacher will be a facilitator and guide or a co-researcher, but at other times will be an authoritative (but not authoritarian) leader and direct instructor. Initial work on a topic, for example, may involve sharing of informal knowledge, observations, and opportunities and suggestions for extending understanding.

When Digital Literature is used in teaching and learning, it involves both pupils and teachers in a reflexive experience where they can build, deconstruct, and reconstruct their own and each other's cultures', and how teachers turn pupils to become collaborators and co-authors of rich-media texts like literature genres.

Using IDL encourages academic success; as pupils learn actively using IDL, they will likely become even more connected to class and the topics or subject matter of the literary genres. They will interact with class members, IDL tools, and the teacher, increasing their chances for academic success. The great relationship between the subject and pupils as an essential part of IDL fosters pupil retention in school.

Interactive Digital Literature, among other new technologies, offers education a challenge to rethink much of its methods and content, helping it tilt the balance away from teacher-centered instruction towards learner-centered study.

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