

## The Impact of Digital Storytelling on Developing Young Learners' Emotional Intelligence

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### Abstract

*This research is aimed at ascertaining whether it is possible to foster emotional intelligence in teenagers through technology. This research is aimed at ascertaining whether it is possible to foster emotional intelligence in teenagers through technology.*

*Today's children seem to lack the ability to empathize, negotiate and cooperate, and they often cannot feel optimistic and about the future. This void is maybe due to the shortage of integrating stories on the level of emotional intelligence (EI). The study of this skill among young learners (YLS) has been widening its scope o account for the different facets of the relationship between this concept and the proper technique that can help learners develop their learning skills. The present article tries to examine the impact of digital storytelling (ST) as a teaching strategy on young learners' emotional intelligence development. It focuses also on showing the benefits of implementing this tool in English language classrooms and how all these concepts can affect positively the learners' language acquisition, and retention and makes the learning experience more engaging and interesting for both, teachers and learners.*

**Keywords:** Digital storytelling, young learners, emotional intelligence.

## **1. Introduction**

Young learners develop EI early in life, and the concept of EI has been linked to academic achievement. However, today's children seem to be unwell emotionally. This shortage can harm not only their academic development but also their relationships (Ghosn, 2001). Digital storytelling is one of the teaching methods that have been formed with the development of technologies to make learning more effective. It combines storytelling with multimedia capabilities such as text, audio, video, animation, and film (Ohler, 2013).

Many studies have investigated the effectiveness of digital storytelling on students, and many have shown that digital storytelling has a greater effect on students' learning (Istemic Starcic et al., 2016), creativity (Schmoelz, 2018), motivation (K.P.K.P. Liu et al., 2018), social intelligence (Mruck, & Mey, 2019) and emotional intelligence (Mashalpourfard, 2019).

Storytelling (ST) has the potential to foster EI by providing surrogate emotional experiences that shape the brain's circuitry for empathy and help the child gain insight into human behavior. It also promotes language learning by enriching YL's vocabulary and modeling new language structures. Moreover, this technique can provide a motivating and safe context for language learning (Ghosn, 2001).

Stories can address messages and values to children (Mashalpourfard, 2019) and storytelling is an implicit way of teaching that motivates the learner to explore more (Schmoelz, 2018). In addition, stories are usually heard better because they are simple and fluent and they may raise children's mental and emotional skills and make them familiar with sounds, words and language (Schmoelz, 2018).

Flynn (1999) discovered that intelligence quotient (IQ) scores have increased from one generation to the next for all the countries, but ironically while the learners are getting smarter, their emotional skills are sharply declining, which makes them vulnerable to depression, disappointment, and moral fragility in society among other repercussions. Therefore, Emotional intelligence has an important role in the success of children in the future since it will help them all the complex and challenging life experiences.

Martinez (2007) used several stories to pique the interest and enthusiasm of English language learners. To conclude, positive outcomes were observed. Throughout the course, the pupils were motivated, participating in activities and meeting all the requirements. They not only liked the idea of working through a story, but their perceptions of the course book shifted as assignments were presented in new and innovative ways. He pointed out that while using a story-based method, unit subjects must be significant because this technique connects students' experiences and interests to the English language.

## **2. Digital storytelling**

Since the mid-1900s, short audio-visual narratives have been used as tools to develop skills in digital literacy and creativity (Schleser, 2012a). This is called digital storytelling. The term 'digital storytelling' is often used to refer specifically to a method that results in a 2- to 5-minute audio-visual clip combining photographs, voice-over narration, and other audio' (Lambert, 2009).

It can take many forms and it has many benefits. One benefit of storytelling is its flexibility, which means the use of a visual arts-based method allows participants to choose the story they wish to tell, define how they tell it and select data that they feel best represents

their story (Edmonds, 2014). Another advantage of storytelling that is considered one of its strengths is the ability to connect storyteller and audience (LaMarre & Rice, 2016).

### **2.1 What is storytelling?**

When dealing with storytelling we naturally think of the word “story”. A story is a narrative account of one sequence of events. It can be real or imaginary. However, a good tale is always a core element of truth, even if it was fiction. The message or the moral that the story passes on has to be consistent and authentic (McMiken, 2015).

A story mobilizes emotions, characters, and sensory details to clarify and simplify facts. That’s why a story grabs individuals of all ages and interests, draws us all along its plot, and effectively conveys key messages (FrogLeaps, n.d). Stories are considered the smallest unit by which humans can express and share their experiences and knowledge of the world. Thus, storytelling represents a means used to describe personality, ideology, and the background or history of a person’s life (Greenhalgh, 2009).

Furthermore, storytelling refers to the art of passing on a piece of information, message or wisdom, in a pleasant way to captivate the audience's attention and fully engage them. Indeed, the fact that it is called an “art” means it requires imagination, skill, and most importantly practice. It is not something one can grasp in one sitting, or even after one course. It’s a trial-and-error process of mastery, it demands training and practicing to achieve competence. But definitely, it is worth the hard work since storytelling can impact positively the teaching and learning experience in various ways (Duppydom, 2019).

In the same context, storytelling is seen as one of the oldest forms of teaching. In fact, the earliest communities used to apply storytelling to answer children’s questions on creation, life, and the afterlife (James, 2013). Added to that, it is described as a creative teaching and learning tool that conveys a moral to a specific audience or guarantees the reflection on an event. It also represents an effective means to generate a lesson, construct multiple emotions and promotes diverse points of view (Boris, 2017).

From a scientific perspective, our brains are hardwired for stories, considering them as a way to organize and process information and help us to guide ourselves. They facilitate making sense of the complex world (Alviani, 2018). Humans focus on understanding and recognizing patterns and new ideas and concepts, and stories offer such patterns. They are built on causes and effects, which means that one event leads to another. And in this context, we as humans think unconsciously in narratives all day long. This idea will be explained in the following section.

### **2.2 How does the brain respond to stories?**

Storytelling connects the listener to information differently. To understand how we have to understand what happens neurologically when children listen to a story.

As an individual in a lecture, two small parts of the brain are activated, Wernicke’s and Broca’s area (Stout and Chaminade, 2012). This is where information is processed. When listening to a story, the entire brain starts to light up. Each of our lobes will light up as we sense and our emotions are engaged. For example, as someone talks about a phone falling and hitting the ground with a thud, our occipital and our temporal lobes are lighting up as though we are seeing that falling phone and hearing it hit with a thud. There is this term, neural

coupling, which says, as listeners our brains will light up exactly when the storyteller starts telling something (Karen, 2021).

Storytelling offers to the listener that kind of artificial reality. In fact, if someone talks about someone else who is walking through the snow and with each step, the snow is crunching under his shoes, and big, wet flakes are falling on his cheeks, our brains as listeners, are now lighting up as though we are walking through the snow and experiencing these things. That's why we can watch an action movie without moving, but our hearts are racing as if we are the stars on-screen since this neural coupling has our brains lighting up just like we are having that activity (Stephens, 2010).

While individuals listen to a story, they automatically gain empathy for the storyteller. The more empathy they experience, the more oxytocin is released in their brain. Oxytocin is the chemical happiness and the more it exists in the human organism, the more trustworthy the person sees the speaker. And that's the reason why storytelling is such a critical skill for teachers because the very act of telling a story makes their students trust them more and rely on what is given by them (James, 2014).

### **2.3 Benefits and Challenges in English Language Learning.**

Storytelling has the potential to foster imagination, humanize individuals, develop empathy and understanding, boots values and ethics, and revive creative processing.

In this context, Borba (2001) sees that 'the tale of virtue' will make a positive change in the kids' world, since it facilitates understanding of the power of virtue and make them believe that they are willing to positively influence the world.

Furthermore, according to Sobol et al (2004), storytelling has multiple uses in YL's education. They affirm that this technique provides a conceptual framework for processing, which will help YLs to build an overall meaningful experience. In other words, it motivates them to mentally map experiences and identify images in their inner heads. Telling stories can provide YLs with effective language models and thoughts that they can rely on and imitate.

In addition, King and Down (2001) reveal that storytelling is a non-threatening mirror. That is, those who enjoy storytelling can reflect and recognize themselves better through the experience in the story, without having to go through the same incident in the real life by themselves. They also say that by non-threatening mirrors individuals can reinterpret the experience and gain a clearer understanding of it.

From another angle, Parkin (2006) considers storytelling as an interactive art show, which is a two-activity that connects and engages both storyteller and audience based on interaction and cooperation to build a whole story.

In the English language classroom, the implementation of storytelling creates an engaging and pleasant learning environment and offers meaningful and comprehensible input (Hashemian, 2015). Stories have the potential to activate the language mechanism of acquisition and retention. They also facilitate for YLs the induction of language elements from the data provided by the stories (Krashen, 1981).

Storytelling has special pedagogical values for the foreign language classroom. As Rossier (2002, p.1) points out, it is an effective educational method since it uses stories that are believable, rememberable, enjoyable, and pleasing. This credibility comes from the fact that stories deal with human experiences as authentic sources of knowledge. Stories make information easier to remember because they involve the learners in the actions of the

characters. In this way, the story will inspire positive expressions of meaning (Routledge, 2016).

Language learners can benefit from digital storytelling since they motivate them to develop the competence of understanding spoken language and engage in processing skills. In link to this context, Castro (2002, P. 52) reports on a study conducted in Colombia indicating that “listening to stories develops children’s listening and concentration skills and their ability to receive and understand information expressed in words. Besides, with the stories, children develop learning strategies such as listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing meaning and hypothesizing”.

Using storytelling in TEYL can facilitate recall and builds connections between emotions and empathy. It also promotes reflective learning the use of processing, and dialogue comprehensive management (McDrury and Alterio, 2003).

Even though this technique has such a positive impact on the teaching and learning experience in TEYL, but it may encounter some difficulties when used in the classroom, and for sure, it does not just refer to an external object that the teacher can use in class and obtain the desired result. In fact, storytelling, in the first place, requires a set of skills, long hours of practice before using it, carefully picking the suitable stories and accompanying it with the necessary equipment in order to create and present a convincing, attractive, seductive, and concrete story that arouses the emotions of the student (spectator), as well as achieving the lesson’s goals (Cheng, 2019).

While digital storytelling is getting more and more popular, it is crucial to emphasize the possibility of failure that can occur without the renewal of educational aids about technological advancement (from software, platforms, and programming to the conception of ideas) or the pedagogical objective established to orient learning and the modernization of teaching methods to keeping it with trends (EDU Trends, 2017).

There is also an external factor that contributes to the challenges in delivering stories. The environment plays an important factor in a comfortable teaching and learning situation. A great environment for conducting a lesson using storytelling is when students are gathered in one area comfortably, listening to the teacher (Shahrill. M and Clarke D. J., 2019).

Furthermore, shortage of time during the teaching session is one of the most prevalent reasons why teachers avoid narrative. Due to the charged school program, teachers are pressed by time and there is no time for a good storytelling session in which students can participate in a discussion to reinforce their comprehension (Kohlberg 1976; and Subadrah et al., 2014)

### **3. Emotional Intelligence**

Emotions, according to Grasha and Kirschenbaum (1980), emotions are seen as effective labels that we assign to internal and external stimulus-response patterns. They motivate us to move towards our goals and are accompanied by psychological, cognitive, and overt body physical processes.

In the same vein, Goleman (1996) believes that emotion refers to a specific feeling and thought a biological and psychological state, and a tendency to act. Altogether, emotions are responses to stimuli provided by the environment that allows individuals to decide the life choices of their own lives. (Endang Sulistianingsih, Sanday Jamaludin, & Sumartono, n.d.)

The term “intelligence” refers to the ability to think, learn from experience, solve problems, and adapt to new situations. It is important since it affects many human behaviors

(Stangor, 2014). Intelligence covers a lot of competencies: higher-level abilities such as abstract reasoning, mental representation, problem-solving, decision making, learning ability, emotional knowledge, creativity, and adaptation to successfully meet the demands of the environment. In the same context, psychologist Robert Sternberg has defined intelligence as “the necessary mental abilities for adaptation to, as well as shaping and selection of any environmental context (Ruhl, 2020).

The term “emotional intelligence” has been defined in different ways. According to Salovey and Mayer (1989), it refers to a set of skills that contribute to the accurate assessment and expression of emotion in oneself and others, the effective moderation of our and others’ emotions, and the manipulation of feelings to motivate, plan and achieve in one’s life.

Daniel Goleman (1995:9) sees EI as “a person’s ability to manage his/her feelings so that those feelings are expressed appropriately and effectively”. He continues to explain that “knowing what one’s feelings are and using that knowledge to make good decisions”.

Research continues to define the concept but the most practical definition comes from Freedman and Jensen (2005) who state that ‘Emotional intelligence is consciously choosing thoughts, feelings and actions to get optimal results in your relationships with yourself and others’.

Goleman (1995), in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, explains the five domains of emotional intelligence:

1. Knowing one’s emotions: Self-awareness is the keystone of emotional intelligence. It is the ability to recognize feelings as they happen in real-life situations.
2. Managing emotions: Handling feelings appropriately is an ability that builds on self-awareness. It is being able to manage strong feelings so that we can soothe ourselves, maintain balance and not be overwhelmed or paralyzed by them.
3. Motivating oneself: Self-motivation and mastery is about being goal-oriented, keeping focused and channelling emotions toward desired results. It leads to being highly effective and productive.
4. Recognizing emotions in others: Empathy is the fundamental people skill. It means being able to recognize emotions in others and understand others’ point of view.
5. Handling relationships: Managing emotions in others is the art of relationships. It is the ability to handle a range of social relationships and to interact smoothly with others. (P. 52)

Being an emotionally intelligent learner, thus, means being aware of one own emotional make-up (both positive and negative): happiness, frustration, confidence, sadness, etc., and being able to recognize and deal with them appropriately (self-regulation). Being emotionally intelligent means that an individual needs achievement and persists in the face of adversity (motivation). It also means being able to identify and understand the emotions other people experience, in other words, it is the ability to put oneself in their shoes (empathy). Having high emotional intelligence means being more sensitive to emotional signals from the social environment, thereby, it helps to become a better colleague, brother, sister, friend, or even parent in the future (social skills).(Duppydom, 2019).

In short EI, according to Bar-On et al., (2007), is linked to individuals' abilities to understand themselves and others, easily adjust to environmental changes, and manage emotions.

### **3.1 Why it matters?**

When thinking of EI, we usually think of the necessary skills that adults need, but we have to bear in mind that this intelligence starts its development in childhood. That's why nurturing EI in children is important for their success in interpersonal and social relationships later in their adulthood (Nabuzoka and Smith, 1995). In the same vein, Henniger (1999) writes 'Emotional development in young children consists of gradual growth in the ability to recognize, label and appropriately respond to The Big Picture 3 their feelings. Each of these steps is important to their emotional health and must be learned through repeated interactions with others' (p. 340).

Scientifically speaking, EI is considered as the interconnection between thinking and feeling. This idea comes out from the assumption that feelings influence nearly every dimension of human experience. Furthermore, 80 percent of an individual's social behavior and actions engender from one's EI, while just 20 percent is the result of rational intelligence. Altogether, we're considered emotional creatures as human beings. (Asma Ben Jebra, 2020)

Unfortunately, most educational systems look for developing these types of intelligence: linguistic and logic-mathematical. Conversely, education should encourage YLs to explore the different areas of intelligence. Emotional education helps children to acquire self-awareness, confidence, empathy, self-control and the ability to assert themselves without conflict (Reiser, 1993).

In this context, Goleman (1998) mentioned that EI involves the following elements: self-awareness, empathy, handling relationships, managing feelings, and motivation. That's why teaching YLs how to be emotionally intelligent means teaching them how to understand their feelings, constructively express them, and recognize what originates these emotions.

The five principles of EI that can be taught to YLs include self-awareness (the ability to recognize our emotions), self-regulation (the ability to control our reactions to our emotions), internal motivation (the ability to think about and identify what's causing us to feel the way we do), empathy (the ability to understand the emotions of other people), and social skills (using emotional intelligence to build strong social relationships). This way YLs will have the ability to work through challenges and respond successfully to complex situations.

Additionally, YLs can learn these five competencies practically at any age, to a specific level. In fact, preschool teachers can begin this EI developing journey by encouraging toddlers and young kids to use words in order to express how they feel in any situation. This way kids can get used to the act of recognizing their feelings regularly which represents a key part of what Dr. Daniel Siegel, author of *Parenting from the Inside Out*, calls "name it to tame it" (2013)

Yet, just like GPS, EI can guide individuals, help them pass obstacles, and move toward success. It allows them to size up challenging situations, put them in perspective, and seek ways to solve the detected problems. (Understood, 2020)

### **3.2 Becoming an Emotionally Intelligent Teacher.**

Different skills (mentioned above) contribute to developing any teachers emotionally intelligence. Self-awareness, for example, is one of the most important skills. Goleman (1995,

P. 51) states, ‘Self-awareness in short means being aware of both our mood and our thoughts about the mood’. That means when teachers have good self-knowledge, they can better understand their students, and when they understand them, they can understand them.

“Knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I don’t know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly. In the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well”. (Palmer, 1998, P. 2)

Ellison (2001) states that if teachers want to teach learners how to be emotionally intelligent, they first need to be emotionally intelligent. He sums up the idea in this statement: “I cannot give what I don’t have. My success with students depends on my own personal intelligence” (P.16). Self-awareness, thus, can be improved when teachers ask themselves questions, observe their feelings and reactions to different situations.

Managing emotions is another skill that has to do with the teacher’s ability to handle their feelings. Teachers can mismanage their emotions but it is normal as they can be overwhelmed by negative feelings such as anger, frustration, stress, anxiety and so on. The role of the teacher here is to know how to stay balanced as Goleman (1995) puts it, ‘Downs as well as ups spice life’, but adds ‘but need to be in balance” (P. 63). To stay balanced, teachers need to change their perceptions so that their feelings can be changed as both thoughts and feelings are interrelated (Bahman, 2008).

The third skill that teachers need to have is self-motivation. Bachman (2008) states that Self-motivated people walk faster towards their goals than those who lack enthusiasm. Moreover, he confirms that teachers can make a difference in the lives of children in their care when they manage to find value in what they are doing. Teachers’ desire to develop self-motivation will help learners to grow and flourish. . As Ellison (2001: 5) states, ‘I teach children. The children are my focus. This is a very different attitude from “I teach math”. My focus makes a world of difference.’

Additionally, Teachers can have a great influence on how children learn and feel about school. It all depends on their relationship with learners. Bachman (2008) argues that teachers who can understand how they feel, how they think, and what messages they are trying to convey through gestures, facial expressions, or tone of voice are called “empathic teachers”. In this way, children may take in and process information easily. Goleman (1995: 111) suggests ‘mastering this empathic ability smooths the way for classroom effectiveness’ and this develops their learning ability.

In other words, if teachers work on empathy, it can develop well. Their emotional state has a great impact on their academic achievement and learning process. The basis of empathy is being aware of oneself so that teachers can read the learners’ feelings. Goleman (1995) ‘The more open we are to our own emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading feelings’.

Unlike all other EQ skills, handling relationship is a skill that incorporates all the other skills. Indeed, if teachers have a positive relationship with themselves they can have a positive relationship with others. Feelings and emotions are transmitted to the outside world. ‘We send emotional signals in every encounter and those signals affect those we are with’ (Goleman, 1995: 111). When teachers are happy or angry the learners can feel it so they can either take negative or positive emotions. Thus, managing emotions is the same as handling relationships. Teachers should try to read the non-verbal signals that the kids are transmitting



to them. As Goleman (1995) explains: “handling emotions in someone else – the fine art of relationships – requires the ripeness of two other emotional skills “self-management and empathy” (P. 12).

To sum up, being an emotionally intelligent teacher has many benefits as it allows them to be happy and enthusiastic. It also gives them the tool to make a turn in the lives of the learners they teach. This can lead to a successful relationship between the learner and the teacher. Mahatma Gandhi says in this context: “You must be the change you wish to see in the world!”

#### **4. Discussion**

There is enough evidence that the storytelling technique provides a richer and more engaging educational environment as it improves the YL’s abilities to think, imagine, analyze, critique, and ultimately become more sensitive, empathetic, and confident (Goleman, 1998). Yet, applying this approach poses multiple challenges, such as the general attitude of teachers toward the importance of this approach, the concept of EI, and the relation between these two concepts.

Nowadays, no one can deny the role of technology in education (Shahsavari et al., 2010) and a lot of YLs “prefer to receive materials digitally where it is acceptable” (Nourinezhad et al. 2021). Indeed, texts, audios, animations and films open the way for the transfer of educational concepts and clear the path for active learning among learners (Jager et al., 2017); moreover, using digital storytelling in education has caused “a revolution in learner’s learning process” (Salehi, 2017, P. 112). With the application of graphics, images, and animations, educational multimedia can stimulate learners and establish a positive attitude toward educational materials among them (C.C. Liu et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, EI and ST are highlighted generally in the business and marketing field. These two concepts are not taken into consideration in education, even though they can sharply influence the academic and personal career of YLs when included in their education. Furthermore, most of the studies done on EI and ST, have taken these concepts on their own rather than about teaching.

#### **5. Conclusion**

It is widely known that storytelling has positive effects on primary YLs by engaging them in the lessons, sparking their creativity and improving their literacy and linguistic skills. However, before realizing a digital storytelling-based lesson, teachers should bear in mind that they need to properly prepare themselves, by training and rehearsing over and over, picking the appropriate story to tell in terms of length and students’ English language level.

Discovering storytelling and applying it in real practice show that stories can really engage and create connections and bonds and foremost, manipulate emotions. Theoretically, it sounds like a magical tool that can solve all the teaching problems. Otherwise, from a beginner teacher’s experience with teaching through digital storytelling, it may show a lot of difficulties, but it is worth the hard work and effort because after implementing it in class, it can foster young learners’ emotional intelligence skills, as well as providing authentic situations to apply the learned contents.

This research offers the chance for teachers to try to find solutions and choose concepts and approaches that are sometimes neglected and deserve to be highlighted. We got to know how emotional intelligence matters in every single aspect of our lives, as adults and as young learners. That's why I tried to find an effective tool that connects YLs to their own emotions and their surroundings and pushes them to reflect on them, as well as relating them to what they were taught at school, more specifically in English.

This should trigger serious research to be done in order to raise awareness of educators about establishing storytelling projects, in which stories are developed for young learners that can go hand in hand with the school curriculum. This storytelling-based approach is meant to change the traditional teaching process and provides both teachers and learners with a vivid teaching and learning experience.

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