

EXPLORING NINTH GRADERS' CRITICAL LISTENING SKILLS USING STUDENT CREATED DIGITAL STORYTELLING

ATAIA BASYONI AHMED ABDUL AZIZ
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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore the effectiveness of using Student Created Digital Storytelling (DST) in improving Ninth graders' Critical Listening Skill (CLS) through retelling technique at Madinat Al-Oloum International School (MOIS) in Saudi Arabia. There are three objectives of the study, the first is to examine how ninth graders develop DST; the second is to investigate the impact of DST in enhancing Saudi ninth graders' CLS through retelling and the third objective is to investigate the effects of DST on Saudi ninth grader's CLS. The methodology of the study is using a mixed method research design. The qualitative research instruments are semi-structured interview, DST observation checklist on DST creation, audio recording of retelling and a CLS retelling observation checklist. The quantitative research instrument is the Critical Listening (CL) pre and post-tests. Sampling of the qualitative approach included eight participants who took part in the semi-structured interview and audio recording of retelling and seventy (70) participants took part in the CLS pre-posttest, randomly divided into an experimental and a control group. The quantitative findings from the t-test statistically showed an improvement in CLS and significantly in related sub-skills such as analysis, evaluation, and judgment skills. The qualitative findings significantly suggested that students' created DST improves EFL ninth graders' CLS positively. Furthermore, this study found that Retelling technique acted as a mediator learning tool between DST and CLS. The implication of this study suggested that using DST can enhance ninth graders' CLS in EFL lesson. And ESL/EFL teachers in primary or secondary schools can use DST as an alternative tool for teaching CLS effectively. However, the use of DST in ESL/EFL listening comprehension, especially in developing and improving CLS can be investigated longitudinally and with more diverse samples for its positive pedagogical impact in strengthening digital skills in 21st century ESL and EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Critical listening skills; digital storytelling; retelling; observation; schema theory; sociocultural theory

MENYELIDIK KEMAHIRAN MENDENGAR KRITIKAL PELAJAR GRED SEMBILAN MENGGUNAKAN PENCERITAAN DIGITAL BUATAN PELAJAR

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menyelidik keberkesanan penggunaan Penceritaan Digital (DST) yang Dicipta oleh Pelajar dalam meningkatkan Kemahiran Mendengar Kritikal (CLS) pelajar Gred Sembilan melalui teknik menceritakan semula di Sekolah Antarabangsa Madinat Al-Oloun (MOIS) di Arab Saudi. Terdapat tiga objektif kajian ini, yang pertama adalah untuk mengkaji bagaimana pelajar Gred Sembilan membangunkan DST; yang kedua adalah untuk menyiasat kesan DST dalam meningkatkan CLS pelajar Gred Sembilan di Saudi melalui menceritakan semula dan objektif ketiga adalah untuk menyiasat kesan DST terhadap CLS pelajar Gred Sembilan di Saudi. Metodologi kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kaedah campuran. Instrumen penyelidikan kualitatif adalah temubual separa berstruktur, senarai semak pemerhatian DST dalam penciptaan DST, rakaman audio menceritakan semula dan senarai semak pemerhatian CLS dalam menceritakan semula. Instrumen penyelidikan kuantitatif adalah ujian pra dan pasca Kemahiran Mendengar Kritikal (CL). Pensampelan pendekatan kualitatif termasuk lapan peserta yang mengambil bahagian dalam temubual separa berstruktur dan rakaman audio menceritakan semula dan tujuh puluh (70) peserta yang mengambil bahagian dalam ujian pra-pasca CLS, yang dibahagikan secara rawak kepada kumpulan eksperimen dan kawalan. Penemuan kuantitatif daripada ujian t secara statistik menunjukkan peningkatan dalam CLS dan sub-kemahiran berkaitan seperti kemahiran analisis, penilaian, dan pertimbangan secara signifikan. Penemuan kualitatif secara signifikan mencadangkan bahawa DST yang dicipta oleh pelajar meningkatkan CLS pelajar Gred Sembilan EFL secara positif. Selain itu, kajian ini mendapati bahawa teknik menceritakan semula bertindak sebagai alat pembelajaran perantara antara DST dan CLS. Implikasi kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa penggunaan DST boleh meningkatkan CLS pelajar Gred Sembilan dalam pelajaran EFL. Guru ESL/EFL di sekolah rendah atau menengah boleh menggunakan DST sebagai alat alternatif untuk mengajar CLS dengan berkesan. Walau bagaimanapun, penggunaan DST dalam kefahaman mendengar ESL/EFL, terutamanya dalam membangunkan dan meningkatkan CLS boleh diasas secara longitudinal dan dengan sampel yang lebih pelbagai untuk impak pedagogi positif dalam memperkukuh kemahiran digital dalam bilik darjah ESL dan EFL abad ke-21.

Kata kunci: Kemahiran mendengar secara kritikal; penceritaan digital; penceritaan semula; pemerhatian; teori skema; teori sosiobudaya

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLS	Critical Listening Skills
DST	Digital Stories created by Students
EFL	English as a foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
SCT	Socio-cultural Theory

LIST OF APPENDICES

- A Critical Listening Skills (CLS) Guidebook
- B School Permission
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- G Semi-structured Interview & Students' Responses
- H DST Evaluation Checklist
- I Audio Recording Verbatim of Students' Retelling
- J Critical Listening Skills Test
- K Instructional Retelling Rubric
- L Software (pictures)
- M Audio Recording Verbatim of DST

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces English learning and education system, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Focusing on digital storytelling (DST), the current study examined its influence on students' critical listening skills (CLS). With that, this chapter discusses the pertinent issues of CLS and how DST influences students' achievements. In particular, the background of study and problem statement are presented. Besides that, the objectives and research questions of this study, as well as hypotheses are listed in this chapter. This chapter also presents the theoretical framework and significance of the study, as well as the operational definitions of key terms used. A chapter summary is presented at the end of this chapter.



1.2 Background of Study

Kindergarten, six years of primary school, and three years of intermediate and high school each make up the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's general education system. Following elementary and intermediate school, students can attend a vocational school, a high school with business, or an arts and sciences program. Twice a year, high school students take comprehensive tests that are overseen by the Ministry of Education. Saudi schools provide a wide range of curricula. They cover various topics, including literature, physics, math, science, English (EFL), Arabic, and Islam. The Ministry of Education controls special education for the disabled and establishes general criteria. Saudi Arabia has designated English as a main foreign language; however, the nation still exhibits a great deal of interest in the language. It is essentially used as the de facto foreign language of study and is the most important foreign language to be taught and learned in the nation.

Alharbi (2019) outlined the key objectives of EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia, as mandated by the 2001 Government Decree. The following aims are emphasized:

- 1- Students need to develop fundamental linguistic abilities and a proficient level of English to be ready for the job market.
- 2- Students are required to recognize English as a globally accepted language.
- 3- By studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), students may get linguistic advantages from various cultures and sciences, as long as it aligns with the principles of Islam.



- 4- Develop a sufficient level of proficiency in English to effectively promote, safeguard, and explain Islam, in any necessary context.

At Madinat Al-Oloum International School (MOIS) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia where the researcher has worked as an EFL teacher for four years, all research participants were enrolled in the ninth grade in which they studied a course in English where the language was being taught as a foreign language. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the participants' English language competence level was equivalent to intermediate (B2) or upper-intermediate (B2+).

Al-Harbi (2016) assured the use of traditional teaching methods and techniques in English CLS classes in preparatory and high schools, which primarily emphasize direct recitation and listening standards, has led to students' inadequate English CLS proficiency, particularly among Saudi ninth graders in Riyadh. The development and introduction of new learning tools and technologies have modernized the conventional learning concept. These new tools and technologies offer various practical solutions, such as the introduction of educational applications, platforms, and websites, which have addressed and improved issues of English learning, especially listening (Khuziakhmetov & Porchesku, 2016). These tools substantially help students to improve their CLS—Saudi ninth graders are of no exception. The significant roles of technologies in enhancing students' classroom involvement, collaboration, and eagerness to learn are undoubtedly evident as mentioned by Haleem et al. (2022); (Wessel-Powell et al., 2016); (Felea et al., 2018). Through technologies, students can

enhance their creativity and skills, especially CLS by actively participating in the creation of digital stories.

Empirical evidence has shown how DST may foster a learner community of practice, enhance learner-centered learning, and improve CLS. Robin (2016) confirmed that Involving students in the creation and sharing of stories is crucial.

DST can improve students' CLS as it is widely used in content-based learning, where students construct digital stories about particular subjects. An encouraging, student-centered learning environment is produced by this sort of involvement. English teachers are increasingly using digital storytelling because of the advent of DST and its pedagogical advantages (Elshehawy, (2017).

As one of the most effective digital applications (Wessel-Powell et al., 2016), DST plays a significant role of integrating technologies into the teaching-learning process. Both traditional storytelling and DST may appear similar, but both forms essentially have their own distinctive elements of art forms (Moradi & Chen, 2019). The use of various interactive media tools in DST to create stories contributes to the expansion of the presence and scope of storytelling within the educational context. Students who are exposed to 21st-century literacy skills demonstrate higher emotional intelligence and better communication skills (Shukla et al., 2017), and most of the digital literacy skills today involve the application of DST.

Accordingly, DST offers a practical approach that makes use of appropriate free-to-use software and offers organized instructional materials and standard



evaluation, which benefit both teachers and students. It introduces a new artistic form of telling stories using digital platform or tools (Shukla et al., 2017), such as the use of computer and online multimedia. Through the incorporation of various learning tools into traditional storytelling, DST contextualizes knowledge in different disciplines necessary for the development of 21st-century skills (Korkmaz, 2017). Eissa (2019) concluded the effectiveness of DST as a tool to motivate students to learn language and actively participate in the language learning process through content, pedagogy, and learning skills. Moreover, DST promotes higher retention, supports idea creation, and nurtures mutual trust and understanding among students with respect to their learning goals given its significant roles of inspiring and motivating students.

The advantages of using educational DST software in the classroom settings have been widely acknowledged (Yang, Chen & Hung, 2022). Educational DST software offers an engaging learning process for the students. From the psychological viewpoints, the elements of curiosity, interest, and enjoyment engage students and motivate them to learn (Felea et al., 2018). Technologies clearly engage students in creating and telling stories (Selwyn, (2020). According to Alamri, Watson & Watson (2021), the incorporation of computer technology itself supports the existing teaching practices and transforms these practices to offer more constructive learning and unique learning advantages in the classroom settings. An engaging learning context can stimulate students to be more engaged in learning and achieve their personal or intellectual goals (Widodo, 2016). Based on a sample of students from Hong Kong community college, Chan et al. (2017) found that the students were more enthusiastic towards filmmaking task and demonstrated motivation and creativity in filmmaking. Alexander (2017) shared similar findings on the benefits of engaging students in a DST





project. The study noted that students can improve their story comprehension skills and understanding of sentence complexity through DST.

Niemi and Multisilta (2016) highlighted several notable points on the concept of engagement strategy based on the study's findings on the influence of using DST on students' mental state. Firstly, the study noted how a stimulating scenario engages students to develop and make use of their skills. Secondly, a dynamic scenario that involves rapid changes and movement, such as animation, attracts students' interest, especially young learners. Thirdly, focusing on the control of computer, the application of DST significantly benefits students in terms of engagement, either in education or in commercial game. Finally, the process of combining learning content and storytelling engages students; even in a conventional classroom setting, teachers incorporate various social, emotional, and behavioral issues into a story to engage students.

In view of the above, teachers should take advantage of the strengths of DST to produce valuable learning content especially in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL). Huang (2023) recommended using participatory activities, such as DST, to improve oral communication performance. Niemi and Multisilta (2016) stressed that DST offers a platform that engages a class of learners to enthusiastically pursue a common learning goal. A teacher takes on the pivotal roles of engaging students with relevant and stimulating learning content and materials and reinforcing students' self-esteem and consciousness in learning and self-identity. The application of DST clearly creates a stimulating learning environment that goes beyond the conventional classroom settings. It engages students to explore the assigned topic online and use the information gained to build up an engaging storyline for a compelling





storytelling. Moreover, students can take advantage of various multimedia forms (e.g., audio, image, text, music, or animation) to aid their storytelling. Throughout the process, students have the opportunities to gain and improve their knowledge and skills and enhance their engagement in listening skills (Sarica & Usluel, 2016).

Besides that, there have been empirical evidences on how DST can improve learner-centered learning and create a learner community of practice. It is pivotal to involve the students in creating and sharing stories (Celik, 2023). Elenein (2019) noted the wide application of DST in content-based instruction, where students create digital stories of specialized topics. This kind of engagement creates a supportive student-centered learning environment. With the emergence and educational benefits of DST, digital stories have gained growing popularity among language practitioners. The use of DST has been extensively discussed in educational research, particularly within the contexts of ESL and English as a foreign language. Prior studies also stressed the effectiveness of multimedia stories in developing young learners' CLS.

Despite the growing research and development in the domain of teaching English to young learners (Widodo, 2016), only a few prior studies on DST focused on the context of English as a foreign Language (EFL) especially in the Saudi classroom settings. For instance, Liang & Hwang (2023) highlighted the significant role of DST in improving EFL learners' oral production and noted the ability of learners to deliver their stories clearly, smoothly, and spontaneously. Learners have numerous opportunities to practice their pronunciation when they tell and retell stories and to evaluate their fluency when they listen to their voice recording.





In another study involving a sample of 30 intermediate EFL learners, Tamimi (2024) examined the influence of DST on students' motivation and found that the participants in the experimental group demonstrated higher levels of learning motivation, creative thinking, and language skills than the participants in the experimental group.

Likewise, Lucarevschi (2016) explored the role of DST in motivating a group of young EFL learners. Extrinsic motivation involves prompting an individual to perform an action for reward, such as job promotion or higher pay grade, whereas intrinsic motivation is about an individual's desire to participate in an activity for the individual's own interest (Murayama, 2022).



through creation and assessed the influence of DST on learning motivation and performance in English among students. The study demonstrated the significant relationship between language usage performance in DST and achievement test scores, as well as the significant relationships of creativity performance with various dimensions of motivation, which included extrinsic motivation, task value, and elaboration. The study further reported the positive influence of the proposed DST approach on language performance, which resulted in higher levels of extrinsic goal orientation and elaboration, as compared to intrinsic goal orientation (Liu et al, 2018)

However, considering the extensive number of studies on the use and benefits of DST, only a few studies considered exploring the use of DST among early year learners (EYL), especially within the Saudi context. Besides that, there have been





limited findings on the interactions of young learners with DST in English language learning, including on how this group of learners handles multimodal texts, such as digital stories. With effective engagement, young learners can make use of their outstanding potentials for creativity, passion, and commitment towards learning. In one of the prior studies, Widodo (2016) targeted young learners from two primary schools in East Java, Indonesia and explored the influence of DST on student engagement in a genre-based digital storytelling project. The study reported improved language and literacy skills, as well as content knowledge among these students. Through this project, students were provided a platform to creatively share and discuss related experiences. They were motivated to be creators of multimodal narrative texts. The processes of digital story creation, which involved decision-making for the types of images used, caption development, and story editing, engaged these students to be problem solvers.



The project involving the creation of digital stories also democratized the ways of creating digital stories through the use of various modalities, allowing these young learners' voices to be heard.

Students generally have no issues of getting the gist, recognizing the characters, and summarizing what they listen when the storytelling approach is used (Kalantari & Hashemian, 2016). Moreover, this approach transforms a dull, monotonous learning environment into a vibrant, interesting learning environment that engages students' attention and interest and effectively motivates them to participate and interact actively in the classroom. This unique mixture of learning and entertainment helps students to create vivid mental images and stimulate critical thinking and other learning skills. The benefits of an engaging learning environment can be observed through students' achievements and improvements.





When it comes to storytelling, students are more likely to be subjected to more repetitions, sounds, and gestures. DST is a creative form of art and learning that has been used to entertain learners of different cultural backgrounds for decades, which can certainly benefit Saudi ninth graders. The art of storytelling serves as a dynamic tool of language learning (Choo, Abdullah & Nawi, 2020). It stimulates minds and creativity and offers a dynamic environment for language learning, which can be a unique learning experience for both individuals and groups. Both teachers and students are the sources for new activities. The process of DST begins from listening to a story and ends with class discussion and interaction.

Furthermore, studies have reported the use of DST in bridging the disconnection between the high-tech environment beyond school and the low-tech environment in school and offering numerous benefits that cannot be achieved through traditional storytelling for Saudi ninth graders (Al-Amri, 2020). The significance of DST in students' learning makes it an ideal approach to engage students (Al Khateeb, 2019). Recognizing that, the Saudi Ministry of Education promotes the effective use of information technology for English as a foreign language (EFL) in the classroom settings. Technology integration for classroom settings also requires new pedagogical approaches and models (Hawkins & Weis, 2017). This can be a challenge for teachers who are used to the conventional teaching approach to incorporate digital applications, particularly DST, in the classroom settings for effective learning engagement with students (Hawkins & Weis, 2017). Despite the significance of digital applications for students' learning, teachers in Saudi schools still struggle with the need to integrate technologies into the teaching-learning process. Thus, unlike prior studies, the current study focused on creating DST and measuring the extent of DST in enhancing Saudi



students' CLS in English as a foreign language (EFL). Based on a sample of young learners, specifically Saudi ninth graders, the current study's findings on the application of DST were expected to boost students' CLS through retelling exercises.

Evidently, DST offers numerous opportunities for Saudi ninth graders to create and communicate different types of stories in English language, such as personal stories, historical stories, and Quranic stories, using different modes of communication—for examples, visualization and writing of ideas, documentation and presentation of stories as a historical journal, and the use of meaning-making resources like photographs, video clips, art, music, script text, audio narration, and sound effects. Moreover, the effectiveness of using modern technologies in language learning, especially CLS, has been proven, which highlights the critical need to make use of technologies to facilitate the learning process of Saudi ninth graders. DST offers a more interactive and engaging means for students to explore and discuss various challenging issues in a more laidback manner (Eissa, 2019). Its dynamic process creates rich learning experience that helps students to establish a deeper connection with the topic of interest and enhance their language skills.

Through the creation of digital stories, students are more exposed to a more integrated set of language skills. As shown in Table 1.1, the production process of DST demonstrates how students can integrate all four key language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The creation of digital stories, from the first step of listening to a story to the final step of evaluating the created story, emphasizes the importance of listening skills.

Table 1.1

Production Process of DST

Phases	Steps
Pre-Production Phase	Listening to a story Writing and adjusting a narrative script Planning the project Organizing project folders
Production Phase	Making the voiceover Gathering and preparing media resources
Post-Production Phase	Putting it all together
Distribution Phase	Pre-running DST Applause, applause

Listening is the foundation of communication. Foreign language learners start training their listening skills from early stages as they advance through their language learning. Among all four key language skills, listening skills are less clearly defined (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Despite being the most used and essential skills, mastering listening skills in foreign language learning is the most challenging aspect. Therefore, this aspect of language learning skills requires more training and improvement.

The process of listening involves receiving and making sense of the information and responding to both verbal and non-verbal information (Campoy-Cubillo, 2019). Gonulal (2020) described listening as a process that involves auditory discrimination and aural grammar, from selecting and retaining information to synthesizing the information from the auditory message. Campoy-Cubillo (2019) defined listening as the process of receiving, making meaning from, and answering to the spoken and/or non-verbal messages. According Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), the process of listening requires organizing what is heard into meaningful lexical elements. Meanwhile, listening was discussed as understanding the oral language.

Learners listen to the oral speech, categorize sounds into lexical and syntactic units, and interpret the information. Listening involves the process of receiving and making sense of what the speaker says, responding to the speaker, and making sense of the collaboration. The whole process of listening consists of receptive orientation (to receive the speaker's conveyed message), constructive orientation (to construct and make sense of the message), collaborative orientation (to respond and discuss the meaning with the speaker, and transformative orientation (to create meaning through participation, imagination, and empathy). The process of listening is a complex process of interpretation, as listeners have to match what they hear with what they already know (Afriyuninda & Oktaviani, 2021). Sabouri (2016) and Wah (2019) further described listening as an active, essential mental ability for us to understand the world and create successful communication with one another.

When it comes to EFL, Al-Shaye (2021) noted the importance to understand students' learning issues in order to develop more effective learning strategies for students to improve their language comprehension and listening skills, especially CLS. The issues of listening skills in Saudi Arabia are prevalent. In one of the prior studies, Pineda Jiménez (2018) identified several major issues of listening comprehension encountered by EFL Saudi learners, such as pronunciation issue, speed of speech, poor comprehension due to limited vocabulary, having problems in listening to different accent of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety, and poor audio quality of recording. It is fundamental for Saudi ninth graders to develop and master CLS, such as recognition of assumption, induction, deduction, interpretation, and evaluation of arguments (Hashim et al., 2022). In fact, Saudi ninth graders require CLS to help them pass the standardized test (Pre-Sat) in tenth grade, (SAT1) in eleventh grade, and

(SAT2) in twelfth grade for them to further their study at university. Therefore, the choice of the ninth grade is the most convenient population for the study because they will spend the ninth academic year for mastering and practicing higher order and critical listening skills to prepare for the English pre-SAT in grade 10. The study is being undertaken at MOIS, a school that adheres to the American curriculum and administers the English Pre-SAT, SAT1, and SAT2 to students in grades 10, 11, and 12, respectively. The College Board in the United States developed and administers the English SAT and ACT. The SAT and ACT are designed to assess a high school student's preparedness for college and provide universities with a common, data metric to evaluate all applicants against. The SAT and ACT tests used to gain admission to college or university assess a variety of higher order thinking skills, including critical thinking skills in English writing (productive skill) and reading, which are very similar to the main critical listening skills (Auditory discrimination, analysis, inference, and evaluation & judgement) because they are both receptive skills.

1.3 Problem Statement

Corey (2016), Bell (2018), and Welch and Mickelson (2018) noted teachers' lack of emphasis on the mastery of listening skills in the classroom—for instance, teachers do not give their students adequate time to practice listening skills, as compared to other language skills, during English language lessons. Studies have also noted the lack of effective planning, especially when it comes to CLS. As listening skills are often taught during the early stage of language learning, its importance has been overlooked to a certain extent. According to Al-Seghayer (2021), Saudi EFL teachers mainly rely on



instructional strategies, which emphasize the development of bottom-up skills, to improve students' low English proficiency. The study noted the application of bottom-up listening tasks for students to recognize lexical, grammatical, and pronunciation features and language forms at the word- and sentence-levels. In most cases of bottom-up listening tasks, students are typically required to identify individual sounds, word boundaries, and stressed syllables, to listen for intonation patterns and specific details, as well as to recognize grammatical forms and functions, contractions and connected speech, and linking words and phoneme sequences by circling the words they listen. Other common bottom-up listening tasks include dictation, cloze listening, text-based multiple-choice questions, and similar activities that involve close and detailed recognition and input processing.



which heavily focus on direct recitation and listening standards, has contributed to students' poor mastery of CLS, especially among Saudi ninth graders in Riyadh (Al-Harbi, 2016). Saudi EFL teachers, unlike teachers in process-oriented classrooms, deliver teacher-centered learning and focus on testing students' ability to listen. Saudi EFL teachers pay less emphasis on effective listening comprehension strategies that help students to master CLS. In a process-oriented classroom, students are exposed to isolated listening tasks, which involve the selection of input, design, and sequence listening activities, determination of tasks, and making decisions on the correct responses. Alharbi & Al-Ahdal (2022), similarly noted how listening has gained the least attention in English language teaching in Saudi classrooms. Teachers also tend to overlook this particular skill when they design language lessons based on the



assumption that students' listening comprehension skills can be naturally developed during language learning.

Studies have identified the lack of relevant advanced strategies, programs, online applications, and educational and instructional materials for listening skills as factors that lead to students' poor CLS. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of innovative technology-supported instructional strategies, such as DST, in improving students' academic performance. The significant potentials of DST have clearly gained growing popularity among language practitioners and research interest, particularly in the contexts of ESL and EFL. Most prior studies focused the use of DST among adult learners and in the EFL context despite the evidence on how multimedia stories can benefit young learners, especially in the development of listening comprehension (Akdamar & Sutcu, 2021). Furthermore, it has been proven that DST can effectively enhance Saudi ninth graders' listening comprehension skills, where English is a second and instructional language. DST shapes students' listening skills and influences the nature of their intelligence (Dos Santos et al., 2016; Shukla et al., 2017; Matthews & Sunderland, 2017). DST offers an engaging platform for students to enhance their CLS in order to have better understanding of the available materials and information in English language.

The researcher of the current study is also a teacher and has been teaching using the American curriculum at Madinat Al-Oloum International School (MOIS), an international school located in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, since 2014. The issues and challenges encountered by students during listening lessons prompted the researcher to conduct the current study to explore the effectiveness of DST in improving students'

CLS. Furthermore, at the point of this study, the online search engine (e.g., Google Scholar) revealed no existing studies on the effectiveness of DST in improving students' CLS, especially within the Saudi context. After all, studies have proposed the significance of assessing how CLS can improve academic performance (Wessel-Powell et al., 2016; Hawkins & Weis, 2017; Shukla et al., 2017).

1.4 Research Objectives

In general, this study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of DST in enhancing Saudi ninth graders' CLS. Firstly, the development of DST in this study involved script reading, adjusting, drafting, storyboarding, editing sounds and pictures, and presentation of DST. Students' DST was then expected to enhance their CLS. The presentations of DST (including three case treatments) were observed, specifically on how DST influences and improves students' CLS. The specific objectives of this study are listed as follows:

1. To examine the development of DST by Saudi ninth graders for critical listening lesson
2. To investigate the impact of DST in enhancing Saudi ninth graders' CLS through retelling
3. To investigate the effects of DST on Saudi ninth grader's CLS

1.5 Research Questions

With respect to the specific objectives, the current study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do Saudi ninth graders develop DST for critical listening lesson?
2. How does DST affect Saudi ninth graders' CLS through retelling?
3. What are the effects of DST on Saudi ninth grader's CLS?

1.6 Hypotheses

Based on the review of literature, DST can improve students' language proficiency.

Considering the significance of DST in improving students' CLS, several hypotheses were formulated and proposed for testing in the current study. The study's findings were expected to benefit teachers' decisions to incorporate DST in the classroom settings.

- H1: The mean scores of the pre-test and post-test in CLS are statistically significant different, in favor of the post-test.
- H2: The mean scores of the pre-test and post-test in each critical listening sub-skill are statistically significant different, in favor of the post-test.
- H3: The mean scores of the control group and experimental group in CLS are statistically significant different, in favor of the experimental group.

H4: The mean scores of the control group and experimental group in each critical listening sub-skill are statistically significant different, in favor of the experimental group.

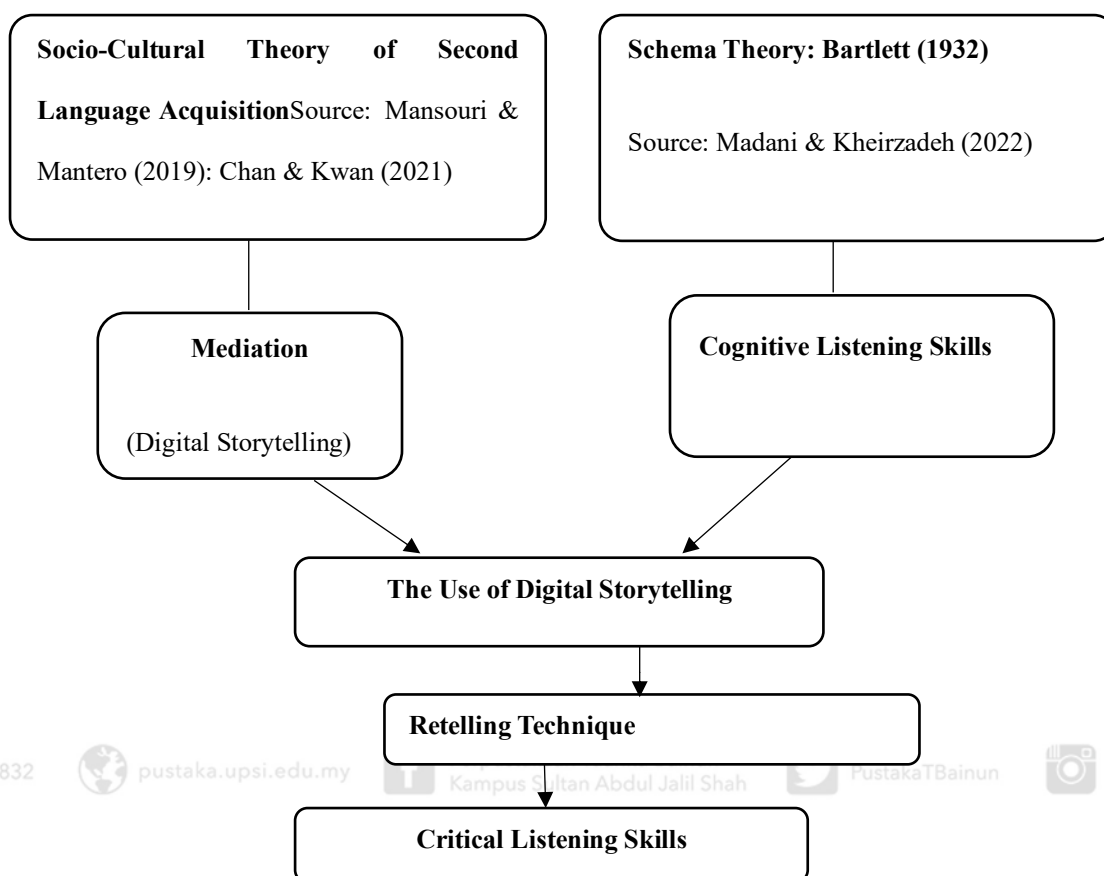
1.7 Theoretical Framework

With respect to the objectives of this study, several relevant theories were identified. The schema theory (Bartlett, 1932 cited in Madani & Kheirzadeh (2022) and socio-cultural theory of second language acquisition (Vygotsky 1978, Mansouri & Mantero (2019): Chan & Kwan (2021) established the underlying theoretical basis of the current study. Figure 1.1 presents the selected theories that established the development of DST.

Guiding the development of DST helps students to gain independence and better understanding of their learning process.

Figure 1.1

Theoretical Framework of Study



A Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978), and his colleagues introduced the socio-cultural theory (SCT) that incorporates the principles and constructs of an approach to learning and mental development. This theory explains human mental functioning as a mediated process that is organized by cultural artifacts, activities, and concepts (Mansouri & Mantero (2019); Chan & Kwan (2021)). This theory's framework explains that humans use and creates cultural artifacts to regulate their biological and behavioral activities. In this case, the use, organization, and structure of language serve as the primary means of mediation. The process of creation requires participation and collaboration within the cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings, such as family and peer group interaction, as well as the institutional contexts, such as school,



workplace, and organized sports activities. Despite the significance of human neurobiology as a key condition for higher order thinking, human interactions within the socio-cultural settings still represent the most essential forms for the development of human cognitive activities.

The use of language essentially involves the social and cultural contexts. In other words, any text in the form of story is somehow linked to a socio-cultural context. When it comes to second language acquisition, mediation, as one of the concepts in SCT, serves as the main construct that combines all varieties of SCT and focuses on the use of physical tools and symbolic tools to mediate humans' cognitive and material activities. Physical tools (externally directed) are auxiliary means to improve the ability to control and alter the physical world, while symbolic tools (internally or cognitively directed) are auxiliary means to control and reorganize biologically endowed psychological processes (Dalsgaard, 2020).

Through mediation, language learners can complete or work on a particular learning task. A series of pedagogical processes facilitates the process of learning by engaging learners with knowledgeable peers or teachers, as well as instructional tools (Huong & Hung (2021); Dalsgaard (2020); Lantolf, Poehner & Thorne (2020). These different processes involving specific tasks require learners to build knowledge of the field (e.g., a story, technology, topicality, or language resources), collaborate to construct knowledge (e.g., teacher-student engagement with text creation), and independently construct knowledge (e.g., individual text production or collaborative text production), (Alkhudiry, 2022).



DST represents the combination of technology use and storytelling. The use of a particular digital tool serves as a mediator of the process of telling a story. The collaboration work involved in DST promotes students' engagement with social and cultural environment. Through DST, under the guidance and support of teachers, students are prompted to recognize language use within a specific context and empowered to be more independent to learn and explore how socio-historically situated texts in the form of stories can be organized and represent different socio-cultural meanings. The processes of creating and sharing stories are purposeful, socially embedded tasks that can be highly engaging for young learners (Glaveanu et al., 2019). Teachers play the important roles of supporting and guiding their students to adopt effective listening skills. Teachers can make use of DST as an effective form of scaffolding to engage students to listen, learn, and understand what they hear and effectively link the audio materials to reading materials.

Apart from SCT, the schema theory was adopted given its relevance to the focus of the current study. In terms of receptive listening skills, learning English requires developing cognitive listening skills, higher-order thinking skills, making inferences, and drawing conclusions, which are typically creative and critical listening skills. With respect to the schema theory, creating new schemata (stored knowledge structure) is noted to be far more pivotal than imparting new knowledge of the language system. Studies have also demonstrated that the accumulation of schemata contributes to efficient comprehension and retention of new listening materials that become more challenging over time as the lessons progress (Sulistyowati, 2019).



Accordingly, there are two major types of schemata involved in listening, namely language schema and knowledge schema. Language schema includes phonological, lexical, syntactic, and grammatical knowledge required for students to grasp the basis for listening comprehension. It is not possible to comprehend listening materials without these four basic aspects of language knowledge (Roddy & Bridges, (2020). Secondly, knowledge schema is related to the typical daily conversations that take place in various contexts or scenarios. The linkage between interlocutors and means of communication are comparatively fixed. Cognitive psychologists refer the absorption and storage of common knowledge in memory as schemata. Both language schema and knowledge schema which are needed to master the four main critical listening skills namely “Auditory discrimination”, “Inference”, “Analysis”, and “Evaluation & Judgment” and other related sub-skills are fundamental prompts to CLS in relation to the use of DST, which were expected to address the current study’s research questions. The ability to make use of CLS helps students to have better understanding of learning, especially listening. With respect to the study’s theoretical framework, a specific CLS guidebook (see appendix A) for students to identify CLS was developed and modified for the approval and use of the panel of teachers in this study.

1.8 Significance of Study

The current study offered valuable insights on the effectiveness of using DST in enhancing students’ CLS, which can benefit relevant stakeholders. Through this study, English language officers at the state education departments and district education



office in Saudi Arabia can gain better understanding on the key principles of DST and appropriate strategies to integrate DST in the classroom settings, particularly during English listening lessons. With that, the appropriate media tools and strategies can be developed to benefit students in the development and improvement of their language skills, especially CLS.

Besides that, English teachers can integrate the use of DST in the classroom more effectively. This study highlighted the significance of DST and how English language lessons can be transformed beyond the conventional learning settings to engage students to discuss, analyze, and explore learning tasks with their peers. This study also presented valuable insights for trainee teachers during their teaching practicum on how to create engaging learning environment through the use of DST in the classroom.

This study explored how to effectively improve students' CLS through DST from the viewpoints of students themselves. Focusing on the significant benefits of DST for students, this study was expected to prompt teachers to effectively guide and motivate students to enhance CLS and actively engage with their peers. Furthermore, DST provides opportunities of creating productive peer relationships and bridging the gap between students with high language proficiency and students with low language proficiency considering that the tasks would require collaboration and teamwork. As a result, Students could boost their confidence, share outputs and think critically while attending critical listening tasks.

1.9 Operational Definitions of Key Terms

The following subsections present the operational definitions of the key terms used in this study.

1.9.1 Digital Storytelling (DST)

Park, Forhan, and Jones (2021) defined DST as a story in multi-media form, incorporating images, and sound presented as a video. A story is first written on paper. Through DST, as a new form of storytelling, a computer application is used to translate the draft into a video format that incorporates texts, images, sounds, and even animation. Basically, DST is a modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. The incorporation of attractive images, engaging music, stimulating narrative, and voice into a video format provides rich immersion of dimensions, colors, characters, scenarios, and experiences, contributing to the effectiveness and strengths of DST. It is easier to make use of different media tools to tell a digital story, and serves as an effective means for students to share cultural information (Rizvic et al., (2019). Furthermore, DST can be used to cover diverse and even challenging topics of society, and there are no limits to the types of software used such as windows Movie Maker, Open Shot, and Clipchamp (computer applications), and Inshot, YouCut and filmigo (mobile applications). These applications are free and easy to use which facilitated the creation of digital stories by Saudi ninth graders.



1.9.2 Critical Listening Skills (CLS)

Mahdavi & Miri (2019) described critical listening as a comprehensive model that consists of different stages of listening comprehension in language learning. These different stages involve effective listening for comprehension, inference, deduction, and understanding the entire speech structure. CLS denotes the act of listening carefully and intentionally in order to understand, interpret, and respond or discuss accordingly based on one's personal experiences through objective standards.

1.9.3 English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

EFL is the standard term used to describe the use or study of English language by non-native speakers in an English-speaking environment (English for speakers of other languages.) The environment may refer to a country in which English language is the mother tongue (e.g., Australia and the U.S.) or a country in which English language has an established role (e.g., India and Nigeria). Mair (2016) linked EFL to the “outer circle” described in “Standards, Codification, and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle”. EFL also refers to specialized approaches of teaching English language for learners who do not speak English language as their mother tongue.



1.10 Chapter Summary

Overall, this chapter discussed the global status of English language and the importance of listening skills, especially CLS. The use and benefits of DST in language learning, especially listening, were also discussed in this chapter. In particular, this chapter presented the background of study, problem statement, and the study's objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. In addition, this chapter discussed the proposed theoretical framework and significance of study. The operational definitions of key terms used in this study were presented at the end of this chapter.