

## **BENEFITS OF USING SHORT STORIES**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines if digital stories affect word acquisition of English language learners at the English preparatory school level. To realize this aim, preparatory school students at the Yeni Yüzyıl University with A2 language proficiency were included in an experimental study. This study came about as a result of our curiosity of the impact of digital reading practices on the vocabulary learning of students, because word knowledge impacts overall language development considerably. A pre and post-test design was used to inquire how digital stories affect the vocabulary acquisition of English Language learners. Digital stories are read from the screen with the practice of various comprehension and discussion activities. Students could also reach these stories outside of the classroom if they choose to read and practice more. This research aims to gather information about the use of digital stories in language classes and its impact on vocabulary learning. We would like to compare the results of the traditional reading group with the experimental group who will receive digital story reading application in addition to the traditional story reading from their course book. This knowledge will contribute to the literature of vocabulary learning in English language teaching. Also, the–results can initiate various technology based inquiries as it relates to the L2 vocabulary development and reading performance. Depending on the results of this study we will be able to inquire further studies including different age groups and different language learning contexts with creative Information and Communication Technology (ICT) reading applications.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary Learning, Digital short story, Second Language Learning

## Introduction

Currents in science and technology also trigger developments in the field of education. These changes can be observed in the field of language teaching too. Education needs to be adapted according to changing technology and the emerging needs in teaching. Technology makes it possible to adapt audio and visual materials for the classroom environment via diverse methods. This study was conducted to investigate the effects of digital short story reading as an alternative teaching medium on students' vocabulary attainment. To better observe this effect, the groups formed were subjected to a period of experimental application. While classical methods were applied to one group, the digital short story practice were applied to the other and the performance difference between groups was measured with the tests performed at the beginning and end of the study.

Technological applications have a big influence on shaping and sharing knowledge of students in education. Thus, teachers can increase the diversity of methods and techniques used in the classroom. Teachers can use effective digital stories to increase classroom management and attract students' attention. Also, digital short stories combine story literacy with visual and media literacy to meet the multi-literacies of students living in the Information Age. Teachers should dominate the process of how these literacies influence students' language development.

## Statement of the problem

English is one of the most feared classes for many students due to psychological perception of English as a difficult course. English learners do not perceive English as a tool which can make life easier (Sekmez, 2017) or even those who realize the important role of English are overshadowed with English performance anxiety. When students use English in their daily life, they always hesitate due to atychiphobia and inadequate grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation knowledge with fear of making a mistake. If learners are made aware of the importance and ease of language learning in the technological age, they can change their perception to their advantage.

Another challenge is that students learn language by memorizing grammar rules, as a mathematical formula, rather than using it creatively. Using storytelling is creative method, but classical methods adhere to textbooks, and standardized tests are commonly used to evaluate students in schools. Hence, teachers have difficulty in evaluating their students' learning process in alternative creative mediums due to mandated procedures. Inadequate resources and mandated curricula force teachers to teach grammar rules and use specific evaluation practices. Literature can be an alternative source for creative teaching and learning practices. There are contradictory opinions about the use of literature for teaching English. According to Lazar (1994), the use of literature is unnecessary in language teaching and a grammar based teaching should be maintained. Teachers do not always prefer to include literature in their lesson, because it is time consuming and risky in comparison to previously tried practices in the classroom. Teachers need to explain the difference between a digital story, slideshow and a multimedia report to learners in order to increase student awareness in alternative language learning resources. Teachers ought to spend more time, and effort to teach a topic from digital platforms and increase student familiarity with digital language learning opportunities.

#### Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate if students can improve their vocabulary learning through digital short stories. Literature can be used with technology for language teaching purposes in order to determine the vocabulary improvement of language learners. Technology integration provides an effective learning process (Dexter, Anderson & Becker, 2014:221-239) especially if short stories are combined with language pedagogy. Studies indicate that digital short stories contribute to language learning, and motivate students in language learning. Digital short story practices benefit students' learning in and out of the classroom and in this study digital short story practices will be studied in terms of its impact on the vocabulary attainment of language learners.

Provided that authentic literature is used appropriately, learners extract not only the language knowledge but also the cultural knowledge from language. Short stories, which are

appropriately selected according to learners' levels, can offer a range of opportunities to develop foreign language proficiency in enjoyable contexts (Scoter, Ellis & Railsback, 2001:1-55). According to Cunningsworth (1984), adults and teenagers are able to relate positively to what they have learned from stories in their real life. Authentic materials such as short stories attract students' interest and thus develop learners' reading ability. Hişmanoğlu (2005) supports this idea that the use of short stories provides a very entertaining atmosphere in the classroom. Therefore, the benefits of using it in language teaching can be clearly observed.

#### Significance of the study

People told their stories thousands of years ago when they lived in caves because of our need to tell and share; Nowadays there are different sources for expression including digital sources (Banaszewski, 2005). Young learners have several digital options such as phones, iPads or computers. Instructors can get students' attention by using online materials more frequently in classes (Bibby, 2011). Stories can be used to improve language comprehension skills because of being a time tested medium for human experience and learning. Learners can easily digitally listen to short stories while they are reading. Digital stories can improve listening skills, and provides opportunities for teachers to develop creative writing skills.

#### Literature Review

Nowadays, a wide range of media can be accessed to create new stories in language classes. Digital stories are among the commonly utilized virtual sources. Digital stories which have properties of successful stories, novelists, screenwriters, playwrights, and poets, develop individual's perspective of the world through a particular language experience. Also, digital stories provide students with narrative practice by allowing them to construct characters and settings on their mind.

Digital storytelling adjusts students in a wide variety of skills: oral storytelling, writing composition, visual literacy, media literacy, as well as an understanding of film conventions. Stories involve interesting and entertaining content which can be used to facilitate learning outcomes (Rossiter, 2002). Students can synthesize the information from short stories to develop their language skills. With this in mind, short stories can contribute to learning in terms of facilitating speech, sharing culture and raising awareness (Georgiou and Verdugo, 2011). Stories also appeal to students who have different kinds of intelligence, such as visual, auditory and kinaesthetic intelligence. Students can experience effective learning environments through individual and participatory interaction with stories and activities (Aiex, 1988). Collie and Slater (1987) argued that the use of short stories can also contribute to students' autonomous work since it provides creative platforms for them to use language. Where learning curiosity begins, learning becomes more enjoyable, attractive and meaningful for students. Thus, this study attempts to use the creative power of digital short stories to teach vocabulary in language classes. The study hypothesis is that digital stories can increase vocabulary learning within language learning.

#### The Use of Short Stories to Teach Vocabulary in English Language Classes

Literature is a valuable data source for vocabulary learning and language development. Yet, it is particularly important to choose the right kind of short stories for the intended pedagogical results. Stories should be in line with students' proficiency level or slightly above their language abilities for them to benefit most from the chosen story. Simple elements can be taught at beginner and intermediate levels, such as character, setting and plot. More complex elements, such as conflict, climax, resolution, etc., can be introduced at more advanced levels (Erkaya, Rocha 2005). According to Gajdusek (1988), pre-reading activities, factual in-class work, analysis and extending activities are very effective ways to introduce a literature text in the classroom. In the pre-reading activities, there is the opportunity to learn about the background of the story and target vocabulary (p. 233).

Furthermore, content should be appropriate to the level of the students. Hill (1994:15) indicated that the needs and abilities of students, the linguistic and stylistic level of the text, and an amount of background information are required for true appreciation of the material. Learners will abstain from language learning when they are bored. For this reason, the right materials should be selected that do not bother students and allow correct evaluation of their understanding. According to Heathon (1988), grammar, spelling, and vocabulary are critical elements of language learning, and it is possible to combine these elements through the use of literature. We can use short stories for young learners and adults similarly. Digital short stories can be utilized for all language levels.

## METHODOLOGY

### Settings and Participants

This study was conducted in Yeni Yüzyıl University in İstanbul with preparatory school students. It took place in the first semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. The participants in the study have different backgrounds and they would study in different departments.

The students' ages varied from 18 to 23 years and they attended classes from 8.30 am to 15.30 pm , each class lasting about 45 minutes. They have 30 hours of English lessons which consist of the main course, listening-speaking, reading-writing and team English lessons shared by four English instructors per week. The students have to take four achievement tests and many quizzes in their skill and main course lessons. The purpose of the Preparatory School English education is to rise students English level and provide a solid foundation for the technical English so that they can participate in their future departments of .

### Data Collection Procedure

The study explores the benefits of using digital short story reading practices for Preparatory School students in their vocabulary attainment. This study lasted for 6 weeks students were given information about the study at the beginning of the class so that they know what is

expected of them as participants. In addition, the researcher kept an observation form. These comments and the responses in the interviews were analysed. In addition, a pre-test was conducted to discover the vocabulary level of students and then a post-test was used to learn how their English level improved.

### Data Analysis Procedure

Pre-test and post-test were used to collect data about students' vocabulary in this study. These tests helped to show progress in the development of the participants in terms of their vocabulary knowledge. First of all, participants were given a pre-test to assess their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Later, participants in the experimental group had the opportunity to read and respond to digital short stories in addition to their regular reading materials in their coursebooks. After each story, the participants noted the unknown words and then tried to guess the meanings from the context of the story. At the end of each story, students were given a test to evaluate their understanding and vocabulary knowledge. Finally, at the end of the six week period, participants were given a post-test to examine their progress and to see how much they have changed in comparison to their pre-test. The participants in the control group had their regular classes with traditional methods. They also learned new words from the text by looking at the dictionary. At the end of the process, the same post-test was also given to them to determine if there are any improvements. The researcher took notes throughout the process and wrote her observations.

### Findings

#### Choice of the Method

There is no best way to classify research methods in the field of education. Therefore, the choice of method is determined by the nature of the subject under investigation. In other words, it depends on the subject of the research, the purpose of the sample examined, and the data collected. Research methods are various procedures that include the theoretical procedures

used in research, experimental studies, numerical schemes, statistical approaches. The nature and purpose of our study is to validate or reject the previously-stated hypothesis; hence, a semi-experimental study was chosen as it is a powerful method for evaluating cause-effect relationships.

### Description of Population and Sample

The students included in the experimental and control groups were at the beginner level of learning a foreign language according to CEFR level. Their vocabulary level still needed to be developed to better express their thoughts and ideas and to bring them to a higher level proficiency so that they can follow their departmental studies when they complete their Preparatory School Education.

The participants in this study were divided into two groups as the control group and the experimental group. Each group consisted of a mixed group of girls and boys, comprising twenty-one (21) students. While the experimental group watched digital short stories, this method was not applied to the control group. All participants in both groups have an English language background of receiving education in high-school and secondary school.

### Scoring

The test included five sections and all sections were scored equally (each section is 20 points). The first section consisted of five questions, and each question had four words with two of these words matched with meanings given below. In the second section, the same method was adapted according to the opposite meanings given below. The students had to compose sentences with the words given in the third section, and multiple-choice questions followed these questions in the fourth section. Students matched the words on the right side of the table with their synonyms on the left side in the final part. All sections have 20 equal points on the exam, and each question is worth 2 points. Whether the students learned all the words equally or not could be measured according to test results. All words in these tests were selected from

the common syllabus utilized with the control and experimental groups. The aim was to measure the contribution of digital short stories to students' word development based on the same word group. The evaluation was completed with the results of the post-test.

### Pre-test Phase

The researcher divided the students from different classrooms into experimental and control groups. The researcher carried out the class with the experimental group. The control group had a different teacher in the English Preparatory School, and essential information about the students consisting of their vocabulary knowledge and language skills was shared with the researcher. The pre- and post-tests were designed based on this data which indicated the specific word knowledge of the students. The pre-test consisted of five categories, each category had four words in a diagram and two different meanings or definitions below. Students had to match the two that fit with the definitions below. In the third exercise, students had to write ten sentences with the words given. The pre-test assisted the researcher to obtain information about students' vocabulary knowledge in both groups. While implementing the exam, students were not allowed to use their mobile phones and dictionaries to ensure the validity of the test. Also, the classroom environment was well organized and observed by the teacher to prevent any cheating. Both groups had approximately the same level of vocabulary knowledge in the first stage according to the results of this pre-test.

### Treatment Phase

In the first session, the participants in both groups completed the pre-test during one lesson hour. After the pre-test results were obtained from both groups, the extensive reading program was implemented for the experimental group, in 8 sessions that lasted for about 6 weeks. Students watched two short stories each week. In order to make sure that they

understood the short story, some comprehension activities (activities were adopted from the British Council) were distributed with each short story. The activities included three parts: matching words, putting the story in order, and true-false activities. After students watched the first short story, they completed the activities about the short story. The researcher collected these documents and analysed them after the class hour. The same procedures were carried out for the other short stories. The selection of the short stories was based on the history, literature and culture driven texts.

#### Experimental Group Post-test Vs. Experimental Group Pre-test

Table 1 and Figure 1 show that the experimental group scores improved and increased significantly between pre- and post-test. Moreover, some students' scores were under the average in the pre-test; however, we noticed that there was an improvement in their scores between the two tests.

#### Experimental Group pre-test and post-test difference

Pre-test:

16 ~~≥ 50~~ → 80,00% ≥ 50

4 ≤ 50 → 20,00% ≤ 50

Post-test:

20 ~~≥ 50~~ → 100,00% ≥ 50

0 ≤ 50 → 0% ≤ 50

Table 1

The Experimental Group's Pre-test and Post-test Difference

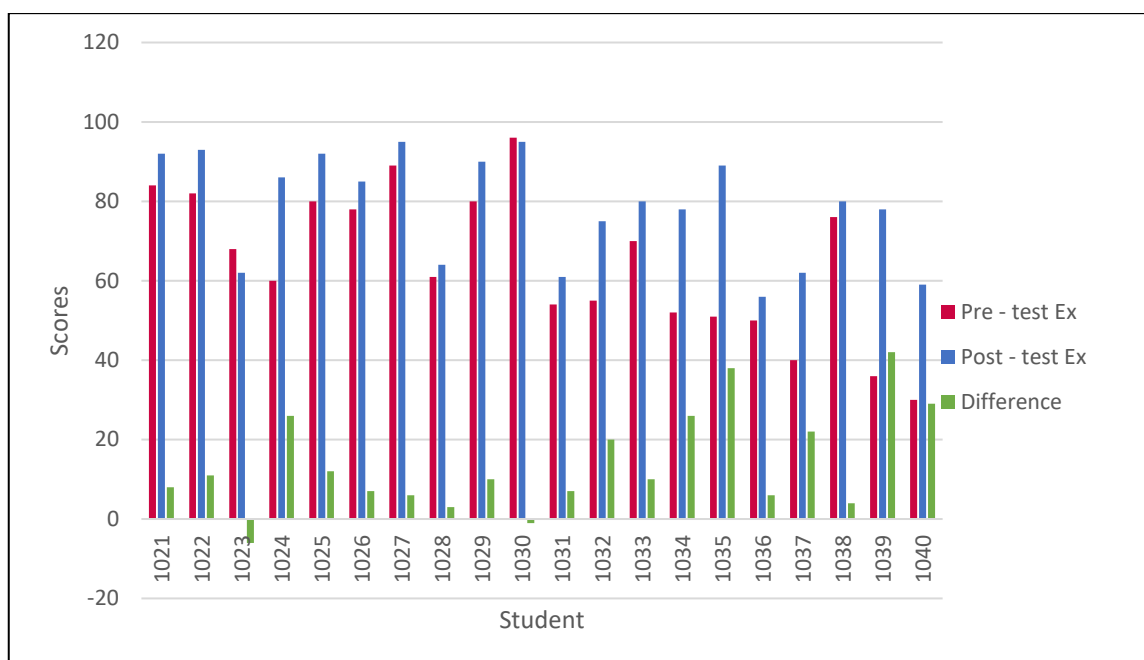
Student	Pre - test Ex	Post - test Ex	Difference
1021	84	92	8
1022	82	93	11
1023	68	62	-6
1024	60	86	26
1025	80	92	12
1026	78	85	7
1027	89	95	6
1028	61	64	3

1029	80	90	10
1030	96	95	-1
1031	54	61	7
1032	55	75	20
1033	70	80	10
1034	52	78	26
1035	51	89	38
1036	50	56	6
1037	40	62	22
1038	76	80	4
1039	36	78	42
1040	30	59	29

	$X_{pr} = 64.60$	$X_{po} = 78.60$	$d_ = 14$
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Figure 1

Experimental Group pre-test and post-test difference



The calculated mean of the post-test  $X_{po} = 78.60$  is significantly higher than the pre-test mean  $X_{pr} = 64.60$ , with a difference of  $d_ = 14$ . Based on these results, watching short stories during the treatment period affected most of the students, and there was a significant improvement in their vocabulary repertoire. In other words, students' acquisition of new

vocabulary items (which is our dependent variable) was affected during the treatment period by watching short stories (which is our independent variable).

In order to make sure that this significant improvement in the experimental group post-test scores is due to the implementation of our independent variable, namely digital short stories (which is our alternative hypothesis) and that they did not occur due to chance (the null hypothesis), we used a statistical test called “the paired-samples t-test”.

#### Experimental Group Vs. Control Group Post-test

Table 1 and Figure 1 clearly show that the experimental group received significantly higher scores than the control group. Even though the control group outscored the experimental group during the pre-test, the experimental group had post-test scores that are much higher than the control group with a mean XE = 78.60.

While the control group’s post-test frequency polygon starts at 31-40 and ends at 91-100 with a peak at 71-80, the experimental group’s frequency polygon starts at 51-60 and ends at 91-100 with a peak at 71-80 and 91-100 which is much higher than the control group peak. In order to calculate the difference between the mean scores for the experimental and control groups’ post-tests, we applied the independent-samples t-test.

#### Insignificant Improvement in the Control Group

As mentioned earlier, the control group scores in the pre-test and the post-test indicate that learning vocabulary using the traditional method was not effective. Students could not develop themselves much to categorize, match, define and contextualize the determined words. This is understood when we compare the means of both pre- and post-test of the control group. The pre-test mean was  $\bar{pre} = 66.60$ , and the post-test mean was  $\bar{pos} = 73.90$  with a difference of 7.30. In other words, they did not show significant progress towards mastery of new vocabulary. To sum up, using traditional methods to teach new words to students is not an effective method.

### Significant Improvement in the Experimental Group

The results of this study show that using short stories as a real teaching material plays an important role in improving students' word levels. Curiosity about the importance of comprehensive reading in language teaching and learning is increased because this technique introduced them to new vocabularies in different contexts. The results obtained from the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group can be shown as evidence. The pre-test average of the experimental group participants is  $\bar{pre} = 64.60$ ; and after the treatment period, the mean post-test increased significantly to  $\bar{pos} = 78.60$  with a difference of 14.

Digital short stories have a functional role in acquiring new vocabulary according to the results of this study. Digital stores improved students' language skills, motivated them, and taught them another culture. Also, students could analyse the materials critically through these stories teaching them higher-order thinking.

## Observation

The researcher kept notes, including comments about the students' behaviours and participation. Students personal and language improvement was observed during the process. These observations indicate that education combined with technology can improve students' vocabulary skills, and they can communicate easier to express themselves. Secondly, digital short stories improved students' critical thinking and self-confidence. Students could interpret better when they simultaneously read and watched something. This exposition skill provides students with acquired knowledge rather than memorized knowledge.

Provided that students interiorize the stories, the words they learn can be persistent. Based on observations, they enjoyed the learning process while watching the digital short stories. Learning with pleasure also increases permanence in learning. Vocabulary knowledge can be acquired more easily when there is no stress and exam anxiety. Another advantage of short stories is that students could predict the meaning of new words in a dialogue with the aid of the visuals. In the comprehension exercises after the story, the words supported by the visuals ensured that learning that is more explicit.

## Teacher Views and Students Views

In this section, the opinions of the experienced English Preparatory School teachers about the pre-test and post-test are presented. Teachers views are significant for the study because they are the first hand observers of their learners.

The first teacher states that; vocabularies were chosen from course books that adhere to the common curriculum, and these words provide reliability and validity. Students encounter some parts of the curriculum for the first time, but these parts are designed very clearly and comprehensibly to prevent confusion. Additionally, using all question types enables measurement of all skills of students. The students have not learned meaning of the words

directly from a dictionary, instead they predicted the meaning of the word in a sentence. This skill assisted them while composing a sentence in the exam. However, word limitation (researcher guessed that the teacher meant to say limited amount of vocabulary) could be more effective for evaluating the sentence writing section, and students may forget the words they learned between the pre and post-tests.

The second teacher indicated that the; the test had validity in terms of the words chosen from the textbooks of both groups of students. The use of different question types was crucial to ensure reliability and increase the likelihood of getting the same result in different groups. There were sufficient and explicit question types to measure vocabulary and sentence knowledge.

The third teacher; the multiple-choice questions proved knowing the meaning of the word is not enough by itself since students ought to also know how to use this word in a sentence. In section three, using the words in a sentence is one of the best methods to understand whether students can write a sentence appropriately. Moreover, the time between two tests (pre-post) may not affect students' results negatively, on the contrary, it confirmed that permanent learning happened in this process. In addition, their curiosity about words that they are not familiar with has increased.

Control group students' opinions about the exam; students stated that the writing sentence part was the most difficult since they are not sure about the meaning of words. Multiple choice questions, on the other hand, were easier for them, because they are familiar with this type of question. However, except for a couple of students who thought the pre-test was difficult throughout the classroom, all stated that the test was explicit and feasible to their level.

Experimental group students; the rate of vocabulary knowledge in the first exam was lower compared to the last exam although the test was easy. Students stated that they had difficulty in using words in a meaningful way in the sentences. Additionally, they declared that they were able to understand easily in the first and second parts of the tests.

## General Discussion

This study was carried out to investigate the effectiveness of short stories for developing and expanding the vocabulary of students. It revealed that students who watched and read short stories showed significant improvement in their vocabulary knowledge compared to students who followed only teacher instructions from the book in their regular. Experimental group students gained critical improvements in their vocabulary knowledge based on their pre-test and post-test results. These tests highlight the importance of fieldwork and the practice based research activities. Based on the results of the tests and the researcher's observations, the collected data revealed that the word memorization technique was much less successful in developing students' vocabulary skills. On the other hand, according to the results between the pre-test and post-test, control group students could not progress considerably in their vocabulary attainment.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to inquire about the effectiveness of watching and reading digital short stories on preparatory-school students' vocabulary repertoire. Analyses and results of this research revealed that watching digital short stories improved their vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge is an essential part of language learning. Teachers should collaborate with their students while teaching vocabulary. Predetermined curriculum and fixed course book plan makes this collaboration difficult at times. Language teaching methods that are integrated with technology are essential for teaching students new words. Hence, students ought to be informed about technological opportunities in language education. Digital tools including short stories and vocabulary activities is a good example of technology assistance in vocabulary attainment. This research indicated that digital short stories provided many benefits in language teaching. Digital short stories provide advantages to advance other language skills of students as well such as speaking, listening, writing and critical thinking. Thanks to the

critical thinking strategies utilized with digital stories learners acquired they were able to put themselves in the characters' place in the story. Psychologists David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, at the New School for Social Research in New York, stated that reading literary works improved the ability to perceive and understand other people's feelings and improve social relationships (Temizkan,2018). The students noticed that they had enhanced empathy and started to be more thoughtful. Oatley's (1999:8) comment on this subject is that fictional stories improves people's empathy and understanding of others. When the students watch new fiction, they can imagine themselves in the characters' positions, and it widens their views and world of thought, which provides them different perspectives or angles. They learn to analyse events from different perspectives when they watch the life of historical characters that they did not know before. Cadorath and Harris (1998:188); supported this view indicating that the text itself has no meaning, but only gives direction for the reader to make sense from their own reading experience. The short stories supported students' creativity as they have to read, connect the dots, think critically, analyse, and come to conclusions.

The short stories allow them to explore other cultures and understand the similarities and differences between cultures. They offer different portraits of lifestyles, personality, moral and human values from different cultures, and this viewpoint positively affected students' personalities. Therefore, short story selection should be made according to students' needs and backgrounds. Each teaching strategy is valuable and unique. Each student has a different character, knowledge, and language background, and each teaching strategy applies to some of them. Teachers should find the most suitable teaching methods and activities to select an appropriate story. Literature is a great medium for teaching vocabulary in English. Ghosn (2002:172) states that literature is a linguistic way to contribute to people's feelings. Literature reflects real-life events, and it enables students to discover other cultures. Literature is one of the most beneficial authentic materials that widens students' worlds. Authentic literature materials provide a motivating, entertaining, and exciting lesson for students. According to Custodio and Sutton (1998:20), literature can offer different perspectives, allowing students to

question, interpret, connect and explore. The students can open new doors to different worlds through stories.

Moreover, short stories generate opportunities for personal expression and strengthen students' knowledge of lexical and grammatical structures. Although short stories seem easy, they compound many language skills altogether. Experimental group students developed their vocabulary knowledge with the help of the short stories, which were not complicated and difficult to understand. When the researcher received students' thoughts about learning new vocabulary the majority answered that they obtained positive gains from digital stories. The students stated that digital short stories they watched and read assisted in developing their vocabulary knowledge and other language skills. According to the results of the tests, short stories are significant resources to create opportunities and improve vocabulary and grammar knowledge of students. Taking the results of this study into consideration highlights that, using the short story technique combining it with digital presentation proved to be a successful language learning method.

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