

The Impact of Digital Storytelling on the Promotion of National Identity among Preschool Children

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Abstract

This paper reports on a case study that explores the impact of digital storytelling (DST) on the promotion of national identity. This study used a qualitative approach to investigate the observed phenomenon. The context of this case study involves the utilization of DST within a modern, technologically equipped kindergarten that has adopted the new Saudi curriculum. Six preschoolers were included in this case study, and a range of qualitative data were collected through observations (notes, photographs, video recordings), nonparticipant and interaction observations, and children's artifacts. Thematic analysis revealed that DST is a valuable tool for promoting national identity among preschool children. By incorporating DST into early childhood education, educators can effectively engage young learners in exploring their cultural heritage, thus fostering a sense of pride, belonging, and connection to their national identity.

Keywords: *Digital Storytelling, Early Childhood Education, Preschool Children, National Identity*

INTRODUCTION

Digital storytelling (DST) is a globally recognized idea that numerous countries have adopted for their educational applications (Moldovan et al., 2019). From preschool to high school, storytelling is a widely used educational experience that teachers present to their students to help them develop a variety of skills (Di Blas et al., 2009), such as language skills (Lucarevski, 2016), to clarify science (Hu et al., 2020) and to foster improvements in moral and social development (Thambu, 2017). DST supports student learning and enables teachers to use innovative and enhanced teaching methods (Rahiem, 2021). Moreover, DST is a versatile and adaptable tool that can be used to teach and learn a variety of school subjects at all levels of education. These stories can be created using simple programs such as Photoshop or Fireworks or more advanced technologies such as Adobe Flash to create characters and add animation (Rahman et al., 2020).

Particularly in the context of early childhood education, DST—a relatively new pedagogical approach—is still underutilized, despite its potential to enhance student learning and provide teachers with an innovative and effective teaching method (Rahiem, 2021). Emerging evidence suggests that this teaching approach is suitable for young learners and provides a dynamic and engaging way to deliver learning experiences (Blackwell et al., 2014). One notable example of this approach being utilized is Saudi Arabia, which has recognized the value of digital platforms in enriching educational resources for children both within and outside the formal education system, as highlighted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD, in (2020).

Similar to the approaches of several countries worldwide, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia has acknowledged the paramount importance of early education and has taken proactive measures to enhance this critical field. Through collaborations with local Saudi universities and international organizations such as the Arab Gulf Program for Development (AGFUND) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Ministry has developed a tailored national curriculum for early childhood education (MoE, 2018). Notably, the inclusion of DST in this curriculum is significant, reflecting Saudi Arabia's commitment to providing young learners with a modern and interactive educational experience in line with global best practices. However, recent literature indicates that prospective teachers are not fully utilizing the potential of digital technology to promote student learning (Al-Abdullatif, 2022).

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This strategic move not only reflects the commitment of the Saudi Arabian education system's commitment to innovation but also demonstrates that DST is recognized as a valuable tool for promoting young children's cognitive, behavioral (Contini et al., 2018; O'Byrne et al., 2018) and socioemotional (Rafraf Lotfi, 2022; Rahiem, 2021) development. Moreover, this initiative signifies a pivotal shift in the educational landscape, paving the way for a more inclusive and dynamic early childhood educational experience in Saudi Arabia while also offering a promising model for other regions that are seeking to integrate DST into their educational frameworks. Since Saudi Arabia has acknowledged the pivotal role of early childhood in shaping its future citizens, DST seamlessly aligns with efforts to cultivate a strong sense of cultural pride and national identity among young learners. This commitment is evident within the national curriculum, in where DST emerges

as a powerful method for instilling a deep connection to Saudi Arabia's rich cultural and civilizational heritage. Moreover, the emphasis on integrating DST into teacher preparation programs highlights the country's proactive approach to enhancing lesson plan development and fostering technology-rich learning experiences for future educators (Bugis, 2018).

Through a case study, this article explores the impact of DST on the promotion of national identity among 5-year-old children in the Al Qassim region of Saudi Arabia. This aspect is fundamental to the national standards outlined in the Saudi Early Learning Standards (SELS), which emphasize the development of a sense of belonging associated with people and specific places. This sense of belonging plays a crucial role in helping young Saudi children form a collective identity that is essential for their connection with their homeland, which represents the cornerstone of Saudi culture (MoE, 2022). Through the integration into early education, DST has emerged as one of the tools offered in the new Saudi National Curriculum. These curriculum updates, which were recently implemented in early childhood education across Saudi Arabia in 2023 and 2024, aim to provide high-quality education and enriching experiences for all Saudi children.

Promotion of National Identity through the Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling

Researchers, such as Smeda et al., (2014) believe that DST is an effective tool for supporting students and provides a unique opportunity to combine digital media with innovative teaching and learning practices. This approach is proving valuable for creating a dynamic and interactive educational environment. In line with Bruner's findings from 2003, storytelling, both traditional and digital, proves to be a creative and constructive mechanism that can help individuals form their identities, connect with others, and understand their place in the world. When children develop a healthy sense of identity, they are less likely to fear differences or belittle other children to feel better about themselves. Similarly, understanding group identity and personal identity is central to a child's sense of belonging (Anonymous, 1999). Furthermore, building a strong sense of national identity is critical for maintaining community loyalty and cohesion and for raising children who will grow up to be productive members of their communities. Through experiences and interactions with others, children learn the ideals and civic virtues that constitute citizenship (MoE, 2018). Integrating digital media with storytelling not only conveys information, but also encourages meaningful interactions and provides students with a comprehensive and enhanced learning experiences that go beyond those of traditional teaching strategies.

DST differs from traditional storytelling in one key respect. DST uses a wide range of digital multimedia techniques, such as images, written content, audio recordings, videos and music, to convey information about a particular topic using technology (O'Byrne et al., 2018). According to Porter, (2005), DST "draws on the ancient art of oral storytelling and uses a palette of technological tools to weave personal stories with images, graphics, music, and sound blended with the author's own voice" (Yang & Wu, 2012). These videos are distributed via short clips that usually last from two to six minutes. In these clips, a combination of text, video footage, voice recordings, music, and images is used to effectively convey complex ideas and emotions and to captivate, provoke, and engage audiences (Gubrium & Harper, 2016; Khoo et al., 2023).

Screen media is prevalent in the lives of young children today. Research has shown that preschool children are often familiar with digital devices before they come into contact with books (Rahiem, 2021). These new developments and technologies need to be aligned with current paradigms of educational psychology to ensure that learners are guided by best practices (O'Byrne et al., 2018). Through DST, learners can improve their

communication skills by organizing thoughts, asking questions, expressing opinions and creating narratives (Rahiem, 2021). For example, O'Byrne et al. (2018) highlighted its benefits for organizing ideas, developing communication skills, and fostering collaboration. The emerging DST model, which emphasizes social-emotional development and self-expression, is particularly effective in early childhood education. Case studies by Nassim (2018) and Al-Aqil, (2018) have demonstrated the benefits of active learning for language and speech skills. The study by Smeda et al. (2014) highlights the benefits of constructivist learning, while Syafryadin et al. (2019) and Alotaibi & Alotaibi (2021) highlight the impact on speaking skills and the development of mathematical concepts. In summary, DST is a versatile and effective educational tool.

In line with contemporary educational initiatives, Saudi Arabia is exploring ways to use digital platforms to enrich educational resources for children (OECD, 2020). The Ministry has launched the "Virtual Kindergarten," a free distance learning application that provides a whole range of educational services for children (Soud Alotaibi, 2021). Additionally, the Saudi National Curriculum and Saudi Learning Standards (SELS) for early education, published by the Ministry of Education in 2018, were launched in the 2022 academic year. One of the tools available for education in virtual kindergarten and digital platforms is DST, which has many features that can be used in education. The use of DST is perfectly in line with the Ministry's vision and demonstrates a forward-looking approach to enriching educational practices in Saudi Arabia.

Based on these facts, it is necessary to closely explore the new Saudi curriculum to determine the best practices and methods to achieve the goals of Saudi Vision 2030, especially in the realm of DST. Although DST in early education is not yet as widespread as traditional storytelling methods, the benefits and effectiveness of DST in improving early childhood education are BEING increasingly recognized. Studies by El-Azeem (2017) Masuram & Sripada (2020), Rahman et al. (2020), Sahin & Coban (2020) and Alotaibi and Alotaibi (2021) highlight the various educational opportunities that DST offers. Thus, the current study explores the impact of DST on the promotion of national identity with the aim of building a national personality that contributes to the development of the country and its progress, as well as the ability to communicate with different cultures and achieve the goals of Vision 2030.

This study will address the following crucial question: How can digital storytelling promoting national identity for 5-year-old children in Saudi Arabia?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This case study is conceptually based on Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which states that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in the context of society and can only occur through observation or instruction, without direct reinforcement (Grusec et al., 1992).

The first component of the study is an element that emerges from the theoretical review is DST because it can notably affect the way in which a child's attention is captured. Moreover, it can be a great model for behavior, responsibility, and the way in which people act and work together. By repeating DST many times, the child can adopt the behavior because it is observed more often. Then, when answering questions and engaging in activities related to the DST theme, the child can perform the behavior. Finally, the child can respond to motivation by receiving feedback from the teacher. This theory elucidates how children can acquire behaviors, values, and norms related to national identity by observing and imitating the characters and scenarios in DST.

The second component of the study is national identity. As a child grows up socially, he or she needs to understand his or her identity more deeply by developing a sense of community, history, culture, and distinctive traditions (MoE, 2018). This concept consists of themes. By identifying recurring patterns and themes in children's interactions with DST, this analysis will offer insights into the ways in which digital narratives can shape children's perceptions and expressions of national identity. Thus, the thematic analysis becomes a lens through which the observed social learning can be systematically categorized and understood by aligning the experiential data from the case studies with Bandura's theory. Through this theoretical, the case study aims to explore the multiple ways in which DST contributes to the development of national identity in young learners, reflecting Bandura's assertion about the importance of observational learning for acquiring of complex cognitive and social aspects.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, the researcher explores the impact of DST on the promotion national identity. This study used a qualitative case study approach to investigate phenomena that occur within a specific context and focused on a particular phenomenon (Mills & Gay, 2019). A qualitative case study is used to answer an explanatory question (how or why did something happen?) and to study a unique phenomenon, and it can be employed in a natural setting. Thus, this approach can be used to supplement any data about a child that have been gathered (Mills & Gay, 2019) and is useful in early childhood research because it might examine children holistically (Mukherji & Albon, 2015) By using qualitative methods, researchers can connect with the participants in their context, according to (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This case study took place in a model kindergarten that implements the new Saudi curriculum and is equipped with modern technical resources such as projectors and computers. The teachers at this institution are experienced in DST and served as case studies for this research. This case study aimed to answer the specific research question: “How can DST promote national identity among 5-year-old children?”

The Context

The context of this case study revolves around the utilization of DST within a modern, technologically equipped kindergarten that has adopted the new Saudi curriculum (MoE, 2022). The environment is enhanced with resources such as projectors and computers, which are pivotal for the integration of DST in the educational process. Experienced teachers use their expertise in DST to guide the sessions and provide an interactive learning experience aimed at enhancing children’s understanding of national identity.

In this setting, DST is not only a passive activity but also a participatory one in which teachers and children actively engage. The role of teacher extends beyond mere narration; they facilitate comprehension through group engagement, pose questions to deepen understanding, and offer valuable insights, so they are a critical component of the case study.

The researcher, who plays the role of observer, takes detailed notes on a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from verbal exchanges to nonverbal cues and social dynamics. This comprehensive observation aims to capture the essence of the interaction between the DSTs and the children’s learning experience.

All of this takes place in a controlled, ethical environment where the rights and privacy of the children are paramount, underlining the importance of informed consent and confidentiality. Ultimately, this case study aims to answer the question of how DST can be employed to promote national identity among young learners, specifically targeting 5-year-old children. Through the selection of relevant DST that align with the themes of national identity, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of educational practices that resonate with the cultural and national ethos of Saudi Arabia.

Participants

A selective recruitment strategy was used in this study, focusing on 5-year-old Saudi children whose guardians provided consent and showed interest in DST. This approach ensured that the data accurately represented the target demographic needed to assess the impact of DST on national identity. Initially, six preschoolers were included in the study to increase the sample size as needed for a comprehensive study (Mills & Gay, 2019). Teachers, parents, and school administrators served as key informants and provided important insights informed the selection of the most appropriate participants, thus increasing the relevance and substance of the study. Specifically, the participants were selected through purposive sampling (Mills & Gay, 2019). This strategy ensured that the sample was rich in information, even though it may not have accurately represented the broader community. The selection process was performed in two stages: First, the process involves choosing an appropriate educational institution and subsequently pinpointing a particular classroom inside that institution.

Data Collection

To ensure triangulation, three types of qualitative data were collected (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Observational notes were used to capture the children’s behaviors, responses, and engagement of children during the DST

sessions to understand the impact on national identity. The researcher noted specific behaviors and responses that signaled the children's engagement with and comprehension of the material, including their verbal and nonverbal communication. The focus was on how the children interacted with the story and with each other, and how they responded to story elements related to their cultural concepts. Observing their emotional reactions, such as excitement and interest, provided further insights into the method's effectiveness of the method. Two types of observational methods were employed:

Non-participant observation in the reading sessions: During the read-aloud activity with the teacher, the researcher adopted a nonintrusive approach, non-Participant Observation, to observe the children without engaging with them. By using this method, the researcher could see how the children naturally interacted with the storytelling content and with each other. The focus was on capturing spontaneous reactions, such as facial expressions, gestures, and emotional responses such as excitement or interest. By remaining in the background, the researcher ensured that the children's behavior was not influenced by their presence, providing an authentic insight into their engagement with the material.

Interaction observation during centers time (Reading Center and Art Center): In these settings, the researcher took a more active role by engaging with the children one-on-one, asking questions, and encouraging discussions. This method was used to elicit deeper insights into the children's thoughts and feelings about the stories. The researcher facilitated conversations and prompted the children to express their interpretations and emotional connections through drawings and other creative activities. This interactive approach allowed for a richer understanding of how the children related to the cultural concepts presented in the stories.

Data Collection Method

The researcher initiated the study by sending a formal letter to the Dean of the College of Education at Qassim University, who then sought support from the Department of Education in the Qassim region. With approval from the ethics committee and a circular distributed by the ministry's, kindergartens in the region allowed the study to be conducted. The researcher and the Kindergarten Training Department Director selected a suitable kindergarten for data collection. A meeting was held to select participants and inform teachers about the study's goals and procedures, after which they latter signed in acknowledgment. Guardians' approval for their children's participation was also obtained.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Joint Ethics Review Board for Education and Psychology Research (JEPeM). The five-week study took place during the preschool's reading aloud and learning center time. During the reading-aloud time, the children participated in DST sessions for thirty minutes in groups, and individually for 8 to 15 minutes during the learning center time. Each week included one group and two individual sessions.

The first five weeks focused on the National Identity theme, incorporating two DST pieces from the new kindergarten curriculum. The researcher observed the children's interactions with the DST content, encouraging them to answer open-ended questions and engage in related art activities. The teacher, who had experience with DST, played a crucial role in facilitating these enriching group sessions.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach, in which the data were organized into themes to increase their meaningfulness (Bryman, 2016). NVIVO was used for programming considering of the research questions. Using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the data were methodically categorized based on themes to answer the research question through an inductive approach to identify recurring patterns and themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher used the six-step method of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first step, the researcher read the data thoroughly several times to familiarize himself with it. Afterward, the researcher proceeded to generate the first codes. Saldaña (2016, p.102) describes the researcher's "descriptive coding" as summarizing the core ideas of a text in a short expression. In the third stage, the codes were organized into likely themes and then carefully checked to confirm that each theme was applicable to the coded excerpts. Subsequently, the themes were systematically organized and refined to align with the research purpose and investigations. Finally, the data analysis report described in the findings section was produced (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Ensuring Trustworthiness

The concept of “trustworthiness” is used as an alternative to the positivist theoretical viewpoints of validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish the credibility of the study, the researcher utilized several of the methods described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). After each session, the researcher provided the teacher with a summary of the observation and interviews with the child so that the latter could review the summary and verify the accuracy of the notes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this process as member checking. Additionally, detailed explanations of the data collection and analysis procedures were provided to show how the data were ultimately used to develop the conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017) (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules, 2017).

FINDINGS

Three main themes were identified from the analysis of the data: the cognitive aspect, the belief aspect, and the emotional aspect. The first theme has three subthemes, while the second and third themes have two subthemes as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Themes and Subthemes of the Finding

| Research Question | Theme | Subtheme | Main Idea |
|--|------------------|----------------------|---|
| How can digital storytelling impact promoting national identity for 5-year-old children in Saudi Arabia? | Cognitive Aspect | Comprehension | Ability to understand the context of the DSTs by creating a meaningful new title ability to understand some important information about nation. |
| | | Recall Information | Ability to remembering specific details and responding correctly to questions. |
| | | Language | shows an awareness of their own language and uses culturally relevant terminology effectively. |
| | Beliefs Aspect | Identity Formation | a sense of belonging to a larger national community, an awareness of national symbols, and the use of possessive words to indicate belonging |
| | | Cultural Values | shared beliefs and attitudes that are conveyed and emphasized in the narrative like national duty and collaboration |
| | Emotional Aspect | Emotional Engagement | showing of interest in and connection with digital storytelling when viewing or discussing DSTs |
| | | Emotional Expression | Ability to express the positive emotions associated with their national identity as a result of DST through verbal and non-verbal means. |

Cognitive Aspect

Table 1 illustrates the ‘cognitive aspect’ theme, which is composed of three different sub-themes: ‘digital storytelling comprehension,’ ‘Recall Information,’ and ‘Language skills.’ ‘digital storytelling comprehension’ refers to a child’s ability to understand the content of the DST by creating a meaningful new title for the DST in their own words. On the other hand, ‘Recall information’ refers to a child’s ability to immediately recall and retain information from memory after reading the DST by retelling the narrative by remembering specific details in the DST and responding correctly to questions about the digital narrative. ‘language skills’ are demonstrated when a child shows an awareness of his or her own language and uses culturally relevant terminology effectively.

Digital storytelling comprehension refers to participating children’s ability to understand the context of the DSTs by creating a meaningful new title and their ability to understand some important information about the nation. They showcased this ability during non-participant observation in read-aloud activity and interaction observation in learning areas time with the researcher for two DSTs: Celebrating the National Day (CND) and Mashalh Shepherd (MS). For example, in CND, non-participant observations recorded that child suggested

titles like *“The Story of National Day (Anaher)”* and *“The Story of King Abdul Aziz (Saoud)”*. Similarly, during interaction observations in the reading center, they proposed titles such as *“The Motherland”* and *“My Hometown”*.

In the case of MS, Juman suggested of *“The Shepherd and the Cold”* and Abdulaziz said, *“The Mother and the Seamstress”*. Additionally, interaction observations captured, they proposed titles such as *“Shepherd”*, *“Mashalb”* and *“the cold”*; This quotes clearly showed the participants’ ability to understand the context of DSTs by providing new titles in their own words.

Recall information refers to Ability to remembering specific details and responding correctly to questions. It focuses on the ability produce learned material shortly after it has been acquired, as evidenced by the participants' ability to retell the DST and respond correctly to questions. The children showed strong recall of the DST times (DSTs) of CND and MS. For example, during reading CND non-participant observation recorded that in response to the teacher’s question, *“What did we learn from CND?”*, they said, *“I knew who lives in Saudi Arabia (Dama)”*. during interaction observations, children were successfully able to remember specific details by answering the following question: *“Can you retell DST? (researcher?)”*. For example, children responses as the following: *“All kids on National Saudi Day wear traditional clothes to celebrate in schools. Shayie and Shueae live in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. They celebrate with their friends and bring sweets (Dama);”*.

Similarly, in MS, non-participant observation recorded that, the children said that *“making jackets (Dama)”* and *“making socks (Abdulsalam)”*. The interaction observations captured that, they bailed to recalled specific details such as the following:

“Ghanem takes care of his sheep in the cold winter... Later, the sheep feel hot because of the wool. Ghanem and his brothers hold the sheep to cut the wool. The sheep were happy. Ghanem collects the sheep's wool.... He took some of the wool to his mother; she sewed a Mashalb for him, and he was happy (Abdulsalam).”

The quotes above clearly highlight the participants' ability to recall the DSTs in detail through their retellings. Furthermore, it is evident that the participants were able to accurately recall the DSTs while effectively responding to open-ended questions across each data collection instrument observed. For example, during the CND, non-participant observation reported that in response to a teacher’s question such as *“what day is the DST about?”*, Dama and Abdulaziz said, *“It’s about National Day”*, and the teacher asked, *“What do the boys wear on National Day?”* The children responded, *“Thowb (Dama)”* and *“Bisht (Abdulsalam)”*. Furthermore, the teacher asked, *“What do the girls wear on National Day?”* They said, *“Jalabiya (Juman)”* and *“Abaya and headscarf (Dama)”*. During reading center times, interaction observations recorded that when the children were asked the question *“Can you tell me some of the traditional foods in CND?”* Four participants answered *“Mareasea”*. The researcher then asked, *“Can you name some of the national symbols of CND?”* Dama, Juman, and Abdulaziz answered, *“Saudi flag.”*

During the MS, non-participant observation captured that the teacher asked, *“What covers the sheep’s body?”*. The children answered as follows: Dama answered, *“Wool.”* The teacher then asked, *“How do sheep feel in hot weather?”* Abdulsalam responded, *“The sheep feel uncomfortable”*. The teacher asked, *“Why do the sheep feel like that?”* Abdulsalam replied, *“Because of the heat.”* During the interaction observations, the researcher asked, *“Who is Ghanem?”* All six children answered, *“He is the shepherd.”* Then, the researcher asked, *“Why are Ghanem’s sheep tired?”* Juman, Abdulsalam, Saoud, and Dama answered, *“Because of their wool.”* Anaher answered, *“Because it’s hot,”* and Abdulaziz answered, *“Because summer is coming.”* This example further demonstrates the participants' ability to recall information and respond accurately to open-ended questions, reflecting their ability to recall information with the DSTs.

Language are related to language awareness because they demonstrate the ability to use complete sentences, connectors, descriptive language, complex sentence structures, and cultural terms according to the preschool development stage. The children demonstrated impressive language skills during the CND and MS DST times. They were able to use complete sentences, connectors, descriptive language, and complex sentence structures. For example, during non-participant observation for CND, the participants said the following :

“Hasan lives in Hail, which is a town in the mountains. I visited Hail once with my family” (Abdulaziz).

Language awareness was demonstrated through the expression of complete and complex sentences. Moreover, this awareness became evident during interaction observations. For example, when describing the traditional dish "masabib," the children said:

"This is Masabib, We eat it at home; my mother makes it and we put honey on it; my sister and I like it (Dama)."

Some also shared how National Day is celebrated *"When we celebrate National Day, there are gifts, a cake is served, we wear traditional clothes, and we all celebrate and have fun"*(Abdulsalam).

During non-participant observation for MS, the participants said, *"Ghanem's brother has fetched the sheep and washed their wool so that they are clean"* (Saoud). During interaction observations, they said that *"Ghanem's brothers catch the sheep because they want to help their brother. (Juman)"* These examples clearly reflect the children's language awareness within the limits of their linguistic abilities, as they construct complete sentences, use connectors, incorporate descriptive language, and form complex sentence structures, which is particularly notable for their age.

Cultural terms were used correctly, with Dama mentioning *"Thoub"* and Juman using the term *"Jalabiya"* Each time, the children associated traditional dress and dishes with National Day celebrations, demonstrating their understanding of cultural terminology. Non-participant observation recorded that, during the MS reading aloud session, Saoud said *"Mashalb"* while all six children, during interaction observations reported that used the terms *"Mshalb"* and *"Shepherd"*

Language awareness and cultural terms were also evident during the "My Nation Passport" activity in the art area time with the researcher. Interaction observations reported that each child recognized Arabic as the official language of Saudi Arabia, demonstrating their language awareness when they said, "My language is Arabic" (see Figure 2).



Fig. 2 "My Nation Passport" Activity

Based on these findings, we can conclude that the children's articulation and application of cultural knowledge during these activities reflect their language development and cultural understanding within the context of DSTs.

Beliefs Aspect

The theme "beliefs aspect" is divided into two subthemes: "identity formation" and "cultural Values". As shown in table 1 "identity formation" refers to a child's attachment to and recognition of his or her nation. This includes a sense of belonging to a larger national community, an awareness of national symbols, and the use of possessive words to indicate belonging. "Cultural values", on the other hand, refer to the shared beliefs and attitudes that are conveyed and emphasized in the narrative.

Identity formation refers to the children's sense of belonging to a larger national community, their awareness of national symbols, and the use of possessive words to express ownership and connection. The children demonstrated their understanding of national symbols through the DSTs. Data collections captured that they accurately identified King Abdulaziz as the founder of National Day, named the date September 23, and described the Saudi flag as green with the Shahada. One child even recited the national anthem, expressing his love for Saudi Arabia. During interaction observations, the children creatively discussed how they would include

national elements in their own stories, such as wearing traditional attire and celebrating with sweets in kindergarten.

Moreover, during the "Nation Passport" activity in the Art area, participants was able to correctly identify this, as recorded in the interaction observations (see Figure 3).

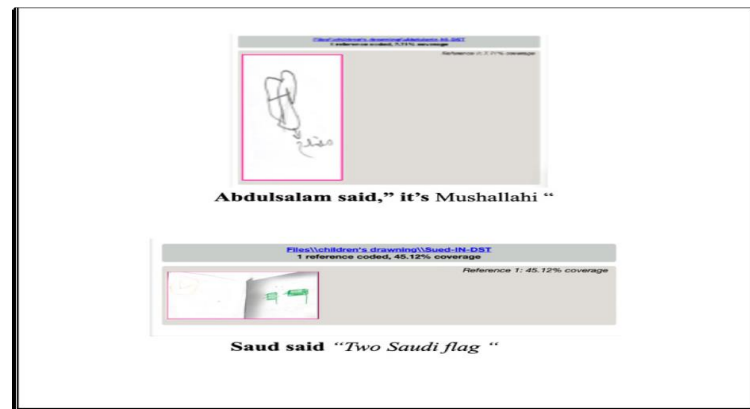


Fig. 3 "My Nation Passport" Activity

Non-participant observation during the MS sessions recorded that the children discussed the practical use of wool, including how to make a Mishlah. During interaction observations, they also talked about the shepherd's clothing and identified the Mishlah as a traditional men's garment, made from wool and resembling a Bisht.

Overall, the children exhibited a strong connection to their cultural dress and confidently discussed their language and cultural preferences, demonstrating a profound sense of identity and pride in their nation.

The use of possessive language can serve as evidence of a sense of belonging, which reflects identity formation in children, as demonstrated by the participants during the reading of DSTs. For example, at CND sessions, the children expressed their sense of belonging through the use of possessive expressions. When asked during interaction observations about the country celebrating National Day.

Dama and Abdulaziz both responded with "our country." While Juman and Abdulsalam made statements reflecting concern for their homeland, such as "We preserve our homeland."

Individually, during interaction observations observed the children demonstrated their attachment to their country. The Children described the following: "the flag of my country (Juman)", "our national clothes (Dama)" and "our flag (Anahar)".

The "My Nation Passport" activity made these sentiments even clearer. For example, Abdulsalam mentioned "my national language".

Dama expressed her patriotism with "I love my country."

These examples show the children's strong identification with and pride in their nation.

Cultural values, such as national duties and collaboration, are reflected in DSTs. These shared beliefs are presented and reinforced through the narratives. The children were able to successfully share their beliefs presented in DSTs, where they demonstrated an understanding of cultural values such as national duty and collaboration.

Regarding the CND, children expressed their gratitude in response to the teacher's question, "What can we offer our country?" For example, Dama said: "Thanks to my country". while Juman reiterated his love for his homeland by saying "I love my homeland."

Some children described it as their duty to preserve and develop the country. Abdulsalam stated, "My duty towards the country is to preserve it and do anything to develop it."

Both children highlighted the collective National Day celebrations and emphasized the importance of wearing national dress and participating in collective activities as expressions of national pride and duty during reading center time. For example:

"Everyone celebrated in schools, wore national clothes and participated in the popular celebrations for Saudi National Day (Dama)".

"We must protect the nation (Abdulsalm)"

The theme of collaboration was evident as the children described their experiences of National Day. They mentioned celebrating together, wearing traditional clothes and eating together in different regions of Saudi Arabia, from Riyadh to Jeddah. Dima, Saud and Abdulaziz personally narrated how they participated in the National Day celebrations, while Anahar spoke of the children wearing traditional clothes and carrying flags to signify unity and celebration.

During the MS session, the children recognized the collective effort in the DST, noting that Ghanem was helped by his brothers in shearing the wool. This recognition of cooperation extended beyond the narrative, as Saud, Abdulaziz, Dama, and Abdulsalam related it to helping their own siblings, reflecting an understanding of the value of good behavior and teamwork. Abdulsalam also mentioned the cultural practice of gift giving and sharing cakes as part of community generosity.

The children's responses during DSTs demonstrate a deep understanding of the cultural values of duty to the nation and the importance of communal celebrations and activities, highlighting their ability to connect personal actions to broader social values.

Emotional Aspect

As shown in table 1 the emotional aspect comprises two subtopics: "emotional engagement" and "emotional expression." Emotional engagement refers to the child's showing of interest in and connection with DST when viewing or discussing DSTs, while emotional expression refers to the child's ability to express the positive emotions associated with their national identity as a result of DST through verbal and nonverbal means.

Emotional engagement refers to the level of personal involvement, interest, and connection that an individual feels toward specific content. During the DST time, the children demonstrated emotional engagement by connecting to the content and sustaining their attention. They expressed interest and a desire to explore the DST further. For example, during the CND non-participant observation, when asked what they thought of the DST, Abdulaziz and Anahar both said that *"I liked it"*, while Dama described it by saying, *"Nice!"*

Interaction observations recorded that the children shared positive feelings about National Day, which can be considered evidence of their emotional engagement. Abdulsalam felt happy, Dama wanted to hug Saudi and his friends, and Anahar loved the celebration. They favored characters such as Rakan, Razan, and Haszn because of their traditional dress. Another child reported that CND was *"beautiful because it is National Day"*.

During the MS non-participant observation, it was recorded that when asked about DSTs, the children collectively responded, "We like it."

In interacting observations, It was observed that they named their favorite parts such as Ghanem's brother helping and the shepherd carrying his mashalh. Dama appreciated the pictures, Juman felt happy, and Abdulaziz felt good reading MS. Talking about old trades and crafts, Dama recalled a woolen cap made by his mother, Juman expressed his joy, and Abdulsalam mentioned wearing a Mashalh, indicating a personal connection to the cultural practices depicted in the story.

In data collections for CND and MS, the children showed a high level of consistent attention. After the group session on CND, they were so interested in the DST that they eagerly asked to experience it again. Abdulaziz's request for another reading highlights their collective commitment. In interaction observations, the children's immersion was evident as they read through the stories with concentration and excitement.

In the MS session, data recording that the children were also captivated and enthusiastically imitated the sounds of the sheep while non-participant observation. In interaction observation, Dama, Abdulsalam and Anahar even imitated the sheep's voices, which shows how engaged they were. Furthermore, the "My Nation Passport" activity at the art center revealed the children's consistent attention even more clearly. Anahar single-mindedly chose a green crayon and drew a heart in her task with dedication. Dama also chose the same color to draw a heart, showing how invested she was in the task. Juman, who chose a pink pencil, showed similar dedication, while Saud drew flags with a green pencil. Each child showed a deep connection to the medium and thematic content of the activity.

Emotional expression refers to the outward display of feelings, moods, or emotions through both verbal and nonverbal expression. During the DST sessions for CND and MS, the children showed emotional expression in relation to their national identity through verbal and nonverbal expressions such as spoken words, body language, facial expressions, and artistic expression. For example, in the CND non-participant observation, it was common to express national identity through spoken words, as children expressed that *"I thank my country (Dama)."* and *"I love the country (Abdulaziz)."*

As in the MS sessions with the teacher, the sentiment was used positively with phrases such as *"I like it"* and *"beautiful"*.

Additionally, during the "My Nation Passport" activity, children also expressed their emotions by drawing hearts in green. (see Figure 4).

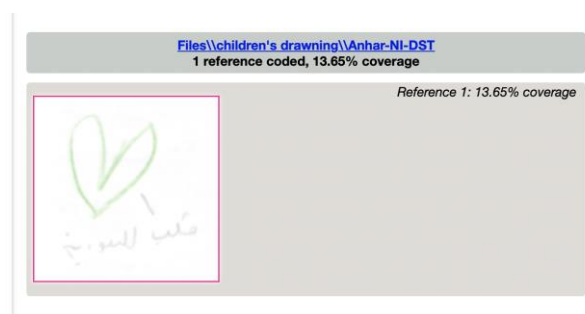


Figure. 4 "My Nation Passport" Activity

During most of the DSTs sessions, the nonverbal expression of emotions was evident in the smiles that appeared repeatedly during the joint reading of both the CND and MS, indicating joy and engagement. Each child, including Anahar, Dama, Juman, Abdulaziz, Abdulsalam, and Saud, smiled before and after engaging with the DSTs, sometimes mimicking sounds from the stories and showing a mixture of concentration and joy during reading center times. Moreover, but their happy and focused facial expressions, especially when drawing with crayons, demonstrated their engagement and satisfaction with the activities.

DISCUSSION

DST has been shown to be an excellent pedagogical tool that is particularly effective in promoting national identity among preschool children. The current study investigated this potential and revealed that DST has a significant impact on promoting national consciousness in young children. Through a detailed analysis, three important aspects of learning that were impacted by DST were identified: the cognitive aspect, the belief aspect and the emotional aspect.

The implementation of the DST, including CND and MS, was integrated into the preschool schedule during read-aloud sessions and learning area activities, utilizing multiple data-gathering methods, vividly exemplified cognitive engagement consistent with Bandura's theory of social learning. Through the distinctive titles of the DSTs and the recollection of specific narrative details, the children actively participated in observational learning. They not only mimicked but also adapted the language and actions of the characters, a fundamental aspect of Bandura's theory positing that learning is facilitated through observing and imitating others within a social context. Additionally, the educational benefits of DST extend to the development of critical literacy,

comprehension and thinking skills in young students. Through engagement with DST, children become active participants in their education, which enhances their connection to cultural heritage and strengthens their cognitive skills. For example, a study by Manullang et al., (2021) showed that the use of DST can improve children's cognitive skills in early childhood. This level of active participation is important not only important for their academic development, but also for their development into informed and connected citizens of their nation. In Saudi Arabia, teachers in education have used DST to enrich lesson planning and strengthen students' competencies in reading, writing, and language acquisition (Bugis, 2018). This active involvement aligns with the assertion of Robin (2016) that DST contributes to improved educational outcomes. When educators integrate DST into their curriculum, they create an environment in which children can actively shape their understanding and creatively express their national identity. Thus, DST is an important educational strategy that links the learning process to the development of national identity.

Bandura's theory of social learning states that individuals, especially children, learn by observing others and modeling their behavior. In the context of DST, children engage with characters who embody national virtues, participate in culturally significant activities, and express a strong sense of belonging through possessive language. This immersion in the stories serves as a socializing device, similar to Bandura's concept of vicarious reinforcement, in which children adopt and internalize the behaviors and attitudes depicted in the stories as desirable and worthy of emulation. The findings of (Kim & Li, 2021) showed that DST projects in a school curriculum can engage learners with a wide range of expressive tools while promoting motivation, creativity, identity development, and connection with other students.

Therefore, the belief aspect of DST in promoting national identity is closely linked to Bandura's social learning theory. It illustrates how DST can effectively shape children's understanding of their national identity by presenting narratives that instill pride, cultural values, and a sense of belonging through storytelling and character modeling.

According to Bandura's theory of social learning, the concept of emotional aspects is closely linked to the way children imitate and mimic the emotional behaviors they have observed in others. Emotional engagement in DST mirrors the attentional processes described in Bandura's theory, where observable behaviors must attract attention to be learned. The fact that children actively engage with the content of DST suggests that emotional stories capture their interest sufficiently to sustain their interest, which is a necessary condition for learning according to Bandura's framework. We can explain the results of this study by the fact that DST caught children's attention and that children became fully emotionally engaged. Digital storytelling has captured the attention of children in early childhood education because of its ability to engage young learners through interactive and visually stimulating narratives. Research and educational resources emphasize that DST creates an immersive and engaging learning experience for children by combining traditional storytelling with modern multimedia tools (O'Byrne et al., 2018; Rahiem, 2021).

The emotional expression with which the children articulated their feelings about national identity after engaging with the DST is consistent with Bandura's concepts of retention, reproduction and motivation. By observing and imitating the emotional expression of the characters in DST, children learn to express their own emotions in relation to their national identity. This ability to express positive emotions in relation to their nation can be seen as a result of vicarious reinforcement — when children see positive reactions to expressed emotions in DST, they are likely to imitate these reactions. The children's ability to express the positive emotions associated with their national identity as a result of DST through verbal and nonverbal means. Digital storytelling expresses positive emotions for children in early childhood education by creating engaging, entertaining, and communicative learning experiences that promote emotional well-being and social interactions (O'Byrne et al., 2018; Rahiem, 2021; Zarifsanaiey et al., 2022).

As a result, DST is a valuable tool for promoting national identity among preschool children, including 5-year-old children in Saudi Arabia. By incorporating DST into early childhood education, educators can effectively engage young learners in exploring their cultural heritage, fostering a sense of pride, belonging, and connection to their national identity.

Limitations of the Research

The research participants included a purposive sample of preschoolers from a single early childhood education setting in Saudi Arabia and were not representative of expected participants from different contexts. Although our qualitative case study findings cannot be extrapolated to a broader population, they might be applied to comparable early childhood education environments and offer detailed insights into the potential benefits of using DST in teacher practices to promote national identity. One important limitation of this study is that it may have left out important thoughts and viewpoints from other stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, or school administrators, who were not addressed in the study. Future studies can deepen the current scope to include all these possible perspectives.

CONCLUSION

Digital storytelling has changed the essence of storytelling by offering possibilities for new types of learning in early childhood education and providing teachers great tools for promoting national consciousness among young children. Thus, the findings of this study show that DST has a significant impact on promoting national consciousness among young children. Through a detailed analysis, three important aspects of learning that were impacted by DST were identified: the cognitive aspect, the belief aspect, and the emotional aspect. Hence, it is recommended that DST be used with preschoolers.

Overall, the idea of using DST for preschoolers is not new. However, research on this topic is still in its infancy. The lack of scientific evidence in this field may partly be related to educators' concerns. Thus, our work seeks to address this gap in research. To further advance and explore the impact of DST on the promotion of national identity, more rigorous research methods are needed. Additionally, there may be a need for more interdisciplinary collaboration, requiring partnerships with teachers, storytelling practitioners, social scientists, and data analytics experts. We believe that such cross-sectoral partnerships may create change, and we envisage a broader integration and utilization of DST within preschool education, thereby fostering enhanced learning experiences for young learners.

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