# The American University in Cairo School of Continuing Education

The Proceedings of the 27<sup>th</sup> NileTESOL/AUC Conference

# **NEW ERA**

# IN

# TEACHING & LEARNING: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

January 23rd & 24th, 2023

# AND

# The Proceedings of the 28<sup>th</sup> NileTESOL/AUC Conference

Engaging and Empowering Learners and Teachers: Methods, Strategies, and Tools

January 23rd & 24th, 2024

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# PREFACE

This is the eighth issue of the annual NileTESOL Conference Proceedings, which we started publishing in 2013. The current volume attempts to highlight and document the wide range of different presentation types featured in the two conferences which were held in AUC's New Cairo Campus in 2023 and in 2024. There are several types of articles: teaching and practice-oriented tips, literature reviews, and research studies.

The 2023 and the 2024 NileTESOL Proceedings includes four carefully selected articles from the conferences which took place on January 23rd and 24th, 2023 & 2024. The articles included in this volume address issues related to English language teaching in different contexts. We hope that language professionals find the volume useful and hope that we can all use the new ideas and techniques presented here in our own classes.

We enjoyed working on this eighth issue of the proceedings, and we are proud of the many interesting, engaging contributions we received. Bringing this edition to light is the essence of academia. Our aim is to provide an opportunity for conference participants to publish their work and to contribute to English language teaching and learning in Egypt and the region. We hope that you will help us disseminate these proceedings and publicize this publishing opportunity to all NileTESOL participants in the future.

We would like to conclude by offering special thanks to the 2023 and 2024 Conference Organizing Committees for their tremendous efforts and dedication in organizing both NileTESOL Conferences. We would also like to thank the Editorial Team of the NileTESOL Conference Proceedings for their hard work, their assistance in vetting submissions, and their making the review process as smooth as possible during this busy and challenging time.

Rania Jabr & Mariam Osman Cairo on November 1, 2024

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# 1. Curricula Design and Language Teaching

#### Samir Omara

English Language Teacher & Teacher Trainer

# Abstract

Language teachers teach different languages, such as English, to help students learn, communicate, and understand. Forward design, central design, and backward design are different approaches for curriculum design. Curriculum design helps language teachers develop student communication, interaction, reflection, and metacognition. The Understanding by Design or UbD framework is curricula design with a key focus on backward design. The backward design goes through output, process, and input. It helps teachers raise big ideas and essential questions for students to explore and answer. It helps students find, explain, and relate different answers for essential questions.

Keywords: curricula design, understanding by design, and backward design

#### I. INTRODUCTION

There are different approaches to designing curricula: forward, central, and backward design. The three approaches have three components - input or language, process or methodology, and output or learning outcomes, but the order of the components is different in each approach. Forward Design goes through input, process, and output. Central Design goes through process, input, and output, and Backward Design goes through output, process, and input. Understanding by Design is a framework that is mainly based on Backward Design; language teachers define desired results, determine acceptable evidence, and plan learning experiences and instruction. Backward Design helps develop language teaching; there are different roles for

language teachers and students, and there are some characteristics for stimulating a positive learning environment.

## **II. DESIGN APPROACHES**

Forward Design goes through input, process, and output. Language teachers decide on the input or language to be taught to students. Then, they design the process or activities that help students learn the language. Finally, they use assessments to make sure students have acquired the output or learning outcomes. This type of design is suitable for language teaching in large classes where textbooks and exams are officially set; language teachers have little choice of language or methodology. There are different examples of Forward Design, such as Content-based Instruction or CBI. According to the CBI method, the key focus of language teaching is on the content or information that students will acquire. A CBI curriculum uses authentic language texts to develop students' communicative competence and meet their learning needs.

Central Design, on the other hand, is a learner-centered approach that goes through process, input, and output. Language teachers decide on teaching techniques, activities, and methods. Then, they use them to develop input or language and output or learning outcomes. There are different examples of Central Design, such as Task-based Learning or TBL. In TBL, language teachers engage students in interactive tasks to design, create, and produce something in language classrooms. These interactive tasks help students develop their interests and focus on meaning. Students engage in

pre-tasks and tasks, in which they report and present the outcome of their tasks and get and reflect on constructive feedback to achieve their learning goals.

Backward Design goes through output, process, and input. Language teachers check learning standards and define desired results. Then, they determine student achievement and assessment evidence. Finally, they plan the most convenient instructional activities.

#### III. BACKWARD DESIGN

Teaching and assessing for understanding, learning transfer, and backward design are key focuses of Understanding by Design (UbD). There are seven key principles for Understanding by Design. The UbD helps teachers think purposefully of circular planning; it does not offer rigid processes or prescriptive recipes. It helps focus on students' abilities to use content knowledge and skills. It helps develop students' understanding. Students explain, interpret, and apply what they learn. They also shift perspective, empathize, and self-assess. The UbD method helps develop effective curriculum backward design. It helps teachers to act as coaches; they ensure that learning happens. It helps review units and curricula against design standards, which helps provide professional discussions for language teachers and educators. It also helps develop student achievement and teacher development, as teachers reflect on and enhance language teaching and learning as well.

Wiggins and McTighe (1998) claim that Backward Design helps develop students' learning and understanding. To go through output, input, and process in Backward Design, language teachers define desired results and acceptable evidence of student learning and learning activities; examine language content standards, check curricula expectations, conduct needs analyses and define important knowledge; check content standards that come from professional standards of language teaching and learning; define understanding goals that are big ideas or concepts that they want students to come away with, not facts that students must know; define essential questions, such as leading questions that they ask their students to sustain their interest and help them understand big ideas; and, finally, define student objectives or outcomes that are observable and measurable.

Moreover, language teachers must define how they would assess students' learning. They define how to check students' understanding using quizzes, tests, performance tasks, and projects. They define performance tasks and other evidence. Performance tasks, which help students apply and transfer their learning, must be authentic. They must help students demonstrate six facets of understanding, as students explain concepts, interpret texts, apply knowledge to new contexts, shift perspectives by seeing the big picture differently, display empathy, and self-assess through reflection and meta-cognition. The other evidence must reflect different thinking skills – both lower-order and higher-order ones. There could be different tools to develop students' self-assessment and peer assessment of their performance, such as using rubrics. Other evidence, such as pre-assessment, formative assessment, and

summative assessment that could be used with individuals, pairs, or groups of students, can also be developed and applied. The other evidence could be formal such as quizzes or informal such as a 'thumbs up'.

Finally, language teachers make use of the learning outcomes and assessments to develop a learning plan of instructional activities; they define and develop different individual, pair, and group activities. They design a variety of learning activities and describe what students will do during language teaching and learning. Richards (2013) believes that Backward Design helps teachers provide students with real-life learning experiences.

## **IV. TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' ROLES**

Backward Design helps develop language teaching, learning, and learning environments. Milner and Milner (2008) think that Backward Design helps teachers to be systematic and flexible. To teach and learn Backward Design curricula, there are different roles for language teachers and students. There are also some characteristics for stimulating a learning environment.

Language teachers help students learn and develop deep understanding. They teach basic knowledge and monitor students' learning to keep them engaged; they use questioning and give constructive feedback; and finally, they learn from and reflect on students' assessments all of which help develop their teaching and assessment as well.

Students learn different things that relate them to different courses. They are always engaged in learning, and they explore big ideas and answer essential questions to develop six facets of understanding. They explain answers to essential questions and develop more relevant questions. Moreover, they use rubrics for self-assessment and peer-assessment and get and learn from different feedback to develop more relevant learning goals. Hodaeian and Biria (2015) think that Backward Design develops students' motivation, as students work to achieve their own learning objectives.

As can be seen from the above, there are some characteristics that are conducive to stimulating an environment which is conducive to learning. Big ideas and essential questions are central to students' learning and classroom culture. There is ongoing motivation for students to explore big ideas and answer essential questions. Language teachers share performance tasks and rubrics with students from the very beginning. There is differentiated instruction of how different students explore big ideas to develop deeper understanding and individual differences. Language teachers display and recognize students' work.

## V. CONCLUSION

Forward, Central, and Backward design are different approaches for curriculum design. They have input, process, and output, but in different order. To conduct Backward Design, English language teachers identify desired results, determine acceptable evidence, and plan learning experiences and instruction. Backward design

helps teachers develop students' learning and helps students learn and go through real-life experiences.

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# 2. Differentiation with ICT Integration

Sarah Elkasabi and Mohamed Osama Mansoura College American Schools

# I. INTRODUCTION

Are we the same? Definitely not. We are all different in a beautiful way; we are all beautiful in different ways. No doubt that most, if not all, language classrooms have become widely diverse in skill levels. These mixed-ability classes can be led cleverly with differentiation and ICT integration to ensure steadily increasing progress and achievements. We aim at equipping language teachers with very interactive tools that can transform the teaching experience, making it more differentiated and much more enjoyable.

# **II. DIFFERENTIATION AND ITS IMPORTANCE**

In theory, differentiation is defined as providing tailored instructions and assessments to help students achieve similar outcomes in diverse methods. By addressing their individual needs, the process and assessment become adaptive and equitable. Differentiating assessment and instruction have become easily implemented through the integration of technology.

# **III. ICT INTEGRATION AND ITS IMPORTANCE**

ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has had a tremendous impact in many fields, including education. Educators can teach lessons, assign homework, and implement various methodologies just by employing technology.

## **IV. GOOGLE FORMS VS PAPER-BASED ASSESSMENT**

The first tool has made conducting assessment very simple, yet very light. Instead of old, plain paper-based tests and quizzes, use Google Forms to achieve the same results but with better execution and a much more engaging interface. Google Forms has proven to be very user-friendly, offering a wide array of question types to choose from. We conducted two kinds of assessments during the presentation and throughout the school year, and almost all the time people preferred the online assessment to the paper-based one.

The paper-based assessment that was handed to people was a hand-out consisting of three fill-in-the-blank questions. (See Picture 1)



Now that you have looked at Picture 1, take a look at the following link to a Google Form on the same topic: <u>https://forms.gle/hPSNTgCQNFkizoMN9</u>.

Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each type of assessment. While traditional assessment has its merits, it presents more drawbacks when utilized in a 21st-century classroom. It provides delayed feedback, and it can be really pricey to print and hand out to students. Additionally, it is not environmentally friendly. Grading, checking, and correcting stacks of paper on a regular basis can also be quite demanding and tedious. On the contrary, online assessments can offer immediate feedback, with fun and encouraging pictures or GIFs.

## V. Zoom

Zoom can be a powerful tool for teachers seeking to integrate differentiation into their lessons. Here are some ways in which Zoom can be used to facilitate differentiated instruction:

Breakout Rooms: The breakout feature is great because it enables educators to have group work through online sessions by dividing students into groups based on any preferred criteria. This can be especially useful for differentiation, as it allows teachers to group students by skill level. For example, advanced learners can work together on more challenging tasks, while struggling students can work together on remedial activities. Teachers can also move between breakout rooms to provide individualized support and feedback.

To illustrate this, consider the following example:

In the following activity, advanced level 3rd graders worked with peers of the same level to come up with words that included digraphs, while students at lower proficiency levels worked together to find the target words in a reading passage and highlight them.





Another example is a writing activity in which students also worked in groups based on their proficiency levels.

A Tracher Foraday	
I won a spelling contest and I was	Date <u>Final Dratt</u> Teacher
I played with my students and we had	XXXX I was contrest and a teacher for aday. Taught In
	english and I prepares my in the valit started without same in the
	Englishteacher and all ma
FLeve 1	friends loved my lesson. It was fun.
You miss	
A 30 A	

Chat Function: The chat function in Zoom can be used to facilitate communication between teachers and students during a lesson. Students can use the chat to ask

questions, share ideas, or even submit work. Teachers can also use the chat to provide immediate feedback and support to students. This is especially useful for students who may be hesitant to ask questions in a larger group setting or who may require more personalized attention.

Polling: Zoom's polling feature can be used to assess student understanding and to provide instant feedback on student learning. Teachers can use polling to gauge student comprehension, to provide additional support for struggling learners, or to challenge advanced learners with higher-level questions.

# VI. FLIP (PREVIOUSLY: FLIPGRID)

Flipgrid is an innovative platform that allows teachers to create engaging video-based discussions and activities. It can be a powerful tool for teachers looking to integrate differentiation into their lessons.

Here are some ways in which Flipgrid can be used to help differentiate instruction and assessment:

Topic Choice: Flip allows teachers to create multiple topics for discussion, giving students the ability to choose the topic that best suits their interests or learning style. This allows for differentiation by interest, as students can engage in topics that are most relevant to their own interests and passions.

Video Responses: Flip allows students to respond to discussion prompts or activities through video, which can be a more engaging and accessible mode of communication for some learners. For students facing challenges with written expression or language barriers, video responses offer an effective alternative to actively participate in class discussions.

Accessible Features: Flip is also accessible for students with different learning needs. It provides closed captioning options for students who require it, and its user-friendly interface can be navigated by students with different levels of technical proficiency.

The following link contains a sample of two 4<sup>th</sup> graders of very different levels, yet they both beautifully show their ability to summarize Hamlet and share their work on Flip. (<u>https://drive.google.com/file/d/14PKZHwA8Nb863PRHJfMY2IR6oT--KPx0/view?usp=sharing</u>).

#### VII. Teams

Microsoft Teams is a versatile platform that offers a variety of features that can be useful for teachers looking to integrate differentiation into their teaching and assessment.

Here are some ways in which Microsoft Teams can be used to help differentiate instruction:

Assignments: Microsoft Teams allows teachers to create and assign individualized tasks and assessments to students. This can be particularly useful for differentiation, as it allows educators to create homework and assignments that are suitable for their students' needs.

Rubrics: The platform also allows teachers to create and use rubrics to provide feedback on student work. This can help to differentiate instruction by providing students with specific and targeted feedback based on their individual needs.

Private Channels: Microsoft Teams allows for group collaboration and discussion, which can be used to differentiate instruction based on students' abilities and interests. Teachers can create different groups for students with different levels of ability, providing each group with appropriate resources and support.

Immersive Reader: Microsoft Teams also offers an Immersive Reader feature, which can be used to support students with different learning needs. The Immersive Reader provides tools, such as read-aloud, text spacing, and visual aids to help students better understand and engage with the content.

Reading Progress: It is a tool that contains a myriad of reading passages that suit different levels of students. It helps teachers understand and monitor students' progress throughout the year by providing analysis for individual student's submissions on criteria, like fluency, mispronunciations, repetitions, accuracy, and many more. It provides students with a Reading Coach, which is a tool that helps them practice some of the words they incorrectly read until they get it right. This tool improves reading fluency and can be very adaptive throughout the academic year.

The photos all belong to the same student. He started his reading journey with a lot of areas to work on, but with consistent practice and increase of difficulty of the passages, improvements can be noticed throughout his submissions.



G The New Clubhouse	Close
<ul> <li>Construct</li> <li>Barton</li> <li>Construct</li> <li>Construct<th>✓ Malek Hamed Mo✓ &gt; Student Work ✓ Returned View History ○ The New Clubhouse ···</th></li></ul>	✓ Malek Hamed Mo✓ > Student Work ✓ Returned View History ○ The New Clubhouse ···
Max's clubhouse need then mom what was falling apart. He told his mom made that he wanted look two worked it you to build a new one. "First, you need a plan," said Max's mom need it . "Let's figure out what what the new clubhouse was showed should look like."	Take action is student view FreeBack Nice workfil Points
They worked together. Max and his mom made a need help was worked small house out of play clay. Max should showed his mom what he wanted. He wanted a door on the help house. He wanted look door two windows on the help house. He wanted a door then to paint the house	

## **VIII. Padlet**

This platform gives teachers the chance to create engaging tasks and activities through the creation of virtual bulletin boards for collaboration and information-sharing. It can be a powerful tool for teachers looking to integrate differentiation into their teaching.

Here are some ways in which Padlet can be used to help differentiate instruction:

Varied Learning Styles: Padlet can be used to create a variety of interactive and multimedia resources, such as videos, images, audio clips, and web links, which can cater to different learning styles. For example, visual learners can access infographics or images, while auditory learners can listen to audio clips.

Collaborative Learning: Padlet is designed for collaboration, allowing students to work together on shared projects or activities. This can help to differentiate instruction by enabling students to work with peers who have similar learning needs or interests and by providing opportunities for students to learn from each other.

Individualized Feedback: Padlet allows teachers to provide individualized feedback to students through comments, replies, or annotations on their posts. This can help to

differentiate instruction by allowing teachers to provide specific feedback and support to each student, based on their individual learning needs and abilities.

Flexibility: Padlet can be used in a flexible manner to suit different teaching and learning contexts. Teachers can use it for brainstorming, researching, discussing, or assessing, depending on their instructional goals and their students' needs.

Easy Accessibility: Padlet can be accessed on multiple devices, including desktops, laptops, tablets, and smartphones. This makes it easy for students to access and participate in Padlet activities, regardless of their device preferences or accessibility needs.

In our presentation, we shared a few Padlets with the audience (attached below). One of these Padlets (Gallery Show) was created during the quarantine and was used to make students reflect on their achievements and work after group activities.

#### 3rd Grade Amazing Learners (padlet.com)

The other Padlets were assigned to students as a part of their assignment (Grammar Padlets). These Padlets focused on Possessive Nouns and were tailored to specific student levels (below-level and on-level). All students achieved the same skill, which was the ability to identify possessive pronouns, but they undertook different activities to do so.





# **IX. STATISTICS**

Students learn in very different ways, but most of them are motivated when technology is involved in the learning process. The following photo shows the participation rate of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students during the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023 before and after the implementation of differentiated instruction and assessment through technology. 86% of students committed to classwork and homework once it matched their interests and became entertaining and flexible.



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# 3. Online Learning and Language Anxiety: How Camera Policies Impact Outcomes

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# Abstract

This paper addresses the well-established, causal relationship between language classroom anxiety and learning and outcomes, and the more-recently explored relationship between camera policy and anxiety in the virtual classroom. The first section of this paper provides a brief overview of language anxiety, as it has been studied since the 1980s. The second section addresses Zoom fatigue, a more recent phenomenon that has emerged with the rise of online learning. The third and final section of this paper provides a recommended approach for teachers to introduce and implement classroom policies that take into consideration the effects of Zoom fatigue and foreign language classroom anxiety.

Keywords: classroom anxiety, Zoom fatigue, online learning.

# I. INTRODUCTION

Evidence-based research underpins many effective teaching practices and policies, guiding everything from grammar instruction methods to diversity and inclusion initiatives. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a global shift to online teaching, a significant number of educators were unfamiliar with the nuances of research in this realm. This unfamiliarity led to the development and implementation of online teaching strategies and policies that were not necessarily grounded in empirical evidence. A notable example is the widespread enforcement of "camera-on" policies,

where students are mandated to keep their webcams on throughout sessions or risk facing consequences.

### II. FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY

The term foreign language anxiety (FLA) refers to a set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to the language learning process in a classroom setting (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). While FLA has been observed in the learning of various languages, the phenomenon has been most extensively studied in the context of English-language learning (Djafiri & Wimbarti, 2018). The experience of FLA is influenced by both internal and external factors; internal factors include an individual's attitude and motivation towards language learning, while external factors include teaching methods and classroom environment, the latter of which is especially prescient to this paper (Djafiri & Wimbarti, 2018).

A considerable amount of research has demonstrated that foreign language anxiety can bear several negative effects on language learners. Those who experience FLA are less likely to choose to study foreign languages (Bailey et al., 2000). FLA also leads to lower levels of motivation in language learning, as reported by learners themselves (Liu & Huang, 2011). Moreover, FLA has been found to universally correlate with poorer skill performance in language learning (Zhang, 2019). These findings highlight the significant impact of FLA on language learners and their academic outcomes. It should be noted here that the term "foreign language anxiety" in its strictest sense refers specifically to anxiety triggered by communicating in a foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). However, when Horwitz et al., first wrote about the topic, in the 1980s, they referred to "foreign language classroom anxiety" (emphasis added), indicating that their research extended beyond the anxiety provoked by communicating in a foreign language to include the conditions of the language classroom more broadly (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Moreover, even contemporary research on anxiety among language learners often fails to differentiate between different types of anxiety based on their causes. This means that many of the effects attributed to FLA may actually be caused by anxiety more generally. As a result, it is important that researchers and teachers recognize the potential overlap and interconnectedness between different forms of anxiety in the language-learning context. By doing so, we can better understand the various factors that contribute to anxiety among language learners and develop effective strategies to address and mitigate it.

### **III. ZOOM FATIGUE**

Zoom fatigue refers to the negative psychological, emotional, and sometimes physical effects that may arise from communicating via Zoom or other digital video communication platforms. This phenomenon has been observed among both workers attending meetings and learners attending lessons. Zoom fatigue is associated with a range of negative effects, such as difficulties in concentration, lack of motivation, low productivity, and anxiety (Zoom Fatigue and Why It Matters: Know the Facts, 2021). Research focused on language learners has revealed that a significant number of students feel uncomfortable during online lessons, with almost half of all students participating in one study reporting "anxiety/fear of being exposed/shame/shyness" as the primary reason for their discomfort (Gherheş et al., 2021). This anxiety is particularly linked to the experience of appearing on camera before others. As established, anxiety among language learners is associated with negative effects, including decreased motivation and performance. It is therefore incumbent on teachers to take measures to mitigate Zoom anxiety, as they would any other detrimental classroom condition.

#### IV. COMBATTING ZOOM FATIGUE

While much guidance related to combatting Zoom fatigue is directed towards participants, not leaders, there is little doubt that language teachers can also play an important role in mitigating the negative effects of digital communication. One key approach is to implement a sensible, evidence-based camera policy in the online classroom. Scholarly research suggests that empowering students to decide when to turn their cameras on or off is a key component of a sensible camera policy for online teaching (Bailenson, 2020; Nicandro et al., 2020). While many teachers may rely on student camera use as a "[f]alse indicator of engagement" research indicates that students are actually often distracted by their own image or other computer programs

when the camera is on (Student Camera Use During Zoom Class Sessions, 2020; Fosslien & West, 2020).

Nonetheless, there are some instances in online English classes when it may be necessary for a teacher to see a learner's face; for example, Stanley (2019), writing for the British Council, notes that pronunciation activities may involve learners and teachers looking at each other's mouths. Therefore, a sensible camera policy for language teaching should be flexible and adaptable to the goals of the lesson, while also prioritizing the reduction of exposure and Zoom fatigue.

To help navigate this maze of needs and priorities, teachers can ask themselves three questions before instructing students to turn on their cameras:

1. Is turning their camera necessary for the current task? Can the student

successfully complete the task with their camera off?

It is true that there are some activities, such as the pronunciation practice described by Stanley (2019), that are clearly improved by the use of video. However, there are many more activities to which video use is irrelevant. It is essential that teachers seriously and rigorously consider whether camera use is necessary to an activity before demanding it.

2. Why might this student have their camera off? What efforts have I undertaken to (privately and respectfully) discern this student's reasons for turning off their camera? This question pertains to student motivation. There are a variety of reasons why students may want to keep their cameras off: to avoid anxiety and shame (Gerhes, et. al., 2021), to mitigate distraction (Duffy, 2020), to reduce exhaustion (Bailenson, 2020), to protect themselves from judgment (Student Camera Use During Zoom Class Sessions, 2020), or simply due to a lack of reliable internet access (Student Camera Use During Zoom Class Sessions, 2020). It is important that teachers not make assumptions about why students keep their cameras off. Rather, teachers ought to reach out to their students to learn more about their needs and worries. This should always be done discreetly, i.e.: not in front of other students, which can be humiliating, but in a 1-on-1 format. In Zoom calls, this can take the form of writing a private message to a student.

3. Why do I want to see this student's video? What other, more reliable measures have I taken to gauge my students' level of engagement?

The third and final question calls for the most internal reflection. There may be several reasons why a teacher wants to view a student's screen, some more legitimate than others. Scholars at Brown University (2020) noted that teachers tend to rely on seeing students' faces as a "[f]alse indicator of engagement." In reality, seeing a student's face does not give the teacher any meaningful information about the student's level of engagement, as the student could be focusing on their own video or someone else's. Teachers who rely on seeing their students' faces should instead consider more reliable methods of measuring engagement, such as short, frequent formative assessments.

The above three questions present a framework for reflection for teachers considering instructing their students to turn on their video cameras during a Zoom lesson. While every class is different, these questions can guide any teacher to making a more thoughtful decision.

## V. CONCLUSION

Anxiety is a significant factor that can hinder language learning in the classroom, and different types of anxiety cannot be easily separated. Online learning and camera-on policies can exacerbate anxiety among students. Therefore, teachers should develop sensible camera policies that enable students to make choices about their cameras. Before asking students to turn on their cameras, teachers should take care and consider whether turning the camera on is necessary for the current task, whether students can complete the task with their cameras off, and why a student may have their camera off. Overall, it is essential for language teachers to create a supportive and inclusive online learning environment that mitigates anxiety and enhances language learning outcomes.

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# Digital Storytelling and Hands-on Learning Experience: An Active Learning Approach

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# Abstract

Digital storytelling is a hands-on learning model that integrates technology with learning and incorporates multiple media forms, such as graphics, audio, and written texts. The purpose of this study is to investigate, through a project-based learning approach, how digital storytelling as a model of active learning fosters 21st-century skills and empowers teachers and learners to engage in technology-oriented settings. The study adopts a qualitative case study approach, using fourth-year university students' graduation projects as the sample. The project was about writing an adapted story, publishing it on a website, and then changing it into a graphic story using a storyboard application. This project was a practical application of the knowledge and skills acquired in the students' various courses. The study has found that digital storytelling presents an effective educational medium that promotes learning skills, life skills, and digital literacy. Some of the limitations encountered throughout the course of the project were related to the challenges students faced while establishing the website or using the online storyboard application. The study recommends the use of graphic storyboard applications and websites in students' projects to enhance students' engagement, promote their learning experience, and create digital citizens capable of competing in the 21st-century professional market.

Keywords: storytelling, active learning, 21st-century skills, project-based learning

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital storytelling has widely spread as a modern form of narration due to its significant role in enriching the educational and learning process. Attracting students' attention and arousing their interest are some of the challenges teachers face. However, by applying the digital storytelling model to the classroom, students become the focus of an interactive experience where they learn to be creative and innovative. To further encourage students' engagement and life-long learning, educators are now advocating the use of active learning, a classroom approach that focuses on how students learn more than what they learn. It encourages students to take an active role by analyzing and applying the content, rather than passively receiving information. The main purpose of this research paper is to examine the effectiveness of digital storytelling as an active learning model by tracing the aspects of this learning approach in the projects. The paper also aims at exploring the impact of utilizing digital storytelling as a 21st-century skills model of active learning on students' abilities. This is because the active learning approach relies heavily on the use of 21st-century skills, which consist of three broad skills: learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills. These skills need to be fostered in today's graduates to enable them to compete in the job market and to provide them with the potential for continuous self-development.

The significance of this study lies in showing the importance of changing students' roles from passive learners to ones who are actively engaged in interactive activities, capable of collaboration and self-expression, and possess the ability to inspire

others. For this study, two graduation projects were conducted in groups, in two consecutive semesters, using storytelling with different media platforms and the same objective. In group-based projects, students collaborate with colleagues to investigate the problem, find resources, apply information, and make decisions. Moreover, using technology enriches the experience, as it extends learning beyond the physical walls of the classroom and establishes a collaborative learning environment that motivates students to learn. By applying 21st-century skills to their projects, students are given the opportunity to learn and apply their knowledge and consequently, and also contribute to the progress of their community. This research paper, through these group-based projects, attempts to find answers to the questions raised in this study, which are:

- 1. How effective is storytelling as a method for promoting active learning among students?
- 2. How does the use of digital storytelling enhance students' 21st-century skills?

### **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **II.1 Active Learning: Definition and Principles**

Active learning represents an instructional approach to teaching and learning that actively engages and involves students in the learning process. Bonwell and Eison (1991) define active learning as "anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing." This means that learners can think, discover for themselves, and make their own decisions as a result of being stimulated by a question or a problem. Furthermore, Freeman et al., (2014) explain that active learning means "students engage in learning through activities and/or discussion in class, as opposed to passively listening to an expert" (p. 8413). In short, active learning requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing. It is worth noting that the various definitions of active learning have something in common; they all build on students' higher-order thinking skills (HOT) (Bloom et al., 1956). According to the *Cambridge Assessment International Education* teaching team, active learning methods contribute to developing students' higher-order cognitive skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and knowledge application through group work, hands-on projects, experiments, and interactive activities.

Some of the main characteristics associated with the active learning process are being student-centered, collaborative, constructive, reflective, involving students in higher-order thinking (application, analysis, evaluation, and creation), and providing feedback. One of the benefits of the student-centered approach is students' engagement and involvement in the learning process. Joel Michael (2006) elaborates that if students are continuously involved in learning through hands-on activities, problem-solving, and decision-making, they have a greater chance of remembering information. Fink (2013) states that students' active engagement leads them to perform better and retain their knowledge longer than their peers who passively listen to sessions and memorize the content. Furthermore, Johnson and Johnson (2018) emphasize the importance of effective collaboration of students with the teacher and

their colleagues to create meaning, solve problems, learn, and develop skills. In other words, collaborative learning is based on recognizing that learning is a social process. Such an approach to learning encourages students to think in a higher order, including self-reflection on how and why they learn.

#### II.2 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills: Definition and Categories

Since active learning is closely linked to 21st-century skills, as they share the same goal, which is producing a graduate who can self-learn, think creatively and critically, work well with others, and quickly solve problems, educationalists need to take into consideration infusing their curricula with the much needed 21st-century skills to prepare their graduates for a competitive global job market (St. Louis, et. al., 2021).

21st-century skills are used to refer to a group of skills, character traits, and work habits that any college graduate in contemporary times should possess to be able to succeed in his/her life and career, regardless of which career the graduate intends to follow ("21<sup>st</sup> century skills", 2016; Buckle, 2024; "Competency Standards", 2019). Various attempts have been made to identify the core 21st-century skills. This research used the framework suggested by the *Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills* network; it is a model followed by thousands of educational institutions both in the US and globally. It divides the skills into three broad categories: learning skills, which include creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication; literacy skills, which include information, media, and technology skills; and life skills, which include flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and

accountability, and leadership and responsibility ("Framework for 21st Century Learning").

#### II.3 Storytelling and 21st-Century Skills

The question is: Is it possible for literature to be used to enhance students' 21st-century skills? It has become a trend in universities to underestimate the value of teaching literature to students. Beers and Probst (2011) state that although there is a growing trend in American high schools to focus on teaching non-fiction rather than fiction books to prepare students for the types of texts they will read on State exams, they believe that reading literature is important in the 21st-century world, as it teaches students to be global, ethical, and socially responsible citizens, as literature creates human beings who can empathize with others suffering from different ordeals, and even think of creative solutions to end some world problems.

That is why, the instructors of the graduation course for the 2022-2023 academic year decided to use literature, especially storytelling in both written and digital forms, as a tool to inculcate 21st-century skills and active learning in their students before they finally went out into the real world.

Digital storytelling is one way to propagate personal, historical, or theme-based stories using technology ("Field Education Landscape", 2021). It appeared in the 1990s and has greatly developed since then. It includes the use of multiple media. like text, speech, visuals, and sounds in presenting the story as a final product to the audience. Digital storytelling has been proven to cater to the 21<sup>st</sup> job market as it creates a student

who has the capacity of lifelong learning. Isaacs and Jo (2020), after surveying 8 studies on the relationship between digital storytelling and 21st-century skills between the years 2010-2019 using qualitative analysis, have discovered that digital storytelling enhances most skills, but among the topmost are creativity and critical thinking, followed by communication, collaboration, and citizenship.

#### II.4 The Relationship between Project-Based Learning and 21st-Century Skills

While St Louis et al. (2021) suggest using a project-based learning (PBL) approach to foster 21st-century skills in STEM students, this research aimed to follow Saavedra and Opfer's (2012) suggestion of using pedagogy embedded in PBL for language majors to enhance 21st-century skills in language graduates.

Thus, this study decided to apply PBL to the Graduation Project of 4th-year students of a Language faculty at one of the private universities in Egypt. PBL encourages students to actively engage in thinking about the knowledge they have acquired during their four academic years of study and to implement this knowledge. A paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Educational Research Association in Vancouver has proven that teachers who use the PBL approach tend to implement 21st-century skills in their teaching and assessment more than those who do not (Ravitz et al., 2012). Similarly, Musa et al. (2012) have discovered that PBL helps improve 21st-century skills like interpersonal skills, communication skills, teamwork, project management, and problem-solving, which are necessary to prepare graduates for the workplace.

# III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative approach by conducting two different case studies of the graduation project held in two consecutive semesters in the academic year 2022-2023. The study involved about 82 senior students enrolled in each course. Over twelve weeks, the group-based project was divided into multiple steps with tasks divided among the members of each group. Storytelling was a common medium between the two graduation projects; however, the implementation, the method, the tools, and the media used were completely different. In project one, students were asked to write a story and create activities about the literary elements of a story. Additionally, students created a website and uploaded the story to it. They also recorded an audio version of the story targeting the visually impaired and then uploaded it to the website. In project two, students were asked to create a graphic story using Pixton software. For assessment, the instructors corrected the material step-by-step and gave the students feedback to edit and make changes.

#### III.1 Case study 1

During Fall 2022, a group-based project about storytelling was conducted, and it consisted of eight steps:

#### Step One: Deciding the story

In the first step, students in groups of four or five were asked to choose a classical English play/novel from a provided list. Students were given a detailed session on the different types of adaptation with a special focus on the commentary type. Cartmell (1999) explains that this type of adaptation comments on the source text in which "the original is altered" (p.24). Relatively, students adopted the interweaving strategy through which they altered or added new themes, characters, or plotlines to comment on the source text. Students in this step had to meet intensively and go through the suggested readings to make their decision. They also discussed their suggestion to settle on the point of departure. After making their choice, instructors met with each group and discussed with them their choice, the point of departure from the source text, and the rationale behind their decision.

#### Step Two: Writing a Plot outline

In this step, students were asked to submit a one-page plot summarizing the main events of the story in the form of the different plot stages: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. After finishing the outline, they were asked to submit a table comparing their plot to the original story, pinpointing the points of similarities and differences between their proposed plot and the original. Students had to meet and communicate with one another to reach a consensus on a plot. In the pre-scheduled weekly meeting, the instructor sat with the group and gave feedback on the

plot, raising questions to alert students to loopholes that existed in their plots or to encourage them to be more creative.

#### Step Three: Division of Roles & Story Writing

In the third step, students decided on the tasks and divided the different stages of the plot among the group members. Students met regularly and reviewed the written material to avoid any overlap or contradiction and accordingly, made the necessary changes to the text. Instructors provided students with multiple sources about how to create a successful plot, format the dialogue, and introduce the point of view of the narrator (POV) that was suitable for the story and events. Over four weeks, the instructors reviewed and corrected the individually submitted material every week based on correction criteria (see Appendix for short story correction criteria), and sent the comments back to the entitled students to make the changes and edit the mistakes. One of the challenges students encountered in this step was determining the most appropriate POV for the narrative. They insisted on employing the 1st person narrator, where the story was told from the perspective of a single character. However, as the story progressed, the narrator revealed details that s/he could not logically have had access to. After receiving the feedback, students submitted their second draft. They received further comments which they corrected, and then finally, they compiled all the parts in one book.

#### Step Four: Interactive Online Activity Creation

In the fourth step, each group had to create four activities, one activity for each member. Students were asked to create advanced activities about the literary elements of the story that addressed multiple intelligences. They used a variety of online interactive activity sites, such as wordwell.net. One of the points of strength of this site is that it presents the activity in different forms or layouts, depending on the players' preference. A major challenge facing students during this step was finding good interactive activity sites for academic purposes. However, they were able to reach effective sites and tailor their activities in a way to serve their needs and purposes. The activities were then corrected by the instructor based on pre-prepared criteria.

#### Step Five: Audio Recording

In this step, each group recorded the story after dividing the roles among its members. In some instances, students recorded the story collectively in one session; in other cases, each recorded his/her part separately. Afterwards, they used an audio joiner to merge the recorded parts. The instructors provided students with the name of one audio joiner; however, some students suggested and used their audio joiner which they might have felt more comfortable with. One of the challenges students faced with this step was that the number of characters in the story was more than the number of group members. Accordingly, some members took more than one role. In other instances, a female member had to record the role of a male if there was a shortage of males in the group.

#### Step Six: Website Creation & Design

In this final step, students were given a session on how to design a website using Wix. This step required frequent meetings to upload the written story to the website and decide on the website's layout and images that suited the content. The main challenge that students faced with this step was the technical problems associated with designing a website, such as uploading the audio version of the story to the website, which sometimes caused the website to glitch if the recording was too heavy. However, with the help of IT staff and students surfing professional sites, they were able to overcome these technical problems.

#### Step Seven: Cover Page Design

Finally, the students were asked to agree on a design for the cover page and to finalize their choice of title for their story. Students had to use the Internet and computer programs, like Adobe Photoshop, to design their covers. Students then had to do the final editing, compiling the project together and printing it out in the form of a book.

#### Step Eight: Final Presentation

The final step required the students to prepare a presentation summarizing their story, displaying the similarities and differences between their story and the original fairytale, justifying the changes they made, and presenting the challenges they met and how they solved them. They were also asked to reflect on the entire project and speak about the skills they learnt throughout. Students were asked to use PowerPoint, Keynote, Canva, or any other application of their preference.

#### III.2 Case Study 2

During Spring 2023, a group-based project about storytelling was conducted and it consisted of six steps. Case two followed the same first three steps as case one with consistent feedback given by the instructor after each step. However, in this case study, students were asked to choose the story they were going to adapt from the fairytale genre while in the first case, it was from the famous classical novels or plays. In this case study as well, students were asked to Egyptianize their stories, which meant they needed to change the setting, and the characters, and add an Egyptian flavor to the stories, like some of the Egyptian customs and traditions based on the era and place they chose to place their stories in. The purpose of this addition to this project was to make students aware of cultural differences and to teach them how to introduce their culture to foreign readers.

# Step 4: Writing a Graphic Short Story (first & second drafts) (Instead of Steps 4,5, & 6 in Case 1)

In this step, students were required to change their finalized written stories into graphic short stories using the Pixton Application to which a subscription was made. Before doing so, instructors gave a lecture on the language of the graphic novel as well as the different options available in the Pixton Application. Students were shown a demo on how to use the app during this session. Thus, students were required to actively think about the information they gained during these sessions and to use this information in successfully creating their own products. The instructor limited the students to a certain number of pages as the Pixton app itself sets a maximum number of panels, which a student can use. This paused a challenge to the students as the written story was much longer than the graphic story, which entailed that they left out several parts of their original written story. Hence, they had to decide which parts to keep and which parts to leave out; they had to work on their summary skills, as they had to shorten certain dialogues and certain parts voiced by the narrator. Students had to also collect more information about using the Pixton app and to further familiarize themselves with the tools of the app as well as the different techniques available to the illustrator of a graphic story, which could convey deeper meaning without directly stating it. For instance, colors could create atmosphere and convey messages about characters, so they needed to be used wisely by students. Students had to learn how to use visual cues provided by the App to replace the verbal description in their original story.

Students had to meet to decide on the figures they would choose from the app to represent the different characters in their stories. They had to choose how they would dress the character, their hair color, style, eyes, etc...They also had to decide on the images for the different settings that would appear in their stories. These group decisions had to be made from the beginning to avoid any inconsistencies later on. Each student in the group then had to convert his/her part into a graphic short story. However, students soon discovered that the Pixton app had its limitations, especially as

they were presenting Egyptian culture in their stories. For instance, some of the groups were presenting stories that were happening in Egyptian villages. They could not find proper images on Pixton to present these villages, especially the style of houses there.

Again, the students had to resort to other online apps for more options that would allow them to edit images and then upload them back on their Pixton project. Some of the other apps and sites used by students were: Bing image creator, Picsart, Canva, Adobe Photoshop, Apple Photos, Wonderai. Thus, some students got the chance to experiment with AI. One group used AI to create the figure of a spooky devil that they could not find on Pixton.

After they finished their first drafts, feedback was given by the instructor, but this time the feedback was about their choice of visual cues and the words they decided to include in the captions, thought, and speech bubbles. The instructor also made sure that the entire plot flowed smoothly and that there were no sudden unexplained jumps after certain parts were deleted. Students were then asked to write a second draft, which the instructor re-checked in the scheduled meetings.

At the end of the project, students were asked to give a final presentation like in case 1.

# **IV. RESULTS**

The figures below provide a key to the principles of active learning and 21st-century skills.

	Cases 1 & 2	
Figure & 2	SEQ Figure \* ARABIC 1 Cases 1	
P	Principles of Active Learning	

21 <sup>st</sup> Century Skills						
Figure 3. 21st-Century Skills						

Figure 2. Key to Principles of Active Learning

The following table matches the steps of the project with the active learning skills and

21st-century skills in the form of a matrix.

# Table 1: Active Learning and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill Matrix

Steps	Р	Principles of Active Learning				21 <sup>st</sup> Century Skill		
	P1	P2	P3	P4	S1	S2	S3	
	Student- centered	collaborative	constructive	reflective	Learning Skills	Literacy Skills	Life Skills	
1. Selecting a Story for Adaptation from a provided list of plays/novels (C1) and fairytales (C2)	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	V	
2- Discussing the main points of the plot, discussing the points of similarities and differences between their proposed plot and the original work with justification, and writing a plot outline (C1 & 2)	V	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$^{\vee}$	$\checkmark$	V	
3. Dividing roles and writing the Story (C1&2)	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
4. Creating activities that address multiple intelligences about the literary elements of the story, using online activity sites, such as Kahoot and Word Wall (C1)	V	V	V		N	$\checkmark$	V	
5. Recording an audio version of the story for the visually impaired people, using a recorder and an audio joiner application (C1)	V	$\checkmark$	V	V	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	V	
6. Creating a Website to which they uploaded the written short story, the audio version of the story, and the supplementary activities.(C1)		$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	V	
7. Cover page design & project compilation & printing (C1&2)	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	

<ul> <li>8. Presentation (C1 &amp; 2)</li> <li>* Students settle on a design, decide the points that will be included and the organization of these points.</li> <li>* During the presentation, each group member must present a part and the group reflects on the skills they learnt.</li> </ul>	N	V	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	N	1	V
	Principles of Active Learning 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Skill						
Steps	P1	P2	P3	P4	S1	S2	S3
	Student- centered	collaborative	constructive	reflective	Learning Skills	Literacy Skills	Life Skills
9- Graphic Short Story Writing (C2) Students learn about the Pixton Application tools and the language of comics and then use Pixton to design and write a graphic adaptation of their short story. Students then edit and rewrite based on feedback.	N	V	V	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	V	N

## V. DISCUSSION

It has been noted that students actively participating in this group-based project have mainly practiced their higher-order learning skills in most of the steps through discussion, analysis, and evaluation, which all require critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. All these phases demonstrated an effective model of active learning, which efficiently employed 21st-century skills.

Through both cases, it has been observed that the active learning approach that is project-based has positive effects on students' learning and students' 21st-century skills, preparing them for a competitive job market that requires lifelong learners.

In the first three steps in cases 1 and 2, students' learning skills have been enhanced through brainstorming, discussion, and application, which were the main distinctive features of these steps. Brainstorming ideas generated discussion about the setting of the story, the plot, POV, and the characters. They had to critically analyze their original story to understand its hidden nuances and reflect on knowledge of the literary elements gained during their previous years, which is what active learning requires them to do. Students experienced writing individually first and then collaboratively. Students have shown their creativity and critical thinking through writing a well-developed story with an intricate plot. Moreover, their regular meetings to discuss details and ensure there was no overlapping information or contradiction reflected collaboration and communication.

These meetings also solidified students' life skills, such as their ability to interact respectfully with one another and to show flexibility, as some of them sometimes had to make compromises or rewrite some of their parts to accommodate the opinions and needs of other group members. Students used and enhanced their literacy skills in both case studies by reading sources about writing dialogue, developing character, and adopting a POV. Although students' readings about the above-mentioned topics reflected the lower-order learning skills, once they started implementing them, they developed their higher-order skills, as writing required them to use critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making, which are all features of active learning.

Through steps four, five and six in case 1, students were able to develop their literacy skills through learning and experiencing diverse platforms. For example, in step three, they had to search for online sites that create and tailor activities to their needs. In the following step, students had to record their material and then use an audio joiner, a skill that required searching, experimenting, and implementation. Moreover, in the process of designing the website, students learned and gained experience by considering the content, layout, images, grammar, and copyright. As noted above, students used lower-order learning skills by reading about each of the previous steps to develop higher-order learning skills by applying what they had learnt while analyzing and synthesizing the data they collected. The application was in the form of writing, recording, and designing.

In the second case study, as students started working on their graphic story, students had to decide which parts to keep and which parts to leave out from the story without destroying the plot or character development, which required decision-making, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, flexibility, and proper social interaction, as some students had to accept the idea of dropping some of their parts. To develop their media literacy, they watched further videos explaining the use of Pixton Application, and they read online resources on the tools of the graphic novel. Students learnt the differences between the medium of the graphic story, its tools, and the written short story. Their work clearly reflected that they were able to construct their own work based on acquired knowledge through the lecture given or their own research; for instance, they learnt to use visual cues to replace the verbosity of the written story. Collaboration and communication were shown as they made collective decisions about the appearances of their characters and settings. The usage of Pixton Application, plus their need to overcome its limitations by searching for and using other applications online, served to improve students' information and technology literacies.

It is also noteworthy that the feedback sessions throughout the project were crucial for developing critical thinking, social, and communication skills, and for fostering a sense of shared responsibility among the group for the product presented to the instructor. They also motivated the students to come up with creative solutions to questions and problems raised by the instructor. For instance, in one of the groups, the story ending was quite predictable. By challenging them, the instructor was able to

motivate them to come up with a brilliant, unexpected ending that turned around all the events in the story.

The final two steps for both case 1 and case 2, which were the design of the cover page and the presentation, motivated students to become active learners, as they even took the initiative to design a back cover and write a blurb, synopsis, or quotation reflecting the inherent message of their story. These two steps required students to use learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills, as they had to be creative and innovative, think critically, make decisions, collaborate, communicate, use the Internet and the computer to design their cover pages and presentations, and even reflect on their entire learning process for the sake of the presentation. They had to divide tasks, agree on the design for both the presentation and the cover page, and manage their time well to meet the final deadline. During the presentation, they needed to display their mastery of both verbal and body language. Students also divided the tasks of the final editing, compiling, and printing of the project. They, thus, acquired some of the basic skills necessary for project management.

At the end of the project, students learnt how to work alone and in a team, how to reflect on their mistakes and learn to correct them and avoid them in the future. They learnt to accept criticism and to use it constructively, and they learned how to navigate through the different media and technologies that are quickly emerging in today's world.

### VI. CONCLUSION

This study focused on the use of storytelling as an active learning approach to enhance 21st-century skills. While several studies have been conducted in the STEM field, the humanities discipline still needs further studies to show the effects of PBL and active approach on the enhancement of the much-needed 21st-century skills. Thus, the researchers recommend that future research would study this effect on Egyptian university students through a project in the translation field to help graduate motivated and creative translators ready for the job market. Moreover, this study has managed to assess all the targeted skills; however, leadership and initiative needed to be further spotlighted in the assessment.

Since this research has focused on fourth-year language students, it is recommended to test the effect of using this approach on students in other years at the university. The aim is to check whether it is better to conduct an entire project that targets all the 21st-century skills and all the aims of active learning, or whether it is better to target certain skills and aims according to the students' academic year.

As it is important to teach the 21st-century skills through an active learning approach and many schools and universities worldwide are targeting them in their curricula, it is important to prepare teachers to teach these skills by providing them with proper training.

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