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INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN DEVELOPING ALGERIAN LEARNERS' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract

Digital storytelling (henceforward DST) refers to the idea of mixing the traditional art of storytelling with a variety of technological and digital devices. It is one of the most effective teaching and learning techniques used by teachers to promote social-emotional learning atmosphere. The proponents of DST believe that this technique can enhance students' engagement, achievement and motivation. In this respect, this instructional innovation has revolutionized the traditional educational practices with its crucial role in developing learners' competencies, especially emotional intelligence (henceforward EI). This research paper investigates the effectiveness of using digital storytelling, in the department of English language at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University in Mostaganem, Algeria. It also examines the effects of this innovative technique on developing English as foreign language (henceforward EFL) learners' emotional intelligence. We employed a mixed methods design to cover the principal elements and queries of the research. We conducted an experiment that lasted for four weeks, a classroom observation and an emotional intelligence test for learners. The target population consisted of 44 third year bachelor students. They belonged to group one and group five at the University of Mostaganem. They were randomly selected to test the effectiveness of digital storytelling in developing their emotional intelligence. The results revealed a significant development of learners' emotional intelligence due to the DST project.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, emotional intelligence, social-emotional learning.

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, many practitioners and active teachers around the world have attempted to apply in their educational process new teaching and learning techniques using information and communication technologies (henceforward ICTs). The latter has dramatically transformed the usual educational norms, shifting from traditional to technology-based education. Digital storytelling (henceforward DST) is one new technique used in

education to promote learning. It is widely known as an entertaining and powerful pedagogical tool that can bring about several benefits for learning and teaching that engages both teachers and learners (Incikabi, 2015; Walters L.M., Green, Walters T.N., & Wang, 2015). Likewise, digital storytelling could provide a functioning social and emotional learning (henceforward SEL) atmosphere that has implications in enhancing students' learning. As digital storytelling is facilitated through the use of multiple digital tools and multimedia, it brings together an amalgamation of script, music, pictures and audio narration that allows learners to present their collected information through the medium of technology. To be more specific, in the Algerian context, the fashion of digital storytelling in education was not recognized by most teachers and learners; hence, few of them are familiar with this trend that has prevailed in the educational environments.

This study is motivated by the current gaps that exist between the skills students learn at university and the skills they need to operate successfully in the 21st century. In that, traditional learning falls short of providing them with the competencies and knowledge they need outside the classroom. Thence, digital technologies could transform the way people learn and the nature of work and social-emotional relationships. In particular, emotional intelligence (henceforward EI), decision-making, information sharing, innovation, creativity, collaboration are all of a great value in the 21st century, but traditional methods and approaches do not provide learners with these skills (Darling-Hammond, et al. 2008). Moreover, DST is a new educational tool that could assist learners in honing the skills required for effective operation in contemporary society (Robin, 2008).

A need for change is justified as teachers have to adopt new ways of teaching to help their students develop various competencies. Hence, this study investigates the effects of implementing digital storytelling in English as a foreign language (henceforward EFL) context in higher education, and the extent to which it helps students develop their emotional intelligence. This research work also aims at raising teachers' and learners' awareness of the importance of emotional intelligence and instilling the culture of digital storytelling. Therefore, the main issue raised in this study is as follows:

- Can digital storytelling assist EFL students in developing their emotional intelligence competencies?

Reflecting on the question above, we hypothesized that DST could be a good asset for EFL students as it promotes social and emotional learning atmosphere through providing a safe and comfortable environment, as well as encouraging interaction and collaboration between learners. It may also help learners to develop and strengthen their emotional intelligence competencies.

2. Literature Review

The enormous developments of digital technologies have changed the art of storytelling, giving birth to a movement called digital storytelling. As digital media has increasingly become a part of human life with its ever-changing format of images, applications, software, and hardware, it also allows us to change the way we tell stories in our global world.

The beginnings of the use of digital storytelling in education were a result of Lambert's and Ashley's creation of the Center for Digital Storytelling (henceforward CDS) in 1996. As CDS collaborated with various schools and universities to implement digital storytelling projects, the use of DST in education spread (Banaszewski, 2005). Moreover,

with the publication of Lambert's book; Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community (2002) and his development of the seven elements of digital storytelling, teachers gained further awareness of this educational technique and how it can be used in the classroom to promote the development of various skills. In this perspective, digital storytelling has been generally described as the process of commingling and weaving one's stories with digital sources such as music, audio, and text (Alrutz, 2014).

Using digital storytelling in the educational context has become increasingly common in higher education and a number of studies have been conducted to showcase the advantages of DST. For example, a quasi-experimental study was conducted in the EFL context to investigate the effects of digital storytelling on 6-year-old Spanish learners' listening comprehension. The results demonstrated the enhancement of the experimental group students' listening skills including an improvement in their foreign language 'linguistic structure' and ability to comprehend 'vocabulary', 'sound patterns', 'and prosody of the foreign language' (Verdugo & Belmonte, 2007, p.89).

Furthermore, Among the other proven benefits of digital storytelling is that it increases 21st century learners' level of attention in addition to stimulating their curiosity and interest (Robin, 2006). Students were found to develop a cooperative spirit as a result of group work, criticizing, and assessing their own and their peers' digital stories. It also "provides value in enhancing the student experience through personal ownership and accomplishment" (Robin, 2006, p.712).

From another angle, teachers are also capitalizing on the benefits of digital storytelling by making and exhibiting/presenting their own digital stories in their classes (Robin, 2006). Robin (2006) also noted that teacher-centred digital stories are substantially capable of assisting students to better understand the lesson's "abstract or conceptual content" in addition to becoming more engaged in the learning process (p.711).

The creation of digital narratives is a collaborative activity that enables social learning, which further enhances and stimulates emotional intelligence. For example, Frenzel, Müller & Sottong (2004) argue that "storytelling-based learning promotes knowledge as well as social and emotional intelligence" (as cited in Felicia, 2011, p.986). In this venture, a study that was carried out by Pieterse and Quilling (2011) of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa found that making and watching digital stories helped students change their preconceived ideas about others. Additionally, it has provided them with a positive emotional experience and development. Participants were also able to voice their leadership thoughts and make them heard by their adult counterparts as well their parents (Pieterse and Quilling, 2011). From a similar angle, a collaborative learning atmosphere would in itself be sufficient in boosting learners' EI through group discussions and work.

Moreover, there is a compelling relationship between emotional intelligence and individuals' ability to effectively function and work with other people as part of a team (Cox, 2011). In this regard, Slater (2005) emphasizes the fact that since "the key components of the collaborative process are inherently emotional in nature, leaders who are successful in developing collaborative work cultures may be those who are able to manage, rather than deny, their emotional selves" (Slater, 2005, p. 330 as cited in Cox, 2011, p.443).

To conclude, the irrevocable relationship between digital storytelling and emotional intelligence has not been widely researched, especially in the Algerian educational context. Emotions have been corroborated to be crucial in the process of learning and teaching. In this

regard, DST may assist learners in developing their EI and validating their emotions as it gives them voice and space. DST can "provide closure to deeply emotional issues in … [students] lives" (Robin & Pierson 2005, p.713) although "[t]he emotional potential of digital storytelling, however, is still largely untapped" (Miller, 2008, p.19).

3. Methodology

We used a mixed methods design to gather the data needed for the validation of our research work. The research tools were an Emotional Intelligence Test to measure students' EI and a classroom observation in order to qualitatively gauge learners' EI development and provide a more in-depth analysis. We observed them in natural settings with their learning process during the oral expression sessions.

3.3 Context

We carried out the research study at Abdelhamid IBn Badis University, English language department, Mostaganem, Algeria. This setting was chosen because it fitted the requirements of our experiment such as the availability of rooms equipped with projectors.

3.4 Participants

The target population, for this study, consists of 44 third year bachelor students. They belong to group one and group five at the University of Mostaganem. Their ages are between 18 and 24 years old. They are randomly selected to scrutinize and investigate the effectiveness of DST in developing their emotional intelligence.

3.5 Procedures

The experiment lasted for four weeks with third year bachelor students, specifically, group one and five in the department of English language, at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University. Our experimentation was based on various lessons taken mostly from the Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling website in which learners were introduced to DST. Its process was based on Dávid Bán's and Balázs Nagy's (2016) model "The Digital Storytelling Workshop Step by Step" which is further modified to suit the demands of our context. The experiment took place every Wednesday from 9.30 till 11.00 with group one and from 11.00 till 12.30 with group five for four weeks.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments used in this research are an experiment conducted at different stages, a classroom observation and an EI test for learners in which it was taken in a modified fashion from Anapyts Development model 2013.

4. Results

The following section presents the data collected in the observation sessions as well as students' answers on the emotional intelligence test.

4.3 The Effects of Digital Storytelling on Learners' Emotional Intelligence

This section discusses the analysis of the data collected from learners' responses on the emotional intelligence test and via classroom observation to gauge their level of EI before and after the experiment. The classroom observation and emotional intelligence test are analyzed and illustrated as follows:

4.1.1. Classroom Observation

a- Pre-Experiment Observation

We attended four sessions with third-year bachelor students (group 1 and 5) to collect information about their emotional intelligence quotient and to see whether it is possible to realize the experiment with them.

We observed that learners' self-awareness and self-regulation were low; most of them could not regulate their emotions, especially when responding to the teacher's comments or working in groups. They also demonstrated lack of confidence and high anxiety. Students' undesirable reaction to criticism and feedback was also detected. Additionally, we deduced that learners' motivation was low as volunteering, risk-taking, engagement and participation were rarely observed, for example, when the lecturer asked them to volunteer and prepare a story for the coming week or be the first to present.

In addition, when the lecturer asked students to give their points of view on the presentations or ideas of their colleagues, they did not demonstrate empathy. They did not provide constructive feedback, and sometimes their answers showed that they were not actively listening. When one female student expressed a personal opinion regarding the negative effects of polygamy and spinsterhood, she was faced with a high lack of empathy, negative opinions and comments from her colleagues. Rather than dealing analytically with facts, they addressed the topic from a subjective point of view. In addition, they did not take turns when speaking or respect conversation etiquettes. The lecturer had to intervene to calm down the situation.

Besides, we examined social skills through collaborative work. For instance, in the second session, the teacher asked her learners to work as a group and each one should re-tell the story that his/her classmate wants to write in the future, i.e. each student should present the story of his/her classmate. Students at this stage were discussing the ways stories will be told and performed. Some students said "you write in details which story you want to write, and I do the same and when you finish give it to me to read it, and I will try to paraphrase it, and you should do the same" others said, "I talk about mine, you talk about yours". Instead of listening to and communicating with each other, each learner was working individually. From these comments, we could infer that their social skills and ability to communicate with each other, were highly low and weak.

Additionally, the teacher could not control the classroom as students' side conversations dominated oral expression sessions. She usually used her coercive power by warning and punishing students in order to make them listen to each other and follow her instructions. After the last observational session, students were handed an EI questionnaire in order to collect quantitative data that would either support or disprove our preliminary findings.

b- During-Experiment Observation

We observed learners when working as a group in the classroom during the story circle sessions in order to trace the developmental journey that students were going through as they became aware of emotional intelligence and its significance.

- **Session One**

Learners showed a massive interest in emotional intelligence after the EI test they took in the pre-experiment stage. Many of them admitted their prior lack of awareness of this type of intelligence, but once they took it, they started re-considering their emotional intelligence level. After they have watched our digital story, they started reflecting on the situation described in the given story, empathetically and positively. They attempted to see the problem elucidated in the digital narrative from the Narrator's and the Character's perspectives and points of view. They started to describe their ability to be self-aware and control their emotions as if they were the storyteller. When illustrating the idea of creating a digital story, we observed an increased motivation in the classroom and on the Facebook Group about the process of realizing this project. Unlike the pre-experiment sessions where students refused communicating with us, many of them took the risk of developing their social skills and started sharing their fears and anxieties with others. One of the learners said: "We could share our fears and experiences with everyone in the classroom, thanks to this story, but I think creating our own story will be highly beneficial". In conclusion, learners elucidated a willingness to develop their emotional intelligence and felt that the DST process would be helpful.

- **Session Two**

During the second session, we observed an enhancement in learners' EI. We can say that learners moved from being in the lowest level of EI to a moderate state. Learners started appreciating and respecting each other's contributions wherein they became active listeners. Learners revealed the topics of their stories varying from educative, instructional, to historical. They produced a personal story with various subjects in groups, such as: "Over Weight", "Facing Fears", "Trust God", "Jerusalem", "Social Anxiety", "Being Born", "Keep Faith", "The Lost luggage", "The Fated Chance of Friendship", "The Pursuit of Happiness", "Mulan", "Life Experiences", "Time Is Remedy", "The Aged Mother", "Ratatouille", "The Giving Tree". The students commented on and asked questions about the stories in the story circle sessions. Their reactions to the feedback was not negative as they tried to benefit from their classmates' comments. For instance, when the first group talked about their story "Social Anxiety" and shared their narrative, prompt feedback was given. One student said, "I believe that your story is well-structured, but I think that you need some examples to illustrate more". Another student declared "I find the topic a little bit general, and I think you should either add a definition at the beginning of the story or do something to make it clearer and attractive".

The group accepted these pieces of advice wholeheartedly and integrated the proposed changes into their digital stories. In other words, there were less negative reactions to criticism and greater comfort with the uncertainty of the teacher or their classmates. For example, when the teacher pointed out that the story of "Mulan" should be shortened to draw their classmates' attention to the message of their digital story, they accepted the teacher's comments and modified their story. Some students stood up and asked for feedback to create a treasured digital story. Besides, students' motivation has noticeably increased, in which it was middling and almost reaching accepted levels of enhancement. In a similar angle, learners became more aware of other emotions, and they consummately progressed towards achieving higher levels of empathy. Although their social skills were developing slowly, there was a clear shift in terms of valuing their friends' efforts.

- **Session Three**

Differing levels of digital literacy did not present an issue as everyone was able to work collaboratively with others. Although our context has many limitations, we could pursue our aim and could realize the project in which learners showed their willingness to bring their laptops and work in the classroom. Eventually, this session was devoted to digital storytelling creation in the class, where learners sat in groups and helped each other. Though many obstacles appeared at the beginning of the session, collaboration and the emotional intelligence spirit made it special for everyone. Their competencies were gradually improving. Self-awareness and self-regulation were detected as students exhibited high control of their emotions when they moved to different classes in addition to some learners who were struggling with digital programs. We observed accurate self-assessment as they could assess their digital skills and EI development honestly and self-confidently. Despite the issues that could arise with group work, we noticed that many learners tried to manage and control their negative emotions and stress by empathizing with and learning from their classmates instead of providing unconstructive feedback. Learners become more empathetic as they tried to help each other while respecting differences in level of digital literacy. There was also much evidence of student motivation and engagement in their actions, happy faces, and the large number of questions they asked whether related to their specific topics or not. In the same vein, people's skills unexpectedly flourished during this class; their motivation led them to participation and risk-taking. Generally, learners transformed in a constructive way as they made attempts to behave in a more emotionally intelligent way.

- **Session Four**

The last session was devoted mostly to the presentation of the digital stories with feedback provided by peers. In doing so, learners appeared to be more aware of their EI and considerate in the wording of their feedback and actions. Throughout this session, we could detect that learners appeared to possess self-awareness, which was evident in their high self-confidence, self-esteem, and ability to word their feelings in front of their classmates which dominated the oral expression sessions. Many students could monitor their negative emotions when confronting and presenting their digital stories in front of others, in which self-confidence was adopted by many of them; this treat has characterized many students' presentations and general attitudes. In a similar vein, they showed improved self-regulation, especially when receiving comments and critiques on their answers, performances and presentations of digital stories.

Furthermore, it seems that technology motivates learners more than the traditional way of learning and teaching. Additionally, they seemed more excited and intrinsically motivated, participating and taking risks. Furthermore, their empathy altered as well in which they became more careful with their comments and prejudices. They tried to understand their mates and change their judgemental glasses into empathetic ones. In a similar aspect, social skills improved as learners could stand on the stage and talk to their classmates. Learners did not ridicule others' mistakes, but they supported each other. Among other matters we observed was that while some students were sitting alone before the experiment, they moved to sit with others during the experiment. In other words, DST project allowed them to broaden their social network. The participants were also able to communicate and work collaboratively with some guest classmates from the other group as well as some Master's students. Nevertheless, despite all these improvements, we would argue that although the DST project helped students shift their focus towards the importance of emotional

intelligence, they still need more time, practice and knowledge about the different ways they can enhance their Emotional Intelligence.

4.1.2. Emotional Intelligence Test

In addition to the observation, we designed an EI test to equip our findings with credibility and reliability. At this stage, 44 students participated in answering the EI test, and the responses were analysed quantitatively from very low to very high emotional intelligence. The analysis of the EI test enlightened and provided us with more credibility that was relevant to our observation outcomes. In this respect, we asked the respondents to be honest since this test is of high importance and value.

a. *Analysis of the Pre-experiment Emotional Intelligence Test*

The pre-experiment test aimed at gauging learners' EI before the integration of digital storytelling in the classroom. The following figure further discloses the findings of the pre-experiment emotional intelligence test:

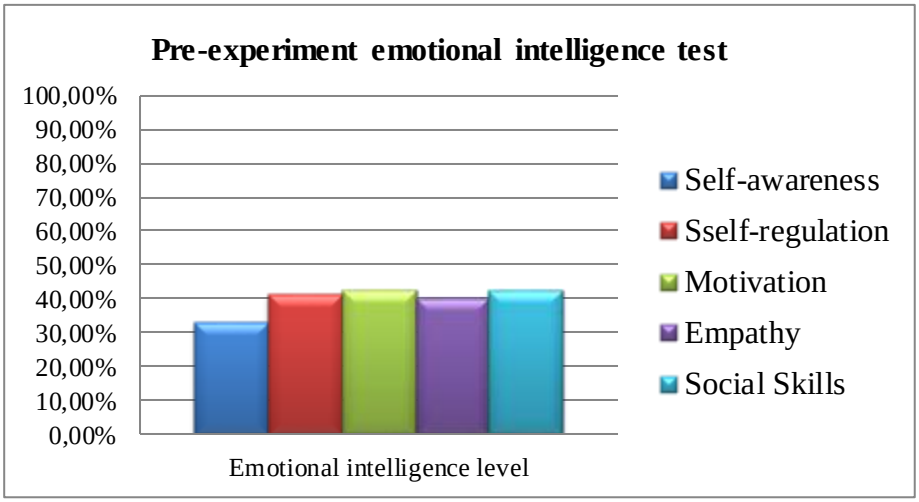

Figure 1. Pre-experiment Emotional Intelligence Test

Figure 1 shows varying rates of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. There are low to moderate rates on all different components of EI. In particular, students' self-awareness is low with a percentage of 33.33%. Their self-regulation competency level is also low, and amelioration should be considered with a rate of 41.67%.

As motivation fluctuates between low and moderate levels of EI with a percentage of 42.83%, it is also necessary to increase this EI component. Learners' empathy is poor and requires further development with a percentage of 40.5%. Finally, students lack social skills as they fluctuate between low and moderate levels of EI with a percentage of 42.67%.

b. Analysis of the Post-Experiment Emotional Intelligence Test

The post-experiment test aimed to measure the emotional intelligence of learners after incorporating digital storytelling in the classroom. The following figure shows the results of this test:

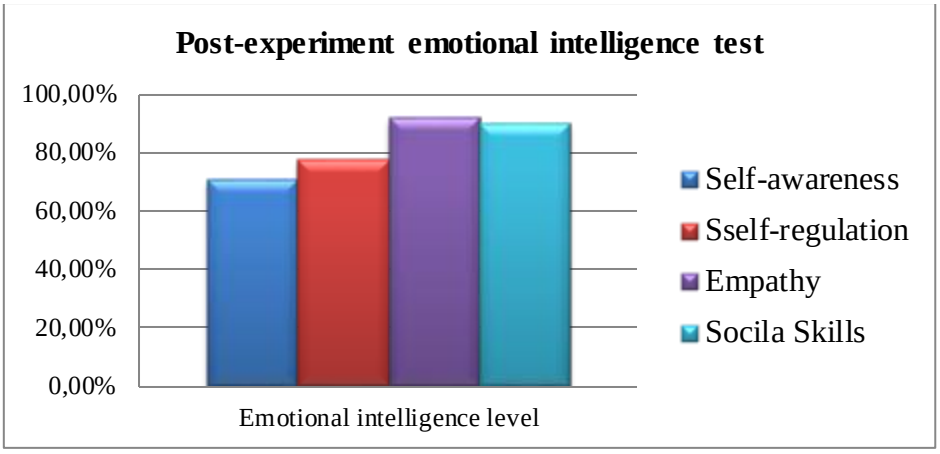

Figure 2. Post-experiment Emotional Intelligence Test

The above figure presents the results of the post-experiment emotional intelligence test. First, their self-awareness becomes at a high percentage of 70.83%. In parallel, their self-regulation competency is developing after the experiment, but it still needs further attention with a rate of 77.33%. In keeping with this perspective, students' motivation is increasing in which a shift towards high intrinsic motivation is recognised with a percentage of 86.83%. Regarding empathy, consummate resettlement of this competency is also noticed with a high rate of 91.67%. In a parallel fashion, social skills are enhancing, and a move towards perfection is observed with a percentage of 89.83%.

5. Discussion

The findings of the pre-experiment EI test indicated that the learners participating in the study needed to work to develop this competency, as the results of their EI test either fluctuated greatly or revealed a number of gaps. Furthermore, through classroom observation, we could figure out that learners lacked many competencies such as social skills and empathy. This lack of social skills and empathy caused problems for the teacher who sometimes used threats and wielded her coercive power to make them respect her and others. Before the experiment, the culture of emotional intelligence was not incorporated in the classroom as students demonstrated unawareness of this area of competency through portraying irresponsible attitudes towards the teacher and their classmates.

The learning atmosphere transformed greatly when students heard that we are going to use digital tools in the classroom. During the story circle sessions, learners became more enthusiastic, started admiring what they were doing in oral expression sessions, they asked questions, shared personal stories happy and sad, talked about the history of Algeria, moral lessons, etc. Several students portrayed an urge and an impetus towards developing their EI and creating their digital stories. By the end of the workshop, we observed a change in learners' emotional intelligence which was measured quantitatively through EI test in which the results were distinct from the pre-experiment EI test.

It was evident that digital storytelling affected learner EI in several ways. Initially, by comparing how the students were before the integration of this innovative technique and after the realization of the project, we confirm that DST is beneficial for students' EI development. In the pre-experiment phase, students were neither sure of themselves nor aware of their emotions and how they affect their actions. They were unable to cope with their feelings which were often embodied in their angry attitudes towards feedback. They could not see the

world from other's point of view. These negative dispositions were almost eliminated during the experiment as they developed a greater awareness of EI, and its importance and they learned how to give constructive criticism and feedback. Also, they could display EI behaviour that allowed them to share and receive experiences and emotions. Positive attitudes are clarified, and willingness to accept the emotions, opinions and comments of others has become a defining characteristic of their reactions.

Finally, we can say that digital storytelling can help learners develop their EI, specifically when using this technique in collaborative groups. In better words, DST process including story circle, writing the narrative, the multiple choices that DST offers, collaboratively collecting digital tools, all of these can assist learners in developing and improving their emotional intelligence competencies.

In conclusion, assessing and measuring learners' emotional intelligence is neither an easy task nor a stable one, i.e. we utilized a number of data collection tools to supply our hypotheses with reliable data.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we investigated the effectiveness of digital storytelling in developing students' emotional intelligence at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University. We endeavoured to find a modern way to help today's generation develop their emotional intelligence. Achieving such an aim required the implementation of a carefully designed experiment coupled by/with classroom observation and the administration of an EI test as valid data collection instruments. Our results indicate that this new technology-based way of telling stories can assist learners in improving one of the most primordial competencies in the 21st century which is emotional intelligence.

To conclude, digital storytelling can consolidate and reinforce learners' EI as well as other 21st skills such as collaboration, digital literacy, creativity, etc. It also assists teachers in creating a classroom environment that is motivating and allows room for creativity and innovation. Accordingly, digital storytelling integration is warranted as the Algerian Universities mainly utilise rote-learning approaches to teaching without trying technology-based techniques such as DST.

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