ENHANCING VOCABULARY AND WRITING SKILLS THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the benefits of using Digital Storytelling (DST) in language classes in higher education. The study also aims to explore the appropriate classroom activities which assist language teaching and learning. The thirteen-week study adopted a pretest and posttest quasi-experimental design involving a group of 20 postgraduate students and research scholars in two English classes. Qualitative data were collected, questionnaire responses for learning, as well as recordings of student interviews for evaluating the effectiveness of DST in learning. Descriptive analysis and qualitative content analysis was used for evaluating the obtained data. Our findings indicate that DST is happy with DST and they feel they learned a lot from DST, especially their written skills and enhanced the high level of vocabulary.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Higher Education, Enhancing Vocabulary, improving classroom teaching, Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Famous Victorian critic Matthew Arnold (1882) wrote an essay entitled 'Literature and Science'. The essay discussed the relationship between literature and science. As stated by Arnold, "literature is the basis for 'knowing ourselves and the world', and science 'it is one thing to just look at literature." It implies that a human being in its full form, however, science studies the human being its incomplete form.

21st century learning happens in a swiftly changing and innovation suffused condition. increasing classroom availability of emerging preparing and training learners with the skills required for 21st century citizenship is the challenges which researchers and practitioners face in this new millennium. Publications by the partnership for 21st - century skills (2004) and other researchers (e.g., Crane et al., 2003; Eisler, 2006; Robin, 2008) have supported a focus on core subjects, critical thinking, and learning motivation, along with information literacy. Looking for an interaction of technological advancements with developments in pedagogy, researchers have recommended that an ideal combination of social constructivism and technology-integrated learning is important for science is only a part of the literature. Numerous past authors have composed on the connection amongst literature and science. D.H. Lawrence, a well-known novelist likened literature with science, medicine, and philosophy. He believes that, literature studies technologies and access to an abundance of information is the key characteristics of this environment, (e.g., mobile learning devices, online applications, and social media tools), (Malita and Martin, 2010; Robin, 2008).

Attaining modern educational objectives (Koohang, Riley, Smith, and Schreurs, 2009; Neo and Neo, 2010; Sadik, 2008). Social constructivist basics bring out the importance of students' collaboration in using available tools and learning activities within an authentic environment in constructing and reconstructing ideas and beliefs (Vygotsky and Cole, 1978). Knowledge is actively constructed by each student or group of students through their interactions with their physical, social, and technological environment, but of course not simply transmitted from instructor to student (Fosnot, 1996; Prawat,

1996). In recent years, our lives have become significantly involved and interlinked with technological tools. Developing technology resulted in new generations being more technology-friendly than their parents and, even more so, their grandparents. The generational differences in our technologically advanced society do not escape the eyes and interest of many researchers in various fields. Consequently, scholars have discussed that "the impact of the digital technologies and especially the Internet in the 21st century post-secondary classroom is unquestionable and dramatic" (Tamim, Lowerison, Schmid, Bernard, and Abrami, 2011, p.2). Storytelling is a powerful way to express ideas and communicate experiences. Since, the definition of subjects, as far back as Aristotle's tutoring experiences, storytelling has been part of teaching (Alexander, 2011). In fact, writing is another form of storytelling. The rapid development of information technology, "made students live in a world that has been transformed by technology, and they are often raised to as 'digital natives' because their experience to digital resources begins at birth" (Morgan, 2014, p.20).

Storytelling can be used to enhance learning outcomes for general, scientific, and technical education. In general, it is a powerful pedagogical paradigm (Sharda, 2007).

1. Concepts

The American Digital Storytelling Association defines digital storytelling as 'the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling (in which) stories derive their power by weaving images, music, narrative, and voice together, giving deep dimension and vivid color to the characters, situations, experience, and insights'.

A combination of a spoken 'text' with still images, music or sound to create what is in effect a short 'mini-movie (5 Minutes) can be called digital story.

Digital storytelling, thence, is a process of creating a short purposeful movie with various multimedia components in order to create an engaging presentation.

The use of digital storytelling in education allows students to express their thoughts and ideas in a different, hopefully creative, way.

Digital storytelling is being used as a method of promoting students' reflection on their learning, and can be equally used as a process to support reflection and/or as a method of assessment. The emphasis of digital storytelling has to be on the story itself, rather than the technology. "Story without digital works, but digital without a story doesn't" (Ohler, 2008, p.xviii).

2. Digital Storytelling and Academic Attainment

The effect of innovative technology-based instructional guidelines on students' academic performance must be evaluated rather than the attention to fitting options for instructors. Scholars have observed the efficiency of digital storytelling in increasing learners' academic attainment. The academic success correlates positively with the oral behaviors of repeating, chanting, and singing, at an early stage of language acquisition. This achievement has been proven by the researchers (Ellis, 1993; Gomez, Arai, and Lowe, 1995; Schank, 1990; Tsou, 2003) in connection with language learning.

Actually, listening and narrating to stories shapes early learning and can even affect the nature of our intelligence (Schank, 1990; Tsou, 2003). The efficiency of digital storytelling particularly has been proven for developing listening comprehension skills in elementary school English as a second language learner (Tsou, Wang, and Tzeng, 2006; Verdugo and Belmonte, 2007). The suggestions of the authors for the further studies should include different age groups and explore other linguistic areas such as reading and writing, which could further substantiate the link between a media-rich environment and language learning.

3. DST and Vocabulary Development

Many studies have shown that using stories in the foreign language teaching classroom is a powerful and effective way to improve and develop the four basic skills of language: speaking, writing, listening, and reading.

Moreover, making students participate in such activities can motivate them to be active learners, developing within them a constructive approach towards English language learning (Cameron, 2005; Isabel, et al., 2004; Haven, 2000). According to Isabel et al., (2004: 158) stories are influential educational means for second language learning and teaching. They attract the students' attention

to use new words and assist them in the creation of new vocabularies by the help of participation and interaction (ibid). This is the reason that the teachers in the classrooms in many parts of the world have been reusing this method of learning for the young learners (ibid).

Haven (2000:75) in his research demonstrated that stories which have been used particularly by young learners had a strong and inspiring effect. He declared that the conceptual and factual information has been learned faster and also remembered longer when that information is delivered as a well-told story. He explained that's those teachers who are dealing with elementary level learners should consider such a strategy specifically in vocabulary teaching. This researcher discussed that this strategy could be incorporated into different kind of materials such as computers, internet, musical instruments, pictures, and textbooks in a way that would be of high motivational effect and fun for the youngers (ibid).

Cameron (2001) stated that we, as foreign language teachers should try to involve our learners in DST project taking care of more than just language forms and performing language skills in a most natural way. Karlsson (2012) in his survey on enhancing CLT by stories in the second language classroom demonstrated that listening to stories can naturally lead to storytelling while reading stories can equally naturally lead to story writing. In his conclusion he declared, because young learners acquire language instinctively, the activities teachers do in class should assist this achievement. He argues that for the teachers the most valuable resource which can offer children a world of meaning are stories. Even later on teachers can use these stories to "assist children to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing" (ibid).

4. Purpose of the Study

The researchers have for many years been interested in innovative approaches to learning in higher education, with the strong belief that offering learners the conducive access to new learning, sharing, and acquisition of knowledge through teaching-learning tools. The latter contributes in enabling the learning processes in our technologically-dominated world.

The objective of the study is to examine the benefits of using Digital Storytelling in language classes. It also aims to explore the appropriate classroom activities which assist language teaching and learning.

Digital storytelling bears productive potential for learning as a learner-centered activity in Higher Education. More specifically, this research intends to empirically investigate the following research question:

- What are the potentials for learning when digital storytelling is used as a second language learning activity?

Here, the kind of learning would be self-learning, as perceived by the students and expressed through their reflections.

4.1 Statement of Hypotheses

This hypothesis is limited to the second language activity in terms of developing and acquisition of a higher level of vocabulary. This hypothesis can be outlined as:

- When DST is used as a second language learning activity, it increases the written skill ability and enhances the use of higher level vocabulary.

5. Significance of the Study

This work benefits students in three ways: It gives them an opportunity to express their own ideas, interests, and dislikes; also, it forces students to use more complex sets of structures and a presumably advanced range of vocabulary.

6. Research Design

This research project aims to explore the impact of digital storytelling on students' learning engagement and outcomes. It focuses on exploring the potential of digital storytelling as an innovative teaching and learning approach in higher Education.

The selected students had the opportunity to engage themselves in innovative learning experiences based on digital storytelling. In order to enhance the reliability and validity of the research, multiple methods of data collection and analysis have been used. Data are collected primarily by adapting the qualitative method. Questionnaires, Reflection logs, Interviews and finally observation of all data have been used to collect qualitative data.

6.1 Subjects

The study was conducted in a group of (n=20) students who have been selected randomly as subjects on a voluntary basis. The students (Postgraduate and Research Scholars) are selected from the Department of English and Cultural Studies, Punjab University, Chandigarh, India. The selected students are the subjects of the study because, in higher education, a higher level of vocabulary is required.

These students got admitted to the University based on the entrance exam. That is why the researcher did not attempt the research study on students from the lower level. In fact, the researcher is investigating into the advanced level of vocabulary as DST will involve a higher level of vocabulary which is required for higher education.The second reason is the study of the drama, literature in postgraduate courses. All the data collection takes place at the Department of English and Cultural Studies, Punjab University, Chandigarh, India. The digital storytelling project carried out in this group based on Shakespeare's tragic play, King Lear (1608).

6.2 Procedure

Before starting the experiment, the researcher arranged several meetings and discussions related to studying the play, and both efferent and aesthetic dimensions were touched upon in order to contextualize the book's topics. These meetings helped the students to understand the digital storytelling method as well, including DST based instruction, and to know how to work with Adobe Premiere Pro5 software.

Each student has his/her own profile. The students learned how to draw a storyboard before creating their DST and how to edit and sync their narration (own voice) with pictures and music. During this, they were asked to write down their stories which are based and related to Shakespeare's play, King Lear. In fact, this textbook is being taught at postgraduate level in the classroom and students are to be tested in the same.

At the beginning of the class, the researcher poses certain questions about a topic based on contexts or experiences related to the students' books. Writing a script, which reflects a logical story or sequence of events would be the next step. Students must find out a topic to write their script based on King Lear. When they complete their writings, they question each other engaging in peer evaluating or training. Narrating the stories in a traditional way would be the next step, which helps in the finding of the details important to their stories. Next, a story map must be designed to show the main competence of the story and their connection to the overall narrative.

An immediate evaluation of students' stories and feedback on how to progress incapable elements of their stories would be the main story mapping offers. Furthermore, in a story map, (see Figure 1) students represent their stories, placing the sequence of scenes, effects, and other digital elements.

Instead of the multimedia component, a focus on the content in each task in this pre-production paper-based is required. The main process for creating digital stories in the final product media-based is writing scripts and story handling. Recording own voice, and preparing the multimedia component would be during the production stage. In the post-production stage, the content is settled and edited into a digital story.

The student will share their ideas, comments, and digital stories with their peers in the distribution stage.

6.3 Implementation of DST in the Classroom

The following steps were used to help students easily integrate digital storytelling. it could give clear techniques on the most proficient method to incorporate digital storytelling when pupils don't have any experience in the digital story. (Bull and Kajder, 2005; Lasica, 2006; Miller, 2009; Ohler, 2008; Robin, 2006; Sadik, 2008; Sharda,

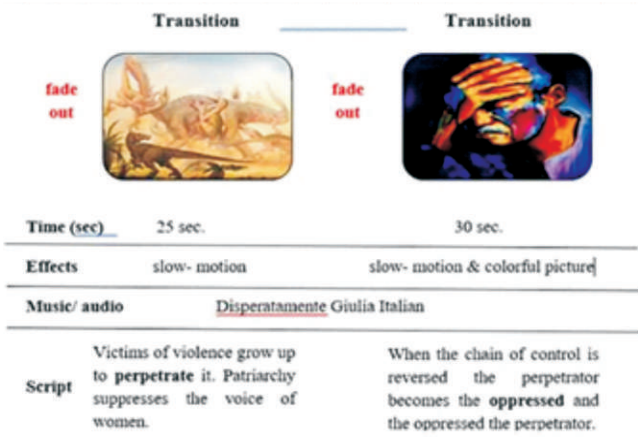

Figure 1. Student- Created Storyboard based on Shakespeare's Play, King Lear

2007a; University of Houston, 2011).

6.3.1 Students' Workshop

There were two workshops and their main aims follow:

1. Introducing DST (Workshop 1):

- Aim: Description of digital storytelling
- Implementer: Researchers
- Description: Digital experiences of the students with sound, video, and storytelling was the first conversation of the workshop. it followed by an indication of probable methods for involving students and improving the results of learning by using digital storytelling as a medium. The next step was exploring the strong ability of digital storytelling as a learning and teaching means among the constructivist paradigm.

2. Introduce Adobe Premiere Pro5 software (Workshop 2):

- Aim: Describe how to create a digital story with the Adobe Premiere Pro5 software
- Implementer: Researchers
- Description: in this workshop Adobe Premiere Pro5 software was introduced to the students with an explanation of how to create a digital story using this software, and various features and options available in Adobe Premiere Pro5 were demonstrated.

7. Methods

The concentration of this research would be on the level of the student interactions and the educational results related to the outcomes of utilizing digital storytelling. subsequently, this exploration aims to investigate the academic advantages of digital storytelling; In order to achieve a complete understanding of these phenomena, qualitative data have been collected. In order to enhance the reliability and validity of the research, multiple methods of data collection, and analysis have been used. Data are collected primarily by adapting the qualitative method. Questionnaires, Reflection logs, Interviews and finally observation of all data have been used to collect qualitative data.

7.1 Observation

After Questionnaires, Reflection logs, Interviews the researchers believe that observations are part of the conclusion of the data collection and the research. This tool contains three different forms.

7.1.1 Summary of Data from the Candidate

In the observations, the researchers checked the profile of each candidate by giving the summary of the data and the evaluated of the candidate.

7.1.2 Evaluation

For evaluating the quality of Digital Stories, observations, and a scoring rubric have been used by the researchers. There were two different aims in this phase, the first one is to document the provision of better education through digital storytelling and the second one is to evaluate the level of student engagement.

With the help of scoring rubric, the level of engagement which is quantity would be measured. As reported by Sadik (2008), to evaluate ICT- based learning project it is suitable to use an assessment instrument, like a scoring rubric. Hence by means of an evaluation rubric, the role of DST in understanding student engagement and outcomes in reliable learning has been evaluated.

An evaluation rubric created by the University of Houston (2011) has been chosen as a guideline to create the rubric fit for this research. This rubric has been used to assess students' success and level of engagement in authentic learning using digital storytelling.

7.1.3 Comparison

Finally, after the evaluation of all the candidate profiles has been given, the comparison of the digital story will be present; to give a comparative picture and to show that which story is the most successful or less successful.

8. Methods of Analysis

A subject-based analysis has been used to structure most of the data in this study, i.e. the open question from the questionnaires, the interviews, and the reflection logs.

8.1 Quantitative Analysis

The 18 closed questions in the questionnaires from the 20 respondents were analyzed quantitatively. The researcher, to get an overview and a first impression of the material, structured the data in an Excel spreadsheet. He carried out very simple statistic univariate analyses, where he looked at

average scores, as well as minimum and maximum scores. He next compared the answers given, constantly looking for what could be interesting aspects to include in the interview guide. Based on this, he made a few tables, simply for the sake of giving himself an even better overview of the material. A few bivariate analyses were also carried out. These were mainly related to looking for differences between genders, as one of the variables, compared to various other variables.

8.2 Qualitative Analysis

Twenty interviews constitute the primary source of data in this study. The focus was on the meaning and the content, not on how the research participants expressed the meaning.

9. Finding

Since reflections on learning are central keywords in the researchers' main research question, the researchers were keen on discovering how students would describe learning and how they would look at second language learning outcomefrom digital storytelling as compared to other ways of working in English.

Analyses of all three bodies of data (questionnaires, interviews, and reflection logs) form the basis of the triangulation carried out for the subject Learning and show that the research participants conceive of learning vocabulary.

In one of the questions, the respondents were asked to select how important 17 different declarations were when deciding whether to choose digital storytelling or another way of working with a topic in English if there was a choice. The Likert 4 measure was used with the following answer alternatives: "Particularly significance", "considerable amount of significance", "some significance", and "no significance". Investigation of the surveys demonstrated that 17 of the 20 respondents said that the following declarations had either "particularly significance" or "a considerable amount of significance" for them if they somehow managed to pick digital storytelling as a favored learning movement in English:

"Using DST in English is a way to work on which means I can be more active and engaged in my learning work than when I work in others ways. It helps me a lot to enhance vocabulary and even teach lots of vocabulary to the audience."

The researchers observed that there was a dominant part of young ladies who had selected the following declarations as having "Particularly significance" or "considerable amount of significance".

(18 of 20) research participants see learning potentials related to written skills development in digital storytelling activities in English. Those who do mention the written part as an important learning outcome, point to various aspects related to writing a script. Respondent 4 mentions working on the high level of vocabulary, whereas respondent 11 points to practicing spelling and grammar.

For some of them, the fact that digital stories are short, terse stories where the writer is told to restrict his or her text to around 150 – 300 words is actually a good thing, especially for those students who are not fond of writing longer texts. Komal is an M.A student. she hence finds script writing for digital stories to be a good way of practicing and documenting her written skills. This is also why she believes that teachers should assess all parts of a storytelling production, not only the oral part.

Anmol actually points to rephrasing as related to developing her vocabulary in English. She gives an example:

"Because a digital story script has to be short, I always look for a way to use one great word instead of three words. For example, if I use otherwise instead of if not, then I can save one more word" (Anmol).

9.1 The Impact of DST on Student Outcome

In addition to observations of the above methods, a scoring rubric was used to assess the quality of digital stories. There are two different aims in this stage; the first one is to evaluate the level of student engagement, and to record the arrangement of better instruction results through digital storytelling would be the second one.

The evaluation rubric in learning aspects criteria include:

a) Purpose.

b) Grammar, vocabulary and language usage.

The findings of this research indicate students scored very

good and excellent in purpose and grammar and language usage criteria. However, students performed effectively in grammar and language usage especially use of vocabulary since their knowledge of English was high as they were studying in a higher level of education. According to Lambert (2007), it was imperative to identify the purpose of the story, so that all parts contributed. The grammar and vocabulary used in the story can be anything from simple to complex.

10. Discussion

All traditional literacies, also writing could encompass by digital storytelling as a language learning method. It is differing to write a script for a digital story however from other written formats. This phenomenon is due to that students are supposed to write a script of 150-300 words, which is a rather limited length for some of them. In line with respondent's 5 reflections, the written part of a digital storytelling production is not necessarily an "easy solution" for those who do not like to write longer texts, as some of the respondents commented on in the questionnaires. Since, quality means more than quantity, to refer to respondent's 5 words from the interview, the researchers will argue that this might require even more of the writer. The economy is a crucial word and applies both to vocabulary and to sentence construction. A script for a digital story is ideally short, terse and to the point, and requires that the storyteller reflects on every single choice of word.The researchers will, therefore, argue that even though the written text in a digital story is shorter than in other genres, it nevertheless requires quite a lot from the storyteller. This means that there are challenges to be found in digital storytelling also for every student. As Ohler (2008) says: "The shorter time frame forces storytellers to weed out what isn't truly important and prioritize what is" (ibid., p. 33).

Conclusion

The researchers found that the research participants seem to understand digital storytelling as a learning tool that embraces many of the main areas in the subject (i.e. English as a second language), in one and the same activity. These participants see DST as an activity to access other aims, or as an achievement in itself. Furthermore, these participants declare their concern about the amount of the time that DST may take at the University mainly a various technical problem that might happen, even, not having access to the instrument they needed, when they want it.

The present students believe that DST helps them to find, use, learn, and teach each other various amount of vocabulary and moreover helps them to think critically due to the limitation of script writing and presented digitally. Finally, it seems that if digital storytelling is to be perceived as more than a happening that contributes to variation, a structured scaffolding and contextualization must be approached. This applies to the content topic as well as to relevant linguistic matters.

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