

THE POTRAITS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING: A DIGITAL STORYTELLING PROJECT IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

Digital storytelling (DST) has gained significant popularity as an instructional method in English language teaching. However, limited research has focused on investigating the experiences of secondary school students learning to create digital stories in the context of English as a foreign language. To address this research gap, this study presents collaborative writing as an approach utilizing digital storytelling in an Indonesian secondary school English classroom. The project involved collaborative activities where six groups of 36 students collectively participated in the creation of digital stories. These activities encompassed various DST projects, including selecting a story theme, developing the narrative, revising the storyline, and presenting the final product digitally. The findings of this case study indicate that student participants were able to enhance their story literacy skills, foster digital literacy development, engage actively in the story drafting process, and enhance their competence in creating and publishing digital storytelling content. Based on these outcomes, the study suggests that genre-based digital storytelling holds the potential to effectively engage secondary school students in English language learning while simultaneously enhancing their technological literacy.

Keywords – Collaborative writing; digital storytelling project; secondary school

Introduction

A growing number of studies are now looking at how Digital Storytelling (DST) is used in education, starting with elementary, secondary, and higher education. Because the technological revolution and globalization have had such a profound impact on the conceptualization of literacy practice in the 21st century, it is imperative that educators implement effective instructional strategies that incorporate or blend both traditional and emerging literacies (Mills, 2010). According to some sources (Dousay, 2015; Greene, Burke, & McKenna, 2018), DST could be an effective way to meet this demand.

The research projects emphasize the opportunity that DST offers to make it simpler for students to develop their communicative and narrative competences (Ohler, 2013), as well as the digital competences that are typical of

twenty-first century society (Malita & Martin, 2010), in addition to emphasize its contribution to the improvement of students' academic performance (Figg, McCartney & Gonsoulin, 2010). Digital storytelling's (DST) contribution to ELT during the past ten years has received much attention (Ferdiansyah, 2023). DST creation is a significant learning activity that aids in the development of digital, narrative, and creative competences, among other things (Villalustre-Martinez & Del-Moral-Perez, 2014).

DST and Collaborative Writing

In digital storytelling projects, collaborative writing refers to the combined efforts of people working together to produce written narratives on digital platforms. According to Brown (2001), writing is the process of putting ideas into words, developing the main ideas, arranging text structures, and

coherence logically to the work. Furthermore, Linse (2006) asserts that writing entails the production of ideas, their transcription onto paper, and subsequent revision (p. 98).

As explained by Barkley, Cross, and Major (2005), collaborative learning refers to learning activities that are especially created for and completed through pairs or small interactive groups. Collaborative writing in the context of digital storytelling projects in higher school enables students to combine their expertise, viewpoints, and creativity to create engaging narratives. Digital tools allow students to work remotely, synchronously, or asynchronously, overcoming time and space restrictions. Collaborative writing improves the overall quality of the narrative by dividing up the tasks of writing, revising, and editing. The collaborative approach also develops important abilities including creative thinking, negotiation, and communication.

In this research, the term "digital storytelling" (DST) projects refers to a series of pedagogical phases that are used to enable students to produce a digital narrative as their final piece of work. These phases included the first stages of storyboarding as well as the crucial presentation and publication phases. To do this, Schuck and Kearney (2004) designed learner-generated DST cycles which are summarized in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Pedagogical framework for learner-generated digital video projects (Adapted from Schuck and Kearney 2004, 84).

| Stage | Teacher Strategies | Peer Learning Structures |
|-------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|-------|--------------------|--------------------------|

| | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. Developing ideas | 1. Scaffolding, e.g., giving suggestions for purpose, ideas for genre, content, audience, roles, etc. 2. Modelling of films from teacher, other experts, and previous students. 3. Modelling of relevant language | 1. Groups negotiate their own roles based on their own expertise or interests. 2. Formulate a plan to swap and rotate roles through projects. 3. Discussion of necessary teamwork skills. |
| 2. Storyboard | Encourage the use of mind maps to inform storyboards. | Collaborative mind maps. |
| 3. Re-storyboarding | 1. Students have to 'sell' the storyboard to the teacher (formative assessment of storyboard) or peers before filming, and if necessary, editing it. | Group meetings to assess progress and share perspectives. |
| 4. Preparation for recording | 2. Facilitate student preparation of scripts, props, costumes, lighting, etc. 3. Modelling of relevant language. Modelling of recording techniques. | Allocation and rotation of roles. |
| 5. Recording | Give formative teacher assessment (including informal observations) of final | 1. Use of peer tutoring/'expert' system for skills support. 2. Possible collaboration in roles (e.g., |

| | | |
|-----------------|---|---|
| | product quality. | two people share a role) and possible rotation of roles. 3. Peer assessment of film quality. |
| 6. Presentation | 1. Use feedback from audience to inform teacher assessment – summative teacher assessment of task 2. Encourage student reflection (e.g., use of journal, e-portfolio). | Peer assessment and feedback. |
| 7. Publication | Share with an online community. | |

Therefore, DST as an instructional aid is considered more suitable for facilitating students' exploration, development, and evaluation of story concepts, rather than for generating ideas at the outset of collaborative writing. As a result, the primary aim of the initial research conducted in this study is to examine how collaborative writing projects, particularly Digital Storytelling (DST) group projects, influence the academic achievements and self-confidence of English language learners.

DST for Creative Thinking

According to Andiliou and Murphy's definition of creative thinking from 2010, it is understood to be "a type of higher order thinking that requires students to generate ideas, elaborate on and refine ideas, but also critically evaluate their ideas and argue about the effectiveness and appropriateness of their proposed ideas" (p. 217). As students play a role in

the cognitive process of choosing story subjects and writing story scripts, they are reportedly given a lot of opportunity for creative thinking when DST is used in the classroom (Ohler, 2013; Yang, Chen, & Hung, 2020). The effects of DST on students' creativity have been a concern of recent research that have yielded insightful results. For instance, Liu, Lu, Wu, and Tsai (2016) looked at students' creative self-efficacy and performance as a result of a Web 2.0 storytelling activity. The results indicated that peer assessment using a clear set of storytelling rubrics was one useful technique to guarantee students' growth in terms of creativity by doing DST projects. In the same vein, Kim and Lee (2017) discovered that students working on DST group projects could create narratives that were longer, more expressive, and better written than those created using more conventional methods. These studies show that the digital storytelling project was successful in assisting students in the development of their language abilities, literacies, and creative thinking skills.

Besides, it was argued that the use of narrative grammar rules may restrict students' ability to think creatively. Therefore, such scaffoldings were better suited for guiding students to explore, elaborate, and assess story ideas than for coming up with ideas during the first stage of DST. As a result, the second research goal of the current study is to close this gap by examining how DST group projects affect English language learners' creative thinking.

Methodology

The need for digital tools for English learning led to the development of the current collaborative DST project idea. As part of the action research project, the class completed a rigorous six-week training in digital storytelling through a variety of cycles of project-based learning and instructional activities. While most of them are comfortable using technology to

play online games and social media updates, they have rarely utilized their own smartphone or tablet to help them learn English.

This article describes a case study (Yin, 2003) conducted in a secondary school in Java, Indonesia's central region. It seeks to learn more about how secondary school students engaged with the DST production in their English classes. The participants in this study were 36 students in the 10th grade, whose ages ranged from 14 to 16. They received a permission letter outlining the nature of the study and its objectives. The researcher asked for permission before starting to gather the data. Pseudonyms were employed to preserve the students' privacy.

The samples in this study would be regarded as six equivalent groups because (1) all of the groups had the same teacher, textbooks, and amount of time spent on tasks in class, and (2) other significant confounding factors, such as students' DST experience, years of English learning were not significantly different. By employing a qualitative research approach, the students' reflection transcripts were encoded and analyzed inductively. As a result, any variations between the six groups may be more reliably assigned to the study's independent variable.

Finding and Discussion

Enhancing students' digital tool literacy through pedagogical practices

Pedagogical techniques that help students learn how to use digital tools better are important for getting them ready for a 21st-century job. According to Smith, Kahlke, and Judd (2018), the growing dependence on digital technology across a variety of professions requires individuals who possess the capacity to connect with digital tools in a way that is both successful and ethical. To get things started, the teacher posed a number of questions to my students that were

designed to dig into their background knowledge about narrative text. The questions activated students' understanding of narrative texts. They were asked what a narrative text was, what kinds they had read, how well they understood the story, and whether they had written one. As observed in one classroom, the students had similar interpretations of a narrative text as can be seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1:

"According to what I recall from my junior high school English classes, a story is a piece of writing that tells a tale, whether it is true or not."

Excerpt 2:

"Personally, I mentioned that I have come across folktales, legends, and various short stories from the books available in our school library. This exchange of examples created a sense of familiarity and made me realize the diverse range of stories that exist."

Further, the students also got an introduction to digital storytelling from the teacher. The teacher taught students how to make digital stories. I also talked about videography and storyboarding, which are important parts of digital storytelling. In the same vein, Widodo (2016) contends that letting students use visualizations to tell a story could foster creativity. Due to this, the teacher discussed digital storytelling stages and video recording methods as components of digital literacy (See figure 1). Those who were cast in the role of photographers were given the assignment to use their own personal mobile phones to practice snapping images and videos of random things around the classroom.



Figure 1. The teacher gave a brief explanation of the use of online applications for making digital storytelling products.

In addition, integrating pedagogical practices that improve students' digital tool literacy encourages active learning and student engagement. When students have the chance to explore and experiment with digital tools during their learning experiences, they are more engaged and willing to participate in the teaching and learning process. By participating in these hands-on activities, students develop technical skills as well as the capacity to think critically and solve problems.

Digital Storytelling Stages

The use of digital storytelling to facilitate student expression and learning has recently gained popularity. This section delves into the many steps that students must take before their digital stories are ready for public consumption, including storyboarding, asset creation, and publishing.

Brainstorming Ideas

This assignment helped students construct a short narrative text. The teacher guided the students through a variety of tasks, including expanding their understanding of the subject matter, modeling the structure of a narrative text, and working together to construct the text. The students' reflection throughout the brainstorming process was great as it can be seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 3:

"We brainstormed with excitement and transparency. Hearing many points of view and observing the variety of creative thinking within our group were amazing. The non-judgmental atmosphere fostered collaboration and trust. Because of the diversity of our group's backgrounds and perspectives, we were able to generate more ideas for our digital storytelling project."

Moreover, students and the teacher talked about the role of narrative text in various societies (See figure 2) during the brainstorming ideas. Its goal was to increase their comprehension of the sociocultural background that might underlie the genre that the group had chosen.



Figure 2. Each group of students was discussing their project plans while the teacher monitored the students' progress.

Collaborative Writing: Drafting Storyboard

Students must first write their stories as part of the digital storytelling process. Firstly, the teacher asked students to rearrange the chairs with their group members. Then, the students were assigned to start making their storyboard. They will start by adapting the original story from open sources such as Google search engine and Wattpad (see figure 3). After that, they will have a storyboard draft that will be submitted to the teacher.



Figure 3. All of the students were involved in a collaborative writing session in the classroom.

As Thompson and Williams (2022) emphasize, the stage provides students with the opportunity to develop their narrative ideas, structure, and plot. Students can explore topics, characters,

and places while drafting to create a fascinating narrative text. It is in line with the satisfaction of students' impressions of the process revealed in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 4:

"We learned effective communication and active listening through collaborative writing."

Excerpt 5:

"We got together as a group during the collaborative writing sessions to talk about possible plot points and how we can organize them. Hence, each group member contributed ideas and insights. So, it was interesting to see how different thoughts came together into a single story."

From the excerpts, it can be concluded that the students were encouraged to engage in creative thinking, critical thinking, and reflection as they were shaping their stories together with the group. However, teachers had an important role throughout the process to help students through storytelling frameworks, graphic organizers, and facilitating each group's feedback from their peers.

Creating Properties and Giving Dialogic Feedback

An essential part of digital storytelling is the creation of properties, which allow students to include multimedia components that deepen the impact and engagement of their stories. In accordance with Li and Chen (2023), during this stage, students are given the opportunity to experiment with a wide variety of media resources, such as photos, audio, video, and animations, in order to bring their stories to life.

To provide the audience with a multisensory experience, students can choose and modify graphics, add voice overs or conversation, and incorporate music or sound effects. Students not only learn how to use digital media tools better by making properties, but they also learn more about storytelling methods like

spacing, mood, and character development. In this stage, the teacher assists students by offering access to a number of digital tools, tutorials, and examples that demonstrate the efficient use of multimedia components in storytelling (see figure 4).



Figure 4. Teacher gave dialogic feedback for each group in the classroom while the other group of students were creating properties.

Afterwards, the teacher also gave some revisions to the students' collaborative writing in this meeting. It aims to provide dialogic feedback to the students in each group so they can continue their work on making properties after having the writing consultation with the teacher. In the revising assignment, the student who served as the language editor was required to evaluate language issues using the self-evaluation rubric developed. They were directed to review their generic structures, verbs, and word choices using the self-assessment. It helped students spot their writing issues.

Recording Digital Storytelling Product

The last step in digital storytelling is for students to record their stories so that they can share them with a wider audience after publication. The teacher gave them some options to publish their digital stories in a digital video sharing platform such as YouTube, Instagram, Google Drive, TikTok, etc. Before publication, the teacher assisted students in checking the final products in the form of a puppet show and comic strip (see figure 5).



Figure 5. The example of Puppet Show as one of students' Digital Storytelling Product

The final review involves language review, flows, and The goal of the language review procedure was to improve their comprehension of the lexico-grammatical structures used in the narrative. After all of the stages were finished, the students were asked to reflect on their feelings towards the project, which can be seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 6:

"As we finished the project's collaborative writing phase, I am really happy and proud of what we were able to accomplish as a team. This experience has developed my teamwork abilities and increased my respect for the value of collaboration, in addition to deepening my grasp of narrative texts. I'm glad for this wonderful learning experience and excited to witness our digital storytelling product."

Excerpt 7:

"Overall, our project-based learning journey has been tremendously satisfying because of the collaborative writing process. It allowed me to develop my skills and knowledge as a student, writer, and collaborator and has inspired me to value storytelling and the value of group creativity."

Excerpt 8:

"Working on our story with my group members has been a transformative learning experience that has exceeded my expectations."

All of the positive reflections towards the Digital Storytelling (DST) project are in line with Yang's (2012), where it was revealed that DST helps students strengthen their multimodal composition skills and linguistic resources for meaning-making. DST,

which emphasizes learner-centered instruction, can encourage students to compose in multiple media.

Conclusions

In conclusion, collaborative writing in digital storytelling projects represents a form of learning that capitalizes on the combined skills and ideas of individuals who are working together toward the achievement of a common objective. Project-based learning for narrative-focused digital storytelling projects has proved productive and enriching through collaborative writing. Students have experienced the benefits of working together as a team by engaging in collaborative writing. These benefits include harnessing the power of collective creativity and building upon the skills of each individual student. Moreover, collaborative writing has provided students with a forum for sharing their ideas, receiving constructive criticism, and refining their narratives in a supportive and cooperative setting.

The collaborative writing process has cultivated effective communication, attentive listening, and respect for various viewpoints. If the teacher aims to improve students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, collaborative writing helps students take into account many points of view, negotiate concepts, and come to informed judgments collectively.

The study's gender and age disparity limits project-based learning of digital storytelling for narrative text. This discrepancy in participant characteristics may introduce biases and impede generalizability. If the majority of participants were a certain gender in a group, the results may not truly represent the different opinions and experiences of a broader society.

Gender and age disparities may also affect collaborative writing

relationships. Collaboration benefits from diverse viewpoints and experiences.

However, an uneven distribution may limit the diversity of ideas and attitudes that arise during collaborative writing sessions, potentially limiting perspectives and conclusions. Age may also affect project participants' skills and knowledge. The collaborative writing process may suffer from considerable differences in experience or education. The group's age and education distribution may also cause power imbalances or collaborative issues. Future studies should balance gender, education, and age to overcome this constraint. This will ensure a more diverse and representative sample, enabling a better understanding of the collaborative writing process and its effects on digital storytelling project-based learning. Researchers can reduce bias and improve applicability by including more subjects.

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