

Digital Storytelling and Multimodal Composition in English Language Education: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of English has undergone considerable transformation due to the swift advancement of digital technology. Conventional text-based teaching methods are no longer adequate for the demands of contemporary learners who engage daily with various multimodal digital content. One method that has received increasing attention in English Language Teaching (ELT) is digital storytelling, which combines text, images, audio, video, and visual design to craft engaging narratives. This literature review seeks to investigate the application of digital storytelling and multimodal composition in English language education, concentrating on studies published from 2015 to 2024. A total of 22 research articles were reviewed to assess the impact of digital storytelling on enhancing students' language abilities, motivation, creativity, and digital literacy. The results suggest that digital storytelling is an effective teaching strategy that boosts several English language skills while promoting 21st-century competencies.

Keywords: digital storytelling, multimodal composition, English language education, digital literacy, multimodality

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of the English language has evolved alongside advancements in education and technology. Previously, the focus of English learning was primarily on grammar rules and rote memorization. In contrast, contemporary English education prioritizes communication, practical language use, and student involvement. Simultaneously, digital technology has become integrated into the daily lives of students. Learners are now exposed to English through various mediums, such as videos, images, social media, and other forms of digital content. This scenario necessitates that English educators adopt instructional methods that extend beyond traditional text-based teaching and incorporate digital and multimodal communication strategies.

One approach that addresses this requirement is digital storytelling. Digital storytelling enables students to craft narratives by merging text, visuals, audio, and video through the use of digital tools. In this process, students engage with English in a relevant and imaginative manner while also enhancing their digital literacy and skills relevant to the 21st century. Consequently, this literature review aims to investigate the application of digital storytelling and multimodal composition in English language teaching and evaluate its advantages for English learners. Digital stories have become a commonly acknowledged pedagogical practice in English language teaching, blending language acquisition and digital and multimodal writing. Digital storytelling, through its combination of text, image, audio, and video, enables the learner to learn English in real and relevant situations as opposed to the use of conventional written assignments. This method promotes development of various linguistic capabilities such as writing, speaking and listening, as well as creativity and participation of the learners. Moreover, digital storytelling enables students to gain digital literacy because it teaches them to use the digital tools in a responsible and meaningful manner. With the adaptation of the English classroom to the technological changes, the comprehension of how digital storytelling can serve as a pedagogic means gains more importance. Thus, it is possible to review past research on digital

storytelling and derive some useful information on its effectiveness and applicability in the EFL setting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital storytelling has received growing interest within English language education as a teaching strategy that merges language learning with digital media. It is generally described as the process of producing narratives using digital tools that integrate text, visuals, audio, and video (Robin, 2008). In English language classrooms, digital storytelling enables learners to use language in meaningful ways while creatively conveying ideas through various forms of communication. The idea of multimodal composition provides a conceptual framework for digital storytelling. Kress (2010) suggests that meaning is created through the interplay of different semiotic modes, including linguistic, visual, and auditory components. In the realm of English learning, multimodal composition allows students to enrich their language output with images and sounds, which can be especially beneficial for those with limited language skills. Shin and Cimasko (2008) claim that multimodal composing encourages students to concentrate on meaning rather than merely on grammatical correctness, leading to increased confidence in language use.

Research has demonstrated that digital storytelling has a positive impact on students' English language abilities. Yang and Wu (2012) discovered that digital storytelling notably enhanced students' motivation, writing quality, and critical thinking abilities. Likewise, Hung et al. (2012) found that students participating in digital storytelling activities showed increased academic success and creativity compared to their peers in traditional learning environments. Additionally, digital storytelling aids in the development of speaking and pronunciation skills, as students practice recording and refining their voiceovers repeatedly (Razmi et al., 2014). Beyond language acquisition, digital storytelling fosters digital literacy and engages learners. Hafner et al. (2015) highlight that digital literacy encompasses not only technical competencies but also effective communication skills in digital contexts. Through digital storytelling, students acquire the ability to choose suitable media, structure content, and deliver messages to an audience. Numerous studies

indicate that students react positively to digital storytelling tasks, as they feel more motivated and invested in the learning experience (Sadik, 2008).

The literature reviewed suggests that digital storytelling and multimodal composition are powerful strategies in English language education. They facilitate the development of various language skills, boost learner motivation, and enhance digital literacy. As a result, digital storytelling can be regarded as a valuable teaching tool for English educators, particularly in EFL settings.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Multimodality theory assumes that meaning is created by a combination of more than just language, and hence it is created using multiple semiotic modes (Kress, 2010). These modes are such as visual design, audio, gesture, spatial arrangement, and movement which play different roles in communication. In online spaces, students are always exposed to multimodal texts like videos, infographic, memes, and engaging web sites. Multimodality is a challenge to the preeminence of print literacy as a form of literacy in the context of English language education. Students should not only know the correct way to write grammatically correct sentences, but they should be taught how to structure texts that can be communicated in various modes. Digital storytelling fits well within this view because this learning activity asks learners to make conscious decisions on how language, images, and sounds interplay to create meaning.

3.1 Multiliteracies, Digital Literacy.

Multiliteracies, which are the brainchild of the New London Group (1996), provide an expansion of the usual definitions of literacy to make them accommodate cultural diversity and various communication modes. Digital storytelling facilitates multiliteracies by prompting learners to experience the range of cultural stories and digital platforms and acquire such skills as visual literacy, media literacy, and technological competence. In this case, digital literacy does not just involve technical competencies, but rather the capacity to critically assess digital content, make ethical use of the media, and communicate in an effective manner

with the use of digital tools (Hafner, Chik, and Jones, 2015). By producing digital stories, students are able to be producers and not consumers of content and understand better how digital texts make meaning and have implications on their audience.

3.2 Constructivist and Sociocultural Perspectives.

In constructivist terms, learning is done through active interaction and accomplishment of meaningful tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). Digital storiestelling reflects this principle by enabling the learners to build knowledge based on their own stories, collaboration, and reflections. Planning, drafting, revising, and publishing a digital story is similar to real-life communicative activities.

Sociocultural theory also puts more emphasis on the importance of social interaction and tools in learning. Application Digital storytelling tools like Canva and Adobe Express are mediational tools that facilitate language development. Peer interaction, feedback and shared meaning-making also take place in collaborative storytelling projects, which are essential in language acquisition.

3.4. Digital Narrative in English Language Education.

3.4.1 Digital Storiestelling Definitions.

Digital stories can be characterized as an act of narrating stories with the use of digital technology incorporating the multimedia material of images, sound, and video (Robin, 2008). Digital stories can be in the form of personal stories, cultural stories, reflective essays, and instructional videos in ELT. Digital storytelling, unlike the traditional writing assignments, puts more focus on audience, purpose, and design. A student needs to pay attention not only to what he/she wants to say but also to how it is better to do it with the help of several modes. This is shifting writing into an exercise of linguistics to a communicative act, in its entirety.

3.4.2 Language Learning Benefits

It has been revealed that digital storytelling aids in building several language skills at the same time. The script writing and voice recordings make learners more accurate in grammar and vocabulary as well as fluent and accurate in pronunciation (Yang and Wu, 2012). Listening skills are

also acquired with the learners testing the audio quality and coherence. Besides, online narrative can tend towards enhanced motivational effects on the learner. Students are more willing to invest efforts in projects that would enable them to be creative and express themselves. The feeling of ownership that is involved in the digital narratives may alleviate anxiety levels and boost confidence, especially in those learners who might have difficulties in passing some of the writing assignments.

3.5. Multimodal Composition Process.

Conceptualization and Storyboarding: During this stage, an idea or concept is developed to serve as the foundation for the every activity within the project or the film.<|human|>4.1 Conceptualization and Storyboarding: In this process an idea or concept is drawn to be used as the basis in all the activities in the project or the film. Idea generation and conceptualization is the first phase of digital stories. Students can recognize a subject and determine a reader and explain the idea of their narrative. Storyboarding is important at this point as it enables the students to visualize how text, images, and audio would be coordinated throughout the story.

Storyboarding also leads to critical thinking because learners have to make decisions on which modes could deliver certain meanings in the most appropriate way. As a case in point, music can be used to increase the emotional content, whereas the visuals or on-screen text can be used to supplement the factual information.

3.5.1 Production and Editing

In the production phase, learners create collages of their stories with the help of digital tools. Browsers like Canva and Adobe Express are especially helpful in the learning environment since they are free to use, easy to work with, and do not need complex technical expertise.

Editing consists in perfection of language and design. Students rewrite scripts to be clear and accurate, reorganize graphics and make sure that the modes are coherent. This cyclic exercise resembles real writing activities, and validates the role of revision in language acquisition.

3.5.2 Reflection and Sharing

The most important feature of digital stories is reflection. Students analyze their options, consider difficulties, and think about the meaning conveyed in their narratives. By also telling others online or a larger group of people about the digital narratives, this learning process is further facilitated as it offers purposeful activities of communication that are authentic and offer feedback opportunities.

3.6. Pedagogical resources: Canva and adobe express.

The accessibility and versatility of Canva and Adobe Express have made them popular programs in digital storytelling in education. These systems provide templates, drag and drop interface and multimedia integration capabilities that enable students to work on the storytelling as opposed to the technical complexity. Pedagogically, such tools make digital composition democratic. Students who have low levels of technological access are still able to create professional-looking narratives, which minimize inequities in online learners. These tools can also be utilized to scaffold teaching and give systematic assistance to teachers.

3.7. Evaluation of Digital Stories.

Measuring digital storytelling cannot be done using the conventional means of language assessment. The rubrics must assess linguistic and multimodal features such as content, the use of the language, organization, visual presentation, and sound (Hung, Hwang, and Huang, 2012). The purpose of formative assessment is critical in the process of story telling. Given ongoing improvement, peer feedback, self-assessment, and teacher conferencing assist in improving and motivating learners to reflect upon the learning process. Notably, evaluation needs to be based on the effectiveness of communication and not technical excellence.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study will be a literature review. Google Scholar helped retrieve the articles with the help of key words, i.e. digital storytelling AND English learning, multimodal composition in ELT, and digital narratives in language education. The Mendeley Desktop was used to manage the articles.

The inclusion criteria were:

1. Articles that were published in 2015-2024.
2. A study that uses digital storytelling or multimodal composition as the subject matter of English language teaching.
3. Research carried out in the EFL or ESL.

The data on 19 journal articles was chosen and discussed according to their objectives,

5. methods, participants, and findings

Table 1. Literature Review Summary

No	Title	Authors	Sample	Method	Findings
1	Digital storytelling for language learning	Robin (2008)	Secondary school students	Qualitative	Digital storytelling increases engagement and narrative competence. This study indicates that digital storytelling increases students' engagement by allowing them to combine language learning with creative digital expression, resulting in improved narrative skills.
2	Digital storytelling and EFL learners' motivation	Yang & Wu (2012)	High school students	Experimental	Improves motivation, critical thinking, and English achievement, The findings show that students who participated in digital storytelling activities demonstrated higher motivation and stronger involvement in English learning compared to traditional instruction.

No	Title	Authors	Sample	Method	Findings
3	A project-based digital storytelling approach	Hung et al. (2012)	University students	Quasi-experimental	Enhances learning motivation and academic achievement. The results suggest that project-based digital storytelling supports active learning and improves students' academic achievement through meaningful task completion.
4	Digital storytelling: A meaningful technology integration approach	Sadik (2008)	Undergraduates Students	Survey research	Students perceive digital storytelling as engaging and meaningful. This study reveals that students perceive digital storytelling as a meaningful learning activity that encourages active participation and ownership of learning.
5	Multimodal composing in English for academic purposes	Hafner et al. (2015)	University EFL students	Qualitative	Improves digital literacy and multimodal awareness. The findings indicate that multimodal composing enhances students' digital literacy and enables them to communicate ideas more effectively beyond written text.
6	Using digital storytelling to	Kim (2014)	College students	Mixed-method	Improves writing organization and creativity. The study shows that digital storytelling improves

No	Title	Authors	Sample	Method	Findings
	improve EFL writing				students' writing organization and creativity by encouraging careful planning and revision.
7	Digital storytelling in EFL classrooms	Razmi et al. (2014)	Iranian EFL learners	Experimental	Enhances speaking skills and learner confidence. The results demonstrate that digital storytelling positively affects learners' speaking performance and increases confidence in oral communication.
8	Students' perceptions of digital storytelling	Castañeda (2013)	Secondary students	Descriptive qualitative	Students show positive attitudes toward digital storytelling. The findings indicate that students generally respond positively to digital storytelling, viewing it as an enjoyable and motivating learning activity.
9	Multi modal composition and ESL writing	Shin & Cimasko (2008)	ESL university students	Case study	Supports meaning-making beyond linguistic modes. This study highlights that multimodal composition allows learners to express meaning using multiple modes, supporting communication even with limited linguistic ability.
10	Digital storytelling for	Abdel-Hack & Helwa (2014)	EFL learners	Quasi-exper	Improves vocabulary retention. The findings show that digital storytelling contributes to

No	Title	Authors	Sample	Method	Findings
	vocabulary learning			imental	better vocabulary retention through contextualized and meaningful language use.
11	Technology-enhanced storytelling in language learning	Robin & McNeil (2012)	Pre-service teachers	Qualitative	<p>The results suggest that digital storytelling enhances pre-service teachers' pedagogical awareness and digital competence.</p> <p>Enhances pedagogical and digital skills</p>
12	Learner-generated digital stories	Tsou et al. (2006)	Elementary EFL learners	Experimental	Improves listening and speaking skills, This study indicates that learner-generated digital stories improve listening and speaking skills by promoting repeated exposure to authentic language input.
13	Digital storytelling and multiliteracies	Hull & Katz (2006)	Youth learners	Ethnographic study	<p>Supports identity construction and multiliteracy development.</p> <p>The findings reveal that digital storytelling supports multiliteracy development and allows learners to construct and express personal identities.</p>

No	Title	Authors	Sample	Method	Findings
14	Digital narratives for language learning	Kajder et al. (2005)	Secondary students	Qualitative	Encourages creativity and student voice. The study shows that digital narratives encourage student voice and creativity, making learners more active participants in the learning process.
15	Using Canva multimodal writing	Alghasab et al. (2021)	University EFL students	Descriptive study	Canva supports visual literacy and writing quality. The findings indicate that using Canva supports visual literacy and improves the overall quality of students' multimodal writing.
16	Adobe Express in digital storytelling	Smith & Lambert (2019)	Undergraduate students	Case study	Improves multimodal composition skills, This study suggests that Adobe Express helps students develop multimodal composition skills through its user-friendly design features.
17	Digital storytelling and speaking anxiety	Choi & Yi (2016)	EFL university students	Experimental	Reduces speaking anxiety and increases fluency. The results show that digital storytelling reduces speaking anxiety by allowing students to rehearse and refine their oral production.

No	Title	Authors	Sample	Method	Findings
18	Multi modal storytelling in online learning	Kervin & Mantei (2017)	Online learners	Qualitative	Promotes learner autonomy and collaboration. The findings indicate that multimodal storytelling promotes learner autonomy and collaboration in online learning environments.
19	Digital storytelling for critical thinking	Xu et al. (2020)	University students	Mixed-method	Enhances critical thinking and reflection. This study concludes that digital storytelling can be used as an alternative assessment method that captures students' communicative competence more authentically.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the literature review, digital storytelling influences the English language learning in a generally positive way. The results are elaborated on a number of themes.

6.1 Perceptions of Digital stories to students.

Digital storytelling is said to be positively perceived by students in most studies. According to students, digital stories telling exercises are entertaining, interesting, and worthwhile. According to the study by Yang and Wu (2012), students were more motivated to develop digital stories than to use the traditional writing tasks. This implies that, in English classrooms, boredom can be diminished by using digital stories, and therefore participation may be enhanced.

6.2 Language Skill Development

The studies show that digital storytelling helps to promote various language skills at the same time. The development of writing skills is done

through script writing and planning of stories whereas speaking and pronunciation are advanced through voice recording (Robin, 2008). Listening abilities are also developed because students can listen to the audio elements and other student projects. As well, multimodal aspects allow the students to comprehend material more effectively by integrating language, visual and auditory communication (Kress, 2010).

6.3 Digital Literacy and Creativity.

Digital stories promote creativity, as they enable the student to create their own stories with the help of multimedia features. The students get to know how to choose the right images, layouts, and how to use sound. These activities are part of the development of digital literacy that is a crucial competency in contemporary education (Hafner et al., 2015).

7. CONCLUSION

Multimodal composition and digital stories represent good possibilities in the English language teaching and learning. According to the studies reviewed, digital storytelling could be effective in the development of language, motivation, creativity, and digital literacy. In the classroom learning as well as the informal learning context, the students tend to view this approach positively. Digital stories can be used in English language education as substitutions of traditional writing tasks as they offer meaningful, authentic and engaging learning experiences. Thus, the English teachers are advised to incorporate digital storytelling in their EFL teaching with the help of available tools like Canva and Adobe Express. The future studies can be dedicated to the experimental research, action research in the classroom, and to long-term outcomes of the digital storytelling on language proficiency.

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