
СУЧАСНІ ПІДХОДИ ТА ІННОВАЦІЙНІ ТЕХНОЛОГІЇ ФОРМУВАННЯ ІНШОМОВНОЇ КОМУНІКАТИВНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ

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A PROJECT ON DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN A PRACTICAL ENGLISH COURSE

Training of pre-service teachers of foreign languages and world literature to use technology in their workplace is an important part of their professional growth, as the global pandemic and military aggression against Ukraine have exacerbated the need for blended and distance learning. The search, selection, and use of new, effective digital tools for teaching foreign languages and world literature in the educational process remains relevant given the rapid development of digital technologies and the need to develop the communicative and the methodological competences of future teachers. The article describes a project on digital storytelling in the Practical English course, discusses the benefits of using digital storytelling in foreign language and world literature classes. According to the checklist developed by the teacher together with the students, pre-service teachers carried out digital storytelling projects that required them to develop and create their own digital narratives, consider the criteria for selecting digital storytelling tools to use in their teaching practice, and reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of such projects. Data were collected and analyzed from fifteen higher education students who prepared digital stories as a speaking task in the Practical English course. The results showed that the experience of creating their own digital stories deepened pre-service teachers' understanding of this process, contributed to the development of their communicative and methodological competences, and influenced their identification of the benefits of digital storytelling in foreign language and world literature classes.

Keywords: digital storytelling, foreign languages, pre-service teachers, selection criteria, tools for digital storytelling, world literature.

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ПРОЄКТ З ЦИФРОВОГО СТОРИТЕЛІНГУ НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ З ПРАКТИЧНОГО КУРСУ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

Навчання майбутніх викладачів іноземних мов і зарубіжної літератури використовувати інформаційні технології у викладанні є важливою частиною їхньої професійної підготовки, адже глобальна пандемія та військова агресія проти України загострили потребу у використанні змішаного та дистанційного навчання. Пошук, відбір за науково обґрунтованими критеріями та використання у навчальному процесі нових, ефективних цифрових засобів навчання іноземних мов і світової літератури залишається актуальним з огляду на швидкий розвиток цифрових технологій і необхідність розвитку комунікативної і методичної компетентності майбутніх учителів. У статті описано проєкт з цифрового сторітелінгу на заняттях з практичного курсу англійської мови, розглянуті переваги використання цифрового сторітелінгу на заняттях з іноземних мов і зарубіжної літератури. За розробленим викладачем спільно зі студентами контрольним списком (чеклистом) майбутні викладачі виконували проєкти з цифрового сторітелінгу, що вимагали від них розробки та створення власних цифрових наративів, розгляду критеріїв відбору інструментів для цифрового сторітелінгу для використання у своїй викладацькій практиці, рефлексії над перевагами і недоліками таких проєктів. Було зібрано і проаналізовано дані від п'ятнадцяти здобувачів вищої освіти, які підготували цифрові історії як підсумкове завдання з говоріння під час вивчення дисципліни «Практичний курс англійської мови». Результати показали, що досвід створення власних цифрових історій поглибив розуміння майбутніми викладачами цього процесу, сприяв розвитку їхньої комунікативної та методичної компетентності та вплинув на їхнє визначення переваг цифрового сторітелінгу на заняттях з іноземної мови та світової літератури.

Ключові слова: цифровий сторітелінг, іноземні мови, майбутні вчителі іноземних мов та світової літератури, критерії відбору, інструменти для цифрового сторітелінгу.

Introduction. Storytelling existed before the printed sources. It is “the oldest form of teaching and probably the best way to learn” (Stanley&Dillingham, 2023). With rapid advance of technology, classic storytelling has been supplemented by digital

storytelling which “contains some mixture of computer-based images, text, recorded audio narration, video clips, or music” (Stanley&Dillingham, 2023).

Kim et al. (2021) define digital story as a 3 – 6 min multimodal video through which students can engage in critical reflection about their experiences, participate actively in the learning process, and give voice to their identities. Educators all over the world use digital storytelling as an instructional tool which has been recognized as beneficial for improving foreign language skills and aspects of language (Brenner, 2014; Yan & Zhao, 2019; Leong, Abidin, & Saibon 2019; Simsek, 2020; Hava, 2021; Meletiadou, 2022; Nair & Md Yunus, 2022), learner autonomy (Kim, 2018), motivation, engagement, and creativity (Sadik, 2008; Brenner, 2014; Chen, Liu, & Cheng, 2023), critical thinking (Chen & Chuang, 2021) of their students.

Global pandemic accentuated the need to use distance learning tools. Brutal military aggression of Russia against Ukraine further jeopardized the right of Ukrainian students to quality education and challenged educators to search for distance education tools which would provide the learners with the best learning experiences possible under the circumstances. Although the importance of incorporating technology in pre-service teacher training has been universally recognized, language teachers are “faced with the challenge of using technology successfully without proper preparation” (Velazquez-Torres, 2006). Because of these reasons, the necessity of creating training in digital storytelling for pre-service teachers has been brought to the agenda whereas Ukrainian universities face the challenge of preparing language educators to integrate learning technologies in their classroom practice.

The **aim** of this study is to examine whether the project aimed at creating digital stories enhances communicative and methodological competences of pre-service teachers of foreign languages and world literature and changes their perceptions of benefits of digital storytelling. To achieve the aim, the following tasks have been set: 1) to analyse relevant research on digital storytelling at tertiary level, especially that involving pre-service teachers; 2) to describe a digital storytelling project by pre-service foreign language and world literature teachers; 3) to analyse pre-service teacher’s reflection on the project, its benefits and on the ways they can use digital storytelling in their future classrooms.

Literature Review. Numerous studies explored the application of digital storytelling at tertiary level. This review examines how storytelling has been applied in teacher training settings to enhance students’ English language skills.

The majority of studies we analysed focus on pre-service teachers development and acquiring new skills. For instance, Shinas & Wen (2022) examined the ways in which integration of digital storytelling into a required teacher education course on literacy and technology prepared teacher candidates to integrate digital tools into their instruction. Findings revealed that teacher candidates’ experiences with creating their own digital stories “contributed to their developing identities as teachers and influenced their perceptions about the benefits of teaching digital composing in the literacy classroom” (p.1).

Similarly, a qualitative case study by Özüdoğru and Çakır (2020), in which sophomore pre-service literacy teachers created digital stories during the instructional technologies and material design course, examines the opinions of pre-service teachers about the use of digital storytelling in literacy education. The findings indicate that digital storytelling is perceived as entertaining by pre-service teachers, scenario and dubbing are important in practicing digital storytelling, teaching with stories would be indispensable in their future teaching.

In the same vein, research by Kim et al (2021) shows the value of digital stories in fostering reflection and teachers’ development. Çetin (2021) maintains that providing a training of digital story creation to pre-service teachers contributes to the development of their digital literacy skills.

These research studies provide some clear evidence of positive effect of applying digital storytelling in pre-and in-service teacher training, and convincingly suggest that storytelling should be implemented to enhance teachers’ foreign language and teaching skills.

Despite these and other studies discussing the implementation of digital storytelling in EFL classroom in different contexts (e.g. Kim, 2014; Churchill, 2020; Ryan & Aasetre, 2021; Nair & Md Yunus, 2022), a more systematic analysis of the contributions of storytelling to enhance pre-service teachers’ foreign language skills in university contexts is needed. This review surveyed a small body of recently published studies on how digital storytelling influences pre-service teacher training in an attempt to narrow the gap in research. Having analysed diverse pedagogical purposes and different teaching contexts, we can conclude that digital storytelling is an effective way to develop a broad range of pre-service teachers’ skills.

Method. The digital storytelling project was implemented in spring semester of 2023 as a part of the English language course. 15 advanced English language learners enrolled in master’s program “Secondary Education (English Language and Literature)” at the Faculty of foreign Languages of Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University participated in the study. 14 students were females, 1 student was male. All participants of the study graduated bachelor’s program at the same faculty and university and were in the first year of master’s program. The course was conducted synchronously via Zoom sessions and asynchronously via Moodle and Google Classroom. At the time of this study Ukraine’s power plants and electricity grid have been subjected to regular, massive shelling campaigns using missiles and drones. Increasingly frequent power outages (usually lasting many hours) have become daily occurrences in all of Ukraine. Because of power outages, class meetings were not fixed and predetermined. Students did class assignments when they could.

2 anonymous online questionnaires and 2 focus group discussions served as instruments in this study. Questionnaire 1 researched students’ expectations regarding English language skills improvement as a result of their participation in the project. Questionnaire 2 investigated perceived English language skills improvement upon the completion of the project. The questionnaires were administered via Google forms.

Ohler (2013) enumerates five steps of the digital storytelling process: planning, writing a script, preparing a storyboard, collecting necessary materials, production and evaluation. Brenner (2014) explicates three phases in its preparation: 1) – introduction to digital storytelling, 2) – presentation of digital storytelling project guidelines and requirements by the teacher, 3) – production (p. 24). Both researchers stress the necessity of clear guidelines, assessment criteria and feedback.

Çetin (2021) argues that all elements of digital stories (point of view, dramatic question, emotional content, economy, pacing, the gift of the voice and soundtrack) should be effectively prepared and presented to the audience

The purpose of the digital story project was to assess speaking skills of pre-service English teachers. Students prepared their digital stories on the topic “My Family History” withing the broader topic “Respect!” in their curriculum. The digital story project

lasted 5 weeks. The class was scheduled to meet for 80 minutes twice a week, however practically all work was done by students at home as an individual project and speaking task combined.

During the first two weeks, students wrote the text, selected images and sound track (optional). The students wrote three drafts of their texts. Draft 1 has been peer-edited using Telegram chat. The teacher assigned partners in a Telegram course chat. Teacher's suggestions have been given for draft 2, and the final draft was then completed by the students and used in their digital story. Bruner (2014) specifies 4 drafts high-intermediate/low-advanced English language learners enrolled in a university-level, integrated skills, English for Academic Purposes program completed in the course of their digital project. In our teaching context we decided to reduce the number of drafts based on the advanced level of the students' foreign language proficiency. It was collectively decided to limit the duration of individual project to 4 minutes and assign 1 minute for questions and answers after each presentation. We also followed Bruner's (2014) advice and limited the number of still photographs to 10, and the narrative voiceover text up to 600 words (based on the average speech rate of 250 words per minute) as well as make the soundtrack optional.

Students reported that they spent approximately 4 hours working on the project individually outside the class. The structure of the speaking task was familiar to the students from previous semester. The completed presentation had to have an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion. Answering questions by other students or a teacher was optional as the students had an option to submit the project via Moodle or Google Classroom. For video files which exceeded the limit, students have been instructed to upload the files in their Google Drive and leave the access link as a Word file in Moodle or a private comment to the task in Google Classroom. The teacher recommended Windows Movie Maker for creating the stories. Students suggested Power Point and Canva. Stanley and Dillingham (2023) state that it is "the language proficiency and technical tools skill development and not the age or grade level that matters with digital storytelling". All participants in our research were advanced English language learners who selected the tools based on their prior experience. The students also researched digital storytelling tools for secondary school English learners and discussed resources for digital storytelling and possibilities of using ChatGPT for developing their ideas in a focus group. One student expressed her desire to further explore the topic of digital storytelling in her master's thesis on developing primary school students speaking skills. Focus group discussions participants also discussed a checklist for self-assessment and a rubric for assessment by the teacher.

Results and discussion. Responding to Questionnaire 1 at the beginning of the project 76% of the surveyed students expected to improve their English skills, especially speaking (74%) and writing skills (71%). Upon completion of the course 91% of the students agreed that their speaking, and 83% of the students agreed that their writing skills have improved. 88% of the students agreed that their reading skills have developed. The number of students who agreed that their listening skills improved was the lowest (63%) although 5% of students reported an increase in this skill as well.

Focus group discussions revealed that, together with increased foreign language competence, students enhanced their teaching skills of project organization, implementation, and assessment. In the second focus group meeting students reflected about the benefits of digital storytelling.

Our findings are supported by previous research which has established that creating a digital story contributes to both learning and teaching experience of the students (Tiba et al., 2015; Özüdoğru, & Çakır, 2020; Ulusoi, 2020; Çetin, 2021). According to Shemy (2023), utilization of technological applications to improve learning outcomes and learners' performance has broad positive effects on deepening students' understanding, especially in higher education and postgraduate studies. At the same time, pre-service teachers should not overestimate the role of technology in their future professional practice. Technology should not overwhelm the process of language learning and teaching, but it should "function as a springboard for language production and a pathway for engagement and developing community" (Brenner, 2014, p. 27). This research also supports Yan and Zhao (2019) observation that teaching through digital storytelling can be "conducted outside the classroom, and learner-centered learning is realized in the real sense as more autonomy is required of learners" (p. 56).

Our discussion would be incomplete without recognizing that Large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, image creating programs (Midjourney, Dall-E) are powerful technology tools that "can really change civilization in ways that we're in many ways not prepared for" (Alexander). Admitting that these tools pose a big copyright and creativity problem, Alexander (2023) suggests that, if used for digital storytelling, AI could be "a tool to help move people into expression, to move past creative blocks, to supplement the coaching and support the facilitator gives in person or in an online workshop to deepen the reflective work the participant is doing". AI tools can assist students to brainstorm ideas, write an initial draft to be edited, select visual content and sound effects, rewrite the script imitating the style of famous writers, but it cannot yet write students' personal stories. Alexander advises novice digital story facilitators to use Chat GPT for creating a simulacrum of a workshop where ethical guidelines, facilitator's responses in a story circle, group responses are discussed.

Conclusions and prospects for future research. In this paper we have argued that digital storytelling projects develop communicative competence of pre-service teachers of foreign languages and world literature. We also argued that pre-service teachers develop their methodological competence while participating in the projects. We described the structure of the project and suggested instruments for its assessment. The results indicate an increase in the development of the participants' language and professional skills. Digital storytelling projects increase engagement, enrich students' learning experience, develop their motivation, autonomy, confidence. Further research will focus on exploring the role of digital storytelling in students' satisfaction with their teaching internship.

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