



A Tentative Analysis of College Students' Acceptance, Difficulties and Solutions to Introducing Digital Storytelling into English Classes with Assistance of Modern Computer Technology

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Abstract. With the development and application of modern computer technology, digital storytelling has been widely studied and applied in primary and secondary schools in China as a new visual learning tool, but there has been less discussion on how to apply digital storytelling in university classrooms, especially how to make digital stories in English. A survey of 134 students at Guangzhou Xinhua University found that students generally accepted digital storytelling well and were interested in them, but some problems could also be found from the questionnaire results, such as students' lack of confidence in using English to make digital stories, their lack of multimedia skills, and poor teamwork awareness and so on. As a tentative research for a more in-depth investigation about digital storytelling in English education afterwards, the purpose of this study is to present and discuss both the positive and negative aspects founded in the questionnaires, analyze the problems and offer the solutions to them.

Keywords: Digital storytelling · College English · Modern Computer Technology

1 Introduction

The generally accepted definition of digital storytelling is that it is the process of creating a 2–3 min personal story told with the use of graphics, audio, and video, which should include the following seven elements: Point of View, Dramatic Question, Emotional Content, Voice, Soundtrack, Economy, Pacing. [1] Digital storytelling combines traditional storytelling models with digital technology, tightly integrating images, sound and video into the narrative. At present, many educators and practitioners in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan and other countries have developed their own digital storytelling curriculum and activities, which are widely applied in teaching practice and have a positive effect on the development of students' expression competence, problem solving competence, creativity, media literacy and multiple intelligence. [2] [3] Although

some scholars and experts have called for and tried to apply digital storytelling in primary and secondary education in China, not many scholars have discussed how to introduce digital storytelling to university classrooms, especially how to combine English teaching with digital storytelling with the assistance of modern computer technology.

Based on questionnaires conducted through Sojump (Chinese name: Wenjuanxing) of 134 students in Guangzhou Xinhua University, this paper aims to give an analysis on students' acceptance of digital storytelling, the difficulties in introducing it into English classes and the tentative solutions in overcoming these problems with assistance of modern computer technology.

2 An Analysis of English Digital Storytelling from Questionnaires

This questionnaire was conducted through Sojump, and a total of 134 students from various majors at Guangzhou Xinhua University participated and completed the questionnaire.

The first discovery is about students' knowledge and interest in digital storytelling. Since digital storytelling is a relatively novel form of education in China, it is surprising that there is 35.82% of the 134 students had heard of digital storytelling before, which laid a foundation for its introduction into the university classroom (Fig. 1).

Interest, as an essential incentive in English learning, is studied by many scholars and its significance has been stressed more than once. [4] Although most of the students (64.18%) had not heard of digital storytelling before, nearly half of them (50.75%) were interested in digital storytelling and wanted to learn more about it after reading a brief introduction about it (Fig. 2).

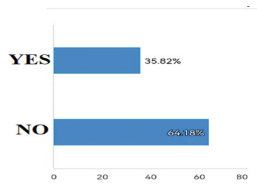


Fig. 1. Have you heard of digital storytelling? (Owner-draw)



Fig. 2. After learning briefly about digital storytelling, are you interested in it? (Owner-draw)

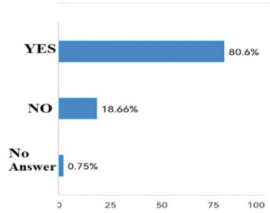


Fig. 3. Do you want to use digital storytelling to replace presentation in English classes? (Owner-draw)

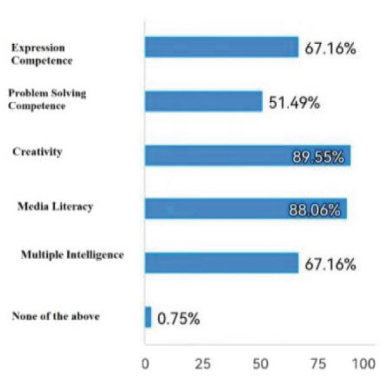


Fig. 4. Which aspect of your competence will digital storytelling improve (multiple choice)? (Owner-draw)

Moreover, 80.6% of the students were willing to try to use digital stories instead of the English presentations made by PowerPoint and some other ways in the English classes, which indicates that most of the students are looking forward to embracing some new technologies (Fig. 3).

While interest certainly plays a great role in English learning, the enhancement of students' abilities in all aspects through learning and making digital stories is also of great significance. In the multiple-choice questions "which aspect of your competence will digital storytelling improve", more than half of the students believe that learning to make and use digital stories can improve their abilities in expression, problem solving, creativity, media literacy, and multiple intelligence, as is shown in the figure (Fig. 4).

Certainly, a number of problems were also found in the questionnaire. First of all, nearly half (43.28%) of the students have no experience in producing multimedia works such as short videos and microfilms (Fig. 5).

Second, 37.31% of the students wanted to work alone on their digital stories instead of choosing teamwork. My personal speculation is that they either had not worked in teams yet or the teamwork they had done had left a negative impression on them. In short, the above data shows the lack of teamwork skills of some students (Fig. 6).

Finally, in the multiple-choice question, what do you think is the biggest difficulty for you in making digital stories in English? More than half of the students chose "English

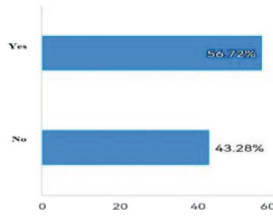


Fig. 5. Do you have the experience in making multi-media works (making short videos or microfilms)? (Owner-draw)

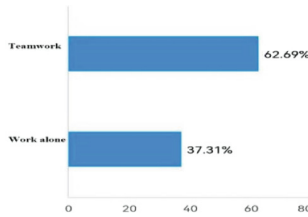


Fig. 6. How do you want to make digital stories? (Owner-draw)

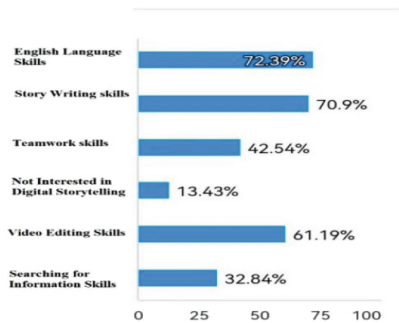


Fig. 7. What are the difficulties for you in making digital stories in English (multiple choice)? (Owner-draw)

language skills”, “story writing skills” and “video editing skills’, as shown in the figure (Fig. 7).

From the final data of the questionnaire, it is explicit to see the negative side that there are certain difficulties in introducing digital storytelling into college English classroom, and the positive side that most college students are interested in digital storytelling, recognize the improvement of digital storytelling for their own ability and are willing to try it.

3 Tentative Solutions with Assistance of Modern Computer Technology

Offering relevant courses with modern computer technology, giving students appropriate incentives, respecting their wishes, and guiding them to work in teams will be employed as tentative solutions to the problems discussed above.

First, offering a relevant course to systematically teach students how to make digital stories in English will be the priority. In Guangzhou Xinhua University, for example, some students have been exposed to some modern computer technologies and mastered the ability of editing and making short videos in activities of student union and Sanxixiang activity (volunteer and investigation in countryside. But how to make a good digital story in English requires not only students' mastery of computer technology, but also their story writing skills and English language skills, so it is still necessary to teach students systematically how to make digital stories in English. With the rapid development of computer technology and the effect of Covid-19, a mixed teaching mode with online and offline is becoming increasingly common. [5] Teachers can record lessons on how to make digital stories in English and then give them to students through some modern learning platforms such as Superstar, so that students can watch them online whenever they like in their spare time; teachers only need to spend a little time in class to answer some students' questions in the process of making digital stories, which effectively saves time in class. With the assistance of modern computer technologies and those online platforms, it would be easier and for both the teachers and the students to master a new skill.

Second, students' performance in making digital stories can be taken as an important part of their daily performance and included in final evaluation to stimulate students' interest and motivation in learning. Taking Guangzhou Xinhua University as an example, in some classes of English majors, business English majors, Spanish, Portuguese and those of college English, English presentations in groups or made by one student alone are common, and the results of English presentations are included in their grades and taken as a big part of their daily performance. As a result, students take the English classroom presentations very seriously each semester and teachers are often surprised by their performance. If the experience of presentations can be drawn upon, then students who want to get a good grade or better score, will also be likely to increase their investment of time and effort in producing English digital stories of good quality. However, at the same time, teachers should also make sure that students understand that grades are not everything and that getting a good score is not the goal of digital storytelling; the goal is to be more active in the classroom, to improve their skills in all areas, including English language skills and multimedia skills, and to enhance the autonomy of students' learning, which is reflected by numerous studies that students' autonomous motivation is a significant predictor of learning intentions and behaviors. [6].

Third, listening to, understanding, and respecting students' ideas and choices is also critical to the success of introducing digital storytelling into the English classrooms in college and to the effectiveness of learning afterwards. In the final non-compulsory question, "Please tell us briefly how to get you interested in digital storytelling", 15 students left comments and 12 of which were meaningful. Some students wanted to be able to choose the theme of their own digital stories and the way to complete it, which

means they wanted the teacher to give them more freedom in the process of making it; some replied that they did not want the whole process to become too complicated; some students emphasized the importance of novelty. When it comes to the themes of digital stories, we cannot deny that it should be diversified, and teachers should set themes that fit what they are learning in the classroom, but they should also respect students' opinions to a certain extent so that students can cooperate better and achieve the purpose of teaching.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the above figure, 42% of the students think teamwork will become an obstacle for them. In order to solve the problem of students' rejection of teamwork, teachers should participate in student teams to a certain extent when necessary to play a guiding and mediating role, especially in the early and middle stages of student team formation, communicate with students in teams and help to solve problems in a timely manner; give students positive feedback and support technically and emotionally when they need. Teamwork can also be conducted by computers online if it is hard for students to gather together to discuss face to face. The birth of Zoom, Tencent Meeting, Skype and some other technologies gave us a lot of opportunities to see each other remotely and more conveniently. It is believed that students who originally rejected teamwork will be much less repulsed by teamwork after having the experience of successful and harmonious teamwork with assistance of modern computer technology.

4 Conclusion

Through a basic study on English digital storytelling conducted on 134 students from Guangzhou Xinhua University, this paper found that almost all of the students were not averse to learning digital storytelling as a new knowledge, and most of them believed that in the process of learning, they could improve their abilities in expression, problem solving, creativity, media literacy, and multiple intelligence. Also, from the analysis of the questionnaire, some problems were found, such as students' lack of confidence in using English to make digital stories, lack of multimedia skills, and poor sense of teamwork. However, it is believed that with assistance of modern computer technology, all these problems can be solved by offering relevant courses online, giving students appropriate incentives, respecting students' wishes, and guiding them to participate in teamwork. Conducted only on 134 students in Guangzhou Xinhua University, being tentative and theoretical, this study is limited and lacking the evidences of practice. In real classes with the application of digital storytelling, there is a possibility that complicated problems may arise, and this study only hopes to lay some useful foundations for a more in-depth study afterwards in this area.

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