Chapter 16
The Complexities of Digital Storytelling:
Factors Affecting Performance, Production, and Project Completion

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a pair of studies investigating factors involved in task-based learning using digital storytelling. In Study 1, the stories were analyzed using the factors of topic, time, medium, and reported technological proficiency. Student attitudes towards the tasks were gauged using a questionnaire that measured perceived task cost and value, engagement with the task, and expectancy for success on future tasks. In Study 2, three mid-task planning conditions were introduced and a questionnaire was administered to see student attitudes towards various modes of mid-task planning. The results of Study 1 suggest that digital storytelling can be incorporated into EFL classes to reduce foreign language anxiety, to provide greater opportunities to use English, and to foster ICT skills. The results of Study 2 suggest that students favor a teacher-led planning condition, and that this planning condition had a positive effect on student attitudes towards the project (value and cost).

INTRODUCTION

In early Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs the stimulus was in the form of text presented on a screen, and the only way in which the learner could respond was by entering an answer at the keyboard. However, more recent approaches to CALL emphasize more learner-centered explorative approaches, in contrast to teacher-centered drill-based approaches (Davies, 2000). For example, Ho and Savignon (2013) expound on the advantages of employing face-to-face peer reviewing (FFPR)

and computer-mediated peer review (CMPR) for academic writing contexts in CALL settings. Another example of recent approaches to CALL is digital storytelling. Project work using digital storytelling allows for a variety of opportunities to engage in language learning and provides options for the foreign language classroom. However, using digital storytelling with language students can create a number of challenges for both pedagogy and technology.

The Center for Digital Storytelling defines a digital story as a short story containing digital images, text, recorded audio narration, and/or music. It allows computer users to be creative storytellers through the process of selecting a suitable topic, writing a script, and developing interesting stories based either on their own experience or the course subject matter. By telling stories with the aid of digital media, students are engaged in learner-centered, authentic tasks. In a digital storytelling project, creating an end product (the digital story) is clearly goal-oriented, and the process itself helps students develop a deeper connection with the subject matter. Robin (2008) suggests that digital storytelling projects provide a strong foundation in many different types of literacy such as digital literacy, global literacy, technology literacy and information literacy. Indeed, the digital storytelling process is an example of a 'multiliteracy' approach. Due to the simultaneous use of a foreign language and technology, students not only are asked to cope with an increasingly globalized society, communicating with other cultures through language, but also are asked to develop communicative competence through new communication technologies.

Digital storytelling (DST) has the potential to help students gain "21st century literacy skills," providing a unique opportunity to acquire new media literacy and ICT skills as well as the standard four skills covered in most language classes. Morgan (2014) reported that digital story projects were beneficial for motivating and helping students to improve their writing and reading, because the projects encouraged students to think about how their stories were created. In addition, Kim (2014) suggested that participants in her study were able to develop their oral proficiency. Yang and Wu (2012) have suggested that DST has an effect on both receptive and productive language competences, serving as a transformative technology-supported pedagogy that combines both English language learning in a constructivist/collaborative context, and self-production of authentic materials.

BACKGROUND OF THE PRESENT STUDIES

Regarding the educational framework of our studies, English as a foreign language (EFL) in Japan, a number of studies have been implemented. Susono (2011) instigated a digital storytelling project at a junior high school for second grade students, finding benefits of the project included a greater understanding of their peers, as well as significant 'knowledge reformation' while writing and rewriting the scripts. Enokida (2015) had students make digital stories about books they had read in an extensive reading assignment and suggested that the stories had a great effect on students' understanding of the content and promoted awareness of story structure. Ono (2014) found that higher proficiency students in his study seemed to feel that their Project Based Learning (PBL) skills such as computer use, data collection, problem solving, discussion and presentation in the field of foreign language teaching, greatly improved after the project, while the lower proficiency students in the study felt that the main benefit of the project was a reduction in their foreign language anxiety.

Many of the above studies dealt with digital stories as projects within a set curriculum. One of the aspects of this kind of project is the amount of time used for planning the task prior to execution. With regard to planning and its effects on production, pre-task planning has received considerable attention

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