

# Student Initiative of Producing Their Own Mini Videos for Language Learning

Amily Guenier, Lancaster University, UK\*

## ABSTRACT

This study explores how students produce their own mini videos using the target language to share experiences and communicate with native speakers. Multimodality is used as a theoretical approach. Class observations and in-depth interviews were used for data collection, which was analysed by theme. The research results indicate that students deem it the agency of their own learning rather than completing the assignments given by the tutor; they gain more from the discussions among their peers and native speakers than from giving the presentations in class only; watching and making comments on their own videos is visually and mentally stimulating, which triggers more thoughts and expressions. Students appreciate the cooperation among themselves, while they also find it challenging to manage their publicity. This research provides empirical evidence on how to encourage students' initiative to improve language skills and enhance intercultural communication competence, which sheds light on reshaping language and intercultural communication education.

## KEYWORDS

intercultural communication, mini videos, students' initiative, technology-assisted language practice

## INTRODUCTION

The recent requirement for language teaching in higher education is to develop students' language-technology cultural competence to become competent contributors to their workplace cultures, and to prepare language learners for a digitally and culturally complex workplace environment (Dressen-Hammouda & Wigham, 2022). Therefore, language tutors are expected to align their teaching practices with digital affordances (Yu & Zadorozhnyy, 2021). What language learners increasingly expect is the use of technology-enabled learning activities for meaningful communication, rather than to access the learning materials from paper to digital materials online. Consequently, the focus of language teaching needs to move beyond grammar and vocabulary toward workplace-based and academic literacy practices integrating digital information, and visual and multimodal modes, focusing on "a combination of digital, multimodal, communicative and multilingual practices" (Ware, 2017: 267).

Within this context, the digital storytelling (DST) approach is employed and implemented on a multimodality platform in this study to optimize the benefits of the digital learning context and to expose students to the digital methods of language practice. This paper aims to explore whether such a relatively novel design encourages student engagement that can better prepare students for future workplace requirements, and thus contribute to an integrated framework that addresses DST, multimodality, and intercultural communication.

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\*Corresponding Author

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Internet Celebrities

With the spread of digital affordance, the mini videos by internet celebrities, also known as social media influencers, web celebrities, microcelebrities, etc., attracted students' attention. In China alone, the number of internet celebrity short videos on social media reached more than 873 million by the end of 2020 (Tan, Han, & Zhong, 2022). One of the factors that contribute to their popularity is the humorous descriptions of certain aspects of their lives that echo the audience's own lives (Delbaere et al., 2021).

Internet celebrities use digital technology and social media to circulate personal stories (Rojek, 2016). As their reputation and their interaction with the audience go up, internet celebrities gradually transform content production into semi-professional production, which in turn provides the impetus for follow-up development. Their specific ability is to make good use of words to attract attention on the internet within the vast ecology of internet users (Xu & Zhang, 2020). The social media influencer value model by Lou and Yuan (2019) suggests that various input components in persuasive communication, such as messenger features (e.g., popularity) and message characteristics (e.g., advertising message value), determine effectiveness. Internet celebrities' videos offer a combination of input modes including auditory (i.e., spoken input) and visual input, and visual input consists of dynamic imagery and can also include written on-screen text. What is in common for internet celebrities is the good use of language – humorous, precise and engaging. Their videos uploaded to popular digital platforms such as YouTube enable them to encounter audiences from a variety of lingua-cultural backgrounds and interact with them through multimodal and multilingual repertoires. During the interaction, there are ample opportunities where people from different cultural backgrounds can make spontaneous communication (Ho, 2022). Internet celebrities' influence has been used for marketing (Tan, Han, & Zhong, 2022), industry (Lu, Xie, Zhang, & Li, 2022), linguistic style (Lee, Liu, and Tseng, 2021), etc., but no studies have been conducted for language skills and intercultural communication, and this gap warrants investigation.

### Digital Storytelling (DST)

Digital storytelling (DST) is termed as telling stories by using digital media (Lim et al, 2021). Unlike reading stories with printed books, DST allows people to record, express, and consume stories on digital platforms, which can help make learning more interactive and fun for learners (Lim et al, 2021). It can be a creative approach in educational settings where students present their ideas from a perspective using photos, pictures, videos, and music to enhance active learning, creativity, empowerment, and critical thinking skills to amplify language learning and teaching (Abdel-Aziz, et. al, 2022).

Regarding language learning, Lim et al., (2021) reviewed 58 journal papers in the Scopus database for the four language skills. In terms of listening skills, Tarinkulu's (2021) research found DST was useful in improving learners' listening skills, while Andayani's (2019) did not find it helpful, and thus different results were generated. For speaking skills, Yang et al. (2020) provided quantitative data from proficiency tests and presentations to determine the progress but did not provide the effect size of the experiment. In addition, Oakley et al. (2018) and Batsila and Tsihouridis (2016) agreed that DST enhances reading skills by providing evidence from reading tests. In the writing aspect, Chiang (2020) reported improvements in writing skills through a written test; meanwhile, Azis and Hu (2020) interviewed participants and analyzed their reflections after the experiment before concluding that DST does improve language writing skills. DST has been found to accelerate students' vocabulary development as well, as it connects students by enabling them to learn and share different topics and ideas. Despite the flourishing of DST being a valuable tool to improve language skills in the four aspects, the applications of DST for intercultural communication are still limited. This study is intended to fill in this gap.

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