



Fostering Intrinsic Motivation and Willingness to Communicate in English as a Foreign Language Classrooms: The Case of Digital Storytelling

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Abstract

Digital storytelling combines the ancient art of storytelling with multimedia elements such as photos, voiceover, sound clips, videos, and hypertext. Even though digital storytelling took its place in English as a foreign language classrooms, Saudi students have certainly not benefited from this innovative participatory method. This study introduced digital storytelling into the Saudi EFL context to allow the investigation of this under-explored area. This project examined the potential of digital storytelling to create intrinsically motivated behaviour and promote a supportive, engaging English language learning environment. It also investigated the effectiveness of this method in increasing classroom participation which is crucial to foreign language acquisition. The 32 10th grade female student participants from a school in Southern Saudi Arabia participated in creating digital stories over twelve weeks. A case study design using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods as scales, observations, and interviews were used to measure the research objectives. Findings highlighted a positive impact on students' intrinsic motivation owing to the characteristics of this activity. Willingness to participate has also increased, although gradually, resulting in



improvement in some aspects of students' literacy. Based on the findings and limitations of the study, recommendations for future research suggested.

Key words: digital storytelling, intrinsic motivation, willingness to communicate, classroom participation, English as a foreign language.

1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of learning a new language is to be able to communicate efficiently. The attainment of this degree of proficiency depends, mainly, on the frequent exposure to the target language and, more importantly, on the frequent use of this language. This condition, however, is hardly achievable in the contexts where the target language is regarded a foreign language i.e., the target language learners have limited opportunities to use it in real life outside of the classroom. That said, English language classrooms should compensate for the shortage of chances outside classroom walls by affording students sufficient opportunities to practice the target language inside classrooms. However, for multiple reasons, reticence characterizes students in English language classrooms (Liu, 2005; Riasati, 2014; Tong, 2010).

Investigation of the factors contributing to the problem of low oral communication is beyond the scope of this paper and, in fact, it has been intensively studied (Donald, 2010; Li & Liu, 2011). This paper, instead, approaches this problem by positively influencing students' willingness to communicate as well as their intrinsic motivation. These two constructs have a strong and immediate impact on English language learners' actual participation in the classroom. On the first hand, past research, MacIntyre (2007), MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clement, and Noels (1998), and Yashima (2002) show that willingness to communicate has an immediate impact on foreign language acquisition. It was found that most willing to communicate students use their linguistic resources more frequently, compared to their unwilling peers, demonstrating noticed progress in their language acquisition.

More important, research has been advanced that willingness to communicate in foreign language is not merely a matter of personal trait, rather, situational factors have been found to have a great influence on students' readiness to speak (Baghaei, Dourakhshan, &



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Salavati, 2012; MacIntyre, Burns, & Jessome, 2011). Such an outcome has an important implication for English language teachers to find out possible ways to engender students' willingness to participate and to avoid diminishing factors.

Likewise, intrinsic motivation appeared to be one of the most important concept in foreign language learning classrooms. Deci and Ryan's (1985) conceptualization of intrinsic motivation in their self-determination theory stood out. According to self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation refers to the intrinsic interest experienced when performing an activity. Deci (1992) considers intrinsic motivation the genuine drive for initiating and maintaining any action. Therefore, for English language learners to endure the cognitive labour embodied in the internalization of the rules and meanings of the target language, the language classroom needs to embrace intrinsically motivating activities (Guilloteaux & Dornyei, 2008).

Hence, success to increase willingness to communicate and intrinsic motivation inside language learners would increase second language use in classroom (Hashimoto, 2002; Hashmi, 2016). With the above information considered, this study proposed using a student-created, digital storytelling activity in the English language classroom to achieve positive effect on students' willingness to communicate as well as intrinsic motivation.

This study hypothesized digital storytelling could increase students' classroom participation by positively effecting their willingness to communicate and intrinsic motivation based on the following. In terms of intrinsic motivation, digital storytelling is well-reported to increase students' engagement in the class (Niemi & Multisilta, 2016; Sadik, 2008; Smeda, Dakich, & Sharda, 2014). Based on Deci's (1992) view of intrinsic motivation as the pleasure experienced when doing an activity, this study assumes students' engagement in digital storytelling activity is a reflective of an increase in their intrinsic motivation.

Willingness to communicate, on the other hand, has been evidenced to be directly influenced by motivation (Hashimoto, 2002). Moreover, several studies indicate the potential of different pedagogical strategies to effect willingness to communicate in second/foreign language classroom (Aubrey, 2011; Kang, 2005; Zarrinabadi, Ketabi, & Abdi, 2014).



Accordingly, this study assumes digital storytelling, as a motivating, creative, and collaborative pedagogical intervention, would have the potential to engender students' willingness to participate in the English language classroom.

Based on these assumptions, this study sought to answer the following two questions:

1. What is the impact of student-created digital storytelling on students' willingness to communicate?
2. What is the impact of students-created digital storytelling on students' intrinsic motivation?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Willingness to Communicate and its Importance in EFL Classroom Participation

In the process of acquiring a new language, frequent exposure and use of the new language is critical to achieve proficiency. If the target language is not a second language, learners will not find ample chances to use it in daily life communications. This then presents a challenge to English language teachers to create classrooms that afford students with abundant opportunities to use the new language they are learning.

In attempt to increase classroom participation, the construct of willingness to communicate has captured the attention of language theorists and educators in recent years (Baghaei, 2013; Bernales, 2014; Weaver, 2005). The construct of willingness to communicate was originally conceptualized in first language by McCroskey and Baer (1985) building on the "unwillingness to communicate" construct originated by Burgoon (1976), "Predispositions towards Verbal Behaviour" by Mortensen, Arntson, and Lustig (1977), and "Shyness" by McCroskey and Richmond (1982). McCroskey and Bear conceptualized WTC as a personality-based predisposition that can be influenced by situational variables but is essentially consistent across different communication situations and with all types of interlocutors.

In late 90s, the construct was extended and introduced into the second language literature by MacCIntyre, Dornyei, Clement, and Noels (1998), who treat it as a situation-based predisposition to initiate communication with a specific person in a specific time. It was also argued that willingness to communicate in the second language varies considerably when



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there is limited contact with native speakers of the new language and the general nature of communication in classrooms tends to be artificial and less authentic.

In review of the pertinent literature, it can be noticed that much of the research has been focused on two areas. First, the majority of studies were identifying the factors that have the potential to influence second language learners' willingness to communicate, with little attention to WTC in foreign language classrooms. A second focus of research in this field was the impact of and relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC) and achievement and proficiency in the second language.

Finally, a growing body of research has been investigating the effectiveness of particular instructional strategies on willingness to communicate in the language classroom. Adopting a quasi-experimental study, Buckingham and Alpaslan (2017), for example, have investigated the potential to increase EFL willingness to communicate through the use of audio-visual speaking activity over four months. Findings highlighted a progress increase in willingness towards the end of the experimental period. Another study by Mirsane and Khabiri (2016) embraced communicative strategies in teaching English language learners as an attempt to increase their willingness to communicate. After sixteen sessions of students' use of various communicative strategies, results indicate noticeable increase of willingness to communicate. Led by a similar desire, the present study evaluated the effectiveness of digital storytelling to engender willingness to participate in English language classroom among Saudi students whose issue of non-participation is a concerning issue (Alhmadi, 2014; Reza, 2015).

2.2 Intrinsic Motivation and its Enhancement in EFL Classrooms

It is indisputable that motivation is fundamental to endure the life-long and tedious process of language learning. This topic has thus gained a massive coverage resulting in expansive literature with vast conceptualizations of motivation and, in turn, proposed motivational strategies. With regard to foreign language classrooms, a well-known distinction of motivation, namely, intrinsic and extrinsic appears to hold critical impact on learners. In a broad sense, intrinsically motivated behaviours are those driven by inner power whereas extrinsically motivated behaviours are performed for the sake of external rewards (Dornyei, 1994).



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Deci and Ryan (1985) made a significant contribution to the understanding and conceptualization of intrinsic motivation under their prominent self-determination theory. As in Ryan and Deci's (2000) words, "Perhaps no single phenomenon reflects the positive potential of human nature as much as intrinsic motivation, the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn." (p.70). It is theorized that intrinsic motivation is a powerful force for initiating and persisting the doing of any activity. It also can be thought of as the sense of pleasure, interest experienced when interacting with and involved in an activity. As such, intrinsically motivated behaviours are more regulated, and thus, better and consistent outcomes are most likely to occur (Guay, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2000).

Within classrooms, teachers can achieve this by adopting intrinsically motivating activities through which students fully engage and actively participate in the classroom. In this connection, Deci and Ryan (1985) pointed out that to increase intrinsic motivation, learning environment should stimulate students to overcome optimal challenges autonomously. They believe learning environments should provide satisfaction to students' three psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in order for students to be intrinsically motivated, and thus, more bound to success. As this study is concerned with evaluating digital storytelling as an intrinsically motivating activity, the discussion to follow will focus only on autonomy and competence as these two needs can be promoted through the tasks included in this activity.

One effective way to promote learner autonomy in a classroom is through adopting a student-centred approach (Warschauer & Whittaker, 2002). Learning environments in which teachers shift roles of responsibilities and control over learning to their students satisfy their psychological need for autonomy resulting in intrinsically motivated behaviours. By embracing and integrating technology into classroom, chances are teachers have far more possibilities to make students in charge of their learning through project-based approach. Hafner and Miller (2011), for example, found integrating digital storytelling in teaching an English for Science course to foreign learners has promoted their autonomy as reflected in their taking responsibility for their projects, monitoring progress and constantly reflecting on their learning. The second psychological need the learning environment needs to satisfy in



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students is their sense of competence. Learning would be pointless if students were constantly failing and tasks were overly difficult. Therefore, students feel competent when faced with optimally challenging tasks that stimulate their innate desire of achievement.

2.3 Digital Storytelling: its Educational Benefits and Effectiveness in English Language Classrooms

Digital storytelling is the act of telling a story with the use of digital technology. All the descriptions of digital storytelling presented in the pertinent literature revolves around this meaning, along with some distinctions depending on the relevant discipline and the purpose of the story. Such pairing of stories and technology produces something packed with the potentials of the appealing tradition of storytelling and the undeniable power of technology.

Alexander and Levine (2008) beautifully described digital storytelling as a collection of

pauses, to let the audience think or to indicate a change in topic; interruptions, to indicate excitement; the ending of a topic before its full resolution, to produce a cliff hanger; vocal intonation, pacing, and pitch; sound effects and music (2008, p. 54).

In educational settings, digital storytelling can be integrated as an effective instructional tool to capture students' attention or simplify abstract and complex concepts. It also can be student-created, which maximizes its educational benefits and unleashes students' potentials and talents especially those aligned with technology, often referred to as "Twenty-First Century Literacy".

Besides its documented benefits in mainstream classrooms, Gregori-Signes (2008) argues for the adequacy of educational digital storytelling as a language learning tool due to its innovative, motivating, flexible, and creative features which research has endorsed. In conformity with this, abundant studies show a satisfactory improvement in both linguistic and non-linguistics aspects of language learners benefiting from this activity

(Hung, Hwang, & Huang, 2012; Yuksel, Robin, & McNeil, 2011)

From the viewpoint of teachers, despite some inherent concerns and difficulties, integrating digital storytelling into English as a foreign language classroom has yielded a positive impact and notable increase in levels of motivation and engagement among learners (Bui, 2015; Celik & Aytin, 2014). In terms of oral proficiency, students were reported to show progress in their fluency and pronunciation (Afrilyasanti & Basthomi, 2011) due, in part, to the



narration process, and also the ample chances it creates for the students to discuss and actively participate in the classroom.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants and Site

A class consisting of 32 Saudi female students at 10th grade participated collaboratively in creating digital stories in English. The selection of this grade level was an informed choice based on recommendations from some English language teachers at the school stating that this activity requires intermediate to advanced language proficiency expected from 10th graders or higher.

3.2 Instruments

The data was mainly obtained qualitatively through prolonged classroom observation by the teacher who took the role of the facilitator of the digital storytelling activity as well as through post-intervention interviews. Nonetheless, a quantitative method was used to provide complementary information. Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) was distributed to the students at the end of the study. The purpose of the questionnaire was to assess participants' subjective experience when they were working on this activity.

4. The Case of Creating Digital Stories in an EFL Classroom

The digital storytelling activity was carried out through three distinctive stages:

4.1 Pre-production Stage extended over four weeks (4 X40 minute periods per week) and involved, primarily, groups brainstorming to come up with a story topic. These were the themes students came up with for their stories: my role model, racism, friendship, memorable moments, and war in Arab countries. Last step story script writing, which was mostly conducted in classroom. Stories ranged from 250-500 words length.

4.2 Production Stage comprised the transformation of the written text into a vivid audio-visual video. It required six weeks in which students were taking and gathering photos, selecting sound tracks and videos and recording narrations. Last step was using "WeVideo" software for video editing.

4.3 Post-production Stage lasted two weeks and included displays of the final product of each group in front of the classroom. Stories have been posted online on YouTube. Here is a



link to one of the stories titled “War in Arab Countries”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrtKccnd-Is&t=2s>.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Effect of Digital Storytelling on Students’ Willingness to Communicate

Two major patterns were observed during the implementation of the digital storytelling activity. First, students showed satisfying levels of willingness to communicate represented in their voluntary responses, initiation of discussion, asking for clarification, and ultimately writing their stories. This mismatch between students’ reported willingness and their actual participation can be attributed to the difference in learning environments, as the questionnaire was answered before the intervention while students’ participation was under different circumstances. This explanation is supported by several studies pointing out to the critical effect of lesson content and context (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005) the teacher (Kang, 2005), perceived communication opportunities (Cao, 2014), and learner motivation (Hashimoto, 2002; Peng, 2012) in language learner’ willingness to communicate. Second, it was observable that students’ willingness to participate fluctuated throughout the project tending to increase towards the end, which is also consistent with Buckingham and Alpaslan’s (2017) who highlighted an increase in some aspects of students’ speaking skill associated with gradual increase in their willingness to communicate. For some students, as reflected in Shahad’s comment, they were confused at the beginning and uncertain of the nature of the project.

“The first two classes had no excitement, but when we started to write, for example when you gave us the things that we’ll be doing, and when we started to write the chosen subjects, that was nice”

5.2 Effect of Digital Storytelling on Students’ Intrinsic Motivation

The descriptive statistics for the Intrinsic Motivation are displayed in Table 2. As seen in this table, the participants’ responses ranged across four scales, interest (Items 1-5), perceived competence (Items 6-10), value (Items 11-15), and pressure (Items 16-18). As the table shows, the mean values for the subscales interest and value (5.79 and 5.67, respectively) are a slightly higher compared to the mean value of perceived competence (5.23). The low mean of pressure (2.51) indicate its relative absence among students during the activity.



Table 2

Student's Evaluation of their Intrinsic Motivation during Digital Storytelling Activity

Subscale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Interest/Enjoyment	5.79	1.09
Perceived competence	5.23	1.28
Value/Usefulness	5.67	1.03
Pressure/Tension	2.51	1.63

5.2.1 Interest/enjoyment as a measure of intrinsic motivation. Of all the indicators of intrinsic motivation pleasure and interest experienced when doing an activity is at the heart of it (Deci, 1992). As evident in the data presented in Table 2, the majority of students experienced high levels of enjoyment during their participation in the digital storytelling project. This finding corroborates similar findings of prior studies that digital storytelling promotes students' enjoyment of the lesson. For example, Suwardy, Pan, and Seow (2013) used digital storytelling to teach an accounting course which students described as "an interesting, fun, engaging, interactive and dynamic way of learning" (p. 114). This result is probably attributed to the nature of the project, which makes the students in charge and control of the learning promoting their autonomy, as was also noticed by Hafner and Miller (2011).

5.2.2 Perceived competence as a positive predictor of intrinsic motivation. For students to be intrinsically motivated, they need to feel competent at what activity they are involved in, and for an activity to be intrinsically motivating, it needs to be optimally challenging (Deci, 2017). The table above shows that perceived competence was relatively low when compared to interest and value. Part of this outcome can be attributed to students' limited English proficiency as the major component of digital storytelling is the story, which needs a relatively vast vocabulary and knowledge of grammar. Students' unfamiliarity with the form of technology used for story creation can also feed into their sense of incompetence.

5.2.3 Value/usefulness as a positive predictor of intrinsic motivation. Students' perception of an activity as useful is a positive indicator of it increasing their intrinsic motivation. If an activity were not interesting in itself, students would still be intrinsically motivated to do it



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when they realise its value and embrace it so that it begins to be interesting (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to the data presented in Table 2, students' view of digital storytelling to be of some value came next to their feel of interest in the project.

5.2.4 Pressure/tension as a negative predictor of intrinsic motivation. The existence of pressure while students are involved in an activity can impede their intrinsic motivation because, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), pressure is a kind of extrinsic motivation which undermines intrinsic motivation. As shown in Table 2, students did not experience high levels of pressure while creating their digital stories. Integrating the project as an extracurricular activity so their performance would not affect their grades in the English subject can be the source of their sense of ease. However, experienced pressure can be attributed, mainly, to the uptake of new form technology, especially for low-tech students. Anxiety resulted from using new technology in classroom is a frequently discussed topic (Aydin, 2011; Rau, Gao, & Wu, 2008).

6. Conclusion

Increase in students' willingness to participate can be added to the educational uses and benefits of integrating digital storytelling into English language classrooms. Findings, moreover, indicate that digital storytelling can be characterised as an intrinsically motivating activity, which somewhat explains its major effect in past research, i.e., being a motivational and engaging tool. However, teachers designing digital storytelling for their students, need to take into consideration their students' level of language proficiency and digital literacy to achieve optimal results.

These outcomes should have significant implications for English as a foreign language education. First is the scholarship of willingness to communicate in foreign language through the enhancement of the base of research indicating the significant role of the classroom environment, activity type in this case. Second is the literature of digital storytelling by means of identifying an additional use and benefit of digital storytelling inside language classrooms. Most importantly is to transfer the successful experience of using digital storytelling in English learning to a new EFL context, Saudi Arabia. Thus, Saudi students can benefit from the latest advances in computer-assisted language learning and be in par with their international peers.



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Finally, this study uncovers the need for future research venues that are specific both to the context of the study and the broad relevant field of knowledge as well. In the former matter, while this study was conducted on a small scale, future research can be a part of a larger program targeting the integration and evaluation of digital storytelling project in English learning in different grade levels. On a broader field, the study could be extended by means of employing an experimental approach and using quantitative methods to evaluate the effect of digital storytelling on language learners' willingness to participate and intrinsic motivation.

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