Teachers’ Concerns and Solutions Towards The Implementation of Digital Storytelling in Teaching English in ESL Classroom in Asian Countries

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We are living in the era of Information Technology where students have a lot exposure to the state-of-the-art devices and softwares. The remarkable revolutions in interactivity and multimedia materials together with countless emerging technologies have also enabled the conception of digital storytelling. However, it has not been widely used in many developing countries such as Vietnam. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to conduct an investigation into the history of digital storytelling, the necessary facilities and how it is being used educationally in the classroom so that teachers in developing countries can widely apply digital storytelling in teaching. This paper also raises students’ awareness towards using technology in their study, which will make an important breakthrough in teaching and learning English in Vietnam.

Keywords: digital storytelling, educationally-used technology, Asian countries

Introduction

Technology and Information Communication Technology (ICT) have exerted their existence in the world for a while. A look at what the world has done can prove this fact. Websites like Captured Wisdom (http://www.ncrel.org/cw/) federally-funded (USA) North Central Technology in Education Consortium for K-12 Teachers, school administrators and adult literacy educators and http://www.satir-ritas.org project in the School Adminstrators’ Technology Integration Resource in Canada help teachers learn how to use ICT and incorporate ICT in their curriculum. UNICEF’s Teachers Talking About Learning (http://www.unicef.org/teachers) has helped create a network for teachers in developing countries with a wide selection of training materials, links, and forums for further discussions. In Asia, nations like Singapore, Malaysia, Korea etc. have been recorded as having designed sound ICT teacher training programs. A program by the pre-service teacher training institute, the National Insitute of Education (NIE) in Singapore which aims to enhance teachers’ ICT ability based on the Masterplan for ICT in Education has proved to be effective. Malaysia has devised four over-arching initiatives, namely, the MSC Project, the National Information Technology Agenda, the K-Economy Master Plan, and the skill HRD Plan. Neighbouring countries Laos has conducted teacher upgrading program to improve the quality of unqualified teachers at district level through Teacher Upgrading

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Center at 11 provinces and Cambodia since 1995 has carried out primary school in-service teacher training by distance, under Distance Learning Education Project. In Vietnam the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) launched the “Year of ICT” to promote a breakthrough in education in the school year 2008-2009. ICT policy in fact started in Vietnam from 2000 when the MOET announced the Masterplan for ICT in education for the period 2001-2005.

Therefore, over the past 15 years, language teachers have enjoyed merits that Internet/World Wide Web bring to their teaching practice like more abundant resources, limitless possibilities for exposure to authentic language and more effective suggested activities. Even though ICT cannot be regarded as a panacea for all educational problems, their advantages are apparently undeniable. It facilitates both instruction and learning process. Teachers can add variety, liveliness, and creativity to their lessons thanks to marvelous programs and software. They help students exposed to English speaking environment via films in different contexts or better aware of cultural differences. What most counts is the opportunity for independent learning for both teachers and students through discovery learning. Discovery learning, as for constructivism, gives more emphasis to students as active participants in their learning procedure (Bruner, 1966; Hermann, 1969, as cited in Bromberg, Techatassanasoontorn, & Andrade, 2013, p. 2), by which students explore, discover, and build up knowledge through interaction with their environment, as well as other students.

Digital storytelling is appropriate for discovery learning because it stimulates students to utilize the technology such as audio, video, and images to convey information in the form of a story (University of Houston, 2011). “Digital storytelling is now practiced around the world in increasingly diverse contexts, from cultural institutions and community development programs to screen innovation and commercial applications” (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009, p. 4). However, it has been applied unevenly around the world. “For example, while digital storytelling is widely used across North America, Europe, and Australia, it is less developed in Asia, Africa, and South America” (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009, p. 7). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is examine the implementation of digital storytelling among the Asian countries to find out why DST has not been widely applied among Asian countries. In order to that, the following questions have been carried out:

1. What are the merits and concerns of the implementation of digital storytelling in teaching English in EFL classroom in Asian countries?
2. How can teachers perceive the benefits of using DST and overcome the difficulties?

With the results from the literature review, the author hopes to find out the answers to these questions to better the situations of implementation of DST in teaching English among Asian countries.

**Definitions of Digital Storytelling**

Digital storytelling is a really new concept, which is not just the simple narration of the characters, but “uses personal digital technology to combine a number of media into a coherent narrative” (Ohler, 2013, p. 16), which makes the stories more vivid and easier to understand. However, it is not just a simple collection of photos with narrations. Creating digital story is a journey of researching topics, writing scripts, storyboarding, and making the final product using the video editing such as iMovie or Window Movie Maker and other tools to deal the audio such as Adacity (Ohler, 2013). Lambert (2013, pp. 37-38) also points out the seven elements to create the effective digital storytelling which include: Self Relevatory (the need to share the story), Personal or First Person Voice (the stories are personal reflections on subject), Scenes (a lived experience of the author
told), Photos more than Moving Image (using images in small numbers to create a relaxed visual pace against the narration), Soundtrack (to add meaning and impact to the story), Length and Design (under five minutes and the emphasis is a raw, more direct feel, with pans and zooms to provide emphasis, dissolves to soften cuts, and once in a while the use of compositing or other special effects) and Intention (all choices about participation, ethics-in-process, as well as distribution).

The exposure to digital storytelling not only encourages students to read more but also enhances their “cretical thinking” (Ohler, 2013, p. 14). To achieve this goal, digital storytelling can be pictured in many forms. For example,

instructor-created stories may revolve around familiar experiences and events that are relevant to students; instructional materials that rely heavily on voice narration; documentary videos detailing a recount of historical events; or student-led productions which enable users to create their own stories and share their developments with others. (Oppermann, 2007, as cited in Suwardy, Pan, & Seow, 2013, p. 110)

Moreover, successful digital storytelling does not only limit itself to engaging students but also motivates and inspires enthusiastic students. “The impact of digital storytelling can be summarized as a convergence of four student-centred learning strategies: student engagement; reflection for deep learning; project-based learning; and the effective integration of technology into instruction” (Sadik, 2008, as cited in Suwardy et al., 2013, p. 111). This can help create a strong purpose in learning.

Therefore, throughout the world, there are major different storytelling programs (see Table 1) which were established to enhance students’ ability in applying technology in creating digital storytelling.

Table 1

| Opening Years of Major Digital Storytelling Program, by Continent |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Name                | Center for Digital Storytelling | “Capture Wales”, BBC | Australian Center for the Moving Image | Kids for Kids | Men as Partners, EnGender Health | Million-Youth-Life-Stories, Museu da Pessoa and Aracati |
| Country             | USA             | Wales          | Australia       | Israel          | South Africa    | Brazil          |
| Continent           | North America   | Europe         | Australia       | Asia            | Africa          | South America   |

*Note.* Harley and McWilliam (2009, p. 6).

It can be seen from this table, programs for digital storytelling were commonly developed across the Europe, America, and Australia while it not very popular among Asian countries. Moreover, across the continents, there are also different procedures of creating digital storytelling. Sylvester and Greenidge (2009) indicate that the steps for creating a digital story include:

1. Writing a story.
2. Sketching scenes to match the narration on a storyboard.
3. Numbering sections of text to correspond with scenes on the storyboard.
4. Collecting graphics that complement the scenes, such as photographs and clip art.
5. Recording the narration.
6. Combining the files into a movie with a video-editing program such as Movie Maker or iMovie.
7. Adding a title frame.
While in the US and Europe, iMovie and Window Movie Maker are used, “in Malaysia, the Microsoft PhotoTory 3 was used because of its fewer requirements of ICT skills and allows offline access” (Thang et al., 2014). Moreover, it adopted Robin and Pierson’s (2005) model (see Figure 1) in creating the digital story telling.

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1.** A description of the tasks and assessment involved in the DST (as cited in Thang et al., 2014, p. 314).

It can be seen that in Malaysian context, teachers adopt Robin and Pierson’s (2005) model, which explicitly provides the steps teachers and students should do. Moreover, students have a chance to post their script on the blog to get feedback from their peers and teachers. This is important because most students from Malaysian in particular and other Asian countries in general are not confident in their English. Therefore, they need to ask for feedback.

Moreover, while the framework of DST proposed by Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California, directed by Joe Lambert is widely adopted among the US and European countries, it is not very popular in many areas of Asia, especially Korean and Japan due to the differences in conceptions of DST. For example,

the Entertainment Lab at the University of Tsukuba in Japan is typical in its use of “digital storytelling” to denote computer technologies, drawing on a “generic” conception of digital storytelling, rather than the “specific” conception that characterizes CDS-based digital storytelling. (Hartley & William, 2009, pp. 7-8)

Therefore, it can be seen that different frameworks have been adopted among Asian countries. However, this shows their effort to incorporate DST in curriculum to teach English because of the educators started to realize the importance of DST in improving students’ English competence. Nevertheless, there are also difficulties when applying DST among Asian countries. As a result, the next section will focus on the merits and drawbacks of DST in teaching English among Asian countries.
The Merits and Concerns of Digital Storytelling Implementation

Merits

It can be seen that DST can provide students with ample merits in learning English and develop other skills as well. Apparently, students are now living in the 21st, which “needs to be prepared to function well in the digital world they live in” (Morgan, 2014, p. 21). Moreover, Hicks (2011) states, “the saturation of technology in students’ lives has produced an entirely different type of student, shaping the way they think, learn, and experience the world around them” (p. 188, as cited in Morgan, 2014, p. 21).

However students from Asian countries can get more benefits in improving their English besides the technological skills. It has been recognized by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia, “the incorporation of technology into the learning and teaching of English has been viewed […] as an important way to promote the learning of the English Language” (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Zainoll Abidin, 2010, as cited in Thang et al., 2014, p. 312). Obviously, “digital storytelling may play the role of an effective platform that makes abstract content more accessible and facilitates discussions about topics in the story, hence engaging a large group of students” (Pounsford, 2007, as cited in Suwardy et al., 2013, p. 110). Therefore, it is easier for students to understand the concepts and immerse themselves in the topics. Students from Asian countries do not have a lot of opportunities to get exposure to the target language because most of the time people communicate in L1. Therefore, this is a great chance for students to practice their language in classroom.

Moreover, as a study conducted by Suwardy et al. (2013) in Singapore Management University, Singapore, most students “felt that digital storytelling was able to provide open-ended discussions, opportunities for decision-making and meaningful feedback” (p. 115). Therefore, students can find themselves involves in the discussion and have a strong motivation to convey their ideas, which helps improve their language competence. Holtzblatt and Tschakert (2011) also states, “DST helps involve and engage students” (p. 359). Tsou, Wang, and Tzeng (2006) also provides an important merit of DST in teaching foreign languages. “According to Tsou and his co-authors, students in the digital storytelling experimental group have a higher enjoyment of and success in language learning compared to students in the control group, who did not have access to digital storytelling” (Suwardy et al., 2013, p. 115). A research carried out by Sadik (2008) also pointed out Egyptian teachers were happy to incorporate digital storytelling in their curriculum because they believed that “digital storytelling enriched the classroom learning environment, the curriculum, and student learning experiences by providing an open-ended, creative and motivating productive tool in the classroom” (Sadik, 2008, p. 502).

Concerns

It can be seen that teachers had positive reactions towards DST. However, rarely do they apply the DST in teaching because several barriers: “unconductive school environment, lack of access to technology and necessary software, and incompatibility of the computers; operating system” (Thang et al., 2014, p. 313).

Obviously, many workshops have been run by Western countries to help support Asian countries. However, the schools rarely do the follow-up activities to develop these workshops. Hartley and McWilliam (2009) provided a vivid example of this situation. Jennifer Nowicki of USA-based Creative Narrations ran a workshop in Southern China for Shantou University’s English Language Program in 2007. However, when she returned to the US, the university took no actions to implement DST in teaching and learning. It is also the same case in Vietnam. According to Bui, Dinh, and Kabilan (2012), 10 out of 12 teachers, which accounted for 83.33%, affirmed that the universities did not provide any IT trainings to teachers. Only two teachers said that
there was some certain training in the universities; however, it was infrequent and did not stick to any schedules. They added that the content in the training was usually inapplicable to their teaching since some training just aimed at promoting a specific software or IT product. Also, what was taught during the training remained “on the shelf” since time and facilities are not assured.

According to Thang et al. (2014), Malaysian teachers can recommend DST to “other class in the future and would recommend it to other teachers” because they said, “student didn’t ask [their teachers] when they encounter technical problem and all like this. They solve most of the problems on their own” (p. 318). It can help students become more independent from teachers and ask for help from their classmates. However, it raises a concern for low proficiency students who are not ready for DST (Thang et al., 2014, p. 319). Therefore, it can be seen that students’ language competence is also a big concern for teachers when applying DST.

Another concern arises from Malaysian teachers, which are also the problem in many Asian countries. DST can be “a chaotic experience” because “[teachers] are not well prepared and [they] are not familiar with the Photostory 3 software, and [they] never had the experience also to create digital story prior to this” (Thang et al., 2014, p. 321). They admitted that several problems could have been put to the minimum if they had prepared better themselves. Obviously, if “instructors themselves are not well-versed with the software, or are not that technology-savvy, so [they] can’t expect the students to. If we can’t guide the students well, how we can expect them to do well in the project” (Thang et al., 2014, p. 321). It is extremely important in the Information Age where students can have more opportunities to get exposure to the technology than their teachers. Therefore, teachers raise a concern towards the launching of the new approach in teaching and learning English. As a result, “there was lack of collaborative efforts among teachers carrying out the innovation” (Thang et al., 2014, p. 321).

However, the question here is: What has led to this strong resistance and a lot of concerns among Asian teachers in applying DST in teaching? Firstly, the teacher is always supposed to be the person to provide students with knowledge and have a profound knowledge while students are receivers. However, “as mentioned earlier, the new generation of students are the ‘digital natives’ and the teachers are the ‘digital migrants’” (Thang et al., 2014, p. 324). Therefore, teachers are afraid of losing face in front of students. Secondly, the changes in the syllabus are usually directive from the school administrators without any announcements in advance, so “many of the teachers were taken by surprise and some of them, especially those who lacked ICT skills, could not see the need for the relatively drastic change from their previous practice and had no clear idea how the changes would benefit their existing teaching environment and their social responsibilities” (Fishman, 2000, Hiltz, 1988, Wilson, Sherry, Dobrovolny, Batty, & Ryder, 2002, as cited in Thang et al., 2014, p. 324). Therefore, Rogers (2003) argues if teachers are considered as “agents of change, it can help speed up the diffusion of innovation in schools” (as cited in Thang et al., 2014, p. 324). Finally, Hargreavaes (2005) found that “older teachers have a tendency to resist changes in schools and would challenge the outcomes of change whilst the younger generation of teachers coming straight from teacher training would be more willing to accept change” (Thang et al., 2014, p. 325). Clearly, age is also an important factor which influences the success of implementation of DST in teaching.

Moreover, as mentioned by Ohler (2013), “students must cite all material they use in digital story, showing the same respect for using graphics, words, music and other media” (p. 255). It dawns on me that we do credit to the authors not only when we use their ideas but also when we use pictures or music. It is fairly true that we cannot use something that did not belong to us. This is also discussed in Harding and Hill (2011),
“[storytellers] respect copyright laws globally and works with partners to design processes that ensure that laws pertaining to the use of images and music are adhered to” (p. 194). Moreover, as the educators, we need “to communicate our own learning about copyright and fair use to others, both through practice and through education” (Center for Social Media, 2009, p. 14). However, this issue is usually neglected among Asian countries where people do not pay much attention to Fair Use and Copyright.

Besides copyright and the above issues, Harding and Hill (2011) also provide guidelines for ethical practice in DST that teachers should also take into consideration when implementing DST in teaching. Storytellers are encouraged to get ready to tell their personal stories in terms of words and images to other people. However, “storytellers are counseled on the risks and possible emotional challenges involved in creating a digital story, as well as on the ways in which story creation may put the storyteller and/or individuals mentioned in a story at risk for harm” (Harding & Hill, 2011, p. 193). Therefore, “digital stories should only be shared in the specific ways for which consent has been obtained from storytellers” (Harding & Hill, 2011, p. 195). However, in Vietnam in particular, people tend to forget the ethnic practice in DST and freely share the images and stories of other people without asking or paying attention to privacy.

Finally, “a small number of students commented that they believed the workload or assessment criteria for the entire course was not feasible or that the amount of grades did not fairly reflect the amount of work that they put into the assignment” (Bromberg et al., 2013, p. 16). This is an important issue in DST because students sometimes do not know the criteria of assessment clearly.

Knowing the merits and concerns of DST, teachers should be notified how to apply DST appropriately in teaching context to make use of DST to the fullest. Therefore, the next section will focus on the some implications for teachers when conducting DST in classroom. This is also address the second question in the Introduction.

Implications

The President’s Council of Advisors on Science & Technology Board (1997) suggested that “training should provide assistance on how to integrate computer use into the curriculum and give pedagogic support to reconcile the tensions between the traditional and new pedagogical methods for using technology” (as cited in Thang et al., 2014, p. 325). As a result, teachers should have adequate time to get themselves adjusted to the new technology to better apply DST in classroom. Realizing that, teachers should also provide step-by-step instructions with vivid demonstration of new softwares in classroom so that students can follow teacher’s instructions and create their own stories.

Furthermore, “there is also a need for course administrators to be receptive to the suggestions given by the teachers” (Thang et al., 2014, p. 325). They should not impose their directive and force teachers to do whatever they want, but the administrators should conduct some experimental implementation before announcing the reform to listen to teachers’ opinions and problems in DST. Thus, teachers will feel less tension and anticipate problems when actually implementing DST in teaching. The administrators should also recognize who have made ample contributions or breakthroughs in implementing DST in teaching.

In terms of implementation of DST in classroom, “students must feel that the assessment of the projects is fair and rewards students for their commitment to their stories” (Bromberg et al., 2013, p. 17). Therefore, teachers should provide and explain clearly the rubrics of DST so that students will know what they are supposed to do to meet teachers’ expectation. Teachers can refer to the website:
http://www.iste.org/docs/pdfs/20-14_ISTE_Standards-S_PDF.pdf to get a better idea of what to require students in learning. As mentioned above, Copyright is an important issue in the Information Age where it is easy to share and copy the online material. Therefore, “explicit explanation and instruction need to be given to students regarding copyright and plagiarism issues associated with the use of digital media” (Bromberg et al., 2013, p. 17). It is also important that teachers should spend some time in class discussing and introducing useful strategies and tools for students to apply when creating DST. Moreover, teachers should choose a particular framework of time allocation and procedures of conducting DST in classroom (as suggested in the Literature Review) to have an explicit plan in DST. More importantly, as a clear procedure proposed by Robin and Pierson’s (2005) in Malaysian context, teachers should let students post their stories on the blog platform, so that they can receive the peer feedback and comments from their teachers to better their stories before using video-editing to make final products. However, teachers should take into considerations the ethnic practice about personal stories in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality.

**Future Directions**

From the literature review, it dawns on me that the implementation of DST has not been widely studied among Asian countries. It can be easy to find a lot of articles in the context of European, Australian, and the US. However, there are a few of studies conducted in the context of Asian countries. Therefore, for the next steps, the author thinks future researchers should conduct more studies on DST in Asian countries to better the situations of implementing DST in Asian countries. Moreover, there is a fact there is no articles about the DST in Vietnam. As a result, for the next step, the author will conduct some quantitative and qualitative research on DST in Vietnam. However, in order to realize this goal, there should be more teachers conduct DST in classroom. This is a big issue because nowadays there are not many teachers organize DST in classroom. The administrators should provide teachers with workshops on DST so that they can perceive the benefits of DST in teaching and learning English, which motivates teachers in carrying out DST in classroom.

Moreover, previously the author just took into consideration the practice of DST in classroom such as students’ low proficiency in using technology, topic selections, and storyboard creation. However, this paper also reveals ample concerns of teachers on DST related to the administrative levels, teachers’ face, and ethnic practice in DST. Therefore, in my opinion, the Ministry of Education or school directors should support teachers and provide them proper recognition so that teachers can have motivations in applying the new approach in teaching English to better the situation of learning among students. Furthermore, administrators should take care of teachers’ emotional feelings when proposing a new measure. They should provide some experimental periods to get teachers’ opinions and difficulties towards the new approach so that teachers have a sense of respect and prepare themselves for all the upcoming challenges.

Last but not least, assessment is an important factor in DST. Therefore, teachers should provide students with clear rubrics in assessing and grading DST. From my point of view, it is essential for teachers to discuss the rubrics or let them choose the rubrics that they feel comfortable with so that students can know clearly what they are supposed to do and do not feel annoyed when certain marks are taken from their products.

**Conclusion**

Digital storytelling clearly provides students with abundant merits. However, there are some other concerns that teachers and administrators should take into considerations to better the DST in classroom.
Therefore, teachers should have a strong belief in innovation and an open mind to accept the new approach in teaching such as DST so that students can have a lot of opportunities to get more exposure to the target, improve their skills, and feel more motivated in learning. Importantly, with the advance in technology in the 21st century, it is our hope that DST will have a bright future not only in the developed countries but it will be used widely by teachers among Asian countries, so that more research on DST will be carried out in the context of Asian countries.

References