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The Impact of Group versus Individual Digital Storytelling on Students' Perception of Literacy Skills in EFL Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare how the group-based digital storytelling assignment and individual-based digital storytelling assignment affected non-English-major-students' perception of literacy skills. The course entitled "Information English" was held for Japanese university students from a Faculty of Information and Communications for 15 weeks. The study goal of the course was to acquire skills and knowledge to present ideas and messages effectively with the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and English as a Foreign Language. As a final assignment of the course, the students were encouraged to create digital stories with recorded voice and to upload the movie files on the net. They were required to introduce Japanese culture to people abroad. In the course of fall term of 2014, each student was supposed to create his or her own digital story. On the other hand, in the course of spring term of 2015, students were supposed to create one digital story with a partner or in a group of 2-3 students. The impact of group versus individual digital storytelling assignment on students' perception of literacy skills enhancement was analyzed based on the results of questionnaires. The questionnaires were based on the literacy skills (Research Skills, Writing Skills, Organization Skills, Technology Skills, Presentation Skills, Interview Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Problem-Solving Skills and Assessment Skills) referred from Robin, B. (2006)'s "educational uses of digital storytelling" .

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to compare how the group-based digital storytelling assignment and individual-based digital storytelling assignment affected non-English-major-students' perception of literacy skills. The impact of group versus individual digital storytelling assignment on students' perception of literacy skills enhancements was analyzed based on the results of questionnaires. The questionnaires were based on the literacy skills (Research Skills, Writing Skills, Organization Skills, Technology Skills, Presentation Skills, Interview Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Problem-Solving Skills and Assessment Skills) referred from Robin, B. (2006)'s "educational uses of digital storytelling" [1].

A course entitled "Information English" was held for university students from a Faculty of Information and Communications for 15 weeks. The study goal of the course was to acquire skills and knowledge to present ideas and messages effectively with the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and English as a Foreign Language. As a final assignment of the course, they were encouraged to create digital stories with recorded voice and to upload the movie files on the net. The students were required to introduce Japanese culture to people abroad.

2. Literature review

According to the Center for Digital Storytelling founded by Joe Lambert, the major components of a digital story have been rationalized in "The Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling": (1) Point of view, (2) A dramatic question, (3) Emotional content, (4) The gift of your voice, (5) The power of soundtrack, (6) Economy and (7) Pacing. (Reference from Center for Digital Storytelling Web site (2005)) [2]

There are also studies of digital storytelling in the foreign language education. For example, Abdel-Hack E.M.& Helwa HSAA (2014) examined the effectiveness of using digital storytelling and Weblogs in enhancing EFL narrative writing and critical thinking skills among EFL majors in Egypt [3]. Kasami (2014) investigated how a digital storytelling assignment affected non-English-major-students' motivation for learning English as a Foreign Language in comparison with a writing assignment [4].

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Based on “Twenty-first Century Literacy” labelled by Brown, Bryan and Brown (2005) [5] and “Visual Literacy” insisted by Riesland (2005) [6], Robin, B. (2006) summarized students increase a full complement of literacy skills in the multiple steps of designing, creating and presenting their own digital stories and provided the following 9 skills (Table 1) [1].

Table 1 The literacy skills referred from Robin, B. (2006)’s “educational uses of digital storytelling”

Research Skills	*Documenting the story, finding and analyzing pertinent information*
Writing Skills	*Formulating a point of view and developing a script*
Organization Skills	*Managing the scope of the project, the materials used and the time it takes to complete the task*
Technology Skills	*Learning to use a variety of tools, such as digital cameras, scanners, microphones and multimedia authoring software*
Presentation Skills	*Deciding how to best present the story to an audience*
Interview Skills	*Finding sources to interview and determining questions to ask*
Interpersonal Skills	*Working within a group and determining individual roles for group members*
Problem-Solving Skills	*Learning to make decisions and overcome obstacles at all stages of the project, from inception to completion*
Assessment Skills	*Gaining expertise critiquing their own and others’ work.*

In this study, the questionnaires were based on literacy skills (Research Skills, Writing Skills, Organization Skills, Technology Skills, Presentation Skills, Interview Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Problem-Solving Skills and Assessment Skills) referred from Robin, B. (2006)’s “educational uses of digital storytelling”. Yuksel, P., Robin, B. & McNeil, S. (2011) reported the results of the online survey collecting responses from educators, students and others from a wide variety of countries to determine how they were using digital storytelling for educational purposes and the survey question items included the literacy skills [7]. According to Yuksel,P., Robin, B. & McNeil, S. (2011), Benefits of Digital Storytelling for Students was indicated as follows.

> *“Approximately 45 percent of the respondents stated that digital storytelling allows students to improve their understanding of subject area knowledge, writing skills, technical skills, and presentation skills. Forty-one percent of the participants stated that digital storytelling helps students improve all of the skills specified in the question. Thirty-five percent of participants agreed that digital storytelling allows students to improve their research skills ….”* [7]

3. The subject of research

This study focuses on the practices of the courses entitled “Information English” for students at a Faculty of Information and Communications in “A University” in Japan in the fall term of 2014 (from September 2014 to January 2015) and those in the spring term of 2015 (from April to July 2015).

In the course of fall term of 2014, each student was supposed to create his or her own digital story. On the other hand, in the course of spring term of 2015, each student was supposed to create one digital story with his or her partner or in a group of 2-3 students. The groups were created by students. In the course of fall term of 2014, 76 students participated and created digital stories in three courses, then 75 students answered the post questionnaires at the end of the course. Similarly, in the course of spring term of 2015, 81 students participated and created digital stories, then 75 students answered to the post questionnaires. Therefore, the study comprised 75 students who had answered post questionnaires in each term (total number of the research subject was 150).

The final assignment was to create a digital story with the use of ICT and shared digital stories on the web with the use of Google Drive. The general theme of the assignment was “Tips for Your Happy Life in Japan” and “Tips for Better Understanding Japanese Culture”. Each student was required to create a digital story which would enable people in other countries to amicably understand Japanese culture. The following message from the teacher was written on the syllabus of this course. “This course was conducted with a notion of ‘Your differences make you beautiful and happy’ and please don’t hesitate

to make a mistake or to be different from other students". There were various kinds of stories. Some stories were created with hand drawing and other stories were created with photos and movie clips.

The courses were taken place in a CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) room, and each student used one computer. Windows Movie Maker and PowerPoint were used as the software for creating the digital stories as they had been installed on the Windows computers used for instruction in the course within the university. Students were allowed to choose either software to create a digital story.

4. Methods

The main research tools in this study were post questionnaires based on the literacy skills (Research Skills, Writing Skills, Organization Skills, Technology Skills, Presentation Skills, Interview Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Problem-Solving Skills and Assessment Skills) referred from Robin, B. (2006)'s "educational uses of digital storytelling". The questionnaires were answered by students during the course for reviewing and improving the assignments and course. The post-questionnaire was conducted in the week 15. It was announced that any answer and comment would not have an influence on the grade. Every student was required to answer the questionnaire survey. The surveys were administered with the use of Google Docs. Students were required to log in to their Gmail accounts under the university domain. T-tests were employed to make sure statistically significantly differences.

5. Results and discussion

The students were asked to rate each literacy skills enhanced through the digital storytelling assignment. The question statement was "Please choose skills which were improved through the digital storytelling assignment. You can choose multiple skills." The results and data analysis will be presented at the conference.

6. Concluding remarks

The purpose of this study was to compare how the group-based digital storytelling assignment and individual-based digital storytelling assignment affected non-English-major-students' perception of literacy skills enhancement. The questionnaires were based on the literacy skills (Research Skills, Writing Skills, Organization Skills, Technology Skills, Presentation Skills, Interview Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Problem-Solving Skills and Assessment Skills) referred from Robin, B. (2006)'s "educational uses of digital storytelling". As a result, more than 45% of the students chose "Research Skills" and "Technology Skills" in both Group and Individual Digital Storytelling assignment, these results tend to approximately correspond with the survey results by Yuksel, P., Robin, B. & McNeil, S. (2011) [7]. The percentage of the individual digital storytelling assignment was higher statistically than group digital storytelling assignment in aspects of "Problem-Solving Skills", Technology Skills" and "Presentation Skills".

The limitations of this study should be pointed out. The major limitation was that the sample size was small and the differences of level of literacy skills and knowledge at the beginning of the course were not considered, and that might not be easily generalized. Therefore, for further research, this project should be carried out with a larger sample size and the level of literacy skills at the beginning of the course should be taken into consideration.

Moreover, while this study focuses on the literacy skills, there are other aspects to compare the group-based digital storytelling assignment and individual-based digital storytelling assignment. The future research will focus on the differences between individual and group tasks in terms of motivation and learning effectiveness.

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