An Investigation of EFL Students'Perspectives on Using Digital Storytelling to Enhance Self-Directed Learning: A Case Study of EFL Thai Learners

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental research used a qualitative approach, and looked at EFL students' perspectives on using digital storytelling for improving self-directed learning. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews from nine students classified into three groups with high, mid, and low English proficiency levels. The students were studying English for Communication and Work (9021103) in the third semester of 2016, and the data were analysed through content analysis. The findings show that it is highly likely that learning through digital storytelling could improve learners' self-directed learning. Thus, it is suggested that teachers should employ this learning strategy during instruction and integrate it into every education scenario in order to increase self-directed learning.

Keywords: digital storytelling, self–directed learning, EFL students introduction

Introduction

Technology plays an essential role in humankind's activities, including business, politics, science, and education. The advancement of technology forces people learn, then apply and utilize it in their daily lives, particularly in teaching and learning. Using a social annotation technology creates enriched opportunities for student engagement with peers, their educators, and learning materials, and offers learners greater control and ownership of their individual learning strategies (Dawson, Macfadyen, Risko, Foulsham & Kingstone, 2012). Innovation may have a direct affect upon self-directed learning as it encourages attaining data, which leads

to online mastery (Timothy et al., 2010). It can be seen that technology is a highly effective tool that enhances self-directed learning (SDL).

Self-Directed Learning is recorded as a key part of student learning in 21st-century education. SDL has also surprisingly been connected to lifelong learning. UNESCO and OECD have recorded SDL as important for an innovative society. There is also increasing research activity on self-direction amongst K-12 students. In short, self-direction is currently perceived as an important 21st-century skill for learners (Chee, Divaharan, Lynde & Mun, 2011). Nowadays, it is accepted that SDL is directly concerned with using technology to study within and outside of the classroom.

Digital storytelling is an educational technique that is part of self-directed learning. Digital storytelling is the recording of learner experiential narratives using technology to record video. Creating digital stories can be supported by computer with many programs such as KineMaster. However, smartphones now play an increasing and important role in this era as they can be used in place of more costly digital recording equipment. There are numerous smartphone applications that learners can use to easily search and obtain their chosen information, and record their digital video stories. Additionally, smartphones can support outside learning anywhere and anytime (Murphy et al. 2014).

Several studies have focused on digital storytelling as a means of improving learners' motivation, autonomy, and engagement as a way to improve EFL speaking skills (Kallinikou and Nicolaidou, 2019). Yumac and Mustafa (2016) revealed in their action research that digital storytelling enhanced students' ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions in terms of writing quality, collaboration among students in the classroom, and improved their motivation to write. Moreover, a study by Nassim (2018) identified the efficiency of using Digital Stories as a tool for improving students' connection in the learning process and improving their reading, writing, and creative skills. Furthermore, digital storytelling is a highly recommended tool for English language students. A recent study by Kallinikou and Nicolaidouwhich (2019) showed that digital storytelling improved speaking and increased motivation. Additionally, Kaminskien and Khetsuriani (2019) discovered that learning personalization supported by technologies brings changes to classroom management practices and strengthens teacher, student, and peer-to-peer collaboration. These research findings highlight that, digital storytelling is a useful and effective tool that can be used to enhance instruction.

This study investigates and addresses the relationship between students' self-directed learning using digital storytelling and learning English as a foreign language. Accordingly, the aim of the study is to investigate the students' perspectives on using digital storytelling to enhance their EFL self-directed learning. The results show that the students' perspectives were positive and that to some degree, using digital storytelling encourages students to be self-directed learners.

Objective

To investigate the students' perspectives on using digital storytelling to enhance their self-directed learning.

Literature Review

What is self -directed learning?

Several definitions of self-directed learning (SDL) by educators and researchers are given. According to Gibbons (2002), a self-directed learner is a one that hones self-directed learning, dispatches testing exercises, and enhances individual information and attitudes to seeking these difficulties effectively. Roberson and Merriam (2012) defined self-directed learning as a means for every individual to find out about different subjects in a way and form that best suits themselves. According to Knowles (1975), SDL is a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without help from others, in detecting their learning needs; framing their learning goals; recognising human and material resources for learning; selecting and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and assessing their learning outcomes.

Among several definitions of SDL, Knowles (1975) went on to identify that SDL words comprehensively and clearly includes the learners' learning by self-thinking, self-planning, self-locating resources, self-controlling, and self-evaluating. Thus, this study utilises Knowles's research as the framework for analysing the data in this research.

What is Digital Storytelling?

Digital storytelling is defined by many educators and researchers. According to Churchill et al. (2008), digital storytelling is a contemporary technique for the formation of computerized mixed media content for communicating thoughts and speaking about ideas and knowledge. Manussanun Somdee and Suksan Suppasetseree (2013) state that digital storytelling can be used as a multimedia tool

in language learning to help students improve their foreign language speaking skills by using technology to tell their stories in their own words and voice. Churchill (2008), as well as Manussanun Somdee and Suksan Suppasetseree (2013) share similar definitions, whereas Jakes (2006) records the digital storytelling process as a series of distinct steps, as follows: (1) Writing an outline of the story, (2) Writing a script, (3) Writing a storyboard, (4) Locating Multimedia, (5) Creating the Digital Story, and (6) Sharing the results. A part from the aforementioned works, Kallinikou and Nicolaidou (2019) illustrate that digital storytelling includes text, images, audio, music, and video. To create understandable and clear digital stories, this study follows the process for creating digital storytelling given by Jakes (2006).

Improving self-directed learning through digital storytelling

A number of studies reported the advantages of using digital storytelling for improving self-directed learning. Kim (2014) claimed that online instructive innovation could bolster a universal language-learning environment. In an English language learning setting, there are numerous approaches to create English learners' autonomy through self-assessed learning. Jenkins and Lonsdale's study (2007) reported the use of digital storytelling as a means of encouraging student engagement and reflection, and a need for consideration to develop an appropriate mechanism to measure student reflection using this medium. In addition, the study of Kallinikou and Nicolaidou (2019) supported the benefits of digital storytelling as a mean of enhancing learners' motivation, autonomy, and engagement, and as a way to improve oral and speaking skills in foreign language learning. Kim (2014) reported that digital storytelling could improve self-reflection, self-assessment, self-confidence, and self-monitoring. Based on previous studies, digital storytelling has been shown to be very useful in terms of the enhancement of self-directed learning.

The smartphone of Language Learning

Nowadays, the behaviour of people around the world is changing. People enjoy spending a lot of their time on social networks. Consequently, it can be considered that social networks are becoming increasingly essential for everyday life. Mobile appliances are more forceful and moveable with plenty of beneficial devices for helping people deal with daily life (Jeng, Wu, Huang, Tan & Yang, 2010). The research on using mobile phones for language learning is intriguing, which is in contrast to the little attention given to using mobile phones for verbal interaction. The most favorite appliance used by people is the smartphone. People can learn through their smartphones anywhere and anytime (Sarica & Cavas, 2009). Smartphones enable users to work, study, and entertain. With regard to schooling, the

context of the learning process and output should be thought of as an enlargement of the learning environment that now extends beyond the classroom (Hwang & Chang, 2011). Smartphones can be now be acknowledged and accepted as essential aids to contemporary instruction.

The advantages of social networking in the aforementioned works in terms of improving self-directed learning in the era of the digital world, digital storytelling is a powerful tool that encourages learners to reach their goal, and therefore, integrating smartphones into language classroom learning might be the new, interesting, and effective way to enhance self-directed learning.

With regard to studies related to Digital Storytelling (DS) to enhance self-directed learning, a case study of Nassim (2018) integrated digital storytelling to motivate language skills and creativity. In the study, 'Microsoft Photo Story 3' was chosen to develop the stories into a digital format. Twenty-four foundation level two English students were selected for the study. An evaluation rubric was developed to assess the students' digital stories together with a survey to record the students' perceptions of the digital storytelling device in English classrooms. The finding showed that students' reading and writing skills were improved. Students developed and were able to organize, cooperate, and collaborate to reach their goal throughout the process of story building. Kim (2014) investigated whether ESL learners could enhance their oral proficiency and autonomous learning environment by using digital storytelling. This research employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Four assessments were used to check the participants' improved speaking ability in storytelling about silent movie clips onto VoiceThread. Three questionnaires to assess their attitudes toward autonomous learning were also employed. Kim's results revealed that using DS enabled learners to develop their speaking skills and build considerable self-confidence. Furthermore, the participants could be learner-centered enabling them to increase their autonomy in oral proficiency. Somdee and Suppasetseree（2013）investigated the implementation of DS in developing English-speaking skills and the satisfaction toward learning from DS of 50 Thai undergraduate students enrolled in the English compulsory course at Suranaree University of Technology in the 2nd semester 2012. The students took a pretest and posttest to identify their speaking ability, and then created their DS using Windows Movie Maker. Additionally, they were interviewed about how digital storytelling had helped them improve their speaking abilities. The results showed that the effects of DS had developed the students' speaking skills and that they could be active and self-directed learners.

Research methodology

Population

There were nine participants selected by purposive sampling after they enrolled in English for Communication and Work in the 3rd semester, 2016. They were classified into three groups: high, mid, and low level, based on their proficiency levels following completion of a general standard test. Students were classified as follows:

1-10 points	High Proficiency	3 student participants
11-20 points	Mid Proficiency	3 student participants
21-30 points	Low Proficiency	3 student participants

The participating students were also required to have their own smartphone, which could connect to the internet and be able to download and use the Video App. Significantly, they all willingly participated in this experimental study.

Research design

Digital storytelling was the learning process used in this quasi-experimental study. The Video App for Smartphones was the program used to create the students' digital stories. The Video App is a smartphone application approved by three experts as it can support and create digital storytelling on smartphones. A student manual was used as a guideline for students to make their digital storytelling using the Video smartphone app and this manual was designed by the researcher. The nine students were trained by the researcher before starting to do their smartphone tasks. The nine participants were assigned to create six digital stories about six topics. After completion of the digital stories, the participants were interviewed to identify their perceptions regarding the use of digital storytelling to enhance their self-directed learning. Four areas were reviewed, as follows: self-planning, self-locating resources, self-control, and self-reflection.

Research instrument

The semi-structure interview was the research instrument used in this study as in an attempt to identify the participants' opinions and allow the participants to express their perspectives. Thus, this instrument is appropriate. The semi-structured

interview was approved by three experts. The research question for the interview was "How did the students learn using digital storytelling to improve Self-Directed Learning?"

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Nine students were individually interviewed privately for a maximum of forty-five minutes and their semi-structured interview replies were recorded by the researcher. After the interview, the data was gathered, grouped, coded, and its meaning interpreted through content analysis. The three groups of participants were coded as follows:

Group classification of students	Participant code numbers
Low proficiency students	UBRU01, UBRU02, and UBRU03
Mid proficiency students	UBRU04, UBRU05, and UBRU06
High proficiency students	UBRU07, UBRU08, and UBRU09

Research Results

The interview data about the students' perspectives towards using digital storytelling to enhance their self-directed learning can be analysed, interpreted, and classified into four items as follows:

When creating digital storytelling using smartphones, all students were independent to do their tasks. The students had the opportunity to plan, find the resources, exhibit control, and reflect. Teachers provided some support and were there to suggest how to learn and to provide feedback following the students' tasks. At every level, the students indicated that their self-directed learning had increased by participating in the experiment. Participation in this DS process encouraged the students to be self-directed and independent to learn because they had to plan to do their tasks, locate the required resources, control themselves, and reflect upon their tasks. The interviews were conducted in Thai and were transcribed prior to translation to English by the researcher. The results for the four categories are as follows:

1) The students' opinions regarding self-planning

High proficiency students: all high proficiency students planned to do their tasks. Each student had a different plan depending on what they liked and then they

adjusted their plan to ensure that it was easy and effective for their tasks. An extract from one of the transcribed and translated interviews is presented as follows:

"For making a digital story using a smart phone, I first planned how to create my digital story. I thought about it many times and I subsequently adjusted my plan for the next story. Using a smartphone to create my digital stories helped me learn how to plan and make them better. I think the process of digital storytelling can help me improve myself as a planner. I also like the video app on my smartphone because it supports me when creating my digital stories." (UBRU08)

Mid proficiency students: students in this proficiency level reported that this experiment was very useful and interesting for them to improve their self-planning ability without being led by the teacher, and they were able to find a way to plan by themselves. Example statements from the transcribed and translated interviews are presented below:

"To participate in this activity I accepted that I have an opportunity to think, to plan, and to do my task independently. No one controls me. I can say what I think. I can create my story as much as I want to. The smartphone can support my digital storytelling to do my task. I really had fun using it. I started by writing a script by searching and gathering the information using the Google translator and YouTube. After I had already written the script, I practiced speaking 5-6 times to try to remember the vocabulary and then record my video to make my digital story. This is my plan." (UBRU04).

Low proficiency students: all the low proficiency students replied that they have the ability to plan how to create their digital stories using their smartphones. They stated that it was easy for them to create their tasks, and they enjoyed doing so. It seemed that this experiment could enhance their self-planning. An extract from the translated interview transcript is presented below:

"This experiment gave me a chance to plan before starting to do my tasks on my smartphone. I planned to do six tasks in this experiment. I think my self-planning was better because I always had to adjust my plan for doing my tasks better. I wrote the script in Thai first, and then translated into English by using the Google translator app and by finding the vocabulary in the dictionary on my smartphone apps. The process of digital storytelling can enhance me to be a good planner." (UBRU01) (ubru03)

The above data shows that the high proficiency students planned differently but the others similarly think that they planned to do their tasks first and then did them later. All nine participants expressed that creating digital storytelling gave them

the opportunity to plan each time they did their tasks. By doing six tasks, the students had to adjust and improve their plan, so it is likely this experiment increased the student's planning proficiency for making good plans for creating their digital stories and becoming better self-planners.

2) The students' opinions regarding self-locating resources

High proficiency students: learning through the process of digital storytelling gave the students the chance to locate the resources because they had to find appropriate content in order to write their scripts and complete their tasks. An extract from a transcribed and translated interview is presented as follows:

"For me, most data I found was on my smartphone because I connected to the internet, and a little bit from a specific book. Therefore, it is easy to get the information I needed to prepare my scripts. I found the information on Google and a vocabulary application." (UBRU07)

Mid proficiency students: the mid proficiency students indicated that they were able to locate the required information on google.com, smartphone applications, pantip.com, and their specific book. They enjoyed locating the resources by themselves because it was easy using their smartphones on the internet. Thus, it is highly likely that the process of digital storytelling cam motivate them to search for and locate the resources themselves. An extract from a transcribed and translated interview is presented below:

"I got most of the information from the internet such as Google.com. It is very easy to find using a smart phone. I really enjoy searching for information using my smartphone. It has made me better at searching for information because I can search anywhere and anytime." (UBRU05)

Low proficiency students: they all found the resources by themselves because it was not difficult. They just searched for information using their smartphones on www.google.com or used a smartphone application to find the required vocabulary, content, and grammar for writing their scripts. An extract from a transcribed and translated interview is presented as follows:

"I got most information from the internet, such as google.com. It is very easy to find using a smart phone. I learned where I should go to find the information I needed for my writing tasks. I only used smart phone apps to help me create the tasks. The smart phone app I used was a dictionary. It was enough for me to write the script." (UBRU03).

As is evident from the above data, all students were able to easily to locate the resources they needed using their smart phones. The students were able to search

for the information and resources anywhere and anytime. It is likely this experiment increased the students' proficiency to search for and locate their own resources.

3) The students' opinions regarding self-control

High proficiency students: the students shared that during this experiment, they did not have anyone forcing them to do the tasks, and that they managed, prepared, and practiced willingly by themselves. Moreover, they expressed that creating and recording their digital stories by using their smartphones was a lot of fun and was a new learning strategy for them. They felt motivated by to do the work without prompting. They also agreed that being a part of this experiment improved their self-control. An extract from an interview is presented below:

"I immediately did each task after finishing the previous topic because I knew that I must take time to search for and locate the information, write the script, and practice speaking before submitting the task. As I said, I can manage myself to do my task because using my smartphone enabled me to prepare the tasks anytime and anywhere." (UBRU07)

Mid proficiency students: the informants expressed that this experiment could help them improve their self-control because they had to complete their six digital storytelling tasks and submit them to their teacher, which meant that they had to be responsible for their learning without pressure from other people. An extract from an interview is presented as follows:

"For me, I can do my assignments and submit them on time. I did not have any problem doing them because I manage my study time well. After I finished studying in the classroom, I used my smartphone to help me with my tasks. I had fun and enjoyed doing this." (ubru04)

Low proficiency students: some low proficiency students could not control themselves or be responsible for their tasks because they had private factors that interfered with their abilities to complete their tasks. One low proficiency student did not have any problem submitting their tasks on time. She demonstrated the proficiency to control her learning with responsibility. Extracts from two interviews are presented below:

"I always hold the script in my hand and try to remember what to say. After that, I record my video gradually until the day I submit it. Smartphones can support me to do my task anywhere and anytime." (ubru02)

"I could not submit my tasks on time because I have to work in the hospital and I also have a 5-month old baby. I tried to do as much as I could while my baby was sleeping." (ubru01)

The above data indicates that most informants expressed their ability to maintain self-control when making their digital stories by using their smartphones. They enjoyed themselves and had fun even though there were many steps to creating each digital story. Smartphones encouraged students to produce their tasks and submit them to their teachers, on time.

4) The students' opinions regarding self-reflection

High proficiency students: they shared that they like to create digital stories using their smartphones because when they completed and shared their tasks, they could review their preparation and speaking abilities. Moreover, they could watch themselves and their friends on their Facebook group and view their friends' abilities as well. An opinion of a high proficiency student- is as follows:

"I think that this activity is really good for enhancing self-reflection, I can see myself in the video, so I know my mistakes and I try to correct them until I improve. In addition, I can watch other friends and know how their ability is. I can also learn from watching their digital stories. I can see my improvement in each task." (ubru07)

Mid proficiency students: all students gave opinions that recording video using a smartphone can enhance self-reflection because when they watch their videos many times they can see their proficiency, gestures, and speaking so they can analyse their improvement. It is likely that the students' reflection had increased because of this experiment. An extract from an interview is presented below:

"Creating digital stories by using my smartphone helped me to be self-reflector because I could watch myself, which helped me know myself, what mistakes I made, and what I needed to do to make myself better." (ubru06)

Low proficiency students: the low proficiency students indicated that engaging in the process of digital storytelling by using their smartphones could enhance their self-reflection. This was because recording videos with their smartphones and sharing them on their Facebook group could increase their self-reflection. When they saw their mistakes, they knew how to adjust their tasks. An extract from an interview is presented as follows:

"When I see myself in the videos that I created on my smartphone I always laugh at myself. It is funny to see myself speak, smile, and act, and this also lets me see my mistakes and what I need to do to adjust myself for the next task." (ubru01)

As is evident from the above data, it can be seen that creating digital storytelling using digital storytelling can enhance students' reflection. The informants had opportunities to watch themselves and then realized what mistakes they made and how much they improved with each task. Moreover, the process of getting

feedback from teachers might be a model of reflection that could also help the students understand their abilities.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the EFL students' perspectives on using digital storytelling to enhance self-directed learning. The results of the study indicate that the students' perspectives on using digital storytelling were positive. The students were interested in the digital storytelling learning process because it was new, interesting, and easy to learn anywhere and anytime. They could learn by themselves and reflect on their own development.

The results show that participating in this experiment led to the students developing their self-directed learning because they had to plan to do their tasks, find the required resources, complete their tasks within a given timeframe, and reflect upon their tasks.

Students were assigned personal work. They did their tasks alone with their teacher acting as a facilitator. This learning strategy highly likely encouraged the students to be self-directed learners who needed try to do their task without help from others. This is similar to the findings of Plews, Kim, Olfman, Ryan, and Eryilmaz (2014). Their study showed that the students' SDL ability could be more effective in planning, organizing, monitoring their course activities, and reflecting on their learning experiences by leveraging a personal system.

For creating their digital stories in this study, the students used their smartphones and various apps. This technology encourages students to perform and easily share their tasks on social media. Learners like to use their mobile phones to create their tasks because they can search for the resources needed, record sound, pictures, and videos, and write text anywhere and anytime, which is interesting and fun for them.

Mobility learning is endless and prosperous and it promotes the user's self-management ability and self-responsibility for their own learning (Camargo et al., 2011).

It can be seen that smartphones encourage outside classroom instruction and support self-directed learning, which is consistent with the study by Sharples, Taylor, and Vavoula (2005), who stated that self-directed learning is aroused by smartphone learning as it embraces the admirable measure of finding that occurs outside the classroom. It is also organized by the learners themselves. Moreover, the self-directed aspects of learning, which social media and other technologies provide,

have significant repercussions in the effectiveness of the user's learning efforts (Tullis & Benjamin, 2011).

In conclusion, improving EFL learners' self-directed learning through digital storytelling could potentially be an effective learning process to promote and blend modern technology with language learning and education for the 21st century. Furthermore, Smartphones can also be a learning tool to support and increase the learning process. With this learning process, EFL learners can automatically become self-directed learners.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should encourage students to be self-directed learners by using the process of digital storytelling in their instruction.

2. Students or people who are interested in this learning strategy of digital storytelling can apply it into their life for developing their personal ability to plan, assess resources, control, and reflect.

3.Encourage teachers and students to use a smartphone in their classroom for outside learning.

4. Encourage researcher to use this learning process to develop other fields of their study.

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