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THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING APPLICATIONS ON READING ENGAGEMANT AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This article explores the possible use of digital storytelling tools in enhancing reading interest among primary school students, particularly fourth graders. Following the IMRAD format (Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion), this paper first explains the significance of the problem, than it analyzes both foreign and domestic studies on the matter, explains its methodology, and finally, describes the results and their possible implications.

Keywords: digital storytelling, reading motivation, primary education, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), children, mixed methods research.

1. INTRODUCTION. Reading is one of the most important elements of learning a foreign language. It is through the reading process that a child will acquire vocabulary, grammar, and language skills in general. This process is especially important for children because it is important for children to develop either a positive or negative attitude to language learning at this stage of life.

Worldwide studies demonstrate that reading activities in primary EFL classes tend to be instructor-oriented, as teachers account for the main part of reading, while independent reading is rarely a part of the work done in classes due to concerns about students' pronunciation. This type of teaching restricts students' possibilities for reading in an independent and engaging way.

In Uzbekistan, teaching English from the early grades has recently been a matter of concern, and some legal acts on improving the quality of foreign language teaching were adopted. However, it has been discovered that learner-centered contemporary approaches to teaching reading have not been employed widely yet, and lessons still continue to use traditional methods of teaching reading. The same issue is pointed out in Russian language pedagogical literature, where it is stated that primary school children do not have enough phonetic and lexical resources for reading independently yet.

Due to this issue, digital storytelling technologies have become common in foreign language teaching during the last ten years. Digital storytelling is an approach to storytelling that combines the use of text, sound, image, and interactive elements in an effort to get the audience involved with the story.

According to different studies that have been conducted around the world, digital storytelling has a good influence on EFL learners in terms of writing skills and motivation. A study performed with sixth graders from Taiwan showed that digital storytelling had a strong impact on extrinsic motivation and creativity, while no solid impact was observed on intrinsic motivation.

The latest research findings demonstrate that the use of digital storytelling has a positive impact on reading skills and listening ability, as well. For instance, among seventh grade children from China, the findings from an experimental study indicate that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in terms of the authentic listening comprehension scores and and engagement results. The research conducted among students enrolled in language preparation courses in Turkey indicates that the process of developing digital stories affects the motivational aspect. Importantly, a study that was solely conducted with the younger students also demonstrates that the use of digital storytelling positively affects the interest of the young learners in reading as well as their language skills.

Even though there much research on the use of various techniques aimed at improving reading skills among young students of Uzbekistan, the vast majority of studies have involved the usage of traditional approaches thus not many studies that examine the application of the digital storytelling tools in the classroom of fourth grade students exist. This is the main gap, thus indicating the relevance and novelty of the research.

For this reason, this article aims to provide a theoretical background and methodical design for the research study on the influence of digital storytelling tools on the reading engagement of the primary school pupils (the fourth grade) studying English, and present justification for the results predicated on previous international studies.

2. METHODS. Due to the nature of the topic, as engagement is multidimensional and not easy to measure with quantitative indicators alone, this section offers a mixed method research design. This approach helps combine the reliability of quantitative data and the richness of qualitative data.

Participants. The study is designed to involve fourth grade students (around 25-30 participants), all from one public school. Convenience sampling will be used for selection of participants.

Instruments. To collect the necessary data, the following tools will be used: (1) the Reading Engagement questionnaire for the age group, administered before and after the intervention; (2) teacher observation checklist used during every lesson; (3) short semi-structured interviews with five to six students.

Procedure. This research is completed over the course of six weeks. During the first week, a baseline questionnaire is given. During the next four weeks, children are given the opportunity to use digital storytelling tools, like Book Creator or Storybird, as part of their lessons. The study closes with the administration of the post-questionnaire and interviews in the last week.

Proposed mixed methods research design



Figure 1. The stages of the proposed mixed methods research design.

Data analysis. A paired samples t test will be used to analyze quantitative data in the analysis of baseline questionnaires and questionnaire results after the intervention. The qualitative data (observation checklist, interview transcripts) will be subjected to thematic analysis coding.

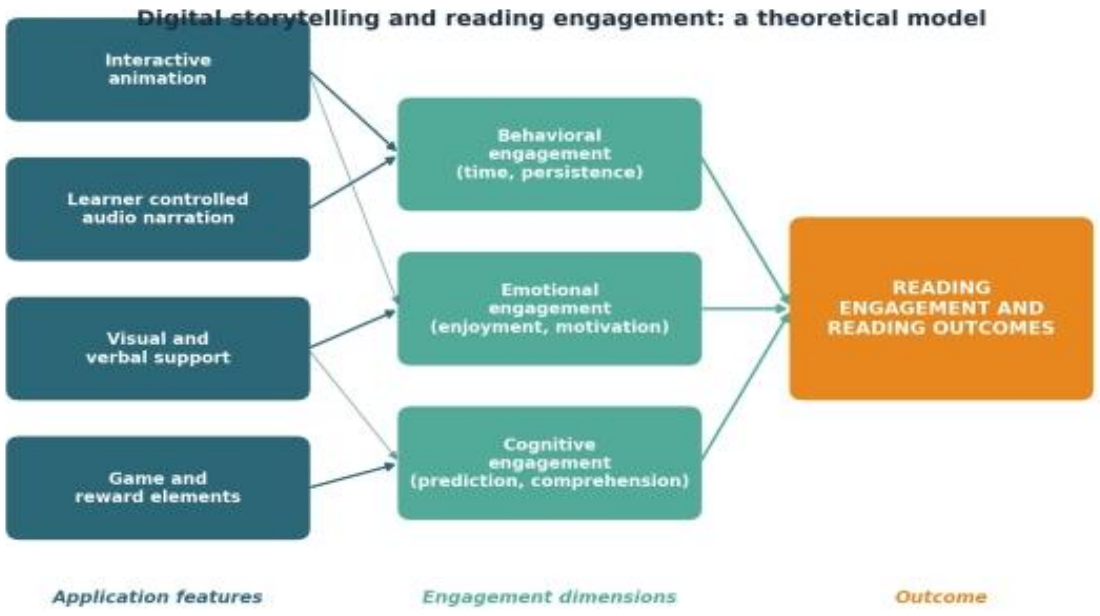
3. RESULTS. The present section neither postulates imaginative outcomes of a survey that is yet to be carried out nor presents conjectures. Rather, it provides the overall tendencies identified through the analysis of past overseas studies on the topic. It is these tendencies that form the research frame.

To begin with, all studies analyzed reported the positive influence of digital storytelling on the students' motivation and engagement in learning process although the levels and nature of this influence differ depending on the circumstances. Thus, in Taiwan, the influence was mostly related to the external motivation and creative processing of new information instead of the internal motivation.

Furthermore, studies on cognitive results show the positive outcomes of such technique as well. After eight weeks of its application, the experimental group showed much better scores than the control one, proving the positive impact of the multimodal company (text, image, and sound) on the perception phenomena.

Third, according to the findings of research undertaken with primary school pupils, digital storytelling is beneficial for this age group as well because the students reported greater participation and motivation towards texts. This can provide optimism about similar results within the current research among fourth graders.

Given these three tendencies, the following theoretical model was formulated: the technical features of digital storytelling apps (interactivity, audio control by the students, visual support, game elements) make a contribution to learner involvement in three aspects (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive, which results in improved interest in reading and reading



results.

Figure 2. A theoretical model developed through literature analysis: the relationship between digital storytelling and reading engagement.

4. DISCUSSION. The above-discussed trends could be accounted for with the help of different theoretical models. Namely, applications for digital storytelling that promote active interaction with texts open new possibilities for enhancing comprehension, vocabulary, and reading strategies, which corresponds to the principles of multimedia learning theory: in order to maximize the impact on comprehensibility, both visual and verbal channels of communication should be used together and neither of them should be overloaded.

Moreover, the notion of motivation generated by digital storytelling could be explained with the help of Self Determination Theory: the interactive and game-like components of the applications allow learners to feel autonomous and accomplished, thus contributing to increasing the interest to the task and creative engagement, rather than intrinsic motivation. These ideas are consistent with the findings of the study carried out in Taiwan.

The obtained results are of practical value for Uzbekistan. The integration of digital technologies into foreign language classes is regarded as one of the directions in the process of reforming the education system of the country, but the issue of adapting such technologies for young learners is under researched, which is why the planned research will allow providing teachers with recommendations for teaching practice in the local context.

Limitations. One must keep in mind that the majority of the research examined was performed on limited samples, in various forms of a couple of classrooms, adding up to a short period of intervention that makes one unable to generalize the results of the studies that were examined. Furthermore, the cultural and educational framework differences primarily between China, Turkey, and Taiwan and Uzbekistan's contexts also make it impossible to apply the research findings directly, further proving the necessity for the research to be conducted in local context.

5. CONCLUSION. In summary, the research studies worldwide confirm the benefits of digital storytelling applications in terms of reading which involves foreign language as well as general language proficiency. Nonetheless, the peculiarities of its implementation for young learners, particularly fourth graders, in Uzbekistan necessitate special investigation. The article offers a solid groundwork to anyone wishing to delve into that subject further in terms of methodology, theoretical model, and literature review.

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