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CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ELT STUDENTS' DIGITAL STORIES FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: Stories are considered an essential part of children's lives and have been pedagogically integral to the courses. This study focuses on how students of English Language Teaching (ELT) program perceive the world of stories for young learners. Within the framework of study, stories prepared in the digital form using Moviemaker, multimedia authoring program, were uploaded to the Facebook course group. Collected videos have been analyzed following the content analysis method and coded seeking answers about the story topic, characters and reflected moral values. The results revealed that in their digital stories, ELT students highlighted "friendship" based on helping and supporting others followed by "philanthropy" while the heroes were largely characterized as male children or animals. The results could be of help in interpreting children's world from the perspective of ELT students.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, content analysis, English Language Teaching

Özet: Hikayeler çocukların hayatlarının önemli bir parçası ve derslerin de pedagojik bir bileşenidir. Bu çalışma İngiliz Dili Eğitimi bölümü öğrencilerinin çocuk hikayelerine bakışına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma çerçevesinde, Moviemaker programı ile hazırlanan dijital hikayeler Facebook'ta ders için oluşturulan gruba yüklenmiştir. Bu videolar içerik analizi çerçevesinde incelenerek kodlanmış ve hikayelerin konusu, karakterleri ve yansıttığı ahlaki değerler açısından incelenmiştir. Çalışma sonuçlarında dijital hikayelerde birbiriyle yardımlaşma ve desteğin öne çıktığı, "arkadaşlık" ve "iyilikseverlik" kavramlarının vurgulandığı, hikaye kahramanlarının da büyük ölçüde erkek çocuklar ya da hayvanlar olduğu görülmüştür. Çalışma öğretmen adaylarının bakış açısına göre çocukların dünyasını algılamaya yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Dijital Hikaye Anlatımı, içerik analizi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi

Introduction

Everybody has a story to tell regardless of their age, gender, socio-economic or educational background. Stereotypically, stories are read or told by the elderly to the younger. However, in their creative and fantastic worlds, children also have a say to create, combine or continue different stories. Therefore, storytellers could be the elderly or children, teachers or students. National Storytelling Network (NSN) (2012) provides a broad definition of storytelling as a form of human expression that is artistic and ancient. To be more specific, NSN listed main features of storytelling as; it provides a two-way interaction connecting the storyteller and listener(s), it uses spoken or sign language creating impact through words in addition to bodily actions, and lastly, it provokes imagination of the listeners activating their multi-senses.

With the expansion of technology and its role in the educational settings, a new form of storytelling has appeared. Digital storytelling (hereafter DS) can simply be seen as the "digital" form of storytelling, not to mention its storytelling features and functions, the digital form adds

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enrichment of visual materials (images, pictures, animations and video), audio possibilities (audio files of sound, music or self-narration), and varying effects and transitions. Additionally, if shared online, digital stories could be accessible for a great range of audience and their comments and feedback through the interactivity function of Web 2.0. Signes (2008) reported the differences between the classical and digital form of storytelling as nonlinearity, discontinuity and autonomy. In brief, the type of media used is considered the main dissimilarity. To further analyze and comprehend, "Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling" listed by the Center for Digital Storytelling could form a guideline for teachers making use of DS:

1. What of the story: Author's point of telling the story
2. Why of the story: The dramatic question to be answered
3. The emotional connection to the listener
4. The nature of storyteller's voice
5. The effect of background music
6. Relatedness and duration of images
7. The tempo and rhythm of the story (Lambert, 2010)

A plethora of educational material is available for children providing mostly visual input and opportunities for hands-on activities leading to learning. Content analysis of children's books (Bekkedal, 1973; Berry, 1999), stories and digital stories in the form of books or videos (Dupain & Maguire, 2005; Smith, 2012) has been providing a great deal of information about both the children's world and how the adults, educators and storytellers have perceived it. The book analysis by Bekkedal (1973) outlined themes presented in the books as human relations, values and cultural content, racial and ethnic groups with a main goal of comparing the contents of books published in 1940s and 1970s. Additionally, Berry (1999) explored patterns for the racial portrayals of African American's in the children's picture books. An interesting review and content study on Cinderella by Smith (2012) focused on the animal helper image in the related storybooks that analyzed numerous variations of the story.

As for the advantages and effects of DS on students and instruction, Dogan and Robin (2008) pointed out the teacher interviews during which teachers stated the increased technical and presentation skills of the students along with their better engagement and observed increased motivation. As for motivation, teachers explained that students as storytellers enjoyed exploring, creating and expressing themselves (Dupain and Maguire, 2005; Sadik, 2008). Furthermore, a number of teachers reported having witnessed increased academic performance as connected to coming to class more regularly and excitedly. On the basis for their study, Yang and Wu (2012) examined the effect of DS on academic achievement for English language learning, critical thinking and learning motivation and announced positive outcomes on all variables. Last but not the least, Robin (2006) summarized the competencies DS increases as skills of research, writing, organization, technology, presentation, interview, interpersonal, problem solving and assessment that are expected to be practiced in each stage of DS.

All in all, though DS seems promising in the educational settings, some of the potential drawbacks could be listed as Bran (2010) mentioned: students who are not used to or uncomfortable with creating authentic work may replicate that of others, there might be problems related to the intellectual property rights and also assessment as echoed by Robin's study (2006).

On the other hand, from the teachers' perspective, time constraints and access to technology were leading barriers to integrate DS (Dogan &Robin, 2008; Sadik, 2008).

This study might be of help to teachers in that digital stories particularly for young learners offer a wide variety of opportunities to construct knowledge, to work collaboratively and interactively; most importantly to activate and enhance their imagination and creativity. Above all, as an integral part of pedagogical consideration, learner and learning motivation are expected to be promoted through hands-on activities via DS.

The Context

This study differs from other project-based research in which in- and pre-service students and children prepare stories/digital stories as a compilation of their work (Dogan & Robin, 2008; Wright, 1997) as here, the storytellers (prospective teachers) have prepared digital stories for their prospective students. The story design could be considered as a materials development process where ELT students were assigned to prepare digital stories for young learners. The students were initially presented with the rationale of DS along with some examples from previous years. Following the video session, the researcher instructed the participants how to make a digital story using Movie Maker. The steps to make a digital story were introduced following the guidelines by Kajder, Bull and Albaugh (2005) with minor changes: At the start, storytellers acted as storywriters by composing the story- the script. After working on the storyboard with the script order, the script was revised and selected images were sequenced in the storyboard. Unlike advised, students were told to add effects and transitions, titles and credits before recording their voice over the story slides. Because slightest change in the timeline of the story affects the synchronization between the audio to the text narrated and image displayed. As a task requirement, ELT students were reminded about the equal distribution of work effort achieved through narration of half of the story. Narration was required for several reasons: in order to have students try out each function of the digital story, to practice pronunciation skills, to check each student's contribution by hearing their voices and finally to signal the power of one's own voice on the listener. Similarly, according to Chung (2006) narration through storyteller's voice over the images stands as a key factor for the authenticity.

As for the time permit, students were given three weeks to complete their movie-making tasks. At the end, 38 digital stories prepared by pairs were collected as a requirement of the course. Unlike YouTube (http://www.youtube.com) as the host used for video uploading in the study by Snelson and Sheffield (2009), this study selected Facebook (http://www.facebook.com) course group named AIBUTEYL (Abant İzzet Baysal University Teaching English to Young Learners) as the place of digital story uploads. Thus, students had the chance to see and comment on their friends' work as they wish. The evaluation criteria announced prior to the project were twofold: in relation to the technology use, students were reminded strictly to use images under Creative Commons License or their own personal pictures. In addition, to include title and credits as well as effects and transitions for each slide appropriate to the slide design, to write down some parts of the story on the slides, to record their voices and upload their movie files. As for the content, students in pairs were asked to prepare an authentic or adapted story appropriate to the level and interest of young learners in which text, audio and visual images needed to be combined.

The research questions sought answers in this study are as follows:

1. What are the topics of the digital stories prepared by ELT students?
2. What are the characters' features in the digital stories prepared by ELT students?
3. What are the moral values in the digital stories prepared by ELT students?

Method

Participants

The storytellers are third year ELT students enrolled in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) II course offered as a part of the National Curriculum for English Language Teaching program prepared and standardized by the Ministry of National Education. They were already enrolled in the pre-required Teaching English to Young Learners I course in the previous semester and have some knowledge about characteristics, needs and interests of young learners and experience in storytelling as they acted out children's stories in class. Seventy-seven students from day and evening groups participated in the DS project in a naturalistic setting, worked in pairs except for a group of three because of the odd number of students in class. As for demographics, the female (n=62) students outnumbered males (n=15) and age of students ranged from 21 to 23.

Data collection procedure

The research design for this study is content analysis based on the grounded theory that makes inferences from the units of analysis as put forward by Krippendorff (2004). The data led the emergence of research questions and the framework for the coding of findings. The scripts of digital stories have been treated as text to be analyzed along with their digital features.

The data collection instrument is the Movie Maker, which is the video creating and editing software application of the Microsoft Windows (Wikipedia, 2012), was preferred due to its availability and user-friendly nature. One can easily handle making a movie by following the menu on the left-hand of the screen systematically. It has been preferred among many alternative DS tools and used for studies on language pedagogy (Bran, 2010; Chung, 2006; France & Wakefield, 2011).

Data analysis

Content analysis was conducted considering the basic requirements stated by Krippendorft (1980) (as cited in Majors, 2009): clarity about the framework of the data, analyst's mastery over the context and related conditions, clear and pre-set objectives of the analysis, analyst's knowledge of making inferences from data and validity. Here, the analyst is the instructor of the TEYL course for the last 7 years and collected the data as a part of the course content with the aim of determining the topic, character and moral values creation of ELT students as prospective teachers of young learners.

As for the steps of analysis, digital stories shared on Facebook group were downloaded to be safely kept and viewed offline for detailed analysis. Later on, to meet the reliability concerns, two researchers viewed the digital stories individually and came up with almost the same coding categories. An interesting note about the unlike categories or differently named ones is that one of the researchers listed all categories around the story structure under sub-categories of Introduction, Body and Conclusion. However, in line with research questions and data in hand, this organization was not adopted. The categories were merged also considering the attributes

used as coding categories by Snelson and Sheffield (2009) in which digital stories selected from Youtube were examined and aforementioned seven elements of digital storytelling (Lambert, 2010). Revised and finalized list of categories are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding categories for ELT students' digital stories

Category	Explanation
Features of the story	
Topic	What the story is about
Characters	
- Gender	General features of characters (gender, age etc.), the order they appeared in the story, family members and their relation to the characters
- Age	
- Parental roles	
Location	The place where the story took place
Moral values	The message story conveys for the audience (here, young learners)
Authenticity	Adapted from existing stories or created
Features of media	
Type of media	Multimedia used: image, video, animations etc.
Duration	Length of the story
Digital aspect	
- Effects	Moviemaker features practiced
- Transitions	
- Interactivity	
Comments	

Results

Thirty-eight digital stories were analyzed following the coding outlined in Table 1. In most general terms, it could be reported that the majority of the stories (n=15) is signaling the importance of friendship through sharing and helping. Stories mainly take place in the forest (n=16) or at home (n=7). The hero is mostly a male child or an animal (a frog, bear, spider, rabbit, butterfly, pony, cat and dog). Names of the stories including animal heroes can be seen in the full list provided in the Appendix I.

As one of the categories, age of the characters has only been introduced in three stories, in the order they appear these are as follows; a 10 year old girl named Lily (S3), in S18 Memo is 7 years old while the lion is 5, the monkey is 4, the elephant is 3, the bear is 2 and horse is a year old; last of all, Bambam is 5 and his sister Çakıl is 6 years old (S28).

Nine of the heroes are male while four of them are female; only three of them heroes of brothers and sisters. Male heroes have been depicted as negative characteristics such as uncooperative to share (S1), misbehaving (S19), disrespectful (S22), and unappreciative (S32). Only in one story (S34), Peter the male hero helps others to win the match. On the contrary four female heroes (S3, S7, S12 and S20) have not been attributed any specific characteristics but represented neutrally. Furthermore, it is quite significant that the parental roles are quite distinct in that mothers have immense part in the childhood period. The roles of the mothers (n=13) and how they appeared in the story can be outlined as:

S2. *Mother* frog welcomes homeless duck.
S3. Lily's *mom* takes her to the zoo to introduce animals.
S6. *Mother* butterfly comforts and assures the little caterpillar about its beauty.
S13. Poor girl's *mom* sews a doll that turns out to be magical.
S14. *Mom* tells a story every night.
S16. The m*other* prepares a fruit salad for her son.
S19. Sam wakes up from his nightmare hearing his *mother*'s voice.
S21. His *mother* tells Tom not to touch others' things without permission.
S22. Tom regrets having yelled at his *mom*, picks flowers for her and never yells to her again.
S23. *Mom* generally punishes the curious bear.
S28. *Mom*, Betty, goes to supermarket and leaves the kids alone at home.
S29. Tom wakes up from his dream hearing his *mother*'s voice.
S37. Little frog picks up flowers for his *mom*.

Though not stated in the coding table (Table 1), several new categories emerged from the data: extra information about the heroes was generated to see whether they are authentic or adapted from current stories, personification as a figure of speech, dreams as a way of expression and role of gender of storytellers. Firstly, stories adapted include the ones with famous cartoon characters such as Katie dreams herself as Little Red Riding Hood (S7), Gold key with Sıdıka (S12), Three little smurfs (17), Clara's dream with Betty, Spiderman, Tom, Tweety (S20), Tom and Jerry vs. the bad cat Şerafettin (S 27), Batman, Superman and Joker (S35) and the Smurfs (S38). It should be noted that Sıdıka and bad cat Şerafettin are well-known Turkish cartoon characters.

An interesting point is that the majority of the stories made use of personification that is a figure of speech attributing human characteristics to non-humans or abstract things (Britannica, 2012). In the digital stories, animals (n=13), objects (a doll, a stone and a rainbow), fruits (n=2), body parts (n=1) have been personalized by having conversation with others. Besides, dogs appeared to be most human friendly and positively connotated animal in the stories (S8, S9, and S32).
Another emerging preference is the use of dreams in the stories. In six of the stories (S5, S7, S18, S19, S20, S23), including one nightmare, the hero/es wake up from their dream at end, realizes that it was a dream, learns from it, feels happy. In some of these kind of stories, the child falls asleep, in some the reader understand that it was a dream when the child wakes up at the end. Furthermore, the dream leads the story to a happy end dramatically.

Digitally speaking, all stories have successfully integrated transitions and effects as they were on the evaluation criteria list. Only one of the stories is missing the title page, except for that all stories have title and credits page. As a Web 2.0 function, interactivity can be observed on Facebook group through *Like* and *Comments*. *Like* could mean either "I have seen your story and am now hitting the *Like* button just to let you know" or "I really liked your story." The number of *likes* for 38 stories is 266 with an average of 7 and *comments* is 24. The first uploaded video received the most comments (n=9) and likes (n=25); some positive comments were followed by some questions and answers about the story script. It could be inferred that the earliest upload have been curiously viewed the most to see the final product. The story (S14) that received the least like, only one and no comments is about two siblings' dream. In another exchange of

information through comments, problems of video visibility due to privacy setting of secret not public have been discussed. In one of the videos (S34) the storyteller commented on his own video as "100% hand-made." Finally, one viewer and the storyteller complimented on each other's videos in the 10 comments posted for a video.

Lastly, though it is not the subject to this study, it is attention-grabbing that gender of storytellers made great difference. As for the participants of the study, the female (n=62) students outnumbered males (n=15). Five stories created by only males: The boy and the wizard, the black hearted bird, the cat Çiçi, Peter in the space and Batman, Superman and Joker. What these stories in common is the negatively loaded characters realizing their mistake after some regretful actions. The cartoon characters chosen also directly reflect the gender of the owner.

Discussion and Conclusion

The thirty-eight stories prepared by ELT students are taken to represent how they perceive the world of children and storytelling. The leading theme of the stories "friendship" signals the importance the storytellers themselves and children attached to it. Friendship is directly linked to cognitive and social-cognitive development of the children (Bukowski, 2001) and contributes to the development of basic skills, social skills and social interaction (Gottman, Gonso & Rasmussen, 1975). DeGeorge (1998) integrated children's literature to teach friendship to children with disabilities based on the reader response theory that suggests responding to the reading materials through actions, here reflecting the story content to their relations with friends. The results suggested positive outcomes of the practice and increased motivation for active participation to the story. Moral values, in the meantime, have emphasized the one's goodnesses to others especially to friends and adults that is the immediate environment.

In the stories analyzed in this study, the oldest hero in the stories is 10 year olds, whereas the youngest is 5 years old for the humans and the youngest is a year old pony for the animal heroes. It could be seen as the world of stories are full of people at or similar ages of children who the reader/audience can feel a connection between their life-styles and adventures. On a similar basis, in the picture book analysis of Bildman (1972) (cited in Bekkedal, 1973), fifty books published between 1950 and 1970 were examined and characters of six-to-nine year olds were identified. According to the results, children mainly boys appeared to be of positive characteristics. Therefore, the age range fits to the age span of target group young learners.

As for the animal heroes, the Cinderella books content analysis that focused on the role of animals, searched patterns for the appearance of animal helpers with its variants (Smith, 2012). The findings revealed positive contribution of animals to humans especially to the female who are in need of help. Along the same lines, the videos in this study housed animals as heroes represented with positive attributions except for a few where the animal is curious or black-hearted; however, learns from their mistakes.

For the considerations about gender, it should be noticed that being exposed to sexist materials could affect the perspectives of readers even more at the younger ages. Research (Bildman, 1972 as cited in Bekkedal, 1973; Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus & Young, 2006; Taylor, 2003) has focused on the analysis of educational materials to eliminate the gender bias. Accordingly, Gooden and Gooden (2001) and in a more recent study Hamilton et al. (2006) analyzed picture books specifying gender representation and indicated a decrease in gender

stereotyping observed in picture books. Like the outnumbering appearance of males over females in the illustrations with a variety of traditional (female as mothers, washer-woman etc.) and non-traditional roles (female as doctors, chefs, etc.), the stories of this study depicted female as heroes less than the male. Nevertheless, in this study the characteristics of male were generally represented as problem makers such as misbehaving or naughty boys. Besides, in another study student comments on gender stereotyping in children's books draws attention to the "wrong message" (p.307) books provide to readers with distinct roles for males and females (Taylor, 2003).

Given the divide of roles, the female heroes remained neutral exploring the world around mostly with their mothers. The frequent appearance of mothers in the digital stories with varying positively loaded roles is significant for the family bonds and mother-children relationship; however, the fathers are missing except for two stories where father takes the child to the picnic and introduces the animals to his son. As a supporting study, Bildman (1972, as cited in Bekkedal, 1973) reported the results of the story book analysis as mostly picturing the adults as having child-rearing role.

It can be concluded that ELT students as prospective teachers put "friendship" first in the child's world and emphasizing doing good to others having learnt from mistakes. The male has appeared in the stories more than female but depicted with negative attributions. Additionally, mother have been attached a variety of significant roles in the life of a child. What emerged from the data is place and role of dogs as the favorite animals, dreams as the context for expressing feelings and the gender of storytellers. The findings suggest that there is a need to further analyze the stories in terms of gender stereotypes and its effect on children as readers, gender of storytellers and their perspectives, the cultural elements reflected and merged and finally, the effect of digital version of stories on the learning and teaching processes.

Digital storytelling provides multiple opportunities for the storyteller regardless of the roles of a writer, a sequencer, a researcher, a designer, a narrator and an instructor. All things considered, DS is a powerful tool in today's technology-suffused world. For further study to recommend, students as storytellers could be interviewed in order to get a wider perspective of their goals, points and dramatic effect they have planned to create through digital stories. In addition, students could perform peer assessment and a revision where necessary could follow. Notwithstanding computers seem to rule over the educational world, it would not be surprising to see next generation create and tell stories using their mobile phones. The coming term could be "mobile storytelling" or has already been.

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Appendix I

List of the stories

1.The boy and the wizard	20.Clara's dream
2.The little frog and little ducky duck	21.The magical fruits
3.Lily and pets	22.Little Tom
4.Three apples	23.The curious bear
5.Cedric's dream	24.The little frog
6.The little butterfly	25.The baby rabbit
7.Katie's dream	26.NA
8.Ten little dogs	27.Tom and Jerry vs. the bad cat Şerafettin
9.Friendship of dog	28.Çakıl and Bambam
10.The pony and her friends	29.Tom and his daydream
11.The secret of a pear tree	30.Guardians of the forest
12.Gold key	31.The hilarious picnic
13.The doll	32.Real friendship
14.A spotted mushroom	33.The cat Çiçi
15.The black hearted bird	34.Peter in the space
16.Fruit salad	35.Batman, Superman and Joker
17.Three little smurfs	36.A selfish cow
18.Memo's dream	37.Little frog with his father
19.Sam's nightmare	38.The smurfs