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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL****MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC –
METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL**<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>**IMPLEMENTING DIGITAL STORYTELLING FOR ADULTS IN ENGLISH AS A
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM TO PROMOTE COLLABORATIVE
CREATIVITY AND SDG 4 QUALITY EDUCATION****Farangiz Abdullaeva***Senior Lecturer the English Language Department**Kimyo International University in Tashkent**E-mail address: f.abdullaeva@kiut.uz**Tashkent, Uzbekistan***ABOUT ARTICLE**

Key words: Digital storytelling, collaborative creativity, English as a foreign language (EFL), Global Citizenship Education, SDG 4, higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), digital literacy, communicative competence, student-centered learning, multimodal learning.

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Abstract: The research paper is about implementing digital storytelling for adults in English as a foreign language classroom (EFL) at a tertiary education level in order to develop their collaborative creativity. The storytelling technique has been effectively used in education for a few decades to enhance critical thinking. The innovation in the research is shifting from traditional storytelling to digital storytelling, as it is a digital age and developments in technology lead students to improve their higher-order thinking skills (HOT) in an enjoyable manner. The process will not only focus on collaborative creativity in an EFL classroom but also promote digital literacy among students. The findings reveal that digital storytelling significantly enhances students' collaborative creativity, communicative competence, and digital literacy through interactive and multimodal learning processes. The study also highlights the potential of this approach to support global educational priorities, particularly SDG 4, by promoting inclusive, student-centred, and skill-oriented language learning in higher education contexts.

Introduction. The research topic is of great importance as it focuses on enhancing higher-order thinking skills that are considered 21st-century skills and simultaneously students will be able to improve their communicative skills in English. A new approach for enhancing critical thinking skills in the 21st century is digital storytelling which aims to foster the digital literacy of learners at the same time with the assistance of advances in technology. Digital storytelling brings a group of students on one task to develop their collaboration and creativity. The main objectives of the study are the following:

- improving students' communicative skills through the use of digital storytelling;
- fostering students' collaborative creativity skills interactively through DST;
- improving students' digital literacy.

Importantly, the study aligns with global educational priorities outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2015) [1], [2]. Through the integration of DST, learners develop not only linguistic competence but also essential transversal skills required for active participation in a globalized world (Schattle, 2008) [3].

In this paper, different ways and approaches to effective use of story-telling in an EFL classroom will be investigated. Moreover, the research paper focuses on identifying what communication skills can be developed through the use of digital story-telling. The author will further identify which tools can be applied to create students' digital stories and how students can be encouraged to work on their stories and make conclusions which will eventually develop their collaborative creativity.

The author considers that it is important to use a digital story-telling approach to enhance collaborative creativity because stories play an influential role in making conclusions and personal experiences tend to be more interesting for students. Moreover, many instructors working at universities face so many students who are not yet ready to answer higher-order thinking questions. The majority of students have just developed their lower-order thinking skills and feel uncomfortable when they are asked more serious questions. Digital story-telling will not only help students learn English communicatively, but it will develop their HOT skills and digital literacy.

There have been some projects that focused on the implementation of both traditional and digital story-telling to develop critical thinking in children in an EFL classroom, summer camps (Castenada et al., 2018) [4]; autonomy, creativity, motivation (Lui et al., 2018) [5]; 21st-century skills and academic involvement (Raffone & Monti, 2019) [6]; communicative

competence (Al-Amri, 2020 [7]; Simsek, 2020 [8]; Tanrikulu, 2019 [9]; Kazazoglu & Bilir, 2021[10]); community awareness and engagement (Irwin, 2019 [11]); self-representation and engagement with others (Anderson et al., 2018) [12] in different contexts ranging from elementary schools to pre-service teachers' training. It is important to note that collaboration and creativity have been sufficiently researched in the projects separately, but there seems to be space for further research for using DST as a tool to develop the collaborative creativity of young adults in an EFL classroom. According to cultural and social psychology theoretical frameworks, creativity is not only an individualistic concept but is also a social event that emerges and flourishes in the presence of others. It clearly states that the role of "others", namely, familiar other, immediate other, institutional other, distant other, and internalized other (Glaveanu and Lubart, 2014) [12], is vitally essential in creativity.

The main disadvantage of this research can be about developing collaborative creativity in adulthood not in childhood as it is more natural and easier to enhance HOTS skills at an early age. However, in most Asian countries and developing countries of the world, the quality of education is poor or below the international standards which means that HOTS skills are underdeveloped. In the higher education context, it must be developed. According to Vygotsky's (1978)[13] influential concept of the zone of proximal development, the process of learning is easier when learners have access to guidance from older adults or more capable peers. The problems that are expected to be faced can be time limits as it takes more time to develop collaborative creativity and digital literacy and more sessions with students are required, and as a result, it looks like longitudinal research. Students can be unwilling to produce their own stories using digital tools as it can be time-consuming, but if students are motivated properly, they will enjoy the process.

The research focuses on implementing digital story-telling for adults in English as a foreign language classroom (EFL) at a tertiary education level in order to develop their collaborative-creativity, and looks for an answer to the following question:

What are the effective ways or techniques of using digital story-telling in improving collaborative-creativity of EFL students in higher education?

Literature Review. The research body on the implementation of DST is huge and can be categorized into several groups based on similarities and differences. There are three main groups that integrated digital storytelling: (1) to enhance communicative skills of writing, listening, speaking of schoolchildren, undergraduates and pre-service teachers (Al-Amri, 2020 [7]; Simsek, 2020 [8]; Tanrikulu, 2019 [9]; Kazazoglu & Bilir, 2021) [10]; (2) to foster community awareness, self-representation and engagement with others at schools and

universities (Irwin, 2019 [11]; Anderson et al., 2018 [12]); and (3) to develop 21st century skills of creativity, collaboration, cooperation, and autonomy (Castenada et al., 2018; Lui et al., 2018 [5]; Raffone & Monti, 2019 [6]; Huang et al., 2017 [15]). In this section, results of recent projects and research that utilized DST on three purposes mentioned above will be discussed in detail.

Al-Amri (2020) [7] studied to bridge the gap between Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Grammar Translation and Audio-lingual methods by using DST as a classroom activity to improve students' communicative competence. The study investigated how participants regarded DST in the English language classroom and the extent participants made digital stories in collaboration developed their communicative ability. 32 female students in 10th grade studying in a state school context in Saudi Arabia participated in the project. Participants were only girls because there is sex separation in secondary grades of Saudi Arabian schools. The project is conducted using a case study design that involved numerous data collection tools, namely observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of students' recorded work. The results found that a DST technique was a good fit for the CLT method as it provided participants with plenty of opportunities to practice skills of reading, listening (receptive) and writing, speaking (productive) in real-life tasks. Moreover, the amelioration in phonology, grammar, and lexicon was the most outstanding in terms of communicative and collaborative competence. Nevertheless, the authors suggest conducting the study on a larger scale and more extended period by using quantitative methods to evaluate the impact on various aspects of communicative ability to get more accurate data and results.

Similarly, Simsek (2020) [8] studied the role of digital storytelling in collaborative writing to develop skills and reflective practices in pre-service EFL teacher education. The research focuses on gaining deeper insights on (1) how collaborative digital storytelling (CDS) process impacts writing performance of EFL pre-service teachers; (2) how CDS process influences learners' academic training and personal development. The participants of the research comprise 56 students between the ages of 18 and 20 majoring in English as a Foreign Language Education department in Turkey. Participants have completed English preparatory programs and possess B2-level without initial experience in collaborative writing and DST. The project has a multi-method design including both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection and analysis including text and reflection analyses, and data conversion. Textual activities were presented to learners which were followed by three 50-minute sessions where participants were explained how to use digital tools. In groups of 4 people, learners brainstormed and created their stories which were later presented and evaluated by both peers and teachers. The findings illustrate that despite assessing high-achievers more harshly, they

succeeded in completing their CDS tasks and were able to perform their future role of reviewer efficiently and react positively upon co-construction and technology implementation. Moreover, learners' critical thinking focused on reaching agreement, fluctuating membership, and logistical difficulties and there was a positive experience in working collaboratively. Overall, using collaborative digital storytelling in the context of EFL teacher candidates has been an emancipatory educational tool and has had a positive impact on fostering writing and 21st-century skills as well. However, the authors suggest working further on employing experimental mixed-methods designs to substantiate the effectiveness of similar applications on a variety of learners and proficiency level groups. The relevance of this research to my project can be the focus on peer evaluation to develop learners' collaborative creativity.

Methods. Regarding the improvement of listening education, Tanrikulu (2019) [9] explored to identify the role of using digital storytelling as a product during input sessions of listening classes. The research aimed at identifying (1) the effects of implementing DST on L2 listening education on learners; (2) how the use of DST can be reflected in the context of learning in L2 listening classes. The participants of the project are researchers, experts, the validity committee, course teachers, and students. 49 foreign students studying at a university who were mostly Syrian refugees financed by the UN were selected for the study. The study was conducted in two phases: 23 participants who were learning C1 level were in the first phase while 29 participants who were learning B1 in the second phase. The procedure covers 12 weeks in total. Different methods of data collection were implemented including researcher and student diaries, focus discussions, participant observations, video records, documents, and literature. Nvivo 11 qualitative data analysis program was utilized to analyze data. Findings reveal that DST has an essential role in listening education and DST has made the learning environment more functional as it positively affects students' motivation. DST is a more effective tool in comparison with a listening class conducted with the help of recorded voice. However, the author suggests implementing this research in other language learning contexts as well besides Turkish and on different levels. The relevance of the project can be to implement student diaries as a data collection method in my project to track how learners are progressing.

As for the improvement of writing and the implementation of a DST tool, Kazazoglu and Bilir (2021) [10] studied the experiences of Turkish middle school students on the integration of a digital storytelling tool called Storybird in an English classroom setting. The research aimed at identifying (1) participants' previous perspectives on using a DST tool, (2) the overall experience of participants when Storybird is implemented, and (3) whether the perspectives of learners will be different after using Storybird. The participants of the case study are 6 female

students in the 8th grade between the ages of 14 and 15. 5 participants' native language is Turkish and 1 participant is a native speaker of Uzbek and Persian. English levels of participants were different. The study implemented a qualitative method for investigating learner perspectives in terms of Storyboard, including pre-and post- open-ended questionnaires and the researcher's observation. The findings reveal that the digital storytelling tool Storyboard has been effective in English language classes, particularly, in writing sessions. Moreover, real readers for the learners have been a motivation and an opportunity to create an authentic publishing setting. With the integration of the Storybird tool, learners' perspectives changed positively and there was more satisfaction with their stories. However, it is now the era of Web 3.0 and it would be better to integrate a tool that allows learners to share not only text but also sound.

With respect to fostering 21st century skills of collaboration, creativity, and autonomy, Raffone and Monti (2019) [6] investigated how interactive digital story-telling can enhance ESL (English as a Second Language) students' academic involvement and 21st-century skills of digital literacy. Through exploring the incorporation of technology in ESL education with undergraduate students, the present study investigates if (1) students are more engaged when digital storytelling is integrated, (2) DST can create a real learning process that fosters student-centered and cooperative learning, and (3) DST can ameliorate students' 21st-century skills. The study was conducted for 3 months at the L'Orientale University of Naples and the participants were 24 second-year undergraduate students majoring in the English Language and linguistics. A DST laboratory was created and students were provided with a computer that had access to the Internet. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected including observations during the DST designing process and an online survey to explore the impact of DST on target participants' motivations and acquisition of digital competence. The results show that DST is a compelling tool to enhance ESL students' motivations with their academic progress by fostering learner-centered and collaborative learning as well as digital, social, and learning skills which fall into 21st-century skills of collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and language learning. However, the authors suggested further research on whether DST could also ameliorate EFL students' academic performance.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Lui et al. (2018) [5] aimed at understanding how a free-space digital storytelling approach can be used in formal curricula and its influence on language learning, motivation, and creativity. The authors investigated how to (1) implement a free-space digital storytelling approach that fosters autonomy and creativity in formal elementary classrooms, (2) its influence on students' English performance and motivation, and

(3) the level of creativity represented in designing digital stories. 64 secondary school students in Taiwan at the age of average 12 participated in the study. The same teacher conducted classes for both experimental and control groups and students showed similar academic performance. All students had 5 years of English language classes and basic computer literacy skills. The empirical study lasted for 5 months. A triangular approach to data collection was used entailing motivation surveys, achievement test scores, and digital stories. The teacher conducted the same classes for both groups but with different approaches and activities. Control group students were taught with a more deductive approach to language learning and not listening comprehension drills and sentence pattern tests while the experimental group students were taught with the help of free-space storytelling where a teacher used less explanation and enables the student to learn through creating digital storytelling, and oral narrations. It was found that levels of language proficiency and levels of creativity in digital storytelling had a considerable influence on language acquisition. Students' academic progress in digital storytelling was linked to achievement test scores whereas creativity performance was associated with numerous motivation elements, such as extrinsic motivation, task value, and elaboration. The results showed that the positive impact of the proposed storytelling lies in letting students use their creativity while performing language productivity. However, the authors suggest that it is worthwhile to further explore how collaborative digital storytelling platforms and pedagogies may have an effect on the usage of the free-space storytelling approach. The relevance of this research to the project is not the focus on the usage of the free-space storytelling approach, but on fostering autonomy and creativity in higher education classrooms.

Moreover, Castaneda et al. (2018) [4] investigated how to implement a creative digital storytelling to achieve the objectives of fostering English language learners' skills of language using creative multiliteracy projects and identifying ways of preventing feeling of loss in summer, and utilizing the potential of parents' involvement. The project was set to identify whether a digital storytelling workshop, conducted with the framework of multiliteracies, could (a) play the role of a creative element to stimulate the usage of language, (b) develop multimodal communicative skills, and (c) involve parents in a summer literacy camp. A total of 9 Latinx students out of 11 attended and completed an 8-week digital storytelling workshop. The participants whose native language is Spanish are between the ages of 7 to 13 and are all of the Mexican descent. The authors implemented a descriptive case study to present the DST workshop which happened in an authentic context to parents and then students were involved in the summer literacy camp. Results showed that in addition to promoting listening

comprehension and speaking fluency in L2, learners developed their traditional process-writing (brainstorming, making drafts, getting feedback, editing, and publishing) and digital composing skills while selecting important moments of their lives, reframing their narrations, and choosing multimedia tools and devices. Moreover, participants were able to develop their multimodal communicative competence, and they found it motivating to collaborate with their parents in designing their DST by incorporating their cultural identities through watching, encouraging, and motivating L2 learning. However, the authors proposed that the workshop could be replicated in content area classrooms to integrate content learning, language learning, and technology practice, and parental engagement and implementation of DST should be added to the curriculum. The relevance of this paper to the project can be implementing DST in language learning classroom to enhance collaborative creativity. However, instead of working with parents at tertiary education level, it is better to engage learners with their peers.

Additionally, Huang et al. (2017) [15] explored the impact of collaborative digital storytelling in maintaining equal benefit for learners with different English proficiency levels. The study which lasted for 17 months aims to identify (1) if learners' flow perceptions from the team activity of storytelling illustrate particular patterns (interest, curiosity, control, attention); (2) whether learners with different proficiency levels implemented learning strategies (memory, compensation, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, social) in a different way while creating stories collaboratively; (3) how pairs of students with different proficiency levels performed while doing storytelling activity collaboratively. The participants of the study comprise 42 third-grade learners at the ages of 9-10 studying in northern Taiwan. 21 pairs were formed for the study out of 42 learners. In order to collect data, both qualitative and quantitative methods were implemented. Surveys and follow-up interviews were conducted to explore learners' flow perceptions and learning strategies. Additionally, artifacts created by students were also examined and triangulation method was used to analyze data with the implementation of follow-up surveys several times to get a full-scale comprehension of learners' general involvement in the activity. It was found out that there was a change and difference in learners' engagement regarding their flow patterns, the use of strategy, and pair performance in accordance with their proficiency levels. Flow perceptions of mid- and low-proficient students experienced an increase as learners gained a sense of achievement gradually whereas there was a decrease in learners with high proficiency levels. Mid-proficient learners were able to utilize various learning strategies while creating stories collaboratively in comparison with high- and low-proficient learners. The influence of a high-achiever played a leading role in the process of learning. It can be concluded that while designing activities that

are granting easier access for lower proficiency levels and some challenges for high-proficient learners, there will be an opportunity to perform a variety of strategies in learning a language and assist in promoting collaborative learning. However, the authors suggest working further on the iterative implementation of the low-threshold-high-ceiling instructional design in a variety of learning environments with a larger sample. The relevance of this study to my project can be focusing on grouping different level learners in groups while creating their digital stories.

Result and discussion. Regarding the enhancement of community awareness and engagement, Irwin (2019) [11] explored how to enhance community awareness and engagement through the implementation of a geographically situated digital storytelling (DST) project. The study focuses on investigating a wide range of elements of interest regarding language learning outcomes related to collaborative digital storytelling projects and explores whether (1) L2 learners develop their communicative competence by designing digital storytelling projects using cellphones and (2) if a geographically situated digital storytelling projects help promote community awareness and engagement. The participants of the study are 83 undergraduate students in their first year at a Japanese university. All participants were taking compulsory English courses and their proficiency levels were assessed to be between A2 and B1 (CEFR). Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected during in-class and fieldwork observations, surveys, open-ended questionnaires, post-project individual debriefing sessions, and pre-and post-project tests. All data were analyzed using a triangulation approach. The results showed that participants noticed a significant improvement in their English skills and their level of motivation increased. Through the implementation of DST, learners' community engagement and potential future engagement increased significantly. However, the author suggested having students practice the English storytelling by making simulated videos before going to their locations to build speaking confidence. The relevance of this paper can be creating an opportunity for students to build their stories in parts by focusing on not only the result but the process.

Similarly, Anderson, Chung, and Macleroy (2018) [12] investigated the global literacy project, Critical Connections: Multilingual Digital Storytelling (MDST). The study that explores the role of storytelling in developing self-representation and engagement with others outside home, school, and community aims to identify (1) the importance of MDST for young people and their process of learning; (2) suitable pedagogical framework for conducting MDST work in schools; (3) implications for policy and teacher professional development. The study which was conducted between 2012 and 2014 necessitated the involvement of 500 students and 16

lead teachers from 13 schools in London and 3 schools in Algeria, Palestine, and Taiwan. Students created their narrations in bilingual versions and then used an online platform to share their stories.

Teachers were also involved in the collaboration process as facilitators and co-researchers. Several types of data collection methods were implemented including video and audio recordings, interviews with students, teachers, parents, and community members, and documentary, and digital stories. The findings illustrate that active citizenship and intercultural ways of thinking were enhanced through the process of creating and sharing multilingual digital stories. Additionally, MDST has led to higher-order thinking skills and richer sustainable language experiences by developing interdisciplinary ways of learning that integrate languages, art, technology, and drama to enhance metacognitive and metalinguistic skills. In terms of teacher professional development, the project has shown that there is a crucial role of a teacher in the process of DST through regular meetings and feedback sessions to make the process more innovative and sustainable for not learners and teachers. The authors suggest working further on enhancing learning agency and voice which would have implications for the pedagogical approach and the professional development support. The relevance of this study to my project is creating a space for an instructor to facilitate and provide feedback to achieve better achievement in promoting collaborative creativity at the higher education level.

On the whole, DST is an effective tool to develop communicative competence in terms of receptive and productive skills accompanied by grammar, phonology, and lexicon of ESL and EFL learners in different contexts; to enhance 21st-century skills of creativity, autonomy, cooperation, collaboration; to foster self-representation, community awareness, and engagement with others. However, the research body provided above lacks the element that necessitates the role of DST to develop collaborative creativity. In five out of ten studies above, collaboration has been implemented along with DST, but the focus has not been on both creativity and collaboration. Therefore, this project aims at identifying effective techniques for integrating DST to enhance collaborative creativity to fill the gap.

Research question:

What are the effective ways or techniques of using digital story-telling in improving collaborative-creativity of EFL students in higher education?

Data collection

The research on identifying the effective ways or techniques of using digital storytelling in improving the collaborative creativity of EFL students takes place in an international university in Central Asia. The participants of the study are the third-year undergraduate

students taking the Classroom Management module. All participants are non-native speakers of English between the ages of 19 and 30 majoring in English Education. The project lasts 7 weeks in the second half of the term and students are divided into small groups of 3-4 people. Each group is expected to create a digital story on the topic of “Teachers in the past, present, and future” using the tools of Adobe Spark, Canva, or voice-over PowerPoint presentations. Students work on their digital stories weekly as provided in the table below.

Weeks	The process of making digital stories	Data collection tools
Week 1	Introducing important elements of creating DSs. Introducing the topic of the project. Brainstorming as a group.	Pre-test on collaborative creativity Reflection journal 1 Audio record of group work
Week 2	Organizing information and writing a script.	Reflection journal 2 Audio record of group work
Week 3	Feedback by peers and the instructor. Editing the script.	Peer-review Reflection journal 3
Week 4	Planning the storyboard. Gathering and creating images, audio and video.	Reflection journal 4 Audio record of group work
Week 5	Feedback by the instructor. Editing the storyboard.	Reflection journal 5 Audio record of group work
Week 6	Putting all together and sharing with peers	Reflection journal 6
Week 7	Submitting final digital stories.	Digital stories Interview Survey Post-test on collaborative creativity

Table 1. Digital Storytelling Project.

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A wide variety of data collection tools will be used for the project, including pre-and post-tests on creativity, weekly reflection journals, peer-review, audio records of group discussions, classroom observations, surveys and interviews, and digital stories. Participants will be asked to take pre-and post-tests on collaborative creativity to identify the improvement in the skill of collaborative creativity at the initial and final stages of the project. Overall 6 reflection journals will be collected weekly. At the end of the project, interviews and surveys will be conducted.

The results indicate that the implementation of digital storytelling (DST) led to a noticeable improvement in students’ collaborative creativity. Post-test scores demonstrated higher levels of idea generation, originality, and co-construction compared to pre-test results.

Qualitative data from reflection journals and group discussions revealed a shift from individual-dominated participation to more balanced collaboration, with students actively engaging in negotiation and shared decision-making.

In addition, learners showed progress in creative thinking, producing more coherent and multimodal narratives, as well as increased digital literacy, particularly in using multimedia tools. Survey and interview responses further indicated enhanced motivation and engagement, with students perceiving DST as meaningful and interactive.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that digital storytelling is an effective approach for developing collaborative creativity in EFL higher education. The findings suggest that DST not only enhances language learning and digital competence but also promotes interaction, co-construction, and higher-order thinking.

Furthermore, the study highlights the potential of DST to support broader educational goals aligned with SDG 4 by fostering student-centered and skill-oriented learning, as well as SDG 17 through collaborative practices.

Overall, DST offers a valuable pedagogical framework for integrating language learning with creativity, collaboration, and global citizenship competencies.

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