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## Pre-Service ESL Teachers' Perceptions of Parody Integration in Digital Stories

<sup>1</sup>Azmi Abdul Latiff and <sup>2</sup>Nurairhan Mat Daud

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Science Technology and Human Development,  
 Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Languages and Management,  
 International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Abstract:** Advancement in digital technology has led to the increase in popularity of digital videos. Online videos are easily accessible to users through Youtube and similar networks. The language learning and teaching field in particular has also benefitted from the technological advancements in digital video production. One of its uses is in the teaching of language through humour. The use of digital videos could help create a humorous atmosphere in the class. Substantial number of research has been conducted on the use of humor in language classes but most of them are based on printed materials. This study attempts to use the videos on Youtube to create parody as a means of developing their language skills. It seeks to investigate students' perception of integrating elements of humour in the digital stories. The study aims to capture the language of humor used by the students through the videos that they produced. In order to do this, a group of ESL pre-service teachers were given the task to produce a humorous video-based (on Youtube) digital story. Self-administered online questionnaire was used to elicit their responses. Overall, most of the teacher trainees gave positive feedback to the given task. From the pedagogical perspective, the research concludes that producing humorous video-based digital story could be used to improve students' language skills.

**Key words:** Digital storytelling • Parody • Humor • Perception • Writing

### INTRODUCTION

Technology advancement has opened up opportunities to improve learner engagement. The arrival of Web 2.0 for instance, has witnessed the use of Web 2.0 applications such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook for language learning purposes [1, 2, 3]. The advancement in technology has also given a new lease of life to some traditional classroom activities. One such activity is storytelling. Traditionally, a storytelling activity in a class involves either the teacher or one of the students telling a story in front of the class. Some storytellers tell their stories interactively to make their stories interesting [4] explains that interactive storytelling can be traced way back to prehistoric years when a storyteller performed his narration around a campfire. There was no fixed storyline and the storyteller would shape and mould his story based on the audience's reactions. Some traditional storytellers used aids, props or realia to enhance their presentations but the story was narrated orally.

With technological advancements, storytelling activities have taken on a modern twist. Digital technologies offer multi-media means of storytelling. Stories can now be delivered through a mixture of digital components that may include computer-based images, texts, recorded audios, video clips and/or background music [5]. According to [4], digital stories are narrative entertainments that reach the audience via digital technology and media-microprocessors, wireless signals, the Web, DVDs and other digital means. In other words, digital stories interweave different media to enhance the art of storytelling.

Another feature that a storyteller can include to make his story more interesting is humor. Many people enjoy storytellers who are humorous. Suggestions have been made to incorporate humor into the language classroom [6]. Substantial number of research has been conducted on the use of humor in language classes. Teachers have employed humor to reduce tension, alleviate boredom and maintain student interest and comfort [7, 8, 9].

**Corresponding Authors:** Azmi Abdul Latiff, Faculty of Science, Technology and Human Development,  
 Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.

These studies were, however, done on the humor that was created by teachers. [10] suggests that learners should be encouraged to participate in humor-filled class. Humor is, however, difficult to teach. Despite its potential, the combination of storytelling and use of humor in language classes have not been well-researched. Combining humor in digital storytelling could result in a meaningful integration of technology into a language classroom [11] and this could consequently enhance language learning.

**Research Objectives:** The lack of practice and research on the language of humor in digital stories has prompted the researchers to conduct a study on the use of humorous storytelling technique in an ESL teacher trainee class. The main objective of this research is to elicit the perceptions of ESL practitioners on the integration of humor into digital story production.

The study aims to address the following research questions:

- What are the pre-service teachers' perceptions of digital story production?
- What are the pre-service teachers' perceptions of the integration of parody into digital storytelling?

### **Literature Review**

**Digital Storytelling in Education:** Digital storytelling promotes the development of several skills among learners. [12] highlights that the process of creating digital stories utilizes almost all of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. These skills include information literacy, visual literacy, creativity, inventive thinking, risk-taking and effective communication. The skills can be developed when students actively participate in the creation process of digital storytelling [5]. [13] adds that the process of creating a digital story involves leveraging a wide variety of skills including researching for topics, script writing, storyboard planning and assembling the final product using video editing software.

Digital storytelling is therefore, a great tool to enhance multiple skills among learners. This is proven by [14] who posits that being able to read "new media," including digital stories "is not just a matter of literacy". In fact, it is also "a matter of survival" since it is increasingly required at the workplace.

**The Benefits of Digital Storytelling to Language Learning:** Traditional storytelling provides the initial exposure among children to language literacy. Listening

to bedtime stories, for instance, help to develop their listening skills. Telling stories would help the children develop their speaking skill, motivation and confidence to use the language.

Research has shown that digital storytelling is a great tool to develop language skills. In [15]'s study, all teachers reported that their students displayed an increase in their technical, presentation, research, organizational as well as writing skills.

In another study, it was found that the activity was able to engage low proficiency readers and writers to express themselves accurately during conventional language learning classes [16]. [17] observed that the students were more conscious of the presence of audience and yet more confident in telling their story. Perhaps the awareness that their stories or products are accessible to a larger audience made them more careful in narrating their story.

The technology used in preparing a digital story allows learners to listen to their pronunciation. They could 'listen to their script' as they do the recording and listen to it as many times as they wish. [14] states that due to the interplay between writing, speaking and listening, digital story telling could be used to help students in learning a language.

According to [11], digital storytelling encourages students to organize and express their ideas in a meaningful way. A digital storytelling activity allows learners to express their personal experience or develop a story based on their personal point of view.

One of the emerging techniques in digital storytelling is the use of video-based digital story [18]. This technique is gaining popularity, probably due to the fact that it combines several multimedia elements including audio, video, music and text. Musical and humorous videos are the most viewed videos on Youtube [19]. In other words, music and humor are two of the elements that would make a video popular among the online viewers. Digital stories delivered on Youtube are generally short as the video platform provider allows a 10-minute limit to video uploads.

**Humor in Language Class:** Humor is an important personal and interpersonal interaction that could be used as an effective tool in education in general and language learning in particular. [20] suggests that humor is one of the effective means of enhancing students' motivation. It can reduce stress, improve classroom climate, increase learning enjoyment, increase student-teacher interaction and even facilitate learning.

[21] discover in their research that the use of appropriate verbal humor in the classroom could create opportunities to enhance the learning of a second language. Moreover, humor also positively affects language learners in three aspects. Psychologically, it motivates, relaxes and cheers up the learners. Socially, it attracts students' attention, increases their affiliation with other learners and enhances their participation in classroom activities. Instructionally, humor also promotes understanding and learning of a second language and enhances retention of the learning materials.

Nevertheless, [22] reminds that the use of humor in a language class needs to be planned and not employed randomly. In other words, it should have specific learning objectives. With careful planning and clear and specific objectives, humor can make shy and timid students play a more active role in class activities. Students will feel that they are part of the class. This will encourage them to contribute without losing face or feeling awkward especially when making mistakes. [22] adds that using humor will also help to create a communicative atmosphere in a language class. It encourages authentic communication, participation and interaction among the students. Humor is henceforth, a medium to reach out to those students who are too afraid or nervous to express themselves in a foreign or second language.

Besides creating a motivating language learning atmosphere, humor can also help to develop critical thinking skills. According to [23], the use of parody, which is an element of humor, is useful in helping language learners develop self-awareness, an important concept in critical thinking. [23] explains that the intent of parodies is to highlight things that are not right in the world through the media.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Research Design:** A multi-method research approach was adopted to address the objectives of the study. The research design comprised quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. A questionnaire survey that included an open-ended item was used.

**Participants:** The participants in this study were 27 undergraduates at the Institute of Education, International Islamic University of Malaysia. They were being trained in the area of Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL). Part of the training included the use of computers

in language learning. The length of the course was 14 weeks and this study was conducted on those enrolling in Computer Assisted Language Learning course.

**Data Collection:** An online questionnaire was employed to elicit responses from the participants and to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was constructed partly based on [24]. It was divided into three parts. Part A consisted of the demographic profile, Part B focused on the participants' perception on the digital storytelling task and Part C elicited their perceptions on the use of humor in the video. A Likert scale with a four point rating (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, 4=Strongly Disagree) was used for most of the items while the open-ended item that asked the respondents of their opinion on the whole activity.

Data was also collected using video-based digital stories produced by students. This video-based digital story is one of the latest developments in digital storytelling [18]. Each of the teacher trainees was given an individual task to create a humorous story on video that contains elements of parody. The participants were asked to download any 2-3 minutes video clip of a movie from the Youtube. Their task was to turn the movie into a parody by writing humorous subtitles to the movie clip. The inclusion of the subtitles was done through the use of movie editing software such as Window's Movie Maker or Mac's iMovie.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of the study are presented based on the data gathered through the video-based digital stories and the students' responses to the questionnaire. A varying degree of humor was reflected in the video-based digital stories. It was observed that a few struggled to produce a humorous digital story while others managed to do it well. The screenshots of some of the students' works are shown below:

Data collected from the questionnaire survey was reported and analyzed based on the following research questions:

- What are the pre-service teachers' perceptions of digital story production?
- How do the pre-service teachers perceive the integration of parody in digital storytelling approach in an ESL writing class?

Table 1: Teacher trainees' perceptions of digital stories

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
1. Digital storytelling is an interesting classroom activity	14 (52%)	7 (26%)	4 (6%)	2 (7%)
2. Digital storytelling provides me the opportunity to think creatively and critically	11 (41%)	11 (41%)	2 (7%)	3 (11%)
3. Digital storytelling enables me to share my ideas with my classmates.	9 (33%)	12 (44%)	4 (15%)	2 (7%)
4. Digital storytelling makes English learning fun and pleasant.	14 (52%)	8 (30%)	2 (7%)	3 (11%)
5. Digital storytelling makes me more engaged in the lesson.	11 (41%)	9 (33%)	6 (22%)	1 (4%)
6. Digital storytelling makes me the class atmosphere more enjoyable.	15 (56%)	7 (26%)	3 (11%)	2 (7%)
7. Digital storytelling makes me happy with story writing activity.	11 (41%)	10 (37%)	2 (7%)	4 (15%)
8. Digital storytelling makes me like English writing more.	11 (41%)	6 (22%)	8 (30%)	2 (7%)
9. Digital storytelling could improve my writing skill.	9 (33%)	8 (30%)	8 (30%)	2 (7%)



Picture 1: A Screenshot of Parody by Student A



Picture 2: A Screenshot of Parody by Student A in a Following Scene



Picture 3: A Screenshot of Parody by Student B



Picture 4: A Screenshot of Humorous Sub-title by Student C

**Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions on Digital Story Production:** Table 1 presents the teacher trainees' perceptions of digital stories:

When the trainees were asked whether digital storytelling was an interesting classroom activity, (statement 1), 78% expressed agreement. The students' responses in the open-ended section of the questionnaire support this finding.

*"...it is really helpful in making learning more fun"- Student C.*

*"In my opinion it is very interesting to create a funny digital storytelling for the students. Students may enjoy the lesson."- Student I.*

*"My opinion, this assignment of making digital storytelling assignment will create an amazing environment in class..."- Student B*

With regards to thinking creatively and critically (statement 2), 82% agreed that digital storytelling provided the opportunity to do so. This is supported by the students' responses in the open-ended section:

*"Digital storytelling does make learning fun. but it takes time to get use to make it a success. as a first timer it is almost impossible to make it done in a week because it needs a lot of creative thinking.*  
- Student J.

*"I think digital storytelling assignment is difficult and need a critical thinking"*- Student C.

*"It helps to develop our creative thinking skill and also imagination"*- Student S

For statement 3, 77% of the students indicated their agreement that "digital storytelling enables them to share their ideas with their classmates".

In terms of making English learning fun and pleasant(statement 4), 82% of the trainee teachers agreed to the statement. A total of 74% pointed out that they agreed with statement 5, that digital storytelling made them more engaged in the lesson.

*"it's kind of exhausting to create funny a story yet it's an exciting task as i laughed most of the time doing this".* -Student A

*"It is fun and enjoyable to have a digital storytelling in the classroom..."*- Student F

With regards to making the class atmosphere more enjoyable, (statement 6), 78% expressed their agreement. Additionally, 78% of the trainees indicated their agreement that the activity made them happy with story writing activity (statement 7). 63 % of the teacher trainees believed that the digital story activity has made them like English writing more (statement 8), whereas another 63% indicated that the activityhelped them improve their writing skills (statement 9).

These responses imply that the digital storytelling task has received favorable responses from the trainee teachers. The activity has also given some positive impacts on their learning of English language particularly on the writing skill. In general, it can be concluded that the trainee teachers were convinced with the potential of digital storytelling as a useful activity in ESL classes.

**Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions on Integrating Humor into Digital Story:**

Table 2 presents the analysis of five statements related to the integration of humor in digital stories. When the trainees were asked whether it was the first time that they were assigned to create funny materials in class (statement 10), 78% expressed disagreement. With regards to whether creating a funny digital storytelling makes the learning process fun (statement 11), 85% of the trainees indicated their agreement with this statement.

*"it's kind of exhausting to look for ideas to create a story yet it's an exciting task as i laughed most of the time doing this".*- Student A.

*"I've got lots of new knowledge throughout the process of making the digital storytelling. This is my first time in doing parody and I enjoyed it a lot.:"* -Student D.

*"In my opinion it is very interesting to create a funny digital storytelling for the students. Students may enjoy the lesson. It is quite hard for me to think about something funny and combine it with education as this is my first time creating it.-* Student J.

For statement 12, 74% of them indicated their agreement that "creating a funny digital story helps to develop my critical thinking".

In terms of creativity (statement 13), 85% of the teacher-trainees agreed that the integration of funny elements in the assignment has helped to develop their creativity.

Table 2: Teacher trainees' perceptions of integration of parody in digital storytelling approach in ESL writing class

Statement	Strongly Agree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Strongly Disagree F (%)
10. This is the first time that I have been assigned to create funny materials in class.	18 (67%)	3 (11%)	1 (4%)	5 (19%)
11. Creating a funny digital storytelling makes learning activity fun.	16 (59%)	7 (26%)	3 (11%)	1 (4%)
12. Creating a funny digital story helps to develop my critical thinking.	13 (48%)	7 (26%)	5 (19%)	2 (7%)
13. Creating a funny digital story helps to develop my creativity	16 (59%)	7 (26%)	1 (4%)	3 (11%)
14. Writing funny scripts makes the digital storytelling activity enjoyable	15 (56%)	8 (30%)	3 (11%)	1 (4%)

*"I love it! Because it makes me think of many ideas in order to produce fun learning materials. It makes me to think more creatively. I'm sure students will find out that learning using this method is very enjoyable"- Student E*

Finally, a majority of them (86%) agreed that writing funny scripts for the digital story has made the task enjoyable. Overall, the responses in this part indicated that the integration of a funny element in the digital story has received positive responses from most of the participants.

#### **Problems Faced by the Pre-Service Teachers in Producing Humorous Video-Based Digital Stories:**

Even though they enjoyed the digital video production activity, some found the task daunting. These were mentioned in the open-ended section of the questionnaire.

*"... but the process of making it is very hard and stressful especially for the first timer in making this digital storytelling"- Student B.*

*"...there are several obstacles during the making of the work since this is the very first time i ever experience doing digital storytelling" - Student H.*

*".....but it takes time to get use to make it a success. as a first timer it is almost impossible to make it done in a week because it needs a lot of creative thinking."- Student J.*

This problem was more obvious among those who produced video-based digital story for the first time. This included Student B, H and J who was observed to be struggling in the class. According to Student J, she needed a longer time to produce the parody, as the activity required her to think creatively.

Meanwhile, Student C admitted that the task was a difficult one because they needed to be creative to produce the parody. Student A also admitted that the assignment was mentally exhaustive especially when it comes to searching for ideas to create a new story based on the existing video.

*"I think digital storytelling assignment is difficult and need a critical thinking."- Student C.*

*"it's kind of exhausting to look for ideas to create a story...."-Student A.*

Student L found the assignment stressful and suggested that it should be a group work rather than an individual task.

*"Maybe it will be more fun less stress if it is a group assignment. Not all people know how to crack a joke."- Student L.*

Integrating humor in the parody was also challenging to them in creating the video. They found it difficult to integrate the funny element into the story as expressed by student I.

*"It is quite hard for me to think about something funny and combine it with education as this is my first time creating it."- Student J.*

Another issue highlighted by the teacher trainees relates to technical glitches such as incompatibility of the video editing software with their computers. A few needed more time to finish the task because of technical problems that they faced. According to one of them:

*"it is fun but sometimes it is hard to use some software like movie maker or windows live movie maker because it is not compatible with our laptop. whenever it get stuck in the middle of doing the parody movie, it pissed me off!"- Student G*

#### **DISCUSSIONS**

The main objective of the study was to investigate the perceptions of a group of pre-service ESL teachers of the use of parody in digital story production. The majority of the trainee teachers agreed that they enjoyed the first time experience of including elements of humor in a digital story. The feedback from the open-ended item showed that they were thankful for the opportunity given to them to create the story. They also highlighted a few problems concerning the exercise. These included limited time, lack of technical experience and technical problems such as software incompatibility. Despite these problems, the majority of the participants enjoyed the experience of creating a humorous subtitle for a digital story. These findings are in line with earlier studies on the benefits of digital storytelling activities [11, 14, 15, 16, 17].

The activity required the participants to write a humorous sub-title for the given movie clip. The majority enjoyed the task and said that it made writing an interesting activity [25]. Writing story that is presented digitally could motivate ESL learners to write in a foreign or second language.

Creating a funny story is a challenging task because it requires the participants to be creative and critical in order to come up with humorous scripts. All these augur well in developing learners' thinking skills. The inculcation of humorous elements serves to make language learning more interesting. This finding supports earlier works on humor in language learning by [20, 21, 22, 23].

### CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that digital storytelling can be a powerful mechanism to engage learners in language learning. Their writing skill can be improved through script writing activity, which is part of the digital story production activity. Furthermore, the integration of humorous element or parody in the digital story could enhance learners' creativity and critical thinking. The findings indicate the potential of humorous digital storytelling activities in language learning.

This study also highlighted several issues that need to be addressed by language teachers who wish to adopt this approach in their class. These include students' lack of skills and experience in video production and the inability in coping with technical problems. They would also have to be creative and critical in order to produce a good parody. All these elements could make the activity stressful to the language students. Students may need to be exposed to many humorous stories to give them guidance in producing their own. Doing the activity in groups may also reduce the technical problems as they could solve the problems together and create the parody collaboratively.

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