

A Multi-Group Exploration of Learner Agency: Voice-Over Projects in the Age of AI

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Abstract

Integrating digital storytelling into ELT curricula offers unique opportunities for creative expression, yet the rise of AI-generated narration tools necessitates a re-evaluation of learner agency. This presentation shares a multimodal speaking routine where learners transform silent animations into narrated scenes through collaborative scriptwriting and voice-over production. The routine aims to make speaking purposeful by aligning language with on-screen timing. It draws on research suggesting that voice-based digital storytelling supports motivation (Hwang et al., 2020), visual-auditory integration aids retention (Paivio, 1986; Jones & Miller, 2021), and media-rich tasks encourage purposeful language use (Sampson et al., 2022). Two implementations inform this reflection. In a B1+/B2 lesson, groups drafted scripts and used AI text-to-speech for efficient completion within class time. Conversely, in an extracurricular cycle with A1+/A2 volunteers, learners preferred recording their own voices. These students actively negotiated line length, adjusted register, and occasionally rejected teacher suggestions to ensure the visual pacing remained effective. Iterative retakes revealed increased attention to pronunciation, prosody, and pause placement. While AI provided technical efficiency, the transition to authentic vocal production empowered lower-proficiency learners to take full ownership of their linguistic output. Adopting a reflective practitioner stance, the session reports meaningful patterns in micro-level decision-making and increased sensitivity to intelligibility. This perspective discusses the benefits of prioritizing the "human voice" over automated synthesis to foster student identity. The presentation concludes with practical tips and a list of accessible digital tools for educators looking to implement similar multimodal tasks in their own contexts.

Keywords: Autonomy; Multimodality; Pedagogy; Speaking; Storytelling