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# From the narrators of folk tales to digital storytelling. Students as young researchers

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**Abstract**
The present dissertation focuses on whether digital storytelling can enhance the learning process in Preschool Education (Kindergarten) and in particular in thematic units related to folk tales (folk culture). In the theoretical context, the importance of folk culture, the characteristics and the importance of the storytelling of the folk tale in the Kindergarten are examined, while at the same time the introduction of ICT is approached in the form of digital storytelling in Primary School Education as an innovative teaching tool. Simultaneously, some learning theories that assist and are related to the introduction and use of Information and Communication Technologies, generally in education, are also analyzed. In the research context, using a guided research project, the attitudes and perceptions of teachers regarding the use of ICT, especially in the form of digital storytelling, are explored in the Kindergarten. Subsequently, the benefits emerging from digital storytelling for students are examined, such as the enhancement of their oral and written speech, collaborative learning, and computer literacy.

**Keywords:** Digital Storytelling, Kindergarten, Folk Culture, Folk Tale, Learning Theories, Information and Communication Technologies, Oral and Written Speech, Collaborative Learning, Computer Literacy

**Introduction:**
The term "storytelling" seems common and familiar to everyone, as it is often used in everyday communication to refer to the narration of events or myths. Storytelling is encountered in many activities of everyday life, in the narration of personal events and experiences, in the telling of fairy tales to children, etc., it is therefore a means of sociability, as it helps to build relationships and trust. Simultaneously, its character is educational, as through its stories models to be imitated or avoided are projected. Due to its educational character, it is used as a pedagogical method with various results. Storytelling is an act of communication that exposes orally or in writing various real or imaginary events. Necessary components are the narrator / transmitter, the message / narrative content and the receiver / recipient of the narrative (Papaleontiou, 2014). Thus, it is an art form with an interactive character, as through storytelling, whose tools are the words and the actions, the imagination of the receiver is stimulated (Bratitsis, Panagiotakopoulos, 2017).
Storytelling has an entertaining role and given the activation of the imagination, it is perceived in a different way depending on the experiences, opinions and perception of everyone. Through it, the human tries to face unpredictable or unexplained events and interpret them as ordinary (Kapaniaris, Papadimitriou, 2012).
The evolution and impact of new technologies on the formation of society is particularly important in several areas of human life, especially in the field of education. The introduction and systematic use of technology in education imposes new learning conditions, with the aim of enhancing students' cognitive abilities, acquiring skills, and finally adopting a positive attitude and behavior towards the educational process.
In particular, digital storytelling combines traditional storytelling with new technologies, i.e. the text is framed by images, sound, video, and even the voice of the creator himself. It is an interactive genre that transcends linear narrative by involving the receiver-user of digital media in text formatting. At the same time, the traditional structure of the story with the

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linear flow changes and is enriched with episodes and ramifications that constantly surprise the receiver (Meliadou, Nakou, Gouskos & Meimaris, 2011). In this sense, digital storytelling with the possibility of visualization can refresh the fairy tale and re-purvey its messages (Chen, Ferdig & Wood, 2003: 1-15). Consequently, the digital collections of elements of folk culture function as a natural extension of the real collections (Kapaniaris, 2017).

The contribution of digital storytelling to the improvement of the performance of the weaker readers is especially important, as the multimedia material can attract their interest, so that they can express their ideas more freely or look for new ones (Kapaniaris, Papadimitriou, 2012) .

When students are encouraged to tell a story, they simultaneously cultivate their mental, social and emotional abilities. It also improves their language expression in an effort to achieve accuracy and clarity. Their vocabulary thus is enriched and this can be traced not only in their oral speech but also in writing (Oikonomou, x.x.).

The application of digital storytelling enables students to absorb knowledge in a different way and interact more constructively with its content (Bratitsis, Panagiotakopoulos, 2017). It can be used at all levels of education, even in adults' training. Its different forms are perceived as examples of ideas for immediate teaching, as problems that students themselves are called upon to solve and as guidance to teach children ways to solve problems (Smeda, Dakich & Shard, 2014).

Taking into account the above observation, it is proven that the cooperation of the student with the teacher is required, as the subject of teaching has an increased degree of difficulty and the student is not able to work alone. This, however, does not mean that due to the guided teaching the students do not acquire automatic and accurate representation of the concepts. On the contrary, students construct meanings by contributing with their own perceptions and combining them with their experiences under the respective social environment (Schunk, 2010, 252).

The role of the teacher is redefined. He now becomes the manager of knowledge, acts as a guide and counselor with the aim of increasing children's internal motivation to learn. In order for the introduction of ICT in education to bring positive results, it needs to be based on learning theories and the teacher to be trained accordingly, so as not to merely transmit information but provide motivation to students. It should not be overlooked that the integration of new technologies in school is not an end in itself but a complementary element that aims to meet specific needs (Zakopoulos, 2002).

**The subject of research questions**
Prior to the research conduction, a number of research questions were risen, which consequently contributed to the design of the educational scenario, worksheets and final results. Thus, the following questions arose:

- What are teachers' attitudes and perceptions about digital storytelling and how can digital storytelling be used by teachers during the Flexible Zone to approach topics such as folk culture?
- Can the use of ICT in the form of digital storytelling improve cognitive and learning processes in the context of a guided research project?

- Can students' engagement with digital storytelling contribute to the teaching of cognitive subjects, such as folk culture and environmental studies developing written and oral skills?
- Can students' engagement with digital storytelling contribute to the broader context of computer literacy through the completion of a digital artifact?
- Can student participation in the development of digital storytelling further contribute to the collaborative classroom climate?
- Can the application of learning activities using digital storytelling add value to the existing educational material that students will produce?

The research questions were recorded in tables and linked to the collection tools, as well as to the objectives of the guided research project. The questions related to the use of digital storytelling were utilized in the collection tool and constituted the electronic digital questionnaire, which was then distributed through Gmail Google Drive to the teachers who participated in the research.

**Object of research**
The present study explores the benefits of ICT introduction in Kindergarten with the use of simple computer activities and digital tools, through which the learning process can be enhanced and new opportunities could be created for multiple approaches to various educational subjects. At the same time, the utilization of traditional storytelling combined with digital, highlights a more complex educational process as traditional literacy is involved with multilingualism. As a result, an experiential and interactive educational environment is created, which expands the traditional values of learning. Therefore, children are gradually and appropriately prepared to become active recipients by knowing new communication practices.

**The innovation of the research**
The present study was formulated in such a way so as to explore and detect the attitudes and perceptions of teachers (Kindergarten Teachers) of Preschool Education regarding the use of digital storytelling during the Flexible Zone in order to approach thematic units, such as folk culture, environmental studies and other cognitive objects. Subsequently, the research was extended to the learning outcomes that digital storytelling could bring to teaching, such as enhancing computer literacy and collaborative climate. In order for the research to be achieved, an educational scenario was created based on the creation and use of a digital narrative, as well as on worksheets, in order to be evaluated by teachers of Preschool Education.

**Aim of the research**
The aim of this research is to investigate whether digital storytelling can contribute to better learning outcomes in the teaching of folk culture and in particular in topics related to folk tales with a cross-curricular approach (language, ICT, visual arts) in Preschool Education using a guided research project. In this way, at the end of the guided research project within the Flexible Zone, it will be checked whether the teaching objectives have been achieved, as well as how the digital storytelling affects the learning process.

The thematic unit to which the above approach will be

applied in Kindergarten is the "4 seasons of the year". In addition, an attempt will be made to connect the four seasons of the year with folklore and riddles as well as with issues of daily life (weather phenomena, activities, clothing, etc.) based on the DEPPS.

**Methodology of the research**
Due to the special circumstances (COVID-19) a digital questionnaire, designed using the Google forms tool, was used for the completion of the research questions. More specifically, an electronic questionnaire was created, through which the evaluation of the educational scenario was carried out, as well as the detection of teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of digital storytelling along with the learning outcomes that it can contribute to Preschool Education. All questions in the questionnaire are closed-ended, in order to facilitate the data analysis.

Before completing the questionnaire, the educational scenario was shared to the teachers in order to evaluate it along with the activity sheets through the Gmail Google Drive application with an open link, so that they can access the research questionnaire, the educational scenario and the activity sheets. The sample of the research consisted of (15) teachers of Preschool Education due to the difficulty in finding kindergarten teachers.

**Research implementation**
The implementation of the educational scenario was based on the use of a guided project of eight teaching hours, which interdisciplinarily involves various learning areas. Specifically, two teaching interventions will take place each week lasting 2 hours each (a total of 4 hours in the first week and 4 hours in the second week).

As for the theoretical approach, the educational scenario is based on the theory of social constructivism (Piagget) and the sociocultural approach (Vygotsky). According to Piagget (1926) knowledge is acquired in the context of open-ended problems, by solving them and working in small groups. According to Vygotsky (1978) the value of social interaction is emphasized, which is based on the zone of impending development, in which we can teach a child only what he is able to learn by gradually preparing him for the next zone of development. Here the role of the teacher is more "auxiliary" controlling the actions of the students.

**Expected results**
The educational scenario includes some objectives in terms of learning, knowledge and use of technologies. In more detail, the students:

1. **Regarding the cognitive objectives:**
   - should understand the four seasons of the year and the corresponding months that constitute them through elements of folk culture (folklore, riddles) and issues of daily life (clothing, weather, etc.)
   - appreciate the contribution and importance of each season in human life
   - cultivate oral (storytelling) and written (production) skills
   - understand the difference between traditional storytelling (folk tales) and digital storytelling, in order to produce their own contemporary artifact

2. **Regarding the learning objectives:**
   - exchange views with each other, act individually and finally collaborate in groups
   - engage in activities that will enhance initiative, self-action and decision-making both at individual and collective level
   - develop their creative thinking with drawings and rebuild new information

3. **Regarding the use of new technologies:**
   - become familiar with the use of ICT tools (computer literacy)
   - Navigate the internet in search of pictures, proverbs and other necessary information.

**Presentation of Research Questions**
At this point, the analysis of the findings that emerged from the teachers' answers in the electronic questionnaire will be presented.

- Attitudes and perceptions of teachers regarding the use of digital storytelling during the Flexible Zone to approach thematic units (e.g. folk culture)

**Table 11:** Attitudes and perceptions of teachers regarding the use of digital storytelling during the Flexible Zone to approach thematic units (e.g. folk culture)

|            | Answers/ Percentages |
|------------|----------------------|
| Not At All | 0 |
| Barely     | 0 |
| Enough     | 4 (26, 7%) |
| Much       | 8 (53, 3%) |
| Very Much  | 3     (20%) |

- Evaluation of the educational scenario

**Table 12:** Evaluation of the educational scenario

|            | Answers / Percentages |
|------------|-----------------------|
| Not At All | 0 |
| Barely     | 2 (13, 3%) |
| Enough     | 2 (13, 3%) |
| Much       | 9 (60%) |
| Very Much  | 2 (13, 3%) |

- Digital storytelling as a tool for teaching cognitive subjects (e.g. folk culture)

**Table 13:** Digital storytelling as a tool for teaching cognitive subjects (e.g. folk culture)

|            | Answers/Percentages |
|------------|---------------------|
| Not At All | 0 |
| Barely     | 2 (13, 3%) |
| Enough     | 1 (6, 7%) |
| Much       | 10 (66, 7%) |
| Very Much  | 2 (13, 3%) |

- Digital storytelling as a tool to enhance computer literacy

**Table 14:** Digital storytelling as a tool to enhance computer literacy

|  | Answers / Percentages |
|---|---|
| Not At All | 0 |
| Barely | 2 (13, 3%) |
| Enough | 2 (13, 3%) |
| Much | 2 (13, 3%) |
| Very Much | 9 (60%) |

- Digital storytelling as a tool to enhance the collaborative climate among students

**Table 15:** Digital storytelling as a tool to enhance the collaborative climate among students

|  | Answers/Percentages |
|---|---|
| Not At All | 1 (6, 7%) |
| Barely | 1 (6, 7%) |
| Enough | 2 (13, 3%) |
| Much | 6 (40%) |
| Very Much | 5 (33, 3%) |

- Digital storytelling as a means of adding value to existing educational material

**Table 16:** Digital storytelling as a tool of added value of existing educational material

|  | Answers/Percentages |
|---|---|
| Not At All | 0 |
| Barely | 1 (6, 7%) |
| Enough | 1 (6, 7%) |
| Much | 9 (60%) |
| Very Much | 4 (26, 7%) |

**Conclusions**

After conducting the research and based on the answers of the Preschool Education teachers, the following conclusions were drawn regarding the perceptions and attitudes of the Kindergarten Teachers, the use and utilization of the digital storytelling so as to approach the thematic units during the Flexible Zone, the learning outcomes that can be brought to the teaching practice, and the existence of an educational scenario that proposes teaching interventions using ICT. More specifically:

It is concluded that digital storytelling is, according to the teachers, a very effective tool for approaching thematic units (e.g. folk culture). Students can meet the cognitive objects by participating in a more modern teaching approach.

It supervened that the majority of teachers who participated in the research considered the existence of an educational scenario to be very or very much useful. Teachers deem the teaching interventions that have been supported and enriched with Information and Communication Technologies more effective.

It becomes apparent that Preschool Teachers consider digital storytelling an important tool for approaching thematic subjects and reinforcing speech. Storytelling with enriched vocabulary can help students express and externalize their thoughts and feelings on a developing topic. Thus, Information and Communication Technologies help to familiarize students with oral and written speech and understand concepts through an experiential and interactive way.

It was also inferred that Kindergarten Teachers regard digital storytelling as a very effective tool for enhancing computer literacy, since students become familiar with digital tools, through learning to play, extract information, and organize the material they collect.

The vast majority of participants considered digital storytelling to be very or very much effective in enhancing the collaborative classroom environment. This is explained by the fact that the appropriate environment is formed, in which students interact, explore, experiment, discover, and in the end decide as a whole how to solve problems.

It became clear that the largest percentage of participants felt that digital storytelling helps and further develops existing educational material. The use of ICT and especially in the form of digital storytelling encourages students to learn while providing enjoyable experiences.

It was proven by the research that most teachers of Preschool Education have formed a positive attitude towards the use of ICT, especially in the form of digital storytelling. In fact, they consider that digital storytelling is an essential educational tool, which has the ability to approach thematic units (folk culture, environmental study, etc.) presenting situations and events of everyday life in a pleasant, fun, experiential and interactive way.

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