IMPLEMENTING DIGITAL TOOLS IN TEACHING AMERICAN LITERATURE TO ENGLISH MAJORS

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Abstract: American Literature is a compulsory subject in most English Language curricula for English majors in Vietnam. However, while teaching this subject in English, EFL teachers encounter many difficulties, such as students' lack of language competence, hesitation in discussing activities, and low interest in literature. Therefore, to ease the teaching process, this action research tried applying Wordwall, Bamboozle, Padlet, and Kahoot in the pre-teaching, while-teaching, and post-teaching stages in two American Literature classes. This application process was described in the teacher's reflective journal during the 15 weeks of the course. Eventually, a Likert-scale and open-ended questionnaire was distributed to 71 English majors from these above classes, asking about their perspectives on this application. Also, ten randomly-picked students were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview to explore the students' attitudes profoundly. The research findings revealed that a high percentage of students (94%) favoured implementing digital tools in their literature courses. Most responded that these tools helped them effectively deal with vocabulary difficulties, boost group work participation, and increase learning engagement. As a result, this study suggests recommendations for teaching American Literature or other literature and culture subjects at the tertiary level.

Keywords: digital tools, American Literature, Englishmajors

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1. Introduction

American and British culture and literature are mandatory subjects for many tertiary English Language Programs (NLU-HCMC, 2018; ULIS, 2019; HCMCOU, 2021). However, with the decrease of reading culture in the young generation, it seems that teaching literature in English has encountered lots of difficulties, such as a lack of students' interest, lack of students' confidence, inadequate teaching methods, students' proficiency level, and the mix-match of the text selected and students' language ability (Floris, 2004; Kaba, 2017; Isikli & Tarakcioglu, 2017). Therefore, it is likely that teachers should change their teaching methods so that the target language literature can become more appealing to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students.

Among many changes in literature teaching to EFL learners, applying technology should be considered for the sake that students nowadays belong to the digital native generation, which has a strong interest and is very familiar with digital tools (Kaba, 2017). In fact, students are now more proficient in the language thanks to the use of technology in EFL instruction (Alsulami, 2016). Therefore, teachers should incorporate pedagogical knowledge and technical skills to improve language teaching and learning, keep track of classroom activities, gather student feedback, and conduct evaluations (Healey et al., 2008). Indeed, using Internet-based apps in English instruction has been acknowledged as a way to boost students' interest in studying foreign languages (Gilakjani, 2017). Thus, it is highly recommended that educational institutions should use Internet-based applications in their EFL instruction.

As a result, digital tools have been applied to many language courses in Vietnam. There have been studies on the effectiveness of using technology in teaching and learning English language skills (Vu, 2016; Nhu et al., 2018; Nhu et al., 2019; Pham, 2020). However, there is not much research on applying digital tools in teaching American Literature to EFL students, a subject that requires students to have

adequate language ability and critical thinking. This action research, therefore, was done in two American Literature courses at a university in Ho Chi Minh City with the hope to help EFL students cope with difficulties in learning American Literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teaching literature to EFL students

Considerable research has been conducted regarding the benefits of teaching literature to EFL students. Literature has been widely recognized as a valuable educational resource that aided students in improving their language skills, vocabulary, and grammar (McKay, 1982; Floris, 2004; Turker, 1991; Daskalovska & Dimova, 2012). Reading literature in the target language is believed to expose students to authentic materials of the target language (Parkinson & Reid-Thomas, 2000; Floris, 2004). Additionally, literature is an excellent source for both intensive and extensive reading (Khatib et al., 2011). Consequently, students who comprehend literary texts experience a "sense of achievement" as these works are intended for readers, not foreign language learners (Berardo, 2006, p.62). Moreover, literature helps students to promote cultural awareness (McKay, 1982; Cruz, 2010). Thanks to reading literature in the target language, students experience the culture and the way people in the target culture behave (McKay, 1986). In conclusion, studying literature on the target language is suitable for EFL students because it enriches the target language, introduces the target culture, serves as authentic material, and involves personal experience through universal themes relevant to students' experience (Floris, 2004).

2.2. Difficulties in teaching literature to EFL students

However, besides the benefits of utilizing literature in EFL teaching, there have been many difficulties that teachers have to overcome. First, the significant difficulty is the student's language proficiency. Teachers and students must deal with complex and

complicated vocabulary and grammatical structure (Floris, 2004; Kaba, 2017.) Another difficulty is related to the student's motivation. According to Kateregga (2014), many EFL students are not interested in learning English literature because they think literature is not a good subject to provide the skills and knowledge needed for their potential good job in the future. Similar findings are found in the Indonesian context in the research of Novianti (2016).

Moreover, Sell (2005) pointed out that even EFL teachers regarded literature as "unrealistic" while considering language learning to be practical and realistic. As a result, the next obstacle is the reluctance to teach the literature of the target language from the teachers. According to Sell (2005), because the teacher is more knowledgeable and assumes a more prominent role in conveying that information to the students, teaching literature involves an imbalance of power and work in the teacher-student interaction. Consequently, the student-centred approach needs to be addressed in English literature courses. In brief, although teaching literature in the target language brings many benefits to EFL teaching, many obstacles should be overcome, such as students' lack of language proficiency, interest, and inappropriate teaching methods.

2.3. Technology in language teaching

Long-term research has been done on the advantages of using technology to teach English. According to Warschauer et al. (2000), using the Internet in English instruction can offer authentic language resources, raise students' literacy levels in online communication, motivate them to engage with others outside of class, foster a positive learning environment, and enable teachers and students to work quickly. More precisely in 2006, Mishra and Koehler developed the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework (TPACK) for integrating educational technology in classrooms. TPACK emphasizes the importance of three types of knowledge: technological knowledge (TK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), and content

knowledge (CK) in designing teaching instruction. The framework highlights that effective ed-tech integration requires a foundation built upon content and pedagogy, where technology communicates the content and supports pedagogical practices (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

Later, Beatty (2013) suggested eight commonly used computer-assisted language learning (CALL) applications that might be employed in language teaching: word processors, games, literature, corpus linguistics, computer-mediated communication, the internet, modifying existing materials, and Personal Digital Assistants. When examining the benefits of integrating digital resources into a language classroom, Andrade (2014) suggested that doing so would boost the effectiveness of the teaching activities. Additionally, using digital tools could increase students' opportunities to work in pairs and groups and their autonomous learning because they could do so at any time and at their own pace (Costley, 2014; Sato et al., 2015). Last but not least, Ulla et al. (2020) have drawn attention to the fact that different digital tools enabled innovative teaching styles and strategies, more exciting and engaging activities, exercises, and a good influence on EFL students.

In the Vietnamese context, numerous studies (Vu, 2016; Nhu et al., 2018; Nhu et al., 2019; Pham, 2020; Hoi & Mu, 2021; Tran et al., 2023) have examined the efficiency of employing technology in teaching and learning English language skills. Most indicated that digital tools designed for EFL teaching were useful, user-friendly, and inspiring. However, there needs to be more research regarding the application of digital tools in teaching the target language literature to EFL students. This research gap led to this action research on implementing digital tools into teaching American Literature to enhance EFL students' learning.

2.4. Research Questions

To incorporate digital tools into the teaching of American Literature to improve the learning experience of EFL students, two research questions were formed as follows.

- *How can four digital educational tools, including Kahoot, Wordwall, Bamboozle, and Padlet, be combined in an American Literature class?*

- *What are the students' perceptions of this implementation?*

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Setting

The action research was conducted in an American Literature course at Nong Lam University- Ho Chi Minh City. This compulsory 15-week course aims to help students master fundamental knowledge about literature themes, typical authors, and literary works of six major periods in American literature. After the course, students are supposed to be able to analyze the setting, plot, main themes, and writing style of each author. Also, the course helps students improve their reading, speaking, and writing skills in academic English. They know how to look up and synthesize documents for a presentation topic. Students can analyze, argue and defend their opinions towards major themes of the six periods in American literature. Another course objective is to promote students' critical thinking skills and increase their interest in American literature.

3.2. Participants

The participants included 71 students aged 20 to 22 from two English major classes (DH18AV and DH19AV) in the second academic semester of the school year 2021-2022. These students were at the upper-intermediate English level and in the last semester of the university's compulsory curriculum. To enroll in this course, the students must complete the required Introduction to Literature and American Studies courses. Therefore, they obtained a fundamental knowledge of literature and American culture.

3.3. Research instruments

3.3.1. Teaching journal

First, this action research was conducted by applying digital tools to teaching American Literature in the pre-, while, and post-teaching stages. Teachers used Kahoot, Wordwall, Bamboozle, and Padlet to design interactive quizzes and bulletins in the following three stages.
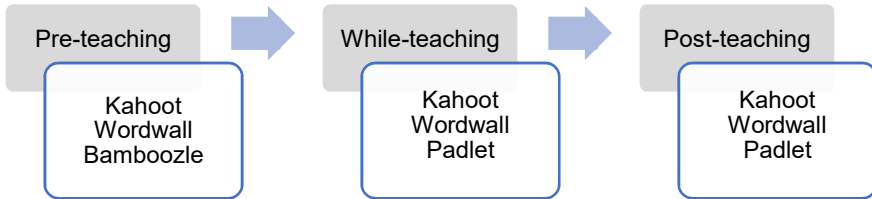
Pre-teaching		While-teaching		Post-teaching
Kahoot Wordwall Bamboozle	→	Kahoot Wordwall Padlet	→	Kahoot Wordwall Padlet

Figure 1: Digital tool application in the teaching process

3.3.2. Kahoot

This program was created to assist teachers in allowing students to participate in vocabulary games on their mobile devices. In this study, post-reading exercises were utilized to assess' students' comprehension and teach vocabulary. Additionally, a poll was administered to the students at the end of each Kahoot activity to generate a formative assessment and gather their feedback. Additionally, the most recent Kahoot quizzes were added to each classroom's learning management system (Google Classroom) later, so students could continue learning at home.

3.3.3. Wordwall

This tool is designed to generate learning activities that offer a variety of interactive formats, including matching, gap-filling, quizzes, anagrams, grouping out, labelling, and so on. These quizzes could also be converted into Microsoft Word or PDF worksheets. This action research used this application to teach vocabulary, as a board

game to practice group discussion, and as a post-reading quiz. The application's lucky random wheel was utilized daily to motivate students to participate more in the lessons.

3.3.4. Bamboozle

Like Kahoot and Wordwall, this application was implemented mainly to activate students' prior knowledge and provide new words. This tool was applied to change the class atmosphere because it has a different screen and interaction form than Kahoot and Wordwall. This application was also helpful in designing interesting group competitions in class since it is very gripping, and its pop-up questions keep the result very gripping till the end of the game.

3.3.5. Padlet

Padlet is a collaborative canvas that allows teachers and students to share ideas and work together. It is also a class website where teachers can post lessons, videos, and images. It can also be used as a class portfolio to keep track of all the lessons and the student's ideas as they are presented in writing, photographs, or other visual media. In this study, Padlet was primarily used for post-teaching group discussions. Students were required to work in groups, and each group had to put their arguments on Padlet. Then the teacher showed the Padlet on screen for the whole class to read and comment on their friends' opinions. If there was not enough time in class, students could read the Padlet at home and continue to leave their comments for their classmates' posts.

In conclusion, the teacher kept a teaching journal and recorded the tools used in each lesson. The purpose of utilizing these digital tools can be explained in the following table.

Table 1: Purposes of digital tool application

DIGITAL TOOLS	TARGET PURPOSE	OTHER PURPOSES
Kahoot	Teaching vocabulary in pre-stage Checking students' comprehension in while-stage Conducting formative assessment	Promoting group work Getting feedback
Wordwall	Activating students' prior knowledge Teaching vocabulary in pre-stage Checking students' comprehension in while-stage Conducting formative assessment	Selecting students' name Promoting pair work, group work
Bamboozle	Activating students' prior knowledge Teaching vocabulary in pre- teaching stage	Promoting group collaboration
Padlet	Designing group discussion in the post-teaching stage Conducting summative assessments(groups' midterm projects) Posting video clips and reading materials A bulletin for groups' projects	Promoting pair work, group work, and peer assessment Class Portfolio

4. Questionnaire

In the 15th week of the course, 71 students were given a questionnaireasking them to describe how they perceived their teacher's implementation of digital tools in teaching American Literature. Four items comprised the survey, some of which used a5-pointLikert scale. This investigation focused on the following:

- Students' perception of this implementation

- To what extent this implementation improved students' learning performance

- Students' preference for each of these digital tools

5. Interview

Ten students took part in an interview so that the researcher could explore the questionnaire's results more thoroughly. Five students from class DH18AV and five from class DH19AV were randomly selected and invited to participate in the semi-structured interview. They were questioned about the reasons behind their responses regarding their perception of this implementation, how it changed their learning performance, and their suggestion for the instructional strategy.

5.1. Data analysis

Data was collected at the end of the semester to ensure that all students could express a consensus regarding the utilization of digital tools in American Literature courses. After quantitative analysis of the information received from the questionnaire, charts, graphs, and tables were developed, and then there was a brief explanation and discussion. The qualitative data from the interview were transcribed, categorized, and analyzed thematically. Eventually, a conclusion and pedagogical implications were offered based on the research's findings.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1. Students' perception towards the implementation of digital tools in American course

Figure 2: Students' perception towards the implementation of digital tools in American courses
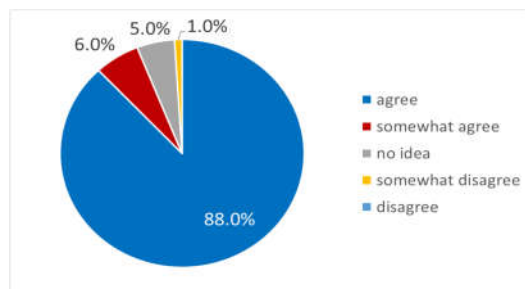
Chart 2 showed that 94% of 71 students in two American classes approved using Kahoot, Wordwall, Bamboozle, and Padlet. Almost all of these students (88%) strongly believed this implementation was helpful. Next, 6% of the students expressed some agreement. Meanwhile, 5% of students reported having no ideas at all. Only 1% of the students disagreed with it, and none of them strongly opposed it. Therefore, it is clear from the high rate of student agreement that using digital tools enhanced the students' learning.

6.2. The effectiveness of digital tools in improving students' learning performance

Table 2 demonstrates how applying digital tools enhance students' academic achievement in an American Literature course. The mode numbers across all categories are 4 and 5, indicating that the implementation has produced fruitful results in terms of instruction.

Table 2: The effectiveness of digital tools in improving students' learning performance

STATEMENTS	CENTRAL TENDENCY		DISPERSION		
	MEAN	MODE	MIN	MAX	SD
learning more actively	4.4	4	1	5	0.50
working in groups more effectively	4.5	5	2	5	0.73
understanding new words	4.5	5	3	5	0.65
promoting a positive learning atmosphere	4.4	5	3	5	0.64
increasing teacher-student interaction	4.3	4	2	5	0.54
increasing students' attention span	4.5	5	3	5	0.58
understanding the structure and details of the work	4.5	5	3	5	0.50
Scale: 1= strongly disagree, 2= somewhat disagree, 3= neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5= strongly agree *N=71*					

First, helping students work in groups more effectively, helping them understand new words, increasing students' attention span, and

helping them understand the structure and details of the work are the four categories with the highest mean scores at 4.5. Indeed, student 5 explained why he could improve his group work through these applications: *"I think posting our answers on Padlet and playing Kahoot in teams makes everyone in our group participate more actively and increase the classroom learning atmosphere."* Similarly, student 8 agreed*: "The way the teacher teaches literature is fascinating. I had a good time while remembering what I had learned."*

Second, learning more actively and promoting a positive learning atmosphere are the two benefits of applying digital tools in teaching American Literature (mean: 4.4). Student2 provided an explanation for this effect in her interview response: "*Unlike what I thought about literature classes where teachers often give long lectures, and students listen and take notes passively, this course is interesting because I could actively learn American literature through these digital tools, and then it makes me focus on the lesson more.* "

In brief, the fact that all of the categories in this question had relatively high mean and mode values likely demonstrated that these applications positively impacted students' active learning and interest in American literature.

6.3. Students' preferences for four digital tools

Table 3: Students' preferences for four digital tools

APPLICATIONS	CENTRAL TENDENCY		DISPERSION		
	MEAN	MODE	MIN	MAX	SD
Kahoot	4.1	4	1	5	0.86
Wordwall	3.9	4	1	5	0.92
Padlet	3.8	4	1	5	1.13
Bamboozle	3.6	3	1	5	0.93
Scale: 1=strongly dislike, 2=somewhat dislike, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat like, 5=strongly like *N=71*					

Kahoot won the priority with both mean and mode numbers at around 4.0. Wordwall, the application used in all teaching stages, took the second place in the list. Padlet was in third place, and Bamboozle was less preferred than other previous applications; however, their mean and mode numbers are high, too (respectively 3.8 and 3.6). When being asked about their preference, student 3 noted that:

"I like studying American Literature with Kahoot most because it's fun to play games and compete with other students. My teacher often asked us to play in teams of 4 students, and we had 5 seconds to discuss. That way made us collaborate more in learning. To win the game, we had to assign each member in the group different roles, and we all had to read the work in advance to get the answer correct."

Student 6's answer is about Wordwall and Padlet: *"I prefer Padlet and Wordwall because they can be used as a resource for us to review the lesson after class or before the exam. Especially Padlet."*

6.4. Students' perception of the implementation frequency

Table 4: Students' perception of the implementation frequency

| Teaching Stage	CENTRAL TENDENCY		DISPERSION		
	MEAN	MODE	MIN	MAX	SD
Pre-teaching stage	3.2	3	2	4	0.63
While-teaching stage	3.3	3	1	4	0.74
Post-teaching stage	3.4	4	1	4	0.79
Scale: 1=no application, 2=should reduce time, 3=no ideas, 4=should increase time *N=71*					

This question was added to the questionnaire to check whether the application level was appropriate and whether the teacher should increase or decrease the frequency of this application. However, it is apparent from Table 4 that the students think this application's

frequency is quite adequate. A few of them suggested increasing the utilization of digital tools in the post-teaching stage. Student 1 noted: *"I would like the teacher to add more questions to the comprehension quiz at the end of the class. If more questions were added, I could remember more about the literature work."*

6.5. Obstacles in implementing digital tools in an American Literature Course

Figure 3: Obstacles to implementing digital tools in an American Literature Course
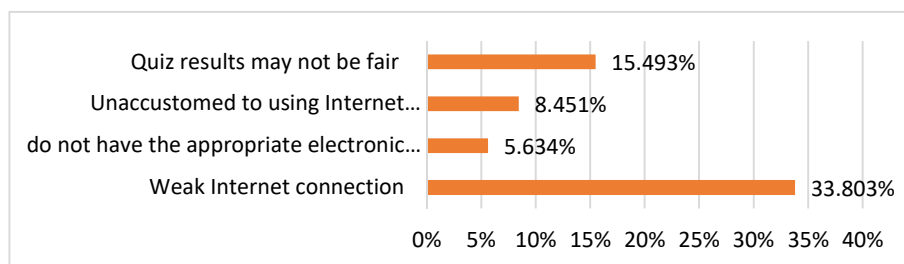
The last set of questions aimed to find whether students had to encounter difficulties while learning American Literature through digital tools. Regarding the students' perception, the major problem of applying these digital tools was the unstable Internet connection of the school (33.8%). Student 3 also explained: *"Due to the lack of Internet connection, we had to share the electronic devices when we worked in groups, which sometimes might cause some obstacles in our learning."*

Also, 15.5% of students feared that the quiz results might be unfair to all students. Student 8 told his experience: *"When our group was competing in a Kahoot game with other groups, we lost the wifi connection, so we could not take first place in the quiz. Although it didn't happen often, it made us worry about the risk of losing the game because of the Internet connection."* Last, a few students expressed their worries about being unaccustomed to using Internet applications and not having the appropriate electronic device (8.5% and 5.6%, respectively). Student 9 worried: *"I think that the quality of the electronic device also plays a role in learning this way."*

In short, both the questionnaire and interview results indicated that although there were some difficulties in the digital tool implementation in teaching American Literature to English majors,this instructional practice was highly appreciated and welcome.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Through the utilization of four digital teaching aids-Kahoot, Wordwall, Bamboozle, and Padlet-this implementation has attempted to promote the students' engagement in learning American literature. These applications were employed in all teaching stages, including the pre-, while-, and post-teaching stages, in 15 weeks. The results of this study demonstrated the beneficial impacts of this educational strategy on students' learning performance. In particular, students could work in groups more successfully, comprehend new terminology more easily, analyze the work better, and their attention span were lengthened significantly. Additionally, students admitted that Kahoot and Wordwall were their favourites among these above Internet-based applications.

Based on the findings from the questionnaire and semi-structured interview, the suggested process of applying digital tools in teaching American Literature can be described as follows:

Table 5: Suggested procedure for teaching American Literature

Teaching Stages	Activities	Suggested digital tools
Pre-teaching	- activating students' prior knowledge	- Wordwall/ Bamboozle
	- playing vocabulary quiz	- Kahoot/ Wordwall
While-teaching	- reading	- Kahoot/ Wordwall
Post-teaching	- playing comprehensive quiz in groups	- Kahoot/ Wordwall
	- discussing the assigned questions in groups	- Padlet
	- implementing group projects	- Padlet

The research findings have revealed significant implications for both EFL instructors and administrators. Firstly, it is recommended that digital tools be incorporated into the teaching of literature to EFL students. By leveraging digital resources such as e-books, online literary analysis platforms, and multimedia materials, instructors can enhance the engagement and interaction levels among students. This approach not only makes the learning experience more dynamic but also allows for a deeper exploration of the target literature.

Secondly, to facilitate the integration of digital tools in the language classroom, it is crucial for administrators to ensure a stable wifi connection. A reliable internet connection enables seamless access to online resources, collaborative platforms, and interactive activities. Thus, creating an environment with consistent and reliable connectivity is essential for maximizing the benefits of incorporating digital tools in the EFL classroom.

Lastly, EFL instructors should take into consideration their students' access to and familiarity with internet-based applications. Understanding students' references and preferences regarding digital tools allows instructors to make informed decisions when selecting and adapting specific applications for instructional purposes. Furthermore, instructors should carefully consider the fair implementation of these applications in classroom assessments, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to demonstrate their learning outcomes.

By embracing these implications, EFL instructors can enhance their teaching practices, foster student engagement, and create a more interactive and effective learning environment. Administrators play a vital role in supporting these endeavours by providing the necessary resources and infrastructure to facilitate the integration of digital tools in the language classroom. Together, these efforts can contribute to the advancement of EFL education and better meet the evolving needs of contemporary language learners.

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