

Engaging University Students in Designing an E-magazine

Dorela Kaçauri, Fas S. Noli University, Albania

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Abstract

Student learning outcomes rely on the depth and quality of their engagement in language learning. Since the early 2000s, the concept of engagement has gained a lot of attention from researchers. They often define engagement as a complex construct that consists of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional components. In addition, students' engagement is very important in the class as it functions as a facilitator of their learning. It leads to meaningful outcomes and prevents students from dropping out. The aim of this paper is to present how university students were engaged in designing an e-magazine. The participants in this project were 10 students who are studying the English language at the Faculty of Education and Philology at "Fan S. Noli" University, in Korca, Albania, in their first year. This project was part of their final continuous assessment in the subject of "Text Analysis 2" in the academic year 2022-2023. Students were divided in groups and each of the groups had a specific task. They developed their own ideas and perspectives on a range of topics that are important to young people nowadays. Students worked collaboratively and individually online and onsite to plan and compose a variety of content. Later, they turned their ideas into digital texts for the e-magazine. The digital website that was used to design it was www.canva.com. In the end, students downloaded the Pdf version of the e-magazine. The results of this project were really satisfying for the students as they were involved in online research, analysis, discussion, writing, and designing an e-magazine in the English language.

Keywords: University Students, E-magazine, Writing Process, Designing

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1. Introduction

Electronic material in education presents the potential to provide knowledge in a more cost-efficient, expedient, and impactful manner. As a result of this benefit, Druin (2002) asserts that numerous educators and training providers are beginning to shift towards delivering content through digital media. Lesk (1997) further asserts that the rising expenses associated with publishing necessitate the creation of digitized content. Consequently, there is an increasing inclination towards transforming physical books into digital format and creating new titles in electronic form (Carjaval, 1999). Electronic material provides numerous advantages that are not present in traditional printed text. Readers will be provided with supplementary resources that are enriched with multimedia elements such as video and audio snippets. These materials will be presented with a level of information that may be customized according to the reader's taste (Collins, 1996).

Norshuhada et al. (2003a) propose that contemporary electronic content for readers can be sourced from several web platforms, including novels, journals, newspapers, magazines, manuals, and books. All of these materials belong to the category of electronic books (e-books) and can exist in many formats, including PDF, HTML, LIT, or RTF (Norshuhada et al., 2003b). In the past, e-magazines were exclusively limited to paper books that had undergone digitization processes, enabling them to be seen on computers. Later on, the phrase was expanded to include multimedia, hypertext, or hypermedia systems that are structured around a book metaphor.

Nevertheless, the existing definition of an e-magazine has been broadened to encompass titles accessible online, articles that can be read via email and retrieved using a portable electronic reading device or files that can be downloaded onto a computer (Norshuhada, 2002).

Numerous researches have focused on the electronic versions of textbooks, storybooks, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. This study primarily examines the e-magazine, which serves as a significant source of knowledge for students. Magazines are often published periodically and feature popular articles that are written and illustrated in a less technical style compared to those found in journals.

Magazines like *Time*, *Redbook*, *People*, and *Newsweek* are serial magazines targeting a broad readership. They feature stories on popular topics spanning various domains, including entertainment, business, economics, and academic disciplines. Magazines in the university setting are typically available at the library, serving as a resource for students to acquire more knowledge to supplement their studies or to just expand their general knowledge.

2. Literature Review

Dewey and Kilpatrick, prominent American pragmatists during the early 1900s, focused on establishing the theoretical and practical basis for learning via direct experience. Dewey and Kilpatrick regarded education as a comprehensive and intentional endeavor occurring within a social context, with a substantial influence. They perceived it as a means to establish a more democratic society, as the process of education should not only equip young folks to be responsible citizens, but also enable them to develop the ability to collaborate.

The educational reform movement in Germany after the First World War was influenced by the works of Dewey and Kilpatrick, with a focus on creating a more democratic society.

Similarly, in the Soviet Union during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period, the idea of project learning had a significant impact, as this was a time when new and experimental ideas were still viable. In the 1960s and 1970s, as criticism of institutionalized schooling increased, project learning emerged as a prominent topic of educational concern in Europe. Subsequently, there has been a notable surge in project work across several domains of education. However, concurrently, the term 'project' has frequently been misconstrued as an activity that does not meet the criteria of a project. Typically, it involved opposing established educational methods and emphasizing the idea of enjoyment rather than serious and responsible work, as well as prioritizing freedom over restrictions (Legutke, M and Howard, Th. 1991:157-158).

Diane L Fried-Booth asserts that more learner engagement in an activity leads to greater benefits for them. As motivation in project work originates internally rather than outside, the project becomes a process driven by the learner, resulting in more useful products. The projects are not structured according to a syllabus and the terminology used does not just come from the textbook, but rather from the inherent nature of the project. However, it is still necessary to carefully organize, discuss, and assess the project (Fried, B. D. 198: 5).

In addition, learners are empowered to incorporate their understanding of the world into the classroom and apply information from various disciplines (Phillips, D. Burwood, S. & Dunford, H. 1999:6). In conclusion, Wicks highlights that project work allows learners to use their knowledge from other disciplines in the classroom and expand upon it while working on a project (Wicks, 2000: 9).

Language teaching often revolves around the concepts of grammatical complexity and accuracy, as well as challenges related to vocabulary and spelling. In project-based learning, the focus is not solely on language, but also on other tasks that the teacher must handle. These tasks include managing the input of topic information, organizing social interaction and relationships among the learners, and providing opportunities for discussion and planning future actions. These responsibilities should be included in the work and planning arrangements of teachers. Diana L Fried-Booth asserts that in order to achieve success in project work, it is crucial to build a strong working connection. It is essential for learners to possess the ability to collaborate, not just amongst themselves, but also with their instructor (Fried-Booth, 1986: 9).

2.1 Definition of Key Terms

E-Magazine: An electronic magazine that combines traditional magazine content with multimedia elements such as videos, interactive graphics, and hyperlinks.

Student Engagement: The degree of students' participation, involvement, and interest in the learning process.

Role of Technology in Education: Technology has revolutionized education by providing students with access to a wide range of digital resources, enhancing communication and collaboration, and enabling self-directed learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants of the Study

The participants of this case study are 10 students, 5 of whom are females and 5 are males. They range in age from 18 to 21. They study in the Bachelor study program “English Language”, in the Faculty of Education and Philology, Department of Foreign Languages at “Fan S. Noli” University, Korça, Albania. They had to write and design an e-magazine collaboratively as a group.

3.2 The Research Design

The aim of this research project is to design an e-magazine using the platform, www.canva.com. This research design outlines the steps to be followed in order to create a high-quality e-magazine in this platform:

1. Selection of E-Magazine Topic: Identify a specific topic or theme for the e-magazine that aligns with the intended audience and purpose of the publication.
2. Timeline: Develop a detailed project timeline with milestones for each phase of the project.
3. Students' roles: Assign students a role that they will have during this project.
4. Canva Platform Familiarization: Familiarize students with the Canva platform's features and capabilities through training and tutorials.
5. Content Curation: Gather and organize relevant content, including articles, images, and other multimedia elements, based on the chosen topic.
6. E-Magazine Design: Create a wireframe or design layout for the e-magazine, considering visual hierarchy, typography, color schemes, and branding.
7. E-Magazine Creation on Canva: Utilize Canva's design tools and templates to create the e-magazine, incorporating the selected content and design elements.
8. Review and Testing: Conduct internal testing to ensure that the e-magazine functions properly, is visually appealing, and aligns with the target audience's preferences.
9. Finalization: Finalize the e-magazine design, content, and layout.
10. Presentation: Students present the e-magazine in front of the class.

3.3 The Research Instrument

The research adopted a qualitative approach to investigate student engagement in designing e-magazines. Data were collected through observations of university students involved in the e-magazine creation process. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and privacy, were addressed.

3.4 Students' Roles

Designing an e-magazine on www.canva.com is a collaborative effort, and students can take on various roles to ensure the project's success. Here are the roles and responsibilities for students working on this project:

1. Project Manager

- Coordinate the project timeline and deadlines.
- Ensure that all team members are on track and meeting their responsibilities.
- Communicate with the instructor or team leader and provide updates on the project's progress.

2. Content Creators

- Research and write articles, features, and content for the e-magazine.
- Source images and other media content that complements the articles.
- Proofread and edit the content for accuracy and clarity.

3. Graphic Designers

- Use www.canva.com to create visually appealing layouts and templates for the e-magazine.
- Select fonts, colors, and graphics that align with the magazine's theme.
- Design cover pages, page layouts, and other visual elements.

4. Editor

- Review and edit the content for grammar, spelling, and style.
- Ensure consistency in tone and branding throughout the e-magazine.
- Collaborate with content creators to refine their work.

5. Layout and Formatting

- Work on the formatting of the e-magazine, ensuring that it is visually appealing and user-friendly.
- Adjust the layout as necessary to make the content flow smoothly.

4. Findings

The findings of the research revealed varying levels of student engagement in the e-magazine design process. Some students exhibited high levels of enthusiasm, taking ownership of their projects and demonstrating a deeper understanding of the content. Others faced challenges related to technology, time management, and design aesthetics. The students' experiences, both positive and negative, shed light on the complexities of engaging students in the e-magazine design.

4.1 The Process of Creating an E-magazine Involved Several

The first step was selecting a specific topic or theme that aligned with the intended audience and purpose of the publication. Their topic was focused on “Digidiscovery – Discover our digital world.” The title of the e-magazine was “Crithinks”.

The project timeline was developed, with milestones for each phase as displayed in the table below:

Table 1. The timeline of the project

Week 1 Identification Onsite	Week 2 Familiarization Onsite	Week 3 Production Online	Week 4 Presentation and Evaluation Onsite
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a specific topic or theme of the e-magazine • Decide on the topic they each will write about in the e-magazine • Take roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarize students with the www.canva platform's features and capabilities through training and tutorials. • Gather and organize relevant content, including articles, images, and other multimedia elements, based on the chosen topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a wireframe or design layout for the e-magazine, considering visual hierarchy, typography, color schemes, and branding. • Utilize canva's design tools and templates to create the e-magazine, incorporating the selected content and design elements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the project in front of the class and receive the evaluation.

Students worked both onsite and online to discuss their ideas about the content of the e-magazine. From their discussion it resulted that their magazine would be multidisciplinary and they decided to write articles on the following topics:

1. 7 chakras of the body
2. The science if the emotional intelligence
3. Film industry: the latest news and releases
4. Sports activities developed by universities in Albania
5. Best books of 2023
6. Tattoos that Albanian youngsters love
7. Beauty standards
8. The impact of social media has on students
9. Fashion Trends
10. Most impressive record on the world of football

The roles that students took were as follow:

- Project manager (1 student): The project manager was responsible for overseeing the entire project, coordinating the efforts of the team members, setting goals, creating timelines, and ensuring that the project was on track to meet its objectives.
- Graphic designers (2 students): they were responsible for creating visual elements, such as images, illustrations, and layouts, that were aesthetically pleasing and align with the project's goals. They worked closely with the project manager and other team members to ensure that the design elements enhance the project's overall presentation.
- Editor (3 students): Editors were responsible for reviewing and improving the written content of the project. They ensured that the text was free from grammatical errors, was well-structured, and effectively communicated the intended message.

- Layout and formatting (3 students): Layout and Formatting team members were responsible for structuring and organizing the project's content. They ensured that text, images, and other elements were placed correctly within the project, creating a visually appealing and user-friendly layout.
- Content creator (all students): All students were involved in content creation. They contributed to the project's content by providing information, ideas, text, and other materials necessary to fulfill the project's goals.

This team structure allowed for a clear division of responsibilities and ensured that each aspect of the project, from project management to content creation and design, was handled by students with the relevant skills and expertise. Effective communication and collaboration among team members were essential to ensure the project's success.

Each student in the class presented the project, showcasing and providing comments on their individual pages. The e-magazine included some of the following pages:



Figure 1. Cover of the e-magazine

Crithinks Magazine

Introduction:

Crithinks Magazine is a magazine created by students of the first year 2022-2023, the 2nd Group in the English language program at "Fan S. Noli" University, Korçë, Albania.

Every student has written his/her article as part of their project in "Text Analysis 2".

The purpose of this project is for students to further develop their writing skills and improve their use of English, as well as encourage teamwork and cooperation within the classroom.

We would like to thank our professor Dr. Dorela Kaçani for her support throughout the project!

We hope you enjoy reading/listening to this project as much as we enjoyed working on it!



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Figure 2. Table of content



Figure 3. An example of an article

5. Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that student engagement in the e-magazine design process varied among participants. Some students exhibited high levels of enthusiasm and a strong sense of ownership over their respective roles, resulting in a deeper understanding of the content and its presentation. On the other hand, some students encountered challenges related to technology, time management, and design aesthetics. These challenges underscored the complexities involved in engaging students in the e-magazine design process.

The Project's Multidisciplinary Nature

One of the noteworthy aspects of this project was the students' decision to create a multidisciplinary e-magazine. They chose to explore a diverse range of topics, reflecting the multifaceted interests and perspectives of the team members. This diversity is evident in the choice of article topics, which spanned areas such as chakras, emotional intelligence, film industry updates, sports activities in Albanian universities, book recommendations, tattoo trends, beauty standards, the impact of social media on students, fashion trends, and remarkable records in the world of football. This diverse set of topics provided a rich and engaging content mix for their e-magazine.

Team Structure and Roles

The division of roles among the students in this project was a crucial element in its success. The project manager played a pivotal role in coordinating the efforts of the team and ensuring that the project remained on track and met its objectives. Graphic designers focused on creating visually appealing layouts and templates, aligning with the project's goals, and collaborating closely with other team members. Editors were responsible for improving the written content, guaranteeing that it was grammatically correct, well-structured, and effectively conveyed the intended message. The layout and formatting team members were tasked with organizing the content to create a visually appealing and user-friendly layout. All students contributed to content creation, providing information, ideas, and materials to fulfill the project's goals.

The team structure made it possible for a distinct division of labor, ensuring that students with the necessary knowledge and abilities handled each component of the project. Effective communication and collaboration among team members were essential to ensuring the project's success.

6. Conclusion

This paper is focused on a case study involving 10 students from “Fan S. Noli” University in Korça, Albania, aimed to design an e-magazine using the Canva platform. The project involved students aged 18-21, enrolled in the Bachelor study program "English Language." The research design covered topics such as topic selection, timeline development, students' roles, Canva platform familiarization, content curation, e-magazine design, creation on the online platform www.canva.com, review and testing, finalization, and presentation. The study adopted a qualitative approach, observing students involved in the process and addressing ethical considerations. Students took on various roles, including project manager, content creator, graphic designer, editors, and layout and formatting. The e-magazine, titled "Crithinks," featured articles on various topics, and involved both onsite and online collaboration. Each student presented their individual pages, including the cover, table of content, and their pages. The case study provides a comprehensive overview of the collaborative effort and the outcomes of the students' efforts in creating the e-magazine.

Engaging university students in designing e-magazines offers an innovative and effective approach to enhancing student engagement and learning. The findings emphasize the importance of providing students with opportunities to actively participate in the creation of digital content. By addressing the challenges and providing support, educators and institutions can harness the potential of e-magazines to foster digital literacy, creativity, and

critical thinking among students, ultimately preparing them for the demands of the 21st century.

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Contact email: dkonomi@unkore.edu.al