

ENHANCING EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING: A CASE STUDY IN A VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

ABDUL FALIQ HABBI NAWA, SUMARTA EVI KARLINA AMBARWATI.

UNIVERSITAS SINGAPERBANGSA KARAWANG

2010631060149@student.unsika.ac.id

Abstract

Digital storytelling (DST) has emerged as a powerful pedagogical tool in enhancing students' speaking abilities, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This study explores the implementation of DST in a vocational high school in Cianjur, Indonesia, using a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through classroom observations and interviews with students to examine how DST influences their narrative speaking skills. The findings revealed that DST engages students actively through multimedia elements, improves their pronunciation and fluency, and boosts their speaking confidence. However, the study also identifies key challenges, including limited English proficiency, lack of confidence, and inadequate school facilities. The results indicate that while DST has strong potential in language learning, its success heavily depends on students' foundational English skills and the availability of supporting infrastructure. The study concludes with suggestions for improving DST implementation in EFL classrooms, including increased training, better access to digital tools, and targeted support for speaking proficiency.

Keywords: *digital storytelling; EFL; narrative speaking; speaking skills; vocational education*

INTRODUCTION

Digital storytelling is a versatile and innovative approach to language learning that can significantly enhance English language skills. By combining storytelling techniques with multimedia tools, learners engage in a creative process that fosters critical language competencies, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In the context of speaking, digital storytelling provides an interactive, creative, and engaging approach to skill development. Utilizing technology alongside the art of storytelling allows students to practice in supportive, authentic settings that foster not only fluency but also confidence and communication competence.

Despite its advantages, DST also presents several challenges that may hinder its effectiveness. These include technological limitations, student anxiety, and the need for effective pedagogical strategies. Prior research by Chen and Lin (2019) highlighted that DST can enhance fluency and ac

curacy in ESL classrooms, yet gaps remain, particularly in contexts such as Indonesia where digital access and student readiness vary widely. Therefore, this study investigates the use of DST in a vocational high school to determine its impact on students' speaking skills and to identify associated challenges. Speaking, as a productive language skill, involves the generation of spoken output that is grammatically correct, appropriately structured, and contextually relevant. Harmer (2007) emphasizes the importance of realistic and repetitive practice in developing speaking abilities.

However, students frequently encounter difficulties such as speaking anxiety, poor pronunciation, and lack of motivation, which inhibit their oral performance. Digital storytelling offers an innovative medium to overcome these barriers by integrating visual, auditory, and contextual cues into language learning. This study aims to examine how DST can improve speaking fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and overall communication abilities in vocational high school students. It focuses on the creative integration of digital tools to support storytelling practices that not only improve speaking but also promote student engagement and motivation.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, which is suitable for exploring complex phenomena within real-life educational contexts (Yin, 2018). The case under investigation involves the implementation of DST in a vocational high school in Mande, Cianjur, with a focus on Grade 1 EFL students.

To structure the DST implementation, the researcher adapted steps from Robin (2008), including introducing the DST concept, teaching narrative structures, guiding digital tool usage (e.g., PowerPoint), supporting storyboarding, and evaluating oral presentations.

Participants and Site: The study involved 2–3 first-year vocational high school students who were selected for interviews. The school was chosen for accessibility and the relevance of its EFL curriculum.

Data Collection Techniques:

- **Observation:** Used to monitor student participation, engagement, and performance during DST tasks.
- **Interview:** Open-ended interviews captured students' perceptions, challenges, and experiences with DST.

Instruments:

- Observation sheets included evaluation of pronunciation, fluency, intonation, story content, and digital media use.

- Video recordings were used to document student presentations and capture classroom dynamics.

Procedure:

- **Preparation:** Teachers were trained on DST tools; students received guidance on storytelling and digital design.
- **Implementation:** Students developed digital stories in groups and presented them in class.
- **Evaluation:** Observations and interviews were analyzed thematically to derive insights.

Data Analysis: Following Braun & Clarke (2006), qualitative thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes from observations and interview transcripts.

FINDINGS

The findings are based on data from observations and interviews, focusing on students' responses and the challenges they encountered during DST implementation.

Students' Responses:

Students expressed that DST helped improve their speaking abilities, particularly in pronunciation and fluency. They found DST engaging due to the use of images, sounds, and videos which made the learning process more understandable and enjoyable.

"In terms of speaking, digital storytelling can help us learn speaking because the images and sounds can help us learn English." (Student 1 and 2)

Students also stated that DST was more interesting than traditional learning methods, even though it was initially challenging due to unfamiliarity with the tools.

"We think the use of digital storytelling is an interesting method compared to ordinary learning methods, but it is quite difficult to do because we are not used to it." (Student 1 and 2)

Challenges:

Despite the positive reception, students faced significant challenges. These included limited speaking proficiency, lack of confidence, and inadequate access to technological tools such as laptops or editing software. Many students hesitated while speaking, exhibited pauses, and had difficulty constructing longer sentences fluently.

"We think that having more adequate tools to use can help the effectiveness of this method to be used." (Student 1 and 2)

From the researcher's perspective, these findings highlight the dual role of DST: it serves as both a facilitator and a barrier, depending on student preparedness and resource availability.

The research revealed two primary themes: (1) student engagement and improvement in speaking skills, and (2) challenges in implementing DST.

1. *Student Engagement and Skill Development* Students reported that DST was a more interesting and enjoyable method compared to traditional approaches. The visual and audio components of DST supported vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation. One participant stated, "Digital storytelling helps us because we can imitate pronunciation and understand the story better." Observations also showed improved fluency among students who practiced repeatedly with digital tools.
2. *Implementation Challenges* Despite positive feedback, students faced difficulties due to their limited English skills, especially in fluency and pronunciation. Nervousness and lack of confidence hindered performance. Technological barriers also surfaced. The school lacked adequate facilities such as multimedia software and internet access. Students suggested that more training and equipment would improve their ability to engage with DST effectively.

Based on the findings in this study, it can be concluded that digital storytelling (DST) holds substantial potential as an innovative and engaging tool in enhancing the narrative speaking skills of EFL vocational high school students. The use of multimedia elements such as images, audio, and video enables students to better understand the context of the stories and mimic accurate pronunciation, which directly supports the development of their speaking fluency and accuracy. Students' responses show a strong interest and positive attitude toward DST, as it provides a more contextual and interactive learning experience compared to conventional methods.

However, despite these promising benefits, several challenges still hinder the effective implementation of DST. The most prominent issues are students' low English proficiency—particularly in speaking—and their lack of confidence when expressing ideas orally. Many students still struggle with pronunciation, grammar, sentence structure, and fluency. In addition, technical limitations such as inadequate access to supporting facilities (e.g., computers, editing tools, internet connection) in some schools have become major barriers to maximizing the potential of digital storytelling.

From the researcher's perspective, for DST to be successfully and sustainably integrated into language learning, it is crucial to address these two critical factors: (1) strengthening students' basic English speaking competence through consistent practice and structured support, and (2) improving technological infrastructure and digital literacy in schools. Support from

educational institutions and government is also essential in providing the resources and training needed for both students and teachers to implement DST effectively.

In summary, while digital storytelling is proven to be a powerful pedagogical tool to develop students' speaking skills, its success is highly dependent on foundational language abilities and the availability of appropriate technological resources. Therefore, a holistic approach involving pedagogical innovation, infrastructure readiness, and student capacity building is necessary to ensure the optimal use of DST in EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Digital storytelling has the potential to enhance narrative speaking skills in EFL vocational education by making learning more interactive and meaningful. The multimedia features help students improve pronunciation, fluency, and contextual understanding.

However, the effectiveness of DST is contingent on overcoming challenges such as low English proficiency and inadequate school infrastructure. To ensure successful implementation, schools must: Provide foundational English speaking practice. Offer training in digital literacy and DST tools. Invest in technological infrastructure.

Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students through DST processes and providing feedback to enhance learning outcomes. With institutional support, DST can become a sustainable method for improving speaking proficiency in Indonesian vocational schools.

Suggestions:

- Strengthen foundational English speaking skills before DST implementation.
- Provide training on digital tools and storytelling techniques.
- Ensure access to necessary technological resources.
- Create a supportive classroom environment with regular feedback and encouragement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the students and teachers of SMK in Cianjur for their cooperation and participation, as well as Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang for supporting this research.

REFERENCES

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Chen, Y.-L., & Lin, C.-H. 2019. The Impact of Digital Storytelling on English Language Learning: A Study in an ESL Classroom.
- Harmer, J. 2007. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Robin, B. R. 2008. Digital Storytelling: A Powerful Technology Tool for the 21st Century Classroom. *Theory into Practice*, 47(3), 220-228.
- Syafrayadin, H., & Salniwati, A. R. A. P. 2019. Digital storytelling implementation for enhancing students' speaking ability. *IJRTE*, 8(4), 3147-3151.
- Yang, Y.-T. C., & Wu, W.-C. I. 2012. Digital storytelling for enhancing student academic achievement. *Computers & Education*, 59(2), 339-352.
- Yin, R. K. 2018. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Sadik, A. 2008. Digital storytelling: A meaningful technology-integrated approach for engaged student learning. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 56(4), 487-506.