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## Digital Storytelling: A Case Study on the Teaching of Speaking To Indonesian EFL Students

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### Abstract

Multimedia has become more appealing in the teaching and learning process, as it is interactive and encouraging. New advancement in technology usually arouses students' curiosity and, in turn, increases their motivation. This study investigates the implementation of digital storytelling in teaching speaking EFL students. The results show that students could easily produce communicative and understandable story using digital storytelling. They could understand other friends' story easily, so that they contributed actively and supportively in speaking class activities.

**Key words:** digital storytelling, teaching speaking, EFL students.

Recent advancements in digital technology have brought about some changes in educational sphere. Pertinent to this situation, previous research projects on the use of digital storytelling have tended to concentrate on classes of nonnative English speakers. The projects have shown that digital storytelling can be implemented and used well in teaching; digital storytelling can deepen students' educational experiences. De Craene (2006:1) rightly points

out that digital storytelling can assist teachers to manage their classes: digital storytelling is helpful not only as a teaching technique but also for classroom management.

A confident opinion on digital storytelling has been expressed by Porter (2008:7). He says storytelling builds 21<sup>st</sup> century communication skills: creativity and inventive thinking, multiple intelligences, higher-order thinking (lessons learned), information literacy, visual literacy, sound literacy, technical literacy, effective communication (oral, written and digital), teamwork and collaboration, project managements, and enduring understandings. Digital storytelling helps develop a range of digital communication styles necessary to function in a knowledge society.

Building on previous research which has paid attention to the use of digital storytelling as a technique in teaching in general (e.g., Neal, 2004; Andrasik, 2001), conventional techniques for the teaching of speaking can be imbued with digital storytelling, for digital storytelling can be safely thought of as encouraging students' engagement in the speaking class activities. Brice (2009) shrewdly explains that kids tend to learn best through multi-modalities teaching. Since multimedia digital gadgets bear multimodal properties, digital storytelling can be safely believed to be able to help learners of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students to learn speaking.

Based on "ICTs" (2008), digital storytelling helps students to develop story literacy, media literacy, and visual literacy. Digital storytelling becomes effective in enhancing students' story literacy because it actually reflects students' habit in their daily lives, in which they grow up surrounded by stories told with pictures, words, and music particularly on television and in movies. It is, therefore, hypothesized that it will be a good idea to take advantage of this familiarity and the power to encourage students to create stories based on students' families and memories.

Bull and Kejder (2004) explain that an effective digital story can pursue, find out, and communicate new understanding that is rooted in who we are as humans. In addition, Doyle (1999), in his article "Language and Teaching Tolerance in ESL Classes" states that some research in bilingualism shows that students learn more actively when they are encouraged to transfer what they already know to their learning of English. This means that by empowering students to tell and share their own experience and story through digital storytelling, students will be more motivated in English teaching and learning process. Thus, it can be safely believed that, through digital storytelling as a teaching speaking technique, students may have materials to talk about in their speaking class because the topics are about themselves. An active and responsive class can also be anticipated.

Neal's research (2004) entitled "Storytelling at a Distance" studied about the movement of conventional storytelling to digital storytelling. The research has demonstrated that digital storytelling is effective for conveying informal information because of stories' capacities for subtlety, their attention-arresting nature, and their ability to convey layers of meaning. All these factors contribute to learners' tendency to remember and further ponder over stories' meanings.

Another piece of research on digital storytelling is Andrasik's (2001) project entitled "FEI STU Bratislava Experience with Digital Story-Telling in Social Sciences Education." This research studied the use of digital storytelling in learning economics for Slovakian students. The project shows that digital storytelling is efficient in helping the students learn economics because the presentation of system dynamics approach using storytelling allows the students to understand a huge number of complex behaviors arising in contemporary economy. After successfully conducting the research on digital storytelling in helping the learning process of economic science, Andrasik (2001) believes that, naturally, such a mode of digital story-telling can be beneficially used for a lot of other complex subjects.

In short, previous studies have confirmed that digital storytelling can be implemented and used well in teaching. In this line, the objectives of the present project are as follows:

- (1) to describe students' opinions on digital storytelling production,
- (2) to describe the quality of students' digital storytelling,
- (3) to describe the influence of digital storytelling on students' speaking skill.

## **Method**

A case study was employed, which took a small sample—five students of grade VIII of *MTs Surya Buana*, Malang, East Java, Indonesia. As such, this project is preliminary in nature. Preliminary observations were carried out in order to render the students' speaking skill, identify the students' interest in learning English, and make decision on which students to work with. In conjunction with the observations, the researcher also sought for recommendations from the school principal and the English teacher for the selection of the students.

The above attempts resulted in the selection of five students: those who were good in English and had a sound ability in operating computer as the prerequisite in the production of digital storytelling. Since the students were not really familiar with digital storytelling, they were given some explanation about the step-by-step guide in the production of digital storytelling.

The observations of the students' speaking skill and interest also gave an overview of the speaking activities to devise. The implementation of digital storytelling was conducted outside the class period in the form of extra lessons, which took seven meetings. This was executed so, for it was the only way permitted by the school principal. In addition to observations conducted through total participation, the data collection was also carried out by distributing questionnaires to the students and also the viewer-students (those not involved directly in the project) dealing with the implementation of digital storytelling.

In short, the data were those gained from the results of observations of the students' participation and presentations, subject-students' questionnaire, and viewer-students' questionnaire. Additional data were in the form of documents, which included photographs and lesson plan. These additional data were used for verification.

## Results

### Students' Opinion on the Digital Storytelling Production

To answer the first research question about digital storytelling production, five students' opinions on the production process were collected. The results indicate that four students liked immensely the implementation of digital storytelling, whereas, one student liked the implementation of digital storytelling. The digital storytelling production was considered not difficult by the students. It is apparent as three students had stated that the production process was neither difficult nor easy.

Furthermore, one student thought that it was not difficult and another student felt it was really simple. The easy process of digital storytelling production was also shown on the questionnaire and it discussed about the time needed for the digital storytelling production. The result shows that one student considered the production process to be really fast, while two students regarded the production process as fast, and another student said that it was neither fast nor slow.

Students' opinions about storyboarding process were also listed: storyboarding process was considered really helpful for digital storytelling production. Three students deemed that storyboard they made before the digital storytelling production really assisted them in the production process and two students stated that it was helpful without any adverbial emphasis. Storyboarding was also considered able to quicken the digital storytelling production; a student said it really accelerated the process, three said it accelerated the process, and another neither felt it quickened nor decelerated the process.

In contrast to the above positive points, observations show that the students experienced difficulties in the narrating process when they had to match their pictures with their voices. Interestingly, however, they also said that narrating process was the most interesting process. This implies that they did not consider the narrating process as a problem.

To summarize, all the findings on digital storytelling production above confirm that students enjoyed the implementation of digital storytelling in English teaching-learning process and the production process was not difficult. A summary of the findings is shown in Table 4.1.

### The Quality of Students' Story in their Digital Storytelling

The second research question is about the story in the digital storytelling. The data about students' story were obtained from students' scores on their presentation. The scores ranged from 1 to 4. There were four categories in scoring students' storyboard presentation. The first category was clarity of purpose. The result shows that all of five students earned score 3. The second category was image. For this category, three students obtained the highest score, one received 3, and another one obtained 2. The third category was the grammar used in telling story. Three students earned the perfect score, one students 3, and another one 2. In the fourth category, vocabulary, two students earned the highest score, two obtained score 3, and one obtained 2.

Other findings about students' story were derived from the students' scores on the sharing occasion when they showed their digital storytelling to the viewers. There were five categories on scoring the students' digital storytelling presentation. The first category was voice consistency. In general, the students' voice consistency in telling their story could be deemed good. Three students obtained score 3 and two obtained score 2. Subsequently, the second category was the students' fluency in presenting their story. In this regard, one student earned 4, indicating that she spoke very fluently and without any doubt in answering questions. Two students obtained score 3, which means that the students were fluent but were sometimes rather doubtful in answering questions. Another two students scored 2, which means that they were often doubtful in answering questions.

For the third category, pronunciation, two students scored the best, two pronounced well, whereas one pronounced just alright. From the data obtained, it can be assumed that students had already had good pronunciation. The fourth category was the students' conversational style. Four students scored 3, and one scored 2. The last category was students' voice pacing. All of the five students scored 3. Score 3 shows that all students occasionally spoke too fast or too slowly for the story line, which means that the pacing (rhythm and voice punctuation) was relatively engaging for the audience.

**Table 4.1 The Findings on The Digital Storytelling Production**

INSTRUMENTS		RESULTS	OVERALL FINDINGS
1. Subject students' questionnaire after the implementation of digital storytelling	- Digitalizing process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students liked the implementation of digital storytelling they experienced</li> <li>- Students said that the production process was not difficult</li> <li>- Students stated that the time needed for digital storytelling production was short.</li> </ul>	Students found that digital storytelling production was not difficult, especially because of the storyboarding process. In addition, the production did not consume much time.
	- Storyboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students agreed that storyboard was helpful in digital storytelling production</li> <li>- Storyboard accelerated the digital storytelling production</li> </ul>	
2. Researcher's journal		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students found difficulty in the narrating process when they had to match their pictures with their voice. However, they mentioned that narrating process was the most interesting process.</li> </ul>	Students did not find any problem in digital storytelling production

Based on the data from the viewers' scoring on the subject students' plot of story, generally, most of the subject students could produce a story with coherent plot. In terms of the diction, the story was considered to have correct good choice of words. With regard to stress and intonation, the subject students had average ability in using stress and intonation. As regards pronunciation, the subject students were able to produce clear pronunciation.

In conclusion, all the data obtained from the students' storyboard presentation, the students' digital storytelling scoring, and the results of viewers' questionnaire, the students could produce a communicative and understandable story. In addition, the students were able to produce a good story as indicated by coherent plot, correct diction, and accurate stress and intonation. The findings on the subject students' story within their digital storytelling are summarized in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2 The Findings on the Students' Story within Their Digital Storytelling**

INSTRUMENTS	RESULTS	OVERALL FINDINGS
1. Students' presentation scores - Storyboard presentation - Digital storytelling	Students could produce story with early planned of view purpose, communicative and logical images, correct structure of sentences, and correct variety of words  Students' story already has articulate fluency, clear voice consistency and conversational style, and understandable pronunciation.	Students were able to produce a communicative story
2. Viewers' questionnaire	Students were already able to produce a good story that is indicated by coherence plot, correct dictions, stresses and intonations.	Students' were able to produce an understandable story

### **The Influence of Digital Storytelling on Students' Speaking Skill**

The last research purpose was to investigate the influence of digital storytelling on students' speaking skill. In this regard, it was documented that all students could participate actively and supportively. Students' active responses were obvious in their active involvement in the speaking activities. In addition, students' supportive responses were evidenced in their ability to provide support or reasons for their statements.

In addition, the story board presentations also indicated that there was awareness of audience as well as emotive content. Two students could clearly explain why their selection of vocabulary, pictures, graphics and music suited the target audience. The other two students had some awareness of the audience in the design and could partially explain to what extent

the vocabulary, pictures, graphics and music went well with the target audience. One student, however, had some awareness of audience in the design but found it hard to explain why the vocabulary, pictures, graphics and music that were selected fit the target audience.

In terms of emotive content, there was only one student deserving the highest score of 4, indicating that she could engage the audiences deeply and emotionally. The rest scored 3. Additionally, responses to the questionnaire shows that four students said that digital storytelling was really helpful in communicating their stories and one of them said it was just helpful. Asked about their opinions, all the five subjects conceded that digital storytelling helped them to learn speaking skill.

In addition, observations also indicate that narrating process allowed the students to speak a lot. The students' repetitions in telling their story could train their pronunciation. Also, by listening to their recorded voices in digital storytelling, students could assess their own fluency. The summary for the findings on the influences of digital storytelling on students' speaking skill can be seen in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3 The Findings on the Influences of Digital Storytelling on Students' Speaking Skill**

<b>INSTRUMENTS</b>	<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>OVERALL FINDINGS</b>
Records of students' participations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students showed an improving progress in giving contributions by responding supportively, responding very actively, introducing a new (relevant) point, and digressing from the topic</li> <li>- Students started to be brave in asking questions, responding to the discussions and introducing new (relevant) points.</li> </ul>	Digital storytelling made students contribute actively and supportively in the speaking activities
Students' storyboard presentation scores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students could explain why vocabulary, pictures, graphics and music that are chosen fit the target audience.</li> <li>- Students could engage audiences deeply and emotionally</li> </ul>	Students already had ability in using speaking for communicative purpose.
Subject students' questionnaire	Digital storytelling was really helpful for students in learning speaking and communicating their story.	Using digital storytelling students already had ability in using speaking for communicative purpose.

Researcher's journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Narrating process forced students to speak a lot. In the narrating process, students had to repeat pronouncing their story until they obtained the correct form so that it contributed positively for their pronunciation.</li> <li>- By listening to their recorded voice in digital storytelling, students could measure their fluency.</li> </ul>	Narrating process in the digital storytelling production made students to speak a lot and practice their pronunciation and fluency
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## Discussion

### Students' Opinion on the Digital Storytelling Production

As stated in the findings on the digital storytelling production, students liked the implementation of digital storytelling they experienced. The five subject students said that the production process was not difficult and they did not find any problem. One of the factors for the easy production process is the fact that they were facilitated through storyboarding phase. This phase provided the students with step-by-step scaffolding consisting of the constructing, arranging, and illustrating processes similar to that proposed by Orech (2007). Orech is right in saying that storyboarding allows students to structure their story and illustrate images using words. Additionally, storyboarding makes students work easily because it gives them time to design and assemble components that will be needed.

Besides, the researcher's guidance in the phase of storyboarding by projecting the students to write their own recount also made it easy to construct their story. The researcher's instruction is identical to Banaszewski's (2002) statement, i.e., if at the first writing process students come up with no idea to write, teachers could ask students to write about places where they felt comfortable, safe, or happy—places where they could just be themselves.

Moreover, in the storyboarding phase, by asking the students to tell and share their own experience and story, they become more motivated in English teaching and learning process. It is so because they usually have something in their mind; they know what they will talk and they are usually eager to share what they have experienced. Projecting students to transmit what they already know can encourage them to learn more actively. As pointed out by Doyle (1999), some research in bilingualism shows that students learn more actively when they are encouraged to transfer what they already know to their learning of English.

The data also show that storyboard accelerated the digital storytelling production. In the storyboard, students already had and prepared all the elements in digital storytelling so that their work on digitalizing their story would be easy. In this regard, McGrath and Patetl (2007) rightly believe that storyboard as a plan of the digital story has the function of showing the co-ordination of the key elements of the voice, the archives and images, and the music soundtrack.



Therefore, in the digitalizing process, students just need to transfer all the elements they already had in their storyboard. That was why the five subject students found that storyboard made their digital storytelling production faster. We should note however, that in the narrating process, students found difficulties when they had to match their pictures with their voices. Yet, surprisingly, the students said that narrating process was the most interesting process.

### **The Quality of Students' Story in their Digital Storytelling**

As noted above, up to the storyboarding process, the students were already able to communicate their story. By having purpose right from the outset, the students could lead their viewers to track their story. Additionally, the students' story indicated articulate fluency, clear voice consistency and conversational style, and understandable pronunciation of the students. The fact that, right from the start until the end of the process, the students had many opportunities to speak in English might help explain the students' success. This is in line with Cahyono's (1997:85) explanation, i.e., learning English should be an active process in which the learners should actively create conscious efforts to practice the language and look for many opportunities to use the target language they have learned.

An interesting point is that, in addition to the understandable story produced by the students, the students' choice of words also showed emotive contents, allowing the viewers to be glued to the story. This means that the students could communicate new understanding to their viewers. This also means that the students could come up with effective digital story allowing them to pursue, find out, and communicate new understanding that is rooted in who we are as humans (Bull & Kejder, 2004).

### **The Influence of Digital Storytelling on Students' Speaking Skill**

Through the implementation of digital storytelling, the students were identified to quite active in giving contributions to the activities: they started to be brave in asking questions, responding to the discussions and introducing new (relevant) points. The positive progress in the students' speaking ability was also indicated by the students' storyboard presentation scores. The students could explain why vocabulary, pictures, graphics and music that were chosen suited the target audience. They could engage the audience deeply and emotionally. All these findings show that technology gains in importance of these following competencies: critical thinking, decision-making, ability to handle dynamic situations, teamwork, and effective communication. The findings show that digital storytelling contributes to help students communicate their own story effectively (Anderson & Weert, 2002:9).

It is interesting to note that narrating process forced the students to speak a lot. In the narrating process, the students had to repeat the pronunciation of some words for the purpose of telling their story until they obtained the correct form. This has contributed positively to their pronunciation. By listening to their recorded voice in digital storytelling, the students could measure their fluency. Also, the digital storytelling has trained the students to have effective communication and creativity. All this is in line with Porter's (2008) proposition that digital storytelling builds 21<sup>st</sup> century communication skills: creativity and inventive thinking, multiple intelligences, higher-order thinking (lessons learned), information literacy,

visual literacy, sound literacy, technical literacy, effective communication (oral, written and digital), teamwork and collaboration, project management, and enduring understanding.

## Conclusions

In light of the results of the present study, it can be concluded that the activities involved in digital storytelling production potentially encourage students to actively speak up, improve their vocabulary, and train their pronunciation and fluency. In short, digital storytelling allows the student to communicate well using a foreign language they are learning. It should be noted that this present case study was carried out as an extracurricular activity. Relevant to this situation, we also need to note that the production of digital storytelling does not consume much time. Therefore, we can assume that digital storytelling can be easily implemented in the class—it will not disrupt other language teaching techniques as shrewdly pointed out by De Craene (2006: 1), that is, digital storytelling could be used as classroom management for the teacher by keeping the time for the digital storytelling production.

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