

REFLECTION ON THE USE OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN SPEAKING CLASS IN THE PANDEMIC TIME

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Article info	Abstract
<p>Submitted: 04 April 2022 Received: 24 April 2022 Published: 29 April 2022</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: digital storytelling; reflection; speaking project; online-learning mode</p>	<p>The individual digital storytelling project was given to 129-second semester students of Speaking Class in English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara Indonesia during this pandemic time. After a virtual workshop on how to do digital story-telling was given to the students, they were asked to create their video stories. There were two topics given to the students. Students might have the freedom to either tell their own stories or to tell a fable or fairy tale. After doing the project, students were asked to do self-reflection on their project by answering a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of three closed- questions and three semi-open questions. The result revealed that the majority of the students mentioned that the project was engaging, could improve their speaking skills, and accommodate their creativity. Besides, most of the students argued that the project could enhance their autonomous learning. 126 students out of 129 said that the project was very beneficial to improving their speaking skills even though they had only virtual speaking classes during the pandemic, except there were three students who showed that they needed the in-person feedback from the teacher and the ambiance of the real face to face class. Thus, it is recommended to apply digital storytelling and its implications in online-learning mode.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning *Speaking* in the Indonesian context have been a huge challenge due to constraints such as limited time to practice in the class, a large number of students, and students' reluctance to speak English. This teaching and learning process becomes more

problematic particularly when we have online-learning classes during these pandemic times. According to Rinekso et al (2021), speaking became the most challenging skill to teach in the online learning mode due to the shyness of the students to speak virtually and the difficulties of the teachers to give feedback on students speaking production.

A similar situation has also been experienced by the writer in her *Speaking* classes at the tertiary level. Based on her observation, the time to practice speaking and interactions in the virtual classes was very limited. These limitations seem to be less beneficial to reduce the students' reluctance and shyness. It might be very helpful to give opportunities to the students to practice speaking not only in the virtual classroom but also outside the classes. Regarding this, a project was designed to be done by the students outside the classroom at their own pace. The project aims to encourage the students' motivation, creativity, and autonomous learning. Thus, they could develop their speaking abilities by themselves and do not depend merely on the activities in the online learning classes.

The use of modern digital storytelling has been implemented by educators and researchers, particularly in the area of language teaching and learning. Meadow (2003) argues that the concept of storytelling is not new. Yet the idea of digital storytelling is new. The Digital Storytelling Association in Sadik (2008) describes Digital Story Telling as:

The modern expression of the ancient art of story-telling. Throughout history, story-telling has been used to share knowledge, wisdom, and values. Stories have taken many different forms. Stories have been adapted to each successive medium that has emerged, from the circle of the campfire to the silver screen and now the computer screen.

The definition above implies that digital storytelling is a transformation of traditional storytelling into computer screen storytelling. Software programs are used to design a story-telling with computers. In this technological era, the use of modern digital storytelling might be preferable to traditional storytelling. Meadows (2003) mentions that digital storytelling is the social practice of telling stories that make use of low-cost digital cameras, non-linear authoring tools, and computers to create short multimedia stories. It means that digital storytelling could be more engaging compared to traditional storytelling due to the use of multimedia. It is also economical and has a social function. Furthermore, Lynch and Fleming (2007) mention that "...digital story-telling, which encapsulates aural, visual and sensory elements, utilizes the multitude of cognitive processes that underpin learning-from verbal-linguistic to spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist and bodily-kinesthetic". This means digital storytelling can be considered a holistic learning tool due to the involvement of some aspects; cognitive, sensory, affective, and kinesthetic.

In more practical and specific terms, Jetnikoff (2009) defines digital storytelling as “the short form of computer-generated or recorded, orally narrated storytelling. Some digital stories are podcasts, which are purely audio-based although they may be supported by still digital images. Others are combining narration, still images and music or soundtrack”. By using software and computer, the story could be recorded and be presented audibly. Or it could be also completed by using pictures and background music. In other words, digital storytelling digitally could be assessed audibly or audio-visually.

To design digital storytelling, there are some software programs available on websites. In this research, the software program that is used is the Photo Story 3 for windows which can be downloaded freely through <http://windowsphotostory.com>. Students were asked to prepare their personal stories as Tendero (2006) points out that “digital storytelling is emerging as a way to shape narrative”. Digital storytelling seems to be more effective to describe the narrative text.

Some further conceptual ideas on the use of digital storytelling, depict that there are very significant relationships between the use of digital storytelling and autonomous learning. Barret (2006) found that digital storytelling facilitates the convergence of four student-centered learning strategies: student engagement, reflection for deep learning, project-based learning, and the effective integration of technology into instructions. This finding indicates that digital storytelling seems to be very student-centered. Students are more involved in their learning process and are given opportunities to reflect on their deep learning.

Furthermore, (Frank Van Gils, 2005) suggested many advantages of using digital storytelling in education: 1. to provide more variety than traditional methods in current practice. 2. to personalize the learning experience. 3. to make explanations or the practicing for certain topics more compelling. 4 to create real-life situations in an easy and cheaper way.5. to improve the involvement of the students in the process of learning. From these suggested advantages, particularly from advantage 2, it can be implied that the use of digital storytelling gives opportunities for the students to express their personal preferences and interests. Students could be more active and engaged in their learning development. This corresponds with the concept of autonomous learning given by Holec (1979) “the ability to take charge of one’s learning”.

Digital storytelling has been used in many contexts of teaching and learning a foreign language. In the context of Greece, experimental research has been conducted to examine the relationship between adults’ engagement in digital storytelling and their speaking skills and motivation when learning a foreign language. The study was done on 20 foreigners that learn Greek as a foreign language. The results reveal that the use of digital storytelling gave

positive impacts on adults, speaking skills and improved their motivation in learning a foreign language (Kallinikou & Nicolaidou, 2019). In Taiwan, research on digital storytelling has been conducted on 54 students that learning English in a high school. The research aims to see how digital storytelling could improve students' English proficiency and creative thinking. This two-group quasi-experimental research is a collaboration between an English course and a computer course (Yang et al., 2020). In the same context of Taiwan, another current experimental research has been done on the use of a specific digital storytelling application (Toontastic) to find out the relationship between learner engagement and students' speaking competence (Fu et al., 2021).

In the Indonesian context, recent qualitative research on the use of the project of digital storytelling has been done on 50 first-semester students of the Forestry Study Program, Faculty of Agriculture, Universitas Palangkaraya. The research is a compilation project with English-based Computer Information Technology (ICT) that aims to see the impacts of the digital story-telling project on English productive skills; writing and speaking (Misrita et al., 2020). Another research that has been done on digital storytelling during this pandemic time is a qualitative study that pointed out how digital storytelling could encourage the students to be more active, authentic, and purposeful in their learning environment. The research that had been done on an EFL class of a Senior High School in Indonesia also gave an opportunity for the students to exposure to a variety of skills and collaborative work portfolios (Rohayati et al., 2021).

However, there is little research has been done to reflect comprehensively on the application of digital storytelling particularly in pandemic times at the tertiary level of English teaching and learning process. This research aims to depict a deep reflection on how digital storytelling motivates the students, encourages their autonomous learning, and brings students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the use of digital storytelling in the pandemic times.

METHODOLOGY

This research was considered as a descriptive qualitative approach. The participants of the study were 129 - second-semester students in the English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia who were mixed in terms of gender. 84% of the total participants are female and 15.5% are male students. They were all enrolling in *Speaking II* class in the 2020/2021 Academic Year with the pre-Intermediate level of English proficiency.

By using an online methodology, the students were trained to do digital storytelling projects by using Photostory3 for windows. After that, the students were asked to create their digital storytelling in two weeks and to select one of the topics given; life story or fable/fairy tales. Their projects were saved in MP.4 and uploaded to Google Classroom. After completing the projects, the students were given a set of questionnaires to reflect on how this project motivated the students in learning *Speaking*, how the process of making the project could encourage their autonomous learning, and perceived the effectiveness of the use of digital storytelling in on-line learning mode during the pandemic time. The questionnaire had six questions that consisted of three closed questions and three open-ended questions as identified and suggested by Mackey & Gass (2005). Then, the questionnaire data were analyzed thematically by following the three stages of qualitative data analysis suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) covering data condensation, data display, and drawing/ verifying conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Preferred Topic on Digital Storytelling Project

The first finding in the research was the results of the student's preferences in choosing the topics of their digital storytelling projects. To enhance students' autonomous learning, two topics were given to be selected. Students had opportunities and freedom to decide which topic was interesting to them. From the table below, it can be seen clearly that the majority of students (59%) chose the topic of fable/fairy tales in telling their digital story rather than telling their own story (41%). This revealed that the students chose to tell classical stories rather than telling their current life situations or experiences. They selected well-known stories like *The Lion and Mouse*, *The Cat and the Fox*, *The Monkey and the Crocodile*, *Cat and Mouse Partnership*, etc.

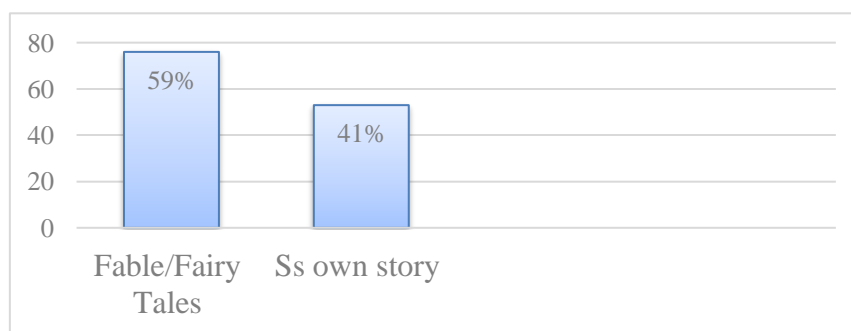
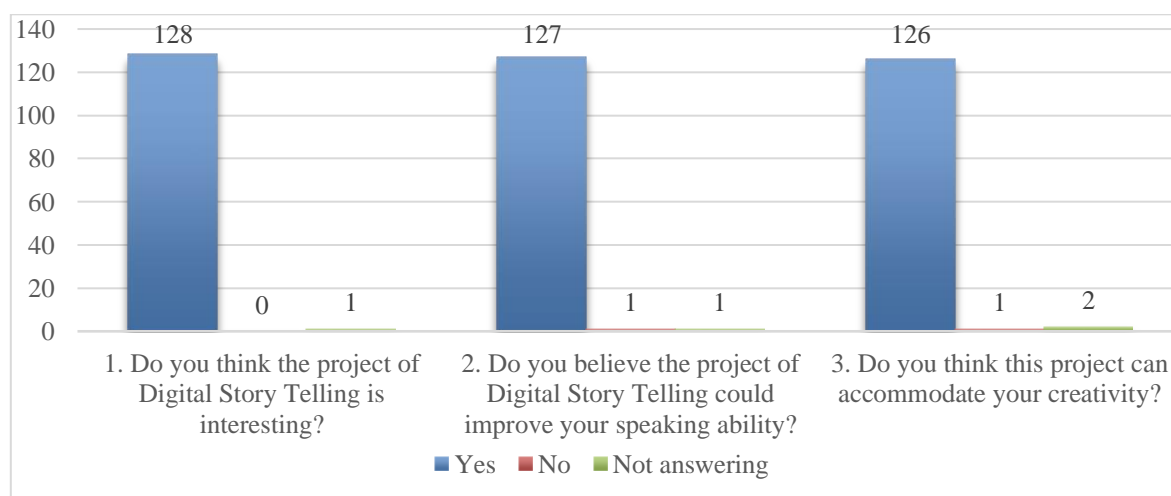


Figure 1. Results of students' preference on topics

Digital Storytelling and Students' Motivation

To see how the project of digital storytelling could encourage students' motivation in learning *Speaking*, a set of closed questions were given to the students. Overall, the results revealed that the majority of the students pointed out that this project was engaging, could improve their speaking ability, and accommodate their creativity.

Figure 2. How digital storytelling could encourage students' motivation in learning by *Speaking*



From the chart above, we could see that almost all students (99.22%) mentioned that this project was appealing to them. Similarly, students also believed that this digital storytelling project could improve their speaking ability and accommodate their creativity in many ways except there was one student who mentioned the opposite, and two students gave no response to these questions.

As Lynch and Fleming (2007) mention that digital storytelling can be considered a holistic learning tool due to the involvement of some aspects; cognitive, sensory, affective, and kinesthetic. It is interesting to find out the particular aspects of the digital story that could attract students' attention. One question was delivered in which the students could select more than one feature of the digital storytelling. The result showed that the most interesting aspect that students like was the story. Similar to the concept of the story, the narration was the third most engaging feature for the students. The total percentage for these two

characteristics was 57% which was the majority of total answers. This means that story and narration were more interesting for the students rather than technology. Technology reached only 20% of total answers from the students followed by the aspects of music and picture (13% and 7% respectively) as can be seen on the chart below.

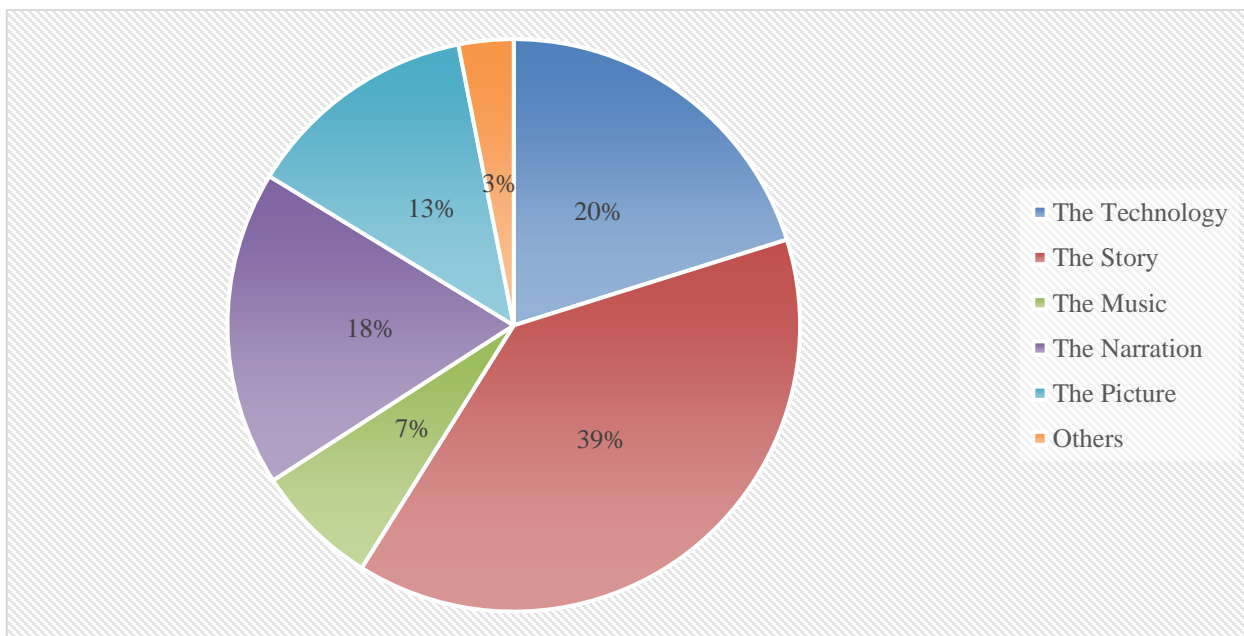


Figure 3. Aspects of Digital Storytelling that attracted students' attention

Digital Story Telling and Autonomous Learning

The relation between digital storytelling and autonomous learning has been discussed by some researchers and practitioners. Digital storytelling facilitates the convergence of four student-centered learning strategies: student engagement, reflection for deep learning, project-based learning, and the effective integration of technology instructions (Barrett, 2006). There were 173 answers received from the students regarding the relationship between digital storytelling and autonomous learning. We could see that the students related autonomous learning to some aspects of the learning process and results; efficiency in learning, self-confidence, self-learning, improving creativity, self-correction, encouraging curiosity, and engagement between audience and storyteller as reflected in the table below.

Table 1. Digital Storytelling and Reflection on Autonomous Learning

Students' Response	Percentage
Digital story-telling is efficient – as it could deliver the story clearly – and simple.	6.36%
Digital story-telling could improve speaking skills, vocabulary, and self-confidence.	20.23%
Digital story-telling could enhance self-learning (independency)	14.45%
Digital story-telling improves creativity by using digital technology (the use of animation, music, narration, dubbing)	38.15%
Digital story-telling is in the form of video where they could repeat it over and over so it helps them to learn the correct intonation, pronunciation, or grammar (self-correction).	4%
Digital story-telling is a fun/interesting activity that encourages curiosity and as a result, gains more knowledge.	11.56%
Digital story-telling is an activity that has engagement between the audience and the storyteller.	5%
It's not improving autonomous learning because students still feel the need for a tutor to improve their speaking skills.	0.57%
It's not encouraging autonomous learning because students think speaking to a camera is much easier than speaking in front of a live audience.	0.57%
It's not improving autonomous learning because student prefers direct story-telling.	0.57%
It's not increasing autonomous learning because students feel using digital story-telling is just hard to do.	0.57%

From the data above, it could be seen that majority of the answers related autonomous learning to creativity which was the highest percentage (38.15%) of total answers. The process of making digital storytelling could accommodate their idea and creativity due to the opportunities to combine narration, music, animation, and dubbing as reflected by the student's answer below:

Yes, because I'm better trained to think creatively, be it in defining a story, composing words, and making videos.” -DHA

Similarly, in the experimental research done in Taiwan to investigate how digital storytelling could improve students' speaking and creative thinking, it was revealed that digital storytelling instruction had a positive impact on students' creative thinking (Yang et al., 2020). Digital storytelling was considered an interdisciplinary feature in which the students could visualize their story in aesthetic appeal and guided them to make innovative use of multimedia. Thus, the students could reach their creative potential.

Further characteristics that students linked between digital storytelling and independent learning were that digital storytelling could improve students' self-confidence and self-learning with 23% and 14.45% respectively.

“Yes, I think digital storytelling improves speaking learning. Because I still lack confidence when talking to other people, but with this project, I can talk and tell stories to improve my speaking skills.” –ISBG

“I think yes, because in this digital storytelling while u got a problem in using the technology you have to find out the solution by yourself.” –ST

It is important to point out that the process of making this project could give chances for the students to do self-correction, even though the percentage was relatively low (4%) as we could see from the students' quotations below.

Repeating speaking to get good grammar makes us accustomed to speaking conversations with good grammar, and we can search how to make good storytelling.” –MOBH

“Yes, I think so. Because I can record and listen to my story and then repeat it for improving my pronunciation. I also can improve my ability for using technology.” –ES

Self-correction was very important in the process of learning independently, particularly in the time of online learning mode where the teacher had a limited chance to give feedback to the students. Further, this also confirms the findings that done by Fu et al., (2021) which pointing out that the use of digital storytelling (Toontastic) supported learners in improving their speaking competence and learning engagement. Students were engaged to improve their speaking competence particularly their phonological skills.

However, it could be seen that few students asserted that digital storytelling was not successful in encouraging their independent learning due to their needs for direct feedback from the teacher, preference for direct oral storytelling, and difficulties in doing the project.

I think not really. Because I still need a tutor to improve my speaking skills.” –RA

“I think, it’s just a little bit, I prefer to choose story-telling directly, but so far it’s good in this pandemic” –DEM

Digital Storytelling and Pandemic Time

There were 170 total answers received from students regarding the effectiveness of using digital storytelling during the pandemic time. It is interesting to see that majority of students (33.52%) mentioned that using digital storytelling gave them opportunities to do self-correction (see Table 2). This answer was also in line with the previous question that relates this project to independent learning. This revealed that the students realized that in online learning mode classes students received limited feedback or corrections from teachers or their peers.

Table 2. The Effectiveness of Using Digital Storytelling in Pandemic Time

Answers from students	Percentage
Is done online and put them at ease and confident.	6.47%
Improves students’ independent learning.	11.76%
Enables students to showcase their speaking ability by reading the narration.	17.64%
Enables students to have engagement (practice) with peers freely creatively and communicatively e.g. breakout room in zoom	14.7%
Is a fun activity that boosts students’ spirits in learning.	10.58%
Is very useful and enables them to do self-correction).	33.52%
Learn to <i>speak</i> maximally while avoiding getting infected by CoVid-19.	3.53%
Have a problem with pronouncing words without the help of the lecturer.	1.16%
Don’t get the ambiance of the real class by doing it virtually.	0.58

This project was also effective to be done during a pandemic time when the students still could have opportunities to show their speaking ability to themselves, their friends and their teacher. As the students learn in online mode, they might not have enough chances to speak during the discussion in zoom virtual meeting.

“Yes, it is effective to improve my speaking skills. Because this project gave me chances to showcase my speaking ability and to improve my speaking skills to be even better.” –MFK

“Yes, because in storytelling we need to make some voices that are suitable for the characters in our story. So, I guess it improves our speaking ability because not only speaking like we did usual, we need to change our voice for narrating the story and mimicking the characters.”

Another aspect that students mentioned in their answers was that by doing this project, students could learn maximally without interacting directly with other students and the virtual classes were not boring as pointed out by the student’s reflections below:

“Yes, I do. Talking directly to people in the class in this pandemic situation has the risk of getting a virus, so digital storytelling can help us improve our speaking skills.” –TLFS

“Yes, of course. It improves my speaking skill and makes the virtual class doesn't feel boring because there is a kind of learning method like the use of digital storytelling.”-STP

However, from the data above, it could be concluded that there were a few students (1,74%) who mentioned that the project of making digital storytelling was less effective because they still need real feedback from the lecturer and the real ambiance of the speaking class.

CONCLUSION

Digital storytelling was a very engaging learning approach to be used in speaking classes, particularly during a pandemic time in which all classes were done virtually. Digital storytelling gave a positive impact on motivating the students to learn *Speaking*. It seemed that digital storytelling was effective to help students improve their speaking abilities, particularly their phonological skills. Besides, it was strongly beneficial to encourage students’ autonomous learning in terms of efficiency in learning, improving self-confidence, self-learning, creativity, doing self-correction, encouraging curiosity, and increasing the engagement between audience and storyteller. The project of digital storytelling seemed also to be effective to be applied in online learning mode because the students could do self-correction, show their speaking abilities, and would not feel bored with virtual classes. Lastly, digital storytelling also had an important role as a reflection of students that could be useful for teachers and students.

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