

# Digital Storytelling and EFL Students' Engagement in Developing Speaking Skills

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## Abstract

This study aimed to explore the students' behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement in English speaking learning through the digital storytelling (DST) project. This case study research was conducted at a private senior high school in Karawang, West Java. The participants in this study were 14 eleventh-grade students. The data were collected by observation, interview, and students' reflective journals. Six of the fourteen students voluntarily participated in the interview to obtain their views on the DST project. The results of the study revealed that students showed positive responses in behavioral engagement because they completed their project and constantly paid full attention in class. Secondly, the DST project also cognitively involved the students, both in speaking skills and in using technology. Finally, the students' emotional engagement was positive during this DST project, as they felt happy sharing their hobbies through a digital platform.

**Keywords:** Students' Engagement; Digital Storytelling; Speaking Skill; Technology in Language Learning

## INTRODUCTION

The rise of technology is currently occurring, especially in education, and as a result, instructors are being required to be tech-savvy. Globalization and the technological revolution have had a significant impact on how literacy practice is conceptualized in the twenty-first century, highlighting the necessity for teachers to use effective teaching strategies that integrate or combine emergent and conventional literacy (Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Mills, 2010). As technology advances, teachers will be able to give creative assignments to assist students in improving their speaking skills. Anjaniputra (2013) discovered that secondary school teachers who use cooperative learning, role-playing, drilling, and creative tasks are effective in developing their students' speaking skills. According to Kuning (2019), speaking is a crucial skill to teach when learning a second language. As a result, teachers must guarantee that all students in the classroom are able to engage and have an equal chance to improve their speaking skills. This is consistent with Nunan's (1999) statement that teachers should support their students by developing communication management strategies to ensure that each student has an equal opportunity to utilize conversations in both large and small groups to enhance their interpersonal speaking and listening skills. Digital storytelling (DST) is an educational innovation that uses technology to build meaning and tell personal tales, so it can help students improve their speaking skills. Lambert (2013) defines DST as the process of producing meaning through the sharing of stories or personal narratives while using digital technology. DST is becoming more popular in educational activities since it allows students to communicate actively, making learning more enjoyable instead of just teaching vocabulary. According to Hung (2019), compared to direct teaching of vocabulary and linguistic forms, DST provides more opportunities for communication and improves learning. The DST project provides

students with a variety of benefits, one of which is improved verbal communication abilities. For example, when students listen to and then repeat certain portions, they get more involved with the language. Hava (2019) discovered that listening to stories and retelling portions of them inspired students to actively use their language, which helped them improve their oral communication skills.

DST was implemented in the 1990s by the Digital Storytelling Center in America (Lambert, 2013). Digital storytelling is an artistic combination of graphics, audio, and/or text conveyed in the form of several-minute videos. In line with Lambert (2013) Digital storytelling (DST) is an artistic combination of someone's voice, pictures, music, sound, and/or text, generally presented as a brief video of three to five minutes. DST can be carried out through several steps, as suggested by Smeda et al., (2014): (1) Brainstorm, (2) Storyboard, (3) Search the Material, (4) Creating the Digital Story, (5) Editing and Feedback, (6) Submission and Evaluation. The final results of this digital storytelling project may take the form of creative videos, documentary videos, and others. There are also different ways to express it, such as screenplays, documentaries, creative videos, and Claymation, a kind of stop-motion animation in which items seem to move on their own (Ranker & Mills, 2014, p. 441). In addition, teachers can create digital storytelling projects to convey subject matter, and students can use it to share information and generate meaning. To teach and convey instructional information, teachers or experts can produce digital stories (Rance-Roney, 2010; Verdugo & Belmonte, 2007), or students can use it to process data and create interpretations (Liu et al., 2016; Stewart & Gachago, 2016), with the latter application of DST in education constituting its main application. English lessons should allow students to know how to use technology and digital multimedia texts to express and create meaning (Abdel-Hack & Helwa, 2014). It is now recognized that DST is one of the strategies used to enhance student-centered, technology-integrated, and project-based learning. DST has gained recognition as a constructivist instructional method that is useful to improve project-based, technologically integrated, and learning experiences that are focused on the student in the coming years (Barrett, 2006; Robin, 2016). Previous research found that students made significant improvement in speaking proficiency in terms of language usage and fluency; yet, no meaningful connection was found between students' engagement and fluency, or between language use and involvement (Fu et al., 2021). Another research conducted by Roza & Shadiev (2023) about the usage of digital storytelling (DS) in a multilingual classroom of pre-service TEFL students affects the teaching of academic public speaking abilities by enhancing cultural diversity. Another research conducted by (Asnas, 2024) about the attitudes and obstacles that students faced when adopting digital storytelling for English language learning. The results of this study show that participants have a positive attitude toward the use of digital storytelling since it keeps them entertained while still allowing them to focus on learning the subject and speaking English. Almost all of the research examines improvement, effects, and students' motivation. However, digital storytelling is still underpracticed in Indonesian schools, particularly Senior High Schools. As a result, it is important and beneficial to conduct a study on students' engagement in digital storytelling in learning speaking skills.

## METHOD

The qualitative approach was perceived to be the most effective approach for this study. (Creswell, 2012) defines qualitative research as a method of studying and understanding the importance that individuals or groups place on a social human issue. This study uses a case study research design. This approach allows the researcher to collect data and do descriptive analysis. A case study offers a method for systematically analyzing and explaining a phenomenon (Yin, 2003). The research was conducted at a private senior high school in

Karawang, West Java. The researcher observed an eleventh-grade class that consisted of 14 students. For data collection, observation, interviews, and a weekly journal were conducted to identify students' engagement in the DST project in learning speaking skills. Six of the fourteen students voluntarily took part in the interview to share their thoughts on the DST project. Qualitative data analysis was applied to analyze the data, as proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994). They stated that there are three processes of processing qualitative data, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and validation. When reducing data, the researcher gathers essential information through observation, interviews, and a weekly journal. Furthermore, the researcher reads the gathered data carefully and then selects it suitably based on the researcher's objectives. The second stage is data display, where the researcher also showed the findings of observation, weekly journal, and interviews with students regarding their involvement in the digital storytelling project in learning speaking skills in the form of text. The last stage is conclusion drawing/verification. The researcher concluded the crucial elements from all of the data acquired, which produced a clear conclusion that answers the research question.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Based on the data acquired from observation, weekly journal, and semi-structured interviews with six students, the research revealed three themes of students' engagement in the DST project in learning speaking skills. The three themes are: (1) students' behavioral engagement in the DST project in learning speaking skills, (2) students' cognitive engagement in the DST project in learning speaking skills, and (3) students' emotional engagement in the DST project in learning speaking skills. The detailed results are described as follows:

#### 1. Students' behavioral engagement in the DST project in learning speaking skills

Students showed positive behavioral engagement in the creation of digital storytelling projects in learning speaking skills; they paid full attention during class activities and completed their projects successfully. Interview excerpts with students are as follows:

**P2:** I enjoyed this process since I was able to share my photos, learn new things, and understand the basics of video production. I believe DST makes it easier for me to express myself and show my passion.

**P3:** I had no problems with the digital storytelling process because I enjoy talking and editing videos. I believe this project is beneficial since it helps me better understand who I am, which makes me happy because I now know what I enjoy.

Based on the interview excerpts above, the participants were satisfied and had no difficulty working on the digital storytelling project. Participant 2 stated that by creating DST, he could share his photography results through this activity. Meanwhile, participant 3 was pleased and had no difficulty because he liked talking and editing videos.

#### 2. Students' cognitive engagement in the DST project in learning speaking skills

Digital storytelling also engages students cognitively. They believed that through creating this digital storytelling project, they succeeded in increasing their vocabulary and improving their ability to communicate in English and use technology. Interview excerpts with students are as follows:

**P1:** This digital storytelling activity makes it easier for me to speak English because, before making a video, I have to practice speaking, which makes me more active and fluent in speaking English when creating digital storytelling videos.

**P2:** CapCut is really simple and easy to use, allowing me to edit videos on my phone from anywhere, unlike other video editors. Despite the limits, many capabilities, such as noise reduction, require CapCut Pro. Overall, I like using CapCut.

**P4:** I gained a great deal of new vocabulary while writing narratives for digital storytelling videos. There are several difficult words that I have just learned the meaning of. Digital storytelling is one of the most effective ways for me to expand my vocabulary.

Based on the interview excerpts above, participants believed that working on a digital storytelling project helped them speak English fluently, use technology, especially CapCut on their smartphone, and expand their vocabulary.

### 3. Students' emotional engagement in the DST project in learning speaking skills

Students expressed emotion while working on the DST project; they were happy and believed that they had benefited from creating this digital storytelling project. Interview excerpts with students are as follows:

**P1:** I'm happy that I've learned more about DST, explored deeper into my hobby, developed dubbing narration, and improved my video editing abilities. I'm pleased about that because I've learned a lot of new stuff.

**P2:** Making the digital storytelling project made me happy since I gained a lot of knowledge, came up with a concept for the video, and, since I like taking pictures, was pleased that my images would finally be used in the project.

**P5:** I think digital storytelling is really beneficial. I thought that digital storytelling was just traditional storytelling and was unaware of its existence. I may therefore use the images and narration in this digital storytelling video to more fully describe my hobby. In addition, I used to be insecure when speaking English since I didn't know how to pronounce it correctly. However, this DST project taught me how to do it correctly, and I gained confidence.

**P6:** I believe this digital storytelling project helped me get more comfortable speaking English, which I was initially nervous about. It was also really helpful since I learned how to produce digital storytelling, edit videos, and do voiceovers, things I had never done before for this project.

Based on the interview excerpts above, participants 1 and 2 showed positive emotional engagement, as they felt happy while creating this digital storytelling project. Participant 5 felt that this DST project was very beneficial for her, as she was able to share her hobbies more deeply and with more confidence through photos and narratives. participant 6 stated that digital storytelling gave him greater self-assurance because it taught him things he had never learned before, like how to edit videos and make voiceovers, and tell stories digitally.

## Discussion

The results of students' engagement in the DST project in learning speaking skills are favorable. It was discovered that students responded positively to behavioral engagement in learning while working on digital storytelling projects, as seen by their paying attention in class and adherence to the teacher's instructions throughout the entire process. In line with Asnas (2024) They have a positive view of digital storytelling since it keeps them entertained and enables them to concentrate on speaking English and studying the subject. Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that students also demonstrated cognitive engagement when they said that working on digital storytelling projects helped them expand their vocabulary and improve their English speaking skills. According to research by Roza & Shadiev (2023) Students can use digital storytelling to enhance the coherence and cohesiveness of their speech. This is also supported by research carried out by (Hasanah et al., (2021), who states that students have had favorable experiences with digital storytelling and that their speaking skills have improved since its creation. In line with Rahmawati et al., (2023) The use of DST enhances students' technological skills, critical thinking, and reading comprehension. Lastly, the results show that, in terms of emotional engagement, students believed that making digital stories helped them and gave them confidence. Additionally, they are pleased because engaging videos with digital storytelling enable them to freely share and express their hobbies. According to research by Lazareva & Cruz-Martinez (2020) Students' emotional experiences with the project were positive because they were able to freely and confidently express their thoughts, and the assignment style was judged to be less demanding than giving a direct presentation in class.

## CONCLUSION

Students demonstrated good engagement during the process of creating a digital storytelling project in learning speaking skills. They behaved well in class; they were always focused in class and accepted responsibility for completing their work well. In addition, students engage cognitively in the digital storytelling creation process, as it enables them to expand their vocabulary and enhance their English-speaking abilities. Lastly, because they were happy in the process of creating the digital storytelling project, students also showed positive emotional engagement. It was incredibly fulfilling to them as well. Therefore, it can be concluded that the student engagement in the digital storytelling project is favorable in terms of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects.

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