

Exploring the Implementation and Outcomes of a Digital Storytelling Project in an EFL Secondary School Speaking Class

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Abstract

This study addresses the limited understanding of how digital storytelling projects are implemented in secondary EFL speaking classes, despite their recognized potential for fostering communicative and creative learning. It explores the implementation process and outcomes of a Digital Storytelling Project (DSTP) conducted in an Indonesian EFL secondary school. Using a qualitative interpretive case study design, data were gathered through classroom observations and rubric-based assessments involving one English teacher and twenty-one eighth-grade students divided into four groups. The analysis revealed that DSTP was carried out through three main stages, including planning, implementing, and reporting, with varying degrees of teacher facilitation. The project stimulated students' engagement, collaboration, and creativity. However, insufficient scaffolding and unclear guiding questions during the planning phase affected project coherence and duration. Students' speaking performance improved particularly in fluency and pronunciation, while issues remained in content clarity and narrative structure. Overall, DSTP provided meaningful opportunities for authentic language use and collaborative learning. The study concludes that digital storytelling, when implemented with adequate instructional scaffolding, can serve as a pedagogically rich medium for teaching speaking and aligns with the principles of Indonesia's Independent Curriculum emphasizing creativity, collaboration, and student agency.

Keywords: *Digital storytelling; Project-based learning; EFL speaking class; Secondary school*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as a core component of language learning because it reflects learners' ability to use the target language in authentic communication (Nunan, 1999). Among the four language skills, speaking plays a crucial role in enabling learners to convey ideas, express feelings, and interact effectively with others. However, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia, particularly at the secondary school level. Students often struggle with fluency, accuracy, and confidence due to limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and restricted exposure to authentic language use (Octavia, Astutik, & Rahayu, 2022). These challenges highlight the importance of finding effective and engaging approaches that promote meaningful oral communication in EFL classrooms.

In response to these challenges, technology-enhanced learning has gained increasing attention in language education. One promising approach is digital storytelling (DST), which integrates multimedia elements such as images, sound, and narration to

enable students to express ideas creatively. As a pedagogical tool, DST aligns with constructivist and multimodal learning theories that emphasize active engagement, collaboration, and meaning-making through diverse modes of representation. Research has shown that DST provides authentic contexts for language use and supports students' communicative competence (Penalba, Camanigo, & Romero, 2020). For example, Rahiem (2021) found that digital storytelling fostered creativity and collaboration in early childhood education. Similarly, Carhill-Poza and Chen (2020) reported that adolescent EFL learners demonstrated greater agency and expressiveness when using digital tools. Moreover, Huang (2021) revealed that smartphone-based video projects encouraged students to merge language learning with real-world experiences, improving engagement and performance.

Other studies further support the role of digital storytelling in enhancing students' language learning experiences. Azor et al. (2020) demonstrated that audiovisual media could increase students' motivation and oral participation. Astuti and Chakim (2023) found that DST improved EFL students' fluency and confidence, while Yang, Chen, and Hung (2020) reported that DST supported teenagers' creative and collaborative learning through interdisciplinary projects. Dewi and Dian (2022) observed that university students perceived DST as inspiring and beneficial for vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar development. Likewise, Mardhiah et al. (2024) showed that integrating local folktales into DST enhanced cultural awareness alongside speaking proficiency.

While these studies consistently indicate the potential of DST as an innovative tool for developing speaking skills, most of them adopt quantitative designs or focus on university and early childhood contexts. Only limited qualitative research has examined how DST is implemented in secondary school EFL classrooms, particularly in Indonesia. This reveals a methodological and contextual gap, little is known about the classroom processes, teacher facilitation, and the nature of student products that emerge through DST at this educational level.

The relevance of this study also aligns with Indonesia's *Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka)*, which emphasizes project-based learning (PBL), creativity, collaboration, and technological integration. DST embodies these principles by engaging students in authentic, collaborative, and multimodal language production. Through activities such as scriptwriting, recording, and presenting digital narratives, students are encouraged to exercise creativity, critical thinking, and student agency, core values of the *Pancasila Student Profile (Profil Pelajar Pancasila)*.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the implementation and outcomes of a Digital Storytelling Project (DSTP) in an EFL secondary school speaking class. Using a qualitative interpretive approach, it investigates how the project was facilitated, how students engaged in the process, and what kinds of digital storytelling products they produced. The findings are expected to provide insights into how technology-based projects can be effectively integrated into speaking instruction to support communicative competence and align with the goals of the Independent Curriculum.

METHODS

This study was guided by two main research questions: (1) how is the Digital Storytelling Project (DSTP) implemented in an EFL secondary school speaking class? and (2) what are the characteristics of the students' products resulting from the implementation of the DSTP? To address these questions, a qualitative interpretive case study design was employed. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher

to gain a detailed and contextualized understanding of classroom practices, student interactions, and meaning-making processes as they naturally occur, which reflects the growing importance of qualitative inquiry in applied research for providing valuable insights into the local perspectives of study populations (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). The interpretive perspective views knowledge as socially constructed through participants' experiences, making it suitable for examining how students and teachers engage with technology-based storytelling in authentic classroom settings. In addition, this design aligns conceptually with the principles of project-based learning (PBL), as the DSTP was organized around three key stages, planning, implementing, and reporting, which are consistent with the Independent Curriculum's focus on creativity, collaboration, and student agency.

The research took place in a public secondary school in West Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. The participants consisted of twenty-one eighth-grade students and one English teacher. The school was selected purposively based on its readiness to implement project-based learning, basic access to digital tools, and the teacher's willingness to collaborate. The students were chosen because they regularly participated in speaking classes and had access to devices required to complete the project. They were divided into four groups, each responsible for developing one digital storytelling video. The English teacher served as the classroom facilitator throughout the project, while the researcher acted as a non-participant observer.

Data were collected through classroom observations, a speaking performance rubric, and a visual product rubric. Classroom observations were conducted during four meetings representing the three phases of the project: planning, implementing, and reporting. Each meeting lasted approximately eighty minutes. Observation sheets were used to record teacher instructions, students' collaboration, language use, and engagement with digital media. The researcher also wrote field notes after each meeting to capture contextual details and emerging reflections. The speaking performance rubric, adapted from Hatipoglu (2021), assessed students' fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, expression and emotion, and content clarity using a four-point scale. The visual product rubric evaluated students' digital stories in terms of creativity, coherence, and the integration of visual and spoken components. These rubrics were not treated as quantitative instruments; instead, the scores functioned as descriptive references that supported qualitative interpretation of student performance. All instruments were reviewed by two English-education experts to ensure clarity and content validity before being used in the field.

The analysis process followed an inductive thematic procedure to identify emerging patterns related to the research questions. The data analysis began with familiarization, during which the researcher reviewed observation notes, reflection entries, and students' digital products. This process followed the step-by-step guideline of thematic analysis described by Dawadi (2020), which emphasizes systematic familiarization and coding to ensure a rigorous and trustworthy interpretation of qualitative data. Key phrases and events were then coded to capture meaningful aspects of the DSTP process, such as teacher facilitation, collaboration, creativity, and language use. The codes were compared and grouped into broader categories that represented recurring ideas across the data. These categories were further refined into overarching themes that explained how the project was implemented and how students expressed their learning through the final digital products. The findings were interpreted holistically by connecting classroom practices, rubric assessments, and students' multimedia outputs.

To ensure credibility, triangulation was applied across data sources and instruments, and detailed descriptions of the classroom context were used to support the interpretation.

To maintain clarity and traceability during data presentation, each qualitative data source was assigned a specific code. Observation notes were labeled as ON and field notes as FN (e.g., ON1, FN1). These codes were consistently used in the findings section to indicate the origin of each data excerpt.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the English Education Department's ethics committee. Participation was voluntary, and all participants and school identities were anonymized in the report. All collected videos and related materials were used solely for academic purposes and stored securely to ensure participant privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

1. The Implementation of the Digital Storytelling Project

a. Planning Stage

To answer Research Question 1, which explored *how the Digital Storytelling Project (DSTP) was implemented in the EFL secondary speaking class*, the findings revealed that the process followed three main stages: planning, implementing, and reporting.

During the planning stage, the teacher introduced the project and explained its objectives and expected outcomes. However, classroom observations showed that no guiding or essential questions were provided, and the project schedule was only presented in general terms. One observation note stated, "*Students seemed unsure about what theme to choose since the teacher did not specify guiding questions*" (ON1). This lack of direction affected the thematic focus of several groups.

The teacher also gave only a rough timeline without specifying deadlines for each task. As noted in the field notes, "*Students discussed among themselves how long it might take to complete each part, but the teacher did not confirm the duration*" (FN1). The absence of detailed scheduling led to delays, as students extended their project completion from one week to twelve days.

Overall, the planning stage highlighted the importance of structured facilitation. The missing elements, guiding questions and time management, reduced coherence and limited students' thematic creativity, which later influenced the quality of their digital stories.

b. Implementing Stage

The second stage involved collaborative production. Students worked in four groups to write scripts, rehearse, and record their stories using mobile phones and editing software such as Cap-Cut. Observation notes documented that "*students appeared highly motivated and engaged when recording scenes, yet they frequently switched to Bahasa Indonesia during discussion*" (ON2). This language-switching behaviour indicated that while collaboration was strong, authentic English use was inconsistent.

The teacher's facilitative role was evident through frequent feedback on pronunciation and expression. One entry in the field notes stated, "*The teacher paused group work to model how to pronounce certain words before students continued recording*" (FN2). This shows that teacher scaffolding contributed positively to students' fluency and pronunciation.

However, challenges persisted in maintaining English use throughout discussions and rehearsals. Despite these limitations, the implementing stage demonstrated growing students' agency, students negotiated roles, students' creative decisions making, and students' responsibility for producing videos.

c. Reporting Stage

In the reporting stage, students presented their completed videos to the class. Each group showcased their stories and received feedback from peers and the teacher. Observation notes described, *"Students smiled and applauded after each presentation, showing appreciation and engagement"* (ON3).

Rubric-based assessments showed that fluency and pronunciation improved noticeably, as repeated recording and editing acted as self-regulated oral practice. However, grammar and vocabulary remained weaker, with some groups relying on pre-written scripts from the internet. The presentation sessions also fostered reflective thinking, students discussed what they enjoyed and what they found challenging, revealing increased confidence and ownership of their work.

Overall, the results indicate that the DSTP was implemented successfully in structure but faced challenges in scaffolding and thematic guidance. The teacher's facilitation and students' collaboration played key roles in sustaining engagement throughout the process.

2. The Product of the Digital Storytelling Project

To answer Research Question 2, which investigated *the characteristics of students' products from the DSTP*, the analysis focused on their speaking performance and the quality of their digital outputs.

The speaking assessment results indicated that students performed best in fluency and pronunciation, achieving scores mostly in the "Good" category. This improvement was supported by observations that *"students practiced their lines repeatedly before recording to ensure smooth delivery"* (ON4). The process of multiple retakes served as self-directed oral training, helping students internalize pronunciation and rhythm through practice.

Conversely, grammar, vocabulary, and content clarity were identified as weaker aspects. Some stories lacked coherence, and several groups delivered lines mechanically without emotional expression. A field note recorded, *"One group's story about friendship lacked a clear ending and was read too monotonously"* (FN3). This reflected limited expressive training and insufficient scaffolding during the planning phase.

From a technical standpoint, the digital products demonstrated creativity in visual presentation. Students incorporated background music, text overlays, and transitions effectively. One observation entry noted, *"Students explored camera angles and used props creatively to enhance storytelling"* (ON5). However, editing skills varied, some videos appeared polished, while others showed abrupt cuts and uneven audio.

The production timeline also extended beyond the initial one-week plan, as groups required additional time for coordination and technical adjustments. Despite these challenges, all groups successfully completed their videos, demonstrating persistence and collaborative effort.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of DSTP effectively supported students' engagement, collaboration, and speaking development, yet required stronger scaffolding during the planning phase. These results are consistent with Saripudin et al., (2021) project-based learning framework, which emphasizes structured guidance in planning, production, and presentation. The lack of essential questions and clear scheduling in this study limited students' thematic focus, aligning with Hamidah et al. (2020) who found that inquiry-based planning enhances coherence in project outcomes.

During implementation, students demonstrated student agency, evident in their ability to make creative decisions and self-regulate their recording and editing processes. This finding supports Carhill-Poza and Chen (2020), who argued that digital technologies promote collaboration and autonomy in language learning. Moreover, the repetitive recording process functioned as self-regulated oral practice, leading to fluency improvement consistent with Astuti and Chakim (2023).

However, persistent challenges in grammar and content organization suggest that digital storytelling alone does not guarantee linguistic complexity. This aligns with Mauren et al. (2022), who emphasized that expressive and linguistic training should accompany digital storytelling tasks. The observed gaps in content clarity also reflect Nair et al. (2021), who stated that narrative coherence requires guided orientation and resolution.

The extended duration of the project, from one week to twelve days, highlights the practical challenge of managing time in digital storytelling projects, which aligns with Gursoy (2020), who asserts that meaningful and high-quality digital storytelling outputs necessitate substantial time investment. Furthermore, the observed enhancements in students' collaboration, creativity, and engagement corroborate the findings of Markula & Aksela (2022), who emphasize that project-based learning positively influences students' motivation, sense of responsibility, and teamwork in educational contexts. Additionally, the project's alignment with the Independent Curriculum and its focus on fostering creativity, collaboration, and communication is consistent with the observations of Wahyuni, Hasbi, & Kanada (2024), who highlight that educational innovations can encourage learner independence and proactive engagement in classroom tasks. Similarly, the improvements in students' speaking performance through group discussions align with Mardiyah, Jaya, & Uzer (2023), who found that small-group collaborative activities enhance learners' oral proficiency and confidence.

In terms of pedagogical implications, this study shows that DSTP aligns well with the Independent Curriculum's goals of fostering creativity, collaboration, and communication, the core aspects of the Pancasila Student Profile. The findings reaffirm the importance of integrating technology meaningfully into speaking instruction to create authentic and student-centred learning experiences.

Overall, this study extends previous research by providing qualitative insights into how DSTP operates within a secondary EFL context under Indonesia's Independent Curriculum. While earlier studies have primarily focused on quantitative improvements or higher-education contexts, this study highlights the critical role of teacher scaffolding, structured planning, and inquiry-based guidance in shaping meaningful project outcomes. When implemented with these supports, digital storytelling has strong potential to cultivate student agency, communicative competence, and 21st-century skills in EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Digital Storytelling Project (DSTP) can transform speaking instruction from a teacher-centred practice into an interactive and creative learning experience. Through collaborative scriptwriting, performance, and video production, students engaged in active meaning-making, negotiation, and reflection. These processes encouraged authentic language use while allowing learners to express ideas through multiple modes, verbal, visual, and auditory, which fostered both communicative competence and confidence.

The pedagogical strength of DSTP lies in its capacity to merge social interaction with multimodal representation. By combining collaboration, peer feedback, and digital design, students experienced language learning as a shared process of constructing and expressing meaning, rather than as individual memorization or performance. This demonstrates that fluency and motivation can develop through purposeful, creative communication supported by digital tools.

Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on higher education or controlled experimental contexts, this research offers a situated understanding of DSTP implementation within Indonesian secondary EFL classrooms under the Independent Curriculum. This study therefore contributes by contextualizing DSTP within a national project-based learning framework, showing its potential to integrate communicative, creative, and technological competencies in real classroom practice.

Theoretically, this research reinforces the value of interactive and multimodal learning environments in promoting learner agency and meaningful communication. Pedagogically, it emphasizes the importance of clear task design, continuous scaffolding, and reflective evaluation to maximize the benefits of DSTP. Although limited by its single-school context, this study provides a foundation for future research across diverse schools and grade levels to further explore DST integration in EFL speaking instruction.

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