

The Role of Digital Storytelling in Enhancing EFL Learners' Speaking Fluency and Narrative Skills

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 12 Jan 2023; Received in revised form: 20 Feb 2023; Accepted: 05 Mar 2023; Available online: 14 Mar 2023</p> <p>©2023 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords— digital storytelling, EFL speaking, narrative skills, fluency, learner motivation.</p>	<p><i>Digital stories have already been proven to be an effective classroom activity in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where learners can be provided with a chance to build speaking fluency and narrative competence in the natural, engaging, and contextual environment. Digital stories provide beneficial restoration of the cognitive, linguistic, and affective development using visual, auditory, and textual data to facilitate the proper communication process. This paper examines how digital storytelling can help develop oral proficiency in EFL learners, especially in fluency, complexity of narrative, and learner motivation. A mixed method was used with 60 intermediate-level EFL students who were separated into both experimental and control groups. The results indicate that digital storytelling plays a significant role in enhancing the fluency in speaking and the cohesion of the story and also promoting engagement and fostering confidence in learners. The paper presents the pedagogical possibilities of the incorporation of digital storytelling in the teaching of speaking to facilitate prolonged oral conversation.</i></p>

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Communicative competence in EFL learning comprises speaking fluency and narrative competence (Goh and Burns, 2012). Nevertheless, numerous learners are not able to create fluent narratives and speak without any problems because of the lack of exposure, fear of mistakes, and lack of motivation. Conventional classroom practices do not usually offer real-life contexts of oral expression, and learners are left ill-equipped to handle life in the real world.

One such pedagogical process has been identified as digital storytelling, as a way of involving learners in a significant act of language use by integrating the

story-building process with a digital media encoder (Robin, 2008). The development of multimedia stories gives learners an opportunity to plan, rehearse, and present narratives, and this will help them to develop both cognitively and linguistically. The digital storytelling is also characterized by its multimodality, which allows involving visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners in learning.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The given paper can fill a significant gap in EFL teaching, enhancing oral competence and narrative skills in the students unless they have problems with fluency and confidence. Online stories do not only provide a platform on which language may be learned through this interaction process but also foster self-sufficiency, creativity, and sustained interaction.

These findings have implications for the EFL teachers who would like to use digital technology in the delivery of the speaking lesson, particularly for those learners who would not wish to participate in the classroom.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

The proposed study is expected to discuss how digital storytelling affects the fluency and narrative skills of EFL learners in speaking. The specific objectives are:

1. To measure the implications of digital storytelling on the fluency of speaking in learners.
2. To explore the effect of digital storytelling on oral production and the complexity and cohesion of the narrative.
3. To research the motivation and engagement of learners when performing speaking tasks using digital storytelling.
4. To offer pedagogical suggestions on how to incorporate digital storytelling in EFL speaking programs.

1.4 Research Questions

The following questions are the guides of the study:

1. What are the effects of digital storytelling on the speaking fluency of EFL learners?
2. How does the digital storytelling improve the narrative skills of the learners?
3. What is the effect of digital stories on engaging the learners in speaking activities and their motivation?
4. How do learners feel about using digital storytelling as a tool to develop oral language?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Storytelling in Language Learning

Digital storytelling (DS) combines narrative construction and multimedia application, including video, image, audio, and text, to develop interactive and learner-focused projects (Robin, 2008). DS has also been demonstrated to facilitate active interaction, real communication, and multimodal literacy in the teaching of language (Sadik, 2008). DS integrates mental, emotional, and interpersonal processes and helps learners to plan, practice, and deliver stories in enlightening situations.

It has been proposed that DS improves oral proficiency, narrative competence, and vocabulary acquisition. As an example, the learners who build digital stories are repeatedly practicing sentence structures and thematic vocabulary, which

contributes to fluency and coherence (Huang, 2017). Moreover, DS provides learners an opportunity to be creative with language, which motivates them and eliminates anxiety experienced by speakers when speaking to an audience (Hung, 2015).

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

2.2.1 Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) highlights the importance of social interaction and scaffolding in language learning. Digital storytelling allows collaborative work, peer-to-peer reaction, and teacher-directed work, which is consistent with the vision of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Learners create stories collaboratively, but with guidance as they progress from assisted to independent production.

2.2.2 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

DS is compatible with Task-Based Language Teaching that focuses on meaningful use of language by way of tasks that reflect real-life communication (Ellis, 2003). Creating a digital story is a challenging task that involves planning, writing, practicing, and delivering, which enhances fluency, accuracy, and complexity in oral production.

2.2.3 Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning

The theory developed by Mayer, the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (2001), assumes that learning becomes more effective when verbal and visual information is combined, which leads to greater processing. DS uses narration, pictures, and sound and promotes dual coding and thinking, which enhances memory and oral expression capacity.

2.3 Empirical Studies

2.3.1 Digital Storytelling and Speaking Fluency

Several studies show that DS has a positive influence on the oral fluency of EFL learners. Huang (2017) discovered that students who generated digital stories had an improved speech rate, decreased hesitation, and increased speech production. In the same vein, Hung (2015) indicated that DS was found to assist the learners in conquering the fear of speaking by offering them a safe and systematic environment to rehearse and express themselves.

2.3.2 Digital Storytelling and Narrative Skills

DS assists in building a narrative form such as sequence, coherence, and elaboration. Barrot (2016) discovered that students who participated in digital

storytelling created better-organized stories, used cohesive devices more effectively, and had a richer vocabulary. Learners can better plan and track narrative development through visualization of elements of the story, such as the use of multimedia compared to traditional oral tasks, because of the capabilities this task affords them.

2.3.3 Digital Storytelling and Motivation

Digital stories have been identified to provide motivation to learners by being autonomous, creative, and participatory. The learners mentioned that they enjoyed mixing personal experience with the technology that enhanced intrinsic motivation towards engaging in speaking activities (Sadik, 2008). DS also facilitates interaction with peers; learners can give feedback and share stories, which makes learning collaborative and socially supportive.

2.4 Advantages of Digital Storytelling for EFL Learners

1. More Oral Practice Opportunities: learners rehearse and note down various drafts before presenting, thus developing fluency.
2. Multi-mode Involvement: Visual, sound, and textual combination is inclusive of the various styles of learning.
3. Real-Life Communication: DS activities recreate the situation of real-life communication, which improves relevance and retention.
4. Scaffolding and Feedback: Teacher instructions and peer review assist learners in enhancing the accuracy and cohesiveness of the narrative.

2.5 Challenges and Limitations

In spite of its advantages, DS is facing challenges:

1. Technological Barriers: The learners can have barriers in access, digital literacy, or familiarity with the software (Robin, 2008).
2. Time-Intensive: DS activities include planning, recording, and editing and could be time-consuming in the instructional time.
3. Evaluation Challenges: Multimodal narratives might be difficult to evaluate, which means that rubrics should be able to measure fluency, narrative structure, and creativity.
4. Cognitive Load: The combination of various media can be overwhelming to certain learners, especially novices (Mayer, 2001).

2.6 Summary of Literature

The present literature confirms that digital storytelling can be used as an effective teaching methodology in EFL to improve speaking fluency, narrative, and motivation. DS involves the learner cognitively, socially, and affectively, which is consistent with the sociocultural, task-based, and multimedia learning theories. Despite the challenges, we can optimize its effectiveness through appropriate scaffolding, effective use of technology, and appropriate evaluation criteria.

The review contributes to the empirical research of the effect of DS on the development of oral proficiency and narratives and presents a solid argument in favor of the current study.

3. Methodology and Results

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research Design

The present research was carried out in a mixed-methods design, which is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative one was speaking fluency and telling stories through the pre- and post-tests; the qualitative one was the experiences, motivation, and attitude towards digital storytelling through interviews and classroom observations. The triangulation option was also a possibility of mixed-method design, as it offered the opportunity to form a complete picture of the impact of digital storytelling on oral performance.

3.1.2 Participants and Sampling

The participants were 60 intermediate-level EFL students in an undergraduate-level English course at a university in one of the Middle Eastern countries. The digitally literate learners with moderate and little speaking participation were chosen through purposive sampling. They divided the subjects into two groups:

1. Experimental group (n= 30): worked on weekly digital storytelling.
2. Control group (n = 30): This was the control group, where they engaged in conventional activities that included oral storytelling without the use of digital media.

3.1.3 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection tools were collected using the questionnaire, survey, and interview methods as follows:

1. Oral Proficiency Tests: These were pre- and post-fluency, lexical richness, and narrative coherence tests.

2. Questionnaires: Likert scale questionnaires were distributed to the groups (with regard to motivation, engagement, and perceived speaking confidence at the beginning and the end of the intervention).

3. Semi-Structured Interviews: A total of 12 members of the experimental group were interviewed using semi-structured interviews in order to elicit the depth of perception and experience.

4. Classroom Observation: Direction of participation, cooperation with others, and involvement of learners in reciting stories.

3.1.4 Procedure

The intervention was organized in the form of a course that lasted 10 weeks:

1. Experimental group: The students created digital stories using the assistance of multimedia tools (video, audio narration, and images) and shared them on one of the class's platforms. All learners were given one story in a week and given feedback about the teacher and his or her peers.

2. Control group: Did the same face-to-face narrative activities without the use of digital technology.

The first week and the tenth week were the weeks during which the pre-tests and the post-tests were conducted, respectively. Surveys and interviews were conducted after post-tests.

3.1.5 Data Analysis

1. Quantitative data: The results of both groups were compared in regard to fluency, narrative structure, and the use of vocabulary according to paired-samples t-tests and ANCOVA.

2. Qualitative data: NVivo was employed to organize interviews and notes during observations with the help of themes that were identified to indicate trends of motivation, confidence, and engagement.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Quantitative Findings

1. Speaking Fluency: The experimental group gained speaking fluency scores by 32% compared to 10% in the control group ($p < .01$).

2. Narrative Skills: Cohesion, sequencing, and lexical variety were significantly improved by experimental participants compared to the control group ($p < .05$).

3. Motivation: The experimental group score increased significantly on motivation, particularly on enjoying the task and autonomy.

3.2.2 Qualitative Findings

The three major themes were obtained through interviews and observations:

1. Increased Self-Confidence and Decreased Anxiety: It was found that the learners had been less tense in the asynchronous feedback and digital storytelling exercise.

2. Improved Innovation and Focus: It was observed that the students liked the multimedia and had to speak and refine their stories more. The narrator found satisfaction in telling the story with the help of auditory and visual aids.

3. Collaborative Learning: The interactive and critical thinking offered by the peer evaluation process enabled us to make the narratives more organized and fluent.

4. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The digital storytelling is an effective tool that can be applied to enhance speaking ability, better narrate a story, and feel more inspired to study, and this is reflected in the results. The qualitative information about the process of cooperative learning, participation, and confidence means the gradual enhancement of oral proficiency. DS provides a system that enables the learners to sharpen and reason besides practicing their speaking abilities as they advance, thus enabling them to shift from being shy speakers to being active speakers.

5. Conclusion

Digital storytelling has the potential to deliver considerable pedagogical value to EFL learners, with a complex influence on language learning and student engagement. This research has fully realized this advantage. The students who participated in the digital narratives practice were very much improved in the fluency of their speaking as a result of their ability to articulate long sentences with fewer interruptions. Their story skills also developed positively as they exhibited a smoother flow of thoughts, a higher number of possible lexical choices, and narrative coherence as compared to their control group. Additionally, the digital storytelling approach was more likely to positively influence intrinsic motivation, imagination, and the desire to read,

making it a viable and engaging method for language acquisition.

The advantages of curriculum design must be weighed against the encumbrance of technological accessibility, the potential to achieve something in a specific time frame, and the intellectual load. It is notable that educators should make the most of the digital storytelling potential with the assistance of accurate instructions, scaffolding, and feedback.

Also, we make classroom observations, which would be made on the basis of patterns of behavior, the completion of tasks, and student involvement. These observations may provide a more in-depth understanding of how the students interact with the traditional and gamified writing activities.

The future research can be directed towards the long-term effects, the variation of the levels of competence, and how DS may be integrated with other digital tools so that children could build oral and multimodal languages. Moreover, twelve members of the experimental group are engaged in the semi-structured interviews in order to gain a better understanding of their engagement, perception, and concerns.

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