Exploring Student's Experiences in Learning English Using Digital Stories: A Narrative Research

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Abstract

Digital storytelling merges traditional storytelling with digital media, creating short films that blend photos, text, video clips, animations, and music using computer-based tools. This narrative research study narrates the experiences of students utilizing digital storytelling to enhance their English learning journey. Employing narrative inquiry design, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with fourth-semester students from the English Letters Department of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. In depth interview was conducted to obtain full information from the subject, and subsequently, the data was analyzed through the steps of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. The findings highlight the participant's early exposure to English through songs and movies, which laid a foundational understanding of the language. The study reveals that digital storytelling is a multifaceted learning medium. The participant engaged with English content on platforms like the BBC website, significantly improving his language skills. Creating his own digital stories further honed his speaking, listening, vocabulary, and writing abilities. Crafting scripts for digital storytelling particularly advanced his creative storytelling skills. Moreover, the study sheds light on the participant's challenges and successes with digital storytelling. One notable challenge was understanding native speakers' speech, which differed from the non-native speaker's pronunciation typically taught in schools. However, the interactive nature of digital storytelling provided an engaging and effective way to enhance language skills, surpassing traditional learning methods.

Keywords: *Digital Storytelling; EFL Student; Learning English Experiences*

Introduction

Digital storytelling has quite a lot of functions or benefits. Oskoz & Elola (2016) state that the benefits of digital stories are to improve listening skills, improve written or digital skills, acquire new vocabulary, improve literary skills, motivate, and develop imagination. Moreover, when digital stories are associated with L2, someone who studies digital stories can improve their English language as L2 skills through these digital stories.

Digital stories utilize both conventional storytelling techniques and other forms of digital multimedia, such as images, audio, and video (for example, graphics, text, recorded audio narration, video, and music to deliver information on a particular topic), Signes (2010). The term "digital storytelling" refers to storytelling amusement which uses digital media and technology such as wireless signals, the Internet, DVDs, and microprocessors Handler Miller (2004). In the simplest way Digital storytelling is an instructional technique that combines traditional narrative elements with digital technology, such as images, audio, video, and animation. Through digital storytelling, English language learning becomes more captivating and interactive for learners. Well-crafted stories can provide a more authentic and relevant context for language use in everyday situations.

Robin and Mcneil (2019), explain that in education digital stories are used in education and training to introduce new information, help people talk about it, and make abstract or conceptual information easier to understand. Based on these cases Robin (2016) states digital stories may be a valuable instructional tool for children of all ages and any grade levels who are faced with constructing their own stories. Digital storytelling also can have utilized to offer a variety of entertainment experiences (Handler Miller, 2004).

Wirawan (2020) stated that using media requires teachers to step away from traditional teaching methods and facilitate learning by motivating the students to use media for the learning process. Selection of the right media will create a good learning output. According to research findings from Yuliani and Hartanto (2022), the learning media used in this research is digital storytelling. It has been successful in attracting students' attention to English lessons. This can be proven by the increasing number of students who participate in class activities including group projects and question and answer sessions, even this is applied to online classes. Students that take part in the creation of digital storytelling learn to organize their thoughts, pose some questions, share their ideas, and build narratives which improves their abilities, Robin (2016).

Despite the increasing prevalence of digital storytelling, many people still do not fully understand its application, particularly in the context of learning a second language (L2), such as English. Digital stories hold numerous benefits for language learners, including improving listening skills, written or digital skills, vocabulary

acquisition, literary skills, motivation, and imagination (Oskoz & Elola, 2016). When applied to L2 learning, digital stories can significantly enhance a learner's English language skills.

However, in Indonesia, the use of digital storytelling in English language learning is not widely implemented. Consequently, many learners find it challenging to learn English through digital stories. The difficulties often stem from a lack of grammatical understanding and the challenge of translating stories between the mother tongue and English. Research by Hasibuan et al. (2013) highlights that students often struggle with English due to internal factors like self-confidence and external factors such as the teaching media used.

Choosing the right media and method for learning English, such as digital storytelling, is critical for successful language acquisition because it exposes students to cultural nuances and everyday language use. Digital storytelling, in particular, promotes an engaging and participatory learning experience by enhancing vocabulary, comprehension, and contextual awareness via well-crafted narratives. However, challenges arise as a result of unequal access to technology and resources, varying levels of technical proficiency among learners, and potential cultural and linguistic barriers that can impede comprehension and engagement. Furthermore, the passive nature of digital storytelling may restrict active speaking and writing practice, while digital distractions can impair learners' attention and comprehension. Despite these challenges, careful media selection and cultural relevance considerations can significantly improve students' English proficiency and learning outcomes.

In addition, ensuring the quality of content is crucial, as poorly designed stories can lead to confusion or disinterest. The readiness of educators to effectively integrate digital tools and platforms into language instruction is another concern, requiring proper training. Lastly, there is a need for the development of appropriate assessment tools to accurately measure both language proficiency and multimedia competencies. So, the identified problem in the research is the focus solely on analyzing participants' experiences in using Digital Storytelling to learn English, without addressing the broader challenges and considerations associated with this approach.

Given these challenges, it is crucial to explore the experiences of students using digital storytelling to learn English. This research aims to address this gap by examining the experiences of students at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan in creating and using digital stories for English language learning.

In the exploration of the effectiveness of Digital Storytelling as a tool for English language acquisition, a comprehensive analysis is undertaken, with a keen focus on examining participants' experiences. The study delves into the intricate

dynamics of how individuals engage with Digital Storytelling in the process of learning English. By scrutinizing the participants' perspectives, challenges, and successes, the research aims to uncover valuable insights into the impact of Digital Storytelling on language acquisition. This analytical approach not only sheds light on the multifaceted aspects of utilizing this innovative method but also contributes to the broader discourse on optimizing language learning strategies in the digital age. and the results will answer the following problems.

1. How does the students' experience before knowing digital storytelling as an English learning media?
2. How does the impact of digital storytelling on students' English skills?

Method

The researcher took narrative research as the method in this research. Narrative inquiry is the study of experience. According to Clandinin & Caine, 2018), narrative inquiry combines storytelling with research through the use of narratives as research data or as a tool for data analysis or presentation of findings. Based on Barkhuizen et al (2017), narrative inquiry is a well-established umbrella word for study incorporating stories; it is also the name of the field's premier interdisciplinary publication. Narrative Inquiry is more than retelling (or paraphrasing) people's stories, this research typically attempts to investigate the experience, values, and sense-making as reflected in stories; and approaches a deeper inquiry into these stories with an analytic (Bamberg, 2020).

The research subject for this study is the fourth semester students of the English Education Department in Universitas Ahmad Dahlan batch 2021/2022 who have been learned English using Digital Storytelling. The researchers used semi-structured interview guidelines to record students' learning experiences while using digital stories. It means that the researcher conducts an interview directly to the subject in which the interview is more informal, free questioning, and possible regarding their responses, views, attitude, beliefs, and other information.

The questions on the instrument of this research were about the participant's experience in learning by using storytelling, it was included before knowing storytelling, using storytelling and the effect after using storytelling.The data gathering process occurred on four occasions which started in April 2023, accompanied by the following specifics: Initially, the first data collection transpired through a face-to-face interaction with Bob's condition who looked very happy at that time.

The trustworthiness of data is essential in research to validate study findings, demonstrating how data is collected to ensure reliability and minimize errors, thus affecting the validity of final results. Shenton (2004) identifies four key considerations for data trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability,

and confirmability. Member checking, as noted by Birt et al. (2016), ensures data validity by returning interview or analyzed data to participants for verification. Additionally, narrative inquiry is employed for data collection with precision, consistency, and thoroughness, recording all data for documentation. Data analysis utilizes qualitative narrative inquiry methods, as described by Clandinin and Caine (2013), involving storytelling and research, and qualitative data analysis transforms raw data into understandable patterns and themes (Ngulube, 2015). Techniques from Sutton and Austin (2015) include data interpretation, transcribing, thematic coding, and reading between the lines to derive meaningful insights from participant narratives. The researcher will provide a summary of this methodology and a detailed discussion of findings in the subsequent chapter.

Results

The subject of this study is a student in the fourth semester of an English Literature program. This student, named Bob, has had a passion for English since he was young and possesses extensive experience in learning the language. Bob has earned numerous awards in English competitions, including those focused on English debate, speaking, and writing. One of his notable achievements was writing a storytelling piece, which he successfully presented to his lecturer.

From a young age, Bob was provided with various media to facilitate his English learning. He watched English-language cartoons and foreign films with subtitles, which greatly contributed to enhancing his English skills.

Bob was someone who knew enough English since he was young. Bob's family really supported him in speaking English, so he could easily got to know English. He also found an environment that supports him in speaking English. Therefore, it was not surprising that he spoke in English and had some experience since he was a child.

The story begins well before Bob becomes acquainted with digital storytelling. Bob grew up immersed in English stories, having watched cartoons and blockbuster films such as Spiderman and Superman. His exposure to English began at a young age, aided by a variety of media formats such as videos and video games. As a result, Bob became very familiar with the language, which helped him learn English more quickly. In addition to watching movies, he supplemented his education with books in elementary school.

"Well, learning English, there isn't really a clear starting point because even before I was in school, I used to watch cartoons like those on Cartoon Network. I also enjoyed watching movies like Spiderman and Superman back then. So yeah, from a young age, I was exposed to media like that. Even before that, I

started getting familiar with videos. I began playing games from a young age, and those games were in English, so from the very beginning, I was frequently exposed to the English language."

Bob's view in English was different when he was in Junior High School. Then, when he was at junior and senior high school, Bob's goal of learning English is to be able to communicate more properly, especially when he tried to communicate with people who use English. In other words, his goal in learning English was to increase his confidence when meeting and chatting with other people who speak English

"The purpose is to communicate more effectively, I guess, when I try to interact with people who use that language."

Bob embraced university life at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, immersing himself in academics while reflecting on his short- and long-term goals. He aimed to improve his English skills for academic endeavors in the near future, motivated by his deep love of the language. Bob aspired to excel on English proficiency tests such as the TOEFL. His love of the language served as a constant source of motivation, prompting him to experiment with various learning methods such as videos, films, and books. Despite enjoying activities such as video games and movies, Bob remained committed to learning English using any available media.

"As a child, my learning was considerably enriched by cartoons and video games. When I hit college, the motivation to strengthen my English got a bit more involved, like participating in things like TOEFL tests, events, and yeah, sometimes even competitions."

Bob, an avid English enthusiast, explored various media like cartoons, video games, and Western films such as Spiderman to learn English even before discovering storytelling as a learning tool. Despite already grasping English through these mediums, he found storytelling particularly captivating and envisioned its potential application in elementary and junior high school classrooms to foster student engagement. Bob's commitment to mastering English led him to constantly seek new learning resources, including storytelling. Once he learned about its widespread use in student competitions, he became even more intrigued by its potential as a learning medium. From then on, Bob recognized storytelling as a fascinating and effective tool for language acquisition.

"Well, probably since I realized that storytelling is one of the areas often included in competitions for students."

During his university years, Bob pursued both classroom and autonomous learning. He studied English extensively and honed his skills by watching English-language videos and using storytelling resources on the BBC website. Bob preferred autonomous learning because it felt more comfortable to him. He enjoyed using media, including storytelling, in English learning because he thought it was beneficial to both beginners and intermediate learners. Bob found digital storytelling to be particularly effective in improving his conversational English skills, and he recognized it impact on his speaking ability.

> *"There was one particular platform, analogous to BBC, that was exclusively dedicated to storytelling and I firmly believe that digital stories have exerted a significant influence on my abilities as a student, particularly with regard to my speaking skills."*

One day Bob found challenges, the challenge he faced when learning English by digital storytelling was understanding native speakers' speech because it was not the same as non-native speakers that are usually taught at school. He needed more time and more practice.

> *"The challenge is like when watching videos, I have to understand native speakers' conversation because it's not the same as what we typically learn in school."*

VBob then found that digital stories were a modern way of learning. He felt that it was different from traditional learning which was still in the old way as was mostly done by teachers in schools to teach students. Digital story telling was a very effective medium to improve Bob's speaking and also his listening, so speaking and listening can use digital storytelling media.

> *"Digital Storytelling is a very effective medium, especially for those who want to improve their speaking and listening skills."*

As Bob experimented with digital storytelling, he encountered difficulties with pronunciation but discovered that his listening skills improved significantly. Traditional learning methods seemed dull in comparison. He discovered various English components through BBC stories such as "Crocodile and Lion," which made learning more interesting. Bob improved his English skills significantly by imitating narrators' pronunciation and vocabulary.

> **"***Learning pronunciation directly by saying it ourselves, and this is incredibly beneficial for improving both listening and speaking skills. In the storytelling videos from BBC Learning, there was a story about a crocodile and a lion, if I remember correctly. That story was already captivating, and it was the components of the story that truly sparked my interest in learning English. The components of storytelling can significantly influence pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and overall interest in learning English."*

Bob was being motivated in learning English using digital stories. Digital stories made him able to increase the confidence to appear and to learn more about aspects of the English language such as speaking, listening, vocabulary, pronunciation, and others. Likewise, digital stories not only motivated him in improving speaking skills but also increased his confidence in telling stories.

> *"Yes, because it's not just about motivating the improvement in English speaking skills, but also boosting confidence in storytelling."*

Bob discovered that digital storytelling sparked his interest and motivation in learning English. Bob found digital storytelling to be more engaging than traditional lectures due to its interactive and audio-visual elements, which facilitated his understanding of a variety of subject matter. This engaging method not only kept Bob from getting bored but also improved his knowledge of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Bob was able to anticipate storylines and better understand conversations by using his newfound understanding of character dynamics, pronunciation, and intonation, which he acquired through storytelling.

> *"When we compare it with traditional teaching methods to boost motivation and enhance English language skills, in my view, digital storytelling proves to be more effective. Students could find themselves drawn to learn new words because digital storytelling involves playing character roles, making it more engaging for students or listeners. In my perspective, digital storytelling exerts a considerable influence on vocabulary acquisition, grammar learning, and pronunciation practice. Storytelling emphasizes the process of recounting a narrative, where pronunciation, intonation, and proper articulation must be precisely aligned with the character we are portraying."*

Digital storytelling had a significant impact on Bob's abilities, particularly in writing, speaking, reading, and listening. While writing narratives presented initial difficulties, reading helped him understand word formation and grammar. He improved his speaking skills by narrating stories, and listening to content increased

his understanding of English sentences. Reading scripts helped him improve his reading skills. Storytelling significantly improved Bob's speaking, reading, and listening skills, bolstering his overall English proficiency.

> *"In the aspect of writing, the challenge lies in being the creator of the storytelling or digital storytelling because the narrative is an essential element of storytelling. In terms of speaking, the stories are conveyed verbally to the general public, inevitably exercising my speaking skills, as I learned how to effectively deliver a story to make it understandable to others. As for reading, the aspect is not significantly involved unless I aim to present the storytelling, such as memorizing the script, which might serve as a knowledge-enhancing exercise for reading."*

Bob's goal on creating a digital story was for improving his English skill. He had often made digital stories for about a month. He was able to make one to two stories. Even though this was still a personal need, it has not been made public consumption. Bob has a YouTube channel and he intends to publish his work on YouTube.

> *"I fairly often engage in creating digital stories, sometimes producing one or two a month. I do have a YouTube channel and have had intentions of posting them there, but this plan has yet to be realized."*

Bob's skill in digital storytelling was supported by image media. He can make images on his own and he also took the images from the internet to support the characters in the story.

> *"We used… umm, we started by drawing the characters manually, and then we digitally colored them using Photoshop, if I'm not mistaken."*

Bob also usually takes videos of a character on the internet that matches the story he is going to present. So that when the storytelling is presented it will look interesting. After implementing it, Bob's storytelling went away better and he felt satisfied with his achievement.

> *"In my opinion, for tools and media in storytelling, animation and visuals, such as drawings, are more suitable for digital storytelling because they attract the students' interest."*

Creating digital stories proved to be more challenging than Bob initially anticipated, with motivation emerging as a key obstacle. He recognized that lack of motivation and innovation could hinder his storytelling abilities. Overcoming these challenges required Bob to allocate time for introspection and reflection. He found solace in quiet moments, seeking comfort in solitude while contemplating solutions. Bob found inspiration in serene environments, whether gazing at nature's beauty outside or from the comfort of his home. Viewing greenery or trees from his window uplifted his mood and boosted his productivity, enabling him to tackle storytelling challenges more effectively.

"In terms of 34 challenges, I predominantly face issues relating to a lack of motivation and innovation. My personal approach is to position myself in an open space, seated comfortably in solitude, and I prefer the vista from the higher floors, offering a comprehensive and pleasing view of the surroundings."

He recognized the benefits of audio-visual storytelling, including following the narrator's language style and enhancing understanding through related scenes. Incorporating digital stories into English learning proved highly effective for Bob. In college, Bob witnessed significant improvements in his English skills, particularly in vocabulary and pronunciation. Digital storytelling played a pivotal role in this progress, providing clear pronunciation examples and facilitating the learning of new vocabulary.

"In my opinion, there are numerous benefits, especially for students like me. It also greatly benefits young children, specifically those in primary and kindergarten levels. Combining digital storytelling with English language learning is, in my opinion, highly effective and beneficial. In terms of its impact, digital storytelling plays a significant role in enhancing my vocabulary and pronunciation."

Digital storytelling significantly bolstered Bob's confidence in articulating thoughts and speaking English fluently. By immersing himself in digital stories, Bob found it easier to engage in conversations and interact confidently in English, preparing him for various tests and competitions. Participating in storytelling competitions, Bob utilized demonstrations and improvisation techniques, which further enhanced his self-assurance. Sharing his work on social media platforms and joining online competitions allowed Bob to showcase his storytelling skills and gain recognition.

Through digital storytelling, Bob learned to retell stories effectively, initially struggling but persevering to improve his narrative abilities. Eventually, he mastered the art of storytelling, captivating audiences and effectively conveying narratives in public settings, earning acceptance and admiration from others.

> *"The impact is that I've become more confident in how I string words together. Thinking in English is more flexible, more fluid, more pleasant. How I express myself in English feels more unrestricted.*
> *Ah… so the habitual practice of storytelling profoundly impacts my self-confidence. Hence, it's not solely about gaining confidence in narrating a story; it also enhances self-assuredness in public presentation and appearance. In my experience, getting introduced to and listening to storytelling offers a fresh perspective. It prompts queries such as how to speak English, how to narrate in English, and how to speak English in front of many people."*

Bob's experience with digital storytelling helped him master both American and British accents, which improved his pronunciation skills. He found that watching movies or videos with subtitles was especially beneficial for improving his pronunciation and spelling. Bob's interest in storytelling inspired him to compete in English competitions, and his frequent viewing of BBC broadcasts allowed him to imitate various accents, thereby improving his speaking skills. Overall, Bob found digital storytelling enjoyable and engaging, particularly because of its animated format, which he thought made learning English more enjoyable.

> *"If subtitles were provided, it also aided me in understanding the correct spelling of certain words. Digital storytelling has taught me a lot about pronunciation, articulation, and even accents. In my opinion, learning English through digital storytelling is a fun experience, especially because it involves animations that make it more engaging."*

Digital storytelling was good for Bob, especially when he was in Kindergarten and Elementary School because it affected his speaking and listening skills. So, the use of this media is considered very appropriate.

> *"Overall, digital storytelling is highly beneficial for improving skills like speaking and listening."*

After incorporating digital storytelling into his college experience, Bob noticed a significant improvement in his pronunciation skills compared to his junior and senior high school years. He found the learning process during those earlier years monotonous and often struggled to comprehend the pronunciation of his lecturers. Pronunciation held immense importance for Bob, as mishearing a word could completely alter its meaning.

"Even when my lecturer would explain something, I would sometimes find their pronunciation difficult to comprehend."

Bob acknowledged the numerous benefits of digital storytelling for language learners like himself, emphasizing its role in enhancing English skills. He recommended platforms like YouTube for beginners to explore various types of storytelling and highlighted BBC Storytelling for Kids as a valuable resource for children learning English. Additionally, he mentioned BBC storytelling for adults and suggested using Google to find tools for creating digital stories.

"Yes, I still use digital stories because they are excellent for making my English skills even better. "For those seeking recommendations on using digital stories? My personal experience suggests that beginners can find a plethora of digital stories on platforms like YouTube. This includes stories for children, like those provided by BBC Storytelling for Kids, which are abundantly available."

Bob emphasized the effectiveness of digital storytelling in improving speaking and listening skills, as well as pronunciation. He stressed the importance of correctly understanding pronunciation in storytelling to avoid misinterpretations of words. Overall, Bob believed that digital storytelling was an invaluable medium for language learners seeking to enhance their English proficiency.

"In my opinion, for people who want to learn English and more, digital storytelling is a very effective medium, especially for those who want to improve their speaking and listening skills. Digital storytelling is an extremely effective medium for improving these two English language skills, which are speaking and listening abilities."

Discussion
Bob's Experience with Digital Storytelling in Learning English

Bob's journey in learning English began at an early age, fueled by his exposure to English cartoons and later, western movies like Spiderman during his junior high school years. His approach to learning English was varied, incorporating textbooks, movies, talk shows, and most notably, storytelling. Digital storytelling, in particular, played a crucial role in enhancing his language skills.

Through digital storytelling, Bob was able to focus on key language aspects such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening skills. This experience aligns with the findings of Wilson (2002), who notes that storytelling is an inherent human activity that helps reinforce language understanding and skills. By engaging with stories, learners rephrase and retell in their own words, which solidifies their language comprehension. Furthermore, as Georgiou & Verdugo (2010) highlight, storytelling provides a meaningful context for integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing, making it particularly effective for young learners.

Bob's enthusiasm for English also led him to create his own stories during college, demonstrating a learner-centered approach that aligns with Ling in Julia (2015), who describes how storytelling aids in processing information and effective communication. This interactive method fosters language development by encouraging learners to retell stories using different word constructions, thereby enhancing both comprehension and verbal skills.

The Impact of Digital Storytelling on Bob's English Proficiency

The impact of digital storytelling on Bob's English proficiency was profound. It helped him significantly improve his speaking, listening, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, reading, and writing skills. By regularly engaging with stories, Bob became accustomed to the accents of native speakers, which enhanced his listening skills and, subsequently, his pronunciation. His vocabulary expanded as he encountered new words in the stories, prompting him to learn and use them in context. Additionally, by imitating conversations from the stories, Bob's speaking skills improved, supporting Cameron's (2001) assertion that storytelling is a valuable tool for practicing listening and verbal expression.

Bob's experience also underlines the potential for storytelling as a teaching method in classrooms. He believes that storytelling can be effectively used by teachers to enhance English learning, as it encourages students to express their feelings and improve their pronunciation through the retelling of stories. This belief is supported by Bhakti & Marwanto (2018), who suggest that storytelling can

be a collaborative activity, fostering interaction between teachers and learners and contributing to the overall development of language skills.

Conclusion

The study's conclusions show the complex journey that participants took when using Digital Storytelling in their English language learning experience, outlining four distinct phases: pre-exposure, implementation, creation, and impact. Participants demonstrated a strong command of the English language prior to participating in digital storytelling. This proficiency was developed through a variety of media, including cartoon films like Spider-Man, Batman, and video games. Participants showed a great deal of interest in digital storytelling when it was introduced into their lessons. They saw it as a way to improve speaking, listening, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and understanding intonation nuances, among other English language skills.

In the process of creating digital stories, participants discovered that creating them was enjoyable and enriching—even though they were primarily created for their own use and academic presentations rather than for public consumption. Even though they were never published officially, the participants' meticulous scripting of their stories made these endeavors a significant contribution to their writing abilities. After use, the effects of digital storytelling were observed in observable improvements in several areas of English. The ability to distinguish between American and British accents was reported as enhanced by the participants, who also had better listening and pronunciation skills. In addition, even though participants' speaking confidence needed improvement, they were able to recount stories with ease. Their vocabulary grew as they became adept at recognizing and correctly pronouncing new terms as well as the subtle differences between the vocabulary of American and British English.

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