The Challenges of Using Digital Storytelling in ESL Classroom among Form 3 Secondary School Students

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Abstract

The technology has introduced innovative teaching tools, including the use of digital storytelling in educational settings. This study explores the challenges students face in English classroom when digital storytelling is used and their strategies to overcome. 20 participants were involved in this qualitative research through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed that students struggle with lack of ideas, limited vocabulary, constructing sentences, and technical issues with laptop. The study also discusses the strategies students took to overcome the challenges. Students seek help from teachers and peers, refer to different digital story and listen to music as it aids them to relax and find ideas. The findings highlight the significance of these applications in enhancing students' learning experiences in English classroom, with insights valuable for administrators and teachers.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Challenges, Secondary School Students

Introduction

The integration of digital storytelling (DST) in academic settings has increased over the years due to its effectiveness and the benefits it offers to learners. DST originated in the United States and has since spread to Asian and European educational contexts over the past three decades, enhancing both storytelling and learning through digital media (Wu & Chen, 2020).

Storytelling has been a significant aspect of the cultures of Asean countries for many years. It has long been used to convey narratives, cultural values, messages, and moral lessons. Storytelling serves as a powerful medium for engaging audiences' attention, thereby enabling the effective transmission of information without interference (Angelita et al., 2024). The transition from conventional storytelling to DST is notable. In the digital era, the shift from traditional to digital storytelling forms is considered imperative. (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Smeda et al., (2014) defines DST as an art form of oral storytelling that has evolved into a modern medium, enabling almost anyone to use readily available hardware and software to

create personal narratives by combining still and moving images, music, sound effects, and the author's imagination. Furthermore, Normann, (2011) describes DST as a short narrative, typically two to three minutes in length, in which the storyteller uses their own voice to tell their personal story. The emphasis is on the personal element, which may be connected to other characters, settings, interests, or any aspect that enhances the personal quality of the narrative.

DST is combining narrative elements with digital media to create stories. It involves the use of computer-based tools to craft stories that integrate images, text, audio, and video, enhancing both the storytelling process and the audience's engagement. DST includes a narrative methodology that employs digital instruments to produce multimodal narratives (Yu & Wang, 2025). Numerous definitions have been proposed for DST, yet they predominantly align with the concept of integrating the art of storytelling with diverse modalities of digital multimedia, including, but not limited to, photographs, audio recordings, and videos; the term encompasses a blend of digital images, written narratives, audio descriptions, video presentations, and musical elements, all focused on educating the audience about a given subject (Robin, 2006).

Literature Review

DST serves as an innovative tool which unites writing with multimedia elements to create a complete system for English language learning in secondary schools. The combination of narrative structures with digital media in DST leads to increased pupil engagement and motivation and better language skills overall. The implementation of DST has demonstrated positive effects on three key areas: digital literacy and writing abilities and complete language proficiency. The development of digital narratives through methodology teaches pupils reading and writing skills as well as speaking and listening abilities and viewing skills which makes education more engaging and enjoyable (Tobin & Blanton, 2014).

Research shows that DST implementation leads to improved narrative writing skills in pupils because pupils achieve better writing assessment results and express positive feedback (Azmi Zakaria & Abdul Aziz, 2019; Diva Akbar, 2024; Puspitarini & Junaedi, 2024). According to Azmi Zakaria & Abdul Aziz, (2019) participants identified DST as an essential tool which drives pupils to write better.

Digital story functions as an instrument to enhance both narrative creativity and engagement levels. The use of DST enables pupils to discover new storytelling methods and multimedia tools which results in better narrative organization and increased student interest in writing activities (Purnamasari, 2024). The incorporation of multimedia elements including audio and video and graphics within storytelling creates an interactive learning environment that boosts student motivation and participation.

The technical requirements associated with DST is a significant obstacle. The process of digital narrative creation requires advanced skills to operate video editing software and audio recording equipment and multimedia platforms. The lack of technological skills among learners leads to both dissatisfaction and reluctance toward accepting DST (Asnas, 2024; Nuroh et al., 2024). The technical obstacles in learning parallel the creative challenges that both learners and educators face. The process of creating an interesting story and selecting

proper multimedia elements and maintaining plot coherence proves difficult for those who lack experience with this method (Aldemir Engin, 2023; Nuroh et al., 2024). The workshop participants who were mathematics educators struggled to develop an engaging dramatic inquiry and successfully merge multimedia elements during their DST training (Aldemir Engin, 2023). One of the most significant challenges is time constraint. The short intervention within the formal school syllabus restricted the depth and richness of the storytelling process (Wan Mohd Nasir et al., 2024). Participants often lack sufficient time for discussions, brainstorming, and in depth content development, leading to simpler or less creative story content. Given that DST relies heavily on detailed narratives and multimedia integration, yet often limited by a packed school curriculum.

In pupils' context, digital story has potential to enhance pupils' engagement and motivation. However, pupils perceive it as a challenging tool. Pupils found it hard to use digital story due to unequal access to technology and digital literacy skills among pupils. Such disparities affect inequities in the quality of digital narratives created by pupils, as well as in their capacity to engage effectively in DST tasks (Noari, 2023; Stang & Steen, 2023). Certain pupils may perceive DST as a source of inspiration and empowerment, others may experience reluctance or uncertainty regarding their capability to generate digital narratives due to different level of motivation and engagement. Such disparities can result in quality variations of pupils outcomes and the overall efficacy of DST as a pedagogical instrument (Asnas, 2024; Ramalia, 2023).

Tables and Figures
The thematic analysis from semi-structured interview has highlighted the following challenges pupils face in using DST in an English classroom.

Table 1
Challenges students face in using DST in an English classroom

Themes	Data
Lack of ideas	" *Saya tak pasti cara nak start dan akhir jalan cerita saya.*" I am not sure how to start and end my story.
	"Picking a topic, do not stop me from blur. It took me so much to complete my storyline."
	"I know beginning, but not the 'tengah' and ending"
	"Clueless to find idea"
Limited Vocabulary	"Challenging aspect is finding proper words"
	"I know what to say, but I don't have words to write"
	"I kept repeating the same words because I did not know perkataan lain yang sama maksud"
Difficulty in constructing sentences	"I found it difficult to form correct sentences"
	"My sentences were often short"
	"I needed a lot of time to revise my sentences"
	"Constructing nice sentences was challenging"
Technical issues with laptop	"Kadang-kadang, I feel frustrated because the technical problems interrupt my focus on the story"
	"Changing laptops because of technical issue make me mad"

Furthermore, data from semi-structured interview also gives insights on what are the strategies students used to overcome the challenges they face in using DST in an English classroom.

Table 2
Strategies to overcome the challenges students face in using DST in an English classroom

Themes	Data
Seek help from teachers and peers	When I did not understand how to continue my story, I asked my teacher for guidance, on how to organize my ideas
	Discussing my story with friends helped me get new ideas
	My classmates helped me correct my sentences and suggested better words
	Working together with friends made the digital storytelling task easier to complete.
Refer to different digital story	I referred to sample digital stories provided by my teacher
	Watching other digital stories helped me write my own ideas
	I learned how to combine images and text effectively by looking at digital story
Listen to music	Listening to music helped me relax
	Music helped me focus better while writing

Discussion and Conclusion
One of the prominent challenges identified is pupils' lack of ideas, particularly in developing and structuring storylines. Many pupils expressed uncertainty in starting, developing the middle part, and concluding their stories. Past study by shows that generating ideas for story scripts is considered one of the most challenging parts of the digital storytelling process, as learners report difficulties in brainstorming and coming up with coherent ideas (Nawal & Jumariati, 2023). Moreover, students reported limited vocabulary and constructing sentences. Pupils frequently mentioned difficulty in finding suitable words to express their ideas and a tendency to repeat the same words due to limited lexical knowledge. Many ESL learners face important challenges in writing well because of the limited vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge, and struggle to structure their thoughts well (Zulaikha Aris et al., 2025). In addition to language-related challenges, technical issues with laptops were identified too. Pupils reported feelings of frustration when technical problems interrupted their focus and progress such as failure to operate the given website to write their story. The lack of technological skills among learners leads to both dissatisfaction and reluctance toward accepting DST (Asnas, 2024; Nuroh et al., 2024)

Through the interview findings, a clear picture emerges of strategies taken by students to overcome the challenges when using digital storytelling. Students seek help from teachers and peer to complete the task given. The findings are in line with previous study by Ting & Shukor, 2022) showed the most improvement in terms of choices of word, sentence coherency when peer learning is used in an English classroom that utilized DST. Another strategy employed by pupils is referring to sample digital stories. By analysing example digital stories provided by teachers or viewed online, pupils were able to gain ideas, understand story structure, and learn how to integrate images with text. As a way of creating a digital story reiteration of historical events, autobiographies and adaptations of a character from

storybook (Nadia Raslee, 2021). The wide options allow students to narrate a digital story creatively. Some pupils reported listening to music as a strategy to enhance focus and reduce stress during the writing process. It is in line with previous study by Kim et al., (2024) where a majority of students (94.55 from 200) prefer to practice incorporating music as a background accompaniment during language study. Furthermore, 142 of them stated that listening to music is beneficial role in their foreign language learning, perceiving it not just as a stress-reliever but also a valuable tool enhancing language skills.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the utilization DST
in English classroom comes with some challenges and strategies. Students struggle with lack of ideas, limited vocabulary, constructing sentences, and technical issues with laptop. Strategies taken were seek help from teachers and peers, refer to different digital story and listen to music as it aids them to relax and find ideas. In addition, DST plays a role in helping students organize ideas more systematically and makes it easier for them to develop a coherent storyline, making writing activities more interesting. Future research is suggested to focus on strategies that can increase students' motivation to take part in DST in English classroom.

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