

Digital Story Project: Using Technology to Foster Learners' Speaking Skill

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Abstract

The availability of technologies for instructional purposes has grown rapidly. One of them is using a digital story to teach English for polytechnic students. Actually, it is not a new learning platform, but few teachers apply it in their own classroom especially in the Asian context where English is viewed as a foreign language. To fill this void, the researcher deployed digital storytelling which involved students in creating digital stories and voicing their experience orally. This article further explains the implementation of digital storytelling as a pedagogical language input to foster the students speaking skills which involved the first semester students in Basic English course. Besides, the students engage actively in describing their experiences and showing visual background, which was assisted by a technological application available. The practical implication of this project is that the EFL teachers are able to deploy digital storytelling in their classroom as a medium to bridge learners through meaningful context and social practices.

Keywords: digital storytelling, speaking, project, learning platform

Practical context

Teaching English in a vocational context has been a worldwide issue since it prepares learners to be ready to face a workplace. Within the framework of vocationally-oriented language learning, it refers to a program of “enabling the learner to communicate not only in the (future) workplace but also provides a more general competence that integrates vocational, linguistics, and social skills” (Egloff, as cited in Vogt & Kantelinen, 2013:64). Many efforts have been done to foster the quality of teaching in the field of vocational English especially on speaking skills, but most lecturers pinpoint on drilling and making pseudo-communication activity as reported by (Wijayanti, 2017). They asked their students to practice dialogue stated in the students’ workbook, then performed it in front of the class. The teachers did not let the students have chances to explore ideas or improvise the content of the dialog. This one-way activity results negative impacts on them since they did not get social practices, and meaningful context to actualize their ideas or feelings, but in fact they need them to face the real workplace. In this digital era, learners at university level have a

massive number of experiences in using the digital platform. It involves their digital interaction with other people through social media, for instance Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Besides, they are also active users of various online applications, particularly for academic support (online dictionary, *Clear Scanner*, *PhotoGrid*, *kinemaster*, etc). Those are easily accessed because of the advent of mobile technology. With this mind, the demand for teaching and learning English has been changing. The deployment of technology in classroom instruction is really needed to give new, fun and comfortable nuances. The use of digital stories for teaching English particularly in the field of vocational English can be a challenging activity since it requires the learners to have social practice directly. The extant research on the use of digital stories in university level (Lee, 2014) suggests that creating a digital story facilitates learners to undergo authentic communicative purposes, gain a new perspective on current social, political and cultural issues, and broaden knowledge. Based on this empirical evidence, the writer would like to report the experience of applying digital storytelling with learners who were in the first semester of Food Industrial Technology study program. She believes that applying digital storytelling can be a pedagogical language input for the learners to use English in a meaningful context. She considers this as a new teaching dimension because teachers seldom utilize digital storytelling as a part of language activities in classroom instruction particularly in the EFL context.

Digital storytelling provides more activities in which enable the learners to engage actively during teaching learning process. It is also a part of Basic English subject curriculum so as to facilitate them with more English lessons in a fun and creative way. They took this subject in their first semester. They were required to involve actively in every step of digital story creation. This project took place in one State Polytechnic in East Java, Indonesia in the 2018 / 2019 academic year.

In this class, where the project implemented, the students participated in a one-hour lecturing class and two hours practicum class held once a week. Since the lecturer taught in Food Technology study program, she focused it on the field of food industrial technology. A total of thirty (30) students took part in this digital storytelling project. In this digital storytelling, making them involved in every step, would create great impacts on them since they communicated to each other using English, shared opinions or ideas, negotiated among members and appreciated each other.

Why is Digital Storytelling implemented?

The implementation of the Digital Storytelling project has been investigated frequently. An empirical study suggests that digital stories provided EFL students with authentic input and a longer time of exposure to the target language (Verdugo & Belmonte, 2007). The previous research on the use of digital storytelling centered on university students (adult learners) shows that the integration of digital news stories and content-based learning can help create both more frequent communication among students and a greater sense of

community and of interactive learning than would have otherwise been possible within the traditional classroom setting (Lee, 2014). From this situation, it shows that the extant literature rarely focuses on adult learners, specifically on vocational context. To fill this void, this article reports on the deployment of digital storytelling at the polytechnic level, particularly on food industrial technology context. To start with, the writer would like to highlight background information on ESP, specifically on vocational purposes. It enables learners to communicate not only in the (future) workplace but also provides a more general competence that integrates vocational, linguistics, and social skills (Eglof, as cited in Vogt & Kantelinen, 2013:64). To meet with the learners' needs, the lecturers need to do need analysis. Widodo (2015) further defines that it is an initial step in language materials development, and provides the basis for the design and use of curriculum materials, such as lesson plans, syllabi, textbooks/lesson units, and test papers. Yet, many lecturers still rely upon and utilize commercial ESP books. Sometimes, the contents do not meet the learners' need. As a result, the learners do not get enough space to develop their new and different experiences in using English which is relevant to their future workplace.

To face this digital era, stakeholders have involved technology to support workflows in their companies. With this mind, the learners have to learn, explore, and get new experiences in utilizing many digital aids to support the workflow in the company. The advent of Web 2.0 technology brought new dimensions to foreign language learning and afforded learners' new avenue to explore the functional use of the target language (Lee, 2014:338). This situation requires the lecturers to create activities that enable the learners to involve and engage in different digital tools. To meet this need, the digital storytelling project was deployed for several reasons. Firstly, digital storytelling harnesses the power of audiovisuals to engage students' visual and auditory senses in ways that printed textbooks can never accomplish (Suwardy et al., 2013:110). In relation with this idea, Pounsford (2007) suggests that the combination of text, image, and audio motivates learners to engage more deeply in learning the target language. As the new dimension comes, they have already prepared themselves to be digitally involved in many aspects of life, such as utilizing social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and many others). Therefore, when teachers explore teaching activities by involving technology as a part of classroom instruction, the learners engage enthusiastically since they are used to it.

Secondly, during crafting digital stories, the learners undergo creative learning experiences. It refers to work collaboration, ideas sharing, and meaning negotiation. Thirdly, by applying digital storytelling, the learners have chances to utilize various types of literacies, including multimodal (audio, animation and video) and multimedia forms of communication (text, image, voice) to compile digital stories (Lee, 2014). Lestariyana and Widodo (2018:490) also support the statement that digital storytelling can be defined as a multimodal text and created with technological tools (e.g., Windows Movie Maker, Microsoft PowerPoint, or Photo Story 3) that interweave images, background, music, sound, and scripts/subtitles (if any). Those various activities in digital storytelling provide

chances for the students to learn English more effectively because they need to integrate language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, and also grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation to create meaningful content.

How is Digital Storytelling implemented?

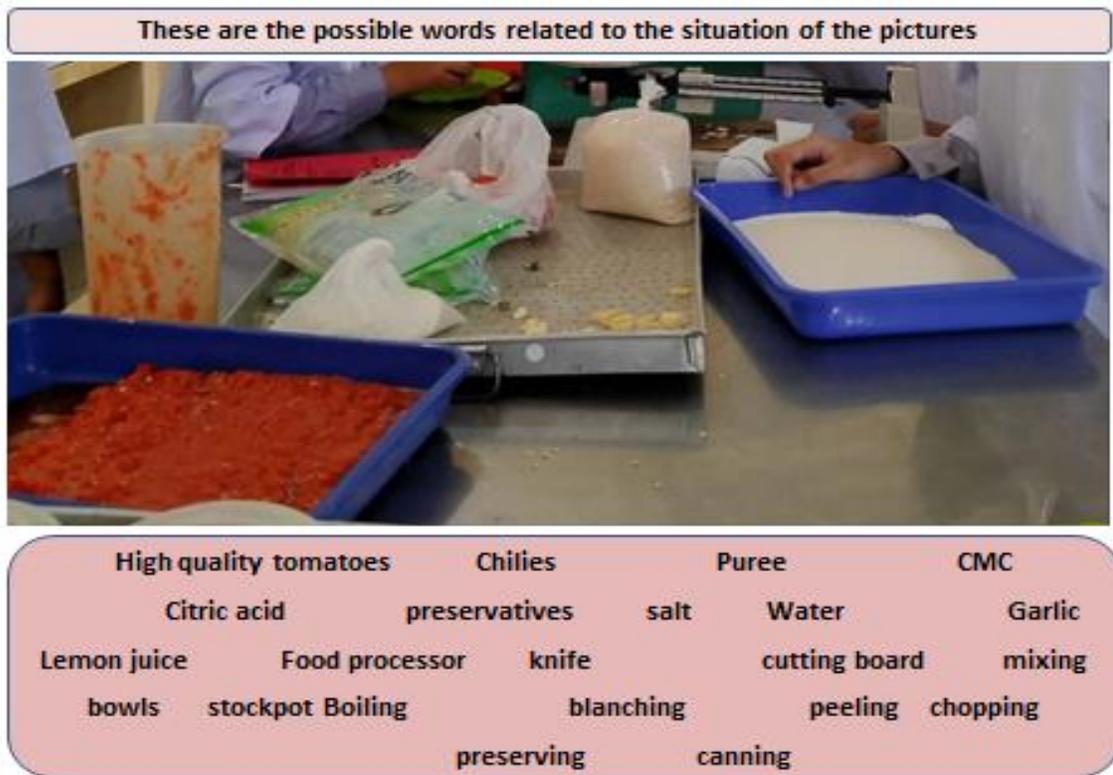
Digital storytelling appeared from the combination of multi-media and storytelling in order to meet the various needs of individuals, such as communication and self-expression, and to facilitate teaching and improve skills (Sarica & Usluel, 2015). With this mind, the activities involved in digital storytelling enabled the students to have further engagement with the topic learned. Before implementing this digital storytelling project, the lecturer focused on basic English material. For preparing the students to have a survival English lesson, she taught integrated language skills by inserting language components, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. In this situation, these fundamental activities served as a bridge before coming to the digital storytelling project. These bridging activities created a comfortable environment for the students to express their ideas in English. These activities took two weeks. In week 3, the lecturer commenced the digital storytelling project. The students run into several steps, such as group divisions, brainstorming, observation, writing the content (script), creating digital storytelling, and story circle. To begin with, the lecturer invited the learners to create a group consisting of 5 students because the class contains 30 students. Each student had a different role in crafting digital storytelling. The writer adapted the students' role in each group suggested by Lestariyana and Widodo (2018). The adapted students' role was a story narrator, photographer, content writer, language editor and digital story creator. To conclude, by giving a different role to each member, the students were assured to involve and engage deeply in creating this digital storytelling project.

After finishing these group divisions, the lecturer facilitated the learners to do brainstorming. Because the students were from Food Industrial Technology study program, so the lecturer let them choose from their own context. Each group was free to pick any possible topic based on the scope of food industrial technology (e.g., *making canned fish, food packaging, hygiene and sanitation, making dairy products, food and beverage processing*). They negotiated and talked about these topics before coming to decisions. They went through deep discussion since each member had his/her opinions and reasons. After undergoing the discussion, they picked selected topics, such as *canned fish processing* (Group 1), *making tomato sauce* (group 2), *making cheese* (Group 3), *food safety* (group 4), *food preservation* (group 5), *making prol tape (fermented cassava-based cake)* (group 6). These topics became a foundation to develop the digital storytelling project.

Following the brainstorming activity, in week 4, the students were asked to visit selected home industries or factories and took photographs of what they observed. This activity allowed the learners to do an intensive observation, shot different scenes, such as

ingredients preparation, tools hygiene, the process, and food packaging. They were also free to have an interview with the owner or person who was in charge of it. In this situation, they had a further discussion to develop and broaden their knowledge; therefore they had enough ideas to develop the project.

After having observation, interview and photographs documentation, in Week 5, the learners had a further discussion with other members to select some photographs. The student whose role was a photographer showed collected photographs to his members. Since, there were abundant photographs; they worked collaboratively to select the best photographs as the material to develop the digital storytelling project. Following this picture selection, the lecturer accompanied them to write a story based on a series of taken photographs. The first, the lecturer guided the students to make a list of keywords related to selected photographs. They wrote any vocabulary to describe the situation in the pictures (see figure 1). This activity was aiming at facilitating them to bridge the context, so they could choose appropriate vocabularies



After having words preparation, the lecturer facilitated the learners to write sentences to describe each picture. The student whose role was a content writer led their members to work collaboratively to create captions from each taken picture. These captions would benefit them to arrange all ideas based on the process they had observed. Figure 2 presents how they constructed ideas based on the taken pictures. Since it was not easy constructing the ideas, the lecturer allowed them to use an online or mobile English dictionary. A

member whose function as a language editor also showed his participation in editing the language used, such as grammatical aspects. In this activity, the lecturer assisted them by providing leading questions, such as (1) *What do you observe?* (2) *What place is it?* (3) *What ingredients are there?* (4) *What are the people doing there?*



The workers are washing the kitchen utensils



The workers are starting the process of making tomato sauce. She is grinding the spices.

Figure 2. Examples of giving captions

After facilitating them to write the captions, the lecturer taught them about generic structures of narrative text. It covered orientation, a series of events, and reorientation or coda. She also assisted them to use appropriate lexico-grammatical features and some discourse markers. These components supported them in creating a well-constructed narration of the taken pictures.

In Week 5, before entering the creation of digital storytelling, the learners worked together to make an outline and a draft of a story for about 150 – 200 words. This collaboration activity enabled them to generate ideas effectively. The lecturer walked around the groups and assisted them to finish the draft. Sometimes, she guided them to find appropriate words to express the ideas. The learners' vignette of the story draft, entitled "Making Tomato Sauce" is presented in Figure 3.

Following these outlining and drafting activities, in Week 6, the lecturer invited the learners to start making the digital story. They got freedom in choosing any software or application in making the digital story, such as Windows Movie Maker, Microsoft Photo Story, Kinemaster, ChatterPix Kids, or Toontastic. The learners were free to create the digital story as they liked. They could add sound effects, background music, narration recording, or even giving any additional motions. During these activities, they decided the things together and worked collaboratively in creating this digital story. The student whose role was digital story creator was in charge of making this digital storytelling. The creator

imported the pictures and text into the software, or application. In this step, the narrator also did his recording by being assisted by the other members. After recording the content, he gave it to the digital story creator to be inserted in the story. The students created this digital story in the classroom for about two hours.



These photograph show how to make tomato sauce. If you want to have delicious and tasty tomato sauce, then you have to follow the following steps. The first, you have to prepare all ingredients, such as fresh, big, and ripe tomatoes, squeezed lemon juice, salt, garlic, chillies (optional), and sugar. Secondly, you have to prepare the equipment, for instance stockpot, mixing bowl, cutting board, food processors, knife, and sterilized jars. After preparing all ingredients and equipment, you may start making it. The first step is boiling water in a stockpot. Drop tomatoes into boiling waters until the skin starting to wrinkle. After that, lift them out and place them in a bowl of iced water. Transfer the cooled tomatoes into another bowl, then peel them. Place them into a food processors and process until smooth. Transfer the tomato puree into a new stockpot until simmering. Do seasoning by adding pinch of salt, sugar, lemon juice and grated garlic. Stir it for about 30 minutes. Let the sauce cool. You can keep them in a jar. This is it; Gorgeous taste of tomato sauce can be served on your plate.

Figure 3. The leaners' vignette of the story draft, entitled "Making Tomato Sauce"

Upon completion of the digital storytelling, in Week 7, the students needed to prepare an exhibition. They shared their digital stories by implementing digital stories circles. They were ready with their laptop and digital stories in each group. The four (4) students went around the exhibition to watch the six videos enthusiastically, while another student was having a role as a host. The host played a role of assisting and facilitating the guests who visited his home.

When the four students visited another home, they discussed and evaluated the content of the story whether it was relevant to the topic or not. They asked some questions to the host when they found some difficulties in understanding the video. In this situation, the host answered and gave clarification to the guests. The guests also highlighted and took notes of the key points for further discussion when they were returning home later. In this situation, the lecturer moved around by observing the students' small group discussions. After finishing the digital stories circle, the students went back to their homes. When returning home, they discussed the six videos, such as examining and finding the meaning

of unfamiliar words and expressions. They shared their opinions about the chosen pictures or even the contents of the six videos they had watched.

After engaging in the digital story circle activities, they were asked to have reflective activity. The lecturer gave two reflective questions, then they answered them individually. The questions were: (1) What new ideas can you get by watching the digital storytelling? (2) What did you learn from these activities? These reflective answers showed the students' enthusiasm, appreciation, and pride in creating this digital storytelling project.

Reflection on the Implementation of Digital Storytelling

Principally, implementing digital storytelling facilitated the students with a new dimension of learning English. They shared, collaborated, and discussed together among group members. They showed strong cooperation to voice their life experience through this project. During all activities in the digital storytelling project, the learners involved actively to make decisions in selecting appropriate photographs, creating captions for the photographs, making outlines and developing story drafts, and finally creating digital stories. With this mind, the digital storytelling project was used as a means of cultivating the students' creativity in using the language, therefore they engaged deeply in the process of learning.

Engaging the students in every activity of the digital storytelling project exhibited beneficial impacts on them. This project was a bridge to connect what they got in the classroom with the real experience in order to facilitate them a better learning situation. Digital stories also provided the real context of how things may work in the real workplace (Suwardy et al., 2013). For this reason, they were able to practice English orally in an authentic situation confidently. Since it was a new platform of learning for them, they were very enthusiastically participated in utilizing this technology to craft their digital storytelling. Students' active participation could not be seen only on the use of technology, but also on the ability of using English. The basic purpose of applying this digital storytelling project was to ensure that the learners build their language skills while staying focused and interested in the process of learning and also acquiring reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills (Alba, 2014). Therefore, they felt comfortable in using English because their members always helped and supported them to be active in every activity. By having support from members, they could work collaboratively and effectively as a part of teamwork in order to achieve a great digital storytelling project. Besides, the students' communication skills were getting improved. All activities in this digital storytelling project required all members to negotiate meaning, share ideas, and express their feeling interactively. They shaped their interaction among peers using English successfully in this collaborative digital storytelling project. In conclusion, the project can be seen as a pedagogical tool to enhance language learning, therefore it enabled the learners to take part comfortably during the activities.

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