

## The Implementation of Digital Storytelling in an Online Classroom to Help Promoting Students' Critical Thinking Skills

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**Abstract:** Over the last few months, the Covid-19 pandemic has turned traditional learning into online learning. As a result, EFL teachers are expected to utilize digital technology to aid students to meet learning objectives. Through digital technology, EFL teachers could select their learning strategy, including storytelling, in their instructional practices. This study portrays the implementation of digital storytelling in EFL online classrooms and the student's critical thinking skills promoted by the learning strategy. The study employs the case study qualitative method. The data was collected through observation and interview by utilizing an observation checklist as well as a list of questions. The study reveals that the implementation of digital storytelling was conveyed in a proper step by optimizing various media. The students also show positive responses through their active engagement during the learning process. In addition, students can develop their critical thinking skills by presenting their ideas and active discussion with their friends.

**Keywords:** digital storytelling; online classroom; secondary school students

### Penerapan *Digital Storytelling* di Kelas Daring untuk Membantu Meningkatkan Keterampilan Berpikir Kritis Siswa

**Abstrak.** Selama beberapa bulan terakhir, pandemi Covid-19 telah mengubah pembelajaran tradisional menjadi pembelajaran daring. Akibatnya, guru EFL (Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing) diharapkan memanfaatkan teknologi digital untuk membantu siswa memenuhi tujuan pembelajaran. Melalui teknologi digital, guru EFL dapat memilih strategi pembelajaran mereka, termasuk mendongeng, dalam praktik pembelajaran mereka. Penelitian ini menggambarkan implementasi *digital storytelling* di kelas daring EFL dan keterampilan berpikir kritis siswa yang disajikan melalui strategi pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi kasus kualitatif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi dan wawancara dengan memanfaatkan daftar periksa observasi serta daftar pertanyaan. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa implementasi *digital storytelling* disampaikan dalam langkah yang tepat dengan mengoptimalkan berbagai media. Para siswa juga menunjukkan respon positif melalui keterlibatan aktif mereka selama proses pembelajaran. Selain itu, siswa dapat mengembangkan kemampuan berpikir kritisnya dengan mempresentasikan idenya dan aktif berdiskusi dengan temannya.

**Kata kunci:** digital storytelling; kelas daring; siswa sekolah menengah

## Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has struck the world over the last few months. It consequently shifted the learning mode from traditional learning into online learning. To cope with such a problem, both EFL teachers and students should employ digital technology in learning practices as technology offers some benefits for them. Binkley et al (2012) mention that the current method of schooling should lead students to challenge the forthcoming time, be prepared for their future work, just as lifetime learning. It is further supported by the fact that the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands learners to be ready in implementing the materials they have learned at school and performing their digital literacy skills to overcome the possible challenges in daily life practices. It is in line with Rong and Noor (2019) who state that introduction to innovation is imperative for the current age to set up their future.

Regarding this, Digital Storytelling (DST) has been seen as an alternative way of teaching during this online learning condition. DST opens an opportunity for students to develop their own stories. It is supported by Skouge & Rao (2009) who revealed that the implementation of digital stories is welcomed by students due to the chance of creating personal digital stories. Also, DST opens an opportunity for students to find out the connection between the material with real-life experience (Hung, Hwang, Huang, 2012).

Classroom learning is mostly familiar with digital storytelling. It is one of the strategies that can combine technology and the use of advertising. At the Center for Digital Storytelling in California, the beginning of the rise of digital storytelling is expected to occur in the late 1980s (Lambert, 2009). DST can be described as a combination of images, sound, and video combined with the narration and emotions of an individual (Educause, 2007). In simple words, DST is a digital visualization of a story accompanied by sound, music, or pictures. Digital storytelling has beneficial effects on the skills of students from a

pedagogical point of view. The ability to develop a learning approach that incorporates conventional and innovative sides to invite hesitant students to develop their skills and expertise are some of the results offered.

To provide evidence and enrich literature in the field of education, the use of digital storytelling needs to be further investigated. When implemented in an educational environment, interactive storytelling often has many advantages. These benefits include enhancing the opportunity to obtain knowledge and address issues for both students and teachers (Robin, 2008). This needs to be discussed with complete understanding and good use by teachers so that these benefits arise and have an effect on both students and the teacher themselves. In addition to these benefits, digital storytelling can also be optimized to enhance the academic performance of students and encourage the attitude of students towards school and learning (Tamin et al, 2011).

Five core elements related to student development of learning using digital storytelling are proposed by Robin & Pierson (2005). These five themes are categorized into reflection skills, language skills, higher-level thinking skills, social skills, and artistic skills. One of the key elements in this study is critical thinking skills. Concerning critical thinking skills, DST helps developing students' HOTS abilities. This ability covers the ability to think critically, creatively, problem-solving, increase students' motivation, metacognitive abilities of students in learning, self-evaluation, empathy, and analysis and synthesis.

In its implementation, digital storytelling has many primary elements that shape the structure. Lambert (2007) argues that the base of digital storytelling is formed by 7 key elements. The seven elements are *point of view, dramatic question, emotional content, the gift of your voice, soundtrack, economy, pacing*. Hronova (2011) in Abdel-Hack E.M., Helwa HSAA (2014) mentions several types of DST, namely, (a) photo stories, a combination of photos and text; (b) video words are combinations of words or phrases

and images to create a film or a brief and easy presentation; (c) presentations, a combination of text and images to present a specific subject; (d) staging is a kind of presentation, but students are not based on the truth, but they need to find ways to build a meaningful narrative by doing their emotions, behavior, events, sentences, etc.; (e) video clips, i.e. putting together pictures, words, recorded speech or narration, and music.

DST offers resources for students who learn to use them as a tool that brings forward elements of technology. Raymond (2008) suggests that DST for learners can become a medium of speech. In learning, this could cause positive things that can improve the abilities of students, particularly in critical thinking. In terms of DST implementation, the secondary school level is demanding. Students can gain a lot of feedback from the instructor at this time and then be improved by utilizing social skills and logical thinking with high imagination. Xu et al (2011) argue that in a class that for example, places innovation in project-based learning, DST can be applied.

One crucial factor that needs to be possessed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century period is thinking and acting critically in response to what is happening in the world. This skill must be educated and possessed early on so that students are used to logical thought and can learn to be able to face the times and compete in the world. Facione (2015) says that critical thinking is a way of thinking that offers evidence of a thing, interprets and solves a problem with specific intent. Whereas Bailin (2002) describes critical thinking as a capacity for good and quality thinking that meets the standards for adequacy and accuracy.

Critical thinking becomes a capacity for learners to be prepared by teachers by the use of an effective, interesting, and meaningful learning mechanism. In the critical thinking suggested by Angelo (1995), there are many categories including analyzing, synthesizing, recognizing, and solving a problem, interfering, and evaluating. Facione (2015) suggests, in line with that argument, that critical thinking

relates to the perception, inferencing, self-arrangement analysis, clarification, evaluation, argumentation, the conceptualization of an occurrence. Therefore, this research focuses on 5 indicators of critical thinking, namely composing, analyzing, interpreting, explaining, evaluating.

Critical thinking seems to be a crucial skill to have in today's society to succeed in a global context in which people perform their best possible results. Critical thinking means that someone needs to go through a certain sequence of thinking, starting from reasoning, subject analysis, proof gathering, argumentation, and conclusion (Fahim & Eslamdoost, 2014). It can be simplified that critical thinking needs to be taught appropriately with the right approach to offer a sense of meaningful approach. Somehow it is possible to accept logical thought as the task to be pursued rather than just a concept (Arend, 2009). The challenge is how to ensure that learning is developed with the support of the teacher's experience and insight based on critical thinking elements. Besides, the teacher should relate the material and the teaching approach to the sense of real-life so that the students can develop their sensitivity to the environment and specific topics.

## Method

The study was carried out using a qualitative method of analysis. Because of the purpose of this study, this approach is chosen to capture the phenomenon that happens in the classroom, to understand the information in any operation carried out. The descriptive approach is used in the qualitative research method since the researcher provides descriptions of the collected data from the area where the issue of the participants occurs by observing behaviors and interviewing (Creswell, 2009). Besides, a qualitative method has more advantages in giving details of definite phenomenon and matters by forthcoming the problems directly with flexibility for the researcher to select the way of doing the research (Alwasilah, 2002). Qualitative research in the form of a case study was implemented in this study to

explain the effect of digital storytelling to develop students' critical thinking skills. This case study was chosen because it focused on one particular site as it has particular uniqueness that was interested to study.

There are two main ways of data collection, they are observation and interview. This observation is intended to capture every activity and moment during the learning session. It is also intended to gather information related to students' critical thinking activities appeared. On the other hand, the interview session was carried out to grasp a better view especially on both students' and teacher perspectives related to the implementation of digital storytelling and its relation to their critical thinking as well as their challenges during the online classroom.

In delivering the content, the classroom teacher has often implemented storytelling and even digital storytelling. Often familiar with the use of puppets, the teacher digitalizes media to assist her teaching. Therefore, the classroom's teacher completely monitored and managed the classroom while during the online classroom meeting, the researcher would observe the activities.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the results of observations made, several interesting points can be explained. These points are digital storytelling implementation, critical thinking that appears during the discussion, as well as the ability and good teaching skills and knowledge about digital storytelling.

### Digital Storytelling Implementation

The Implementation of digital storytelling is optimized by the use of several media, such as video, picture, as well as teacher narration. The teacher prepared the material beforehand so that she was ready enough to deliver it during the online learning session. To cater to internet quota efficiency, she combined video sharing with her narration. She also asserted that it was also part of the strategy to avoid students' boredom by changing different media.

At the time of observation, it was seen that the children were enthusiastic about participating in activities delivered by the teacher. The questions asked by the teacher are often answered and become interesting discussion materials to be used as a basis for further idea development.

The teacher often asks questions such as, "how is the story going?". "What will character X do?". This question becomes a trigger for students to present their ideas. The teacher also emphasizes that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers because each student has the right to develop and build their storyline

As already emphasized, 5 elements are the focus of this study. One element that often arises is how students analyze and explain their ideas or arguments. In this case, it appears that students dare to present their ideas by first looking at the instructions and explanations that the teacher provides. Not only that, but students also pay close attention to other students' opinions and respond to each other's statements or ideas.

The teacher challenges students to express their opinions by emphasizing that the stories developed can adjust to the desires of the students themselves. The discussions that took place became more enjoyable and students claimed to enjoy the learning that was carried out because they did not feel afraid of making mistakes.

The 2 elements that stand out are analyzing and explaining. These 2 elements often appear during discussion sessions. Students are directed to study any information presented in as much detail as possible, starting from the instructions, ideas, storylines, and other students' opinions that are conveyed. Thus, the arguments presented by students become more meaningful and trigger lively and active discussions with their friends. The teacher also uses rhetorical questions, such as "is character X really like that?", "Is character X ready to go through the obstacles he is facing?" These questions trigger other students to exchange ideas.

During the learning session, students can respond to the questions asked by the

teacher and express their predictions related to the story given. They managed to create their own stories by making their characters, story themes, and the sequence of the story. At some point, the teacher needs to stop the discussion as she needs to move on to the next phase of the story. It reflects that the students' engagement was relatively high with digital storytelling.

Class teachers who teach previously have been familiar with digital storytelling and have been applied during classroom learning activities even before the pandemic took place. The teacher herself admitted that she needed more time to prepare lesson plans and arrange the things in them, including teaching methods, techniques to be used, and what activities would later be implemented in online classes. He further added that the delivery technique used was modified to accommodate online learning.

The teacher's experience in teaching is an important element in the implementation of digital storytelling in this online class. Since critical thinking is also included in one aspect of learning, the teacher also considers including a variety of activities that focus more on discussions and similar activities that lead to the activeness and active role of students. The hope is that students' thought processes will emerge and can be more clearly exposed.

In general, students and teachers responded positively to the implementation of digital storytelling in online classes. However, it turned out that there were still some obstacles faced by both teachers and students. First, it takes a lot of time to prepare to learn support materials and media that will be used in online classes that can run optimally and are easily accessible to students as well. This requires teacher knowledge and understanding combined with teaching experience in learning activities. For example, how the teacher prepares a lesson plan, the media to be used, also tries the media on the existing platform to ensure its use during the lesson. Second, not all students have adequate gadgets. One of the factors that influence

this is more to the economic factors of diverse student families. So, this has an impact on teachers who need to get around how to be able to present material that can still be accessed by all students with existing devices. Finally, it is still related to technology, namely unstable internet access. The geographic location of the students' homes which are so diverse is also an obstacle because sometimes students complain that the signal is not stable and is even lost. This is also added to by the existence of several students who have limited internet data quotas so that teachers are required to be able to make the available media and learning time effectively.

Despite the positive things mentioned, there were several problems encountered during the implementation of digital storytelling, namely long teacher preparation time, proper device availability, and limited internet access. Long teacher preparation time has something to do with the need for a long time to prepare the learning, starting from making lesson plans, selecting media, learning techniques, to activities that will be carried out in the online classroom. Then, the problem arises in the realm of the availability of capable gadgets. Not all students have good tools to support conducive learning. The teacher also added that the students' diverse economic factors were considered the main factor for this to happen. Finally, an unstable internet connection often interferes with the learning process due to the location of the students' homes with different scopes and environments. Some students complained about having limitations in the internet quota to be able to access full learning. This also creates another burden for the teacher as she needs to prepare plan B to cater to those who encounter this difficulty.

From some of the explanations above, it can be said that the use of digital storytelling has been positively welcomed by teachers and students who are operated through online classes. In addition, what is interesting is how the implementation of digital storytelling can trigger students to think critically. This supports Robin & Pierson (2005) who state that one of the

themes that can be selected in learning that uses digital storytelling is higher-level thinking skills, which include critical thinking skills.

The results of this study also support the statement of Facione (2015) who argues that some elements of critical thinking are analysis and explanation. These 2 elements were highlighted during the learning process, especially when they often appeared during discussion sessions. In addition, the results of the interview also indicated that the implementation of digital storytelling was welcomed positively and was able to bridge the changes in offline learning to online by maximizing the use of digital storytelling combined with interesting activities. The advantage of digital storytelling put forward by teachers and students is how students can think critically by previously gathering information and listening to ideas put forward by their friends to be processed and compiled into a solid argument. This is also in line with Robin (2008) who argues that one of the advantages of using digital storytelling is that it can increase the ability to collect information for both teachers and students.

As previously explained, students were very enthusiastic about learning and enjoyed participating in activities provided by the teacher related to the digital storytelling that was being delivered. This point strengthens the argument of Tamin et al (2011) which states that digital storytelling can be used to improve academic achievement and student attitude towards learning. The benefit of implementing digital storytelling pushes the teacher to engage the students during the learning situation into a more advanced condition where they are also directed and motivated to think critically.

It can be concluded that the implementation of digital storytelling can trigger students to be able to think critically, especially on elements of analysis and explanation. In addition, one of the crucial factors in this implementation is the experience and knowledge of teachers about digital storytelling which is packaged in an online platform. Students participate actively

in learning by conveying their ideas and arguments without any doubt or fear of making mistakes. Even so, the implementation of digital storytelling has encountered several obstacles which may disturb the convenience of both teacher and students during an online classroom. Overall, the implementation of digital storytelling should be further studied specifically in an online classroom situation. As the COVID-19 pandemic seems no to disappear any time soon, the study in the area of online learning should be carried out more often as a way to provide sufficient information for teachers, parent, even the education stakeholder.

## Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, several points can be concluded. First, the success of learning is supported by the good ability of teachers who deliver learning in the classroom even though it is carried out online. Second, Digital Storytelling can promote students' critical thinking, especially in analyzing and explaining skills through discussions and questions posed by the teacher. Even so, there are several obstacles faced during the implementation of DST in this online class. These problems are long teacher preparation time, proper device availability, and limited internet access. These problems need to be addressed for learning to run effectively with online media.

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