

The Students' and Teachers' Perception of the Use of Digital Storytelling within the Project-Based Learning Approach for Engaging Undergraduate Students in English

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Abstract

One of the major issues in achieving a more effective learning process is the lack of productive instructional activities that require students' engagement. Consequently, it is encouraged by academics to promote high levels of student engagement, especially in instructional design. This study investigates students' and teachers' perceptions of using Digital Storytelling (DST) within a Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach to encourage cognitive engagement in English language classrooms. DST employs the ADDIE Model as its conceptual framework. Data were collected using qualitative methods through online surveys and semi-structured interviews involving 10 English lecturers and 10 English Education students at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar in 2018. The findings indicate that DST positively impacts engagement by fostering creativity, enhancing motivation, and improving critical thinking skills. The integration of DST in language learning offers significant benefits, highlighting the need for innovation in educational practices.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Cognitive Engagement, English Language Learning, Motivation, Critical Thinking

INTRODUCTION

Student engagement is a critical element in achieving meaningful learning outcomes in English Language Teaching (ELT). However, ELT classrooms in Indonesia are often characterized by traditional teacher-centered approaches that limit student interaction, creativity, and motivation. These approaches are deeply rooted in rote learning and exam-focused teaching, which fail to develop critical thinking, collaboration, or problem-solving skills in students. As a result, students frequently perceive English learning as monotonous and irrelevant to real-world applications.

Efforts to reform ELT practices have included bilingual curricula, communicative approaches, and the integration of technology. While these efforts have shown promise, their success has been limited by traditional pedagogical mindsets and a lack of resources to support innovative practices. This highlights the need for a more engaging, student-centered approach that leverages modern pedagogical frameworks and tools to foster higher-order thinking and active participation.

Digital Storytelling (DST) has emerged as an innovative educational tool that combines multimedia elements such as images, audio, and text to create narratives. When integrated within a Project-Based Learning (PBL) framework, DST has the potential to transform English language

classrooms into dynamic, interactive spaces. This study explores the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the use of DST within the PBL approach, with a focus on its impact on cognitive engagement, motivation, and critical thinking.

The research objective is twofold: (1) to evaluate the effectiveness of DST in fostering engagement and critical thinking in English language classrooms and (2) to identify the challenges and opportunities associated with its implementation in the Indonesian context. The findings of this study aim to contribute to the growing body of literature on technology-enhanced language learning and provide practical insights for educators seeking to innovate their instructional practices.

METHODS

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore teacher approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT) and the integration of digital-based methods. Qualitative research is well-suited to this topic, as it emphasizes understanding participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations within their own social contexts, as opposed to imposing predetermined theories or assumptions. The focus of the study was to uncover the complexity and richness of the experiences of teachers and students in the process of integrating digital tools and methods into language teaching.

Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to interact with participants in a natural setting, facilitating the collection of data through descriptive words, which provide a deeper insight into teaching and learning conditions. This approach was particularly advantageous in capturing the lived experiences of teachers and students, whose perspectives were central to the research. By prioritizing participants' behaviors, emotions, and viewpoints, the study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of how digital tools—specifically Digital Storytelling (DST), Project-Based Learning (PBL), and Flipped Classroom—were perceived and implemented in the English language classroom.

A key strength of qualitative research is its ability to explore participants' experiences through flexible, open-ended questioning, allowing for a deeper exploration of personal views and contextual details. Teachers and students were interviewed in their own environments—at their workplaces, campuses, and at times that were most convenient for them. This method helped

establish rapport and trust with the participants, enabling them to freely share their thoughts and experiences. The qualitative approach, as described by McMillan and Schumacher (1997), was chosen for its ability to provide insights into the participants' behavior from their own perspectives, making it ideal for understanding complex, nuanced educational phenomena (p. 373).

Data Collection

Data collection in this study was conducted through two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and online surveys. These methods were employed with lecturers and undergraduate students at the University of Muhammadiyah Makassar (UNISMUH) in Indonesia, as well as Indonesian lecturers studying at the University of Adelaide in South Australia. The semi-structured interview format was chosen for its flexibility in exploring key themes while allowing participants to express their views in their own words.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of both predetermined questions and opportunities for participants to elaborate on their responses. This format encouraged participants to share their personal experiences, insights, and reflections on the integration of digital learning methods into their teaching practices. The online surveys, on the other hand, provided an opportunity to gather broader, more quantitative insights into participants' views and experiences. Combining these two data collection methods enabled the research to capture both the depth and breadth of participants' perceptions.

The qualitative approach emphasizes the interpretation of context-rich data, providing a more holistic understanding of the participants' perspectives. The data collection process involved multiple steps: identifying appropriate participants, obtaining access to the research settings, and developing tools for data collection that aligned with the study's goals. Ethical considerations were a key component throughout the process, ensuring that participants' rights and confidentiality were respected.

Participants

Lecturer Participants

The study included ten lecturer participants, five of whom were located in Adelaide, South Australia, and the other five were based in Indonesia. In Adelaide, the lecturers were pursuing doctoral degrees (Ph.D.) and had varying years of teaching experience. The participants in Adelaide were:

- **LP1:** Female, 2 years of teaching experience

- **LP2:** Male, 6 years of teaching experience
- **LP3:** Male, 3 years of teaching experience
- **LP4:** Male, 11 years of teaching experience
- **LP5:** Female, 10 years of teaching experience

These five lecturers were also teaching at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar (UNISMUH) in Indonesia, where they integrated digital tools in their teaching practice. The lecturers in Indonesia were:

- **LP6:** Male, 23 years of teaching experience
- **LP7:** Male, 6 years of teaching experience
- **LP8:** Male, 3 years of teaching experience
- **LP9:** Female, 9 years of teaching experience
- **LP10:** Female, 9 years of teaching experience

This diversity in experience levels provided a broad range of perspectives on the challenges and benefits of integrating digital methods into the language classroom. Additionally, the inclusion of lecturers from both Adelaide and Indonesia offered an opportunity to compare and contrast how the use of digital tools is perceived and applied in different educational contexts.

Student Participants

The study also included ten student participants, all of whom were enrolled at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar in Indonesia. These students had varying levels of experience with learning English, reflecting their diverse educational backgrounds and stages of language acquisition. The student participants were as follows:

- **SP1:** Female, 10 years of English learning experience
- **SP2:** Female, 10 years of English learning experience
- **SP3:** Female, 13 years of English learning experience (most experienced)
- **SP4:** Female, 7 years of English learning experience
- **SP5:** Male, 11 years of English learning experience
- **SP6:** Female, 10 years of English learning experience
- **SP7:** Female, 10 years of English learning experience
- **SP8:** Male, 12 years of English learning experience
- **SP9:** Female, 10 years of English learning experience
- **SP10:** Male, 10 years of English learning experience

The range of English learning experience among students enabled the research to capture a variety of perspectives, from novice learners to those with extensive experience. This diversity in student backgrounds helped illustrate how different students responded to and engaged with digital learning tools.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), a method that focuses on identifying and describing themes within qualitative data. The TCA approach is widely used in qualitative research because it allows for the organization and interpretation of large amounts of data, highlighting recurring patterns and significant themes.

The analysis involved several key stages:

1. Pre-analysis: During this initial phase, the research objectives were clarified, and the materials for analysis (interview transcripts, survey responses) were organized. This step helped establish the boundaries for the analysis and ensured that the relevant data was identified.
2. Exploration: In this phase, coding was used to categorize the data into manageable units. The analysis units could be individual words, phrases, or larger thematic sections. Each piece of data was assigned a code that reflected its meaning and relevance to the research questions. This process helped break down the complex data into interpretable chunks.
3. Treatment and Interpretation: After coding, the data was treated according to predefined rules. This involved identifying and interpreting the underlying themes within the data. It also required making inferences and ensuring that the coding process was reliable, reproducible, and accurate. Techniques like inter-rater reliability (checking consistency between different coders) and stability (consistency of coding by the same researcher over time) were employed to validate the coding process.

Major Code Labels identified in the study included:

- Teachers' and students' perceived concepts of Digital Storytelling (DST), Project-Based Learning (PBL), and the Flipped Classroom.
- The perceived impacts of DST on student engagement, including increased investment in classroom activities, enhanced focus on learning experiences, and a more positive attitude toward learning challenges.

Key themes derived from the data included:

- Digital Storytelling: Lecturers had varying perceptions of DST, ranging from highly relevant (e.g., using DST for news broadcasting) to less relevant (e.g., using it for simple picture story narration).
- Project-Based Learning: This approach was understood as a method involving both group work and individual tasks.
- Flipped Classroom: Lecturer understanding of this approach ranged from seeing it as relevant to blended learning, to lack of prior knowledge in how to implement it effectively.

Perceived Impacts: Both lecturers and students reported increased motivation, enthusiasm, and enjoyment in the learning process when using digital and project-based methods. Students were particularly motivated and dedicated to their learning.

This Thematic Content Analysis provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the participants' conceptual and contextual understanding of digital tools and methods, revealing both the perceived benefits and challenges of integrating these methods into English language classrooms.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Findings

This study applied the ADDIE Model as a theoretical framework and data analysis tool, ensuring that the findings reflected the participants' original statements and perceptions. The research aimed to capture insights into the use of digital-based teaching methods, such as Digital Storytelling (DST), Project-Based Learning (PBL), and the Flipped Classroom approach, in English language classrooms. The findings highlight both lecturers' and students' experiences with these methods, providing a comprehensive view of their effectiveness, challenges, and areas for improvement.

Online Survey Results

The online survey gathered responses from 10 participants, including 7 lecturers and 3 students, regarding their perceptions and experiences with digital-based teaching and other learning approaches. The following summarizes the key findings from the survey.

- **Frequency of Application (Lecturers):**

- 7 lecturers reported using digital-based teaching methods to engage students in English Language Classrooms (ELC).
- 7 lecturers applied Project-based Learning (PBL).
- 4 lecturers integrated Digital Storytelling (DST) with multimedia (audio, video, text, images) in ELC.
- 4 lecturers employed the Flipped Classroom approach.
- **Lecturers' Knowledge and Understanding:**
 - 7 lecturers were familiar with both teacher-centered and student-centered learning.
 - 6 lecturers had an understanding of Project-based Learning (PBL).
 - 7 lecturers recognized the significant impact of DST on student engagement.
 - 7 lecturers acknowledged the effectiveness of the Flipped Classroom in ELC.
- **Student Experiences:**
 - 3 students reported experiencing Group Project-based Learning (PBL).
 - 2 students had encountered DST integrated with multimedia in ELC.
 - 1 student had been exposed to the Flipped Classroom approach.
- **Students' Satisfaction and Perceived Impacts:**
 - 3 students expressed satisfaction with PBL for improving the English learning process.
 - 3 students noted the significant impact of Group Projects on enhancing English learning.
 - 3 students highlighted the positive effects of DST on student engagement in English learning.
 - 3 students discussed the potential benefits of the Flipped Classroom concept.

The Interview Results

The interview phase involved 20 participants, including 10 lecturers and 10 students, with interviews exploring their perceptions and experiences regarding DST, PBL, and the Flipped Classroom. The interviews were conducted both electronically and face-to-face, with Indonesian participants interviewed via international calls and Australian participants interviewed in person. Guided by questions related to English Language Teaching (ELT), the study followed the ADDIE Model for data analysis. Thematic Content Analysis of the interviews revealed key insights into

the engagement, focus, and learning attitudes of students, particularly in the context of DST, PBL, and the Flipped Classroom.

A. Teachers' and Students' Perceptions on DST and Other Accompanying Learning Approaches

1. Teachers' Contextual Perceptions on Digital Storytelling (DST) and Similar Methods

- **Conceptual Variations in DST:**

The concepts of Digital Storytelling (DST) varied significantly among the lecturers. Some perceived DST as highly relevant to their teaching, while others found it only moderately relevant or not aligned with the ADDIE elements. Many lecturers adapted DST to the resources and facilities available at their respective institutions, indicating a wide range of interpretations and implementations.

Findings on Project-Based Learning (PBL)

- **PBL Conceptual Variations:**

The lecturers had varied perceptions of Project-based Learning (PBL). Some lecturers emphasized group-based tasks such as drama, personal conversations, and classroom presentations, while others focused on individual assignments like academic writing and dubbing projects. The projects were categorized based on their relevance to the ADDIE Model.

- **Types of PBL Projects:**

The PBL projects varied from video presentations and news broadcasting to Pecha Kucha presentations and picture story narrations. While some projects were deemed highly relevant to the ADDIE Model, others faced challenges in their alignment, particularly in terms of evaluation and student engagement.

- **Collaborative and Individual Work in PBL:**

Lecturers emphasized both collaborative and individual aspects of PBL. Group work projects, such as mini-projects and role plays, were commonly used to foster critical thinking and cooperation, while individual assignments focused on research skills and presentation.

Flipped Classroom (FC)

- **Understanding and Implementation:**

The understanding and implementation of the Flipped Classroom approach varied. Some

lecturers, like LP3, used pre-class materials and social media platforms for student interaction, while others, such as LP4, described FC as a blend of traditional and online methods. Despite its potential benefits, some lecturers struggled with cultural factors and the lack of robust technological infrastructure, especially in Indonesia.

- **Challenges and Limitations:**

Several lecturers, including LP5 and LP8, lacked prior knowledge of the Flipped Classroom model and had a limited understanding of its digital tools and interactive potential. Their focus remained on logistical aspects, such as providing materials ahead of time, without incorporating interactive digital elements into the process.

Impact of DST, PBL, and FC on Student Motivation and Engagement

- **Increased Student Motivation and Enthusiasm:**

Many lecturers observed high motivation and enthusiasm from students involved in DST and PBL activities. For example, LP9 noted that students actively engaged in mini-projects related to journalism, while LP3 saw students showing enthusiasm in project-based debates. The lecturers recognized that these approaches encouraged students to be more creative and invested in their learning.

- **Students Exceeding Expectations:**

Students often exceeded expectations in terms of focus and effort. LP8 and LP9 observed that students were highly dedicated, showing a strong commitment to their learning, often surpassing standard performance expectations.

- **Enhanced Positivity Towards Learning Challenges:**

The implementation of digital tools like DST and PBL had a positive impact on students' attitudes towards learning challenges. LP5 noted that students enjoyed engaging in digital activities and became more positive in their learning efforts, even when facing challenges such as limited IT skills.

B. Students' Perceptions on Digital Storytelling (DST) and Other Digital-Based Teaching Methods

Digital Storytelling (DST)

- **Perception of DST:**

Students primarily defined DST as a video-making project using digital elements such as audio, text, images, and PowerPoint presentations. They viewed DST as a creative outlet,

focusing on producing engaging content rather than following structured instructional frameworks like the ADDIE Model.

Project-Based Learning (PBL)

- **Understanding of PBL:**

Students defined Project-based Learning as assignments that could either be individual or team-based. Some students described PBL as involving research or social innovation projects, while others emphasized its interactive aspects, such as communication between students and teachers.

Flipped Classroom (FC)

- **Understanding of FC:**

Students' understanding of the Flipped Classroom model varied widely. Some viewed it traditionally, focusing on the distribution of materials before class, while others considered it more modern, incorporating online platforms and links for learning.

Impact on Student Engagement

- **Constant Investment in Classroom Activities:**

Students reported that DST, PBL, and FC enhanced their motivation and engagement in learning English. They expressed that the digital-based methods made learning more enjoyable and encouraged greater participation.

- **Focus and Self-Determination:**

DST had a noticeable impact on students' focus and self-determination. Students reported putting more effort into projects, especially in terms of improving their presentation skills.

- **Positivity Towards Learning Challenges:**

Despite facing challenges such as limited IT skills and equipment, students found enjoyment in learning through DST, PBL, and FC. This positivity helped them overcome difficulties and stay motivated.

Overall Perception

Overall, students viewed DST, PBL, and FC positively for their role in enhancing engagement and enjoyment in learning English. However, they often lacked a comprehensive understanding of these approaches as structured instructional models, focusing more on the interactive and digital aspects. Students expressed a need for more structured guidance and support in using these digital tools effectively.

This section summarizes the findings of the study, focusing on the perceptions of lecturers and students regarding the use of digital-based teaching methods, including Digital Storytelling (DST), Project-Based Learning (PBL), and the Flipped Classroom. The results underscore the positive impact these methods have on student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes, while also highlighting challenges in their implementation and understanding across different educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

Digital Storytelling within the Project-Based Learning approach offers a promising pathway to enhance engagement, motivation, and critical thinking in English language classrooms. By combining multimedia elements with student-centered pedagogies, DST creates dynamic and interactive learning environments that appeal to diverse learners. The findings of this study underscore the potential of DST to transform language learning, provided that the challenges of implementation are addressed through institutional support and professional development.

Further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of DST on learning outcomes and to develop strategies for scaling its implementation across diverse educational contexts. By embracing innovation and leveraging technology, educators can create meaningful and engaging learning experiences that prepare students for success in the 21st-century world.

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