

Using digital stories to teach English listening skill at Thai Binh Duong Primary school: EFL teachers' Perceptions and difficulties

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Received: 15/05/2024; Accepted: 31/05/2024; Published: 11/06/2024

Abstract: The study investigates the effectiveness of digital stories in enhancing listening skills at Thai Binh Duong Primary School (TPS), particularly for students learning English as a foreign language. It explores teachers' perspectives on using digital stories and identifies challenges in the teaching process. The findings reveal that digital stories are positively perceived as an effective tool for teaching listening skills, aiding students in language knowledge, listening sub-skills, and creating a conducive learning environment. However, teachers faced difficulties such as technical issues, content influence on young learners, and complex linguistic features. The study suggests further research with different approaches and subjects to diversify the understanding of digital stories in language education.

Keywords: EFL teachers, digital story, listening skill, primary education

1. Introduction

The new English language education method, focusing on developing the four major skills, has found listening to be particularly challenging to teach, especially to elementary students. Research by Graham and Santos (2015) highlights a gap between theoretical listening research and practical teaching materials, resulting in inadequate instruction. Studies indicate that children learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) score lower in reading and listening compared to native speakers (Burgoyne et al., 2009), and there is a notable lack of research on listening skills in primary education for EFL students (McKendry and Murphy, 2011). Balancing these skills and aligning them with exam-driven curricula is critical, with an emphasis on measuring listening comprehension accurately.

Digital stories are believed to enhance literacy and assist students, including those with limited English proficiency, by providing rich, complex text interpretations through visual and verbal means (Towndrow and Pereira, 2018). Thai Binh Duong Primary School in Dong Nai Province has pioneered the use of digital stories to diversify teaching methods. However, fostering listening skills remains challenging despite experienced teachers, with concerns about varying accents in audio causing confusion and the complexity of materials.

A study was conducted to explore TPS teachers' perspectives and practices regarding digital stories in

teaching listening skills. The goal is to enhance the teaching curriculum and support teachers, contributing to the overall educational framework.

The study seeks to answer the following question:

1. What are the EFL teachers' perceptions of the benefits of digital stories in teaching English listening skill at TPS?

2. What are the difficulties encountered by the teachers who teach English listening skill in the digital story-based classroom?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of digital stories

According to the book by Reynolds G. (2014), it is believed that digital stories can be understood as the combination of the traditional way of storytelling, by literacy work, and the modern method of transferring the story, through video, pictures, audio recording. Instead of archiving stories on books by written literacy works, storytellers now can utilize the continuously updated technology to make written content more understandable convenience to digest. For example, readers can sit back and listen to a digital story read by a comfortable voice rather than reading the story word by word. In this way, the digital stories emerge as a way to help readers feel more relaxed when they are in the process of digesting the story. In addition, the digital stories can also be seen as an upgraded or alternative version of the original ones. That is to say, a digital story can be an adaptation of a well-known

literacy work, a sharpen transcript of an interview or even a bibliography story of a person. The stories now not only are written in letters, but also become more illustrative with sound effects, visual display and even animated characters.

The study focuses on the second definition of the digital stories, in which students are introduced and taught with various literacy works. The TPS's purpose is to encourage students' engagement and activate students' language ability covering all language competences as well as help them to familiarize with different speech acts and styles. In this case, digital stories enable students to be exposed with various listening materials and circumstances and thereby, offering them the genuine experience on the speech acts and styles.

2.2. Previous studies

Numerous studies have explored the effectiveness of digital stories in developing listening skills for elementary learners. Loniza, Saad, and Mustafa (2018) found that kindergarten pupils taught with digital stories performed better in post-tests compared to those taught traditionally. This suggests digital stories can enhance listening skills and encourages educators to adopt new methods.

Jakob, Atmowardoyo, and Weda (2018) extended this research to eighth graders, finding that digital stories not only improved listening skills but also increased student interest. This shows digital stories can be adapted for different ages and levels, despite challenges with vocabulary.

Oduolowu and Oluwakemi (2014) discovered digital stories were particularly effective for primary students, with girls showing greater improvement than boys, likely due to their focus on the mood of interaction, which digital stories emphasize.

Challenges include creating relevant audio content (Andayani, Akbar, and Situmorang, 2020) and difficulties in replaying specific audio segments (Altun, 2018). Additionally, teachers need training to integrate digital stories effectively into their teaching (Cigerci and Gultekin, 2017). Tanrikulu (2018) noted that students accustomed to written materials might struggle with this new format.

Despite its proven effectiveness, digital storytelling is still rare in Vietnamese education. Le Hien (2016) found it enhanced university students' speaking skills, while Nguyen Thi Mong Tuyen (2017) demonstrated its benefits for bilingual education, though focusing more on Vietnamese.

Given the lack of research in Vietnam on digital stories for listening skills, further studies are necessary to explore this promising educational tool.

2.3. Conceptual Framework

The objectives of the study are to investigate the perspectives of the teachers towards the use of the digital stories. There were both positive and negative feedback accordingly even though the positive ones were the dominant. Furthermore, the differences in the adaptation techniques also had influence on the perspectives. The difficulties, on the other hand, had limited impact on the perspectives as they could be considered challenges for improvement. It is noted that the conceptual framework is adapted the research by Maniar (2017), which is conducted to investigate the application of digital stories in teaching.

3. Research design

3.1. Research methods

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative method used systematic data collection to examine cause-and-effect interactions among variables (Burns & Grove, 1993), involving large sample sizes and scientific data analysis.

The qualitative method followed an inductive approach to gather subjective data and develop hypotheses, providing ethnographic insights into cultural and behavioral aspects. Ward et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of qualitative research in understanding teaching complexities but noted a lack of diversity, equity, and ethics in studies from 2005 to 2009.

3.2. Participants

The study involved 30 teachers from TPS school, all experienced in teaching academic English to primary students and using digital stories for teaching speaking and listening skills. Their extensive experience and the significant amount of time spent teaching listening skills (over 5 hours at school and around 3 extra hours) ensured the reliability of the collected data.

3.3. Research instruments

The research used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data was collected using an 18-question questionnaire adapted from Maniar (2017), reviewed, translated into Vietnamese, and administered online via Google Forms. The first four questions gathered demographic information, while the remaining 14 addressed the research questions.

Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with 30 participants, conducted online via Google Meet and recorded for analysis. This approach combined statistical analysis of the questionnaire with qualitative insights from the interviews for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic.

3.4. Data collection and analysis procedures

Figure 3.1 illustrates the process of collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data of the study.

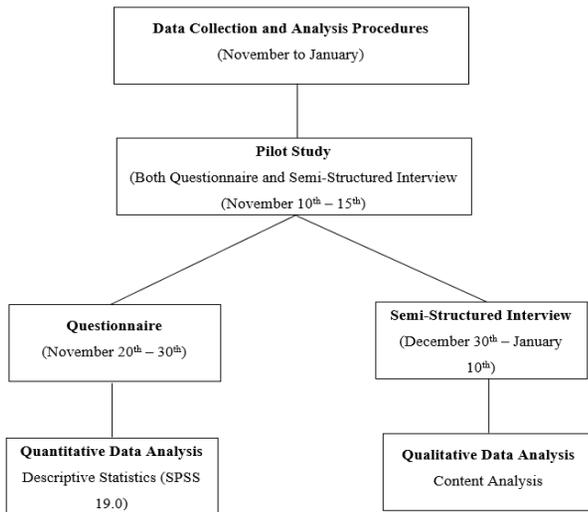


Figure 3.1. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The author collected data at the end of the second semester, ensuring teachers had sufficient experience with digital stories and flexible timing. The questionnaire, administered to 30 Vietnamese and foreign teachers five days after a pilot study, allowed participants ample time and reduced curriculum pressure. Data were analyzed using SPSS 19.0, focusing on language knowledge, sub-listening skills, and the learning environment.

One month after quantitative analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with all 30 participants from December 30th to January 10th. Each 30-minute interview, conducted in Vietnamese or English based on preference, was recorded and transcribed. Participants were informed about privacy rights and study aims. Qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis, involving coding, categorizing, theme identification, and interpretation of connections.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Teachers’ perceptions of the application of the

digital stories in teaching listening skill

Following the indicated categories in the given questionnaire, the according findings presented in this part would include three main aspects including the language knowledge, the micro listening skills, and the learning environment.

Overview of Teachers’ Responses

Table 4.1 presents the overall mean scores of teachers’ responses on the effectiveness of digital stories. The highest rated component is the learning environment and resources (M=3.89, SD=0.78), followed by listening sub-skills (M=3.83, SD=0.76), and language knowledge (M=3.77, SD=0.79). Overall, teachers perceived digital stories as effective, particularly for the learning environment and listening sub-skills.

Table 4.1. Teachers’ Responses on The Merits of the Digital Stories

	n=30	
	M	SD
1. The language knowledge	3.77	.79
2. The listening sub-skills	3.83	.76
3. The learning environment	3.89	.78
Overall	3.83	.78
<i>Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation</i>		

Language Knowledge

Table 4.2 shows teachers’ responses on language knowledge provided by digital stories. Teachers agreed that digital stories help with pronunciation (M=3.77, SD=0.67), identifying key structures (M=3.73, SD=0.94), and providing useful vocabulary (M=3.68, SD=0.85).

Table 4.2. The Language Knowledge

Statement	n=30	
	M	SD
1. Digital stories provide useful vocabulary.	3.68	.85
2. Digital stories help to identify key structures.	3.73	.94
3. Digital stories help to identify words’ pronunciation.	3.77	.67
Overall	3.72	.82

Listening Sub-Skills

Table 4.3 highlights teachers’ responses on the various listening sub-skills. Digital stories help with stress and linking sounds (M=4.03, SD=0.71) and determining listening tasks’ requirements (M=4.00, SD=0.64). They also assist with identifying details (M=3.83, SD=0.80) and general information (M=3.70, SD=0.75).

Table 4.3. The Listening Sub-Skills

	n=30	
	M	SD

4. Digital stories help students with general information clarification.	3.70	.75
5. Digital stories help students to identify details in texts.	3.83	.80
6. Digital stories provide tips to identify speakers' tones.	3.60	.93
7. Digital stories help to clarify stress and linking sounds.	4.03	.71
8. Digital stories help to determine listening tasks' requirement.	4.00	.64
Overall	3.83	.76

Learning Environment

Table 4.4 shows teachers' perceptions of the learning environment. Digital stories create a communicative environment (M=4.23, SD=0.70) and a collaborative environment (M=4.00, SD=0.87). They also provide stress-free learning (M=3.87, SD=0.73) and useful listening sources for further development (M=3.93, SD=0.70).

Table 4.4. The Learning Environment

	n=30	
	M	SD
9. Digital stories provide the communicative environment helping students to practice listening authentically.	4.23	.70
10. Digital stories provide the collaborative environment helping students to work with peers.	4.00	.87
11. Digital stories provide stress-free learning environment.	3.87	.73
12. Digital stories provide listening sources for further listening development.	3.93	.70
13. Digital stories provide appropriate learning sources for the listening learning process.	3.80	.80
14. Digital stories provide an active learning environment.	3.67	.80
Overall	3.91	.76

The semi-interview revealed that teachers believe digital stories positively influence students' listening skill development. Most teachers highlighted the benefit of lexical resources in helping students recognize and pronounce new words accurately. Additionally, digital stories aided in understanding stress and linking sounds. Some teachers noted that the content resembled real-life listening, providing useful prior knowledge. A few teachers also mentioned that digital stories foster a collaborative and communicative learning atmosphere, beneficial for practicing real listening through activities like role-playing.

In terms of the language knowledge, VT1 noted that her students identified a wide range of lexical resources in various listening materials, helping them recognize synonyms and similar expressions. FT7 appreciated that the stories included new words found in other materials, reducing the need for additional sources. VT3 was pleasantly surprised by how engaging the digital stories were for her students.

VT14 highlighted that the stories clearly demonstrated stress and linking sounds, making

them easy to explain. FT4 mentioned that the slow, expressive delivery helped students remember better. VT2 and FT13 found the content authentic and beneficial for real listening practice and future study preparation.

Most teachers viewed the content positively for its variety and usefulness in teaching specific information and gist listening. They believed the spoken language in digital stories prepared students for authentic listening experiences. FT6 and VT7 agreed that the diverse materials supported both gist and detailed listening skill development. VT17 and FT14 praised the native-like spoken language for aiding communication and exam preparation.

In summary, digital stories foster a positive learning environment, enhancing listening skills through engaging, collaborative, and stress-free experiences.

4.2. The difficulties in adopting digital story-based teaching

Figure 4.1 highlights the primary challenges teachers face when using digital stories in the classroom. Technical issues, such as audio and visual problems, were the most common difficulty. Content-related challenges also posed significant issues, with teachers struggling to explain complex material. Additionally, some teachers noted social issues, like students mimicking negative behaviors of characters.

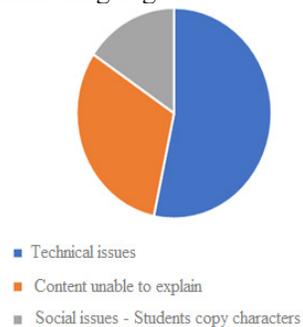


Figure 4.1. Challenges When Teaching with Digital Stories

Quotes from Teachers' interview:

VT4: Concerned about students imitating extreme behaviors, causing conflicts.

VT7: Struggled with off-topic questions related to story content.

FT10: Relied on colleagues for support with problems.

FT5: Noted both positive and negative character influences on behavior.

Linguistic challenges in education include the

time-consuming search for additional materials to meet curriculum needs and the difficulty in explaining complex grammatical structures beyond students' comprehension. Overcoming these hurdles requires innovative teaching methods to ensure linguistic education remains accessible and engaging.

Another social impact mentioned by most of the participants is that stories with strong characters led to role-playing conflicts. Besides, life lessons were sometimes hard to convey due to their underlying meanings.

Overall, while teachers found digital stories beneficial, they faced challenges such as technical issues, content explanation difficulties, and social impacts on students. Despite these drawbacks, teachers remained committed to using digital stories, seeking support and adapting strategies as needed.

5. Conclusion

The study evaluated teachers' perspectives on using digital stories to teach English listening skills. Despite adaptation challenges, digital stories benefited students by improving listening skills, language knowledge, and creating a supportive learning environment. Teachers noted enhancements in stress and sound linking, and task requirement determination. The interactive, resource-rich environment was advantageous. However, difficulties included complex content and negative impacts, though technical issues were minimal with proper preparation. Solutions involved discussing effective teaching strategies and revising content. Overall, digital stories fostered a communicative, collaborative, and active learning environment, enhancing listening skills.

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