



# การพัฒนาทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษโดยใช้การเล่าเรื่องสื่อดิจิทัลผ่านการสอนเสมือนจริง สำหรับนักเรียนภูฏานระดับชั้นประถมศึกษาตอนต้น

## Development of English-Speaking ability using Digital Storytelling Techniques through Virtual Instruction for Lower Primary Students in Bhutan

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### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ทำการศึกษาการพัฒนาทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษโดยใช้การเล่าเรื่องสื่อดิจิทัลผ่านการสอนเสมือนจริงสำหรับนักเรียนภูฏานระดับชั้นประถมศึกษาตอนต้น วัตถุประสงค์ของงานวิจัย คือ 1) เพื่อศึกษาผลการใช้การเล่าเรื่องด้วยสื่อดิจิทัลผ่านการสอนเสมือนจริงต่อความสามารถในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนชั้นประถมศึกษาตอนต้นในประเทศภูฏาน และ 2) เพื่อศึกษาความคิดเห็นของนักเรียนที่มีต่อการเล่าเรื่องด้วยสื่อดิจิทัลผ่านการสอนเสมือนจริงในการพัฒนาทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ กลุ่มตัวอย่างในการทดลองประกอบด้วยนักเรียนระดับชั้นประถมศึกษาตอนต้น จำนวน 30 คน จากโรงเรียนแห่งหนึ่งในประเทศภูฏาน โดยใช้วิธีการวิจัยแบบผสมในการศึกษา เครื่องมือ 2 ประเภทที่ใช้ในการทดลองได้แก่ การสัมภาษณ์แบบระลึกข้อมูลย้อนหลัง และ แบบทดสอบก่อนและหลังเรียน การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณใช้การทดสอบ paired-sample *t*-test และข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพใช้การวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา ผลการศึกษาพบว่ามีความแตกต่างระหว่างคะแนนเฉลี่ยของคะแนนสอบก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียนอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ .05 นอกจากนี้ การเล่าเรื่องด้วยสื่อดิจิทัลส่งผลเชิงบวกต่อการออกเสียง คำศัพท์ หลักไวยากรณ์ ความคล่องแคล่ว และการจับใจความสำคัญ ผลจากการสัมภาษณ์พบว่าการใช้วิธีสอนนี้มีผลเชิงบวกต่อทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียน

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## Abstract

This study examined the development of English-speaking ability using digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction for lower primary students in Bhutan. The objective of this study was to examine 1) to what extent do digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction develop the speaking ability of lower primary students in Bhutan, and 2) the students' opinions towards the use of digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction on developing their speaking ability. The participants were 30 lower primary level students from one of the schools in Bhutan. The study adopted a mixed method approach. Two tools were used to collect data, a semi-structured interview and a pre post achievement test. Quantitative data were analyzed by paired sample *t*-test, and qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis. The findings of the study showed that there was a significant difference between the students' mean scores in pretest and posttest at the significant level of .05. The findings also indicated that digital storytelling has a positive effect on developing pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency and comprehension. The results of the interview reported that the implementation of the treatment had a positive effect on the students' speaking ability. This study also recommended that digital storytelling should be used for enhancing students speaking abilities in lower primary schools.

**Keywords:** digital storytelling, text storytelling, virtual instruction, speaking ability

## Introduction

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small, mountainous, landlocked country in South Asia, located in the eastern Himalayas, bordered by India and China. Bhutan is home to a population of about 770,000, spread over approximately 38,394 square kilometers, with about 71 percent of its land under forest cover (World Bank, 2013). The modern education system of Bhutan was established in the early 1960s to start its first five-year plan, which addressed basic educational needs, and to develop the human resources required for the socio-economic development of the country (Ministry of Education, 2016). The introduction of English was deemed imperative to starting the first development activities in Bhutan. As a result, English was introduced as an official language for communication and a medium of instruction in Bhutan (CAPSD, 2006a; CAPSD, 2006b; DDC, 2002).

Although English has been Bhutan's second language since the 1960s, Bhutanese people still face difficulties in speaking English. Many studies have been conducted on the speaking ability of Bhutanese students but most of it has been on the secondary levels. The 2011 Annual Status

of Student Learning exercise, which assessed core competencies for students in grades 4, 6 and 8 for English, Mathematics and Science, indicated that English oral proficiency is not assessed at all (Royal Education Council, 2011).

Speaking ability remains one of the challenges confronted by English as second language learners (Khodabandeh, 2015). Despite English being the medium of instruction, most Bhutanese students have to retake the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to obtain the minimum required scores (LaPrairie, 2014), and Bhutanese students are found to have low critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills (World Bank, 2009). A lack of sufficient English communication ability is prominent. To achieve increased success rates on tests, the basic foundation of English skills should be made stronger, from the grassroots level of the primary grades on up, since even the students at the university level lack speaking skills good enough for effective communication in academic and social situations (Biddha & Thinley, 2010).

The government has attempted to close the gap by having national guidelines to assist in teaching English (EPGI, 2007). Most such interventions need scientific approaches in order to work fruitfully. The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) lecturers themselves largely have personal experience only of traditional teaching and learning (Gyamtscho & Maxwell, 2012). To ignite the students' interest in speaking English outside the classroom, the use of innovative models like digital storytelling (DST) in the curriculum will engage the students' motivation to learn English. Digital storytelling is one of the alternative methods that makes learning English more interesting (Putri, 2019). Storytelling activity can enlarge children's communication with adults, with their friends, and also with themselves. By implementing digital storytelling, students also have an opportunity to speak English in a non-threatening way, because they are able to edit their spoken text (Lestariyana, & Widodo, 2018). Besides laptops and computers, digital storytelling can also be created through cheaper and easier devices, such as smartphones, which almost every household in Bhutan owns.

The use of modern technology has been a great tool for improving speaking ability. Digital storytelling can effectively assist the learning process among young learners. It can assist them in developing multimodal communicative competence, by promoting a learner-centered environment. In this way, learners have numerous opportunities to interact and use language in authentic and personally meaningful ways (Rance-Roney, 2008). Technology is used very little in

Bhutanese classrooms, especially in the lower grades. The use of digital storytelling in the primary level will be a most engaging technique for young learners in enhancing their speaking ability. Therefore, the researcher used digital storytelling techniques through virtual teaching for enhancing the speaking ability of lower primary level students.

## **Objectives**

1. To study the development of English-speaking ability using digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction for lower primary level students in Bhutan.
2. To find out the opinions of lower primary level students towards the use of digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction in development of their speaking ability.

## **Methodology**

### ***Population and Participants***

The population in this study was 30 lower primary level students in one of the primary schools in Bhutan. Lower primary level students were the main target of the investigation. The participants were grade three students in the academic year of 2021, who use English as a second language. In Bhutan, Grade 3 students have three subjects, which are English, Mathematics and Dzongkha. In the English language curriculum, speaking is combined with the other three main language skills.

## **Instruments**

### **Pre-Post Test**

The researcher conducted a pre-test before the treatment, and a post-test after the treatment, of about 50 minutes each. In both the pre-test and post-test, the students were given a picture card to use while narrating a story. The students narrated a story of 2-3 minutes using the pictures, and submitted a video in a Facebook Messenger group. Oral Proficiency Scoring Categories proposed by Brown (2004) were used, whereby the students were assessed on five aspects: pronunciation, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension. In this tool, the researcher used the *t*-test to test the significance of the difference between the results of students' mean scores in all mean scores of pre-tests and post-tests.

### **Semi-structured Interview**

For the semi-structured interview, 10 students from the low (3), moderate (4) and high (3) proficiency from the pretest were selected on a voluntary basis. 4 students from the moderate proficiency group were selected since the majority (19) of the students fell in the that group. From the pretest who scored 11, 12 and 13 were considered the low where 6 of them scored 11, 12 and 13 and 3 of them voluntarily agreed to do the interview considering the availability of their free time. The students with moderate proficiency were the ones who scored 14, 15 and 16 in their pretest scores. 19 of the students scored 14, 15 and 16 in their pretest from which 3 of them volunteered for the semi structured interview. From the 5 high achievers who scored 17, 18 and 19, 3 of them volunteered for the interview. The Data was collected in the form of audio messages in messenger application, transcription was analyzed using content analysis.

In order to validate the research instruments, three experts were invited to make a judgement of each item, using the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) index (Laksana, 2016). Therefore, in this study, content and construct validity were assessed by three experts with at least five years of English teaching experience, *i.e.*, a professor from Chulalongkorn University, one lecturer from Thammasat University, and one expert from Bhutan (an English teacher who has completed a Master's in English from Phitsanulok University).

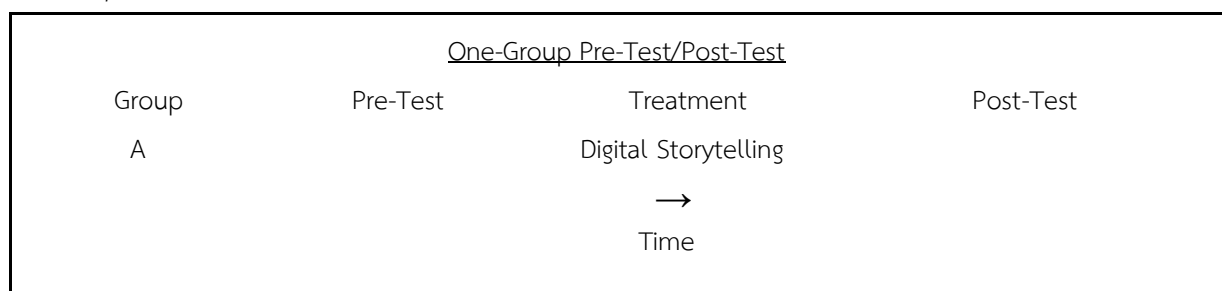
### ***Data Collection Procedure***

This study used a mixed methods design to understand the research problem more completely. Two main tools, the pre-test and post-test and the stimulated recall interview, were used to gather the data. Semi-structured interview was used with the best, weak, and average storytellers. All the participants were added to a Facebook group with the assistance of their parents and guardians. The study was conducted for eight weeks, and there were two classes per week of 50 minutes each. During the eight weeks of lessons, they were taught using digital stories from YouTube through Facebook Messenger. The students watched videos of 5-15 minutes, and retold those stories in 2-3 minutes. Semi-structured interview was done twice, once after first pre-test, and once again after post-test.

One of the tools used in this study was the pre-test/post-test, so one-group, pre-test/post-test design was used (Cohen, 2014), in order to investigate the effects of digital storytelling on the students' speaking ability. The one-group pre-test/post-test design is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*One-Group Pre-Test/Post-Test (Örnek et al., 2007)*



As shown in Figure 1, a single group of subjects was given a pre-test, the treatment, and lastly, the post-test. The pre-test and post-test were administered before and after the treatment, which consisted of the digital storytelling. The pre-test and post-test results were compared using the paired sample *t*-test. The results of the pre-and post-tests were analyzed, and the semi-structured interview was used to investigate the opinions of the students towards the treatment.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data analysis involved both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The first question concerned the effects of the digital storytelling techniques on the development through virtual instruction of the speaking ability of the third-grade students. To analyze the data, the participants' mean scores from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed by a paired-sample *t*-test, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. It was found that the English-speaking ability of the third-grade students was significantly higher after the post-test, as the *t*-test results indicated that the *p*-value was .001, which is less than .05, meaning that it was significant. For the qualitative data, the stimulated recall interviews were conducted, using the low, high, and average performing videos submitted by the students. The information from the stimulated recall interview was analyzed through content analysis. The responses were coded and linked, and, through the content analysis, several themes were identified, based on the responses made by the research participants.

## Results

To analyze the data, further *t*-tests to compare the means of all the pre-tests and post-tests were performed with respect to all five dimensions of the marking rubric, e.g. pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, as well as for total marks, secured at a hypothesized mean difference of zero, with an alpha value of .05. Table 1 illustrates the comparison between the mean scores from the pre-tests and post-tests. If the *p*-value is less than the significance level, the difference between the means is statistically significant. Thus, it can be proved that the mean score for English-speaking ability was higher after the treatment with digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction than before.

*Pronunciation:* The *t*-test results indicate that the *p*-value was .001, which is less than .05. Thus, it can be concluded that the difference between the pre- and post-test results for “pronunciation” is statistically significant.

*Grammar:* The *t*-test results indicate that the *p*-value was .001, which is less than .05. Thus, it can be concluded that the difference between the pre- and post-test results for “grammar” is statistically significant.

*Vocabulary:* the *t*-test results indicated that the *p*-value is .001 and it is less than .05, and it can be concluded that the difference between the pre and post-tests results for “vocabulary” is statistically significant.

*Fluency:* the *t*-test results indicated that the *p*-value is .001 and it is less than .05, and it can be concluded that the difference between the pre and post-tests results for “fluency” is statistically significant.

*Comprehension:* The *t*-test results indicate that the *p*-value was .001, which is less than .05. Thus, it can be concluded that the difference between the pre- and post-tests results for “comprehension” is statistically significant.

**Table 1**

*t*-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means (Total Scores)

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2 tailed)
Pre-Test	30	15.00	1.64	-6.73627	-27.293	29	.001
Post-Test	30	21.27	1.78				

**Total Scores:** As illustrated in table 1, it was found that the English-speaking ability of the third-grade students were significantly higher after the post-test as the *t*-test results indicated that the *p*-value is .001 and it is less than .05. It can be concluded that the difference between the pre and post-tests results for “total scores” is statistically significant. It showed that there was a significant difference between the students’ scores in pretest and posttest at .05 level. Since the *p*-value (.001) was less than .05, the null hypothesis was rejected. It indicated that there was a significant effect of digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction on Bhutanese students' English-speaking ability.

In addition, the researcher employed Cohen’s *d* to investigate the effect size of the digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction on English speaking ability of lower primary level students of Bhutan. The value of the effect size was interpreted by using the following classification.

<i>d</i>	Interpretation
0.1	Very small Effect
0.20	Small Effect
0.59	Medium Effect
0.80	Large Effect
1.20	Very large Effect
2.0	Huge Effect

The effect size of the digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction on English speaking ability of lower primary level students of Bhutan is presented on the table 12 below.

**Table 2**

*The Effect Size of the digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction*

Cohen’s <i>d</i>	Effect Size
1.25762	Very Large effect

The result indicated that digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction had a very large effect on English speaking ability of lower primary level students in Bhutan. In summary,



the students' mean score in posttest after the treatment of digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction was higher than it was in pretest. It suggested that the implementation of the treatment improved the students' English-speaking ability.

As the second research question was concerned with the participants' opinions towards the use of digital storytelling techniques and virtual instruction, the information from the semi-structured interview was analyzed through content analysis. The responses were coded and linked, and several themes were identified through the analysis, based on the responses made by the research participants.

The analysis of the students' interview responses presented three themes:

**I. Digital Storytelling makes the students' learning process more enjoyable.** The record showed that most students found digital storytelling more interesting than classroom storytelling. When the learning process is interesting, it makes it enjoyable and fun for the students that are learning through the various methods. The responses provided by the majority of the students indicated that they also understood more, compared to text storytelling. The data shows that DST had a significant effect on increasing the students' motivation to learn English.

**II. The differences between classroom learning and virtual learning.** The Grade 3 students were new to virtual classes, and they were uncomfortable at the beginning. Gradually, as they did more activities in the virtual classroom, they began to show a preference for virtual classes over regular classes. They commented that they used their mother tongue, mixed with English, in their regular classroom, which was accepted, and that, since, in the virtual classroom, they could use only English, the virtual classroom really helped them to improve their English speaking. Furthermore, they explained that the activities were more interesting in the virtual classroom, compared to their regular classroom, as they felt that only the extroverted students got a chance to participate on a regular basis in the regular classroom, whereas they were happy that all of them got a chance to participate and speak up with their ideas in the virtual classroom.

**III. Effects of virtual storytelling on students' behavior.** For many of the students, it was their first time doing virtual activities, hence, they had different reactions and opinions towards the whole experience. Some students were happy, confident, and enthusiastic, while most felt shy, nervous, and less confident, at the beginning of the data collection. Initially, some of them even requested to submit their videos in the researcher's personal chat, instead of the

group chat. The reason for the different feelings was based on their ability to speak properly and communicate well in English. However, by the final SRI, the majority of the students were comfortable sharing their videos in groups, and actively participated in all the activities. Based on the different responses provided by the students, as well as the development of their responses over time, it is clear that virtual learning has positive effects on boosting the students' confidence, while simultaneously enhancing their speaking skills.

## **Discussion**

The objective of this study was to explore the development of English-speaking ability using digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction for lower primary level students in Bhutan and to investigate the opinions of lower primary level students towards the use of digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction in enhancement of their speaking ability. This study sought to contribute to a growing body of studies hence the bulk of literature in the digital storytelling and virtual instruction field. This section presents the discussions of the findings in relation to the previous studies.

### **Students English speaking ability improvement**

The results from the comparison of the Pre- and post-tests of speaking activities indicated that the mean score of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test. The mean differences of the speaking test showed that there was a wider range of scores between the pre-test and post-tests. The *t*-test of pre-test and post-tests were performed with respect to all the five dimensions of Oral Proficiency Scoring Categories proposed by Brown (2004), such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension and for total marks secured at hypothesized mean difference of zero, alpha value of 0.05.

This study concluded that the difference between pre-test (15) and post-test (21.30) was statistically significant and the list of activities and semi-structured interviews helped better performance of the students during the post-test. The finding of this study was not really different from the finding of the study conducted by Elenein (2019) who found that there was a positive effect of digital storytelling on developing oral communication skills.

There has to be a good strategy for young learners to understand digital texts as they contain information graphics which give various views of information compared to that of printed

texts. Robin and Pierson (2005) indicates that integration of visual elements with written text both enhances and accelerates student comprehension. The findings of this study are consistent that the students learn new vocabularies by looking at the pictures in the videos and comprehending the meanings. Whereas they expressed that if they have to read the printed stories, they have to ask the teacher or refer to a dictionary to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words in the story. Moreover, the confusion in pronunciation of the new words always made them hesitant to ask questions or use in their daily conversations.

### **The students' opinion towards the use of digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction**

The results from the semi-structured interview indicated that digital storytelling techniques through virtual instruction mostly had positive effects on the students' English-speaking ability. The positive effects could be seen from the videos of the students' retold stories, their fluency and word choice during the retelling of the stories, and their improvement in using the virtual platform to express their ideas and opinions. After digital storytelling activities, students increasingly present their ideas with confidence, whether working individually or in groups (Rahayu, 2021). In the semi-structured interview, S5 stated, 'After speaking English in our Facebook group chat, now I feel confident speaking to anyone in English.' The researcher found the students presenting their stories and opinions with more confidence compared to the beginning of the study. This study helped students to improve their English-speaking ability along with the overall motivation and confidence among them.

To ignite the students' interest in speaking English outside their classroom, use of innovative models like DST in curriculum engaged students' motivation in learning English. Digital storytelling is one of the alternative methods that makes learning English more interesting (Putri, 2019). Learning through multimedia (DST) engages more senses than traditional learning, and learning content through multimedia (DST) assists students in easily preserving and remembering information. From the responses provided by the majority of the students when learning through digital storytelling, they understand more compared to text storytelling. Furthermore, the responses showed that DST has a significant effect on increasing students' motivation to learn English.

The result of this study was consistent with the findings from Mirza (2020) which showed that most participants found the activity of digital storytelling enjoyable and educational and

were eager to repeat their experience. In brief, the results of semi-structured interview had proven that the digital storytelling through virtual learning had positive effects on the English-speaking ability of the students.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of this study lead to some suggestions for the implication of digital storytelling through virtual classroom in lower primary level students as follows:

The findings of this study have revealed that digital storytelling through virtual instruction developed the students' English-speaking ability and had positive effects on the students' English-speaking ability. The use of digital stories gave opportunities for students to learn how speak English and use it in the retelling of their stories. Students used their national language mixed with English in their regular classrooms while explaining any text stories and creating the English-speaking environment in virtual classroom helped them polish the speaking ability. The use of English without being mixed with any other languages made the students more interested to speak fluently just like in the digital stories. It motivated the students to mimic and gave them confidence to use English in their daily conversations.

Usage of technology in Bhutanese classrooms is very less. Young learners develop their digital literacy through digital literacy tools, which promote self-regulated learner autonomy when they force themselves to learn English (Turula, 2017). Moreover, young learners with high digital literacy learn English by transforming, informing, and reforming messages or texts from digital literacy tools (Davidson, 2009). Thus, the English teachers, especially in Bhutan, should consider applying the use of modern technologies to help students improve their English-speaking ability.

The results of the semi-structured interview showed that the students could better understand from digital storytelling compared to text stories. It also indicated that they learn to pronounce new words better from the digital stories. Therefore, the English teachers can use technologies to give audio or video demonstration of unfamiliar words and teach the correct pronunciation. As modern technologies like computers and mobile phones are easily available, every school can consider making more use of it. The curriculum developers can also consider the research procedures of this study to make a framework in terms of developing English speaking ability courses among young learners.

## Recommendations

The recommendations for the further study are as follows:

Based on the results of the present study, digital storytelling should receive more attention from teachers, especially in lower primary education. Curriculum developers could implement the inclusion of modern technologies and digital storytelling in the lower primary English curriculum. Furthermore, a future Bhutanese researcher could also try the same methods, to see the effects of digital storytelling with the national language, Dzongkha.

The study was limited to 30 third-grade students in only one school in the western part of Bhutan. Therefore, a future researcher could repeat the study with a larger group of students to reinforce and confirm the accuracy of the results. Future research could also focus on studying the effects of digital storytelling in Early Childhood Care and Development Centers (ECCD Centers) or Grade PP (Pre-Primary), which would further strengthen the authenticity and the reliability of the findings.

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