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Perceived Benefits of Digital Storytelling for Speaking Development Among Motivated Indonesian EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the perceived benefits of Digital Storytelling (DST) as an instructional approach aimed at developing speaking-related competencies among highly motivated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in an Islamic private university in Central Java, Indonesia, where the majority of academics are Muslims. Implementing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the research combines quantitative observations of learners' speaking activities with qualitative insights into their experiences and reflections. While the data indicate improvements in certain aspects of speaking, particularly in areas such as confidence, engagement, and idea formulation, the findings are interpreted cautiously due to the small sample size and specific contextual factors. Students reported that DST activities enhanced their motivation, reduced their anxiety, and provided them with greater autonomy in expressing themselves orally. Rather than positioning DST as a

panacea for speaking fluency, the study suggests that it may serve as a complementary pedagogical tool that supports affective and cognitive dimensions of oral language learning in culturally specific EFL contexts.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling (DST), Efl Learners, Higher Education, Language Learning, Motivation, Speaking Fluency

INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in speaking is considered one of the most critical and challenging coping skills to master in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It is particularly noteworthy in the context of Indonesian universities that focus on communicative competence. Despite the implementation of curricula changes and the integration of new technologies, most EFL students continue to encounter issues such as anxiety regarding the foreign language, a low subjective assessment of their speaking skills, and insufficient exposure to real-life oral communication situations (Mohammadi Khomjani, 2020; Murad et al., 2023; Tamimi, 2024; Tatlı et al., 2022; Yasmin et al., 2025). This appears to be the case in most tertiary educational institutions with larger populations of Muslim students, such as private universities in Central Java, where cultural and societal factors greatly influence language learning.

As noted by Robin (2016), Digital Storytelling (DST) has emerged as an instructional strategy and method that combines story creation with visuals and audio, thereby engaging learners and improving their oral skills. DST) as a teaching strategy is grounded in constructivist learning theory (Bruner, 2006; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Thus, employing DST as a teaching strategy allows learners a degree of control over how they demonstrate their identity and language skills, which is meaningful and personal to them. According to Huang (2023) and Zhussupova and Shadiev (2023) proficient speaking skills, such as fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation, can be improved through storytelling and rehearsal activities with peer feedback.

The effectiveness of DST as an instructional approach in fostering speaking skills and motivation has been documented in

previous studies (Bai & Xian, 2024; Hava, 2019; Liu et al., 2018). However, most of the research works have used EFL learners as a single homogeneous group, disregarding the varying motivational profiles of learners (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Most notably, the strongest motivation among the most engaged students is likely to result in the greatest cognitive and affective engagement with DST as a teaching strategy task. Such studies are, however, limited, especially in unique cultural contexts with predominant Muslim populations, where self-perception of digital readiness and educational frameworks starkly contrast with more globalized settings (Aditya & Zuhdi, 2023; Tolchah & Mu'ammar, 2019).

In Indonesian university settings, speaking in English is often situated within a broader web of socio-cultural expectations. Learners may face constraints not only in linguistic capabilities but also in negotiating social values such as humility, politeness, and reverence for authority, all of which affect classroom discourse patterns. In this context, DST emerges not merely as a technical tool for oral performance but as a culturally responsive space that empowers learners to express themselves without violating implicit social norms (Lee, 2014).

DST integrates personal narrative with multimedia production, enabling students to tell their stories in a low-anxiety, creative format. These stories often reflect themes such as family, faith, perseverance, and local identity, which resonate with the learners' lived realities. Given that DST supports learner autonomy while respecting cultural constraints, it offers a uniquely suitable pedagogical approach for speaking development in Islamic EFL environments (Lestari et al., 2022).

This study positions DST as a teaching strategy in the setting of a Muslim-dominant learner demographic to contribute to the still-emerging discussions on context-responsive, learner-centric approaches in EFL teaching. The results are anticipated to assist practitioners and policymakers in Islamic and Muslim contexts concerning the integrative use of DST as a pedagogical approach for developing speaking fluency and learner autonomy among students.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to explore learner perceptions and observable changes in speaking performance following the integration of DST activities in an English-speaking course, implemented in an ICT in ELT class. The study sample consisted of 15 highly motivated undergraduate EFL learners, selected through purposive sampling based on established motivation indicators. The sample consisted of 15 highly motivated undergraduate EFL learners, selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria for this purposive sampling were: (1) enrollment in the English Education program, (2) completion of foundational speaking courses, (3) scoring above the threshold set on the pre-screening Motivation in English Speaking Performance Questionnaire (MESPQ) (4) demonstration of active participation and willingness to engage in technology-based speaking activities. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient baseline motivation and digital readiness required for engaging with Digital Storytelling tasks. Although the sample size limits the generalizability of findings, it was deemed appropriate for exploratory analysis and thematic insights. Although the sample size limits the generalizability of findings, it was considered appropriate for exploratory analysis and thematic insights in line with Patton's (2015) emphasis on information-rich cases, Creswell and Clark's (2017) justification for small qualitative samples in explanatory mixed-methods research. Additionally, Tisdell et al. (2025) argue that homogeneous, well-targeted samples are sufficient for achieving thematic saturation.

The sample consisted of 15 highly motivated English Education undergraduates from an Islamic Private University in Central Java, Indonesia, during the 2023/2024 academic year. The selection included individuals who fulfilled the defined inclusion criteria for this research. Motivation metrics and primary and composite motivation were evaluated using the motivational expert's English Speaking Performance Questionnaire (MESPQ), adopting Alderman's theoretical framework. In this case, the selection criteria were deep operational composite motivation,

which includes intrinsic motivation, positive attitude, and active participation in speaking English. Concerning the depth of the study under this subgroup, the sample size from this population met the approaches claiming adequacy for qualitative sample size of saturation and thematic analysis (Patton, 2015; Tisdell et al., 2025). As these authors argue, purposive sampling is better than random selection because it aims to investigate the influence of DST as a teaching strategy on a homogeneous, highly motivated group. This means the internal validity concerning motivation sensitivity within intervention-focused studies depends heavily on it (Etikan et al., 2016).

The MESPQ motivation evaluation and a speaking fluency test were the main instruments, alongside qualitative assessment interviews. The local folklore recounting story tasks created for teaching included a speaking fluency test developed in earlier references (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019; O'Sullivan, 2024), which helps guide formative evaluation processes along culturally relevant narrative discourse. The participant's oral fluency, including smoothness, coherence, and measures of the rate and frequency of pauses and confidence, was assessed using a speaking performance evaluation rubric. Furthermore, the MESPQ gave peer and teacher evaluations on 21 items evaluated on a Likert scale addressing task attitude, rewards, and speaking tasks. The dimensions of the evaluative criteria demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.8, confirming reliability across all constructs (Cronbach, 1951; Pallant, 2020). For the qualitative data, an open-ended questionnaire focused on learners' perceptions regarding the motivational impact of DST as a teaching strategy, including its challenges, usefulness, and their overall assessment of speaking fluency post-intervention. The questions were designed in a pilot study and refined for optimal clarity to enhance the meaningfulness of the responses (Kvale, Steinar & Brinkmann, 2014).

The procedures for data collection were carried out for 16 weeks, constituting an academic semester within the ICT in ELT course that privileged Digital Storytelling as the primary teaching strategy for enhancing speaking proficiency. In Week 1, participants

verified their motivation profiles by completing the MESPQ, followed by a pre-test to assess their fluency level. The remaining 14 weeks consisted of face-to-face tutorial classes, each lasting for 100 minutes, during which learners engaged in DST-related activities following the structured curriculum. This curriculum encompasses stages such as topic selection, scriptwriting, peer feedback, voice recording, multimedia integration, video editing, and final presentations, structured according to Robin (2016) four-stage Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy model: pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution throughout classes, instructors scaffolded and provided formative feedback in efforts to promote teamwork and the use of authentic language (Arroba & Acosta, 2021; Robin, 2016; Wei et al., 2025).

There were 14 meetings in addition to two meetings designated for mid and final tests. In Week 1, participants completed the MESPQ instrument to identify motivational baselines, followed by a pre-test assessing speaking fluency. Weeks 2 through 6 focused on DST pre-production activities, including topic selection, scriptwriting, grammar development, and initial pronunciation checks. The mid-Project Rehearsal and Peer Review in Week 7 allowed for formative assessment of learners' oral progress. From Weeks 8 to 13, the focus shifted to facilitate DST's production and post-production phases, during which students created storyboards, recorded voiceovers, edited multimedia content, and engaged in peer feedback cycles. Week 14 was devoted to exhibiting final DST products through a class showcase. Week 15 served as the post-test period for measuring speaking improvement, while Week 16 was reserved for final written reflections and open-ended qualitative questionnaires examining students' perceptions of DST. Detailed descriptions of the activities are available in the appendix.

Data analysis was done using two complementary processes corresponding to the mixed-methods design. Questionnaire responses were collected before and after the study and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Initial analyses included checking data normality for using the

Product-Moment test to justify the application of parametric tests. Following this assessment, a paired-sample t-test was conducted to evaluate variances in fluency scores before and after the implementation of DST as a teaching strategy intervention, with the level of significance set at p < .05. This study explores the impact of using Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy on the speaking fluency of highly motivated students. As a data collection instrument, the Likert scale was used to facilitate students' responses regarding their perceptions of DST. Given that open-ended questions can make it difficult for students to formulate clear and structured answers, the Likert scale was chosen because it allows respondents to assess statements with levels of agreement that are easier to understand and respond to more quickly. According to Fink (2024), the Likert scale provides clarity and minimizes confusion for respondents in giving consistent answers. Additionally, the use of the Likert scale allows for more objective and quantitative measurement, which is more suitable for numerical data analysis and for measuring perceptions more systematically and measurably. Themes were validated with member checking and peer debriefing without the use of research instruments, so the credibility of the themes was enhanced (Nowell et al., 2017). The qualitative analysis described the learners' experiences, motivations, challenges, and explainable findings to support the quantitative outcomes. In this study, both types of data were combined as per Creswell and Clark's (2017) explanatory designs, wherein qualitative results or explanations were provided alongside quantitative data, framing the primary questions related to the impact of DST as a teaching strategy for enhancing fluency among highly motivated learners.

This comprehensive analysis captures all aspects of analyzing DST as a teaching paradigm, considering its impact on speaking fluency through the learners' observable and rich qualitative data. It outlines the participant profile, applies relevant instruments, and constructs processes that level up to accomplish completeness and coherence. Ultimately, the emerging narrative regarding motivation and technology-influenced teaching dynamics in foreign language

teaching is best captured by using valid quantitative and complex qualitative data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

RQ 1: *How does implementing Digital Storytelling (DST) as a pedagogical approach influence the speaking fluency of highly motivated undergraduate EFL learners?*

This research attempted to respond to the question: What impact does Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy have on the speaking fluency of highly motivated undergraduate EFL learners? Research suggests that the use of DST in instruction has a tremendous and positive effect on the speaking fluency of this learner type. The results indicate that the learners' fluency scores improved after applying DST as a teaching strategy, as supported by the data presented in Table 1. This DST is a teaching strategy that aids learners in achieving higher levels of fluency. Previous studies endorse these results, stating that DST as a teaching strategy offers myriad opportunities for practice, multidimensional engagement, and the nurturing of oral proficiency (Du et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2021; Isaacs et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2020).

Table 1. Highly Motivated Students' Fluency Score

Measure	Mean	SD	SE Mean	t	df	p-value	95% CI for Mean Difference
Fluency Pre-test	3.53	0.52	0.13				
Fluency Post-test	4.00	0.65	0.17				
Difference (Pre-Post)	-0.47	0.64	0.17	-2.82	14	.014*	Lower: -0.82, Upper: -0.11

Note: N=15 where SD is standard deviation; SE is standard error; df is degrees of freedom, and CI is confidence interval. $p < 0.05$

illustrates marked improvement in fluency concerning the Digital Storytelling intervention.

The study examined the impact of Digital Storytelling (DST) as a pedagogical approach on the speaking fluency of highly motivated undergraduate learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The application of DST as a teaching strategy resulted in improved learners' fluency scores. A paired samples t-test revealed that fluency scores increased from an average of 3.53 (SD = 0.52) in the pre-test to 4.00 (SD = 0.65) in the post-test, indicating higher oral performance among learners in the subsequent assessments. The average difference in these scores was significant, with t (14) = -2.82, p = .014, and 95% confidence intervals ranging from -0.82 to -0.11, confirming the hypothesized improvement.

The outcomes demonstrated that participating in DST as a pedagogical approach improves learners' fluency by facilitating speech repetition, narration, and multiple forms of expression that promote confident and fluent speech. This benefit also seems to relate to the moderation of learner autonomy, with social interaction serving as a key component of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Bruner, 2006; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The results also underscore that the learner-centered approach of Digital Storytelling (DST) boosted students' motivation, as a consequence, changing the undergraduates' speaking practices by resolving anxiety and enhancing fluent speech (Bai & Xian, 2024; Mohammadi Khomjani, 2020; Paas et al., 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

This research employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to explore learner perceptions and observable changes in speaking performance following the integration of DST activities in an English-speaking course. The sample consisted of 15 highly motivated undergraduate EFL learners, selected using purposive sampling based on established motivation indicators. Although the sample size limits the generalizability of findings, it was deemed appropriate for exploratory analysis and thematic insights.

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Table 2. High-Motivation Students' Fluency Before and After Digital Storytelling (DST) as a Teaching Strategy Implementation

Fluency Element	Pre-DST Implementation	Post-DST Implementation	How DST Contributes to Improvement
Smoothness	Some unnatural pauses or hesitations, but the story remains generally coherent.	Mostly flows smoothly with minimal disruptions.	DST encourages practice and repeated story retelling, helping students reduce hesitations and unnatural pauses. Students can refine their pacing and flow using multimedia tools, making the story smoother.
Coherence	Some unclear or jumbled moments, but it was still understandable.	Mostly clear, with minor unclear segments.	DST encourages the organization of ideas into a coherent narrative structure, where students can visualize the flow of their story, enhancing logical sequencing and coherence.
Rate (Pacing)	Inconsistent moments are too fast or too slow.	Mostly steady, some fluctuations in speed.	DST promotes the structuring of their stories into a cohesive framework, which aids in visualization and subsequently reinforces logical order and cohesion.
Pauses (Frequency & Length)	Pauses at unnatural points, but still understandable.	Mostly natural, with minor hesitation.	The tools in DST, for example, voice recording and playback, assist students in self-regulating their speaking rate. Students can achieve an optimal pace for storytelling

Confidence	There is noticeable hesitation and occasional wavering in pitch/volume.	Mostly confident, some wavering, but solid delivery.	through repeated practice. Through DST, students practice delivering stories in a safe, iterative environment. Visual and auditory feedback boosts their confidence by allowing them to refine their delivery and self-assurance over time.

Integrating Digital Storytelling (DST) in teaching increases the speaking fluency of highly motivated undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. DST provides an engaging approach to effective communication through multifaceted tools: crafting, storytelling, and narration foster confident pacing, strategic pauses, and smooth transitions, which are essential for the effectiveness of second language communication. In employing DST as a teaching strategy, an impressive strategy is provided to elevate motivation among highly motivated students (Mohammadi Khomjani, 2020; Tamimi, 2024).

The implementation of Digital Storytelling (DST) improves the flow of speech. This smoothness in speech, or lack thereof, is greatly improved through using DST. As noted, highly motivated learners often practice repeatedly, a hallmark of DST as a teaching strategy, further encouraging them to polish their storytelling skills. Students work on controlling natural pauses or hesitations with the 'Tell Your Story' Activity while recording, editing, and listening to their edits. Students can control pacing and refine their speech as they engage with the media elements in DST, thus enhancing their rhythm, flow, and speech while reducing hesitation (Bai & Xian, 2024; Du et al., 2024).

Regarding coherence, DST leads learners through stories stepwise, allowing them to formulate their thoughts logically. Through storytelling, incorporating listening and seeing, learners can better tell stories with clear beginnings, middles, and ends. The Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy tools help students

digitally outline each part of their story, increasing their focus and minimizing the confusion during storytelling. DST improves clarity and coherence in speech by assisting a person to get from unclear speech, most of the time, to clear, organized speech (Kaptan & Cakir, 2024; Wei et al., 2025).

The rate (pacing) of speech is another element that Digital Storytelling (DST), as a teaching strategy, assists in improving. Highly motivated learners in EFL classes seem to have problems maintaining a steady pace and sometimes speaking too fast or too slow. Using DST as a teaching strategy, learners can record their stories and listen to their recordings to adjust their delivery rate. Because DST is an iterative teaching strategy, students can play around with pacing to discover the rate that allows them to communicate effectively and fluently. Technology not only permits students to practice at their convenience but also lets them assess their speech rate to the normal flow of conversation, which helps improve rate, rhythm, fluency, and pacing in speech (Fu et al., 2021).

Managing pauses in speech, including their frequency and duration, is an integral element of proficient speech that is enhanced with the help of DST. Highly motivated students who actively engage with DST understand better where and how to pause for accentuation and where to continue without unnecessary interruption. Because of the digital nature of DST, learners can observe and control their pauses more effectively than has traditionally been the case with other methods. From the recordings, students can evaluate the impact of their pauses and refine their timing so that their speech is neither robotic nor monotonous. By integrating self-correction and the visual feedback, DST helps reduce the occurrence of disallowed pauses, fostering more fluent and confident speech (Chen, 2024).

The most accentuated advantage of using DST for highly motivated EFL learners is its ability improve their self-esteem in oral communication skills. Speaking fluently in a foreign language can be intimidating, but DST provides a safe environment for learners to rehearse, edit, and retell their stories. This cyclical process build confidence, enabling students to reflect on their

performances and gradually adjust to become more comfortable with their speaking abilities. In a self-paced setting free from pressure, learners are more willing to overcome their fear of speaking and embrace confident, expressive communication (Du et al., 2024; Kang & Kim, 2024; Mohammadi Khomjani, 2020).

In conclusion, using Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy significantly increases the speaking fluency of highly motivated EFL learners at the undergraduate level. The multi-faceted nature of DST ensures progress in smoothness, coherence, pacing, pausing, and most importantly, confidence, thus bolstering the learner's performance and shaping them into successful communicators. Through participation in DST, the students not only polish their fluency but also gain a higher degree of self-reliance regarding their ability to articulate in English (Bai & Xian, 2024; Hava, 2019)

RQ 2: How do highly motivated EFL learners perceive Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy for enhancing their speaking fluency?

Upon critically reflecting on the impact of DST in various educational settings, it becomes clear that its strength lies in skill development and value alignment. In line with Sociocultural Theory and Self-Determination Theory, DST enables meaningful learner participation through tasks that foster ownership and personal relevance. By scripting, recording, and sharing stories that reflect their cultural touchpoints, learners are immersed in a learning environment that supports cognitive and emotional engagement. For instance, narratives centered on personal transformations during Ramadan, family rituals, or overcoming social anxiety showcase how DST bridges the gap between language learning and identity affirmation.

This perspective aligns with the view of Canagarajah's (1999) and Belda-Medina's (2022), who argue that English language learning in postcolonial and religiously grounded contexts must accommodate local epistemologies and identities, rather than impose external communication standards. As this study shows, DST embodies this alignment by offering learners a space to

practice English through stories they feel comfortable and proud to share.

Furthermore, recent findings by Nair et al. (2021) and Tamimi (2024) confirm that DST substantially improves learners' speaking confidence and fluency, particularly in sensitive and collectivist cultural environments. It helps reduce the affective filter that inhibits spontaneous speaking in classroom settings.

To answer the second research question on how highly motivated EFL learners perceive DST for enhancing their speaking fluency is explained in Table 3.

Table 3. Highly Motivated Students' Perception of Usefulness of Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy on their Fluency

Perception Aspect	Pre-DST Perception	Post-DST Perception
Increased Motivation and Engagement	Students felt disconnected from speaking activities and lacked personal engagement.	Students became highly engaged, expressing excitement and motivation through storytelling.
Enhanced Self-confidence	Students expressed hesitation and anxiety about speaking in public.	Increased self-confidence as students practiced in a low-pressure, iterative environment.
Improved Fluency and Speech Elements	Students struggled with inconsistent speech, hesitation, and unclear organization.	Fluency improved, with smoother speech and more coherent narratives in storytelling.
Active Collaboration and Feedback	Limited feedback from peers or instructors reduces the effectiveness of improvement.	Peer feedback became a significant part of the learning process, enriching speaking performance.
Personalization and Autonomy	Students had limited control over topics and speech practice activities.	Students gained autonomy in selecting topics and managing their speaking practice.
Enjoyment and Positive Learning Experience	Traditional speaking activities were	Students found DST enjoyable, engaging,

	perceived as tedious and stressful.	and less stressful than traditional methods.

Incorporating Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lessons provides a new, engaging, holistic technique for improving learners' speaking fluency. Using language, DST fosters interest, raises self-esteem, and enhances personalization, all serving language development. This analysis aims to integrate the insights gained from experiences of highly motivated EFL learners with DST within the conceptual frameworks, such as Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Sociocultural Theory, demonstrating how DST affects several dimensions of speaking fluency development.

The Implementation of DST revealed increased motivation and overall engagement among learners, which is probably the most significant outcome. Students involved in this study previously had unfavorable perceptions about speaking exercises, which caused them to attempt to communicate in a way that lacked personalization. They described traditional methods as overly imposed, inhibiting genuine engagement with the language. The introduction of DST transformed this experience. Many students reported heightened motivation to partake in class and interact with English, attributing this shift to the creativity inherent in the DST approach. This motivation was attributed to the autonomy and control that DST provided in choosing topics and storylines. These findings support Bai and Xian (2024) assertion that DST as a teaching strategy improved students' speaking skills, autonomy, and motivation.

The transformation occurred through the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that motivation is maximized when learners engage in activities autonomously within a self-directed framework (Ryan & Deci, 2020). DST as a pedagogical tool aligns with SDT by enabling students to create stories to fill in the relevant gaps, therefore developing their language skills and social skills. One student explained, "I felt more

excited to speak because it was my own story, and I had control over how I told it." In that regard, DST supports students' motivation to learn a new language through meaningful engagement with the language tailored to their diverse interests.

Anxiety impedes speaking fluency for most learners and remains one of their most significant challenges. Many learners reported considerable anxiety related to public speaking, particularly in English, prior working with DST. These concerns impeded students' fluency, as they cannot speak freely and confidently. Conversely, these fears have been lessened through the iterative design of Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy. Students could record and edit their narratives multiple times, thereby facilitating polishing and refinement before actual interactions, creating a stress-free environment where learners could develop their speaking skills (Robin, 2016; Tatlı et al., 2022; Zhussupova & Shadiev, 2023).

Furthermore, students made the necessary adjustments by employing self-assessment and playback recording methods, leading to improved fluency and increased self-confidence. Through consistent practice, learners reflected on their speaking skills and gradually became more assured. One learner noted, "I feel much more confident now; I can speak more fluently without the fear of making mistakes." Analyses indicate that DST facilitated the simultaneous development of skills while also allowing learners to mitigate anxiety, resulting in freer and more confident speech. This findings aligns with the cognitive load theory proposed by Paas et al. (2003) and Tatlı et al. (2022) that highlights the benefits of reducing cognitive burden. By shifting focus towards peripheral tasks, which alleviate the strain on the core processes, DST allows learners to speak more freely, as some anxiety associated with the task requirements has been removed.

The most notable impact of Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy on language learning is the enhancement of speaking fluency. Before participating in DST, students had trouble with pacing, smoothness, and overall coherence within their speech. Their narratives were often marked by unrelated pauses, resulting

in a chaotic thought process. However, following the implementation of DST as an educational technique, learners overcame these difficulties. The improvement in students' speech can be attributed to the narrative tools' functionalities, which include recording, playback, and editing, allowing them to eliminate interrupting phrases and achieve proper rhythmic flow. This positively contributed to the students' speech credibility and clarity.

A statement from a student, "I have more control over my pace now," captured how their proficiency had changed. This is consistent with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the importance of feedback and peer interaction in language learning (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The strategy of DST promotes collaboration within the social environment of the classroom, enabling learners to receive constructive feedback from both peer and teachers, which is crucial for the enhancement of speaking skills. Furthermore, the DST approach is inherently as multimodal, incorporating imagery, sound, and language, which describes the integration of many different cognitive processes aiding the achievement of fluency through active repetition of the language (Chen, 2024). Students create and edit digital stories, which allows them to practice their speaking skills, and this practice, as research shows, is essential for achieving fluency (Fu et al., 2021). The combination of self-control, response to performance, and consistent practice leads to improved automaticity of speech, thereby enhancing the speech's smoothness, coherence, and rhythm."

Peer sharing and subsequent feedback stand out as the defining features of Digital Storytelling (DST) as an instructional strategy. In the past, students had limited opportunities to socialize and receive structured feedback concerning their speaking skills, thus leading to a rather conservative estimation of their strengths and weaknesses. It facilitated increased collaboration with peers and cross-evaluation, with other people's input helping them achieve better speaking skills. Many students reported being able to identify more gaps in their performance due to peer review sessions, particularly in terms of fluency and the logical sequencing

of ideas. In light of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which underscores the centrality of social interaction in language learning, these comments were invaluable. New language skills could be learned by creating social dialogues that included narrating their contents. Feedback aids learners in developing a profound understanding of language, its concepts, and proficient mastery (Wei et al., 2025).

The autonomy element within DST as a teaching strategy refers to learners selecting and controlling the topics and intricacies of their assignments. It is an additional factor that strengthens speaking accuracy and skills. Even before implementing DST strategy, many students encountered passive engagement challenges that were considerably interlaced with the language due to monotonous activities designed for them and rigid movements organized within the classroom. Digital storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy, however, allowed learners to determine topics of personal interest for themselves and where they could control and take ownership of their work. As one of the learners remarked, "I liked that I could choose a meaningful story. It made the whole process more enjoyable." That autonomy is crucial to intrinsic motivation, one of the three fundamental pillars of self-determination (SDT). Motivation is higher when the learners can choose what they want to engage in (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Digital Storytelling (DST) as a teaching strategy aligns with the SDT principles as learners get to choose the stories they want to tell, work in a participatory manner, and show fluency.

The implementation of DST as a teaching strategy brought about a more practical and enjoyable way of learning. From the students' perspectives, traditional speaking activities were bound to be stressful and tedious, contributing to their disengagement. On the other hand, DST as a teaching strategy allowed for so much creativity and innovation that students enjoyed learning. As articulated by the students, "I felt relaxed and in a good mood," with many expressing a preference for multimedia as a means for self-expression. As a teaching strategy, DST was perceived as considerably more enjoyable than regular speaking exercises. One

student noted, "Multimedia made it a creative endeavor instead of a test." Such notions align with Gardner (2014), who claims that the key motivators that drive effective language learning are enjoyment and motivation. By removing the pressures associated with speaking tasks, DST improved the classroom atmosphere and students' interactions with the language.

To sum up, applying Digital Storytelling (DST) as a pedagogical strategy promotes the development of speaking skills among language learners. From a Vygotskian perspective, as elaborated in his Sociocultural Theory, with Self Determination Theory (SDT) and Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), learners' speaking skills are enhanced through the autonomy granted by SDT. The application of DST not only fosters improvement in learner confidence but also encourages and refines students' engagement with the language on multiple levels. Moreover, the facilitation of fluent multimodal presentations strengthens collaborative efforts. This study illustrates how DST assists learners in achieving fluency while promoting personalization, enhancing motivation, and supporting their growth throughout the construction of their language learning journey.

CONCLUSION

Digital Storytelling (DST) not only serves as a strategy to facilitate speaking practice within the classroom but also emerges as an autonomous, culturally relevant, and deeply personal approach. It enhances identity affirmation, encourages self-motivation, and aids fluency development, especially in EFL contexts within predominantly Muslim countries. This study illustrates how highly motivated learners are more confident and fluent in speaking when DST is employed benefitting from increased autonomy and reduced anxiety and heightened creativity.

Despite the findings being context- and sample-specific, one implication underscores the pedagogical importance of DST as a responsive teaching strategy. It adeptly integrates affective engagement with cognitive achievement in oral performance. To

pursue this line of research, studies involving more heterogeneous learner groups with longitudinal frameworks to evaluate the enduring effects of DST on language use are necessary. In conclusion, this study confirms that Digital Storytelling serves as a transformative catalyst when implemented in culturally sensitive and motivation-rich settings. It enhances learner fluency, fosters autonomy, and builds speaking confidence in EFL education.

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Appendix:

Week Instructional Schedule for DST-Based Speaking Course

Week	Activity Description
1	Participant Profiling & Pre-Test: – MESPQ (motivation questionnaire) – Pre-test of speaking fluency
2	Introduction to DST & Group Formation: – Understanding the DST framework and speaking goals – Topic brainstorming aligned with personal/cultural themes
3	Scriptwriting: Draft 1: – Collaborative story outlining – Grammar and vocabulary review – Peer discussion
4	Scriptwriting: Refinement & Peer Feedback: – Script translation (if necessary) – Review and revision – Pronunciation self-check with tools
5	Storyboarding: – Creation of visual storyboards – Linking images and sequences to narrative
6	Voice Recording Practice: – Recording narration – Peer feedback on delivery
7	Mid-Project Rehearsal & Peer Review – Full-script oral rehearsals in groups – Peer and teacher oral feedback sessions – Pronunciation and pacing coaching – Completion of a self-evaluation checklist to prepare for recording and multimedia integration
8	Feedback Review & Script Finalization: – Reflecting on mid-semester results – Incorporating teacher feedback into the DST draft

9	Production Begins: Multimedia Curation: – Gathering images, music, and sound effects – Introduction to video-editing tools
10	Voice Integration & Timing: – Aligning narration with visuals – Adjusting pacing and timing
11	Video Editing: – Finalizing videos with transitions and effects – Technical polishing
12	Peer Review & Teacher Feedback: – Sharing video drafts – Structured oral and written peer critique
13	Video Revision: – Refining DST product based on feedback
14	DST Exhibition & Reflective Dialogue: – Showcasing completed videos – Group discussions on learning experience
15	Post-Test (Final Speaking Test): – Individual oral fluency test using the same rubric as Weeks 1
16	Final Reflection & Open-Ended Questionnaire: – Written reflection on DST impact – Completion of qualitative data collection