

EXPLORING EFL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE AND CHALLENGES IN DIGITAL STORYTELLING-BASED LISTENING ACTIVITIES AT VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study explored students' experiences and challenges in learning listening through digital storytelling at a private vocational high school in Subang. Many EFL learners face listening comprehension difficulties, especially in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, following spoken input, and maintaining concentration. Therefore, this study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how digital storytelling shapes EFL learners' listening learning process. A qualitative case study design was employed involving six tenth-grade students selected based on their participation during digital storytelling lessons. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that students generally had positive experiences with digital storytelling. They showed enjoyment and interest, used visual elements to support story comprehension, reported positive changes in pronunciation awareness and vocabulary acquisition, and engaged in collaborative discussion. However, students also encountered challenges, including unfamiliar vocabulary, difficulty following the pace of narration, and fluctuating concentration. To cope with these difficulties, they relied on visual cues, subtitles, teacher explanations, and peer discussion. The study concludes that digital storytelling provides meaningful listening experiences and supports students' engagement when accompanied by vocabulary preparation and listening guidance.

Keywords: *Digital storytelling, listening comprehension, EFL learners, students' experiences, students' challenges*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi pengalaman dan tantangan siswa dalam pembelajaran menyimak melalui *digital storytelling* di salah satu sekolah menengah kejuruan swasta di Subang. Banyak pembelajar EFL mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami kosakata yang belum familiar, mengikuti informasi lisan, dan mempertahankan konsentrasi selama kegiatan menyimak. Berdasarkan hal tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami secara lebih mendalam mengenai bagaimana *digital storytelling* membentuk proses pembelajaran listening para pelajar EFL. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan enam siswa kelas X yang dipilih berdasarkan partisipasi mereka selama pembelajaran *digital storytelling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas,

wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi. Data dianalisis dengan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana (2013) yang meliputi kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa memiliki pengalaman positif terhadap penggunaan *digital storytelling*. Siswa menunjukkan minat dan antusiasme, memanfaatkan unsur visual untuk memahami cerita, melaporkan perkembangan dalam kesadaran pelafalan dan perolehan kosakata, serta terlibat dalam diskusi kolaboratif. Namun, siswa juga menghadapi tantangan berupa kosakata yang belum familiar, kesulitan mengikuti kecepatan narasi, dan perubahan tingkat konsentrasi. Untuk mengatasi hambatan tersebut, siswa memanfaatkan petunjuk visual, *subtitle*, penjelasan guru, dan diskusi teman sebaya. Kesimpulannya, *digital storytelling* dapat memberikan pengalaman menyimak yang bermakna apabila didukung persiapan kosakata dan bimbingan menyimak yang memadai.

Kata Kunci: *Digital storytelling*, keterampilan menyimak, pembelajar EFL, pengalaman siswa, tantangan siswa

A. Introduction

Listening is one of the important English skills that students need to develop because it provides language input and supports meaningful communication. In an EFL classroom, listening helps students understand classroom instruction, receive new information, and respond appropriately to spoken messages. When students have weak listening skills, they may misunderstand the content of learning materials and lose important information delivered by the teacher.

However, listening remains a difficult skill for many EFL students. Hardiyanto et al. (2021) found that students often struggle with vocabulary recognition, concentration, and the influence of classroom noise during listening activities. These problems may prevent students from understanding

spoken English accurately. Similar difficulties also appear when students listen to materials that contain unfamiliar words, fast pronunciation, or accents that they rarely hear in daily learning.

The development of information and communication technology offers teachers more options for designing listening activities. Technology can help teachers present listening materials in a way that is more concrete, attractive, and accessible. One learning medium that can be used for this purpose is digital storytelling. Digital storytelling combines spoken narration with images, animation, music, sound effects, and visual movement. This combination allows students to process information through both audio and visual channels.

Digital storytelling is relevant for listening instruction because it does not require students to rely only on sound. Aini et al. (2023) explain that digital storytelling presents stories through electronic media by combining sound, pictures, colors, animation, and music. Fakhrudin et al. (2023) argue that English teachers need to consider both audio and visual channels to support listening comprehension. When students hear spoken English while seeing relevant images, they can use visual clues to infer meaning and follow the story more easily.

Previous studies show that digital storytelling can improve listening comprehension and increase students' engagement. Akdamar and Sütçü (2021) found that students who learned through digital storytelling performed better and showed more positive attitudes toward listening tasks than those who received conventional instruction. Budianto et al. (2021) also reported that digital storytelling helped students remember the plot of a story, recognize English words, and predict the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. Other studies found that the audio-visual features of digital storytelling helped students understand story

content, maintain attention, and learn pronunciation and vocabulary.

Even though previous research reports positive outcomes, most studies on digital storytelling have been conducted in general academic settings, such as elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, or university contexts. The use of digital storytelling in vocational high schools has received less attention. This gap is important because vocational students may have different learning needs, practical orientations, and levels of English exposure compared with students in general academic programs.

Another gap concerns the dominant research approach used in previous studies. Many studies employed quantitative or quasi-experimental designs that focused on measuring score improvement. These designs are useful for showing effectiveness, but they do not fully explain how students experience digital storytelling during listening activities or what challenges they encounter while using it. Therefore, a qualitative approach is needed to provide deeper insight into students' learning experiences and difficulties.

Based on these issues, this study investigated EFL students' experiences and challenges in learning listening through digital storytelling at a private vocational high school in Subang. The study addressed two research questions: what are EFL students' experiences in learning listening through digital storytelling, and how do EFL students encounter challenges in learning listening through digital storytelling? The study is expected to provide contextual insights for English teachers and future researchers who are interested in using digital storytelling to support listening instruction in vocational education.

B. Research Method

This study used a qualitative method because it focused on understanding students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges rather than measuring numerical improvement. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore how participants construct meaning from their experiences. In this study, the researcher examined how students responded to digital storytelling-based listening activities and how they described the difficulties they encountered during the learning process.

The research employed a case study approach. A case study was suitable because the research focused on one bounded context, namely one selected tenth-grade class at a private vocational high school in Subang. This approach enabled the researcher to investigate the implementation of digital storytelling in a specific classroom setting and to obtain detailed information from observations, interviews, and documentation.

The study was conducted from 27 April 2026 to 30 April 2026 at a private vocational high school in Subang. The school was selected because it provided learning facilities that supported the implementation of digital storytelling. The researcher had also conducted preliminary observation at the school and found that students showed active participation during English learning activities. Digital storytelling had not been used in the English learning process at the school before this study was conducted.

The participants were six tenth-grade students from class X RPL. The English teacher assisted the researcher in selecting the class and supported the implementation of digital storytelling during listening activities. The selected students participated in classroom

listening sessions and provided data through observation, interview, and documentation. Their participation allowed the researcher to explore how vocational high school learners experienced digital storytelling and what obstacles appeared during the listening process.

The research instruments consisted of an observation checklist, semi-structured interview guidelines, and documentation. The observation checklist was adapted from Vandergrift and Goh's framework of listening processes and Robin's elements of digital storytelling. It focused on students' engagement, listening comprehension, interaction with multimedia, metacognitive listening processes, participation, interaction, and learning challenges. The interview guidelines were used to explore students' experiences, interest, vocabulary problems, narration speed, concentration, perceived learning outcomes, and strategies for overcoming difficulties.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during two face-to-face English listening meetings in which

digital storytelling was used as the main listening material. The researcher observed students' attention, emotional responses, participation, peer interaction, and difficulties during the activities. After the observation stage, six students were interviewed individually to obtain deeper information about their experiences and challenges. Documentation included photographs, students' worksheets, observation notes, digital storytelling media, and interview recordings.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data condensation stage, the researcher selected and simplified information that was relevant to the research questions. In the data display stage, the researcher organized the data into themes related to students' experiences and challenges. In the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the patterns found in the data and verified them through triangulation among observation, interview, and documentation. Ethical considerations were applied by requesting school permission, informing participants

about the research purpose, protecting students' identities, and using the data only for academic purposes.

C. Research Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented based on two main themes: students' experiences in learning listening through digital storytelling and students' challenges during the activities. The observations were conducted on 27 April 2026 and 28 April 2026, while the interviews were conducted on 30 April 2026. The findings show that digital storytelling created both positive learning experiences and several listening difficulties for students.

The first experience found in this study was students' positive affective response toward digital storytelling. During the first meeting, students showed interest in the video, story, animation, and sound effects. They sat attentively, maintained eye contact with the screen, and reacted to humorous or surprising parts of the story. During the second meeting, their engagement became stronger because they were more familiar with the learning format. They looked more confident, responded more actively, and participated more in the learning activities.

The interview data supported the observation results. All six participants described the digital storytelling activity as enjoyable and interesting. Several students stated that the animation made the story easier to follow, while others mentioned that the characters, audio, and storyline attracted their attention. Students compared the activity with their usual English learning, which they described as mostly involving materials or reading. For them, listening through digital storytelling felt less monotonous because the story was presented through moving images and sound.

The second experience was students' narrative comprehension through visual support. Observation data showed that students frequently used visual elements to help them understand the story. When they encountered unfamiliar words, they looked at the characters' actions, facial expressions, illustrations, and setting. Some students also pointed to parts of the visual display while discussing the story with peers. These behaviors indicate that students did not depend only on spoken narration; they actively connected audio information with visual clues.

The interview results confirmed that visual elements became an important scaffold for comprehension. Students reported that pictures and animation helped them understand the story even when they did not know all English words. For example, one student explained that the image of a shepherd asking villagers for help made the meaning of the narration easier to imagine. Another student stated that the combination of pictures and sound helped them continue following the story despite vocabulary limitations. This finding shows that digital storytelling supported meaning-making through multimodal input.

The third experience concerned students' perceived changes in listening skills. During the first meeting, several students could identify the main idea of the story, but some were still hesitant when the teacher asked them to explain the content. Their responses were short and lacked detail. During the second meeting, students showed better comprehension. More students could retell the main message of the story in simple language and participate in post-listening discussion.

Students also reported positive changes in pronunciation awareness and vocabulary acquisition. Some

students said they learned how certain English words were pronounced after hearing them in the story. Others remembered new words such as wolf, sheep, shepherd, villager, and cry because they heard the words while seeing the related visual context. The repeated exposure to the story helped students focus on details after they had understood the general content. This suggests that digital storytelling helped students connect sound, meaning, and context.

The fourth experience was active engagement through worksheets and collaboration. During the first meeting, only a small number of students actively shared opinions during the post-listening discussion. However, several students still discussed the story with peers and asked about unfamiliar vocabulary. During the second meeting, the teacher facilitated group work using worksheets. Students discussed comprehension questions, wrote answers in Indonesian to ensure understanding, translated their answers into English, and presented the results to the class.

The worksheet results showed that students could answer questions about characters, conflict, and moral message coherently. This was meaningful

because many students admitted that their English vocabulary was limited. The group discussion helped them compare interpretations, ask for help, and complete the task together. Students also stated in the interviews that discussion with friends made the activity more lively and helped them understand pronunciation and word meaning.

Although students generally responded positively, they also faced several challenges. The first and most dominant challenge was vocabulary comprehension. Observation data showed that students became confused when the digital stories contained many unfamiliar words. In the first meeting, some students relied on subtitles, visuals, and teacher explanations to understand the story. In the second meeting, they were still challenged by vocabulary, but they looked more capable of overcoming the problem because they had become more familiar with the activity.

All interview participants acknowledged unfamiliar vocabulary as a common problem. Some students said they understood only important words, while others recognized a few words such as sheep, wolf, cry, or villager. Several students knew the

Indonesian meaning of an object or event but did not know the English word. This finding indicates that limited vocabulary affected students' ability to understand the details of the story. However, students did not stop listening when they encountered unfamiliar words. They used visual clues, subtitles, teacher guidance, and peer discussion to maintain general comprehension.

The second challenge was difficulty following the pace of narration. During the first meeting, some students could not immediately catch all information because the story was delivered at a pace that felt fast to them. Replaying the video helped students follow the story more effectively. During the second meeting, most students were more familiar with the format and could follow the story better, although some still struggled with certain parts of the narration.

The interview data showed that students perceived narration speed differently. Some students felt that the narration was standard, while others felt that it became fast when they had to think about unfamiliar words. The difficulty was therefore not only caused by the actual speed of the narration. It was also related to the time students

needed to process vocabulary. When students spent too much attention on one unfamiliar word, they risked missing the next part of the story. To handle this situation, several students chose to continue listening and use the next visual or narrative context to recover meaning.

The third challenge was fluctuation in concentration. Observation data showed that students generally maintained attention during both meetings, but their focus sometimes declined in the middle of the activity. This happened when they encountered difficult parts of the narration or when classmates invited them to talk. Compared with the first meeting, students appeared more focused and confident in the second meeting because they had become familiar with the digital storytelling format.

Interview data indicated that concentration was affected by both internal and external factors. Internally, unfamiliar vocabulary made some students focus on guessing meaning rather than following the story flow. Externally, peer interaction sometimes distracted students from the screen. One student said that looking away for a few seconds could make them miss the next part of the story. Another

student explained that difficult words made it hard to focus because they kept thinking about the meaning. These findings show that listening through digital storytelling still requires attention control, even when visual support is available.

The findings demonstrate that digital storytelling provided a more engaging listening experience than conventional audio-only activities. The multimodal features, especially animation, pictures, narration, and sound effects, helped students connect spoken language with context. This supports the idea that listening comprehension is an active process in which learners construct meaning by using linguistic input, background knowledge, and contextual information. In this study, students did not only hear the story; they also interpreted visual information, discussed meaning with peers, and reflected on unfamiliar vocabulary.

The findings also show that digital storytelling needs instructional support. Visual elements helped students understand the general storyline, but they did not remove all listening difficulties. Vocabulary remained the strongest obstacle, and it affected students' perception of narration speed

and concentration. Therefore, teachers should provide vocabulary preparation before listening, guide students during while-listening activities, and create opportunities for post-listening discussion. With proper scaffolding, digital storytelling can become an effective medium for improving students' engagement and comprehension in vocational EFL listening classes.

Table 1 Summary of Students' Experiences and Challenges in Digital Storytelling-Based Listening

Aspect	Main Finding	Instructional Meaning
Positive responses	Students enjoyed the animation, audio, characters, and story flow.	Digital storytelling was perceived to make listening activities more engaging and less monotonous.
Visual support	Students used images, animation, and character actions to infer meaning.	Visual elements can scaffold comprehension when vocabulary is limited.
Listening progress	Students reported better pronunciation awareness and remembered new vocabulary.	Repeated exposure helps students connect sound, meaning, and context.
Collaboration	Students discussed worksheets and helped peers understand the story.	Post-listening tasks can strengthen comprehension and participation.
Vocabulary challenge	Unfamiliar words became the most frequent difficulty.	Teachers need vocabulary preparation before listening.
Narration and focus	Narration felt fast when students processed unfamiliar words, and focus sometimes fluctuated.	Teachers need replay, guidance, and structured while-listening tasks.

D. Conclusion

This study explored EFL students' experiences and challenges in learning listening through digital storytelling at a private vocational high school in Subang. The findings show that digital storytelling created an enjoyable and meaningful listening experience. Students showed positive affective responses, used visual elements to understand the stories, perceived improvement in pronunciation

awareness and vocabulary acquisition, and participated actively in worksheet-based collaboration.

The study also found that students encountered several challenges during the activities. The most dominant challenge was unfamiliar vocabulary. This difficulty affected students' ability to understand details, follow narration speed, and maintain concentration. Students also experienced temporary loss of focus due to internal factors,

such as thinking about word meaning, and external factors, such as peer distraction. However, students used several strategies to overcome these problems, including relying on visuals, subtitles, teacher explanations, and peer discussion.

The results imply that digital storytelling can support listening instruction when it is applied with appropriate guidance. Teachers are encouraged to prepare key vocabulary before the listening activity, replay important parts of the story when necessary, and provide structured post-listening tasks. Students are encouraged to record unfamiliar vocabulary and review it after the activity. Future researchers may conduct similar studies with more participants, different vocational majors, or comparative designs to obtain broader findings on the use of digital storytelling in EFL listening instruction.

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