Engaging young learners of English with multilingual digital storytelling (MDST) during covid-19 school closure

by Erma Nuroh

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In Indonesia, the use of Multilingual Digital Storytelling (MDST) to teach elementary school students English is not new. However, digital learning is rarely implemented in practice because English is a local subject and a foreign language in elementary schools. However, during the pandemic, researchers recognized the need for online learning and used Multilingual Digital Storytelling (MDST) as a model to promote and reflect on multiliteracy in education. The teachers recognize the importance of storytelling, and interactive storytelling allows for self-expression and interaction with others. This research explicitly outlines their experience of using MDST as a pedagogical innovation for pupils aged 12 years. In this MDST project, students co-created digital stories as multimodal texts. In this regard, they used a variety of multilingual (e.g. Javanese, Bahasa Indonesia, and English) as well as visual and technical resources, which enabled them to communicate their real-life experience through digital stories. As a result of this learning, English primary school teachers will experiment with MDST to engage students in language learning as an effective method of innovative learning.

Keywords: English language learning, multilingual digital storytelling; multiliteracies framework, young learners of English

INTRODUCTION

As was the case in several other countries, tens of thousands of schools in Indonesia were closed in March 2020 as a result of COVID-19's pandemic lockdown. While schools reopened in August for the green zone and a portion of the yellow zone, as announced by Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim on the Indonesia Minister of Education and Culture's YouTube channel. However, the teachers' constraints remain, and it's almost impossible to predict when the closure will end at this point. As a result, teachers face enormous difficulties adapting to online teaching in the face of this pandemic, sustaining learning with limited contact with students, and encouraging students to pursue learning and growth. However, it is unclear to what extent educators are equipped to address this issue and its most critical factors.

Extensive school closures have taken place over several periods, generally affected by rapidly changing technological advances and digitalization, not least to the point of education (eg, Selwyn 2012; McFarlane 2019). As a result, 'digitalization in the classroom' has become a major concern, both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, several schools in Indonesia – as in other Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand – lag behind the planned development of information and communication technology (ICT) transformation (Fraillon et al. 2019). The question, therefore, arises not only as to whether the lockdown can be compensated by the use of digital resources by teachers and students in online teaching but also as to how the expertise of teachers and the educational opportunities of teachers to acquire digital skills lead to mastering the difficulties of the particular situation of teachers.

The use of technology to teach children can be a complex learning tool for children to learn, particularly when learning English. One of the approaches used to teach English online through digital storytelling. Current research on the use of interactive stories in primary schools (Jones & Chapman, 2017) shows that children are involved in sensors as they engage in multilingual digital storytelling. Multilingual Digital Storytelling (MDST) is a digital storytelling method that provides language and culture, young learners argue that when stories are produced in different languages or a mixture of languages, they also have greater cultural validity" (Anderson and Macleroy 2016, 1). The theoretical approach is defined in the book "Multilingual Digital Storytelling" (Anderson and Macleroy 2016), which aims to change monocultural discourse and to create connections between languages. They explore how language learning should go beyond a narrow instrumental approach that focuses on conversational concepts, adapted environments, and intercultural exchanges (Anderson and Macleroy 2017, 494). Another research confirmed the value of incorporating digital storytelling and language learning in the MDST study: the ability of students to cope with reading and writing difficulties; link speech and literacy and carry out the writing process; the room for children to analyze and communicate various cultural influences in the lifestyles; facilitated learning through meaning and trust.

Numerous studies on the use of multilingual digital storytelling (MDST) in English classrooms have been conducted. Evidence suggests that multilingual digital stories, or MDST, can have a significant impact on knowledge, language, and literacy (Jones & Chapman, 2017; Widodo, 2016). Although previous research has focused on the use of MDST in adult-oriented language learning, recent literature has rarely focused on young learners, such as children aged 10-12 years (Pappamihiel & Knight, 2016). To address this realistic void, this article discusses the use of multilingual digital stories in primary schools throughout Indonesia. To begin, we'd like to provide some context for English in Indonesian primary schools. Since the 2000s, English has been included in the curriculum of Indonesian elementary schools (Hawanti, 2014; Widodo, 2016). Although English primary schools lack an official curriculum, this ICP class follows the Cambridge curriculum and the Ministry of Education and Culture's National Curriculum; English primary school teachers create or start preparing curriculum documents in English, such as textbooks, teaching materials, and practice tests.

Numerous educators continue to rely on and utilize nationally published EYL textbooks. According to Hawanti (2014), English teachers have taught this textbook to children. This textbook contains exercises and examination questions. These practices are grouped according to themes. Current empiric evidence (Widodo, 2016) suggests that the English teaching profession does not provide much space for students to be innovative and engage in various English things that are related to everyday life.

This study examines the professional development of teachers, specifically those who have been teaching for two years. They were at Islamic Primary School in East Java, SD Muhammadiyah 3 Ikrom. As part of the digital indigenous' generation (Prensky 2001), the goals of this study are required to rapidly adapt to the complexities of online learning posed in the current situation. After completing basic education, they are assumed to be significantly qualified to use interactive learning software (Jäger-Biela, Kaspar, and König 2020). We will discuss the following research questions: What is the importance of Multilingual Digital Storytelling for learners and their studying?

METHODS

Three months (March–May 2020) of research observations were conducted at the Islamic Elementary School in Sidoarjo, East Java, Indonesia, with the following considerations: (1) the school provides an EYL curriculum for the International Class Program (ICP); (2) the school has a bilingual class that uses English in the learning process; and (3) the researcher has access to the school to carry out the research process. The ICP program is a regular plus class, which implements the National curriculum from the Ministry of Education and Culture, but in the process, there is an additional Cambridge curriculum. Participatory Action Research (PAR) was used in this study because multilingual digital storytelling (MDST) is a component of a learning tool activity that teaches students and teachers how to become storytellers. Two English teachers as well as the researchers discussed with students about such a theoretical subject. The purpose of this study is to motivate and inspire teachers and students to use multilingual digital stories (MDST) as a method of English instruction through the creation and delivery of multilingual digital stories. The researcher collaborated with two English teachers to collect this data. Researchers have also served as peer teachers. This is the role of researchers in the choice process. The classes developed by English teachers and researchers are made up of students who have volunteered to engage in online learning of English. These participants are inspired to learn technology in English. During fieldwork, researchers place themselves as outsiders and insiders in the field to close the distance between the participants studied and us as researchers (Bruce, Flynn, & Stagg-Peterson, 2011).

Participants consisted of 20 children aged between 10-12 years of a private Islamic primary school in rural areas. The school is located in Sidoarjo, East Java, Indonesia. The students studied English in kindergarten for two to three years. Before beginning the observational field research, the

researcher held a Video Chat with two English teachers and

twenty students to discuss and report on this research in Indonesian. I encourage students and teachers to maintain the confidentiality of all information that may be used for publication purposes. Additionally, they offered to represent the data's use for research purposes. When this study began, the students were in fifth grade. Each student is multilingual in Indonesian, Javanese, and English. They come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (for example farmers, traders, entrepreneurs, employees, etc.).

Before interacting with students, the researcher presented technical consulting instruction to two English teachers on how to use multilingual digital storytelling while working from home (WFH) during the pandemic, to professionally train more of these teachers. The two English professors were literary technicians. During the five hours of classroom instruction, students are instructed to take pictures and write stories or essays. Photo Story 3 software was used as a visual story development software framework in this research. Photo Story 3 has been selected due to its low ICT skill requirement as well as ability to be accessed offline. All English teachers have received technology training, and both teachers and researchers have instructed students on how to use the software in multilingual digital storytelling. To sum up, there are four stages of participating students, teachers, and researchers: gathering observational data through participant assessments, informal interviews, and images of student work and story drafts. All data were analyzed using interpretive and narrative approaches. Data is classified as point interactions, i.e. teacher-student interactions; groups of students, description of this relationship based on how often teachers and students optimize this encounter, and interpersonal contact, i.e. how students communicate with friends.

These three phases of research make it possible to catch some of the results that are important to the research question. Thematic research is primarily focused on recognizing, analyzing, and documenting trends (themes) in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This research involves the preparation of data, the preliminary coding, the search for themes between codes, the verification of themes, the definition and marking of themes, and the preparation of the latest presentation (Braun & Clarke, 2006) explaining that a thorough discussion of each phase has taken place. Data is then classified and labeled based on recurrent themes that represent data sets related to a specific research subject. Class discourse analysis is being used to understand categorized results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Developing Knowledge and Collaborative Storytelling

The purpose of this study is to teach students how to comprehend stories in aspects of their objectives and context, how to use story-telling technology, how to use Indonesian and English as story-telling tools, and how to engage in multimodal activities. Students have compiled this knowledge and shared draft stories to create digital stories. Students can prepare for interactive story creation with classmates by developing knowledge about stories and using Microsoft Picture Story 3 as a technology tool.

Additionally, the teacher has increased students' familiarity with digital stories, which are creative mashups of personal voices, images, music, sounds, and/or text, typically displayed in the form of short videos (Lee, 2014, Lee, 2015). Developing digital story knowledge to demonstrate student growth through digital stories has the potential to provide students with new possibilities to write a wide range of multimodal texts. Additionally, students are fostered in the creation of digital stories using the Photo Story 3 software. In other words, students have been involved in the creation of digital stories throughout that knowledge-building stage. Equipping students with a variety of skills, such as storytelling, Photo Story 3, language resources, additional technical support tools (e.g. cameras or smartphones), and semiotic resources, enables others to collaborate on the production of digital stories.

Take note that data sources such as pictures, songs, and audio all contribute to the overall meaning and implications of the digital story. The teacher demonstrated several online language resources for students to use when creating digital stories, including devices such as smartphones and electronic translators. Additionally, students may use copyrighted content, like images and videos, as long as the source is properly cited or recognized (to avoid plagiarism and respect copyrighted content, they study literacy). They are also directed to use a cell phone equipped with a camera to photograph the object being observed. After knowledge is built, students and teachers participate in writing stories about the object being observed. This joint story was created during field visits by visiting and inspecting rice fields around the school.

The teacher says students what they have been learning and guides them to think about what stories they're going to write. Until pupils take pictures of their stories, the teacher teaches them how to take pictures. The teachers are preparing to draw from these images. This example shows students how to take pictures of what they are going to observe. When a teacher discusses how images can be a source of stories, students are interested. Service requires logical thought. After the photo session, the teacher describes the rhetoric or organizational gestures of the plot, including the beginning, the middle, and the end. They've read a few brief accounts of such a three-stage organization. All participants stated that they had never been taught how to write stories using this rhetorical device. They are simply writing stories without regard for the rhetoric surrounding them. Each student stated that they earned straightforward instruction within an immersive story they had never heard before. They also admit that sharing knowledge and making stories together makes them think about how to make digital stories. Through teacher-structured learning activities, learners are ready to follow the development of story texts and story circles at this stage.

Language learning, multilingual repertoires, and identity

The research focuses on the creation and sharing of digital storytelling in schools as a framework for language learning. This is true pedagogically for both content-based and task-based approaches to language teaching when viewed through

the lens of network-based language teaching (NBLT), with an emphasis on learning and themes. In contrast to the widespread belief in communicative language education that L1 should be removed from the classroom, the idea here is for digital stories to be bilingual.

Significant evidence from school data indicates that participation in activities deemed important has aided students' language learning. It aims to improve student's communication skills and ability to present to an authentic, local, and global audience, while also providing an appropriate space for learning and self-expression. Highlighting the process of creating a visual story using the Photo Story 3 program, elementary school students in the ICP class explain how to say something significant, assisting you in finding appropriate words to describe yourself: 'Since you're in the actual life and that you are obvious to say this just happened to come out of your mouth ' (student 15). As with previous research (Castaneda 2013), it has been demonstrated that the sense of responsibility, as well as possession generated by digital storytelling when students are tasked with their voices being heard, is a powerful stimulant for learning, and we begin immediately. Naturally, what has been real and true in the story can also be fictitious, as evidenced by the work of the students in the beginner English class at SD Muhammadiyah 3 Ikrom, who transformed the theme of the textbook 'My Village' into mystical. 'external.' A world filled with intrigue as well as journey.

This enables students to move beyond the consumed vocabulary and practice deciphering the new language required by the stories they tell. The teacher was surprised at how many learners had been able to complete it independently when given adequate space. This includes the acquisition of skills in the use of dictionaries, the application of grammar rules (for example, transitioning from first to third person verb forms), and, perhaps most importantly, the ability to manipulate the language they were previously completely proficient in. new goals' (Teacher 1). In response to other research findings (Castaneda, 2013; Reyes et.al, 2012), she also made significant strides in communicating with students about 'putting their English phonics together to sort pronunciation' (Teacher 1) and repeating voice work to get it right. Increased speaking confidence has been widely discussed in schools by students and teachers, and it is also considered critical when exposing assignments to the role of preparing controlled assessments in English, so it is necessary to develop the quality and the use of language in their research.

Due to the bilingual nature of story production, various language levels emerge at various stages of the creative work. When students collaborate in groups, they frequently use their L1 (or dominant thinking language) for task preparation, assignment agreement, and debate. As far as drafting is concerned, linguistically more skilled students go straight to the target language and then transform into English, but most of them are written first in both Indonesia and Javanese, after which the text is transcribed into the target language (English). Correlations between languages, as revealed by interview data, promote valuable metalinguistic perspectives, including the likelihood of distorted literal approaches. As a result, teachers working with L2 (Indonesia) students are reflecting on how their students begin to understand that 'you cannot directly translate from Indonesian to English,' trying to add that it's something they do not know until they choose to use their language targets (Teacher 2). When sharing digital stories during learning, it was also shown that students were proud to present themselves in an integrated and detailed way through a language vocabulary embodied in the 'multi-competence' framework of Photo Story 3 and the principle of multiliteracies. In addressing this prevalent monolingual debate, we are attempting to re-evaluate and re-organize identity involvement.

Teachers' perspectives on multilingual digital storytelling with young learners

English teachers have discovered that multilingual digital storytelling is beneficial for young English learners when they focus on the overall teaching experience. They discovered that students acted as agents in a variety of capacities, including photographer, policymaker, negotiator, analyst, interviewer, and researcher. Such functions provide a necessary framework for developing multimodal digital stories. Teachers who participated observed that multilingual digital storytelling engaged students in the development of multimodal storytelling texts, something they had never encountered during their structured journey of English learning. While acquiring knowledge, they recognize that language subjects serve as a springboard for developing awareness.

The chosen theme provides a starting point for students' writing scripts for multimedia story assignments. Also, the teacher needs to teach pupils to get acquainted with the story structure, vocabulary sources, and technological resources. They also claim that digital storytelling has required students to use a variety of skills to find and organize content, compose scripts, and combine image, voice, and music to share stories with others through storytelling circles (Lee, 2014). One teacher said that multilingual digital storytelling creates literacy and digital awareness for students. It provides a learning environment in which students can study various forms of literacy, such as multimodal (e.g. sound, video, visual effects) and visual modes of communication (e.g. text, pictures, sound), to create digital storytelling. Just like two English teachers demonstrated, because creating multilingual digital stories requires a variety of resources, students engage in a variety of modes of thought, including logical reasoning, critical thinking, and creative thinking. The teacher notes that multilingual digital storytelling engages children in a range of events that involve the others in discursive photo discussions as a form of narration and storytelling.

In the search and collection of objects (photos), learners participate in activities such as judgment, collaboration, critical thought, innovative thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and cooperation. When writing stories, the teachers said that the students grasped each other's perception of the images taken in collaboration. During this writing exercise, students learned the need for teacher scaffolding to help students find acceptable words

when such terms were either professional or quasi. The teacher points out that students have generated and

exchanged meaning and information through their linguistic and academic experiences with classmates. This student-centered learning has facilitated the production of meaning and the collective creation of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The multilingual digital story-making learning provided students with a new way to tell their own story in a multilingual way, and to share and explore their life experiences through the production of digital stories. It inspired children to become multimodal narrative text writers. Throughout the process of creating a digital story, students should be actively involved when solving problems in selecting images, considering captioning photos, and co-editing a digital story design. They could convey their thoughts through the images they captured. The development of multilingual digital stories could democratize the way children made a story using a variety of tools, such as pictures, music, and animations. Equally significant, students used both the first and the national languages as well as English to make sense of the photographs chosen to construct a narrative that reflected their experience. They often took advantage of the various meanings or messages conveyed in the chosen images. In this respect, photographs may enable students to generate ideas. This visual artifact reflects what the students learned during field observation.

By engaging students with multilingual digital stories, they have more creatively developed their stories based on images taken by themselves. We noticed that three areas of language that most students were concerned with were vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. We, therefore, offered additional language-focused tutorials to students. Also, collaborative learning has been able to involve students in a variety of MDST activities. By working together on digital stories along with the assignment of roles, students may assume their responsibilities. As regards the use of technology, we had to make sure, in the beginning, that students were literate in or familiar with technology e.g. laptop or desktop) and editing software (e.g. Photo Story 3) because they may not know how to operate computers. While most children were digitally literate, we spent some time teaching them to use editing tools, Photo Story 3. We also had to teach the students how to objectively collect and pick appropriate images and sounds to construct a story, so that certain non-linguistic tools could give meaning to the story. Another problem we've faced is how to teach students to give positive feedback on their peer-reviewed stories and multilingual digital stories. As stated earlier, due to time constraints, we did not introduce story circles or presentations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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