Developing English Speaking Skills of Thai Undergraduate Students by Digital Storytelling through Websites

Manussanun Somdee & Suksan Suppasetseree, Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand

Abstract: Digital storytelling is a powerful technology tool in education which integrates computer technologies and the art of telling stories together. It combines texts, images, and audios into creative media of storytelling. Digital storytelling can be used as a multimedia tool in language learning to help students improve their English speaking skills by using technology to tell the story in their own words and voice. The purposes of this study were to investigate the implementation of digital storytelling in developing English speaking skills and the satisfaction toward learning from digital storytelling of 50 Thai undergraduate students who enrolled in the English compulsory course at Suranaree University of Technology in Trimester 2/2012. Before creating digital storytelling, students had to take pre-test to identify their speaking ability. After that, the students were encouraged to create their own digital storytelling by telling the story along with the pictures through window movie maker. Their speaking skills were practiced and improved when they rehearse to tell the story with the window movie maker. Afterwards, all of the digital storytelling were presented and published through digital storytelling websites for sharing the ideas with their friends in the classroom. After the presentation, the post-test was used to compare for finding out how well students’ English speaking skills were developed. The evaluation for efficiency was conducted relying on the Brahmawong E1/E2 formula with 80/80 standard criterion. In addition, the students were interviewed how digital storytelling help them improve their speaking abilities. The effects of implementing digital storytelling in the classroom have developed and helped the students’ English speaking skills. Moreover, it can help teachers to design their curricula with digital storytelling in the instruction so that students can be active and self-directed learners.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Speaking Skill, Web based-Instruction

1. Introduction

The English instruction in Thailand has developed continually, catching up with the other countries’ standard. Many schools have tried to improve their English curriculum in every level sequencely. Although English has been taught in Thailand for a long time, the problems of teaching and learning the English language in Thailand are still recurring shown. The researcher is interested in using technology to improve students’ English speaking skills.

1.1 General Statement of the Problems of Teaching and Learning English Language in Thailand

According to Biyaem (1997), teachers face many obstacles in English language teaching and learning, for instance, inadequately equipped classrooms and educational technology. As for the students, they are lack confidence to speak English with their teacher and classmates because of the effect from their mother tongue, particular in pronunciation. They also lack of opportunity to use English in their daily lives. Many Thai students could not use English skills effectively, especially listening and speaking (Jaiyai, Torwong, Usaha, Danvirattana, Luangthongkam & Piyadamrongchai, 2005). Moreover Punthumasen (2007) found that most
of students do not want to learn English because they find the subject matter boring and also teaching methodology in the classroom is not interesting. In addition, there are not enough interesting textbooks and materials in English which can encourage them to study. As Prapphal (2003) stresses that technology is a good instruction to help students communicate, although it cannot be a substitute for a good language teacher. These reasons support an idea that Thai language teachers at all levels should use more interesting activities, technology, web-based projects, online self-tests, and electronic portfolio to supplement their teaching.

1.2 Research Questions
This study consists of three main research questions:
1) Does the efficiency of Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) created by the researcher meet the prescribe 80/80 standard?
2) Does learning English through Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) improve students’ English speaking skills?
3) Does Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) provide positive opinions toward teaching English language?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Speaking Problems in the Classroom
According to Widdowson (1994), speaking is the active production skill and use of oral production. It is the capability of someone to communicate orally with others. In all of four keys language skill, Khamkhien (2010) also believed that, speaking is considered to be the most important in a second language. It is the ability that requires the process of communicative competence, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary improving. Wongsuwana (2006) believed that speaking skills can be trained and it doesn’t depend on the talent. However, it still is a problem of many Thai students. According Wiriyachitra (2003), English learning in Thailand is not very successful because the most students lack the opportunities to learn and practice English in English environment. Students’ tension, excitement, lack of confidence during taking a speaking in the class time, constraint also are the problems in teaching and learning English (Ratanapinyowong, Poopon, & Honsa, 2007). Many researchers’ investigations of the need for English in workplace had suggested that the English curriculum in Thai university should focus on the most listening and speaking (Wiriyachitra, 2003). Integrating activities in the classroom is the suitable procedure which is selected in this research.

2.2 Speaking Activities in the Classroom
The English activities are one of opportunities to practice the students’ speaking skill. As Harmer (1984) reports since there were stimulations activities in the classroom for motivating the students, they were increased the self-confidence of being part of the classroom including answering the question, sharing the idea, and also presentation. Therefore researcher afraid that, if the students do not get enough chances and activities to practice speaking skill in language classroom, they may get discourage soon in learning. Activities and tasks must be designed to expose the students to the aims language and increased students’ motivation to learn the language in class. Harmer (1998) believed that those good speaking activities can motivate students. As Long & Richards (1987) studies that Learner-centered classroom, the study that opens students’ attitude to focus on individual leaning, where students do the talking activities in groups and have to take responsibilities for using communication to complete a task are revealed to be more conductive to language learning.
than teacher-centered classes, an organization dedicated to the development of teachers. One task used as an English teaching speaking skill activity is storytelling. It is one of activities that is the best choice which researcher see through the abilities of its.

2.3 Storytelling

Storytelling is the original form of teaching (Pederson, 1995). Many researchers believed that story learning plays an important role in students’ language development (Hsu, 2005). All kinds of interesting storytelling are used in different situation which depend on the suitable of students’ age and situation. As Jianing (2007) reported that using storytelling in English classroom is one of good activities to encourage students to study English. Storytelling also can help ESL learners become more self-confident to express themselves spontaneously and creatively (Colon-vila, 1997). Moreover the storytelling is not only assisting to stimulate students’ imagination, but also in developing their language abilities (Koki, 1998). According to Strong & Hoggan (1996), storytelling is a process that offers opportunities to practice organizing, categorizing, and remembering information concurrently with practice in predicting, summarizing, comparing and contrasting information. The process of connection language and though to imagery is the basic element involved in oral and written language comprehension, language expression, critical thinking (Bell, 1991), increased listening and reading comprehension (Applebee, 1978), greater language fluency, and increased vocabulary (Wellhousen, 1993).

Although using storytelling in ESL classroom is still satisfy nowadays, it is almost used in the kindergarten, elementary, primary school, and higher education respectively. In the level of higher education and undergraduate are rarely studies English through storytelling. Because of the older age, the simple storytelling may not be enough interesting for learning English of undergraduate students. Therefore, the way to increase technology for being a part in the ESL classroom is chosen. As Super, Westrom & Klawe (1996) support those providing technology occasional entertaining diversions motivated students during learning task. In this study, technology which is chosen to be tool in the ESL classroom is “Digital”, which is the use of computer in the language learning process. A tool which can also improve the students’ integrated English skills and more interesting is now requiring. However, the interesting tool chosen in this study is “Digital Storytelling” which has an impact on students’ learning and motivation through technology integrates with language learning.

2.4 Digital Storytelling

Nevertheless, Bernajean (2004) gives the meaning of Digital Storytelling as the ancient art of oral storytelling which mixed together with the authors’ own story voice and personal tales which blending images, music, narrative and voice together into their powerful creations (Porter, 2004). Nowadays, digital storytelling has become a compelling tool for classroom teachers and students (Brown, 2005). In agreement with Ohler (2007), digital storytelling has become a widely used new media activity. It is one of educational technology tool used in the classroom. Ellis (2005) suggest that technology has affected the collaborative relationships between students and the way they interact with each other which eventually influence the learning opportunities in the classroom. In the present, development in technology which related one of interesting activity in the classroom, storytelling, is digital storytelling.
Students are motivated, engaged, and interesting in digital storytelling (Davis, 2004). It engages students in the language of their generation which does not like traditional instruction strategies (Hofer & Swan, 2006). Hibbing & Erickson (2003) have shown that the use of multimedia in teaching helps students retain new information as well as aids in the comprehension of difficult material. Digital storytelling also can provide students and teachers with a powerful tool to use in the classroom. Additionally, in the process of telling the story through digital storytelling, they are learning to use technology (Tucker, 2006). As an instruction tool, Burmark (2004) found that the integrating visual images with written text both enhances and accelerates student comprehension, and digital storytelling is an especially good technology tool for collecting, creating, analyzing, and combining visual images with written text. Meadow (2003) also believed that digital storytelling is the social practice of telling stories that makes use of low cost digital cameras, non linear authoring tools, and computer to create short multimedia stories.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study is a quasi-experimental research in the form of one group pre-test and post-test design with both quantitative and qualitative data analyses. The experiment with the Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) lasts 10 weeks. The study includes fifty participants. Prior to the experiment, the participants are measured in their speaking ability by using a pre-test. Then, post-test is given to each participant after all of them use the DSW for 10 weeks. In addition, the participants express their reactions concerning improving their speaking ability by using with the DSW through an interview.

3.2 Research Participants

A group of fifty first-year undergraduate students who study English I (203101) at Suranaree University of Technology, Nakhon Ratchasima, in the second trimester of academic year 2012 is purposively selected as the participants in this study. The reason that the researcher has chosen the first-year undergraduate students, who study English I to be the participants in this study, is that students, who study English I, which is the first compulsory English course in the university, should be trained to acquire certain speaking skills after they finish the course and this is suitable for the present study.

3.3 Research Instruments

3.3.1 Digital Storytelling Website (DSW)

The Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) consists of teaching materials and exercises. It is designed by the researcher. In webpage, there are two units, and each unit has three exercises and a test. Moreover students had to do their own digital storytelling project and submit in the website. There are the basic guides explaining how to do the digital storytelling and the sample of the project in website also.
3.3.2 Pre-test and Post-test

Every participant takes a pre-test to identify their speaking ability before using the DSW. While using the website every 3 weeks, all participants are given the post-test. The results of pre-test and post-tests are compared.

3.3.3 Semi-structured Interview

To elicit students’ reactions about learning through the DSW, a semi-structure interview is conducted final the last post-test. Twenty students are randomly selected. Then they are interviewed in order to find out about their reactions and comments on the DSW.

3.4 Data Collection

The study used one group pre-test and post-test quasi-experimental design. The data collection involved pre-test manipulation with 50 participants. The subjects were assigned to do the pre-test before using Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) to develop English speaking skill. All participants presented an oral presentation in group of 3-4 members about 5-10 minutes in the same topic of the English I course syllabus. Then post-test was given every after finishing the unit in the DSW. The teachers of the English I course are invited to evaluate the students’ oral presentation and choose the most suitable scale of speaking ability for students. After completion of the 10 weeks program, twenty participants are randomly selected for an interview. The interview aims at finding how the DSW helps them improve their speaking ability.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the different instruments are analyzed and interpreted quantitatively and qualitatively.

3.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis was carried out with the data obtained from the oral presentation tests. The statistical method employed to compare the students’ English achievement was the t-test to measure improvement of speaking ability after using the DSW. Lastly, the evaluation the courseware efficiency was calculate based on Brahmawong E1/E2 formula with criteria of 80/80 standard.
3.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis
The qualitative data analysis was conducted using the data obtained from the semi-structured interview. The interview aimed at finding the students’ reactions and comments to their learning through the DSW. It took place after the students were given the last post-test. Twenty students were interviewed in Thai. Each interview lasts between ten to fifteen minutes. While interviewing, a tape-recorder was used to ensure the interview process and ease review process. Then, the data was classified into positive and negative reactions.

3.6 Digital Storytelling Try-out
In the study, there were three phases to try-out the Digital Storytelling Website (DSW). After the end of each try-out phase, the website evaluation was conducted to revise and improve its efficiency. The three phases were consisted of an individual testing, a small group testing, and a field testing.

The individual testing
The first step for try-out was the individual testing with three first year students who in difference English proficiency levels (able, moderate, less moderate) and were not participants in the study. The three students were asked to learn, practice the units and exercises through DSW for writing their views and opinions in the web board. After that the researcher was revised and followed the students’ feedback.

The small group testing
The following small group testing was conducted with six students in different levels of English proficiency (2 able, 2 moderate, 2 less moderate) and were not participants in the study. The same procedure was conducted in this group. After the website try-out in this stage, the researcher revised and modified some vocabularies, conversations, exercises etc.

The field study testing
The last stage for try-out was the field study testing with thirty first year students in difference English proficiency levels (10 able, 10 moderate, 10 less moderate) and were not participants in the study. The same procedure was done with group. All of them were asked to practice and do the exercises through the DSW. After that, there is a web board for the students to express the personal opinions about the DSW. Therefore the website would be revised and determined for the efficiency based on criteria of 80/80 standard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1 Individual Testing</th>
<th>Phase 2 Small Group Testing</th>
<th>Phase 3 Field Study Testing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 students</td>
<td>6 students</td>
<td>30 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1 able student</td>
<td>• 2 able students</td>
<td>• 10 able students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1 moderate student</td>
<td>• 2 moderate students</td>
<td>• 10 moderate students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1 less able student</td>
<td>• 2 less able students</td>
<td>• 10 less able students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Website Try-out Table
4. Results and Discussion

In this paper, the data obtained from the different instruments of the Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) was analyzed and the results of each research question are shown here:

**Question 1:** Does the efficiency of Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) created by the researcher meet the prescribe 80/80 standard?

![Figure 3. Results](image)

To answer the question one, the 50 students were asked to practice and do the exercises through the DSW. As shown in Figure 3, the results of experiment, the Digital Storytelling Website had efficiency at 81.93/84.70 that met the specified criteria 80/80. It was because the website was tested in three steps: individual, small group and field group testing in order to examine the efficiency of the website. The efficiency of DSW in try-out results, the individual testing was not approach to the standard of 80/80, the researcher included some contents and exercises according to the samples feedback. Although the efficiency of DSW in the small group testing was improved, some exercises were edited again since the range between E1 and E2 were not close to. After the DSW was developed twice, the score of E1/E2 on the field study is better and nearly perfect. It can be seen that the efficiency of the product (E2 = 84.70) was higher than efficiency of the process (E1 = 81.93). This was because the website had texts, pictures, sound effect which motivated students’ interest for learning English. As Suwannabubpha (2006) reported that the students in his group saw the pictures and videos which enhanced students’ motivation and comprehension.

**Question 2:** Does learning English through Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) improve students’ English speaking skills?

To answer the question two, the data was used from the students’ speaking presentation. The students presented an oral presentation in group of 3-4 members about 5-10 minutes in the same topic. Then two foreign teachers evaluated the students’ oral presentation and chose the most suitable scale of speaking ability for students.

As seen in Figure 4, the students’ score in the pre- and post-speaking test was compared. It was found that the mean scores of the post-test (2.43) were significantly higher than the pre-test (2.11) which means that the Digital Storytelling Website helps the students to improve their English speaking skills. As Kataoka (2000) reported that many students are more
confident to practice speaking with computers than face to face setting. They feel free to pronounce without embarrassment of their errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Standard Deviation between Pretest and Posttest

**Question 3: Does Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) provide positive opinions toward teaching English language?**

To answer the question three, a total of twenty students were interviewed in this study, as the topics are related to the feeling of using Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) and improving English speaking skills.

The students were asked about how they feel about using the Digital Storytelling Website (DSW). All of the students had positive feelings to DSW. Eighty-five percent of them said that they like DSW because it allowed them to practice and improve English speaking skill. It was easy to use and also interesting and enjoyable. Here are some of the results during the students’ interview:

“I like it. I think it is very useful.”

“Website is very interesting and beautiful. Moreover it is very easy to use. I can understand the vocabulary on the website.”

The students were asked “Do you enjoy using the Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) Why? Or Why not?” All of them answered “Yes, I do.” They enjoyed using DSW because it is very beautiful and the lessons are easy to understand with many pictures. As some of the students’ interview are shown:

“I am so excited that I know how to use the technology improving my English speaking skill by myself.”

“I enjoyed using the website because I can practice my English speaking skill by telling the story. I can tell my story whenever I want and nobody laugh at me when I say something wrong.”

The students were asked “Do you think English speaking skill have improved?” All of them answered “Yes, I do.” They think their own English speaking skill have improved because they had more confidence to speak English with their own digital storytelling when they tell the story. For example:

“I think my English speaking skills have improved because it makes me happy with speaking activity. I have a chance to record my voice for my story. It is very enjoyable to improve my English speaking skill.”

The students were asked how the Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) help them to improve their English speaking skill. Many students liked to study by themselves to improve their English speaking skill. They think the website promoted independent learning to practice
speaking English by record their voice to narrate the story. As some of the students’ interview are shown:

“It makes me more interested in speaking process and activities. Moreover I also have opportunity to think creative storytelling and record my voice. It is an interesting activity.”

The students were asked about problems of learning through the Digital Storytelling Website (DSW). The results from the semi interviews asking about participants’ opinions towards digital storytelling improving their English speaking skill. Although the results from the qualitative data indicate that the participants had positive attitude towards digital storytelling in this research, there were still some problems, such as there were only two units in this course. The website should have more. As some of the students’ interview are shown:

“I think the website should have more exercises for practice.”

According to the findings, it can be concluded that Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) had positive effects on the improvement of students’ speaking skills. Students are motivated, engaged and interested in digital storytelling (Davis, 2004). Robins (2008) found that digital storytelling has captured the imagination of both students and teachers. At all levels of the study and in most subjects can use digital storytelling in many ways to support students’ learning by encouraging them to organize and express their own ideas and knowledge in an individual and significant ways (Robin, 2008)

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Digital Storytelling Website (DSW) was a suitable tool for first year students at Suranaree University of Technology for increasing their knowledge of English. Moreover, it was a means for increasing students’ motivation to improve and practice their English speaking skill. In this research, encouraging students to learn was defined as persuading students to participate in the activities, by making activities interesting for them, making them believe that they will be able to improve their speaking through DSW. An interesting instruction and activities in the classroom also can attract the student to participate teaching and learning in the classroom. The researcher sincerely hopes that this process can encourage and persuade students to improve their English speaking skills.

References


