THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIGITAL STORIES
ON LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Education (TESL)

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DEDICATION

God Almighty

Thou gave me the strength to keep moving on.

Beloved husband, soulmate, friend, my other half,

Khoo Jun Seng

Your love, support, positivity and patience was what made me endure the challenges,

It was a tough journey and I nearly gave up,

But I knew that at the end of the tunnel, there would be light.

The love of our life,

Ferson Marquevius Khoo Zhi Wei a.k.a Babang

Fernyvia Verra Khoo Xin Rui a.k.a Dadik

Ferris Haddeus Khoo Zhen Jie a.k.a Gemok

Fernydhea Odessa Khoo Xin Yu a.k.a Baby

I live my life for you.

Beloved Mum, Pirim Anak Migor

Siblings, Nureyev, Ricky Lee Jones & Caesar Louise Jones

Better things come to those who work hard for it,

We own this!
Praise the Lord! At last, I have reached the finishing line. A project which took lots of blood, sweat and tears, has finally bear its fruit.

Honestly, I couldn’t have done it on time without the constant help and guidance of my beloved supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Faizah Mohamad Nor. Her concern and her ever-willingness to spend time on me and with me contributed to the success of this finished product. I am totally proud of it and I am totally proud to have you as my mentor.

To my husband, children, mum & siblings, I am grateful for you being there with me through thick and thin, and for being a shoulder to cry on. I love you.

My deepest appreciation to my best friends Kana, Zila & Yani who have been with me through this journey of realizing our dream. May our friendship last forever.

Last but not least, special thanks to the SKTJJ1 management, colleagues and pupils for the support and co-operation. Thank you for understanding and for keeping up with me. It was tough, but it was certainly worth it.

God bless.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of digital stories (DS) on listening comprehension (LC). Listening is one of the skills in acquiring a language. However, this skill is the most difficult in learning a language. By developing this skill, it would lead to better comprehension thus acquiring the language better. DS was integrated into the teaching and learning (TL) of the English subject, to improve the student’s LC. The students were exposed to DS once a week during English lesson, for 8 weeks. The week before DS were introduced in TL, the students had to sit for a pre-test, where they were shown 40 pictures which were taken from the DS. They were to answer what they saw, be it in words, phrases or sentences form, depending on their ability. A week after the last DS was shown, the students had a post-test. The 40 pictures were shown again, and they had to write about it. Based on the findings of the study from the pre-test and post-test, questionnaire and teacher’s observations in the journal throughout the 8 weeks of treatment, DS was effective in improving the student’s LC. The students gave positive feedback on the use of DS in their lessons. The teacher also gave positive comments on the use of DS in LC. The students’ LC showed improvement, thus leading them to have a better grasp of the English language.
Kajian ini dilakukan bertujuan untuk mengkaji keberkesanan cerita digital (CD) ke atas pemahaman mendengar (PM). Kemahiran mendengar ialah salah satu kemahiran dalam penguasaan sesuatu bahasa, namun kemahiran ini adalah kemahiran yang paling sukar dikuasai. Dengan mempertingkatkan kemahiran mendengar, ini akan membawa kepada PM yang lebih baik seterusnya menguasai bahasa tersebut dengan lebih sempurna. CD telah diterapkan ke dalam pembelajaran dan pengajaran (PDP) subjek Bahasa Inggeris (BI) untuk membantu meningkatkan PM murid. Murid didedahkan kepada CD sekali seminggu sewaktu PDP BI, dan dijalankan selama 8 minggu. Seminggu sebelum CD diperkenalkan dalam PDP, murid menjalani ujian pra di mana mereka ditunjukkan 40 keping gambar yang dipetik dari CD dan murid perlu menjawab tentang apa yang mereka lihat, atau tafsirkan, dalam patah perkataan, frasa mahupun ayat, bergantung kepada kemampuan mereka. Seminggu selepas kesemua CD dipertontonkan, murid sekali lagi menjalani ujian (ujian pos) di mana 40 gambar yang sama ditunjukkan dan murid menjawab tentang gambar-gambar tersebut. Melalui dapatan dari ujian pra dan ujian pos, soal selidik dan jurnal guru yang memantau murid sewaktu penggunaan CD dalam PDP, ternyata penggunaan CD berkesan dalam meningkatkan PM murid. Murid turut memberi maklumbalas yang positif terhadap penggunaan CD dalam PDP. Demikian juga dengan ulasan guru yang mengajar mereka, iaitu CD telah meningkatkan PM murid, sekaligus meningkatkan penguasaan murid dalam BI.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

L1 - First language
L2 - Second language
KBSR - Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah
UPSR - Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah
ICT - Information, Communication and Technology
ELS - English Language Study
EFL - English as Foreign Language
ESL - English as Second Language
SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Science
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, the statement of problem, theoretical framework of the study, objectives of the study and the research questions. The operational definition of terms, the scope of the study and significance of the study are also presented in this chapter.

“The word 'listen' contains

the same letters as the word 'silent'.”

(Alfred Brendel)
1.1 **Background of the Study**

Listening is acknowledged as having the most significant role in communication, be it daily or education. According to Rankin (1952), listening has taken up 40%-50% of the total time spent on communicating, in contrast with 31.9% speaking, 15% reading, and 11% writing. Mendelsohn (1994) also rectified that listening takes up 40-50% of communication time; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9%. Wolvin and Coakley (1979) stated that the amount of time that students are expected to listen in the classroom ranges from 42% to 57.5% of their communication time. On the other hand, Taylor (1964) estimates that nearly 90% of the class time in high school and university is spent in listening to discussion and lectures.

Listening, together with speaking, reading and writing is one of the four skills in language learning. As a means of communication, listening plays an important role in people’s lives. We have to listen to many utterances in our everyday life. Conversations will take place only when we can understand what our interlocutor says, even though input (listening and reading) alone is not sufficient for acquisition but it is absolutely necessary for second language learning.

Listening is a communication channel that is most frequently used but the studies show that listening skills are the least developed (Galvin, Prescott & Huseman, 1992). It has been estimated that we listen twice as much as we speak, four times as
much as we read, and five times as much as we write. Rost (2002) defines listening as a multi-layered process:

1. receiving what the speaker actually says which is hearing correctly;

2. constructing and representing meaning which is decoding;

3. creating meaning through involvement and imagination which is applying prior knowledge of content and community norms, and predicting ahead; and

4. negotiating meaning and responding which is working out an appropriate response.

Conaway (1982) states that listening has been regarded as the most widely used language skill in the classroom and it plays an important role in one's academic success than reading skill or academic aptitude. Listening is perceived a difficult skill in learning a language especially by L2 learners. Arnold (2000) comments on the pressure it places on them to process input rapidly. Buck (2001) emphasizes the complexity of the listening process, in which the listeners must use a wider variety of knowledge sources to interpret data. Listening comprehension plays a main role in second language teaching, especially with young learners (Grabielatos, 1995). To teach more effectively English listening so as to improve students’ listening ability, teachers need to pay more attention to teaching methods related to this area, integrate listening with other teaching activities, and design listening activities for the classroom and employ creative methods of teaching.

Storytelling is one of these creative ways of teaching and learning in the class. Nowadays, with the rapid development of technology, a new version of storytelling is
emerging: digital storytelling. The term ‘digital storytelling’ refers to the use of technical tools to manipulate images, music, sound, graphics and the author’s voice to express and explore the author’s artistic expression (Porter, 2004). Porter also added that digital storytelling broadcasts the authorial voice through a new type of communication that is beyond the limits of traditional narration. Digital storytelling integrated with powerful technology can be an effective tool to enhance teaching and learning. The educational application of digital storytelling is attracting the attention of many educators (Chung, 2006; Lee, 2005; Robin, 2008; Sadik, 2008; Shin & Park, 2008).

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the effects of digital stories have in improving listening comprehension among Year Three students in a national primary school. This study will also look at the students’ perception towards using digital stories in listening comprehension activities and how it helps them in improving their listening comprehension. The teacher’s perceptions will also be taken into account on how the digital stories help the students in improving their listening comprehension.
1.2 Statement of Problem

Based on the researcher’s experience in teaching primary school students in a national primary school located in Pasir Gudang, ‘chalk and talk’ has always been the traditional way of teaching. This is a common sight in a classroom teaching and learning environment, especially in the Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 classes who are currently under Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (KBSR), where the students are exam-oriented and their goals are to achieve passes for all Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) subjects. Unless there is a need for the use of technology i.e., observation, micro teaching etc., then only the students are deviated into a whole new environment but this situation is quite rare. Otherwise, stimulus pictures, tons of writing and grammar exercises are given to drill and get them ready for the public exam. In other words, only textbooks and modules are used as a medium in class.

Due to this, the pupils get unmotivated and they have less concentration span, leading to an uncontrollable crowd and the learning is disrupted. For the Year 4 students who are the last batch of KBSR generation, with another 2 years undergoing this type of teaching and learning environment, they would certainly feel that the school is not fun at all, except for the part where they get to meet up with their friends. The researcher sees that, to attract and help students to learn English is, by integrating technology that could make the teaching and learning more effective, thus improving listening comprehension. Indeed, the teachers are expected to expand their creativity in teaching and with the exposure to internet and technology, the traditional way had since become a more ‘interesting but still traditional’ because the senior teachers have to gear up and improve on their Internet, Computer and Technology (ICT) skills, compared to the
juniors who were fortunate to have learnt ICT informally or formally (as in teaching institutes).

Furthermore, through informal interviews with other English teachers in the school, the students also encountered difficulties in the English class especially during listening comprehension. These difficulties coincide with Underwood’s (1989) seven causes of obstacles to efficient listening comprehension.

1. Listeners cannot control the speed of delivery, or how fast the speaker speaks.

2. Listeners cannot always have words repeated. In a classroom, the teachers decide what and when to repeat listening passages

3. Listeners have a limited vocabulary. The listeners might encounter an unknown word which may cause them to stop and think about the meaning of that word and thus cause them to miss the next part of the speech.

4. Listeners may fail to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another, giving an example, or repeating a point. Discourse markers used in formal situations or lectures such as "secondly," or "then" are comparatively evident to listeners. In informal situations or spontaneous conversations, signals are more vague as in pauses, gestures, increased loudness, a clear change of pitch, or different intonation patterns. These signals can be missed especially by less proficient listeners.

5. Listeners may lack contextual knowledge. Even if they can understand the surface meaning of the text, they may have considerable difficulties in comprehending the whole meaning of the passage unless they are familiar with the context.

6. Listeners face difficulty in concentrating in a foreign language. In listening comprehension, even the shortest break in attention can seriously impair
comprehension. Listening is very tiring because it requires an enormous amount of effort to follow the meaning.

7. Listeners learning habits such as comprehending text word by word.

Integrating technology into the classroom is not a new idea. Due to rapid technological evolution, new approaches to pedagogy through the use of Web 2.0 applications need to be studied (Salaberry, 2001). One application that is understudied in the context of English language learning is the integration of digital storytelling into the ELS classroom. Traditionally what was storytelling done by man with intonation, movements and gestures, thanks to technology, digital storytelling is the new version of the traditional storytelling.

These audio-visually enhanced flash stories become a potential tool in motivating even the most reluctant reader or writer. In a digital story, it might be a moving picture, or an animated movie, combined with audio, makes the story come to life. Alna (1999) said that storytelling naturally promotes the engagement of the individual imagination, and also the active involvement of the listeners as partners in the creation of the story experience. Digital stories is an effective pedagogical strategy that can be woven into instruction to increase students' competencies in all areas. Researchers such as Hibbing and Rankin-Erikson (2003) and Boster, Meyer, Toberto & Inge (2002) have shown that the use of multimedia in teaching helps students retain new information as well as aids in the comprehension of difficult material. And digital stories can provide educators with a powerful tool to use in their classrooms.
Therefore digital stories attempt to hold one’s attention and making the lesson more fun and attractive, as to what these researchers found out. This method has its own strength and weaknesses. Currently not many researches had been done on using digital stories in the classroom worldwide, and only a few had been done here in Malaysia. Therefore the researcher would like to add to these studies to identify how effective are digital stories in listening comprehension in a different context, to know the perception of the students towards using digital stories in listening comprehension activities, and to identify if digital stories do help in improving the students’ listening comprehension.

1.3 **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

To understand the complexity of this study, the researcher leans on several theories as suitable framings.
1.3.1 The Cognitive Learning Theory

The researcher bases the study on the concept of listening as a cognitive process. Chamot (1995) explains the concept of listening as a cognitive process in terms of stages where information, in the form of sound, reaches the listener's auditory and/or visual receptors, and is then filtered through the listener's short-term memory, working memory, and long term memory (p. 16). The listener, therefore, selects and interprets information in order to understand it (Vandergrift, 2011). This process, known as Anderson's model of comprehension, intricately describes what happens to information the moment the listener receives it by way of audio or audio-visual means.

Figure 1 Anderson’s Comprehension Model based on the Cognitive Learning Theory
The stages, three in all, are also known as perceptual processing, parsing, and utilization (Goh, 2002, p. 5). The received information is first temporarily stored in short term memory (perception), where only the information associated to the listener's prior knowledge or schema is selected and moved to working memory, "the mind's blackboard" (parsing). This first and second stage are significant to second language teaching and learning because at this stage the listener needs to be aware of strategies in order to handle the information; otherwise, it will be lost forever. Therefore, teachers need to help learners recognize what is relevant from what is not because the goal is for meaningful information to reach long-term memory (Chamot 1995; Rubin, as cited in Mendelsohn & Rubin 1995). Once information reaches the listener's long term memory, it becomes part of either declarative knowledge or procedural knowledge (utilization). Declarative knowledge includes concepts, vocabulary, and images… while procedural knowledge … includes both physical and cognitive skills and strategies" (Chamot, 1995, p. 16).

The researcher finds this theory relevant to this study because the aim of this study is to identify the effectiveness of audio-visual, which is the digital story, on the students’ listening comprehension.
1.3.2 Brain-based learning theory

Brain-based learning theory is built upon the structure of the brain how the brain receives and interprets information (Dwyer, 1998). Brain-based theories promote teaching and learning methods that appeal to a variety of learning styles and intelligences with the ultimate goal of increasing learning within a shorter time frame.

A teaching method that meets brain-based learning theories that has been receiving increasing attention is narrative storytelling (Rossiter, 2002). Additionally, storytelling as an effective teaching and learning method is touted by a number of other educational theorists and researchers who underscore storytelling as a reflective, transformative, and/or experimental teaching pedagogy. Literature reveals that narrative storytelling improves learning by actively engaging learners in the information they are being exposed to versus passive student participation often found in traditional classroom settings (Richter & Koppett, 2000). Moreover, it appears that narrative storytelling in a learning community meets the criteria of brain-based and several other learning and teaching theories on many levels.

The teaching method in this study is the use of digital stories, in which through the students’ perception will the researcher find if it engages them throughout the listening activity and does it helps in their listening comprehension.
1.3.3 Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning

Robin (2006) stated that generally, digital stories revolve around the idea of combining the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia, such as images, audio, and video. This is the main reason the researcher chose this theory to support this study. The cognitive theory of multimedia learning is based on three assumptions suggested by cognitive research:

1) **dual-channel assumption** – the idea that humans have separate channels for processing visual/pictorial representations and auditory/verbal representations (Baddeley, 1998; Paivio, 1986);

2) **limited capacity assumption** – the idea that only a few pieces of information can be actively processed at any one time in each channel (Baddeley, 1998; Sweller, 1999); and

3) **active processing** – the idea that meaningful learning occurs when the learner engages in cognitive processes such as selecting relevant material, organizing it into a coherent representation, and integrating it with existing knowledge (Mayer, in press; Wittrock, 1974).

![A Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning](image-url)
Figure 2 summarizes the cognitive theory of multimedia learning. Narration enters via the ears, so the learner selects some of the words for further processing in the verbal channel, organizes the words into a cause-and-effect chain, and integrates it with the visual material and prior knowledge. Animation enters via the eyes, so the learner selects some of the images for further processing in the visual channel, organizes the images into a cause-and-effect chain, and integrates it with the verbal material and prior knowledge. According to this theory, the cognitive process of integrating is most likely to occur when the learner has corresponding pictoral and verbal representations in working memory at the same time. Instructional conditions that promote these processes are most likely to result in meaningful learning.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. to measure the effectiveness of using digital stories in listening comprehension.

2. to know the perception of the students towards the use of digital stories in listening comprehension activities.

3. to know the teacher’s perceptions on the use of digital stories in listening comprehension activities.
1.5 Research Questions

1. Do digital stories help to improve the students’ listening comprehension?

2. What are the students’ perceptions towards the use of digital stories in listening comprehension activity?

3. What are the teacher’s perceptions on the use of digital stories in listening comprehension activities?

1.6 Significance of Study

The research is expected to identify the effectiveness of using digital stories in improving students’ listening comprehension. This study also aims to get feedback from the students on using digital stories in listening activities and if digital stories does help to improve their listening comprehension.
It is hoped that a conclusion can be made on whether digital stories is the most effective and most preferred in teaching listening and to be carried out during listening comprehension activities. By identifying this, teachers, especially language teachers would benefit from this by making their lessons more fun, interesting and capture the students’ attention in liking the subject. Moreover, producers of English teaching materials and curriculum planners could benefit from this study by producing digital stories for the purpose of teaching and learning, and integrating the use of digital stories not only in listening activities but any other activities in where digital stories are deemed suitable to be used.

1.7 Scope of Study

This study is narrowed down to only 30 Year Four students, from the second class in a primary school in Pasir Gudang. They are students with weak to average level of proficiency whereby their scores in their Year Three year-end examinations ranged from B to D grades only. It therefore cannot utilise the effectiveness of digital stories in listening comprehension among the below average or above average students.

The lesson plans would involve listening activities, using digital stories to enhance their listening comprehension. In addition, this study is limited only to listening
The digital stories are for the purpose of listening comprehension and the study focuses on identifying whether digital stories affect the students’ listening comprehension.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Listening

Lundsteen (1979) stated, “Listening is highly complex, interactive process that has been defined as ‘the process by which spoken language is converted to meaning in the mind’. Listening entails, receiving, attending, and assigning meaning (Wolvin and Coakley, 1979). Thus, for this study listening will be the main skill implemented in all the lessons throughout the experimental period.
1.8.2 Listening Comprehension

Vandergrift (1999) declares that “listening comprehension is anything but a passive activity”. Listening comprehension is as an active process in which individuals focus on selected aspects of aural input, construct meaning from passages, and relate what they hear to existing knowledge (O’Malley, Chamot & Kupper, 1988). This study aims to identify changes in the students’ listening comprehension during listening activities.

1.8.3 Digital Stories

Storytelling is the original form of teaching (Pedersen, 1995). Although storytelling is not new, the idea of digital storytelling is new (Meadows, 2003). The Digital Storytelling Association (2002) describes digital storytelling as:

“a modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. Throughout history, storytelling has been used to share knowledge, wisdom, and values. Stories have taken many different forms. Stories have been adapted to each successive medium that has emerged, from the circle of the campfire to the silver screen, and now the computer screen.”

In other words, digital stories are the multimedia version of traditional stories.