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DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A MEDIUM TO SUPPORT JOYFUL LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Ni Made Sintia Indrayani[1], Luh Putu Artini[2], Luh Indrayani[3]
[1,2,3]English Language Education Study Program, Ganesha University of Education, Singaraja, Bali
Corresponding Author: Ni Made Sintia Indrayani, E-mail: sintia.indrayani@student.undiksha.ac.id

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ABSTRACT
In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, English mastery is essential for young learners during the golden age of language acquisition. However, conventional methods often fail to create an engaging environment, necessitating joyful learning supported by digital media such as digital storytelling (DST). This literature review aims to examine the role of DST in supporting joyful learning in English learning for young learners. Using a qualitative approach, the population included publications on DST from 2021 to 2025 in Google Scholar, ERIC, and SINTA; a purposive sample selected seven relevant articles. The instrument, consisting of academic documents, was analyzed through descriptive-interpretive content analysis. The results show that DST increases student engagement through multimedia narratives, creates a fun and contextual learning experience superior to conventional methods, and builds a safe environment that fosters positive emotions. In conclusion, DST effectively supports the principles of joyful learning, although further empirical validation is needed.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, English Language Learning, Joyful Learning, Young Learners

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INTRODUCTION
In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, English language proficiency is one of the essential 21st-century skills that needs to be introduced from an early age, when children are in the golden age or critical period for language learning. According to Harmer (1983, as cited in Ratminingsih, 2016), the earlier someone is introduced to the target language, the faster and better the level of fluency is achieved, while Ratminingsih et al. (2021) emphasize that children's cognitive abilities at this stage are still very flexible and minimally influenced by external factors, thus facilitating the absorption of new languages. Young learners, which generally refer to children aged 3-12 years as explained by Ratminingsih and Budasi (2018) and Suyanto (2014, p. 15), have unique characteristics such as active, imaginative natures, and a preference for learning through concrete experiences, visuals, and interesting stories (Kawuryan, 2011, as cited in Ratminingsih et al., 2021). In addition, as digital natives, they are highly motivated when learning involves technological media (Prensky, 2021; Yang & Wu, 2022,).

This phenomenon is increasingly relevant because young learners' lives are colorful and cheerful, with short attention spans that make them easily bored by monotonous or overly challenging material (Suyanto, 2014, pp. 17-19; Ratminingsih, 2016). Stories are an effective element because they present engaging plots with humorous or inspiring characters, making the learning process feel like an adventure (Suyanto, 2014). Furthermore, the integration of digital technology into their learning reflects their everyday, gadget-rich environment, so multimedia-based media can increase intrinsic motivation (Churchill et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023).

Problems arise when uninteresting English learning materials cause young learners to lose focus, decreasing their interest and engagement in the learning process (Ratminingsih, 2016). Conventional approaches often fail to create a safe, supportive, and enjoyable atmosphere, which is essential for effective language learning (Philips, 2002, as cited in Hartina et al., 2018). As a result, students experience decreased motivation, primarily due to the lack of interactive elements that meet their cognitive and emotional needs (Hwang et al., 2022; Pellas, 2021).

The problem is further complicated by the fact that although joyful learning appears to be a relevant solution that emphasizes a positive and motivating atmosphere, its implementation requires digital media such as digital storytelling (DST), which is still underutilized (Kemendikbudristek, 2025). Limited studies show that DST improves speaking (Arroba & Acosta, 2021), vocabulary (Maya & Halim, 2021), and listening (Tham & Thuy, 2023), but its relationship with joyful learning has not been explored in depth. This results in ineffectiveness in achieving the goals of contextual and enjoyable language learning (Nair & Yunus, 2021; Rajendran & Yunus, 2021).

This study aims to examine the role of DST as a learning medium to support joyful learning in English for young learners through a library study approach. Its urgency lies in the urgent need for strategies that align with the characteristics of digital natives and the principles of joyful learning, to increase student engagement amidst the challenges of short attention spans (Susila et al., 2024; Wachidaturrohmah & Afifi, 2025). Its novelty is the first theoretical synthesis that specifically links the benefits of DST with the principles of joyful learning, filling a gap in the literature with future empirical recommendations (Banoth & Muthyala, 2025; Wirda, 2025).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library study method, which focuses on collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing data from relevant written sources to build a conceptual understanding of the role of digital storytelling in supporting joyful learning in English learning for young learners. According to Sarwono (2006), library study is a research method conducted by reviewing various reference books and previous research findings that have similar characteristics to form a theoretical basis related to the research problem, while Nazir (1988, p. 98) defines it as a data collection technique through a review of written sources such as books, articles, notes, and reports related to the study problem. This approach was chosen because the research does not emphasize direct measurement in the field, but rather an in-depth conceptual understanding of the current literature, as explained by Cahyono (2021) that data in certain types of research are more appropriately obtained through literature reviews than empirical observation, which is in line with Sugiyono (2021) who stated that library research is effective for exploring educational issues through secondary sources systematically.

The research instruments consisted of academic documents such as scientific journals, books, and research reports. The data collection technique used documentation, which involved identifying, examining, and utilizing relevant written sources. Cahyono (2021) emphasized that documentation comes from the word "document," which includes a record of past events in the form of written text, images, or monumental works. Therefore, researchers reviewed materials such as journals and related literature to broaden theoretical perspectives and previous findings. Literature selection criteria included publications that explicitly discussed digital storytelling in English learning for young learners with its impact on joyful learning aspects such as motivation and engagement, articles from 2021-2025 that were fully accessible, written in Indonesian or academic English, and published in journals with an ISSN for credibility. The data analysis technique applied descriptive-interpretive content analysis, where data was understood as symbolic phenomena with implicit meanings. As Bungin (2011) explained, content analysis is a qualitative technique that emphasizes accuracy in analyzing communication content, interpreting messages, and understanding symbolic interactions to conclude core ideas. This procedure is supported by Emzir (2021) who explains that content analysis involves coding themes such as digital storytelling, joyful learning, and language learning, as well as Sudaryono (2022) who recommends the steps of collecting text, determining units of analysis, developing categories, and descriptive interpretation for in-depth results.

The study population included all scholarly publications on digital storytelling in the context of English language learning for young learners published in the last five years (2021-2025), available in databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and SINTA, with a purposive sample of seven articles selected as the most relevant based on inclusion criteria to represent the main findings. This purposive sampling approach is in accordance with Cresswell and Poth (2021) who stated that in qualitative library research, samples are selected based on their suitability to the study's focus for thematic saturation, while Sugiyono (2021) added that an unlimited document population can be used as a limited, information-rich sample through strict criteria to avoid bias. This sample includes studies such as Harjono and Wiryotinoyo (2021), Nair and Yunus (2021), and others analyzed for theoretical synthesis, ensuring comprehensive representation without statistical generalization.

The research procedure was carried out in stages and systematically, starting with the collection of bibliographic materials related to the topic through searches in academic databases, followed by in-depth and active reading to identify new ideas, the compilation of research notes through summaries and syntheses, and a final analysis to draw conclusions compiled into a comprehensive report. This stage follows Nazir (1988) and Sarwono (2006) who emphasize the logical sequence of data collection, processing, and conclusion, with the addition of Sudaryono (2022) that the library study procedure must be critical to produce an original synthesis. After collection, the data were analyzed through content analysis with the steps of coding themes, categorization, and interpretation, ending with report compilation, as recommended by Emzir (2021) and Cresswell and Poth (2021) for validity in literature-based qualitative studies, ensuring a logical flow from theory to practical application in the context of joyful learning.

RESULTS

The researcher conducted a literature search in academic databases and repositories, including Google Scholar, ERIC, and SINTA, to obtain relevant research articles and other academic sources. Based on the search and screening process, seven articles were identified as the most relevant to the focus of this study. Detailed information for each article, including the authors, year of publication, research methods, and key findings, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review

Author & Year	Method	Findings
Harjono and Wiryotinoyo (2021)	Literature Study	The use of digital storytelling creates an interesting learning process, enhances active student participation, and helps them to gain a deeper understanding of the learning materials.
Nair and Yunus (2021)	Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)	The integration of multimedia elements in digital storytelling makes the learning process feel more engaging compared to conventional teaching methods. This media can also maintain students' interest throughout the learning process.
Rajendran and Yunus (2021)	Systematic Literature Review	The use of images, audio, music, and video in digital storytelling makes the learning activities less monotonous,

Author & Year	Method	Findings
		thereby making the learning experience more engaging and enjoyable.
Susila, IKD, Juliari, IGAIT, Arshinta, KN, & Arshanti, KD (2024)	Research and Development (R&D)	The use of audio-visual media in digital storytelling helps students to connect the learning materials with real life contexts.
Banoth and Muthyala (2025)	Mixed-Method Approach	Digital storytelling is able to create a positive learning environment, because the learning process is focused on understanding the meaning of stories in a contextual way.
Wachidaturrohmah and Afifi (2025)	Systematic Literature Review	The use of media such as digital storytelling has been shown to enhance students' interest, activeness, and engagement during the learning process. Furthermore, digital storytelling also exposes students to the use of English in authentic and culturally relevant context, as digital stories present language through narratives that are relevant to everyday life situations.
Wirda (2025)	Literature Review	Digital storytelling significantly enhances primary school student engagement in learning.

Based on the studies reviewed and presented in Table 1, five out of seven studies showed that the combination of narratives with multimedia elements such as images, text, audio, and video in digital storytelling effectively enhances student engagement. This improvement is reflected in learning experiences that feel more enjoyable and engaging compared to conventional methods, increased active student participation during the learning process, sustained learning interest, and deeper cognitive engagement, as evidenced by their ease in understanding the learning material.

Two studies, namely those by Susila et al. (2024) and also Wachidaturrohmah and Afifi (2025), report that digital storytelling supports contextual English language learning through the use of audiovisual media and the presentation of English learning material in the form of narratives that are related to students' daily life. These findings indicate that students are exposed to the use of English in real life contexts, enabling them to connect the learning materials with their daily experiences. Furthermore, study by Banoth and Muthyala (2025) specifically explains that the language learning process through the use of digital storytelling focuses on the interpretation of language through narrative context, which contributes to the creation of a safe and supportive learning environment for young learners.

Overall, the reviewed studies indicate that digital storytelling is able to enhance student engagement, support the creation of contextual learning and positive learning environments in English language learning for young learners.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results, this library study finds that digital storytelling has a positive impact on English language learning for young learners. The key findings identified such as enhancing student engagement, creating an enjoyable learning experience, supporting contextual learning, and also building a safe and supportive learning environment. The interpretation of these findings indicates an alignment between the pedagogical benefits of digital storytelling with the principles of joyful learning.

Joyful Learning is an approach that places a positive, enjoyable, and motivating learning atmosphere at the core of the learning process. This aligns with Andayanie et al. (2025), who defines joyful learning as a learning process that fosters feelings of happiness, enthusiasm, and emotional comfort, leading to student satisfaction in learning, which directly contributes to enhanced motivation and improved quality of student learning. Furthermore, joyful learning integrates elements of play into the learning process, so that learning does not focus solely on academic achievement but also emphasizes enjoyable learning experiences. Therefore, this approach can be considered as an alternative strategy to create learning experiences that align with the characteristics of young learners (Sufiani & Marzuki, 2021). Creating an enjoyable learning experience is particularly important in language learning for young learners, as children at this age learn optimally when they are emotionally engaged, feel comfortable, and enjoy the learning activities, which in turn supports a more natural and meaningful process of language acquisition.

Joyful learning is grounded in certain principles that serve as guidelines for its implementation. This approach views positive emotions, such as feelings of comfort and enthusiasm, as essential prerequisites for effective learning to take place. When students experience enjoyment in their learning process, their psychological and cognitive conditions become more optimal (Andayanie et al., 2025). As a result, students find it easier to remember materials and gain a deeper understanding of concepts, which ultimately increases their chances of achieving learning objectives more effectively.

This principle aligns with the benefits given by digital storytelling as a medium for language learning. Studies conducted by Nair and Yunus (2021) as well as Rajendran and Yunus (2021) indicate that the presentation of materials in the form of narratives integrated with visual, audio, and animation elements makes the learning process feel more engaging and less monotonous for young learners. This presentation aligns with their characteristics, as they tend to learn effectively through movement based an visual activities rather than abstract explanations, have short attention spans, and get bored easily (Suyanto, 2014, p.17-19). The presence of images, animations, and audio in digital storytelling allows students to enjoy the storyline and become attracted to the visual representations, leading them to feel more relaxed and comfortable during the learning process. This sense of comfort and interest directly contributes to the creation of positive emotions, including increased focus, enthusiasm, and sustained student learning interest, which are central to the joyful learning approach. In this learning atmosphere, students become more mentally prepared to receive and process information, which ultimately helps them understand and remember the learning material better.

Furthermore, Banoth and Muthyala (2025) in their study explain that in the learning process using digital storytelling, the students are invited to enjoy the storyline, pay attention to characters and events, and naturally understand the message and meaning of the language through the context of the stories presented. In this condition, the learning process is no longer focused on giving exercises, tests, or demanding right or wrong answers, which often causes students to feel pressured because they have to meet certain standards. Language errors are not seen as failures but as a natural part of the learning process. This kind of learning environment supports the creation of a low pressure and anxiety free learning environment, encouraging students to be more confident in trying to speak or imitate expressions found using English. This condition helps them receive and process language input more optimally. These findings closely align with the principle of joyful learning, which emphasizes learning process as an enjoyable activity not an activity that causes pressure (Azhari & Mutmainah, 2024; Andayanie et al., 2025; Lutfi et al., 2025; Marzius et al., 2025).

Several reviewed studies also indicate that digital storytelling supports students' active engagement and participation during the learning process. This benefit aligns with the opinions of Azhari and Mutmainah (2024) as well as Marzius et al. (2025), who explains that joyful learning consider learning to be more meaningful and enjoyable when students are actively involved in the learning process rather than just being listeners or passive recipients of information from the teacher. The combination of visual and audio elements in digital storytelling helps young learners develop a clearer understanding of the storyline and connect it to their personal experiences (Susila et al., 2024). This process makes learning more meaningful, students feel emotionally connected to the stories, characters, and situations presented. This emotional engagement is able to foster a sense of closeness and interest among students toward the learning material, thereby increasing their motivation to actively participate in the learning process, whether in discussions or in other activities that accompany the use of digital storytelling. This active involvement ultimately helps students understand the English material more easily.

In addition to the benefits, the characteristics of digital storytelling itself also play an important role in supporting the implementation of the joyful learning approach. The integration of narrative elements with various multimedia components, such as visuals, audio, and animation, in digital storytelling addresses the demands of joyful learning as explained by Azhari and Mutmainah (2024), Marzius et al. (2025), and Ministry of Education and Culture (2025). These students emphasize that the implementation of joyful learning at all educational levels should be supported by the effective use of digital technology with a variety of enjoyable learning activities, such as storytelling and visual media support. This combination is considered capable of making the learning process more engaging, interactive, and aligned with the characteristics of young learners. Furthermore, the use of digital technology in digital storytelling is also in line with the reality of young learners' lives, as they grow up in an environment closely connected to technology. Therefore, learning that integrates technology feels more relevant, appealing, and less monotonous for them.

The characteristics of digital storytelling are also in line with the perspectives of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2025, in the Academic Manuscript on Deep Learning), which emphasizes that joyful learning will be easier to achieve when learning activities are designed to be relevant to students' lives. Digital storytelling integrates audiovisual elements and presents narratives that are generally close to children's daily lives, such as family environments, school settings, or simple social interactions (Susila et al., 2024; Wachidaturrohmah & Afifi, 2025). Through stories that represent daily life, whether in terms of plot development, characters, or socio-cultural contexts that are familiar to students, they are enabled to connect learning materials with their own lives. This sense of relevance fosters a feeling of closeness to the learning material and promotes positive emotions among the students, making learning feel meaningful. Language learning materials presented through concrete stories and visuals are also suitable for young learners' learning style, who tend to rely on real life experiences and examples. As a result, English language learning becomes easier to understand, more relevant, and helps students gain a non-abstract but contextual and practical understanding that can be applied in everyday life.

The benefits and characteristics of digital storytelling make it as a learning medium with strong potential to optimize the implementation of joyful learning in English language learning for young learners by providing learning experiences that are enjoyable, contextual, and meaningful. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. This research employed a library study method by examining a relatively small number of articles published within the last five years, which limits the breadth of evidence analyzed. Furthermore, because these findings are based on a literature review, the conclusions drawn are still conceptual and theoretical synthesis rather than direct empirical evidence from classroom learning practice. Based on these limitations, further empirical research, such as experimental studies, quasi-experimental, or classroom-based qualitative research is needed to examine the actual effectiveness of implementing digital storytelling in supporting joyful learning in English language learning for young learners, particularly in relation to students' motivation, active engagement, and the development of language skills.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital storytelling has strong potential as a learning medium to support joyful learning in English learning for young learners, as evidenced by the synthesis of seven recent studies that identified four main findings: increased student engagement through narrative multimedia elements, a fun and less monotonous learning experience compared to conventional methods, contextual learning support that connects the material to everyday life, and the creation of a safe and low-stress learning environment that fosters positive emotions such as enthusiasm and comfort. These findings align with the principles of joyful learning that emphasize active engagement, intrinsic motivation, and a fun learning process in accordance with the characteristics of young learners as digital natives with short attention spans.

However, this study has limitations due to its library study nature with a sample size limited to seven articles from the 2021-2025 period. Therefore, the results are conceptual theoretical synthesis without direct empirical evidence from classroom practice. Suggestions for future research include empirical studies such as classroom-based experiments, quasi-experiments, or qualitative ones to test the effectiveness of digital storytelling on motivation, engagement, and language skill development in real-world settings. Practically, the implications of this study encourage teachers and curriculum developers to integrate digital storytelling into English language learning design to create interactive experiences that are relevant, enjoyable, and support the achievement of educational goals in the digital age.

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