

INTEGRATING LOMBOK'S CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING TO ENHANCE EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Many EFL learners experience difficulty speaking fluently and confidently, particularly in assessment-driven learning environments. This study examined whether digital storytelling grounded in Lombok's cultural heritage could enhance students' speaking performance and influence their affective outcomes. Employing a mixed-methods one-group pretest–posttest design, the study involved 15 undergraduate students who participated in a four to five-week instructional intervention. Speaking performance was evaluated through digital storytelling tasks using a five-aspect analytic rubric encompassing fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and closing remarks. To capture learners' experiences, qualitative data were gathered from reflective journals, focus group discussions, and field notes. The results demonstrated statistically significant improvements across all speaking dimensions. Fluency showed the greatest gain, followed by vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and closing remarks. Qualitative findings indicated that these improvements were supported by iterative rehearsal cycles, increased audience awareness, and culturally grounded inquiry, which facilitated more accurate lexical choices, sustained engagement, and greater confidence. The study provides empirical evidence that locally anchored digital storytelling functions not merely as contextual enrichment but as a pedagogical design principle for speaking instruction. Theoretically, the findings are framed through an integrated perspective drawing on Communicative Language Teaching, Sociocultural Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. Pedagogically, the study recommends adopting culturally grounded digital storytelling as a core speaking cycle, supported by targeted focus-on-form activities and calibrated analytic assessment rubrics.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: 27 October 2025

1st revision: 29 November 2025

2nd revision: 22 December 2025

Accepted: 27 December 2025

Published: 30 December 2025

Keywords:

Digital storytelling;

Cultural heritage;

EFL speaking skills;

Local culture;

Indonesian EFL students

How to cite: Hidayati, R., Hadi, M. J., & Nur'aini, A. (2025). Integrating Lombok's Cultural Heritage through Digital Storytelling to Enhance EFL Students' Speaking Skills. *Jo-ELT (Journal of English Language Teaching) Fakultas Pendidikan Bahasa & Seni Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris IKIP*, 12(2), 626–635. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jo-elt.v12i2.18168>

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are central to second and foreign language learning because they enable learners to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and participate effectively in real-life

communication (Akbaraliyevna, 2023; Durdas et al., 2024; Faryat, 2025). Despite years of instruction, many EFL learners continue to experience difficulties in speaking, including limited vocabulary, anxiety, low confidence, and insufficient exposure to authentic oral interaction. Assessment-driven classroom practices and teacher-fronted routines often constrain opportunities for meaningful communication, thereby impeding the development of fluent and confident speech (Durdas et al., 2024; Faryat, 2025).

Digital storytelling (DST) has gained attention as a pedagogical approach capable of addressing these challenges by integrating text, images, audio, and video into learner-generated narratives. By positioning learners as authors and performers of meaning, DST promotes purposeful language use and extended speaking practice (Archana, 2025; Tymoshchuk, 2025; Tyrou, 2022). Empirical studies consistently report that DST enhances speaking performance, vocabulary development, and grammatical awareness while simultaneously fostering motivation, confidence, collaboration, and digital literacy (Bai, 2023; Itani-Adams, 2021; Kallinikou & Nicolaidou, 2019; Rutta et al., 2021). These benefits align closely with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes meaningful, contextualized language use, learner interaction, and the negotiation of meaning as core principles of communicative competence (Savignon, 2002), as well as with culture-based pedagogy that views learners' identities and local knowledge as valuable curricular resources (Du et al., 2024; Nair et al., 2021; Nambiar et al., 2018).

Integrating local culture into DST further enriches learning by grounding language practice in familiar and meaningful contexts. Cultural narratives, traditions, and community practices can heighten learners' emotional engagement, strengthen identity affirmation, and increase willingness to communicate (Herdi et al., 2023; Luh et al., 2021; Shrestha, 2016). In Indonesian and broader Asian EFL contexts, studies have shown that digital retelling of local folktales and traditions contributes to higher speaking achievement, stronger motivation, and deeper cultural resonance (Daeli et al., 2025; Itu Meo et al., 2023; Nair et al., 2021; Puspitasari et al., 2024).

However, research that explicitly examines digital storytelling grounded in Lombok's cultural heritage remains limited. Few studies have systematically explored how Lombok's distinctive traditions, particularly Sasak narratives and living cultural practices, can be leveraged through DST to simultaneously enhance EFL learners' speaking proficiency and cultural engagement. This gap highlights the need for empirical investigation that connects local cultural resources with measurable linguistic and affective outcomes.

Lombok's cultural heritage offers rich, authentic content that is closely tied to learners' identities. As a thematic foundation for DST, it provides domain-specific vocabulary, narrative structures, and discourse practices rooted in real sociocultural experiences. Such integration has the potential to link linguistic development with cultural affirmation, thereby supporting both communicative competence and intercultural awareness (Ngatu & Basikin, 2019; Shrestha, 2016).

This study investigates the effectiveness of integrating Lombok's cultural heritage into digital storytelling to enhance EFL students' speaking skills, specifically fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, while also examining learners' confidence, motivation, and cultural engagement during the DST process. The study contributes theoretically by extending CLT and culturally-based pedagogy within a localized EFL context, and practically by proposing a culturally responsive, performance-oriented model for speaking instruction grounded in Lombok's unique cultural resources.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using a one-group pretest–posttest design to examine changes in students' speaking skills while qualitatively exploring their learning experiences. The intervention was conducted over five weeks and comprised six sequential stages: (1) orientation and technical training in digital storytelling (DST); (2) cultural immersion through field observations and interviews related to authentic Sasak practices; (3) script writing and storyboard development; (4) digital story production and editing; (5) peer review and community validation involving Sasak elders; and (6) final assessment. This design was intended to facilitate intensive and sustained communicative practice while enabling in-depth examination of affective and cultural development throughout the learning process.

The absence of a control group is acknowledged as a limitation and is justified by the exploratory and contextual nature of the study, ethical considerations surrounding community engagement, and the potential risk of intergroup contamination. To enhance methodological rigor, standardized pre- and posttest procedures, rater training, the use of analytic rubrics, and data triangulation were implemented.

Participants

The participants consisted of 15 undergraduate students from the English Education Study Program who were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) enrollment in a speaking course at the time of the study; (2) familiarity with Sasak traditions; and (3) commitment to ethical principles of cultural documentation. Participant recruitment was conducted through in-class announcements, followed by the provision of written informed consent. Demographic and relevant background information were collected to support contextual interpretation and reporting of sample characteristics.

The participants' mean age was 20.8 years ($SD = 1.2$), with an age range of 20–23 years; the group comprised 8 females and 7 males. Based on a CEFR-referenced internal placement test administered in May 2025, participants' English proficiency levels were predominantly at the B1 level.

Instruments

The research instruments comprised pre- and post-speaking tests, semi-structured focus group discussion (FGD) guidelines, reflective journals, and community validation documents. Speaking performance was assessed through digital storytelling tasks using a five-aspect analytic rubric covering fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse management (closing remarks). The rubric was aligned primarily with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) descriptors for spoken production and interaction (Council of Europe, 2020) and operationalized on a five-point scale (1 = very limited to 5 = very good) to ensure standardized proficiency-level interpretation. Two trained assessors rated all pretest and posttest recordings following a calibration session; interrater agreement was documented, and scoring discrepancies were resolved through consensus using standardized guidelines.

Qualitative data were collected through FGDs and reflective journals to explore students' learning experiences, perceived changes in speaking components, and affective factors such as confidence, motivation, and cultural connectedness. To ensure cultural accuracy and ethical representation, field notes and community validation involving Sasak elders were incorporated to verify narrative content, visual representation, and storytelling ethics.

Instrument quality was ensured through expert review by speaking and local culture specialists, limited pilot testing to check clarity and procedural flow, editorial and technical

revisions based on pilot feedback, and construct mapping to align all indicators with the DST research questions and learning objectives.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using an integrated mixed-methods approach in which quantitative and qualitative findings were interpreted within a single analytical framework. Quantitative data from pretest and posttest speaking scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and paired-sample t-tests with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. Prior to analysis, assumptions of normality for score differences were examined, and missing data were handled using listwise deletion where applicable. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated based on the mean pre–post difference divided by the standard deviation of the difference to estimate the magnitude of change. Interrater consistency was ensured by comparing assessors' scores, resolving discrepancies through discussion, and documenting initial agreement as part of the assessment quality audit.

Qualitative data from FGDs, reflective journals, and field notes were analyzed thematically following five stages: familiarization, independent initial coding by two coders, codebook development and consolidation, theme generation through discussion, and theme review to ensure coherence and distinction. Credibility was enhanced through source triangulation, peer debriefing, and limited member checking, with data saturation determined when no new themes emerged.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative results occurred at the interpretation stage through side-by-side comparison to identify convergence, complementarity, or divergence. These integrated findings informed the pedagogical implications and recommendations for culturally grounded digital storytelling in EFL speaking instruction.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Quantitative Analysis

Overall, speaking performance increased meaningfully from pretest to posttest. At the total score level, the mean speaking score showed a clear improvement accompanied by a medium to large effect size. Gains were observed across all five analytic dimensions, namely fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and closing remarks, with the largest mean increases found in fluency and vocabulary, followed by pronunciation. Grammar and closing remarks also improved, although the magnitude of change in these areas was comparatively smaller.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and percentage gain per dimension

Aspects	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Gain (ΔM)	% Gain*
Fluency	3.00	4.10	1.10	36.7%
Pronunciation	3.30	4.10	0.80	24.2%
Grammar	2.60	3.30	0.70	26.9%
Vocabulary	3.30	4.20	0.90	27.3%
Closing Remarks	3.10	3.50	0.40	12.9%

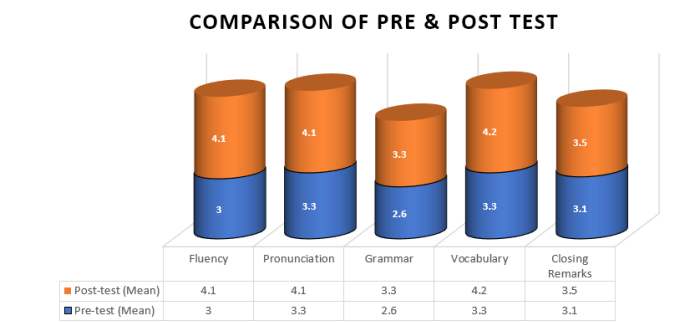


Figure 1. Pre- vs post-test means by aspect

Normality checks using the Shapiro-Wilk test and Q-Q plot inspection supported the use of paired-sample t-tests for most variables. When assumptions were violated, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted as robustness checks. Across all dimensions, p-values below .05 indicated statistically significant improvements. Effect sizes were reported using Cohen's d for dependent means and interpreted according to conventional thresholds (0.2 small, 0.5 medium, 0.8 large), accompanied by 95 percent confidence intervals to indicate precision. Where relevant, common language effect sizes were also reported to express results in probability terms.

Interrater consistency ranged from acceptable to excellent across dimensions, as indicated by ICC (2.2) values with corresponding confidence intervals. Score discrepancies of one scale point or more were resolved through adjudication based on exemplar descriptors, and final analytic scores were derived from the adjudicated consensus or the mean of the two raters.

Table 2
Inferential tests, effect sizes, and interpretation

Aspect	t(df)	p	Cohen's d	Interpretation
Fluency	7.18	< 0.0001	1.85	Highly significant improvement
Pronunciation	7.49	< 0.0001	1.93	Highly significant improvement
Grammar	5.24	0.0001	1.35	Highly significant improvement
Vocabulary	7.22	< 0.0001	1.86	Highly significant improvement
Closing Remarks	3.37	0.0048	0.87	Significant improvement

Consistent with expectations for culturally grounded digital storytelling, students' speaking performance improved across all dimensions, with the largest gains observed in fluency ($\Delta M = 1.10$; 36.7 percent) and vocabulary ($\Delta M = 0.90$; 27.3 percent). These improvements were statistically significant (all $p < .01$) and accompanied by large effect sizes (Cohen's d ranging from 1.85 to 1.93) for fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation, indicating substantial practical impact. Gains in grammar ($d = 1.35$) and closing remarks ($d = 0.87$) were also positive, although comparatively smaller. This pattern is consistent with the intervention's meaning-focused design and the limited emphasis on explicit instruction in grammatical patterning and discourse closing strategies. The quantitative results are further supported by qualitative themes highlighting repeated rehearsal, audience awareness, and cultural anchoring.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative corpus, consisting of weekly journals, focus group discussions, and field notes, yielded four dominant themes that explain how and why students' speaking performance changed.

Theme 1: Rehearsal cycles fuel fluency.

Students described iterative scripting, recording, and re-recording as a safe rehearsal space that allowed them to reduce hesitations and refine pacing. The opportunity to pause,

listen to their own speech, and repeat recordings contributed to more fluent delivery and reduced anxiety during subsequent speaking tasks. One student reported:

“I felt less nervous every time I re-recorded my story. At first, I kept stumbling, but with each take, I got more comfortable with the words, and it felt more natural. I didn't have to worry about mistakes because I could always fix them. It helped me speak more fluidly.”

The iterative nature of DST gave students the chance to work through their hesitations and improve their pacing. Many students mentioned that hearing themselves made them more aware of their pronunciation and rhythm, and this process made their speech flow more smoothly over time.

Theme 2: Cultural anchoring prompts richer lexis.

Exploring Lombok's cultural heritage, such as rituals, crafts, and oral histories, required students to identify specific terminology, collocations, and expressions to convey culturally rich content. This process supported vocabulary expansion and more precise meaning making, which became evident in posttest speaking performances. One student stated:

“Learning about the Sasak traditions was a challenge, especially with words I had never heard before. But when I had to explain the meaning of 'Sasak weaving' or 'Gendang Beleq,' I found that I could remember them better because they were meaningful to me. I think this made my speaking sound more accurate and natural.”

The students' engagement with Lombok's rich cultural heritage helped them learn new words in context. This hands-on cultural exploration led to a more precise and meaningful vocabulary, with learners directly linking words to authentic experiences and their personal connection to the local culture.

Theme 3: Multimodal authorship builds confidence and audience awareness.

Designing multimodal stories for peers and community audiences positioned students as knowledge mediators. Participants reported increased ownership of ideas, clearer discourse planning, including openings, narrative development, and closings, as well as a stronger sense of communicative purpose. These factors contributed to improved pronunciation clarity and more effective closing remarks, although grammatical control developed more gradually. One student narrated:

“When I had to present my digital story to my peers and the Sasak elders, it felt like I had a real audience. I had to make sure my story was clear and engaging, and I knew my pronunciation needed to be perfect. At first, I felt unsure, but as I practiced, I began to feel proud of my work.”

The students highlighted how presenting their work to an audience enhanced their sense of responsibility. This increased sense of ownership of their stories motivated them to perform at their best, contributing to significant improvements in pronunciation and fluency.

Theme 4: Peer feedback and community validation normalize errors.

Regular peer review sessions and member checking of cultural content reframed errors as a natural part of the production process, encouraging targeted revisions such as stress placement, use of cohesive devices, and closing formulas. Students noted that feedback from culturally invested audiences made the task feel worth preparing for, thereby sustaining effort and engagement. One student reported:

“At first, I was embarrassed about making mistakes. But after getting feedback from my classmates and the Sasak elders, I realized that mistakes were okay, as long as I worked on them. They even gave me advice on how to pronounce some difficult words better.”

The feedback from peers and community members created a supportive environment where students felt comfortable making mistakes and improving. This peer validation not only normalized errors but also motivated students to work on their weak points, contributing to their overall speaking progress.

Integrated Interpretation

The largest quantitative gains in fluency and vocabulary align closely with Theme 1 and Theme 2. Rehearsal cycles inherent in digital authoring target temporal aspects of speech such as pause reduction, pacing, and chunking, thereby enhancing fluency. At the same time, the need to encode culturally specific content, including names of practices, artifacts, and social roles, promotes lexical elaboration and results in measurable vocabulary growth.

Improvements in pronunciation, although secondary in magnitude, are consistent with Theme 3, as audience awareness encourages clearer articulation and prosodic planning during repeated recordings. Gains in grammar and closing remarks were positive but smaller, reflecting the design emphasis on meaning focused authorship rather than intensive form focused instruction. Qualitative evidence indicates that students became more aware of grammatical issues during scripting but had limited opportunities for extended practice with complex structures. Similarly, closing moves improved through audience orientation but would benefit from explicit instruction in discourse-level strategies such as summarizing, acknowledging sources, and inviting audience engagement.

The integrated findings suggest that culturally grounded digital storytelling functions as an authentic communicative ecosystem. Local knowledge inquiry supports lexical precision, iterative recording strengthens fluency, and audience engagement enhances intelligibility and discourse organization. Where progress was more modest, particularly in grammar and closing remarks, the findings point to clear design refinements through brief, targeted instructional support embedded within storytelling cycles.

Discussion

This study investigated the effectiveness of integrating Lombok's cultural heritage into digital storytelling (DST) to enhance English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' speaking skills. The findings reveal consistent improvement across all speaking dimensions, with the most substantial gains observed in fluency and vocabulary, followed by pronunciation. These results align with previous DST research demonstrating that iterative processes of drafting, recording, and revising provide sustained rehearsal opportunities that promote fluency development and reduce hesitation (Itani-Adams, 2021; Bai, 2023). Moreover, embedding culturally specific content requires learners to convey nuanced meanings, prompting more deliberate lexical choices and thereby fostering vocabulary expansion. Similar outcomes have been reported in studies examining culturally situated DST, where meaningful context supports deeper lexical engagement (Hafner & Miller, 2019; Yang & Wu, 2012).

Although pronunciation gains were more moderate, they can be attributed to the audience-oriented nature of DST tasks. Preparing digital stories for real or imagined audiences encourages learners to attend more closely to articulation, stress, and overall intelligibility, particularly during repeated recording cycles. This finding is consistent with Tymoshchuk (2025) and Fu et al (2022), who found that audience awareness in multimodal speaking tasks enhances pronunciation clarity and prosodic control, even within relatively short instructional periods.

Improvements in grammar and closing remarks were evident but comparatively smaller. This pattern reflects findings from earlier studies suggesting that meaning-focused DST designs tend to prioritize communicative effectiveness over formal accuracy unless explicit grammatical scaffolding is integrated (Du et al., 2024; Lee, 2020). Although grammar scores in the present study increased by 26.9 percent, learners continued to experience difficulty with

complex grammatical structures. This supports the view that DST alone may be insufficient to foster sustained grammatical development without targeted focus-on-form instruction embedded within the storytelling cycle.

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that culturally grounded DST functions as an authentic communicative environment. Engagement with local cultural heritage enhances topic familiarity and strengthens learners' sense of identity and ownership, factors known to increase motivation, engagement, and persistence in language learning (Norton, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Furthermore, iterative story production supports fluency through repeated practice, while peer and community feedback positions revision as a meaningful and socially mediated learning process.

The findings both corroborate and extend previous DST research by demonstrating that anchoring storytelling in local cultural heritage not only enhances speaking performance but also intensifies learners' investment in the learning process. While prior studies have established the general benefits of DST for speaking development (Itani-Adams, 2021; Bai, 2023), the present study contributes new evidence that culturally specific content, such as Lombok's heritage can amplify gains in fluency and vocabulary by situating language use within culturally meaningful acts of meaning-making.

From a pedagogical perspective, these results support the integration of culturally grounded DST as a core component of EFL speaking instruction. Consistent with recommendations by Hafner and Miller (2019) and Du et al. (2024), future classroom implementations should complement DST with brief focus-on-form workshops targeting grammar-in-use and discourse-level features, including effective closing strategies. Additionally, structured pronunciation support and multisource feedback involving peers, instructors, and community members may further enhance speaking outcomes without diminishing the authenticity that underpins learner engagement.

Finally, the one-group design and relatively small sample size limit causal inference and generalizability. Future research should employ comparative designs contrasting culturally grounded DST with generic topic-based DST and non-DST speaking tasks. Longitudinal studies incorporating delayed post-tests are also needed to examine the sustained impact of culturally grounded DST on learners' speaking proficiency, confidence, identity development, and overall communicative competence.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating Lombok's cultural heritage into digital storytelling (DST) is associated with meaningful and consistent improvements in EFL students' speaking skills, particularly in fluency and vocabulary, followed by pronunciation. By situating language production within culturally grounded narratives, DST creates opportunities for sustained rehearsal, audience awareness, and lexically rich meaning-making, which together support both linguistic development and learner engagement.

The study contributes to the literature in two principal ways. Empirically, it provides evidence that local culture functions not merely as contextual decoration but as a core pedagogical design principle that shapes oral performance in EFL speaking instruction. Theoretically, the findings can be understood through an integrated framework combining Communicative Language Teaching, Sociocultural Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, highlighting the roles of meaningful communication, tool-mediated collaboration, and the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in language learning.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the results support the adoption of culturally grounded DST as a core cycle in EFL speaking courses. Effective implementation involves the use of standardized analytic rubrics with brief rater calibration, the inclusion of targeted focus-on-form support for grammar and discourse-level features, and feedback practices that integrate

peer, instructor, and community perspectives. These strategies allow instructors to maintain task authenticity while strengthening areas where development is more gradual.

Several limitations should be acknowledged, including the one-group research design and the relatively small sample size, which constrain causal inference and generalizability. Future research should employ comparative and longitudinal designs to examine the sustainability of linguistic and affective gains and to explore the applicability of culturally grounded DST across diverse educational and cultural contexts. Overall, this study offers a conceptual and practical foundation for EFL curricula that positions learners as cultural mediators and more fluent, lexically precise, and audience-aware speakers.

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