Digital Storytelling with Puppet Pals to Generate Freshmen's Enjoyment in English Speaking

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Abstract

Foreign language enjoyment (FLE), or positive emotions (PE) in foreign language learning (FLL), has been proven beneficial to foreign language (FL) learners in their FL acquisition process. However, over the past decade, few pieces of research have emphasized the relationship between Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) applications and FLE. This research aims to investigate whether Digital Storytelling (DST) with Puppet Pals app, a short form of digital media production, brings about freshmen's enjoyment in English speaking. Sixty-nine freshmen at Van Lang University (VLU), Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam participated in this project for seven weeks. A mixed-method was used in combination with three data collection instruments: The Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES), video recordings observation notes, and a semi-structured interview. The results indicate that DST with Puppet Pals results in FLE. The findings contribute to research on FLE in practice and on MALL by demonstrating how to generate freshmen's FLE in English oral practice in Vietnam context and offering strategies for learners to reach FLE with Puppet Pals and DST.

Keywords: Puppet Pals, digital storytelling, foreign language enjoyment, speaking teaching and learning, mobile-assisted language learning

Introduction

Positive emotion goes beyond giving pleasant feelings; it has the capability of enhancing the ability to notice things in the environment, promoting awareness of language input, dissipating the lingering effects of negative arousal, and promoting personal resiliency and hardiness during tough times. (Dewaele et al., 2016, p. 46)

The above statement stresses the important role of FLE or PE in FL acquisition. In other words, the shortage of FLE hinders students from making progress, in learning to speak English, particularly in an unconducive environment where speaking activities are boring, teachers are incapable, classrooms are crowded and students have low English proficiency in the target language (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017). Although speaking is an essential part of FLL, teaching speaking skills is confronted with four challenging realities: neglect of teaching speaking theory, inability to practice speaking, the shortage of formulated real-word tasks, and limited exposure to English (Musliadi, 2016). These problems lead to learners'

unwillingness to speak English. If so, they will not make much progress in the target language acquisition (Gromik, 2015).

Besides, Mobile - assisted language learning (MALL) has become a hot trend in FLL and has been proven helpful to improve learners' language skills or language areas (Králová, 2016; Machmud & Abdulah, 2018; Han & Keskin, 2016). For instance, Puppet Pals also enhances fluency in speaking (Hopkins & Nicoll, 2014). One of the most advantageous features of Puppet Pals app is enhancing fluency and reducing the shyness of students practicing English through traditional role-plays in classrooms (Hopkyns & Nicoll, 2014). Furthermore, DST with Puppet Pals is learner-centered, allowing them to "become the architects of their learning trajectories" (Hafner, Chik, & Jones, 2013). In this way, the teacher can both develop students' enhanced communication skills and catches the attention of the class (Robin, 2016).

The major objective of this research is to determine whether DST with Puppet Pals gives rise to EFL students' English-speaking enjoyment through an analysis of previous relevant studies as well as findings from semi-structured interviews, Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES), and observation notes. It also points out some drawbacks of DST with Puppet Pals, how to address the issues and recommendations for future research in the same field.

Review of Literature

What is Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE)

Historically, the term 'Foreign Language Enjoyment' (FLE) has been used to describe positive emotions (PE) in FLL by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), which is the major inspiration in the research trend of Positive Psychology (Frederickson, 2003). The emergence of this concept is significant because of its ability to activate learner's strengths and self-study (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2016). In this article, the terms 'Foreign Language Enjoyment'(FLE) and 'Positive Emotions' (PE) have the same meaning. Both of them mean the experience of enjoyment or well –being state (Segliman, 2018) in task completion, concentration, clear goals, and immediate feedback (Dewaele, & MacIntyre, 2014). For the sake of consistency, only the FLE term will be used throughout this research paper.

Segliman (2018) has a considerable contribution to FLE field when he indicates some common signals of FLE such as curiosity, love of learning and creativity as well as hypothesizes the PERMA model to build FLE, which aims to bring learners' well -being, or general health and happiness, as displayed in Figure 1. The PERMA model is adopted in this research because it explains how learners' FLE will be formed and the activities with Puppet Pals can match the stages of the process of FLE formation.

Figure 1

PERMA model to build FLE, as described in Seligman (2018)
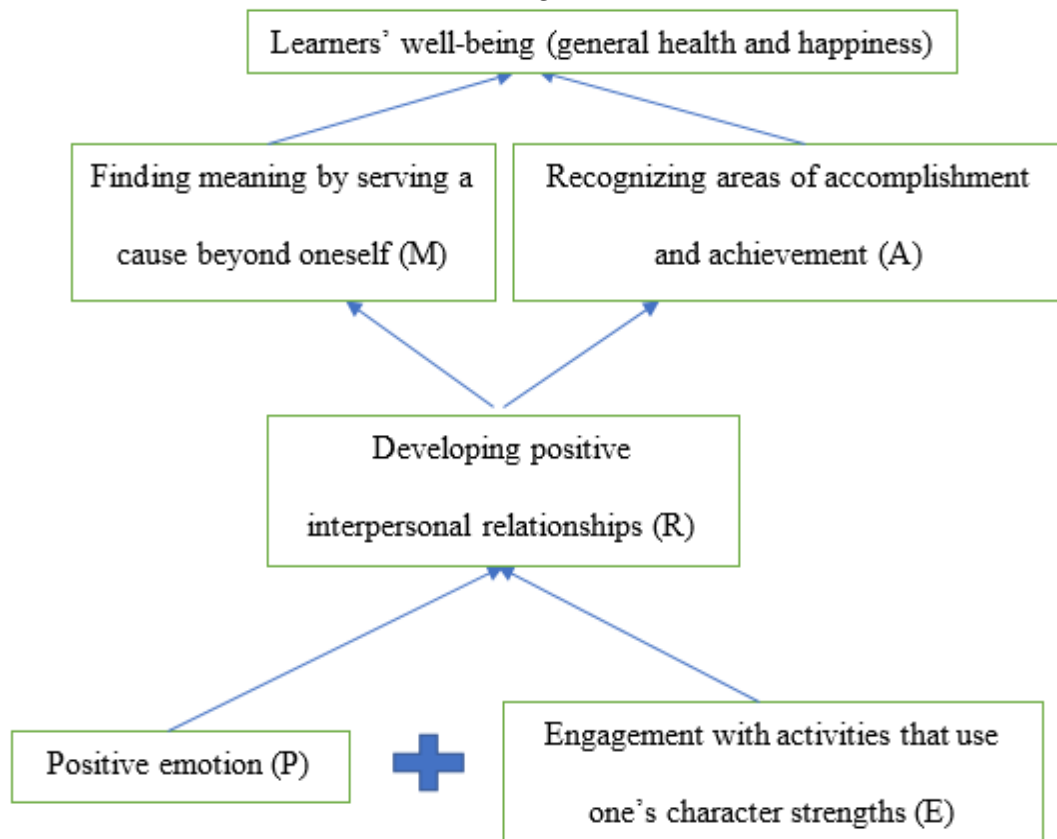
The signals serve as an instrument for teachers to recognize the presence or absence of FLE in the language class. The PERMA model may be referred to as a theoretical frame to persuade as well as to guide pedagogists how PE or FLE promotes learners' well-being (health and happiness), which determines a large proportion of learners' success in FL acquisition.

Benefits and Influential Factors of FLE

The development of FLE has led to the rapid expansion of the epistemological and methodological range of FLE research in TESOL. Its five functions can be illustrated briefly in Table 1 (Dewaele et al., 2019, p. 6; Frederickson, 2003, pp. 300-306).

Table 1
Five functions of FLE

Number	Functions of FLE
1	Widen people's attention and thinking, leading to exploration and play, new experiences and new learning.
2	Undo the lingering effects of negative emotional arousal.
3	Promote resilience by triggering productive reactions to stressful events, improving cardiovascular recovery and making salient feelings of happiness and interest while under stress.
4	Promote building personal resources, such as social bonds built by smiles, intellectual resources honed during creative play.
5	Be part of an upward spiral toward greater wellbeing in the future.

It can be inferred that these five functions of FLE play an important role in the maintenance of students' enjoyable experience in speaking classrooms by tightening the social bonds among group members. These helpful functions work as a predictor that ensures the success FLE – focused speaking periods.

FLE has been proved to bring huge benefits to FL teachers and students (Gregersen, 2013). Segliman (2018)'s findings together with Gregersen's results (2013) offer the list of FLE signals. Joy, interest, contentment, pride, and love are added as signals for the validation of FLE presence (Dewaele et al., 2019).

In terms of empirical studies to explore the relationship between FLE and FL learning, there has been a great amount of research conducted with positive results, which point out elements that may affect the levels of FLE in FL classrooms. For instance, resilience and positive reappraisals are found to be the keys to enjoy a difficult language learning experience with a controlling teacher in a Canadian university quantitative research (Chaffee, Noels, & Mceown, 2014). The level of English proficiency, cultural background, age, specific autonomic classroom activities, and supportive teachers also have an impact on the level of FLE. Moreover, positive classroom activities could boost FL learners' levels of FLE (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014). Spatial factors, proximity to the teacher, a sense of trust, empathy, and belonging to the group of language learners (Falout, 2014), teachers' strategies (Gabrys-Barker ,2014), peers and genders also determine the levels of FLE (J. M. Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017).

Overall, those influential factors to the FLE levels function as a reminder to researchers or pedagogists who have an interest in FLE. All the factors should be taken into consideration if the study concentrates on measuring the level of FLE.

How to Measure Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE)

To determine the level of FLE, the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) by Dewaele, Boudreau, Dewaele, and MacIntyre (2016) has been the most commonly used, fundamental, and supportive measurement. It contains twenty-one items, the response to which ranges from strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, to strongly agree. In this research, this scale is the most suitable tool to measure the students' FLE because its statements focus on checking the presence of FLE signals in foreign language contexts (like Vietnam context). Moreover, the pilot study's result revealed the reliability index of this scale is high enough ($\alpha = .824$), so it satisfies the internal consistency of this research.

**Digital Storytelling and Digital Role-Playing (DRP)**

Robin (2016) defines DST as a technology application that allows computer users to become creative storytellers through the traditional processes of selecting a topic, conducting some research, writing a script, and developing an interesting story.

Expressing the same concept, Hopkyns and Nicoll (2014) name DST slightly differently in their study: "digital role-playing". With this name, the authors base their approach mainly on the strengths of the dramatic approach or role-play, which are divided into two subcategories: real playing (rehearsing a typical real-life situation) and surreal playing (adopting an alternative identity and creating an original situation). Surreal playing is assumed to allow for much greater imagination, creativity, and less anxiety, especially when combined with avatar-based apps, or DST apps. That is because learners can use English in a liberating way and feel less worried about making mistakes as they adopt an alternative identity, they will become more confident and fluent in speaking activities. In nature, DST and digital role-playing refer to the same concept; therefore, DST term can be used instead of digital role-playing.

Robins (2016) also puts forward the twelve-step process to create a DST, as shown in Figure 2. This process is considered as precious guidance for novice teachers to implement DST efficiently.

Figure 2
12-step process of digital storytelling
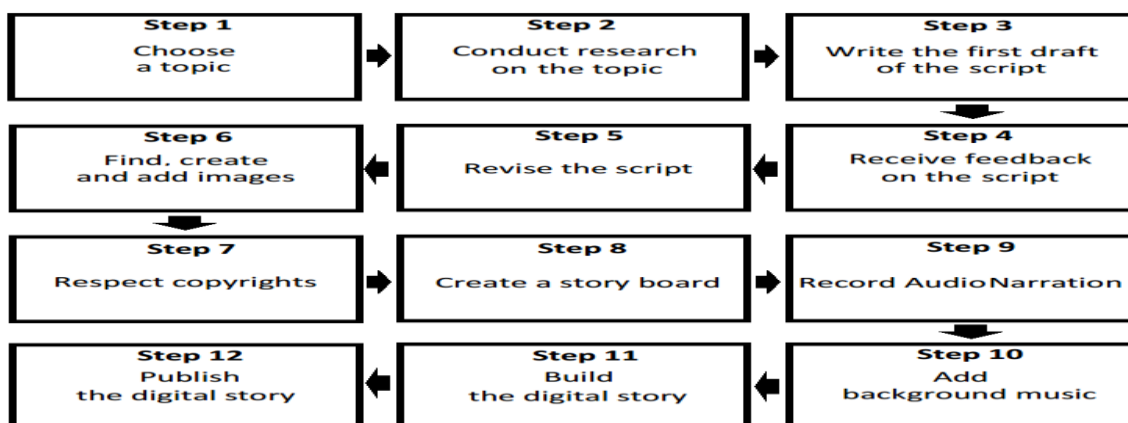
Looking into previous research (Robin, 2016; Hopkyns & Nicoll, 2014) shows the potential of DST surreal playing which can be adopted to boost their FLE. With the aid of Puppet Pals as an avatar-based app, students can invent surreal plays creatively. The study process with Puppet Pals is supposed to exert FLE through group work, imagination, cooperation.

How Beneficial is Digital Storytelling to EFL/ESL Learners?

DST is acknowledged to transform learners into active creators by providing students with additional avenues for language learning via its digital capabilities (Nguyen, 2017). In addition to communication skills, DST also improves learners' research skills, analytical skill, synthesis skill, their social as well as psychological skills evaluating skill and their confidence (Smeda et al., 2014).

Showing his interest in learners' engagement, Robin (2016) also summarizes a set of twenty learners' characteristics of the "Net generation", which teachers can rely on to adopt appropriate strategies for DST that suit learners' traits. This illustration is of great importance because it provides a clear guidance on how to make students more engaged or interested in DST activities based on learners' features as well as implies that DST is a learner-centered approach. Similarly, Signes (2010) concludes that DST helps develop autonomous learning by facilitating "the convergence of four student-centered learning strategies" (p.7).

Another evidence for learners' enjoyment with DST is found in a case study of three families, conducted in Australia, with videotaping (Verenikina & Kervin, 2011). DST together with Puppet Pals and Pocket Ponds proves the influential shift in pre-school children's activeness, engagement, and interests (Verenikina & Kervin, 2011). What differentiates this study from other early researches is the correlation between the engagement level and the characteristics of the digital game. This case study, however, is limited to a small number of young participants in their household environment. Therefore, the findings pose two questions for further future research. Does DST still have a positive impact on children in a more formal environment like at school? While DST suit the natural need of children, do they affect adolescents or teenagers in the same way?

Whereas previous researches depict the merits of DST in terms of learners' engagement and interests in general, qualitative research by Xie (2016) has an emphasis on the influence of DST on promoting EFL students' motivation in a specific language skill - speaking skill, at a university in China. Xie's findings (2016), as a response to enquiries arising from Verenikina & Kervin's study (2011), indicate that DST is not only effective for young children in household settings but also advantageous for teenagers in a formal educational setting. However, DST fascinates children thanks to children's natural desire for role-playing and storytelling while teenage students find DST attractive because it offers a strong sense of achievement.

What Is Puppet Pals, Its Benefits, and Drawbacks?

Puppet Pals is an app developed by Polished Play, which enables students to come up with their own stories, create short animated theatre plays, with the available diverse

backgrounds, self-made or pre-chosen characters, and recorded voice-over commentary. Because the story plots are from learners' unlimited imagination, the products are creative and unique, ranging from funny twists to shorter exchanges that stuck more closely to previously provided scaffolding word-chunks (Caruso & Hofmann, 2018). When students finish choosing backgrounds, characters, writing the story plot, dubbing their voice for characters, they can save the video. Afterward, these digital stories can be shared multimedia message services (MMS), email, and YouTube (Hopkyns & Nicoll, 2014).

Verenikina and Kervin (2011) points out that Puppet Pals adds more fun and authentic engagement because it offers more learner involvement and control. In the context of UAE, Puppet Pals was used to enhancing speaking activities with a focus on fluency and helped reduce students' speaking anxiety (Hopkyns & Nicoll, 2014). Digital activities in Puppet Pals support children during the process of constructing more sophisticated structures in their second language. In terms of vocabulary acquisition, the Puppet Pals app provides learners with the opportunity for brainstorming related lexical items to create new dialogues under the teacher's guidance (Hopkyns & Nicoll, 2013). As a result, they also invent their listening activities by constantly replaying and listening to video recording (Pellerin, 2014).

When it comes to the drawbacks of Puppet Pals app, Hopkins and Nicoll (2014) points out that an extra fee must be paid if more functionality is added such as pictures for extra actors or backgrounds. Besides, the fact that this app can only be used on iPad/iPhone but impossible on the Android system makes it difficult for individual activities because learners cannot join DST activities without having an iPhone/ Ipad. In addition, uneven participation or cooperation of members in a group may influence the result and experience of collaborative learning. Finally, unless learners have been given specific instructions, they cannot learn from Puppet Pals effectively (Holloway, 2014). Therefore, to address these drawbacks in this study, the students had been guided thoroughly on how to use Puppet Pals before they conducted DST activities. Secondly, the participants were divided into groups (2-3 members), in which there was at least one iPad/iPhone so that all students could experience DST with Puppet Pals. Moreover, the characters of the story should be equal to the members of the group to ensure equal participation of all students.
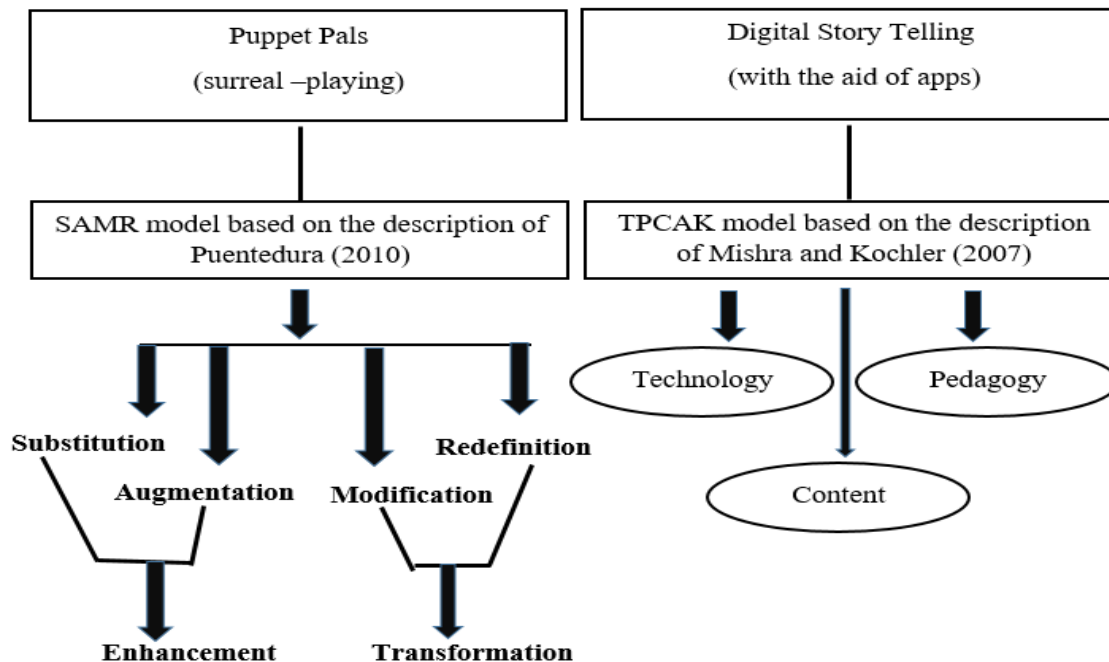
The Theoretical Frameworks

To apply DST with the aid of the Puppet Pals into speaking periods successfully, this project is based mainly on two frameworks: TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2007) and SAMR (Puentedura,2010). TPACK stands for Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge, a framework that employs DST the most effectively (Robin, 2008). As a thoughtful interweaving among three key sources of knowledge: technology, pedagogy, and content (Mishra & Koehler, 2007), TPACK is helpful to guide teachers to apply their knowledge in the classroom (Hick, 2006). Furthermore, to integrate Puppet Pals into speaking lessons the most effectively, Hopkyns and Nicoll (2014) employs the SAMR model (Puentedura,2010), which stands for Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition. He clarifies that this model can promote the advantage of using an avatar-based digital role-play (Puppet Pals app) on a mobile learning platform. By using this model, learners may avoid communication anxiety in the classroom. In other words, Hopkyns and Nicoll (2014) reasoned that the fact

that Puppet Pals is used within this framework will help students surpass the three stages (substitution, augmentation, modification) and reach the highest level of this model – redefinition. The combination of the two models will help strengthen the use of DST with Puppet Pals in oral practice. Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between these concepts above.

Figure 3.
Two frameworks used to apply technology into oral practice, SAMR and TPACK models

The reason why two frameworks are put together is TPACK is effective to apply DST while SAMR model is proved to be effective to apply Puppet Pals. They are the solid theoretical platform to prove the potential success of applying DST with Puppet Pals into boosting students' FLE.

DST and Puppet for Improving FLE in Speaking

Based on the theoretical frameworks above, Puppet Pals should be employed because it is quite a new concept which can stimulate learners' curiosity and desire for discovery. When they are familiar with the app, they can comfortably create various story plots with their rich imagination. As the DST tasks are group work assignments, learners will have the opportunities to work in groups, discuss, analyze, synthesize, argue and reach consensus about the final product, or students may enjoy the sense of achievement. These stages match with the R, M, A in PERMA model (Seligman, 2018), mentioned above in What is Foreign Language Enjoyment section, which will lead to students' language enjoyment. In addition to the technology (the app), appropriate pedagogical methods should be carefully employed

in combination with the flexible choice of speaking topics to assure success, following TPACK model (Mishra & Koehler, 2007). Therefore, the usage of an innovative app like Puppet Pals HD will eradicate the routine, boredom, and lack of engagement in FL classes.

Although some research has been carried out on the benefits of DST and Puppet Pals separately (Ohler,2005; Signes, 2010; Smeda et al.,2014; Hopkyns & Nicoll, 2014; Pellerin, 2014; Caruso & Hofmann, 2018), there have been no empirical investigations into its efficiency on students in Vietnam context. In addition, no research has mentioned the impact of DST with the support of Puppet Pals on giving rise to FLE, especially in speaking class. Secondly, while DST with Puppet Pals is certified for increasing children's enjoyment in household settings (Verenikina & Kervin, 2011), their effects on young adults in formal circumstances need investigating. Thirdly, whereas children's natural demand for stories and role-play causes their enjoyment in DST (Verenikina & Kervin, 2011), the sense of achievement leads students to the FLE state (Xie, 2016). Question is posed about other factors that can bring about students' FLE in speaking class. Besides the natural demand for stories and role-plays of children and the sense of achievement of young adults, what other factors can cause FLE?

Hence, to fill the gaps, this research will concentrate on exploring the impact of DST with Puppet Pals on the presence of students' FLE in English speaking in the Vietnam context. In particular, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1. How DST with Puppet Pals affects freshmen at Van Lang University, Vietnam in learning English speaking?
2. What are the factors that give rise to FLE in English speaking classrooms?
3. How can the application of DST with Puppet Pals be optimized in English speaking classroom?

Methodology

The Research Method

For this study, the concurrent triangulation strategy, one of the six major mixed-method models, was adopted.

> This model generally uses separate quantitative and qualitative methods as a means to offset the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of the other. In this approach, the quantitative and qualitative data collection is concurrent, happening in one phase of the research study. (Creswell, 2009, p.213)

The mixed-method increases the validity and comprehensibility of the data of the project because it is useful when either the quantitative or qualitative approach by itself is inadequate to best understand a research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The purpose of the quantitative data in this study (21-question Likert scales in FLES) is to identify the presence of freshmen's FLE in oral practice with DST and Puppet Pals. Not only do the

qualitative data (from 6 questions in a semi-structured interview and video recording observation notes) uncover the major dimensions underlying FLE, but they also offer validation of DST with Puppet Pals' effect on teenagers' FLE in an educational context. Moreover, the qualitative data from the interview embellish and explain the quantitative findings in more depth and get an insight into the multiple tactics to optimize the application of DST with the Puppet Pals for FLE advancement.

The Sample Population

The participants were 69 freshmen coming from two business administration classes at Van Lang University in Vietnam. The students were from 18 to 19 years old, at the pre-intermediate level and learned General English. The participants had not ever used Puppet Pals HD before. Since the participants were 18 years old and above, there was no need to ask for their parents' permission for their participation in the research. Instead, a consent form was given to the participants to express their agreement to participate in the study, and it was ensured the participants would not face any negative consequences.

Data Collection

To increase the reliability and validity of the research, triangulation was used for data collection: video recordings and observation note-taking, FLES questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews.

Participant Observation

Observation was carried out during English periods (3 hours) in 7 weeks. The time for speaking was about 1 hour per week. What students performed in speaking classes, particularly signals of students' FLE were observed and notes were taken. Participants' groupwork products, video story clips made using Puppet Pals must be submitted weekly for analysis of FLE signals. After the seven-week course, their final video products were also analyzed. This aims to validate the students' attitudes and responses toward the tasks. The note-taking form was prepared in advance at the teacher's convenience. The observation is essential because of its triangulation and combination with other methods ensure the objectiveness and the reliability of the findings. The literature review part helped build a list of signals of FLE, which was incorporated into the Table of observation notes. The teacher observed and determined whether the participants have those signs to decide they have FLE or not.

Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES*)***
The FLES, adopted from Dewaele, Boudreau, Dewaele, and MacIntyre (2016), consisted of 21 5-point Likert scale questions (see Appendix A). Non-probability sampling was employed so that it is easily implemented. All 69 participants (100%) completed the FLES online via Google Form at the end of the course. Exploratory factor analysis (using SPSS software) supported the distribution of the selected items into their respective scales.

The reliability index of this scale was calculated with SPSS software and Cronbach Alpha formula. The scale showed satisfactory internal consistency with α = .824. However, this version, whose questions are entirely in English, may be incomprehensible to low-level students. Hence, the Vietnamese version of FLES comprises some modifications to match the purpose of this study. For instance, the term "foreign language" is replaced with "English speaking". Terms like "Puppet Pals app" or "using Puppet Pals software" were also added to specify the study situation. Besides, these statements were translated into Vietnamese to facilitate students' comprehension as well as the accuracy of their choice.

Semi-structured Interview

Nine participants were randomly chosen to ensure the objective of responses. In the same classroom, one week after the course ended, 9 students were supposed to take a turn and came into the room individually. Then, they sat face to face with the teacher and answered 6 given questions (see Appendix B). The participants' responses were transcribed and given back to students for the accuracy check and coded into themes. The interview data informed the presence or absence of FLE, and the participants' attitudes. The learners' responses were also the platform to reply to research questions 3 and 4.

Data Analysis Technique

When it comes to the FLES, before the analysis, the gathered data was prepared and screened for invalid or incomplete responses. The dataset from FLES was checked for missing data and then analyzed using percentage calculation. If most of the sums of *Agree* column and *Strongly Agree* column is more than 50 percent, it can be inferred that using DTS with the Puppet Pals can exert learners' FLE in speaking. The higher the percentage of the *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* with the statement is, the more FLE that factor results in. The data was presented in Appendix A. Regarding the observation, the notes taken during the speaking periods and the analysis of video products were synthesized into Table 2. The interview recordings were transcribed and processed by using thematic analysis. Some typical answers were quoted as evidence for the themes. Finally, the result from 3 sources was aggregated to form the answers to the research questions.

The Implementation

The research was conducted in seven weeks. At the beginning of the research, teachers instructed the students how to use Puppet Pals HD to create their own stories. In the next step, in each speaking period, students discussed and outlined the story scripts for the topic given in groups. Students randomly chose one set of characters of their favorite, but different sets of characters must have been chosen for each week. There were 18 sets of characters on 18 topics for learners to choose from such as Christmas, Entertainers, Fairytale, Political Party, Talk Shows, Zombies, Fair Weather Friends, Pirates, Space. Then, each group's script was given to the teacher for grammar and vocabulary correction. Afterward, students recorded

their talk with Puppet Pals and submitted their work before the next speaking period. In seven weeks, the participants had 7 weekly tasks and one big video project as a final test.

Results and Findings

Result from the FLES

The figure (see Appendix A) illustrates DST with Puppet Pals can give rise to FLE as well as reveals the major factors that trigger FLE, which answer questions 1 and 2. As can seem from the table in Appendix A, the majority of participants, ranging from 60% to 80%, agree and strongly agree with the presence of FLE. Among the elements that increase learners' FLE the most are the teacher (92.7% - 95.6%), peers (88.4%), the class atmosphere (81.2% - 89.8%), their English improvements (68.1% - 91.3%), and the innovation of the Puppet Pals (68.1% -84%). Most interestingly, more than half of students revealed that they could remove boredom, enjoy others' stories, express themselves better, and became more creative when they used Puppet Pals in for speaking class. Moreover, 91.3 % acknowledge that "it's fun" and "cool to know English", or shows their excitement of discovery in English. Therefore, it can be concluded that DST with Puppet Pals HD can enhance the FLE of freshmen in English speaking classroom. The factors that lead to FLE from the participants' viewpoint can be illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Factors that lead to FLE in English speaking
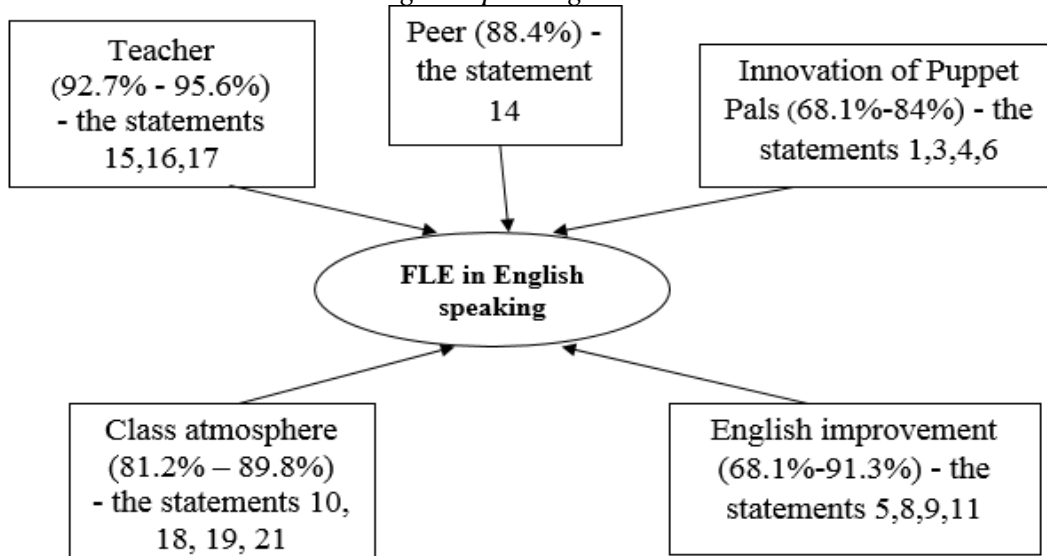
Looking at Figure 4, it is obvious that Puppet Pals app does contribute to creating FLE, but it is the least important factor with the smallest percentages (68.1 % - 84%) in comparison to the others. This might be attributed to the inconvenience caused by the shortage of iPhone / iPad devices or technical issues related to the app, so learners had to share the device if they

want to employ Puppet Pals app, which somehow limits learners' experience with Puppet Pals.

Result from the Semi-Structured Interview

Students' Experience with Puppet Pals

First, there were many positive emotions students admitted gaining while they were studying speaking with Puppet Pals such as excitement (6 students), happiness (9 students), interest (5 students), fun (6 students), creativeness (8 students), enjoyment (8 students), curiosity (4 students), pride (3 students), and love (7 students). These positive feelings are all consistent with the definition of enjoyment, which proves the existence of FLE in the speaking class. A offers a typical view:

> At first, I found it quite **new** and **interesting** to me. I was too **curious** about how to use it. I **love** the colorful characteristics and diverse backgrounds. It was **excited** about **creating** a story of our own. We came up with many crazy ideas, and we **laugh** a lot. (A, male, 18)

It is noticeable that the students enjoyed their experience with Puppet Pals, which coincided with the P, E, R, M, A of the PERMA model (Seligman, 2018), or the Puppet Pals positively transformed their learning. Their FLE state was attributable to the various characters, diverse backgrounds, the enjoyment of story creation.

Students' Feelings with Puppet Pals

Three out of nine students felt comfortable and well-received the lessons. Two acknowledged that their confidence somehow increased. At first, all of them might feel not sure about what they were doing with Puppet Pals, then they realized that they could do many interesting things with it, and finally eight learners found it easy to learn with Puppet Pals. G (female, 18) expresses her feelings:

> It's (Puppet Pals) easy to use although at first, I had no idea about it. I could **create** as many stories as I liked. I felt **interested** in it. Also, **groupwork** brings a lot of **fun**. I was **happy** and with lots of **interesting** activities.

The above comment indicated the common view amongst interviewees that Puppet Pals is capable of reducing speaking anxiety and adding more fun to English speaking activities. The study process exerted FLE, specifically through group work and creative imagination. This finding strongly confirms the viewpoints of Verenikina and Kervin (2011) as well as Robin (2016); that is, Puppet Pals can bring more enjoyment and interest in DST in speaking activities.

The Benefits of Speaking Practice with Puppet Pals

All 9 participants agreed that the app helped decrease their public speaking's shyness, increasing happiness and enjoyment. Commenting on other benefits of speaking with Puppet Pals, one of the interviewees said:

"I can **communicate better**; I think, and I **enjoy** changing into different characters. **Inventing** a **new** story also means making up **laughter**, which makes us **happier** and less stressed" (J, female, 18).

From the interviewees' perspectives, communication skills, pronunciation improvement, and unique stories were the strengths of speaking practice with Puppet Pals. They dared to speak English because they could be other characters and had no fear of losing face in the public. Besides, Puppet Pals was acknowledged as a convenient app because it helped students pay more attention to their pronunciation and must rehearse many times to pronounce better, as reported by one participant.

Of course, my **pronunciation** was better because I have to **rehearse** a lot before dubbing the story. I find myself **more progressive** in **speaking** and **listening** because we also **watched** other clips from my classmate and **comment** on their work. I know more **words** and **expressions** as well as use more correct **structures** after each assignment. My for them **self-searching** and the **feedback** from the teachers and classmates really helped me a lot. (Q, male, 19)

In terms of student improvement, the two skills – of listening and speaking were found to be much better by 8 participants. The reason for this was that students watched and listened to their peers' stories videos and commented on them. Pronunciation improvement was mentioned by 3 participants. Two informants agreed that researching for topic-related words and useful expressions also increased their students' lexical repertoire and grammar structure. Generally, five out of nine students recommended that Puppet Pals was a good choice.

Challenges with Puppet Pals Mobile App

Beside the advantages, the participants also pointed out some challenges with 4 students commenting on their shyness, wrong pronunciation, the difficulties using the app, and time-consuming preparation. Only iPhone owners can install this app. Besides, 2 other students shared that there are limited characters for the free version (only 2 free sets) and the users must pay if they want more extra characters, which sometimes leads to online payment issues, as said by an interviewee:

To me, it was **difficult to operate** the app at the start. I owned an Android smartphone, **not iPhone** system. The free sets of characteristics were only 2, and we had to **pay** money for other topics. **Online payment** was another problem since sometimes I was **charged twice** for the same set of characters. (T, male, 18)

These issues could have been addressed by the teacher's correction in terms of language, the technical guidance, and the payment reminder before the participants conducted activities with Puppet Pals.

Optimize Learning Speaking with Puppet Pals

After the project, the students suggested how to solve the problems identified. All of them thought that technical skills should be improved to avoid obstacles. One student wanted to choose the topics by themselves (X, female,18). Seven out of nine students believed that it was good to apply newly learnt vocabulary into the stories right away. Besides, all interviewed participants felt excited about the Puppet Pals assignment and wished to have more tasks like those. Three students also recommended having more time for preparation and more characters as well as backgrounds to make a choice. In addition, group members should be changed after each story to increase creativeness. One informant reported that:

> The Puppet Pals tasks always make me feel **excited** about and I can improve my English speaking. However, it's better to have **more time** for the preparation for the plots, characters, and backgrounds. It's also rather effective if the **newly learnt** vocabulary can be **employed at once** in the given Puppet Pals conversations. One more thing is that the **technical** should be guided carefully to save time. (Q, male, 19)

It is necessary to have students choose the set of characters and submit them to the teacher before they create their stories so that the teacher can identify and prepare for the necessary vocabulary related to those topics. In this way, it will be less time – consuming for students to design the plots. Moreover, they can also apply the newly – learnt words into Puppet Pals conversations.

Result from The Observation Notes

Based on the signals of FLE collected from previous studies mentioned in the Literature Review, Table 2 indicates what signals of FLE can be observed from the participants. 'Yes' means the signs are obvious, 'A bit' means the signs are not very clear, and 'No' means that sign cannot be found. While 'FLE signals' are collected from previous studies, 'other signals can be observed' is about other signals of language enjoyment that can be seen from learners' behaviors identified in the current study.

Table 2

Observation notes

Signals of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE)				
FLE signals	**Yes**	**A bit**	**No**	**Other signals that can be observed.**
1. Curiosity	✓			
2. Love of learning	✓			
3. Creativity	✓			
4. Laughter's	✓			
5. Joy	✓			1. Happy faces and laughters
6. Interest	✓			2. Fewer anxiety symptoms or stressfulness
7. Contentment		✓		
8. Pride of achievement		✓		
9. Attentive	✓			
10. Resiliency		✓		
11. Willingness to solve difficulties	✓			

The data shows that many FLE signs could be found when students took part in the speaking class or via their video products. Most of the students paid great attention to the teacher's instruction and focused on discussing in groups. Laughter, happy faces, exciting voice, questions raised, creative video products, pride are among the most important signals to identify the presence of FLE.

Discussion

The results from DST with Puppet Pals HD project indicate that this app is an effective MALL tool. That helps increase students' FLE in speaking English. The observation, the interview, and the FLES data demonstrate that students enjoy using the app and feel less anxious, more confident, and willing to carry out more tasks. Besides the pride of achievement found in Xie's study (2016), the findings pointed out other factors giving rise to FLE like the teacher, peers, the class atmosphere, English improvement, the innovation of the Puppet Pals. Despite some technical obstacles, DST with Puppet Pals is warmly welcomed by the participants who felt that their speaking skills, listening skill, pronunciation, vocabulary, and even their memory ability or concentration were improved. This acknowledgement reinforces the benefits of mobile phone functions into language skill improvements like those suggested by Han and Keskin (2016), especially in speaking skills or vocabulary expansion as in the study by Hopkins and Nicoll (2014). The participants'

viewpoints on how to optimize DST with the Puppet Pals revolve around technical training, more time for preparation, member exchange among groups, self -chosen topics. These are new findings that complete the picture of how to facilitate using DST with Puppet Pals in oral practice.

The discovery of other factors resulting in FLE contributes to the pedagogical adjustment in the hope of boosting FLE, raising pedagogists' awareness of what needs concentrating on improving student's FLE.

The findings also confirm the helpful role of DST with the Puppet Pals in addressing the universal issues mentioned in Dewaele and Dewaele (2017): low level of FLE in speaking due to boring activities, crowded class, unhelpful teacher, and time limit. This study provides empirical evidence of exciting DST activities that motivate learners. The uniqueness of the Puppet Pals formed by diverse characters and backgrounds breaks the boring routine of the classroom. In addition, the issue of large class size is addressed by assigning effective group work. The complexity, as well as novelty of the app, arouses students' curiosity or attention, which is similar to Doan's conclusion (2018) that stated that smartphone devices are useful, pleasurable, and interesting, or tighten the connection between group members through discussion activity or facilitating teacher via feedback.

In line with the finding on the merits of Puppet Pals on children in household setting (Verenikina & Kervin, 2011), the evidence of the positive influence of DST with Puppet Pals on freshmen' FLE at Van Lang University, Vietnam, illustrates a comprehensive picture of DST's educational benefits to both little children and young adults in not only a household setting but also an educational context.

Applying DST with the Puppet Pals also addresses the problem of unwillingness to oral practice raised in Akkakoson's study (2016). Recording their talks outside the classroom means more time for preparation and student's talking time during class, one of the factors leading to the successful building of fluent communication (Kormos & Préfontaine, 2017). More importantly, their initial embarrassment and shyness gradually give room for confidence, comfort, and enjoyment. Using Puppet Pals and DST to dub learners' talks also offers students more opportunity to benefit from teacher correction (before and after recording), peer correction, and self- correction (during and after recording). Furthermore, Puppet Pals HD activities let learners have more room for creativity (for the scripts). By preparing for the script and rehearse many times, learners' pronunciation will be improved, and their lexical repertoire is also expanded.

Suggestions for DST with Puppet Pals HD Application into Teaching Speaking

Firstly, teachers need to provide clear guidelines before conducting Puppet Pals activities so that students can carry out the tasks smoothly. More time should be allowed for low-proficient groups of students to help with their planning and preparation in the DST process. For beginners, it is recommended that learners should slow down the speed of characters in stories in English to make it easier for them to speak in English. Additionally,

digital stories or conversations will be more enjoyable if teachers ask students to invite foreigners to take part in it. This can give learners more opportunities to interact as well as communicate with speakers of English from other countries.

Before and after the students' recording, the teacher should give feedback on their script and help them with the pronunciation of difficult words. To save time for lesson planning, teachers should make use of diverse Internet resources and topic-relevant vocabulary, so their workload burden can decrease significantly.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The first limitation of this study is its small sample size of 69 participants. Future studies may collect data from a larger population to determine exactly how DST with Puppet Pals affects the FLE in speaking or other skills.

Secondly, because the observation form was a collection of signals of FLE from previous research and there is only one teacher as a participant-observer, the data from the observation form seem subjective. Therefore, more data should be investigated to validate the reliability and validity of the observation form. Besides, notetaking during class time and analyzing the Puppet Pals videos should be conducted by two or more teachers for the sake of data accuracy and objectiveness.

Thirdly, from the detailed analysis of the factors affecting the FLE in the Literature Review as well as in the Results section, one should be cautious to consider these factors to ensure the validity and reliability of the future research into FLE.

Finally, an unexpected finding is that the majority of students admitted the speaking activity with Puppet Pals can lower their foreign language anxiety. Hence, the effect of DST with Puppet Pals on students' foreign language anxiety can be a topic that is worth further investigation.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study is to identify the existence of FLE in English speaking classrooms from freshmen's perspectives in the Vietnam context when DST with Puppet Pals was employed. Based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the FLES, the semi-structured interview as well as the observation notes, it can be concluded that DST with Puppet Pals can help create FLE in the speaking classroom. The teacher, peers, the class atmosphere, English improvement, and the innovation of the Puppet Pals are important factors that influence FLE. The findings suggest that more concentration on technical issues, more freedom in exchanging group members, and choosing topics are possible solutions to optimize the use of DST with Puppet Pals in the speaking classroom.

While the small sample limits the generalizability of the results, this study provides new insight into a new MALL app that helps students enjoy English oral practice. Based on these conclusions, practitioners should consider the benefits of DST with Puppet Pals on

other English skills together with a bigger number of participants. Additionally, further research is needed to determine whether Puppet Pals can reduce students' foreign language anxiety. Thanks to the results from the research, DST with puppet Pals HD should be employed as a vital and long-term method tool in teaching English speaking to boost students' enjoyment and address the problems of limited preparation time, lack of feedback, and less creativity.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix A

The result from FLE

No	FLES statements	1 (Students - %)	2 (Students - %)	3 (Students - %)	4 (Students - %)	5 (Students - %)
1	I can be creative when using Puppet Pals to create English conversations.	4 - 5.8%	4- 5.8%	10 - 14.5%	37 - 53.6%	14 - 20.3%

2	I can laugh off embarrassing mistakes in speaking English.	5 - 7.2%1	13 - 18.6%	7 - 10.1%	34 - 49.3%	10 - 14.5%
3	I don't get bored in speaking periods with Puppet Pals app.	5 - 7.2%1	7 - 10.1%	10 - 14.5%	32 - 46.4%	15 - 21.7%
4	I enjoy other students' stories created with Puppet Pals app.	4 - 5.8%	2 - 2.9%	5 - 7.2%	39 - 56.5%	19 - 27.5%
5	I feel as though I'm a different person during the English speaking class.	5 - 7.2%	9 - 13%	5 - 7.2%	36 - 52.2%	14 - 20.3%
6	I learn to express myself better in speaking periods by using Puppet Pals app.	3 - 4.3%	5 - 7.2%	7 - 10.1%	41 - 59.4%	13 - 18.8%
7	I'm a worthy member of the English class.	4 - 5.8%	13 - 18.8%	0 - 0%	26 - 37.7%	26 - 37.7%
8	I've learnt interesting things from my English class.	2 - 2.9%	1 - 1.4%	3 - 4.3%	43 - 62.3%	20 - 29%
9	In the English class, I feel proud of my accomplishments.	4 - 5.8%	8 - 11.6%	10 - 14.5%	39 - 56.5%	8 - 11.6%
10	My English classroom is a positive environment.	3 - 4.3%	2 - 2.9%	2 - 2.9%	37 - 53.6%	25 - 36.2%
11	It's cool to know English.	3 - 4.3%	1 - 1.4%	2 - 2.9%	34 - 49.3%	29 - 42%

12	It's fun.	4 - 5.8%	1 - 1.4%	1 - 1.4%	33 - 47.8%	30 - 43.5%
13	Making errors is part of the learning process.	2 - 2.9%	5 - 7.4%	7 - 10.3%	42 - 60.3%	13 - 19.1%
14	The peers are nice.	5 - 7.2%	1 - 1.4%	2 - 2.9%	42 - 60.9%	19 - 27.5%
15	The teacher is encouraging.	2 - 2.9%	0 - 0%	1 - 1.4%	37 - 53.6%	29 - 42%
16	The teacher is friendly.	3 - 4.3%	0 - 0%	1 - 1.4%	25 - 36.2%	40 - 58%
17	The teacher is supportive.	3 - 4.3%	0 - 0%	2 - 2.9%	21 - 30.4%	43 - 62.3%
18	There is a good atmosphere in my English-speaking class.	2 - 2.9%	2 - 2.9%	6 - 8.7%	40 - 58%	19 - 27.5%
19	We form a tight group.	4 - 5.8%	2 - 2.9%	4 - 5.8%	37 - 53.6%	22 - 31.9%
20	We have common 'legends', such as running jokes.	5 - 7.2%	3 - 4.3%	19 - 27.5%	35 - 50.7%	7 - 10.1%
21	We laugh a lot.	4 - 5.8%	3 - 4.3%	6 - 8.7%	42 - 60.9%	14 - 20.3%

1: Strongly disagree   2: Disagree   3: Undecided   4: Agree   5: Strongly agree

Appendix B

Interview questions

1. Briefly describe your experience when you study speaking with Puppet Pals mobile app.
2. Briefly describe your feelings when you learn speaking with Puppet Pals mobile app.
3. In your opinion, what are the benefits/advantages of learning speaking with Puppet Pals mobile app?
4. In general, what have you improved when you learn speaking with Puppet Pals mobile app?
5. What challenges do you have when you learn speaking with Puppet Pals mobile app?
6. In your opinion, what could be done to make learning speaking with Puppet Pals mobile app better?