

# Enhancing French Language Learning through Digital Storytelling: A Case Study on Passé composé Mastery Among University Students

Hamzah Hamsan<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Major Language Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Nilai, Malaysia

\*Corresponding Author: [hamzah.hamsan@usim.edu.my](mailto:hamzah.hamsan@usim.edu.my)

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the impact of digital storytelling (DST) on students' mastery of the passé composé tense in French, focusing on auxiliary verb selection ("être" and "avoir") and agreement rules. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was conducted with 60 Level 2 French elective students (aged 20–22) at a local university. The pre-test results revealed that 71.7% of students made errors, primarily in auxiliary selection and agreement. After engaging in a structured video-based storytelling task, 95% of participants achieved full accuracy in the post-test. These findings confirm digital storytelling as an effective multimodal learning strategy that enhances grammatical accuracy, retention, and metacognitive awareness, while fostering learner engagement and autonomy. Grounded in social constructivist and self-determination theories, this study supports integrating technology-enhanced methods into language instruction, emphasizing digital storytelling as a valuable tool for foreign language acquisition.*

**Keywords:** French language learning, digital storytelling, language learning strategies, multimodal learning, interactive pedagogy

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## 1. Introduction

The integration of digital storytelling (DST) in language education has garnered significant attention due to its potential to enhance learner engagement, motivation, and linguistic proficiency (Barua, 2023; Liu, Tai, & Liu, 2018). Traditional grammar instruction often struggles to ensure long-term retention of complex structures, such as the *passé composé* tense in French, which requires the accurate selection of auxiliary verbs (*être* and *avoir*) and appropriate verb agreement (Chubko, Smith, & Tan, 2020). In contrast, DST provides a multimodal approach that facilitates both cognitive and metacognitive language learning strategies, allowing students to actively construct and refine their language skills in an engaging and meaningful manner (Yang & Wu, 2020; Niemi & Multisilta, 2016).

This study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of DST in improving learners' mastery of *passé composé* and enhancing their overall engagement in French language learning. Specifically, it aims to address the following research questions: (1) How effective is digital storytelling in enhancing the mastery of *passé composé* among university students? and (2) To what extent does DST improve grammatical accuracy, learner engagement, and self-monitoring in French language learning?

To answer these questions, the study is guided by two main objectives. First, it examines the impact of DST on students' grammatical accuracy in *passé composé*, analyzing whether the integration of storytelling leads to a measurable improvement in their use of this tense. Second, it evaluates how DST influences learner engagement, self-monitoring, and motivation, exploring whether this approach fosters a more interactive and autonomous learning experience.

To achieve these objectives, a video-based storytelling task is implemented, and pre-test and post-test comparisons are conducted to assess the extent to which DST enhances grammatical accuracy and learner engagement. By investigating these aspects, this study contributes to the growing body of research on technology-enhanced pedagogical approaches in foreign language learning and provides insights into the potential of DST as an effective tool for grammar instruction.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Language Learning Strategies and Digital Pedagogy

Language learning strategies (LLS) play a critical role in second or foreign language acquisition, providing learners with structured approaches to enhance their proficiency. Oxford's (1990) classification divides LLS into Direct Strategies (Memory, Cognitive, and Compensation) and Indirect Strategies (Metacognitive, Affective, and Social), which have been widely implemented in language education. The rise of digital education has further expanded these strategies, integrating technology-driven approaches that support self-directed learning, engagement, and collaboration (Yang & Wu, 2020).

Among digital approaches, digital storytelling (DST) has gained traction as an effective pedagogical tool, particularly in promoting student engagement, self-monitoring, and collaboration. Oxford (2011) highlights the evolving nature of LLS in digital learning environments, emphasizing the role of digital literacy in strategic language learning. Digital storytelling fosters both cognitive (e.g., processing language in context) and metacognitive (e.g., tracking learning progress) strategies, making it a versatile and adaptive tool in language instruction (Zou, Xie, & Wang, 2021). Research suggests that French language learners, particularly those mastering complex grammar rules like *passé composé*, benefit from structured storytelling approaches that reinforce rule application, sequencing, and contextual use.

### 2.2 The Role of Motivation in Digital Language Learning

Motivation is a key determinant of language learning success, influencing persistence, engagement, and learning outcomes. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021), the integration of technology enhances both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by fostering personalized and interactive learning experiences. In the context of digital storytelling, the ability to create narratives, incorporate multimodal elements (text, voice, video), and engage in collaborative production fosters a sense of ownership and self-expression, enhancing intrinsic motivation.

Moreover, social media-based learning—including platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube—has been shown to reinforce engagement through gamification, social interaction, and feedback loops (Sundqvist & Sylvé, 2016). Gamified elements in language learning apps like Babbel and Quizlet further promote long-term retention and motivation (Reinhardt, 2019). The application of DST in grammar acquisition, particularly for *passé composé*, can leverage these interactive and motivational elements to create dynamic, student-centered learning experiences.

### 2.3 Digital Storytelling as a Grammar Learning Tool

Research has consistently highlighted the pedagogical benefits of digital storytelling (DST) in language education. Barua (2023) found that DST not only enhances literacy skills and motivation but also fosters deeper cognitive engagement with linguistic structures. In particular, French grammar acquisition, including past-tense structures like *passé composé*, benefits from storytelling techniques that require learners to construct coherent narratives while applying correct verb conjugations and auxiliary usage.

Chubko, Smith, and Tan (2020) emphasize that storytelling-based activities improve language fluency and communicative competence, as learners are required to actively retrieve and apply grammar rules in meaningful contexts. Similarly, Liu, Tai, and Liu (2018) highlight the role of DST in fostering learner autonomy, enabling students to take control of their learning process through creative content production.

Moreover, collaborative storytelling activities support peer learning and cooperative knowledge construction (Niemi & Multisilta, 2016). By incorporating multimodal elements—such as visuals, narration, and text—students contextualize grammar structures, making learning more meaningful and engaging (Thang, Jaafar, & Lee, 2022). Digital tools such as Adobe Spark, Canva, and Storybird have been successfully used to create interactive grammar lessons, reinforcing *passé composé* usage in a visually and contextually rich manner (Hafner & Miller, 2019).

DST aligns well with social constructivist principles (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasize learning through interaction and collaboration. Additionally, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) supports the view that DST enhances intrinsic motivation by fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness, critical components of effective second language learning.

### 2.4 Social Media as an Informal Grammar Learning Platform

The role of social media in language learning has gained increasing attention as learners engage with authentic language use beyond traditional classroom settings. Lamy and Zourou (2019) argue that platforms like Twitter and Instagram serve as effective spaces for grammar acquisition, offering real-world exposure to language structures, including *passé composé*.

For example, Twitter's character limit encourages concise, grammatically accurate language use, while trending hashtags and real-time discussions facilitate practical application of grammatical structures (Blattner & Lomicka, 2020). Similarly, interactive features such as commenting, captions, and video responses on Instagram and TikTok provide opportunities for peer feedback and collaborative learning (Kessler, 2021).

As grammar accuracy is crucial in mastering *passé composé*, social media platforms offer instant corrective feedback, reinforcing proper conjugation patterns and auxiliary selection. However, Kessler (2021) warns that informal platforms may also perpetuate incorrect grammar structures if not carefully monitored.

### 2.5 Integrating Digital Storytelling and Social Media for Grammar Learning

Recent research suggests that combining digital storytelling and social media creates a powerful synergy for language learning. Alghasab and Handley (2023) found that students who create and share digital stories on platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram engage more deeply with grammatical structures. For instance, learners creating short videos narrating

personal experiences in *passé composé* are forced to apply tense rules correctly in a communicative, interactive context.

By producing and sharing content that demonstrates grammar usage in real-life scenarios, students receive feedback from a broader audience, reinforcing accuracy and engagement. This interactive approach bridges the gap between theoretical grammar learning and practical application, making *passé composé* mastery more dynamic and contextually relevant.

## 2.6 Challenges and Future Directions

Despite the numerous advantages of DST and social media in grammar learning, challenges remain. Issues such as the digital divide, privacy concerns, and potential distractions may hinder effective implementation (Reinhardt, 2019). Additionally, the informal nature of social media may lead to reinforcement of incorrect grammar usage, necessitating structured intervention and monitoring (Kessler, 2021).

Future research should focus on developing structured frameworks for integrating DST and social media into formal language education. Longitudinal studies are also needed to assess the long-term impact of digital storytelling on grammar retention and language proficiency (Thang, Jaafar, & Lee, 2022).

## 2.7 Conclusion

The integration of language learning strategies, motivation, and digital storytelling presents a transformative approach to mastering French grammar, particularly *passé composé*. DST facilitates interactive, multimodal learning, while social media provides real-world engagement and feedback opportunities. However, effective implementation requires careful structuring and monitoring to maximize benefits and mitigate challenges. As digital technologies continue to evolve, so too will the strategies for enhancing language learning, creating new possibilities for both educators and learners.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Participants

This study involved 60 university students between the ages of 20 and 22 who were enrolled in a Level 2 French elective course. All participants had prior exposure to basic French grammar, including an introductory understanding of *passé composé*. To facilitate collaborative learning, students were organized into small groups, allowing them to engage in peer interaction throughout the digital storytelling activity.

### 3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design to examine the effectiveness of digital storytelling in enhancing *passé composé* mastery. Conducted over a four-week period, the study was structured into three distinct phases. In the first phase, participants completed a pre-test assessing their baseline proficiency in *passé composé*. The second phase involved a digital storytelling intervention, where students engaged in a structured task that required them to apply *passé composé* in a narrative context. In the final phase, a post-test was administered to evaluate the students' retention and application of *passé composé* structures.

### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments

#### 3.3.1 Pre-Test

At the beginning of the study, a 20-item fill-in-the-blank test was administered to assess participants' ability to correctly conjugate verbs in *passé composé*. The test required students to demonstrate competency in three key areas: selecting the appropriate auxiliary verb (*être* or *avoir*), ensuring subject-verb agreement, and using the correct past participle form. The verbs included in the test were *aller, manger, sortir, boire, passer, descendre, naître, trouver, tomber, and voir*. To ensure the reliability and validity of the results, the pre-test was conducted under controlled conditions, minimizing potential external influences.

#### 3.3.2 Digital Storytelling Task

Following the pre-test, participants engaged in a structured digital storytelling task titled “Mes dernières vacances” (*My Last Vacation*). This activity required students to construct and narrate a short personal story in French, integrating the target *passé composé* structures. Each student was instructed to develop a coherent narrative, record a spoken description of past events, and review their verb usage before submitting their final product. The activity encouraged self-monitoring, allowing students to refine their grammatical accuracy through multiple revisions. Additionally, students participated in peer feedback sessions, where they evaluated each other's narratives, provided constructive feedback, and discussed common grammatical challenges. This collaborative approach aimed to reinforce cognitive and metacognitive strategies, making the application of *passé composé* more interactive and meaningful.

#### 3.3.3 Post-Test

To measure learning outcomes, an unannounced post-test was administered at the conclusion of the study. The test, which consisted of 20 fill-in-the-blank sentences, mirrored the pre-test format but presented the *passé composé* verbs in different contextual settings. This methodological approach was designed to assess students' ability to apply *passé composé* in novel contexts, rather than relying on rote memorization.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

To evaluate the effectiveness of digital storytelling in enhancing *passé composé* mastery, a comparative analysis was conducted between pre-test and post-test results. The percentage of correct responses was calculated for three specific linguistic aspects: auxiliary selection, subject-verb agreement, and past participle accuracy. Additionally, a comparative error analysis was performed to identify common patterns of mistakes and areas of improvement.

Beyond quantitative analysis, qualitative reflections were gathered from students regarding their experience with the digital storytelling task. These reflections provided insight into learners' perceptions of the activity, their engagement with *passé composé*, and the challenges they encountered. The combination of quantitative performance measures and qualitative feedback offered a comprehensive evaluation of digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool in second language acquisition.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the pre-test, digital storytelling task, and post-test, assessing the effectiveness of digital storytelling in enhancing *passé composé* mastery. The discussion contextualizes these results within existing research and theoretical frameworks.

#### 4.1 Pre-Test Findings

The pre-test results indicate that a majority of students struggled with *passé composé* structures, particularly in selecting auxiliary verbs and applying agreement rules. Out of 60 participants, only 17 students (28.3%) achieved full accuracy. The most common errors were associated with verb agreement with "être", incorrect auxiliary selection, and improper past participle formation. Specifically, 31 students (51.7%) demonstrated agreement errors with *être*, 27 students (45%) selected the incorrect auxiliary verb, and 13 students (21.7%) misused past participles. Additionally, 3 students (5%) chose incorrect verbs for the given context.

These findings suggest that *passé composé* remains a challenging grammatical structure, particularly due to its dual auxiliary system and agreement rules. The results align with previous research (Liu, Huang, & Xu, 2018), which highlights that explicit instruction alone is insufficient for mastering complex grammatical structures unless reinforced through interactive, contextualized practice. The high error rates observed in auxiliary selection and verb agreement indicate a lack of deep conceptual understanding, reinforcing the need for learner-centered, multimodal instructional methods, such as digital storytelling.

To summarize these results concisely, Table 1 presents the distribution of errors across key grammatical components in the pre-test.

**Table 1: Pre-Test Error Distribution in *Passé composé* Mastery**

Error Type	Number of Students Affected	Percentage (%)
Agreement Errors with <i>être</i>	31	51.7%
Incorrect Auxiliary Selection	27	45%
Incorrect Past Participle Usage	13	21.7%
Incorrect Verb Choice in Context	3	5%

These findings provided a baseline for intervention, justifying the need for a pedagogical approach that fosters deeper engagement and self-monitoring.

#### 4.2 Impact of the Digital Storytelling Task

The implementation of digital storytelling as an instructional intervention significantly enhanced students' ability to apply *passé composé* in a contextualized and interactive format. An analysis of students' recorded storytelling projects revealed that all participants successfully employed *passé composé* in their narratives, demonstrating accurate selection of auxiliary verbs and past participles. Furthermore, peer feedback sessions played a crucial role in fostering collaborative correction, which led to a noticeable reduction in both agreement and auxiliary errors. In addition to these linguistic improvements, students reported increased confidence and motivation, attributing their progress to the engaging and immersive nature of digital storytelling.

The iterative process of planning, recording, and revising their narratives required learners to actively self-monitor their verb usage, reinforcing metacognitive strategies that contribute to grammatical accuracy. These findings align with existing research on learner autonomy and motivation in digital language learning (Oxford, 2011; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021), demonstrating that meaningful engagement in language tasks not only enhances grammatical precision but also supports long-term retention of linguistic structures.

### 4.3 Post-Test Findings

The post-test results showed significant improvements in *passé composé* mastery. A total of 57 students (95%) answered all questions correctly, compared to only 28.3% in the pre-test. The remaining three students (5%) made minor errors, with one student (1.7%) demonstrating an agreement error with *être* and two students (3.3%) misapplying the verb *passer*.

These findings suggest that digital storytelling contributed to a substantial reduction in errors, particularly in auxiliary selection and agreement. The improvement aligns with research by Barua (2023) and Liu et al. (2018), confirming that contextualized storytelling enhances both grammatical accuracy and learner engagement.

To visualize the overall improvement, Table 2 compares the pre-test and post-test results.

**Table 2: Comparative Performance Analysis of Pre-Test and Post-Test Results**

Error Type	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Number of Students Affected	Percentage (%)	Number of Students Affected	Percentage (%)
Full Accuracy %	17 students (28.3%)		57 students (95%)	
Agreement Errors with <i>être</i>	31	51.7%	1	1.7%
Incorrect Auxiliary Selection	27	45%	0	0%
Incorrect Past Participle Usage	13	21.7%	0	0%
Incorrect Verb Choice in Context	3	5%	2	5%

The dramatic reduction in grammatical errors suggests that active participation in digital storytelling fosters deeper grammatical understanding and long-term retention.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that digital storytelling (DST) is an effective tool for enhancing students' mastery of *passé composé* in French. The significant improvement in post-test scores, where 95% of students achieved full accuracy compared to only 28.3% in the pre-test, demonstrates that integrating DST into language learning can lead to improved grammatical accuracy and retention. These results confirm the study's hypothesis that multimodal, interactive learning approaches contribute to better language acquisition outcomes.

The interpretation of these findings aligns with existing research on language learning strategies. Prior studies (Oxford, 2011; Zou, Xie, & Wang, 2021) emphasize that cognitive and metacognitive strategies are essential for language acquisition. The self-monitoring aspect of DST, where students planned, revised, and reviewed their narratives, supports this view. Additionally, peer feedback mechanisms further reinforced accuracy, supporting Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, which argues that learning occurs most effectively in collaborative environments.

The results also align with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key factors in motivation. The creative nature of DST allowed students to take ownership of their learning, increasing engagement and intrinsic

motivation. This finding is consistent with Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021), who argue that technology-enhanced learning environments can significantly boost learner motivation.

### Comparison with Previous Research

This study's findings confirm those of Liu, Tai, and Liu (2018) and Chubko, Smith, and Tan (2020), who found that interactive, student-centered approaches improve grammatical accuracy and learner autonomy. The error reduction between pre-test and post-test aligns with Barua (2023), who found that contextualized storytelling enhances both linguistic competence and engagement.

However, while previous studies (Reinhardt, 2019; Kessler, 2021) suggest that social media can enhance grammar learning, this study focused solely on DST without integrating social media platforms. Future research could explore how combining DST with social media-based learning affects grammatical retention.

### Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study support constructivist and metacognitive learning theories. According to Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, learning occurs most effectively in interactive, collaborative environments. The use of peer feedback in storytelling reinforces this perspective, as students co-construct knowledge through error correction and discussion. Additionally, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) explains that autonomy-supportive activities enhance motivation and learning outcomes. The creative and student-centered nature of digital storytelling aligns with this principle, as students reported increased motivation, confidence, and engagement in *passé composé* usage.

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its promising results, this study has some limitations. First, the sample size (60 students) was relatively small, limiting generalizability to broader populations. Second, the study focused only on *passé composé*, meaning that results may not apply to other complex grammatical structures, such as *imparfait* vs. *passé composé*. Third, the four-week duration may not be sufficient to assess the long-term retention effects of DST.

Future research should explore:

- 1) Larger sample sizes across different proficiency levels.
- 2) Longitudinal studies to assess long-term grammar retention.
- 3) Integration of DST with other digital tools, such as social media and AI-based language-learning applications.

## 5.2 Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of digital storytelling in improving *passé composé* mastery among university students. The results revealed that DST significantly enhanced grammatical accuracy, with post-test scores showing a dramatic reduction in errors compared to the pre-test. These findings confirm that integrating interactive, multimodal storytelling into language learning enhances engagement, self-monitoring, and accuracy.

From a practical perspective, this study provides strong evidence that DST should be incorporated into foreign language instruction. The ability to create, narrate, and revise stories using authentic grammatical structures not only reinforces learning but also fosters motivation and learner autonomy.

However, this study had some limitations, including a small sample size, a short duration, and a focus solely on *passé composé*. Future research should explore broader applications of DST, including its effectiveness in different grammatical contexts and its potential integration with social media platforms.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for student-centered, technology-enhanced pedagogies in second language acquisition. As digital learning tools continue to evolve, future studies should investigate how DST and emerging technologies can be leveraged to further enhance language learning outcomes.

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This study represents a part of my broader commitment to enhancing French language learning in the digital era. As language education continues to evolve, I hope that these findings contribute to more engaging, effective, and student-centered pedagogical approaches. Finally, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my family and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey.

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