

Emphasizing the importance of digital storytelling in rural schools in Malaysia

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Abstract

Aim: This research aimed to examine the degree to which digital storytelling is received favourably or unfavourably by educators and students in rural schools across Malaysia.

Method: This study uses a qualitative research strategy known as case studies. Teachers and students are interviewed using the qualitative method. The researchers in this study have also used video recordings of classroom observations to aid in drawing conclusions. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held with student groups representing various rural areas in Selangor. Teachers of English at the targeted schools will be interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Finally, video recordings are made of classroom observations in which students do not actively participate.

Findings: Results showed that students benefited from participating in storytelling activities. To restate what has already been said, the vast majority of students felt that they had improved in their communication of the target language, their ability to communicate in it, and their self-assurance when doing so.

Implications/Novel Contribution: This research investigates what influences students' communication with and effectiveness at digital storytelling. It also suggests increasing student participation in class discussions to improve education. This study will help us better understand how English language educators and their students view the importance of digital literacy.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Rural Schools, Communication

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INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is a common classroom activity to help students learn and retain English. Once upon a time, before the development of technologies and the advent of the printing press, storytelling was the cornerstone of all effective education. Any good teacher will tell you that telling stories is one of the most effective ways to keep kids interested in learning. Both "[Sadik \(2008\)](#) and [Hammond and Mumtaz \(2001\)](#)" state that storytelling can be used to teach and reinforce numerous useful life, learning, and literacy skills. According to research conducted by Rice University's School Literacy and Culture Project, the majority of students in elementary school and middle school rated storytelling as their favourite activity, and they saw this popular pastime as a valuable resource for fostering English language development in their young audiences ([Abdul Amir, 2015](#); [Hilao, 2016](#); [Junnak & Veerachaisantikul, 2016](#); [McCaig & Pavcnik, 2013](#)).

This study is predicated on the hypothesis that despite widespread familiarity with digital technology, few rural educators and students have had direct experience with digital storytelling. In addition, educators need to acquire the skills necessary to utilize media for instructional purposes rather than merely as a means of staying abreast of technological developments.

The research questions to guide this study are:

1. What are the factors affecting students' participation and communication delivery while involved in digital storytelling?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions of students' communication delivery after the student participates in the digital storytelling activities?

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LITERATURE REVIEW

From a traditional storytelling, the form of storytelling has been enriched to a digital storytelling. Basically, digitally enhanced stories are stories that combine photographs, video, animation, sound, music, text, and often a narrative voice (Arockiyasamy, Surendheran, & Bullard, 2016; Doran et al., 2006; Suwanwong, 2017; Taher, Shrestha, Rahman, & Khalid, 2016). The 21st century has seen the development of many new technologies. With these technologies, secondary school education can expect a more informed generation of technology users among the students. Teachers too, in order to maintain students participation in class, would have to make their teaching methods up-to-date.

Digital storytelling, according to Eisner (1998), allows students to share their stories outside of the traditional written form. It allows students to develop creative presentations utilising a number of different skills, including writing, performance, and technological skills. In addition, digital storytelling provides an opportunity for collaboration not only among students, but also among teachers. Studies suggest that both digital storytelling and student-teacher collaboration have an impact on student literacy achievement.

In a more recent time, a mere traditional storytelling activity has evolved to a digitalized storytelling activity. A digital storytelling is technically a storytelling which is enhanced with the usage of video or computer mediated programme. With this enhanced storytelling, those who are involved in telling stories digitally are able to share the stories anytime and anywhere. In general, a digital storyteller (a student) will acquire technology literacy to be involved in the making of a digital storytelling. According to Blake (2015) technology literacy requires students to show skills in some areas, which include (a) creativity and innovation where students use technology to display creative thinking, problem solving and knowledge construction; (b) communication and collaboration in where students use technology to communicate and collaborate in order to enhance their learning or the learning of others; (c) research and information fluency where students use technology to find and use accurate, up-to-date information; (d) digital citizenship in which students understand what it means to be a citizen in the digital world and practice ethical behavior when they use technology; and (e) technology operations and concepts in which students illustrate an understanding of technological systems and concepts. Therefore, by involving in digital storytelling, students technology literacy and skills will be upgraded synchronously. Synchronize here means both components (technology literacy and technology skills) exist or occur at the same time. Requires some basic technological skills which refer to computer literacy and internet literacy.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a case study approach, a form of qualitative method of enquiry. Generally, a case study focuses on specific phenomenon that requires in-depth investigation and analysis. The qualitative approach is defined as collecting, analysing and interpreting comprehensive narrative and visual data to obtain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). The qualitative method is used to gather data from teachers and pupils. As an extension of the data gathering technique, this research has also conducted classroom observation via video recording to further assist in the findings later.

This research involves Form Four (16 years old) secondary schools pupils from rural schools in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur. It attempts to gather rich non-numerical data from teachers and students. The researcher has conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with groups of students representing different rural areas in Selangor. Each FGD group comprises of six students and will last for at least 45 minutes. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with English Language teachers from the schools identified. Finally, a non-participation classroom observations are conducted via video recording. The data gathered through qualitative will be analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In reporting and discussing the analysis, a coding identifier was used as displayed in Figure 1.

Research Question 1. What are the factors affecting students' participation and communication delivery while involved in digital storytelling?

From the rich qualitative data elicited from the interview, the data was analysed and classified into several themes as shown in Table 1.

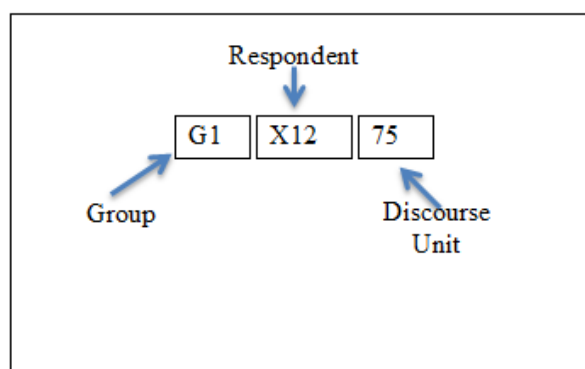


Figure 1. Coding identifier for students (Focus group interview)

Table 1: Classification of several themes

	Themes
Data from students' interviews	1.1 Time factor 1.2 Physical factor 1.3 Video production skills 1.4 Internet skills 1.5 Management skills 1.6 Communication skills

Time Factor

Time factor is identified as an element that affects the students learning process while engaging in the storytelling task. The students mentioned that they had to find appropriate time to meet, plan, and practice the role play in their groups storytelling task.

As mentioned by G1:X1:28: To find aar everybody's free time. So that we can do everything together.

The students also needed to find the time to edit the video for final product of their groups' storytelling. This time factor was a big challenge as they had other commitments that they had to carry out such tuitions, extra-curricular activities in school, as well as helping their parents at home.

G1: X4:32 added that: Difficult at first to find time for everybody to be together. Some of my friends stay very far. So have to go home after school.

Another interesting information found from the students was that the class teacher, who was aware of the storytelling task, showed her support by allowing the students to carry out the task during class hours. Hence, the students were very happy and motivated to continue doing their group work.

This was stated by G1:X2:38: Our English teacher helped us. She watched and gave comments.

It was also discovered that, the making of storytelling video task was deemed as activities that the students were fond of, and at the same time, it was considered as an enjoyable activity. It paved the way for collaborative work, which at the end of the day, led to time management. Moreover, the teacher saw the importance of the activity, hence gave full cooperation for the students to complete the digital storytelling task. As they spent more time discussing the activity, the more opportunity they have to practice their language, acquire new language inputs, and improve the way they communicate with their friends in writing. Since the students got to prepare the video during English class hours, they have to use the English language. It is therefore, during the interaction time, they managed to use English to communicate among themselves under the watchful eyes from their teacher. Overall, students took the opportunity to employ the target language when communicating among themselves because they might not use the language outside the English class hours. This shows that the digital storytelling activities provide room for language acquisition and language communication processes to take place.

Physical Factor

In order to make sure the success of the storytelling activity, the physical factor was also taken into consideration. This factor refers to the place where students met, prepared for the props and carried out the activity. Much communication occurred when deliberating on the meeting venue to discuss the storyline and to come up with the scripts.

For this purpose, the students had to complete the video shooting on the same day as they might not be able to repeat the shooting at the venue. For example, one group decided to do the video shooting in a mall near their house. Since they live in rural areas, most of the students own motorcycles. A number of them were able to go outside school to shoot the video. Other students would use the school as the location of their story.

G2:X5:170 added that: We have not much money to go out from school. So we just use the classroom and the football field for the video.

The excerpts above show that the students were keen on completing the task. Each group member took specific responsibility as assigned by the group. Although they found the task quite challenging especially to do the video shooting at various locations, they enjoyed completing the task.

Video Production Skills

Besides physical factor, the students had to face another challenging factor that is the video production skills. Among the skills are video shooting techniques, lighting, audio recording, dubbing, and video editing. Since none was trained formally on how to produce a storytelling video, they had to learn all these skills on their own. It was mentioned by G2:X15:211 that: We learn to make the video ourselves, through YouTube or ask our friends.

Some of them were afraid that they could not produce a good video as they lacked the skills of video editing. Still, a few others believed that they could complete the task if they worked well together. Most of the discussions were about the decision on the responsibilities of each member like who was going to do the recording of the scene as well as editing the shots. It was interesting to find about how and where they learned to make the video. In addition, when asked about the problem they encountered when producing the video, the students mentioned that they would refer to YouTube, friends and siblings. One of the students, G1:X2:80 commented that: Editing? A lot of time was spent in editing. I did it myself with the help of my friends of course and my brother.

Another student G2:X15:45, mentioned that: Our group use a lot of Windows MovieMakereerrit helps a lot when we make the video.

G2:X15:47 also added that: We learn the video making, like movie maker programme, we learn ourselves. Just watch You Tube. They tell you how to make.

The students also enquired on the programmes that could be used to edit and produce the video. All could respond confidently as they had experience in doing the editing and producing the video while engaging in the digital storytelling task. GX2:X2:101 mentioned that: I think what we produced was good since everything was done by ourselves.

When asked how and when they acquired the skills, most of the students answered during our free time and on my own (G1:X1:69, G1:X1) The skills were not taught formally as a subject in school but was acquired through the practice of completing numerous assignments required by the some subjects in school (G1:X1, G2:X8). As for the technical part, the students did a lot of self-learning (G1:X1:72, G1:X1:85). Most of the students, when asked, said that they have become interested in coming up with the video and hence has become an interesting pursuit for them (G1:X2:153, G1:X1:133). The students also learned other technical parts by watching YouTube (G1:X8:116), while they were also able to use Window live moviemaker (G1:X5:100) and iMovie (G1:X8:121).

Internet Skills

Being among the Y generation, the students mentioned that they had no problem with the skills to use the internet. The school also provides a good internet connection. This is accordance to the Ministry of Education (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2015) whereby "provide internet access and virtual learning environment via 1BestariNet for all 10,000 schools". Hence when they were asked to be involved in the digital storytelling task, the students were eager to commit (G1:X1:82, G1:X1:85). It was also revealed during the interview that the students

had been a frequent user of the internet. Below are the excerpts taken from the students' comments: You know, my brother and I started using the internet since err, I think when I was I think 8 years old, so I think I know, I think quite a number of programmes in the net. (G2:X12:172) involved in YouTube video making competition. Didn't win of course but I love the process. It was what's the word interesting. (G1:X1:84) Have been using since primary school and I think I am good (G1:X1:123)

However, not all of them can access the internet from home as their parents could not afford of some of their housing area has no internet connection. Most of the tasks that involved internet, they would use the computers in the school lab. We can only use the computer in school. No computer or internet at home.

Management Skills

Cooperation is the key to the success in completing the digital storytelling task. Choosing a leader was done voluntarily because the students would know who was the most capable to take the responsibility to be the leader. The cooperation among the group members was clearly seen during the making of the storytelling video. The students made similar comments regarding management skills. Following are the excerpts made by the students:

All group members took turn to shoot the video. (G1:X8:125) Everybody was the leader. Group members took turns to take lead. (G1:X9:155)

We choose leader was chosen with vote. Like election. (G2:X12:355). To further elaborate on management skills, students also showed their abilities in managing the task. In groups, the students would prepare their work chart for them to refer to while in the progress of preparing the video. The students referred to the suggested Step-by-step approach to creating digital storytelling (See Figure 2).

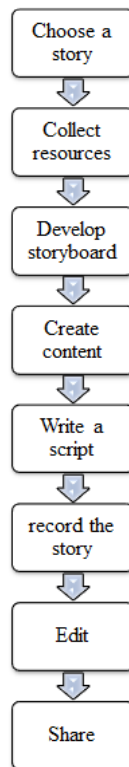


Figure 2. A sample of students step-by-step approach

Communication Skills

While video production skills were deemed as one of the important criteria in order to come up with a video, the on-going ability to communicate among the members of the group while producing the video was vital too. In the process of coming up with the video, a lot of decisions had to be made especially regarding the storylines, plots, location for the scenes and many more. Through these goings-on, the students had to communicate with each other a lot to make decisions. Hence, a lot of communication were carried out during the process of making the decisions for example, face to face meetings and phone conversation.

G2:X16:99 commented on the frequency of the communication in their groups as follows: Oh yes..we communicate a lot with each other and in the past three months the topic is about our storytelling project. I think at some point when we see each other we forgot to ask how are you? haha Besides communicating orally, they also relied on communicating through social network platforms such as Whats App. Communication using the social network assisted them in making decisions without being there physically (G1:X3:71, G2:X14:184). Since they could discuss anytime and anywhere, decisions could be speed up. This is an added advantage for the students as they were given a limited time to complete the digital storytelling task.

G1:X1:165 added: Before this..eerr..I was a very shy personeerrbefore this I don't talk a lot..but since eerr we use whatsapp, I like to eerr to give my opinion eerr and the best parteerr my friends listen to methat is good. Another comment made by G2:22:322: but I have improved when it comes to communicating when I am with my friends. Sometimes I prefer using whatsapp because I can plan what to say it's important to write the right thingsso my friends don't get confuse.

During the interview, it was briefly mentioned by one of the students (G1:X6:32), who was initially a quiet person, who seldom responded voluntarily in past classroom activities. However, with the usage of social network to communicate with her group members, she felt that she had a better opportunity to give her ideas generously. The excerpts below illustrates conversation conducted via WA between the students and the researcher.

23/06/2015, 15:06 - ST7AlyaHadirah: Hello! Are we allowed to create our own short story? 23/06/2015, 15:08 - Roziana M Rosli: Yes you are. But you have to let me know the outline of the story first. 23/06/2015, 15:08 - Roziana M Rosli: Alya,do you have an FB account? 23/06/2015, 15:09 - ST7AlyaHadirah: Alright! 23/06/2015, 15:09 - ST7MaryJohns: I do and i will reactivate it soon ð 23/06/2015, 15:10 - Roziana M Rosli: Oh yes you have mentioned 23/06/2015, 15:10 - Roziana M Rosli: Btw 23/06/2015, 15:11 - Roziana M Rosli: The story that you want to create must be at least loosely based on a book/ story ok. 23/06/2015, 15:12 - ST7AlyaHadirah: For example, we have an idea to do something related to horror 23/06/2015, 15:13 - ST7KarinaSlee: But i never read something horror related story/novels before đć 23/06/2015, 15:13 - ST7AlyaHadirah: What if it is based on a movie? 23/06/2015, 15:13 - Roziana M Rosli: Like twilight?A 23/06/2015, 15:14 - Roziana M Rosli: A lot of horror movies are based on a book 23/06/2015, 15:15 - ST7BeatriceTan: Isn't twilight a fantasy movie? Hahah 23/06/2015, 15:15 - ST7Veni: Umm i was thinking something like insidious 23/06/2015, 15:15 - Roziana M Rosli: Well a bit of horroish 23/06/2015, 15:15 - Roziana M Rosli: Wow 23/06/2015, 15:16 - Roziana M Rosli: Can u check out if it is based from a story? 23/06/2015, 15:16 - ST7AlyaHadirah: Okay! Or we'll do something else instead hahah 23/06/2015, 15:17 - ST7AlyaHadirah: Thank you for your help.

Communication Using the English Language

A significant emerging theme to be discussed here is the English language skills. Since this study looks into how the students communicate with each other using the English language, it is important to see their language abilities while undertaking the digital storytelling task. During the process of creating the digital storytelling, whilst the students were interacting through social networks, they were required to use English. Hence, in the course of collaborating, transferring of ideas, sharing of concepts of the stories, and assigning the responsibilities for each member of the groups, they had to utilise the language.

When inquired regarding their language abilities, the students mentioned that even though they used the language often among friends, they still believed that writing their thoughts in the social networks could enhance their language competency. Besides communicating in the social networks, the students also had to write the scripts for the video. Thus, most of the students communicated with each other in English as the language is widely spoken

in both at school and at home (G1:X13:25; G1:X3:27; G2:X25:64; G2:X33:69). Figure 3 shows the language skills that the students showed in their video.

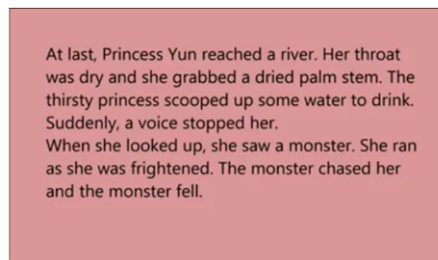


Figure 3. A screenshot to show the use of English language from the video

In addition, G2:X9:129 also added that communication in English was used a great deal during the making of the digital storytelling video activity. It is interesting as we get to spend more time with our friends. We communicate a lot. Since we need to come up with a story in English, so we use the language a lot also. Another respondent, G3:X21:287 explained that; By participating in this making of storytelling video, we had to use the English language for the scripts. And I mean a lot. So, at the end of it, we saw that we used a lot of English so at the same time we have improved as we found a lot of new words. With the help of Mr. Dictionary of course. And our teachers.

Besides communicating in the target language, they used the English language while performing their role play, which was recorded in the form of digital video. This goes to show that the cybernated storytelling video production increased students use of English. Hence, the project provided myriad opportunities for them to practice the language, hence improving their production skills in English. G1:X13:25 mentioned: When we were acting in our drama, at the same time I think my language has improved and I feel this project helped me a lot with the language.

Having discussed the pre-determined themes, there were some data that could not be classified into those themes. Although the data were related to those themes, the perspectives of the content in the data may be different.

Research Question 2: What are the teachers perceptions on students communication delivery after the students participation in the digital storytelling activities?

This research questions is aimed to find out whether students have improved their communication ability after taking part in the digital storytelling task. For the purpose of his, the teachers were interviewed. To direct the discussion, themes are organised accordingly as listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Themes derived from teachers interviews	
Themes	
RQ 2	2.1 Language
	2.2 Communication skills
	2.3 Vocabulary

Language

It was interesting to note that teachers found that their students language competency have maintained after being involved in the digital storytelling task. This was explained by a teacher that: Since they have to use a lot of English, some of them have started to use the language (X1:16). It can be further noted that: English is something they rarely use. However, since they know that everything is going to be recorded, they use the language even if the grammar is upside down (X2:69).

Communication Skills

In the course of completing the digital storytelling task, scores of communication took place. Apart from the discussion regarding the storytelling task, acquiring of other hands-on knowledge also took place while researching

and writing the scripts which included information gathering and presentation, the art of discussion and delegation of work, discipline, time management and writing skills. These sharing and exchanging of ideas, information, experience, and knowledge of the skills in producing the videos offer rooms for lifelong learning process. When asked during the interview of how the teachers evaluated students communication ability before and after their involvement in the task.

X3:98 gave her experience in while watching the students to complete the task: Before I was quite doubtful of their communication skill, especially when it comes to talking with other people or presenting. After these 3 months, the students have managed to change their attitude to communicate. You know what was the first thing that they did? They gave the quietest student to the lead role in our story! At first I waslikewhat? Then, after a lot of practicing and rehearsing, I think they did a great job. And now, there is no turning back. They have more confidence in presenting.

The excerpt above claims the perception that the students have managed to improve their communication skill during the digital storytelling task. This is an interesting evidence that shows this activity did have an effect on the students attitudes toward the language and ability to communicate well in English.

Personal notes from observation

Besides the interview, the researcher also made some personal notes on observations to look into the communication ability during the first observation on the 15 June 2015 and the second session on the date. From both observations made, the researcher was able to notice changes in the students communication ability. Table 1 and 2 show some excerpts taken from the personal notes made by the researcher.

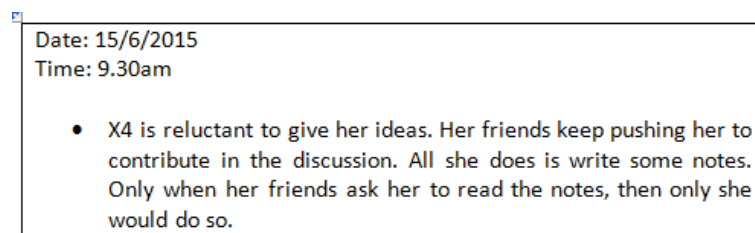


Figure 4. Sample observation note: 1

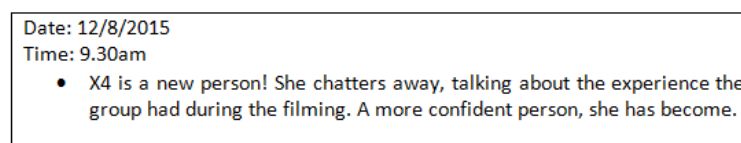


Figure 5. Sample observation note: 2

One interesting observation of X4 who seemed to be very quiet and shy. She did not speak much in the group discussion but was found to be very talkative during the second observation. Perhaps, she was shy in the face-to-face communication at the beginning, but with the frequent usage of the language in WA and face-to-face conversations between, as well as her involvement in her group's discussion she had become very expressive, as observed in the second observation.

In fact, during the interview session, she seemed to talk more openly than other friends in the group. She admitted that she became more confident. Perhaps, one of the responds is due to the reason that she was given the main role in the video.

Vocabulary

It was also during the storytelling task of writing the script and producing the video that the students critically reflected their experience in the usage of the language, offering them the learning experience of improving their

vocabulary. Learning something new, as in this case, the students vocabulary knowledge, has allowed them to continuously learn and improve their vocabulary. G2:20:222 commented that: My friends and I found some new words when we were coming up with the scripts. Had to use thesaurus a lot. She was further supported by G2:22:224 who said that: Yes. When we did this I noticed I used a lot of new words. Words that we use when we were shooting the video. And you know what? My parents were impressed when they saw the video and listening to our dialogues.

These substantiate the notion that by participating in the storytelling activity the students managed to enrich their vocabulary skills. It is worth noting that the improvement came from the students own initiative, while pursuing the activity.

Discussion

Various factors were discovered that affected students participation and communication delivery in the digital storytelling activities. They are listed as (1) time factor, (2) physical factor, (3) video production skills, (4) Internet skills, (5) management skills, (6) communication skills, and (7) language skills. Each factor is discussed based on the findings drawn from the data analysis of the interview responses. These factors are illustrated in Figure 6.

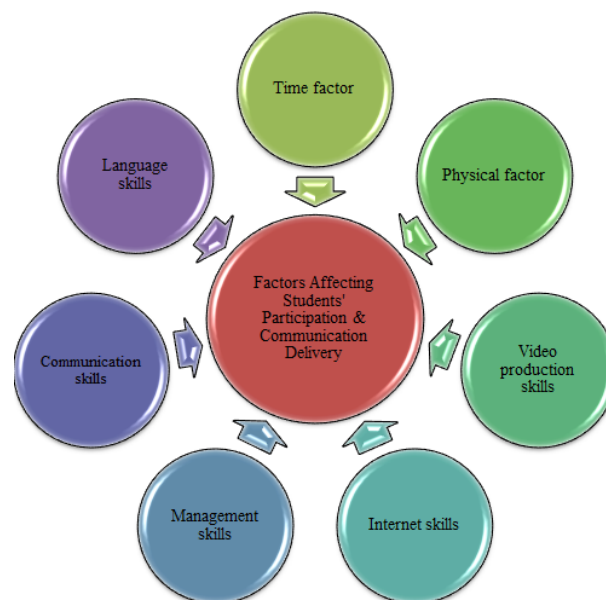


Figure 6. Factors affecting students participation and communication delivery

Based on the analysis, all the factors effecting the participation and communication delivery are all equally important. One factor affects another, and each one is interdependent of each other to determine the success of the digital storytelling video production. The tasks required the students to learn and acquire the skills on their own as they engaged in the activity after the initial guidance given to them. For example, in order to produce the video, they needed to plan (writing the video script or storyboard) and executed the plan (play roles and record the actions). This planning and executing tasks are related to management skills which they were not formally trained in carrying out the tasks. These two steps might not be successful if they failed to communicate clearly in English among the members of their group. Hence, communication skills and language competency are imperative.

Another example is putting things together into a digital video format was very challenging. No one was formally trained to use particular software applications to handle video editing and video production. However, in each group it was found that at least one student had some basic skills in the video editing and video production using common software called moviemaker. After shootings of the scenes were done, the next stage was to edit the video, mixed the voices of the participants, and add background sound or music. They also needed to add texts in the final digital video copy of the story.

All these technological aspects were part of the Internet skills and video production skills. By and large, good language and communication skills became a bridge between what they had planned and what they produced; nothing took place without words since they worked together in groups. It was during the process of producing the digital video of storytelling, they practiced their language ability more often while learning and acquiring comprehensible language inputs. Rieber and Carton (1987) in his social constructivism theory states that learning will be more meaningful when students are engaged in social interactions. During the engagement in the activity, students applied what they had learned and acquired and by doing so, they were honing their knowledge and skills. Indeed, the study found that the students benefitted from these activities. Reiterating the points made earlier, most students found that they had improved their language ability, communication skills, and confidence to use the target language.

In this study, students were able to act out in their role plays in the storytelling video activity using their language competency. In addition to opportunities to use the language in social interaction, the social network platforms like WhatsApp (WA) provided a good scaffolding for them to interact with one another. Without this connection, the success of this video storytelling activity might not be possible.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The making of the digital storytelling video requires the students to engage in planning role plays and post video production. The medium of their communication while engaging in these three activities is in the English language. Besides the language, they need to know how to negotiate, to agree or disagree, to suggest, and to argue with each other while completing their task. All these skills are required for effective communication in order to accomplish the assignment. The more frequency they engaged in the whole process of communication, the more opportunities they would refine their communication skills.

This study started with the aim to explore the usage of digital storytelling in enhancing communication skills of the students. It is hoped that this study could set a base for more studies using online facilities for communication purposes. This is because the communication environment could be expanded beyond restricted time and place, hence fading the demarcation of teaching and learning to such confined traditional classrooms.

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