USING VOKI TO ENHANCE SPEAKING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces Voki as one of Web tools 2.0 that is used in teaching and learning English. Voki makes 21st century learning plausible by allowing interactive and collaborative learning among students. This action research aimed to incorporate Voki as a tool in language learning and identify students’ perception in using Voki to enhance their speaking skills. The sample consisted of 15 Form 4 students from secondary school in Selangor. The findings concluded that Voki helped in enhancing students’ speaking skills in term of pronunciation as well as fluency and they have positive perceptions towards the use of Voki in language learning.

Keywords: Voki, speaking skills, 21st century learning

INTRODUCTION

21st century learning has been immensely influenced by the rise of technology. With the existence of Web tools 2.0, the process of teaching and learning is no longer taking place only in the classrooms, but literally everywhere at any hour. In conjunction, the nature of teaching and learning process today has changed from teacher-centred to collaborative and interactive between teachers and students. In order to have a successful interactive lesson, it is imperative for students to develop their communication skills. Speaking hold an important role in communication (Agravat & Raval, 2015). Without speech, communication will be merely script. According to a study by Charles Spawa & Hassan (2013), Malaysian students believe that speaking skill is the most important skill to learn. Moreover, in this technology era English language is a crucial medium of communication (Parilah et al., 2013). However, not all students are able to speak English fluently upon completing secondary school (Hiew, 2012). Thus, with the help of interactive web tools such as Voki, it is a great opportunity to try different alternative to teach speaking skills to students. Hence, this study aimed to enhance students’ speaking skills by incorporating Voki in language learning and identify students’ perceptions on using Voki to enhance speaking skills.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

What is Voki? Voki is a tool that allows users to create their own talking character which is also known as avatar. This avatar can then be imported into the classroom blog, website, email or profile. Using avatar in language learning able to motivate students’ participation. Thus, more participation from students will result in positive trait in teaching (Mustapha et al., 2010). Students who suffered from genuine fear of performing in the second language which is also known as language anxiety usually has poor performance and achievements (Diao & Paramasivam, 2013). According to Menezes (2016), the use of avatars in teaching and learning process will reduce performance stress among students by protecting their identities.
As an interactive web tool, Voki will be beneficial in teaching and learning of language. Diao & Paramasivam (2013) claimed that Voki has multi languages for voice option. It has several accents for English language such as America, British, Scottish and Australian for synthesized voice. Students are able to choose to deliver their speech by using the synthesized voice or record their own voice. Shy students will tend to choose to use the synthesize voice and more confident students might choose to listen to the synthesized voice for correct pronunciation, and then record their own voices. Either way, students are able to enhance their English pronunciation. As Astune (2012) which is cited by Menezes (2016) said, “students can hear, stop, backtrack, or even self-correct their own recording” during voice insertion. In addition, a study conducted by Zargaryan (2012) found that Voki helped students to improve their speaking in term of vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and grammar.

On top of that, the use of Voki in language classroom is definitely supporting the concept of 21st century learning. Nowadays, students learn a lot by self-discovering. They are very curious especially in ICT and technology department. Having nature of fun-oriented, Voki will appeal more to students’ interest instead of traditional method of chalk and talk in learning language (Agravat & Raval, 2015). In addition, both teachers and students are able to express and share their ideas regarding the lesson at any time, from the comfort of their own space. Bolduc-Simpson & Simpson (2014) said that “Teachers can use this free animated speaking avatar to present short one-minute concepts, make announcements, summarize homework assignments, record messages, or give instructions for doing a task” (p. 244). Last but not least, Voki promotes the concept of collaborative learning. Zargaryan (2012) concluded that “avatars provide an environment of social interactions, which can serve as a basis for collaborative knowledge development” (p. 24).

METHOD

This study is based on action research design. Richards & Farrell (2005) claimed that action research has a strong impact in teaching practice of language teachers. The sample consisted of 15 Form 4 students from secondary school at Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor. The students are identified as modest user of English language based on their Oral English Assessment result. They were not fluent, have limited vocabulary, frequent grammatical errors. Apart from that, they had poor participation in English classroom. In this study, researcher introduced and demonstrated Voki to students. All of the students registered for their own Voki account and created their avatars. For four weeks, the application of Voki has been incorporated in teaching English. Each session took 35 minutes. The researcher gave learning materials and instructions through Voki. Students had to do their tasks and gave feedbacks through Voki. At the end of the four weeks’ period, students had to give comments through their avatars regarding their perceptions on using Voki in learning English especially in speaking.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There were 7 male students and 9 female students who involved in this study. The majority of the students were Malay and only 2 Chinese. Figure 1 showed the avatars created by 15 students.
Data collection for this action research came from students work samples which were the avatars created through Voki. Figure 1 shows the avatars that had been created by the 15 students. Based on the physical traits of the avatars, students tend to create their avatars which reflect who they are in person. Only one student chose an alien as his avatars. This suggested that the student might not be confident enough to put himself out there or trying to protect his identity, which is mentioned by Menezes (2016). In order to monitor students’ progress in speaking skills, the voices chosen by students for their avatars are analysed in their weekly task. Regarding students’ perceptions about Voki in enhancing their speaking skills, their comments were collected from their avatars and transcribed.

Voice Recording versus Synthesized Voice

Table 1. Type of voices chosen for Avatars in weekly task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
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<td>Student 6</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
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<td>Student 7</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 8</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
<td>Voice recording</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 9</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
<td>Synthesized voice</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Every week each student was given a task to create an avatar that speaks English language. During the first week, all of the students chose synthesized voice for their avatars. This suggested that the students were not confident of their speaking proficiency or might want to discover more accents of English provided for synthesized voice. By week 2, only three students chose to record their own voice for their avatars and 12 students still using synthesized voice. By week 3, nine students used voice recording for their avatars and only six were still using synthesized voice. On the 4th week, majority of the students were using their recorded voices for their avatars and only three students still using synthesized voice. From Table 1, it can be concluded that the students were more confident to speak in English by the end of the period. Based on the students’ voice recordings, they seemed to speak more fluent and clear with less pronunciation mistake. Therefore, the voice application in Voki proved to be able to help students with the correct pronunciation and fluency in speaking, as Astune (2012) said, “students can hear, stop, backtrack, or even self-correct their own recording”. The finding of this study agreed with Zagaryan (2012) which claimed that Voki improved students’ speaking skills.

Students’ perceptions about Voki in enhancing Speaking Skills

At the end of week four, the researcher asked the students to share their thoughts through their avatars about the use of Voki in enhancing their speaking skills. All of the students showed positive perceptions on the use of Voki in language learning and agreed that Voki application has helped them to improve their speaking skills. The following are some students’ comments:

“Voki has help me a lot in speaking English. I can say the words correctly by listening to the avatars.”

“Learning with Voki is fun. I can listen to different Englishes and imitate how the avatars speak. Now, I am more fluent in speaking English”.

“I am very shy and my English is not very good. So I feel more confident to share my thoughts through avatars. No one can see me, so no one will laugh at me when I make mistakes in English”.

“Using Voki allows me to listen to my own voice through recording. Before sending my task, I will listen to my recorded voice to make sure I don’t make any mistake”.

“Through Voki, we can share our works with friends. I can learn from them, and they can learn from me”.

Overall, the incorporation of Voki in English teaching and learning has helped the students to improve their pronunciation and fluency in speaking English. Hence, the students feel motivated and confident to speak in English because they were able to avoid their mistakes by listening and imitating the speech produced by the avatars. Apart from that, Voki also allowed shy students to have the opportunities to share their opinions through their avatars. This will eventually promote students’ participation in teaching and learning as well building them to be confidence speakers.
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the result of this study suggested that the use of Voki in teaching and learning English was able to enhance students’ speaking skills and also promote their participation in learning process. As being said, students of 21st century preferred to learn virtually then the traditional approach. Melvina & Jamaludin (2010) point out that changed must be done to suit new learning environment. Therefore, teachers should utilize the use of Web tools 2.0 to create fun and interactive learning. Hence, teachers need to encourage students to be curious in exploring and experimenting with their learning process outside the classroom with online tools.

REFERENCES


