ENHANCING THE WRITING SKILLS OF ESL PRIMARY PUPILS’ THROUGH THE INCORPORATION OF STORYJUMPER.

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ABSTRACT

The learning of English language literacy in ESL setting nowadays highlights the importance of incorporating 21st century skills and technological webtools. The current study attempts to investigate the effectiveness of StoryJumper which is a digital storytelling webtool in enhancing ESL pupils’ writing skills. The study also investigates pupils’ motivation and interest towards writing in English and also the development of collaboration skills as a result of using StoryJumper. The study employs the quasi-experimental design in which the participants are 32 pupils from Year 5 in a rural primary school in Selangor. The participants of the study used StoryJumper to create individual and group stories for the duration of 6 weeks. The instruments used are the pre-test and post-test to gauge pupils’ improvement in writing and also a questionnaire containing 10 items to acquire their perceptions on the usage of StoryJumper. The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores indicated that there is an improvement in pupils’ writing scores after using StoryJumper. Meanwhile, the analysis of the questionnaire reflected pupils’ perception on the usage of StoryJumper is entirely positive. They also testified that StoryJumper is a beneficial webtool in improving not only their writing skills but also their interest and motivation towards writing. StoryJumper also improved their collaborative and communicative skills.

Keywords: writing skills; digital storytelling; StoryJumper; webtool 2.0; 21st century learning.

INTRODUCTION

The current global education landscape focuses on 21st century learning and the emphasis on equipping students with 21st century skills. The change is inevitable as students nowadays who are also profoundly known as “Digital Natives” live in a virtual space and they are constantly in contact with digital multimedia tools to acquire new knowledge (Yoon, 2013). The dimension of learning has changed tremendously in the 21st century in order to keep up with the fast changing world which emphasises acquisition of new skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Currently, 21st century skills are the revolution in the field of education which enthuse the policymakers and educators as it is deemed so crucial that students of the current century will not succeed in the real world context without these skills. Schools should also redefine experiences for their students so that they can be effective global players besides realigning the pedagogy to keep up with the current trends in education. In order to immerse students in 21st century learning, schools should take the effort to create a 21st century learning environment which will enable students to learn in real world 21st century context. This can be done by creating learning practices, support for students and contextually engaging learning environment which reflects 21st century learning components. 21st century learning environment should provide a real-world context for students to apply their knowledge and skills through exploration of authentic tasks (Lombardi, 2007). A supportive 21st century learning environment should allow students to have equitable access to technology, digital resources and quality learning tools. The students of the current century need to see the connection between what they are learning at school with the world outside of school as the digital information environment that they are living in has a huge impact on their motivation to learn (Kuhlthau et al., 2015). Moreover, the labour or working force in the 21st
century also requires set of skills and competencies suited to knowledge Economized hence they should be able to function in an ICT networked environment (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009).

The aims of 21st century learning is also reflected in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) which aims to empower the usage of ICT in enhancing teaching and learning to be more engaging and interactive [Ministry of Education (Moe), 2012]. However, MEB has revealed that ICT usage in schools continue to lag expectations despite the expenditure made by the government to establish the ICT systems throughout the nation which cost more than RM 6 billion over the past decade. The MEB discovered through a study conducted by Moe in 2010 which found that approximately 80% teachers are using less than one hour a week of ICT in their teaching. However, the Moe continues in upgrading the ICT infrastructure in schools and in order to maximise the impact of ICT, teachers will be sent for ICT competency courses. The MEB also hopes to create virtual learning environment in schools by providing 4G internet in all schools throughout the nation so that it can be utilised to share learning resources, conduct interactive lessons and also communicate virtually. The MEB also expects that in the future, Malaysian pupils will get access to personalised learning experience using self-paced learning domain in which teachers will become facilitators instead of the current role as the content providers.

Literacy is the ability to use reading and writing at school and outside of school to accomplish variety of tasks and purpose (Tompkins, 2010). UNESCO (2016) has defined literacy as the fundamental human rights which has the ability to transform lives besides serving as the foundation towards lifelong learning. The Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) also emphasised that each student will receive strong grounding in literacy benchmarked to the international standards besides aiming to have each child to achieve 100% basic literacy in Malay and English language after three years of schooling [Ministry of Education (Moe), 2012]. However, as pupils nowadays are living and learning in the context 21st century, the concept of literacy is no more confined to the basic literacy skills of reading and writing. The concept of what it means to be literate is constantly changing due to the advancement of technology and also the transformation of learning in the 21st century which encourages pupils to assume more responsibility for learning (Tompkins 2010). Due to this evolution in learning, teachers should also transform the way of teaching literacy so that literacy will function as a tool which will enable the pupils to navigate effectively in a digital and media-saturated world. Through the incorporation of innovative literacy teaching and learning practices, pupils’ capacity to apply knowledge and skills in key subject areas will be optimised (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). Not only the teaching of literacy can be enhanced, pupils will also learn to analyse, reason and communicate effectively as they interpret and solve problems in a variety of situations.

The pupils of the digital era are showing keen interest and they immerse themselves in using digital multimedia devices, various web tools and latest applications. So teachers should consider converting and expanding their traditional classroom approach into the virtual ubiquitous environment which will motivate and encourage pupils to learn English. As the initiator of change in incorporating 21st century literacy for ESL pupils, teachers could incorporate digital storytelling as part of their English language lessons in order to engage their pupils in learning literacy skills in a fun way. Digital storytelling has been defined as the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling (Menezes, 2012). Digital storytelling has been exploited in many other areas to improve their practices except in the educational sector in which the reception is still very slow as teachers do not understand the possible effects of incorporating digital storytelling in their lessons (Tendero, 2006). A numerous research findings have stated that pupils are attracted to learn literacy skills through digital storytelling as they are utilising the technology at increasing pace in their daily life (Robin 2008). Some scholars have also asserted the benefits of digital storytelling which can motivate pupils to learn literacy skills as they are interested in using digital tools in daily life besides preparing them to function effectively in a rapidly changing digital world (Yoon, 2012). Meanwhile there are also research which found that teachers are showing a mixed reaction towards the incorporation of digital storytelling in teaching literacy with almost half of them blaming the lack of access and incompetency in using technology as reasons for not exposing their pupils to digital storytelling (Thang et al., 2014). Research studies have also found that teachers are reluctant to use technological webtools in teaching writing and these webtools were used less than one-third of overall English lessons (Applebee & Langer, 2011). Teachers’ reluctance to incorporate digital storytelling in their ESL lessons might be caused by inevitable challenges they might be facing such their confidence in using ICT tools, the availability of...
access to ICT, quality technical support, quality training and professional development in ICT courses (Yunus, 2007).

The literacy skill that will be focussed in this study is pupils’ writing skill and as many would be aware, writing skill can be a complicated skill to learn. Many of us have a view that writing is just a graphic representation of the spoken language and acquiring writing skills is just as easy as acquiring speaking skills (Brown, 2001). However, many of us are not aware that writing requires entirely different sets of competencies which are fundamentally different from speaking. Chitravelu (2005) also stated that most ESL pupils find writing difficult and it is a skill that they are least proficient in. This is because pupils rarely use writing outside school and they have very few social uses for writing in English. Even most advanced ESL students tend to have a lower score when writing skills are assessed compared to other language skills (Cole & Feng, 2015). This is because writing is last domain acquired by ESL pupils when they learn English besides it also requires a more detailed and analyzed knowledge of a language. Moreover, the introduction of new format for the high-stakes which is the Primary School Examination (UPSR) has also given a huge challenge for teachers with necessary writing skills as it was only introduced towards the end of 2015 to be implemented for UPSR in 2016. The new format of UPSR examination introduced two separate papers for English and paper 2 focuses entirely on writing skills hence this shows this reflects the importance of writing skills in the English curriculum and high-stakes testing in Malaysia. This current research will focus on Section C of the new UPSR format in which pupils choose to write a story using the words given based on a single picture or composite pictures. Hence, this research aims to investigate the effectiveness of StoryJumper digital storytelling Webtool 2.0 in:

1. Improving the writing achievement of Year 5 pupils in Section C of English Paper 2.
2. Enhancing their motivation and interest in writing.
3. Encouraging collaboration and communication skills of the pupils.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Storytelling Through Storyjumper Webtool 2.0

StoryJumper is a digital storytelling webtool 2.0 which allows users to create their own storybooks (Kilpatrick et al., 2014). After creating their digital story, users can read their stories online besides sharing it with others. They can also purchase a hardcopy of their digital storybook. StoryJumper can enhance pupils’ creativity in writing and it also improves their writing skills as they are motivated and excited to write stories using this digital storytelling webtool 2.0 (Azzopardi & Cassar, 2013). The incorporation of digital webtools such as StoryJumper is seen to have the potential to motivate pupils to learn English as it is connected to their interest and enhance their digital experience. Digital storytelling webtools emphasises two important constructs of motivation which are task-value and self-efficacy (Yang & Wu, 2012). Task value refers to pupils’ perception on the usefulness and the importance of the webtools in improving their writing skills. Meanwhile self-efficacy refers to their capability in completing the writing task. Digital storytelling webtools Moreover, the incorporation of digital storytelling webtools can also enhance key components of effective writing instructions such as idea development and also writing for authentic purposes and audiences (Kilpatrick et al., 2014).

Yoon (2012) has outlined ten principles in applying digital storytelling in ESL context which is termed as “I AM TOM CAMP”. “I AM TOP CAMP” represents Interactive, Authentic, Meaningful, Technological, Organised, Productive, Collaborative, Appealing, Motivating and Personalised. Digital storytelling is seen as an interactive process because pupils can interact with teacher and their friends throughout the process. It is also seen as an authentic and meaningful task because pupils can share and create their own stories to attract others to read their stories. Moreover, it also incorporates technological aspects as pupils have to use digital webtool to create their digital stories hence they will gain experience using digital media. Digital storytelling also helps pupils to organise their story by editing the storyline and inserting media such as pictures. Digital storytelling also encourages pupils to produce stories with their desired elements such as sound effects, videos and even their own recorded narration. It also promotes collaboration among pupils as they work together to complete their digital stories. It is also appealing, motivating and personalised for
pupils as they create a personalised story hence it gives a sense of achievement to them besides being able to gain a pleasure of learning through fun-learning tasks.

Digital storytelling mainly focuses on writing skills as it requires ESL pupils to write the story based on the different scenarios they have planned based on their storyline. Most importantly, digital storytelling forms bridges to traditional writing as they need to utilise the components of traditional writing such as correct vocabulary, grammar and sentence structures in digital storytelling (Sarica & Usluel, 2016). Moreover, through digital storytelling, pupils are able to learn the art of writing a good story, the ways in which text can be integrated with arts and also on how they can exploit digital storytelling webtools such as StoryJumper effectively (Miller, 2010). Hence, teachers should view digital storytelling as useful webtool to be incorporated in their writing lessons in order to improve their pupils’ writing skills through a meaningful context. Digital storytelling helps pupils to become strategic writers and as pupils become engrossed in coming up with a digital story, they will forget the difficulties they face with writing conventions such as spelling, punctuation and handwriting which has been hindering them from writing using the traditional paper and pencil method (Yamac & Ulusoy, 2016).

The Connection To The Kssr Curriculum

The Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) emphasises the acquisition of English language which is viewed as the dominant language used in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Hence, the mastery of English is considered to enable pupils to have an easy access to electronic media such as the internet [Ministry of Education (Moe), 2011]. Meanwhile, in terms of writing skills acquisition, Moe (2011) also emphasised that by the end Year 6, pupils should be able to write a range of texts using appropriate language, style and form through a variety of media. This clearly shows that the KSSR curriculum does not only emphasise the learning of writing skills through traditional method but it also encourages learning of writing in different media available such as through digital storytelling. Moe (2011) also emphasises language learning in meaningful contexts with purposeful activities with the incorporation of fun elements. When pupils use StoryJumper to write their stories, they are completing a task in a fun manner through the usage digital webtool which serves as meaningful context for writing.

Moreover, Moe (2011) also encourages the integration of salient new technologies in language learning which is regarded as vital for knowledge acquisition and collaboration among pupils. Through the usage of StoryJumper, pupils learn through a new webtool which encourages them to explore the features besides cooperating with their friends to come up with their group storybooks. KSSR also presents language inputs under three broad themes in which the relevant theme for this research is “World of Stories” in order to make learning more meaningful and purposeful (Moe, 2011). Through exposure to variety of stories, pupils will gain wide range of vocabulary, sentence structures and creative writing aspects. The KSSR curriculum also emphasises the acquisition of higher order thinking skills (HOTS) which are applying, analysing, evaluating and creating skills (Moe 2011). Though the usage of StoryJumper, pupils also apply HOTS as they apply their knowledge on writing skills, grammar components and vocabulary in their stories. Pupils also apply HOTS as they create their own digital storybooks by creating their own storyline and embedding graphics as part of their story. The KSSR curriculum contains several educational emphases which reflect the current development in education and one of the relevant emphases to this study is creativity and innovation. Moe (2011) hopes that English language learning can foster creativity and innovation in pupils in which they produce something new in a fun-filled way through a high-level of imagination. Through the incorporation of StoryJumper, pupils will be able to use the web tool by engaging themselves in creative writing besides inspiring them to be innovative in creating their own storybooks with their own ideas.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilised the quasi-experimental design as the researchers used intact group of pupils and it is not possible to randomly assign the pupils as the classes were pre-determined by the school administration.
Creswell (2012) stated that quasi-experimental design is suitable if researchers cannot artificially create groups for the experiment due to the availability of the participants or the setting which prohibits forming artificial groups. As it was not possible for the researchers to carry out the research in two classes and only one class was involved, the research also adopts the within-group experimental design.

There were 32 participants in this study and they are Year 5 primary pupils from a rural school in Banting, Selangor. All the participants involved in this study are Malay pupils. There were 18 female and 14 male pupils. The participants’ language proficiency is of intermediate level. The Year 5 pupils were chosen for the study as they were just exposed to the new format of the UPSR English Paper and they were learning the writing skills required for them to be able to complete the Section C of English Paper which requires them to write a story. Hence, recruiting these pupils for the study will not ascertain the effectiveness of using digital storytelling in improving writing skills but also will gauge their readiness for the UPSR English Paper 2 examination.

Research Instruments And Data Analysis

The instruments utilised in this study were pre-test and post-test using the Section C writing task in Paper 2 which was adopted from the example of new format exam paper provided by Moe. Pre-test was carried out prior to the study in which pupils’ writing task was marked and the marks were recorded to be compared with post-test results. Post-test was carried out after 6 weeks of treatment using StoryJumper digital storytelling webtool in order to assess pupils’ improvement in writing. The marks allocated for Section C is 25 marks so the same score will be used for the purpose of pre-test and post-test.

Moreover, a questionnaire was also carried out in order to acquire pupils’ opinion on the effectiveness of StoryJumper in improving their writing skills, their motivation and interest in learning writing in English language and collaboration among their peers. The questionnaire contained 10 items which were constructed based on the research objectives. The questionnaire was piloted to a class of Year 5 pupils in a different school situated in a rural area with pupils of similar language proficiency. The questionnaire was improved based on the pupils’ comments before being distributed to the participants of the current study. The pupils were given closed-ended questions utilising the nominal scale “yes” or “no”. The researcher thought ESL primary pupils will find it easier to state their responses through a “yes” or “no” response.

The data recorded from the pre-test and post-test scores will be analysed and compared using descriptive statistics comprising of the maximum and minimum scores, the mean and also standard deviations. Meanwhile, data collected through questionnaire will analysed using frequency scores.

Research Procedures

Prior to this research, a pre-test was conducted to record their marks for Section C of English Paper 2. The research was conducted for a period of 6 weeks during the English language lessons and 2 hours every week were allocated for StoryJumper. Pupils went the computer laboratory two days a week which was on Wednesdays and Thursdays as these two days were meant for the Writing and Grammar module as stated in the KSSR curriculum. Hence, it is very apt for this research as pupils do explore writing skills and grammar through their StoryJumper project. As part of this research project, pupils worked on two different stories based on the Section C of UPSR format English Paper and they had to plan and write their story using StoryJumper. The first story is a group storybook and the researcher created the Groupbook in StoryJumper and pupils worked on the story with their group members for the duration of three weeks. After the completion of the Groupbook, pupils presented their story to the class.

Next, pupils were given an individual task and they had to work on their own stories for the duration of three weeks. Pupils presented the story to the whole class individually once they have completed their stories. They were only allowed to work on their stories at school and they were blocked from doing it at home as it will be a disadvantage for other pupils without internet access at home besides it might also affect the results of this research as contact hours using StoryJumper will not be the same for all pupils.
After 6 weeks of exposure to StoryJumper, pupils were given a post-test to assess their progress in writing. A questionnaire was also administered after the post-test to gather information on their opinion regarding StoryJumper.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings will be presented in two sections. The first section will present the pre-test and post-test results. Meanwhile the second section will display the questionnaire results.

**Pre-Test And Post-Test Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.81</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.16</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 32

Research Objective 1: The effectiveness of StoryJumper digital storytelling Webtool 2.0 in improving the writing achievement of Year 5 pupils in Section C of English Paper 2.

Based on the table above, the mean for pre-test is 18.81 meanwhile the mean for post-test is 20.16 which shows an increase of 1.35. Meanwhile the minimum score achieved by the pupils in the pre-test is 15 but in the post-test, the minimum score is 17 which indicates improvement compared to the pre-test. Maximum score for the pre-test is 22 and the maximum score for the post-test is 23 which indicates slight improvement in scores. Meanwhile the standard deviation (sd) for pre-test is 1.96 meanwhile for post-test, the standard deviation (sd) is 1.69. So this indicates that in the pre-test the spread of scores among the pupils were large and in the post-test the distribution of score among pupils narrowed showing that the achievement gap between the high-achievers and low-achievers were narrowed due to the usage of StoryJumper. It can be concluded that the incorporation of StoryJumper is beneficial in improving Year 5 pupils writing skills and their writing performance in Section C of English Paper 2. This is supported by Miller (2010) whom asserted the benefits of digital storytelling which has the ability to teach pupils the art of writing stories in a meaningful context which will improve pupils’ writing skills. Moreover, the improvement of pupils writing skills through the usage of digital storytelling also accomplishes the aim of KSSR which expects pupils to be able to write a range of text using a variety of media. In this research, the pupils achieved this aim as they managed to write stories using the digital storytelling webtool, the StoryJumper.

Table 2: Students’ Perception On Using StoryJumper Questionnaire Results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Did StoryJumper improve your writing skills?</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you feel confident in writing stories now compared to before using StoryJumper?</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Did you like using StoryJumper during English lessons?</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Objective 1: The effectiveness of StoryJumper digital storytelling Webtool 2.0 in improving the writing achievement of Year 5 pupils in Section C of English Paper 2.

Based on the data in Table 2, 28 pupils agreed that StoryJumper improved their writing skills meanwhile only 4 pupils stated that it did not improve their writing skills. 26 pupils also stated that using StoryJumper makes them feel more confident in writing stories with only 6 pupils disagreeing. This is supported by Yamac and Ulusoy (2016) whom stated that digital storytelling encourages ESL pupils to become strategic writers and they are not hindered to write due to the concerns regarding spelling, grammar or sentence structure which has been hindering them from writing. It can be clearly seen that digital storytelling teaches pupils to write and be confident about their writing without being worried about the accuracy of writing which impeded their writing skills progress.

Research Objective 2: The effectiveness of StoryJumper in enhancing Year 5 pupils’ motivation and interest in writing.

Based on the data presented in Table 2, 32 participants agreed that they liked using StoryJumper during the English language lessons. 27 pupils stated that they will be using StoryJumper on their own in the future meanwhile only 5 stated they will not be using it in the future. 29 pupils also agreed that StoryJumper increased their motivation in writing with only 3 pupils disagreeing. Moreover, 28 pupils also stated that StoryJumper helped them to learn from their peers and only 6 pupils think it did not help them. The were also 28 pupils who think that StoryJumper helped them to be a better communicator compared to only 4 pupils whom disagree. Yoon (2012) also agrees that digital storytelling can be very appealing for ESL primary as they work in fun learning mode besides offering a personalised learning experience in which pupils are able to explore the webtool in their own pace. Hence, it enhances their motivation and interest in writing besides encouraging them to feel proud of the stories they have created.

Research Objective 3: The effectiveness of StoryJumper in encouraging collaboration and communication skills of Year 5 pupils.

In terms of collaboration, 27 pupils think that StoryJumper improved their cooperation with their friends and only 5 pupils disagreed. 26 pupils also agreed that StoryJumper helped them to learn from their peers and only 6 pupils think it did not help them. There were also 28 pupils who think that StoryJumper helped them to be a better communicator compared to only 4 pupils whom disagree. Yoon (2012) also agrees that digital storytelling can be beneficial in promoting collaborative learning among pupils as they work
together with their friends so they learn to interact with them besides sharing of knowledge and skills also occur during the process.

Overall, it is apparent that the majority of the pupils agreed that StoryJumper had helped them in improving their writing skills, communication skills, motivation and interest in writing besides helping them to foster collaboration among their friends.

**CONCLUSION**

Through the examination of the data analysis, it is evident that the incorporation of StoryJumper, a digital storytelling webtool, can be beneficial in improving ESL pupils writing skills. The pupils also feel more confident to write in the English language as a result of incorporating StoryJumper in their English writing lessons. The integration of StoryJumper in the English language lessons has also boosted pupils’ interest and motivation in writing which was previously viewed as a difficult task. Moreover, the utilisation of StoryJumper in the writing lessons also encourages the development of 21st century skills in which pupils have to adopt several roles as the creator, collaborator, critical thinker and communicator. Through their involvement in StoryJumper, pupils assumed the role of creator by coming up with their own digital stories meanwhile they assumed their role as critical thinkers when they use their thinking skills to come up with an interesting storyline. They also embrace the roles of collaborators and communicators when they work with their friends and teachers. The utilisation of StoryJumper as part of the English language lessons also uphold the visions embedded in the MEB which aims to enhance the teaching and learning in the Malaysian classrooms through the incorporation of technological tools.

Teachers should also be proactive in engaging their pupils in new learning approaches which is relevant to the current trend in education. Teachers should take the initiative to expose their ESL pupils to technological web tools that might spark their interest and motivation in learning English. Teachers should also constantly research on new ways of teaching that might be beneficial in improving teaching practices and the achievement of their pupils. Teachers should realise that traditional teaching methods should be intertwined with 21st century learning approaches in order to cater to the needs of the current generation of pupils who are digital natives.

The current research has contributed to the area of English language learning on the significance of using digital webtools in improving language skills. A wide variety of webtools are available online and further research on the usage in the classrooms will help educators to choose effective webtools that they can employ in their teaching context. In order to strengthen the findings of the current study, a further research can be conducted using a control group as this study only used one group of participants. Further study can also include a qualitative design in order to support the quantitative research findings and also to gather pupils’ opinion on the usage of StoryJumper. There should also be a research focussing on teachers’ point of view in using digital storytelling webtools such as StoryJumper in order to get their views on the suitability of employing such tools in Malaysian ESL context and the challenges they might go through in order utilise such webtools as part of their teaching and learning process.

**REFERENCES**


