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Abstract
Digital storytelling (DST) could be used as one of the contemporary learning resources for students to increase their participation in the learning of speaking skills. It could also help to broaden students' perspectives towards their potential to become good communicators. Thus, this study aims to (1) examine the use of digital storytelling in the e-Poster Presentation assessment in the learning of English at the preparatory level for diploma studies, and (2) investigate students' perceptions towards this learning approach. About twenty-seven Pre-diploma students at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) participated in the study. These students who had a low-proficiency level in the English language, have used the digital storytelling platform to create e-Poster Presentations for their speaking tasks. For data analysis, written entries and short journal entries were analysed to gain insights into students' perceptions of engaging with DST in their e-Poster Presentation projects. Findings showed that the approach of creating digital storytelling videos and conducting e-Poster presentations has helped to improve their speaking performance. It could be said that the students had favourable opinions towards the digital storytelling approach. Consequently, digital storytelling could be utilised to diversify instructional approaches. DST would be a beneficial tool in encouraging low-proficiency students, especially in higher learning institutions, in enhancing their speaking performances in English language classrooms.
Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Speaking Skills, Low Proficiency, Tertiary Students

Introduction
Speaking is very important in second language learning (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Speaking skill is commonly defined as a person's ability to speak or perform in an acquired language (Hirsch, 2011). Essentially, mastering English speaking skills would enable one to advance in their language skills as there is the integration of other language skills incorporated with speaking. However, it is a matter of concern that not many students are able to speak English fluently after graduating from secondary school, even though they can write well-crafted essays (James et al., 2019).
Having a good speaking ability has an importance that goes beyond the classroom walls. English speaking skills are among one the important soft skills to have which could help

graduates to have better chances to secure jobs. According to Jobstreet.com Malaysia Country Manager, Gan Bock Herm, communication skills are among employers' top five values. Indeed, having a good command of English would help increase a jobseeker's chances to be employed. Unfortunately, the Director of British Council Malaysia, Sarah Deverall stated the second reason why fresh graduates face difficulties to gain employment is that they have poor speaking abilities, especially in the English language (Rozana, 2019).

Among all the four language skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing; teaching and learning speaking skills could be challenging; yet, it is a vital skill for tertiary students. Previous research by Lestari (2018) approved that some of the factors which inhibited students to speak in English are the lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge which restricts the students to communicate effectively. In line with this, speaking activities can help learners enhance their vocabulary and grammar skills, which would also be an added advantage to sharpening students' writing and reading skills.

In the 21st century era, the rising use of information and communication technologies (ICT) has significantly changed educational practices, shifting the emphasis from linguistic proficiency to communicative language proficiency (James et al., 2019). The traditional "chalk and talk," "teacher-centred" teaching style in Malaysia is giving way to a more multifaceted, "student-centred" approach that attempts to improve students' speaking skills (Lu et al., 2010). Indeed, using digital technology in the classroom has become more innovative and attractive. To date, there has not been much research on digital storytelling in English language classrooms in Malaysia, especially for low-proficiency learners in sub-urban areas. This study aims to: i) examine the use of digital storytelling in the e-Poster Presentation assessment in the learning of English at the preparatory level for diploma studies in the higher learning institution, and ii) investigate students' perceptions towards this digital storytelling approach.

Literature Review
Digital Storytelling (DST)
Incredibly, in the 21st-century learning environment, digital learning plays an essential role in education. Much attention has been given towards the integration of current technology in classrooms. This means that our classroom activities could use a broad range of technologies, including computers, tablets and mobile devices, communication devices such as soft-wares and apps, internet data, and other ICT services and applications. Moreover, digital learning technologies, for example, Kahoot!, TED-Ed, Socrative, and many others have been developed to improve teaching and learning. Through the incorporation of ICT in the classrooms, teachers may plan and construct a more viable teaching strategy, and build a more efficient 21st-century learning environment for students. Consequently, this could lead towards better preparation for future real-life applications in the workplace environment (Siricord & Yunus, 2016). All of these online learning resources could increase students' participation in the learning process and broaden their perspectives toward technology advancement in the real world.

Digital storytelling is one of the important strategies used by educators for improving learning. It stands out for improving speaking abilities (Baghdasaryan, 2015). It has been employed in the teaching and learning of English in classroom settings. There are two types of experiences that students may acknowledge when practising DST in their learning, which is ideal and reflective (Abd Rahman & Bakar, 2019). An ideal DST is when the students understood the DST elements and can implement them in producing their digital stories as

seen in the studies conducted by (Thang and Mahmud, 2017; Nampaktai and Suksiripakonchai, 2018). Meanwhile, reflective DST provides the opportunity for students to prepare for the recent subjects they have learned. This means that students are able to make meaning of their current learning process.

Past Studies on Digital Storytelling
According to Nampaktai and Suksiripakonchai (2018), the majority of the students involved in their study, that is 95% of the students gave reaffirmation that digital storytelling changed the way they learned the English language. The researchers agreed that digital storytelling fostered their students' English-speaking ability and confidence level. This was because, in the learning process, students had the chance to learn and understand the language functions and content of the sample stories better before they could create their own digital stories and present them to their classmates.

Similarly, Thang and Mahmud (2017), echoed similar results in their study which measured students' attitudes towards digital storytelling (DST). Their findings revealed that students generally perceived digital storytelling to bring positive influences and had contributed to the development of some crucial skills such as English language skills, ICT literacy skills, critical thinking, problem-solving and collaborative skills.

Also, a study on students' engagement in collaborative EFL storytelling activities by Huang et al (2017), reported that the students' proficiency level was one of the ultimate factors which contributed towards students learning performances, learning strategies and pair performances. Therefore, the findings showed that collaborative digital storytelling was useful in promoting motivation and engagement in students.

Besides that, Ahmadi and Mohamadi (2017); Liu et al (2019); Ponhan and Teeranon (2019); Yang et al (2020) discussed better linguistic outcomes among students and agreed that DST had contributed positively towards students' speaking skills developments. This could mean that preparing digital stories among 21st-century learners might be interesting for the students. In addition, the use of DST could help to promote English language learning as well as create a platform for students to polish their English language speaking abilities. Through the DST platform, students would be able to develop a wide range of vocabulary and grammar usage, improve their pronunciation, and boost their confidence to communicate in English. Eventually, over time, students could become more proficient to communicate in English and prepare themselves with 21st-century academic and soft skills which in future would become valuable assets upon tertiary graduation.

EFL students at Iran's Param Noor University participated in a study done by Abdolmanafi-Rokni and Qarajeh in 2014. Digital storytelling was used to treat the experimental group, and their feedback at the end of the session was positive. 93.4% of the sample subjects agreed that using digital storytelling to convey stories helped in improving their speaking abilities. The learners' motivation for learning languages in general and speaking skills, in particular, was increased through digital storytelling in addition to their speaking abilities.

A comparable study with a focus on intermediate EFL learners was conducted by Razmi et al. in 2014. One group served as the control group, whereas in the other, students had to deliver their stories using Microsoft PowerPoint. The researchers discovered a significant difference in the two groups' oral performance. Additionally, research shows that digital storytelling enhances students' motivation. Moreover, the students became more interested in learning and increased their responsibility level. It was also found that the elements in Microsoft PowerPoint made it ideal for digital storytelling.

Benefits of Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling is often offered as a dominant, technology-derived learning approach. It is also used in the educational setting to convey stories with the aid of digital media to create more appealing stories for the students. This is important as it can help to develop 21st-century skills among students. According to Robin (2008); Bakar (2009), there are five aspects of 21st-century skills which are:

i) Language literacy – the learners' capability to communicate with a large public to gather information and discuss issues;

ii) ICT literacy – the learners' capability to use computers and technology to improve learning and proficiency:

iii) Visual literacy – the learners' capability to understand, respond and communicate via visual images;

iv) Information literacy – the learners' capability to quest for, gauge, and synthesize information; and

v) Media literacy – the learners' capability to read, comprehend and react to information available

Therefore, it is also important to expose tertiary-level students to the use of digital storytelling (DST) as these skills have been identified as one the important 21st-century skills for contemporary students (Thang & Mahmud, 2017).

Methodology

The main purpose of this study was to examine the use of digital storytelling in the e-Poster Presentation tasks in the learning of English at the preparatory level for diploma studies in a higher learning institution. A total of twenty female students and seven male students were involved in the study. The students were undergoing preparatory level courses for Diploma studies, namely Pre- Diploma level at UiTM Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang branch campus. Permatang Pauh is considered to be a sub-urban area in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. The students enrolled in the ELC 030 class, English for Pre-Diploma which is a basic English proficiency subject.

For the English assessment – e-Poster oral presentation, the main researcher instructed twenty-seven students in her class to incorporate DST and produce two videos for their e-Poster oral presentation tasks. They had to produce two DST videos based on two selected themes- Introductory Video and Food. The preparation for making the videos was facilitated by their English lecturer. Nonetheless, students had to independently manage and produce the videos themselves. The e-Poster Presentation rubrics and scoresheet were used to assess oral proficiency among pre-Diploma students in UiTM. It has 4 constructs, such as visual aids (4 marks), content (6marks), language (14 marks), and delivery (6 marks).

The research data was collected from students' written entries. Upon the completion of the second DST video project, open-ended questions were given to the students. The structured open-ended questions ranged from what was the title of their videos, what experiences they liked and disliked, what they had learned, benefits they gained from the project, challenges they faced, and how they overcame the challenges. Apart from that, participants were also asked to write entries in a short journal with regards to their experiences in doing their projects. Students were given forty to sixty minutes to provide their reflections, comments and feedback, and to submit the journal at the end of the project.

Procedures

This study was conducted at the UiTM Pulau Pinang campus for four weeks. For this study, 27 students were chosen and designated as participants. In this study, the main researcher discussed ideas of digital storytelling with the students and showed them how to utilise Microsoft PowerPoint to create their DST videos. For their DST videos, each student had to produce two PowerPoint presentations which contain text, images, and audio. For the first theme – The introductory video, each student was required to prepare a video narrating about themselves and their families. This task was given to them during the first week of the lesson. For this task, participants learned how to make PowerPoint videos. Next, during the second week, the students had to record the narration of the first video and create the DST video. Later on, in the following two weeks, this procedure was repeated for the second selected theme on Food. Here, the students narrated the theme of Food and three unique facts about the food of their choice.

The main aim of these two themes was to encourage the students to narrate stories which were close to their hearts and personal to them. Consequently, the rationale of asking the students to manage such tasks was to help them to speak more comfortably, and also to speak more eloquently as they talk about something meaningful to them. This would eventually be able to help them to enhance their vocabulary usage and confidence level too. Apart from that, the activities were conducted to prepare the students for their e-Poster Presentation, which was part of their assessment for speaking in the ELC030 English subject.

Findings and Discussions

This study aims to investigate the use of digital storytelling in the e-Poster Presentation in the learning of English at the preparatory level for pre-diploma studies in the higher learning classroom, and students' perceptions towards this digital storytelling approach.

Positive Impact of Using DST

Based on students' written responses, the researchers concluded that there were positive impacts of using DST for the e-Poster Presentation. Three main themes were categorised: (1) improving students' communications skills, (2), increasing students' confidence level in using the English language, and (3) improving students' presentation skills.

Improved Communication Skills

Improved communication skill was one of the positive impacts that the students reported to have been gained from their digital storytelling videos in the e-Poster Presentation tasks. The pre-Diploma students mentioned that in producing the DST videos, they learnt to communicate effectively. In addition, some of the students stated that their communication skills had further improved after using DST.

Similarly, a few students commented that they had experienced and learned new things as they managed and prepared the videos for their e-Poster Presentations:

"I have learnt new words and now know how to use them in my presentation."
I feel motivated and encouraged to communicate in English when using DST to do my presentation."
"I usually got nervous to do a presentation, especially if in English class. But with DST, I felt that it helps me to use English to tell stories to my friends."

Essentially, these feedbacks and comments showed that using digital storytelling for the students' e-Poster Presentation, not only improved students' speaking skills but also affected

their motivation in learning English in general and speaking skills in particular (Razmi et al., 2014). It could be said that digital storytelling and story-making create opportunities for people to express their ideas aloud in class, in groups, or for private purposes. In fact, the Pre-Diploma students considered DST video making as a motivational tool which helped them in learning English, and enhanced their vocabulary and grammar skills.

Improved Confidence Level

When the students were asked what they liked about DST in the video-making process, all twenty-seven students commented that they felt happy doing the videos. In general, they said that they gained valuable experiences from preparing the videos. Thirteen students wrote in their short journals that they would apply their experiences in their future and professional life. Some examples of the comments were:

"I like the part we can record ourselves and watch or listen to the recordings, and select the best videos. This helps me to practice and not worried to make mistakes. I feel confident. Just like we did on social media."

"I think using DST is fun. I learn to pronounce words correctly and it makes me feel confident to do my presentation."

The experiences and lessons that the Pre-Diploma students obtained from being exposed to the use of DST in their e-Poster Presentations helped them to become better communicators. According to Kim (2014), digital storytelling has been widely used to help learners to communicate their stories effectively, especially if the topics are related to their daily life activities and personal matters. This would then help the students to build their self-confidence and improve their ability to participate in speaking activities. In regards to this, digital storytelling activities can help to enhance students' speaking skills. This is in line with the research made by Baghdasaryan (2015) who mentioned that students would have the opportunity to record, listen to themselves and be able to watch their pronunciation, their usage of grammar and vocabulary as well as able to expand their fluency in the target language. As the saying goes, *'Practice makes perfect'.* Therefore with DST and more practice in speaking tasks, students are able to develop sentences to create stories with the correct pronunciation. This is because when they recorded the stories, they become more conscious of their English pronunciation in the digital platform; hence this activity could also promote them to add new words to their vocabulary banks.

Improved Presentation Skills

Generally, the twenty-seven students prepared their DST videos as classroom activities in preparation for their e-Poster Presentation. Students commented that they had learned to use digital tools for their e-Poster Presentation:

"I now know how to use PowerPoint to create videos and make the class presentation,.. and I think that will help me a lot when I study Diploma."

"I felt like doing a practice for public speaking…. we can do a lot of practice and improve our presentation to become better."

Other than improving pronunciation and vocabulary aspects, DST has also helped the students to improve their presentation skills as it can inspire them to perform well in public speaking. This is deemed important as it will help students to foresee the importance of digital

tools as aids for speaking and oral presentation activities. Having mentioned that, preparing and recording digital stories can be regarded as a simulation that could help students to practice their communication and presentation skills in situations that are significant to them such as in meetings, presentations or job interviews.

This is in line with a study from Nampaktai & Suksiripakonchai (2018). In their study, the students confirmed that digital storytelling had transformed the way they learned the English language. Moreover, in this study, the opportunities to use the DST in their e-Poster Presentation provided the students with the platforms and learning experiences to learn and comprehend the linguistic functions and content of the example stories better, before they could develop their own digital stories. This means that the students were able to practice and improve their speaking and presentation skills.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that most of the participants agreed that digital storytelling tools have helped them in their speaking and oral presentation tasks. Additionally, the participants were open to the concept of using digital storytelling as a tool to improve their public speaking abilities. It could be said that the students had favourable opinions towards the digital storytelling approach. Consequently, digital storytelling could be utilised to diversify instructional approaches. DST would be a beneficial tool in encouraging low-proficiency students, especially in higher learning institutions, in enhancing their speaking performances in English language classrooms. Moreover, the students' curiosity was piqued by the use of digital storytelling, which was a new learning process for them. DST has helped them to become more confident speakers and active learners when doing the e-Poster Presentation. In fact, a lot of young people are now familiar with digital storytelling. Moreover, there are platforms where people may learn more about digital storytelling. An event called the KL Noir: Magic Storytelling Series showcased such activities. As reported by Kamini Ramachandran to *The Star* newspaper, through the use of storytelling, the knowledge transfer which occurred when connected virtually with people through certain storytelling methods and abilities were extremely fulfilling (Dinesh, 2021).

To date, there has not been much research on digital storytelling in English language classrooms in Malaysia, especially for low-proficiency learners in sub-urban areas. It is hoped that this study contributes to the existing literature by examining the perceptions of Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) low-proficiency students towards the use of DST in their electronic-oral presentation tasks. Since more schools and higher learning institutions in Malaysia now have access to computers and an internet connection, digital storytelling could be one of the practical and affordable ways to promote students in their communication and presentation tasks in English classrooms. The use of digital storytelling could increase students' motivation level and help students improve their speaking skills.

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