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## Enhancing 21st century learning skills via digital storytelling: Voices of Malaysian teachers and undergraduates

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### Abstract

Research studies have discovered that digital storytelling which combines the art of storytelling with a variety of interactive media tools can benefit language learning in a variety of ways. It has been found to encourage and motivate students and at the same time enhance their communication skills and enable them to build conceptual skills and technological skills – all in-line with 21st century skills required by the job market. This paper will describe the use of digital storytelling as an innovation for learning English in an English for Academic Purpose (EAP) course, and the teachers and students' responses to the innovation. The analysis of preliminary data will be derived from interviews with five teachers, and the students' questionnaire survey. The discussion of the preliminary findings will explore to what extent the project enhances the promotion of 21st century skills, such as interactive communication skills, interpersonal skills, technology literacy skills as well as language skills.

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## Introduction

Digital storytelling (DST) involves the integration of technology and the use of interactive media (which may include digital audio, video, movies, digital comic books and multimedia images). It is similar to traditional storytelling in that it is an exercise in communication and a creative process that requires participants to visualize and use their imaginations. It can help build the 21st century skills that are needed in modern workforce by enabling students gain competence in skills considered as an important part of any curriculum. According to the book *Digitales, the Art of Telling Digital Stories*, DST assists in the development of effective communication skills and experiences in specific areas such as:

- Interactive communication
- Interpersonal skills
- Personal and social responsibility
- Technology literacy
- Relevant, high-quality products
- Basic and visual literacy
- Curiosity, creativity, and risk-taking

How does DST help in the achievement of the above mentioned goals? Basically, it allows students to use interactive media to engage an audience and show what they have learned. This requires knowledge of the subject and ability to think in the process of converting their materials into interactive media format. This process is personal and meaningful because they are engaged with it and learned to think about it in a new way. It also involves communication, collaboration and team work as each group of students share their knowledge and know-how with each other. By creating a video as the end product of their work, the participants have to use critical thinking and problem solving skills in order to convey a coherent message. When making the video, the students have to make decisions about which information to include and about how to most effectively format that information to convey their messages. By using digital media to search for materials on an issue meaningful to them and then convey their message to other people through their digital stories, the students are participating in the act of teaching and raising awareness. In order to conduct online research to create a video, the students have to learn how to use software and search on the Web in a variety of ways. This use of technology enables them to gain a better conceptual understanding of the technology that they are using. Thus it can be seen here that the skills they can learn from digital storytelling are all skills relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup> century job market in general. (Ideas for this are drawn from Robin, 2008).

The process of creating a digital story as shown above is rather daunting; however, research studies have shown that its benefits are manifold. It has been shown to improve students' organizational skills, research skills, and enhance their interest in the content taught (Paull, 2002; Salpeter, 2005). It has also been found to accelerate students' comprehension, written skills and vocabulary development (Burmark 2004; Kajder & Swenson, 2004; Papadopoulou & Ioannis, 2010).

DST has also gained ground in Asia. Research carried out in this area has shown positive results as attested by Gyabak and Godina (2011) who discovered that the use of DST could bridge the digital divide in a rural community school in Bhutan. Sadik (2008) demonstrated that the DST projects implemented by Egyptian teachers supported students' understanding of specific content in an academic course. Heo's (2009) study on the effects of digital storytelling on pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and professional dispositions unveiled that it could contribute to the transfer of knowledge and skills of personal technology to educational technology settings. Hafner and Miller (2001) reported that DST was able to foster independent learning among a group of English-medium university students in Hong Kong. All these skills are in-line with the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century which affirms how pertinent DST is to the modern world.

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