

## Harnessing Dramatic Creativity: A Lesson Study on Enhancing Creativity in a Digital Puppetry Project

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### ABSTRACT

To manipulate digitally animated figures, objects, text, audio files, and music in a virtual setting is known as digital puppetry. It is frequently utilised in movies and TV shows, but it has also been employed in education, such in language teaching. The purpose of this study was to investigate the instructional approaches used to teach TESL pre-service teachers enrolled in the "Drama in Action" course to foster dramatic creativity. Pre-service teachers and the researchers worked together to observe and evaluate the teaching and learning processes. Participants wrote and edited drama scripts, made storyboards, chose pictures for the characters and backgrounds, recorded voiceovers, and selected appropriate music to set the tone and mood of the narrative. The findings showed that the pre-service teachers created artistic and compelling digital puppet shows, and with more guidance could have upgraded their digital process, English language accuracy, and pronunciation for better results. With the help of this lesson study, digital puppetry will become an effective teaching tool in ESL classrooms by enhancing the teaching strategies used in the "Drama in Action" course.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study is one of very few studies which have investigated enhancing pre-service teachers' creativity in a digital puppetry project through lesson study.

## 1. Introduction

Lesson study is a collaborative activity that teachers engage in to raise the standard of instruction. A considerable improvement in teachers' professional and pedagogical competencies can be achieved through this practise. The development of pre-service teachers' teaching abilities and their readiness for the teaching profession can both be seen as goals of lesson study with pre-service teachers. Lesson Study is an ongoing effort by a group of instructors to construct and enhance the teaching and learning process, particularly in planning, carrying out, observing, and reporting the teaching and learning process result. It is not a technique or method for teaching and learning (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). The lesson study offers direction on the observed teaching and

learning process. To ensure that several comments and perspectives will help the building of the lesson plan that best suits the observed lesson, it should be done in groups.

Creative teaching, according to [Lin \(2011\)](#), is a fanciful, inventive, and imaginative formulation to educational activity ([Craft, 2006](#)). Creative pedagogy encompasses fictive teaching, creative learning, and teaching for creativity ([Lin, 2011](#)). [Sawyer \(2011\)](#) highlights the ability of the creative teacher to naturally use improvisational aspects. When teaching creatively, a pedagogue should live in the moment and behave freely, following the rules of improvisation. It has been suggested that encouraging students' creativity in the classroom will assist them in identifying and establishing a life framework. The development of creative abilities and attitudes across the curriculum may aid them in navigating a number of circumstances ([Craft et al., 2014](#)).

A creative learning environment for theatre, according to [Dai \(2020\)](#) consists of the following six elements: instructor as a role model, learning climate, collaborative learning, student-centered learning, flexible use of time, and playful action in theatre. Creativity, which is essential for the advancement of society and humans and is a valuable human skill, can be thought of as an inbuilt potential energy.

Digital puppetry enhances instructor-led learning by letting learners to listen to and watch music, read print materials, or view a documentary or animation clip in addition to the instructor's directions ([Saracho, 2020](#)). Among the many advantages of this technique is that the teacher takes on the intermediary role, guiding students through the process of interpreting what they are listening to, reading, or viewing. This can also be created by students themselves. When using this strategy, the student is asked to take on the role of the teacher and develop content that will captivate learners and assist them in mastering ideas and skills. Finally, social media can be utilized to enhance teaching and learning since it comprises a variety of online dramatic technology tools that allow individuals to communicate easily via the internet in order to exchange knowledge and resources ([Wohlwend, et al., 2018](#)). Technology has become increasingly popular. Providing students with a visual aid prior to the talk allows them to compare the subjects under discussion to the image provided. This method enables for easy reference to examples that can be quickly recalled. As an additional benefit of well-prepared demonstrations, [Schwartz and Martin \(2004\)](#) discovered that they "assist students in generating the forms of information that are likely to aid them in learning" from following lectures.

Using puppets to educate can be an effective approach to making story time into reality, stimulating learners' imaginations, and developing positive and creative play ([Liao & Hitchcock, 2018](#)). It found that employing puppets to educate improves students' focus, drive, capacity to observe, and problem-solving skills. Rose, "Puppetry Facilitator for Little Angel Theatre in London, England," had one time said that the use of puppetry could give learners a practical knowledge of abstract things like in learning the English language ([Sextou, 2022](#)). This could be used not just in English classes but also in other fields such as sciences. Making shadow puppetry gives learners a hands-on comprehension of what shadowing is and how it can be modified and utilized to describe or interpret the lesson's content ([Jeppsson et al., 2022](#)).

Puppets and puppetry have the ability to assist pupils in integrating into groups and learning how to collaborate. Four research in the given dataset ([Korosec, 2012](#);

Mehrotra, Khunyakari, Natarajan, & Chunawala, 2007) demonstrate group collaboration and coordination. Korosec (2012) points out that "*quiet and shy youngsters, show-offs, hyperactive and lonely children*" require specific attention, and that direct connection with them can be ineffective, resulting in rejection. Inclusion into the group can be challenging. A puppet can be useful in this situation (Korosec, 2012). The puppet is a tool that aids the instructor in integrating new learners into the ensemble. It serves as a tool for stress relief and relaxation. When the puppet is being made (and the teacher takes a flexible and innovative strategy), the youngster feels embraced and has the opportunity to demonstrate himself in his or her own unique style. Korosec (2012) focuses on the impact of dramatics on socialising in her other research. The puppet has a significant impact on socialisation in a classroom, as evidenced by the research. Youngsters become more self-assured when they make dramatics and engage with them. As a consequence of their accomplishment, these children's classmates learn to comprehend and embrace them (Korosec, 2012). Learning through play can be a crucial component of education, assisting learners in developing life skills. Using puppets to teach can be an effective approach to bring story time to life, stimulate learner's imaginations, and encourage creative play.

Apart from using puppets for shorter improvisations or scheduled performances, it is also feasible to utilize them for long-term undertakings. For example, Gobec (2012) adopted a systematic model for project work with a puppet that serves a variety of functions. For example, a project involving a puppet could take a year to complete and could bring together people from several sectors such as science, art, culture, technique, media, communications, and ecology to collaborate.

### 1.1. Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine how digital puppetry is being used by pre-service teachers to help them improve their speaking and writing skills in English and also to come up with creative lesson plans. With the following objectives:

- i. To investigate the instructional strategies used in a module to harness dramatic creativity through digital puppetry.  
To analyse the digital puppetry produced based on the pre-service teachers' creativity and the language accuracy and fluency
- ii. To examine the pre-service student teachers' experiences when developing digital puppetry.

## 2. Literature Review

This study is underpinned by four concepts in order to fully understand cooperative pedagogical practices. The theories are Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory, Learner's Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Social Constructivism. These are ideal for educators to utilize to guide their teaching practices in enhancing creativity language learning among the learners. They determine how learners connect with, analyse, and memorise knowledge during the educational process.

### 2.1. Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligence

Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligence emphasises the necessity of satisfying students' thoughts and action predicated on various intellectual types, even while addressing students' essential necessities and it is the cornerstone of equipping them to learn. Since

learners begin, retain, and demonstrate their comprehension of knowledge in a variety of ways, this idea emphasises the significance of diversified education (Tsai, et al., 2022). Though traditional practises claim that all learners respond in similar ways, this theory posits that there are many different ways to determine, perform, and comprehend. As a result, our education and evaluation must adapt to the student's evolving demands and fulfil the thoughts and actions of all pupils. Visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and logical-mathematical are the seven educating modalities (Üstündağ Şener & Doğan, 2021).

## 2.2. Learner's theory

Learning is viewed as a form of imprinting by behaviourists, who argue for a compensation and aim system in schooling. Teachers that believe in cognitive theory argue that the notion of education as a change in behaviour is too restrictive, and instead focus on the student rather than the surroundings, especially when it comes to the diversity of human recollection (Dai, 2020). Critical theorists think that a learner's opportunity to comprehend is primarily dependent on something they had already actually understood, and that intellectual capital should be a personalised process of creation. The focus of transforming learning theory is on the often-required shift in a student's assumptions and viewpoint (Britton, Gulgoz & Glynn, 2012). Instructional neuroscience employs approaches such as occasion-related potential and dynamic superconducting magnet tomography to actively monitor the activity of the brain throughout the learning experience outside the realm of educational psychology.

## 2.3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The approach aims to develop students' enthusiasm to participate in the learning process depending on how well their needs are addressed (Lester, 2013). Since it emphasises the significance of fulfilling learners' essential necessities as a basis for education, this is an interventionist theory. Addressing the basic requirements of pupils is an important part of education. Assuring that all learners have enough drink, food, sleep, clothing, and shelter and puppets (digital or physical) demonstrates to students that they might rely on someone as an instructor and that someone is there to help them achieve language, or any other discipline on course. As a result, it's critical to be mindful of your learners' needs. Something as easy as implementing a hospitable meal program or enabling youngsters to go downtown whenever the teacher notices they are fatigued might re-energize them to choose to concentrate (Akpan et al., 2020; Linse & Nunan 2005).

## 2.4. Social Constructivism

This theory is built on student involvement, discussion, and sharing, it is also known as collaborative learning. A variety of groupings and interactive techniques are possible with this teaching method. These could include class-wide talks, discussions in smaller groups, or pairs of students working together on projects or assignments. The fundamental tenet of the theory is that students collaborate in groups to share ideas, brainstorm solutions to problems, find causes and effects, or simply produce something new to supplement prior knowledge. The student is transformed from a passive listener to an active participant and a co-creator of knowledge among co-learners under social constructivism, which transfers the responsibility for information acquisition from the teacher to the student (Akpan et al., 2020).

### 3. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive case study approach to examine how to enhance pre-service teachers' creativity in the learning process designed by the course lecturer in the form of lesson study activities by developing digital puppetry. 91 participants were selected from pre-service TESL teachers taking "Drama in Action " course in the 2021-2022 academic year. The goal of this study was to examine instructional strategies used in a course module and to examine the pre-service teachers' experience when developing digital puppetry. Digital puppetry involves employing digital technologies to control and manipulate virtual characters or puppets in real-time. This method is widespread in education as a teaching and learning tool. Nowadays, students tend to lack focus when teachers use traditional methods in the learning and teaching process. In this study, digital puppetry is used as an instructional strategy to enhance teacher creativity to develop 21<sup>st</sup> teaching materials which can cater all levels of students (Kroger & Nupponen, 2019).

The data collected from various sources were used to create a comprehensive view of the process. Some of these included writing and editing drama scripts, developing storyboards, selecting and creating images of characters and backgrounds, doing voiceover, choosing suitable music to create a tone and mood suited to the plot of the story, lesson plan and post lesson reflections. This triangulation strengthens the study's validity by corroborating findings from different perspectives. The researcher analyse the post-lesson reflections to gain insights into the pre-service teachers' perceptions of their experience and the impact of digital puppetry on their creativity and teaching materials. To determine whether pre-service teachers have strengthened their creativity to create teaching materials, digital puppetry stories created by pre-service teachers were gathered as a data source. While the subject lecturer transitions into an observer who watches pre-service teachers' activities during the learning process, the lecturer functions as the researcher. The study focused on investigating the perceptions, choices and attitudes of pre-service teachers and their lecturer regarding the digital puppetry project. This research had specific boundaries set for its scope. It involved creating puppets and performing puppetry as part of the project. In the study, the perceptions, options, and attitudes of the pre-service teachers and lecturer were sought on the digital puppetry project. This makes up the delimitation of the study. The lecturer provided theoretical information to the pre-service teachers through a workshop. With the guidance of the lecturer, the pre-service teachers selected the types of puppet figures they wanted to create. They worked on their puppets both individually and collaboratively with their friends. Additionally, the lecturers encouraged cooperative work among the pre-service teachers to teach them how to achieve consensus decisions during the process. The researcher employed observation forms to observe the participants activities and discussions, which includes participants communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity skills. The data collected from these forms were used to assess whether there was discrepancy between the pre-service teachers performance and their perceptions of the contributions of the lesson study cycles.

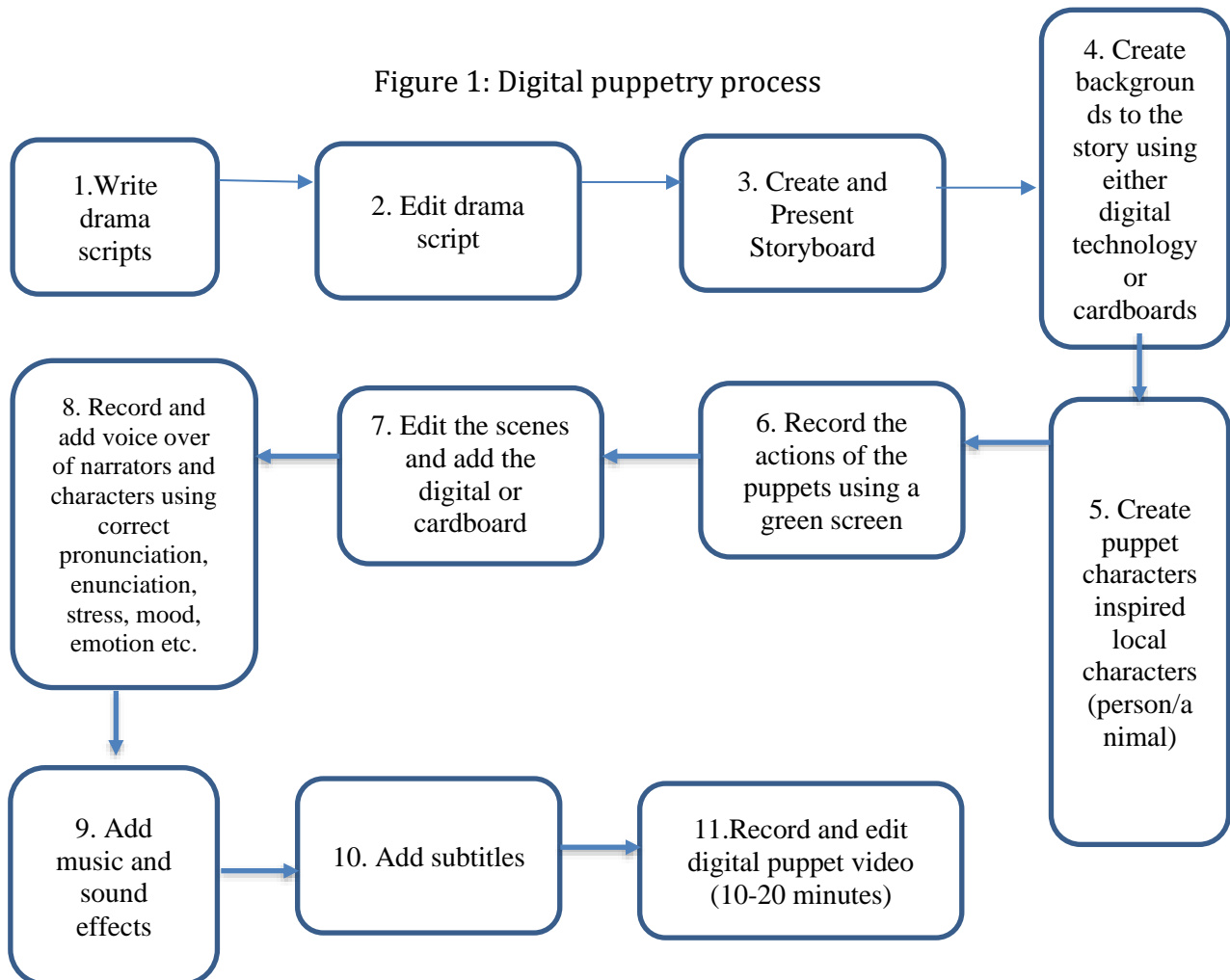
### 4. Result

The pre-service teachers submitted seventeen (17) beautifully crafted stories written in the English language to portray creativity, culture and different genres through digital puppetry. They are entitled as *Bakawali* by The Kalsom Project, *Within Us*, *Goodbye, To the Girl Who Sought Freedom* by Luminous, *I am A Malaysian* by A Quintet, *Layar* by

Marionette, *Melur*, *The Unwanted Surprise*, *The Legend of Keris Kesuma*, *Winter and Bloom*, *The Seesaw* and etc.

#### 4.1. Digital puppetry process

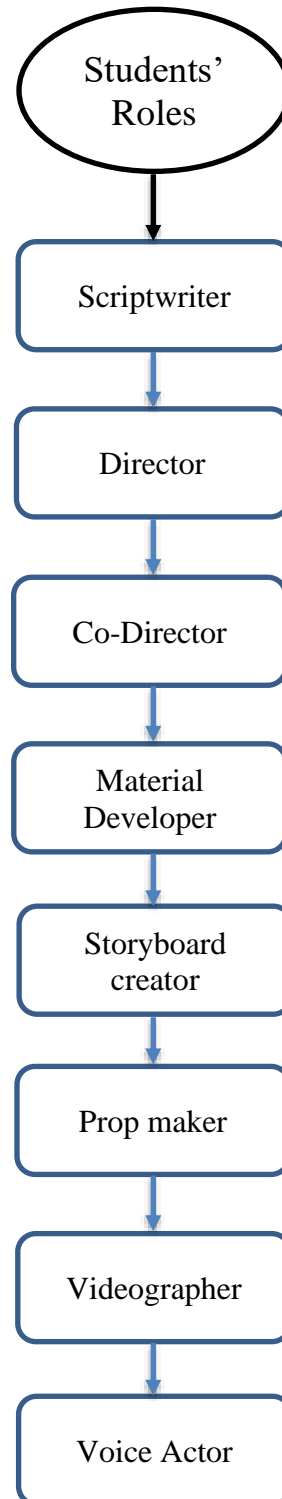
Figure 1 shows the processes that took place while pre-service teachers developed a digital puppetry project. First, they have to come up with a drama script. A few weeks later, they have to edit the drama script according to the lecturer's comments. After that, they have to create and present the storyboard. They created backgrounds to the story using either digital technology or cardboards. The teachers' were able to create puppets inspired by local characters such as people or animals. After the previous processes, the pre-service teachers recorded the actions of the puppets using a green screen and edited the scene by using digital or cardboard backgrounds. Next step, pre-service teachers were required to record and add voice over of narrators and characters by using the correct pronunciation, enunciation, stress, mood, emotion etc. The final step of the process of developing a digital project, the pre-service teachers needed to add subtitles, music and sound effects to give an impactful experience to the audience. Each group recorded and edited digital puppet videos for about 10-20 minutes. The making of digital puppetry took 14 weeks throughout the semester.



## 4.2. Pre-service teachers' roles

Figure 2 shows the roles that every pre-service teacher played during the process of the digital puppetry project. Each pre-service teacher was given a chance to contribute their ideas and opinions throughout the process of developing a digital puppetry project.

Figure 2: Student roles



### 4.3. Analysis on creativity and the use of languages

Digital puppetry is among the avenues for which creativity can be displayed which is enabled by good story writing and the fluent use of languages. Indeed, the stories portrayed in digital puppetry have truly harnessed the young creative minds of the students. To prove this, there are several aspects that presented their creativity such as novelty, relevance, the lingering impression left to the reader and the overall “feel” of the story and performance. In analysis of the submitted digital puppetry works of the students, this part provides such analysis of several stories created by pre-service teachers.

#### 4.3.1. *Bakawali by the kalsom project*

This thriller and mythical genre creatively embodied a mix of the past, the 1921, and the present, the 2022. The switching of the realm of the worlds is a creative patchwork that portrayed the chilling and strange scenes in the whole story. The most creative part, however, is how the creators, through creative and metaphorical words, bring the audience towards the climax, and ultimately towards the unfolding of the century-old myth of the killer, Bakawali.

Scene 1 shows the Modern Kampung Home where the family just moved from the city and into their new home. Scene 2 sets the strange mood as Andina is portrayed as restless and cannot sleep at the new home. Notable element is shown in this that is essential to the ‘time machine’ part of the story, the luring white flower. Scene 3 and Scene 4 encapsulates the 1921s scene. The contrasting past versus present theme was highlighted with the distinguishable pyjamas of Andina, which are clothes that are unlikely to have been known in 1921s. This is how Tok Yan, the antagonist in disguise, was able to come into play and lure Andina completely which went on in Scene 5 and 6. What really sets the spine-chilling Scenes 5 and 6 was the Nenek *Si Bongkok Tiga* humming of Tok Yan and Bakawali. The hysterical laugh of Bakawali also horrifies the audience. The resolution of the story is bitter as Andina was sacrificed and the myth was fulfilled.

#### 4.3.2. *Within us*

This melodrama story portrays a wild ride from seeking a political leader, Tok Belang’s perspective in seeking aid for the plague-laden village, until the introduction of another antagonist, Saudagar and the imprisonment of Tok Belang. The creativity shown in this story seeks to impress upon the moral of the story which is diplomacy and faithfulness in keeping promises. It is further shown in the many characters portraying diverse characters of Haji Dollah, Pak Leh, Devi, Laksamana Ali, Uncle Chong, Aunty Mei, Tuan Hasan.

Scene 1 opens with the conflict of the story – the massive drought and the search for the next leader. Scene 2 sets up Tok Belang as the new leader seeking to fulfill the prophesized savior of the village. The promise of saving the community was taking too long which enabled Tok Belang to trust Saudagar which, in turn, will stir up ruckus and cause the downfall of Tok Belang. Murder and virus are unforeseen elements of the story that were incorporated to portray that Tok Belang was not the envisioned new leader. These elements stretched on in Scenes 3 and Scene 4. Betrayal and truth unfolded in Scene 6 as Saudagar India’s promises were unfulfilled which ended in Tok Belang being

imprisoned. A lot of characters were introduced and the plotline thickens as the story unravels. Hence, it must be ensured that the story goes smoothly and cohesively per scenes in order to have a good story telling

#### 4.3.3. *Goodbye, to the girl who sought freedom by luminous*

This is an action story well written that depicts war, family and love for the country enabled by the creativity shown in every scene. War and conquering lands set in 1919 was beautifully portrayed in the character of the Captain, the diabolic leader of the Militia. True to its action genre, some science trivia were creatively incorporated with the use of potassium chloride for mass killing which is scientifically accurate. Family love is creatively shown in the bitter killing of the family of Dove which was strengthened by her longing to her true family and on the other side of the coin, a blossoming love for family with her new foster family. An overwhelming theme, however, was Dove's love for the country and her people which became her motive for betraying the country that fed and clothe her. Indeed, true to its title, Dove was the "girl who sought freedom" for Mandai although it was "goodbye" as she died in the resolution of the story.

The story opens in a bloody Scene 1 as an aftermath of the killing of Dove's community in Mandai and it captured the attention of the audience. Scene 2 transitions to the adoption and settlement of Dove in Adversus as well as her new family and subsequent training with her foster father. Scene 3 is where the violence and deep trauma takes a toll on Dove which then unfolds to her betrayal and championing the cause of Mandai.

#### 4.3.4. *I am a Malaysian by a quintet*

This story is of a drama genre for which the conflict, climax and resolution is shown to be favorably predictable yet creatively written. The conflict was well shown in the beginning as racism is the overwhelming theme of this story that was creatively written in the characters of Minong, Sarah, Maria and Lily. It was impressed upon Minong's character that she was not normal compared to the conventional norms of the people around her. The bullying scenes were impactful as the insults and name calling were portrayed well. The audience is carried to the climax as the poetry recital competition is introduced. This is through an enabling element of the story and a neutral character, the teacher. Although the poem of Minong, *I am a Malaysian*, is not written and portrayed in full, the descriptive words of the story well conveyed Minong's astonishing performance. As the end of the story comes close, it is creatively portrayed how the protagonist went from being bullies into being friends which is through the introduction of Minong's ethnic background. A thoroughly researched Malays indigenous people, the Orang Asli, is incorporated in the story which strengthened the important core of the story. Verily, the moral of the story is well delivered towards the end of the story where forgiveness and friendship are presented.

Each part shows a smooth transitioning of the story. The introduction sets the mood of the story, the background of the character as well as the core of the story – racism. The pivotal solution in the status quo happens in the next scene where the teacher announces competition which shows the shaken antagonistic characters and an inspired protagonist. The next scene portrays the climactic competition itself and the resulting warm welcome and recognition of the other neutral characters. Finally, the story closes with a feel-good ending.

#### 4.3.5. *Layar by Marionette*

This story has a traditional school scene with an emphasis on dreams, family and societal culture. It is creatively shown how conflict arises in between one's dream, one's family expectations and one's perception of the world. There are three (3) creative notions that are depicted in this story. First, the modern notion that education is the key to a brighter future. Second, the sad truth of the lack of acceptance towards indigenous people. Third, the toxic family culture of holding back a child's dream due to traditional beliefs. Another creative addition is the traditional belief on Srenglook, "*the belief that something bad will happen to someone when they break their promise according to the indigenous people*". These are creative patchworks that makes the story interesting.

Scene 1 opens up with Joseph, the teacher, arriving from a taxi in the village where he'll start to fulfill his teaching dreams. Despite nervousness, he tried to teach the students for which he discovered a stellar student in Scene 2. Fast forward after four months in the story, in Scene 3, Joseph continued to hone the skills of Embun, the star student through an intensive after class program. The conflict also arises towards the end of this scene and is unraveled in Scene 4 as Kartika, the unsupportive mother is introduced and for which the belief of such mother is shown. It creatively shows the reason for the hesitancy of Embun to pursue the program. Scene 5 shows how Embun hides the fact that she joined in the program despite her mother's disapproval, and in Scene 6, the betrayal was revealed showing the rage of the mother. A confrontation arouses in Scene 7 that stretches to Scene 8 between the mother and the teacher. The true reason for Kartika's disapproval also unfolded, through a creative flashback, which is founded upon a valid fear and passion to protect her child from an abrasive world. The story ends in an inspiring ending as the present day depicts a successful Embun and a proud mother, Kartika.

#### 4.3.6. *Melur*

This is a melodrama story which centers on bullying as its main plot. The creativity of this piece is shown in Malaysian culture, local food such as *nasi lemak* and *cekodok pisang*, and local clothing such as the *baju kurung*. The writer also creatively included some western movie for crossovers such as the TV series *Gossip Girls* and british movie, *Wild Child*. These foreign movies also have the same teen and school drama with bullying scenes.

The story opens in Scene 1 with Melur, the protagonist, eager to tell her mother the great news that she got accepted for an all-expense-paid student exchange program in New Jersey, USA for three (3) months. Scene 2 and 3 fast forwards to the day that Melur arrives abroad. She faced bullying from her new classmates which stretched until Scene 4. Melur then called her confidant, Bisiq to plot revenge against the bullies. In Scene 5, they got goat's blood and infused it in the baked red velvet cookies that Melur gave to the bullies. Melur and Bisiq triumphantly made sick, puke blood and flip cars of the bully which stretched from Scenes 6 until 8. Alas, at Scene 9, the bullies figured that it could be Melur and hence, they sought her forgiveness.

#### 4.3.7. *The unwanted surprise*

The storyline was creatively portrayed through a flashback. Since Sarah already knew the story's ending from when she read it in the present, she was able to warn the other characters not to disobey Mak Fidah. In particular, not to eat the latok while Mak Fidah is away and, on another note, culture is creatively shown through this food in the story. This story also should have depicted the saying that "*be careful what you wish for*" as it can be implied that Make Fish was eaten towards the end of the story. However, Sarah jumped instead. This is also the part for which the fictional character Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup was introduced.

#### 4.3.8. *The legend of keris kesuma*

The story creatively incorporates scientific trivias such as the characteristics of Chengal wood as being very sturdy and waterproof, and rattan with flexibility and other special functions which is to laughingly cane children. There are also bits of comedic lines such as mistakenly hearing barter with butter. Corollary to its maritime and icelandic story are the characters of pirates and piracy at sea for which the storyline circles in. Adventure and anthropomorphism of the snake, the Keris Kesuma keeper, also show creativity. Towards the end of the story, the writers creatively left an open-ending impliedly conveying to the audience that the Legend of Keris Kesuma is yet to unfold. It wisely leaves the audience wanting more of a part two (2) of the story.

The introductory part portrays the setting of the story set at 1403 involving trading pathways, ships and merchants. Merchants having barter and going by their usual trade is seen in the first part of the story. At the Istana Seri Kembangan scene, pirates have affected the trade in Malacca for which the Malacca Maritime Force was sent to guard the area, but to no avail. Hence, in the next scene, when the fallen forces reported to the Sultan, the latter ordered the finding of the Keris Kesuma. The next scenes portrayed the search and the forging of the kris and the war championed by Tun Nadir. As the climax ends and resolution comes close, Tun Nadir was killed which makes Sultan Ismail feel apologetic and the need to avenge his death.

#### 4.3.9. *Wither and Bloom*

This story depicts a melodrama genre showing most of the soliloquy scenes of the sad Melor. The creativity speaks loud in the excellent portrayal of the protagonist's loneliness. Her deepest desires for love and attention are vividly felt by the audience. The resentment towards her sister was a fitting consequence of the lack of parenting of her mother and the death of her late father. The writer shows duality of Melor as she was portrayed as a hateful sister but also a loving sister. This creativity shall give the audience a chance to root either for Melor, the sister, or for Murni, the sickly sister. The last line beautifully ends and encapsulates the totality of this melodrama story, "*Murni has withered and bloomed as the most beautiful flower.*"

#### 4.3.10. *Seesaw*

This fictional drama story centers on the protagonist, a woman named Aminah. With the death of his carpenter father, her family was left without a breadwinner. She stepped on the shoes of his father and tried to run the carpenter shop. Men in town questioned her capabilities as a girl to run his father's shop. She could not accept the fate of the mistreated women in the village of Kampung Tipu Tipu and as she cries in the seesaw handmade by his father, Mother Peri appears. The latter is seemingly a fairy godmother

who granted her desires and turned all men to realize their faults. In the end, the maltreatment of women was corrected, Aminah was celebrated and the village lived peacefully again.

This story starts off as a simple fictional fairy tale story, however, it creatively depicts an important message such as recognizing sexism and patriarchy in the society. It is creatively adding a fictional mysterious lady, the fairy godmother of Aminah, Mother Peri, in order to tragically yet comedically break the glass ceiling for maltreated women in the area. It is worthy to note as well that as the title implies, the seesaw that was made by the protagonist's late father is an important element of creativity in the story.

#### **4.4. Analysis on the use of digital puppetry to promote ESL student's speaking and writing performance**

An essential aim of this study is to determine how students learn English as a second language in their speaking and writing performance through the activity of creating and presenting digital puppetry. This goal is well achieved as it can be gleaned from the foregoing analysis of the stories that the ESL students portrayed an excellent use of English language across writing and speaking skills.

In particular, in *Bakawali*, the use of English language is advanced. The grammar and syntax were good and the storyline was delivered in an interesting manner. The cultural aspects of the story were best expressed with the integration of Malaysian language. The humming of the chilling Nenek Si Bongkok Tiga and the conversations expressed in Malaysian felt deeply personal and even more scary.

In the story *Within Us*, the written English is intermediate as the advanced expressions and terms were incorporated such as "he has met the creator" to express the death of a person. However, in the same way, the proper syntax and arrangement of words must be observed in order to convey the meaning clearly.

In *Goodbye, To the Girl Who Sought Freedom*, the descriptive terms and phrases beautifully depict the horrible and bloody opening scene which shows the English proficiency in the use of adjectives. Good grammar and syntax were observed. Overall, the superb use of English language enabled the good storytelling in the script.

As *I am Malaysian*, the use of English language is likewise advanced as the rules on grammar are well observed. It is noted that the English skills enabled the good flow of storytelling. The descriptions of the important elements of the story, for instance, the madness of bullying and insults, the competition scene, and the discussion on Minong's ethical background showed the good utilization of the English language.

In *Layar*, the script was well written though the English language. Advanced terms and literary phrases are incorporated such as the lines "they pride themselves in being a part of this harmonious multicultural nation, yet they bare our land naked with their greed" to portray the unwelcoming world and the oppression of indigenous people. Another good line is "my studying was finally quenched, although the brim is yet to be reached because I realized my voice has no sound among these people" to depict the satisfaction of the hunger for education yet the irony of not being able to speak up and be recognized. These show how satisfactory is the use of the English language in writing the

story. However, it is also recognized that there should be caution in the writing of the terms and phrases so as to ensure that the intent of the message is properly conveyed.

In *Melur*, the usage of English language story is intermediate and its proper use enabled the conveyance of the intent and moral of the story. The proper usage of punctuation marks, however, must be well observed. Malay was also incorporated to give an impact on the background of Melur. Overall, it was well written.

In the story, *The Unwanted Surprise*, the plot was written well which proves that the use of English language is superb. Although the fictional nature of the story may seem shocking or unexpected to the audience, the story and the many lessons of the story were presented well through the English language.

In *The Legend of Keris Kesuma*, there is a superb use of languages in this story. The expressions in Malay were impressive and made the story personal to the audience. The writers also took note of the fact that Bahasa Melayu or the Malay is the Lingua Franca when the story was set which also portrays good use of Malay. Grammar and use of words must however, be utilized with caution.

In *Wither and Bloom*, the writers showed excellent usage of the English language. The choice of words bitterly-sweetly portrays Murni's sadness and resentment. There are notable English phrases that capture the emotion of Melor, and the intent of the writers such as "void of love and care", and "going back to an empty house is the norm for me". Overall, the story is wonderfully and creatively written with exceptional use of English language. Finally, in *The Seesaw*, the lines were written with the use of excellent English. The grammatical rules were properly observed as well. The sadness of Aminah is portrayed along with the comedic lines of Mother Peri through superb English.

#### **4.5. Reflections: What the pre-service teachers gain from the Digital Puppetry**

Ninety-one (91) pre-service teachers submitted their reflections on their activity portraying digital puppetry. They have emphasized on the process, the gaps or challenges they faced and the benefits and learning they gained from the activity.

##### *4.5.1. The process*

As for the process, all of them started with brainstorming. One mentioned that "[Their] brainstorming session was done through Microsoft Teams". Most of the pre-service teachers drafted several stories with different genres before they were able to come up with their final output. One of the participants mentioned, "We had to change the story since it was very boring and plain for the audience to watch. We needed something fun, new and unusual at the same time." The creative process of each group involves conversing with their group mates to delineate the storyline, the moral of the story as well as the characters and their personalities. One stated that "[They set] a meeting in order to discuss a possible idea for our puppetry show. There are many brilliant ideas that we gain during the meeting that being conducted. But it must suitable to the criteria that being list down by Dr Azlina". As the students course through the writing process, they took into consideration the important parts of the story, namely: introduction, conflict, climax and resolution. Although some stories have longer plotlines or fewer parts, the foregoing mentioned parts are easily identifiable with the submitted stories. For enhancing their creativity, some students surfed the Internet through search engines,

and other social media platforms to have an idea of high-quality photos as inspiration. Some groups used hand drawn characters, the props and some decorations glued in cardboard to create realism in their puppetry performance. The creation of such masterpieces is indeed a challenge. Distributing tasks among the group mates were also one of the strategies the students utilized in order to attain a smooth flow of their project making. One reflected that *“since we were scattered everywhere [or are only meeting online], we had divided ourselves into three teams.”* The pre-service teachers also went through the omitting, recreating, adding and other edits to perfect their craft which involves rectifying their errors, proofreading scripts and technically editing their recordings.

#### *4.5.2. The gaps or challenges and benefits or learnings gained*

An important learning that the students mostly shared is the increased digital literacy they gained through creating the digital puppetry. Such computer literacy is an important aspect of the student’s learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some mentioned that the creation of the digital puppetry through software was their source of stress as some face connectivity issues and some are due to the mere fact that they are physically away from each other. One said *“we initially found the assigned task was stressful considering we were all at home and creating such a massive product for the first time was quite arduous.”* However, such hardship only started on the onset and the students quickly got comfortable and learned it. Most students used Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Flash and other audio-video editing applications and devices for which the students learned the basics of these softwares. Others sought the aid of YouTube in order to get the hang of it. One said that *“we had a little bit of knowledge from doing our past project during the last semester, but it was a different case when producing an animation that moves around. We were grateful that there are many tutorial videos on Youtube for us to refer to”.* Another computer literacy learning the students gained is the use of green screens to enable a superb and film-like quality of the performances of the digital puppetry. A participant also mentioned *“we then required a green screen to ensure the recording went smoothly as well as during the editing session”* Another said *“we draw the characters digitally using the iPad. [Then,] we use a full shot (FS) which is a whole-body shot.”* The technical elements of the puppetry as well as how to effectively convey the message of their stories were also learned by the students. One expressed accurately the puppet used mentioning *“The type of puppet that we created is flat figures [which]... are two-dimensional puppets.”* Moreover, since creating a masterpiece of a digital puppetry was not an easy feat, time management was also one of the important gains for the students in this activity. Some created timelines that will fit their individual schedules. As the creativity in this activity is of highest level, the students spent a lot of time practicing the voice and their performances which have also been hard on some students. The editing process by the groups was also rigorous which was a challenge to all of them. Also, on an individual and team level, they were able to cultivate their rapport with their group mates as the activity requires high-level collaboration among the groups. To maintain good communication between their groups, the students utilized different messaging apps as well as online applications like the Google Docs to enhance their collaboration despite their physical distances from each member.

#### *4.5.3. esigning lesson plans*

The pre-service teachers prepared four (4) lesson plans based on digital puppetry. In doing so, most of them focused on the different English language skills, namely: (a)

listening skills, (b) speaking skills, (c) reading skills and (d) writing skills. Other skills were also focused on by the pre-service teachers in their lesson plans such as enriching vocabulary, enhancing pronunciation, stress, and intonation, acting skills, brainstorming, creativity and imagination. The pre-service teachers creatively incorporated several activities in their lesson plans such as Bingo game, Pecha Kucha game, mind mapping, yes or no, Q & A. Some of the pre-service teachers however, employed traditional assessments such as varying worksheets, essay writing, short paragraph writing, fill in the blanks and others. The pre-service teachers ended their lesson plans with a moment to discuss and process the activities with the learners. Overall, the students ensured that the English lessons shall be effectively conveyed with the methods they utilized in an interesting, engaging and fun manner.

#### 4.5.4. Concluding reflection

On the bird's eye view of the pre-service teachers experience, most pre-service teachers were excited to craft the challenging digital puppetry. The activity also increased their appreciation towards digital puppetry and art in general. The pre-service teachers mostly noted that crafting superb lesson plans are essential to teach their students the most basic and the most complex learning. The pre-service teachers likewise unanimously agree that teaching English language is effective through the use of creative means such as digital puppetry. It was an innovative approach that is geared towards adapting to the technology driven future of education. Further, most of them mentioned in their reflections that they actually enjoyed the process of it, learned through the benefits, endured through the hardships of it, and reaped the fruits of their labor as they submit their creative outputs. An encapsulating ending reflection of one pre-service teacher stated that *"I believe this course will bring a meaningful and wonderful experience to [us] as a future educator."*

Although the pre-service teachers submitted their general reflections in paragraph and essay forms, the researcher delineated from their responses as to whether they believe to have increased their writing performance or whether they have enhanced their speaking skills. The activity of digital puppetry, even finger puppetry (Kroger & Nupponen, 2019), involved the use of role-playing which indeed improves communication skills (Jackson & Anthony, 2011). Therefore, all these previous studies supports the findings that the digital puppetry activity enhances the English skills of the ESL students.

## 5. Discussion

Overall, the seventeen (17) digital puppetry stories submitted showed that creativity was harnessed from the pre-service teacher by their creation of their different storyboards and actual performance. Creative teaching was employed in this study by encouraging students' creativity and guiding them in identifying and establishing a life framework (Moumoutzis et al., 2021) for instance, with the use of digital puppetry. Through the digital puppetry activity, puppets were utilized as a medium for presenting new language through dialogue (Wohlwend et al., 2018). Puppetry also enhanced students' ability, intellectual functioning, and emotion regulation developing their creativity, confidence, and topic knowledge and in doing so, a hands-on comprehension of the lessons were gained by the pre-service teachers (Saracho, 2020). Therefore, this lesson study agrees with the foregoing pronouncements of different studies as it is portrayed in the digital puppetry activity of the pre-service teacher, their outputs and

further reflections. Thus, these findings prove that the digital puppetry activity, as a teaching method, improves the English skills of the pre-service teachers.

## **6. Conclusion**

In totality, it is important to note that the research objectives of this study were well achieved and the questions well addressed. It is concluded that creativity can be harnessed through utilizing digital puppetry activity as a teaching method. Moreover, learning English as a second language is shown to be effective through digital puppetry projects. In particular, the majority of the pre-service teachers have perceived to have improved their writing performance as well as speaking skills through the activity. Studies have also supported this finding for which this study supports and finds its basis. The findings likewise find support in the theories that underpins this study, namely: Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory, Learner's Theory, Social Constructivism and Maslow's Hierarchy of Need. Indeed, these theories were well depicted in the crafting and execution of the digital puppetry activity as well as the results and discussion and reflection of the pre-service teachers. It is further recommended that different creative teaching activities be employed in harnessing creativity of the pre-service teachers and in enhancing their English writing, speaking and listening skills. This is because this lesson study shows the effective use of creative means in teaching.

As a final note, English is essential in the Malaysian educational institution as language is an important means to interaction. Pre-service teachers can gain early professional experience through realistic learning in teaching practice courses. The results of this study demonstrate that lesson study encourages the development of teaching competencies in pre-service teachers through repeated cycles of creating, planning, and reflecting. Moreover, "Drama in Action" course helps pre-service teachers with mandatory language skills such as writing and speaking. By the same token, the course assists them to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century lesson plans by using digital puppetry as a teaching tool. Additionally, the pre-service teachers will be better equipped to choose and use a teaching strategy that will encourage them to study literature in their English Language classroom. Therefore, I believe that this study may encourage teachers to develop more creative teaching aids which can cater for all levels of students in the future. With this, the literature scarcity in the use of digital puppetry in enhancing English skills is filled by this lesson study.

## **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

As a lecturer of the Drama In Action Course, the Faculty of Education granted permission to me to conduct the study by involving pre-service teachers from UKM to participate and contribute throughout the study.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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