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READING AS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: LITERARY WALKS IN SINGAPORE

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Abstract

This study explores how literary walks transform reading into experiential learning in Singapore. Through the "Between Pages and Pavements" initiative at Bendemeer Secondary School, students participated in three curated walks at the Civic District, Kampung Lorong Buangkok, and Changi Airport. Each walk paired passages from Singaporean literature with significant spaces, allowing students to encounter texts where history, heritage, and global connections come alive. Data were collected through observations, student narratives, and feedback. Thematic analysis revealed that students engaged with texts more deeply when situated in lived spaces. The Civic District strengthened connections to nationhood, Kampung Buangkok sparked reflections on tradition and belonging, and Changi Airport opened conversations on globalisation. Early findings suggest that literary walks empower students to see literature as a force that shapes how we understand ourselves and our communities.

Keywords

Experiential learning, place-based pedagogy, Singapore literature, literary walks

1. Background of Study

Literature lessons in Singapore often remain within classroom walls and centre on close reading. While effective for analysis, this can limit how students see literature as part of lived experience (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). Place-based pedagogy offers a way forward. It grounds texts in meaningful spaces and enables students to learn through direct encounters (Gruenewald, 2003). Experiential learning theory shows that students gain deeper understanding when they connect ideas to real environments (Kolb, 2015).

In Singapore, there is a growing call to make local literature more engaging and relevant for young readers (Lim, 2018). The "Between Pages and Pavements" initiative responds to this call. Students embark on literary walks that link passages of fiction and non-fiction to three diverse spaces: the Civic District, Kampung Lorong Buangkok and Changi Airport. These walks situate texts in history, tradition and global mobility. They empower students to see that literature is not confined to books. It is alive in the places they inhabit.

2. Statement of Problem

Research on literature teaching in Singapore has often focused on skills for examination. These approaches are valuable, yet they may reduce reading to technical mastery. Literature

education can and should aim higher. It can foster empathy, shape identity, and strengthen civic understanding, contributing to the ongoing decolonisation of English curricula in the region. (Nussbaum, 2010; Lim, 2018). This work affirms that literature is not only read but lived and that students can be inspired to see themselves as part of its unfolding story.

3. Research Questions

- (i) How do literary walks influence students' engagement with Singaporean literature?
- (ii) In what ways do students connect texts to cultural, historical and global spaces during the Civic District, Kampung Lorong Buangkok and Changi Airport walks?
- (iii) How do student narratives, observations and feedback reveal the potential of experiential learning in literature classrooms?

4. Method

The project is grounded in classroom-based action research. A cohort of lower secondary students at Bendemeer Secondary School took part in three literary walks. Each walk was carefully designed to connect texts with space. The Civic District was paired with texts on nationhood and identity. Kampung Lorong Buangkok was linked to stories of heritage and community. Changi Airport brought to life themes of mobility and globalisation.

Data collection combined three sources. Teacher observations recorded student behaviour and participation during the walks. Student narratives captured their reflections through journals and oral sharing. Post-walk feedback surveys provided further insights into how students processed the experience.

The data were analysed using thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Patterns of engagement, emotional response and interdisciplinary connection were identified. The process allowed for triangulation across sites. Each walk revealed distinct but complementary insights into how literature can be experienced in space.

5. Findings and Discussion

The three walks produced rich findings. In the Civic District, students expressed pride and curiosity when they read texts beside monuments that symbolised Singapore's history. At Kampung Lorong Buangkok, they reflected on the tension between modern progress and traditional ways of life. They responded with empathy for the kampung community and expressed surprise that such spaces still exist in Singapore. At Changi Airport, their reflections turned to questions of identity in a globalised world. They linked texts about travel and movement to their own experiences of journeys and departures.

Across all sites, engagement was strong. Students listened intently, shared freely and wrote with energy. Many said that literature "felt alive" when encountered in space. This confirms that experiential learning enriches understanding (Kolb, 2015; Gruenewald, 2003). It also

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challenges the view that Singaporean texts are less engaging than global classics. When rooted in lived environments, these texts inspired both excitement and deep thought. The findings show that literature education can move beyond examinations to foster empathy, critical thinking and civic-mindedness.

6. Limitations

The study is based on a single school and a small cohort of students. Data are drawn from early cycles of action research. This limits the ability to generalise findings. Yet these limitations open space for future studies. Multi-school collaborations, diverse cohorts and longitudinal research will deepen understanding. Despite its scope, the study offers a powerful starting point. It demonstrates that literary walks can be designed, implemented and studied in ways that transform student engagement.

7. Conclusion

The "Between Pages and Pavements" initiative proves that reading can become lived experience. Through literary walks at the Civic District, Kampung Lorong Buangkok and Changi Airport, students encountered texts that spoke to nationhood, tradition and globalisation. These experiences deepened engagement and built empathy, while also strengthening connections across disciplines.

The study shows that literary walks can empower teachers to reimagine the teaching of literature. They offer a model that is adaptable, authentic and inspiring. While small in scale, this project paves the way for further research and wider application. It affirms that literature is not confined to the classroom. It is alive in the spaces where students walk, reflect and grow.

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"ARE YOU WAITING LONG ENOUGH? RETHINKING 'WAIT TIME' IN EFL CLASSROOM QUESTIONING"

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Abstract

In EFL classrooms, questioning strategies are key to fostering engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking. One crucial element is *wait time*—the pause after a teacher asks a question before expecting an answer—allowing students to process and respond thoughtfully. Despite its recognized value, little empirical research explores its use in Indonesian contexts. This study examined wait time among high school EFL teachers in Kota Padang, focusing on its duration and teacher awareness. Twenty teachers from ten schools participated. Data were gathered through classroom video recordings, analyzed via conversation analysis, and stimulated recall interviews. Results showed most teachers allowed less than the recommended three to five seconds, often without realizing it. While inconclusive, the findings underscore the need for greater teacher awareness and reflection on wait time to improve classroom interaction and student learning in EFL settings.

Keywords

Wait time, teacher awareness, conversation analysis, quality education, EFL classrooms

1. Background of Study

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, questioning techniques are critical for fostering student engagement and promoting cognitive skills such as comprehension and critical thinking (Kater, 2023). One of the key strategies is "wait time," which refers to the brief pause a teacher allows after posing a question before expecting a response from students (Almeida et. al., 2008; Chin & Osborne, 2008; Grasser & Olde, 2003). This pause has been shown to provide learners with the opportunity to process the question and formulate more thoughtful answers, thereby enhancing classroom interaction (Saswati, 2022). However, despite its established pedagogical benefits, the practice of wait time remains underexplored, particularly in real-world classroom contexts (Zainil et al., 2022). Recent research suggests that teachers often provide insufficient wait time, which could hinder effective communication and learning. This study seeks to investigate the use of wait time by EFL teachers in Kota Padang, Indonesia, examining both the duration of wait times and teachers' awareness of this strategy. Given the limited attention to this practice in Indonesian classrooms, the findings are crucial for improving teaching methods and enhancing student participation and learning outcomes.

2. Statement of Problem

While the pedagogical benefits of wait time in classroom questioning have been welldocumented in various educational contexts, it remains a significant gap in empirical research focusing on its application in real EFL classrooms, particularly in Indonesia. Existing studies emphasize that adequate wait time enhances student responses, participation, and critical thinking (Rowe, 1972; Tobin, 1987), but many teachers provide shorter wait times than recommended, potentially hindering the effectiveness of questioning strategies (Dillon, 1988). Previous research has mostly been conducted in Western or Asian contexts, with limited attention given to EFL settings in Indonesia, where classroom dynamics and teacher practices may differ significantly. This study addresses this gap by investigating the actual wait time provided by Indonesian high school EFL teachers, exploring their awareness of this practice, and analyzing how it impacts classroom interaction. The literature has consistently called for greater teacher reflection and awareness regarding questioning strategies (Wu, 2016; Nunan, 2019; Zainil & Arsyad, 2021), yet little empirical work has focused on measuring and improving wait time in Indonesian EFL classrooms. This study aims to fill this gap by providing data on the actual use of wait time in local classrooms and offering insights for improving EFL teaching practices.

3. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to advancing English Language Education by providing empirical data on the use of wait time in Indonesian EFL classrooms, a practice that has significant implications for student engagement and learning outcomes. By examining the actual implementation of wait time and teachers' awareness of its importance, the findings offer valuable insights into how questioning strategies can be optimized for better classroom interaction (Walsh & Li, 2022). The results can guide EFL teachers in reflecting on and adjusting their questioning techniques, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and participatory learning environment (Alsaadi & Atar, 2019). Moreover, the study highlights the need for professional development programs that emphasize the importance of wait time, supporting policy decisions aimed at improving teacher training and instructional practices in EFL education. In the broader context, the study's findings may inspire further research on pedagogical strategies that enhance student learning and engagement in foreign language classrooms worldwide.

4. Research Questions

- 1. How much wait time do high school EFL teachers in Kota Padang typically provide after asking a question during classroom interactions?
- 2. Are high school EFL teachers in Kota Padang aware of the amount of wait time they provide in their questioning practices?
- 3. How do variations in wait time impact student responses and classroom interaction in high school EFL classrooms?

4. To what extent does teacher awareness of wait time correlate with the quality of classroom interactions and student engagement?

5. Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze data on wait time in high school EFL classrooms in Kota Padang. Data collection involved two main methods:

- a. Classroom Video Recordings: Twenty EFL teachers from ten high schools were observed during their classroom interactions. Video recordings captured the questioning strategies employed, including the amount of wait time provided after each question. The recordings were analyzed using conversation analysis to identify the duration of wait time and patterns in classroom interaction.
- **b.** Stimulated Recall Interviews: After classroom observations, interviews were conducted with the teachers to explore their perceptions and awareness of wait time. Teachers watched excerpts from the videos of their classes and reflected on their questioning practices.

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative aspect focused on measuring the actual wait times in the classroom using a time-coded analysis of video recordings. Qualitative analysis involved coding interview responses to identify recurring themes related to teacher awareness, perceptions, and factors influencing wait time. The combination of these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of wait time practices and their impact on classroom dynamics.

6. Findings and Discussion

Initial findings from the study suggest that the majority of EFL teachers in Kota Padang provide wait times shorter than the recommended three to five seconds, with many pausing for less than two seconds after asking a question. This observation aligns with prior research (Dillon, 1988; Nunan, 2019) that indicates teachers often neglect to implement optimal wait time due to time constraints or a lack of awareness. Interestingly, during the stimulated recall interviews, most teachers expressed surprise at how brief their pauses were, indicating a gap in awareness about the impact of wait time on student responses and engagement.

Early observations challenge the assumption that teachers, even in EFL contexts, are consistently mindful of wait time as a tool for enhancing critical thinking and student interaction. While teachers acknowledged the importance of the wait time conceptually, they did not consistently apply it in practice. This finding challenges the idea that teachers in Indonesia are fully aware of the value of this strategy, as suggested in some literature (Wu, 2016; Zainil & Arsyad, 2021). Furthermore, the limited wait time observed may hinder students' cognitive processing and participation, confirming the need for more targeted teacher training in questioning strategies and reflective teaching practices.

7. Limitations

This study is limited by its focus on a small sample of 20 EFL teachers from ten high schools in Kota Padang, which may not fully represent the broader population of EFL teachers in Indonesia. Additionally, the study only examines the immediate classroom interactions and does not consider the long-term impacts of wait time on student learning outcomes. These factors may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or educational contexts.

8. Conclusion

The initial findings of this study highlight that many EFL teachers in Kota Padang provide wait times shorter than the recommended duration, which can impact student engagement and learning. Teachers' lack of awareness about the brevity of their pauses suggests the need for professional development programs focused on questioning strategies and reflective practices. This study contributes to English Language Education by underscoring the importance of wait time in enhancing classroom interaction and critical thinking.

Future research should expand the sample size to include a broader range of EFL teachers and explore the long-term effects of wait time on student outcomes. Additionally, examining the cultural and contextual factors that influence teachers' use of wait time could offer valuable insights for improving pedagogical practices across diverse educational settings.

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ENHANCING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT THROUGH COLLABORATIVE LESSON STUDY AMONG EARLY-CAREER AND NON-OPTIONIST ENGLISH TEACHERS IN KLANG

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Abstract

Early-career and non-optionist teachers often face challenges in mastering subject knowledge and teaching strategies, which can impact student learning and engagement. This study explores how collaborative lesson study can help address these issues. Lesson study involves teachers planning, teaching, observing, and reflecting on lessons together, allowing them to share ideas and learn from one another. The research involved 8 early-career and 5 non-optionist English teachers from secondary schools in Klang. Data were gathered through questionnaires, lesson observations and focus group discussions. Two workshops organized by PPD Klang were held at SMK Dato Hamzah and SMK Telok Gadong. Findings showed that participants believed lesson study improved their subject understanding, enhanced their teaching methods, and encouraged student-centred learning. Participants reported increased confidence and an improved ability to meet diverse student needs, leading to greater student engagement. Overall, lesson study proved to be a valuable tool for professional development.

Keywords

Collaborative lesson study, early-career teachers, non-optionist teachers

1. Background of Study

In recent years, Collaborative Lesson Study (CLS) has continued to gain recognition as a high-impact model for teacher learning that centres reflective practice, peer learning, and iterative instructional improvement. A 2015–2020 systematic review notes that many published Lesson Study (LS) projects still lack transparency and theoretical coherence in reporting—an important caution for rigorous study design and interpretation (Kager, 2024). At the same time, emerging empirical studies report competence gains for in-service teachers engaging in LS cycles, including measurable improvements in observed teaching practices, suggesting that CLS can build classroom expertise and support sustainable professional growth (De La Cruz, 2025).

For English language teachers working with second-language learners, research continues to favour interactive, student-centred strategies such as task-based learning, group work, and formative feedback (Richards & Farrell, 2005), while recent studies link teacher support to student engagement through self-efficacy and resilience (Shao et al., 2025; Bizimana, 2025).

Early-career and non-optionist English teachers often lack pedagogical content knowledge and confidence, with research highlighting gaps in language-specific expertise and assessment literacy (Cogent Education, 2025). In Malaysia, these challenges align with the CEFR Roadmap (2015–2025), which demands communicative, standards-aligned instruction.

Despite this promise, specific evidence on CLS with early-career and non-optionist secondary English teachers—and on downstream effects on student engagement—remains sparse and methodologically uneven. Addressing this gap is timely and policy-relevant in CEFR-adopting systems like Malaysia. Accordingly, this study investigates how participation in CLS enhances instructional strategies and student engagement among early-career and non-optionist English teachers in secondary schools.

2. Statement of Problem

In Malaysian secondary schools, the teaching of English is increasingly being carried out by early-career and non-optionist teachers—educators who are either new to the profession or not specifically trained in English language teaching. While these teachers are often enthusiastic and committed, many lack the pedagogical knowledge, language proficiency, and classroom management skills required to effectively engage students in ESL lessons (Abdullah et al., 2020; Ismail, 2019). This has contributed to inconsistencies in instructional quality and low levels of student engagement, particularly in linguistically diverse and highneed districts such as Klang.

Collaborative Lesson Study (CLS) has emerged as a promising, practice-based professional development model that promotes reflective teaching, peer support, and continuous improvement. However, the potential of CLS to improve instructional strategies and enhance student engagement among early-career and non-optionist English teachers in the Klang district remains underexplored.

Therefore, the problem this study addresses is the lack of structured, school-based professional learning opportunities—such as CLS—that specifically support early-career and non-optionist English teachers in improving their instructional strategies and student engagement practices. Without targeted interventions, these teachers may continue to struggle, which can negatively impact student learning outcomes and teacher retention in the long term.

The application among early-career and non-optionist English teachers in Malaysia has not been extensively explored, and little is known about how it can be adapted to address their specific teaching challenges or how it might influence student engagement in ESL classrooms. Without targeted, school-based professional learning models like CLS, these teachers may continue to struggle in implementing effective instructional strategies, potentially leading to ongoing gaps in student learning outcomes and contributing to higher teacher attrition rates over time.

3. Significance of Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses an urgent need in Malaysian secondary schools, particularly in Klang, where a growing number of early-career and non-optionist teachers are responsible for English language instruction. By focusing on this specific teacher group, the study offers targeted insights into professional development strategies that can help bridge gaps in pedagogical content knowledge, classroom management, and language proficiency.

Second, by implementing Collaborative Lesson Study (CLS), the research provides practical evidence on how a structured, school-based, and peer-driven approach can enhance instructional strategies and improve student engagement in ESL classrooms. Findings from this study can guide school leaders, policymakers, and teacher trainers in designing sustainable professional learning models that are contextually relevant and responsive to the needs of teachers with limited formal training in English language pedagogy.

Third, the study contributes to the academic literature by filling a gap in research on CLS applications for early-career and non-optionist English teachers in Malaysia. By documenting both teacher and student outcomes, it offers valuable empirical data that can inform future studies, influence national English education reforms, and ultimately improve learning experiences for students in linguistically diverse and high-need districts.

4. Research Questions

- 1. What specific improvements in lesson planning and delivery practices do 13 secondary school early-career and non-optionist English teachers in the Klang district demonstrate after participating in the Collaborative Lesson Study?
- 2. How does participation in the Collaborative Lesson Study improve English Language Teaching (ELT) interventions and enhance students' achievement in English lessons among secondary school teachers in the Klang district?

5. Method

A structured questionnaire comprising 11 questions based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle Model was administered to all 13 participating secondary school English teachers in the Klang district, both before and after the Lesson Study Workshop. The pre-intervention questionnaire gathered baseline data on teachers' pedagogical knowledge, instructional practices, and perceptions of collaborative professional development. The post-intervention questionnaire, conducted upon completion of the workshop, evaluated changes in these areas and assessed the perceived effectiveness of the Lesson Study approach on teaching practices.

Additionally, the researcher visited each of the 13 schools to observe the implementation of collaboratively planned research lessons. Observation notes focused on lesson

objectives, sequencing, use of authentic materials, student-centred strategies, questioning techniques, and teacher adaptability during lessons.

A series of professional development activities focusing on focused group discussions was carried out to implement the Collaborative Lesson Study (CLS) with the 13 participating teachers. The first workshop was held at SMK Dato' Hamzah, Klang, where teachers were introduced to the concept of Lesson Study, engaged in micro-teaching activities, and completed a pre-questionnaire to capture their initial perceptions and practices. The second workshop, conducted at SMK Telok Gadong, Klang, focused on Lesson Study Cycle 2 and included a sharing session, further micro-teaching practice, and the administration of a post-questionnaire to measure changes after the intervention. Finally, the third post-workshop meeting took place at the Klang District Education Office (PPD Klang), where teachers reflected on Lesson Study Cycle 3, shared their classroom experiences, discussed challenges, and identified effective strategies for improving English Language Teaching (ELT).

For analysis, questionnaire responses were compared using a before-and-after design to identify shifts in practice and perception. Quantitative responses were summarised using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were coded thematically to capture patterns in professional growth. Observation data were triangulated with questionnaire findings to validate results and provide a comprehensive picture of the intervention's impact on lesson planning, delivery, and teacher adaptability.

6. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires indicated a clear improvement in participants' understanding of the Collaborative Lesson Study (CLS). In the pre-questionnaire, many teachers reported limited knowledge of CLS, with some expressing uncertainty about its purpose and procedures. However, the post-questionnaire responses revealed that teachers developed a stronger grasp of CLS principles, particularly in areas such as collaborative lesson planning, reflective practice, and peer feedback. This increase in understanding suggests that the workshops and lesson study cycles provided meaningful exposure and practical experience, enabling teachers to internalize the benefits of CLS for improving English Language Teaching (ELT). The findings align with previous studies that highlight the effectiveness of lesson study in enhancing teachers' professional knowledge and pedagogical practices. Moreover, the growth in teachers' awareness reflects the potential of CLS to foster a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement in schools.

Preliminary analysis based on the observation indicates notable improvements in both lesson planning and delivery among the 13 secondary school English teachers following their participation in the Collaborative Lesson Study (CLS). Post-intervention lesson plans demonstrated clearer objectives, more logical sequencing, and greater integration of

authentic materials. Observations revealed a shift toward student-centred strategies, more purposeful questioning, and increased adaptability in responding to classroom dynamics. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) provided further insights into the impact of the Collaborative Lesson Study (CLS) on students' learning outcomes. Teachers reported that their students showed notable improvement in English Language achievement, with many progressing from TP1 or TP2 levels to TP3 and TP4 after the intervention. They attributed this progress to more engaging lesson delivery, better alignment of teaching strategies with students' needs, and the continuous cycle of reflection and adjustment encouraged by CLS. Teachers also highlighted that collaborative planning and peer feedback during the lesson study cycles helped them refine their approaches, leading to more effective classroom practices. These findings suggest that CLS not only enhanced teachers' professional growth but also translated into measurable gains in students' academic performance, reinforcing the value of CLS as a sustainable model for improving English Language Teaching (ELT).

These early findings confirm the widely held assumption that structured collaborative professional development can enhance teachers' instructional practices. The improvement in adaptability particularly supports existing research suggesting that peer-supported reflection fosters greater responsiveness to students' needs in real time.

Overall, the initial results reinforce the value of CLS in promoting professional growth and improving classroom practices, while highlighting the need for continuous engagement to ensure long-term impact across all participating teachers. Further data analysis will determine the extent and sustainability of these changes.

7. Limitations

This study is limited to a small group of early-career and non-optionist English teachers in Klang, which restricts the generalisability of its findings to other contexts. Variations in participants' prior training and teaching experience may influence their responses to the Collaborative Lesson Study (CLS) approach. Time constraints due to workload and school schedules may have affected the depth of collaboration. Measurements of student engagement rely on observable behaviours and self-reports, which may not fully capture all dimensions of engagement. Additionally, the short study duration and possible Hawthorne effect during observations may limit the assessment of long-term and authentic instructional improvements.

8. Conclusion

This study has explored the use of Collaborative Lesson Study (CLS) as a meaningful professional development approach for early-career and non-optionist English teachers in Klang. These teachers, often lacking formal training or experience in ESL instruction, face various challenges in delivering engaging and effective lessons. CLS provides a structured platform for teachers to plan lessons together, observe real classroom practices, and reflect on their teaching in a collaborative setting. This not only strengthens their

instructional methods but also helps them become more aware of their students' learning needs and responses.

The results of this research indicate that CLS promotes more effective, student-centred teaching strategies while also enhancing teamwork among teachers. The process encourages reflective thinking, mutual support, and continuous learning, all of which contribute to improving teaching quality. As a result, students show greater participation, interest, and involvement during English lessons.

In summary, CLS has proven to be a valuable model in supporting novice and non-specialist English teachers. It fosters professional growth and leads to better student engagement in ESL classrooms. Expanding the use of CLS in schools, especially in districts like Klang, could help raise overall teaching standards and support teachers in creating more dynamic and inclusive learning environments.

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ACTIVITY-BASED AND RESOURCE-BASED FACTORS: A LONGITUDINAL CASE STUDY OF A WORKING ADULT LEARNER

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Abstract

This single-participant case study examines the L2 learning trajectory of a working adult with beginning-level proficiency engaged in self-directed learning over a one-year period. Specifically, it investigates the resources and activities the participant used and their relationship to the linguistic skills that developed. One year's worth of data, including five-minute journals, narrative writing, interviews, and session notes, was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. To explore the relationship between learning approaches and resulting language outcomes, quantitative data will be combined with insights from qualitative data. This combined analysis seeks to capture the complex nature of self-directed learning in adult learners, which differs from classroom learning involving formal evaluation, a set curriculum, and the presence of educators. Such complexity makes it difficult to identify the causal effect of a single factor on specific linguistic development.

Keywords

Self-directed learning, adult learners, resources, activities

1. Background of Study

As adult learners juggle multiple social roles, various factors influence their L2 development, particularly when they learn on their own outside classroom settings. Yet, their self-directed learning (i.e., a process in which learners assume responsibility for identifying their needs and goals, selecting resources and strategies, and evaluating their progress; Knowles, 1975) experiences have received relatively little attention. Self-directed learners in informal learning settings choose what to learn, how to practice, and when and where to learn. Consequently, learning outcomes vary and are influenced by complex factors.

To investigate this complex phenomenon of adult self-directed learning, the current study employed multilayered data sources informed by Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST), which provides an appropriate framework for examining longitudinal developmental processes involving interconnected factors. A CDST-informed research design allows the current study to explore how L2 usage emerges from the interplay among resources, activities, and social contexts.

2. Statement of problem

While most L2 research is classroom- or lab-based, the realities of learners in self-learning environments have not been widely explored. In Japan, L2 learning after formal education is largely left to individuals' efforts, even though English proficiency is often linked to job performance and career transitions (Institute for International Business Communication [IIBC], 2019).

Previous studies have examined informal learning among adult L2 learners in both ESL and EFL contexts through large-scale surveys (Grover et al., 2014; IIBC, 2019, 2023; JACET et al., 2015, 2024). Although these studies provide a broad understanding of how adult learners study, the particular learning resources and activities that support L2 development remain underexplored.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the learning approaches used by a working adult learner and their linguistic development while they juggle various social roles.

3. Significance of Study

This research primarily aims to understand the nature of self-directed learning for a working adult. It is distinctive in its focus on identifying the interconnectedness among L2 skills developed through self-directed learning, the learner's perceptions of L2 learning, and the resources and activities employed. Such an investigation is important, as many working adults in Japan are pressured to acquire L2 English skills for business purposes, yet their individual learning experiences often remain unexplored. A deeper understanding of adult learners' experiences outside the formal curriculum can inform the development of more effective learning opportunities and approaches for those struggling to develop L2 skills in informal, self-directed contexts.

4. Research Questions

- 1. How did the participant's writing (in terms of fluency, lexical complexity, and syntactic complexity) change over the 53 weeks through the daily writing task?
- 2. What learning resources did the participant use, and how did he evaluate their usefulness for his study?

5. Method

The participant in the study was a male car-parts designer in Japan with beginning-level L2 proficiency. In line with the CDST perspective, a multilayered time-series design was employed, and data were collected accordingly. These included daily entries in a five-minute journal, weekly session notes, monthly narrative writings, and monthly interviews. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted before and after the study. The pre-study interview questions covered the participant's learning history, L2 experiences, current social contexts, current L2 proficiency, and L2 learning goals. The post-study interviews explored the effectiveness of the learning resources and activities he used over the 53

weeks, as well as his subjective views on his L2 skill development. The 53 weeks' worth of linguistic data from the journal was analyzed quantitatively using three indices: fluency, lexical complexity, and syntactic complexity. These were further examined through changepoint analysis, which has already been completed, and the significant changepoints will be compared with qualitative data from interviews, session notes, and both daily and monthly writings, which will be analyzed using a suitable qualitative approach.

6. Findings and Discussion

The study showed that the three indices fluctuated greatly over 53 weeks, and significant change points were observed in only two indices: fluency and syntactic complexity. The participant engaged with a range of resources and activities throughout the year, selecting and adapting them to his perceived needs and preferences. According to the participant's self-assessment, not all resources and activities were useful for L2 learning.

Further investigation will be conducted through changepoint analysis integrated with insights from qualitative data. So far, the preliminary combined analysis has indicated one finding: contextual influences on fluency measures when measured by word count. We will continue to analyze the contributions of learning materials and activities to L2 development, with particular attention to the interconnected influence of learning resources to highlight the complexity of self-directed learning in informal settings.

7. Limitations

As the current study is a single-participant case study and merely one example of the many possible self-directed learning experiences of working adults, the results are not generalizable.

Another limitation concerns how linguistic development was measured. Without the presence of educators or formal evaluation, the participant's journal writing was by nature, less reliable as a source for statistical analysis, for example, due to inconsistent writing time. While such challenges in measurement are inherent in self-directed learning contexts, the choice of assessment method should be reconsidered in future research.

8. Conclusion

The current findings, drawn from the first phase of the study, indicate that L2 development occurred in the self-directed learning of an adult learner. This was evidenced by change points detected in the indices of fluency and syntactic complexity, as well as the participant's self-reported improvement. The analysis further suggested that these changes were influenced by contextual factors.

As the next step, we will combine quantitative results from changepoint analysis with insights derived from qualitative data to examine the impact of the utilized resources and activities on linguistic development. Findings from this line of research will contribute to

understanding how to better support working adults learning L2 English without educator guidance, particularly in EFL contexts such as Japan.

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THE LECTURERS' EXPERIENCES AND THEIR VIEWS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A CASE AT A UNIVERSITY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Inclusive education in Indonesia has been enforced since Law Number 8 of 2016 was issued. Even though inclusive education has a broader meaning, people in Indonesia tend to understand it as education for disabilities. This paper will report a study investigating the lecturers' experiences and views about inclusive education at state universities of Indonesia. The data were collected through interviews with fourteen lecturers of four faculties. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The results of the interviews were analyzed qualitatively. Three categories of emerging experiences include: 1) annoyed, 2) ignorant, and 3) emphatic. These three categories affected the lecturers' treatment toward the disabled students. Based on their experiences, the lecturers view that the disabled students (especially the autistic students) have to be handled separately. Then, to help the physically disabled students and the light autistic students, the lecturers thought that skill training was necessary.

Keywords

Inclusive education, disabled students, treatment

1. Background of Study

Inclusive education is a system that welcomes and supports all students to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements (UNICEF, 2017). As pointed out by de Beco (2022), this concept reflects a commitment to create a learning environment that embraces diversity and honors each individual's right to get a meaningful education (de Beco, 2022). Indonesia has taken concrete steps by adopting a policy of inclusive education stated in Law No. 8, 2016. Now it is imperative for schools to accommodate students with diverse backgrounds.

Inclusivity in higher education in Indonesia has also gained greater attention. In fact, the university's admission process is inclusive and does not discriminate against applicants' diverse backgrounds. Although the importance and benefits of inclusive education is admitted by most academics, the implementation varies. There is an indication that lecturers' views of inclusivity differ from each other; this may be due to the complexity of the concept of inclusive education which causes different meanings to different people (Ainscow, 2020; Antoninis et al., 2020). The lecturers' view will affect their attitudes and practices. Thus, unveiling the lecturers' view of inclusive education and their experiences is expected to give some contribution to universities to develop programs for effective policy implementation.

2. Statement of problem

There has been growing interest in research on inclusive education, which most focuses on policy implementation in schools (Sari et al., 2022) with topics revolving around approaches and challenges faced by teachers (Kristiana & Hendriani, 2018). Using bibliometric analysis, Irawan and Putri (2024) reported their research findings regarding inclusive education in Indonesia. Their research shows that the topics of the research were dominated by teachers' professional development, their attitude, and challenges in handling students in inclusive classes in schools. The results of their research certainly provided a valuable contribution to developing a more effective framework of inclusive education in Indonesia.

In spite of that, to date, research conducted in higher education is rare. Universities select new students based on a national entrance test, school achievement indicated by their rapport, and talent. This means that lecturers actually have been familiar with having students from diverse backgrounds, except students with special needs (henceforth SSN). Given the fact that the lecturers are not prepared to handle SSN in inclusive classes, it is assumed that they will have different attitudes and challenges. For this reason, research about this is necessary to set up a better framework for inclusive education in higher education.

3. Significance of Study

This research is expected to provide twofold benefits. Firstly, it will enrich the theory of inclusive education. As is widely recognized, inclusive education not only pertains to integrate students with special needs into regular classrooms but also creates instructional design that supports students with diverse learning styles, various backgrounds, and different levels of abilities. The result of this study should shed light on the challenges faced by lecturers in managing their instruction in inclusive classes, which contributes to the theories dealing with curriculum, approaches, and media of inclusive education. Secondly, the result of this research is expected to improve the implementation of inclusive education in higher education. For example, drawing on the lecturers' views and experiences, universities can set up a better contextualized system to implement inclusivity. Practically, necessary training and suitable instructional strategies may be developed.

4. Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the lecturers' view on inclusive education?
- 2. What are the lecturers' experiences of having inclusive classes
- 3. How do the lecturers overcome the challenges they face in the inclusive classes?

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5. Method

This exploratory study employed a qualitative approach. A purposive and convenient sampling technique was used to select the participants. The selection criteria included willingness to participate, having students with special needs, representativeness, and approval from the deans and the head of study programs. Fourteen lecturers from eleven faculties of Universitas Negeri Padang were then involved. They had students with various backgrounds, including those with special needs.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were developed on the basis of indicators of inclusive education. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes. The data was analyzed qualitatively. Thematic analysis was used to identify the emerging issues revealed in the lecturers' answers to the questions. First, the lecturers' answers were read closely by the researchers in order to categorize them based on the emerging themes. To heighten the validity and the reliability of the analysis, a colleague was invited to read, comment, and confirm the classifications and the analysis.

6. Findings and Discussion

All lecturers agreed that education is for all. They stated that regardless of their diverse background, students should get access to education. They did not discriminate against their students. They stated that they catered for the students with their different characteristics and backgrounds.

However, having students with special needs (SSN) in regular classrooms was challenging for the lecturers. Some (29%) felt annoyed and had a negative attitude towards the integration of SSN into regular classes. According to them, SSN should be treated separately. Some others (36%) were not really sure of the inclusivity. They ignored SSN, focusing on regular students and ignored SSN. Fortunately, 35% of the lecturers felt emphatic on SSN. They attempted to help SSN and made sure that classroom activities ran well.

The result of this study shows that the commitment to implement the policy of inclusive education has to begin with a shared understanding of the importance of inclusivity. This will shape attitude towards inclusive education (De Boer et al., 2011). Research shows that there is a relationship between attitude robustness of inclusive practices (e.g. Jordan et al., 2010; Sharma et al., 2006; Soeharto et al., 2024). Furthermore, including SSN in regular classes without adequate needs analysis has unfavourable consequences.

7. Limitations

This study was conducted only at universities with a limited number of samples. In addition, the convenient sampling technique used did not give the researchers a chance to apply selection criteria. The data was gained only through an instrument which is the interview. Thus, no triangulation was employed. Because of that, drawing conclusion mandates caution.

8. Conclusion

This current study reveals that the lecturers concede the idea of giving access to education to all people. Generally, they claimed that they did not have problems with the fact that they had students with different academic, economic, and cultural backgrounds. They could use several strategies to handle the difficulties in teaching those students. However, they had split opinions about the integration of SSN in regular classrooms. Only 25% of them could handle SSN well. Those were the lecturers who had expertise in special education. The rest tended to opt that the SSN had to be treated separately, especially the autistic students. Based on these findings, it is suggested that universities identify SSN prior to the commencement of the first semester and inform the lecturers. Then, it is also recommended to give necessary training for the lecturers to manage inclusive classes.

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FROM ALIENATION TO INTEGRATION: LEVERAGING DRAMA SKETCH ASSIGNMENTS TO UNITE DIVERSE LEARNERS

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Abstract

Literature and drama are often sidelined in TESL programs, dismissed as irrelevant to students' real struggles. Yet it is precisely issues such as language anxiety, weak analytical skills, and low confidence that they are uniquely positioned to address. This study investigates the potential of a drama sketch assignment to reduce social and knowledge alienation among Diploma in TESL students at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) Kota Bharu. Grounded in Constructivist Learning Theory, Social Interdependence Theory, and aligned with Outcome-Based Education (OBE), the study employed open-ended questionnaires with six students and classroom observations before, during, and after the assignment. Findings reveal that drama sketches fostered collaboration, strengthened peer relationships, boosted confidence, and deepened literary understanding through embodied interpretation. By disrupting alienation and empowering participation, the assignment repositioned literature as a transformative and indispensable tool in TESL education. What is often dismissed as peripheral may, in fact, be central to student empowerment.

Keywords

Social alienation, knowledge alienation, drama-based pedagogy, TESL students, collaborative learning

1. Background of Study

Literature and drama are often dismissed as insignificant in TESL programmes, seen as peripheral to the main goal of language instruction. However, the issues that hinder Diploma in TESL students at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) Kota Bharu, such as language anxiety, poor analytical skills, low self-confidence, and social alienation, are precisely the challenges that literature and drama can address. Observations reveal that many students begin the *Introduction to Literature* course disengaged, struggling with English-medium content and hesitant to join peer discussions, which results in silence, withdrawal, and the misconception that literary study is inaccessible (Siti Nur Saadah binti Saadun et al., 2024). While Baharuddin et al. (2022) emphasise literature's potential to enhance language skills and confidence, it remains undervalued in the institution. Drama, too, is seldom regarded as a serious pedagogical tool despite its proven ability to facilitate dialogue, embodiment, and collaboration (Y. J. Lee & Liu, 2022; McAtamney, 2021; Nguyen, 2023). This study challenges these assumptions by integrating a drama sketch assignment within the framework of Constructivist Learning Theory, Social Interdependence Theory, and

Outcome-Based Education, illustrating how literature and drama can shift from the periphery to the centre of TESL pedagogy. What is often dismissed as insignificant may be essential.

2. Statement of Problem

Malaysia aspires to produce confident English educators, yet many TESL students feel silenced in the very classrooms where their voices should be nurtured. Persistent challenges rooted in social and knowledge alienation undermine their growth as future teachers (Hishamudin & Li, 2023; Othman & Nordin, 2013). At KPTM Kota Bharu, students often resist collaboration, particularly in mixed-gender settings, due to low self-esteem, language anxiety, and limited exposure to inclusive practices. Cognitively, they struggle with abstract thinking, interpretive analysis, and articulating responses to literary texts, difficulties intensified by operating outside their mother tongue, which deepens feelings of inadequacy and disconnection. The Introduction to Literature course (HSL1093), designed to bridge language competence and literary appreciation, often exacerbates these struggles through lecture-heavy delivery, teacher-led interpretations, and individually assessed written tasks that neglect affective and linguistic needs. By contrast, drama sketch assignments are inherently collaborative, embodied, and dialogic, encouraging interaction, ownership, and collective meaning-making, while fostering socially integrative and inclusive learning spaces (Dutton & Rushton, 2022; Hua et al., 2024; B. K. Lee et al., 2020). Yet empirical evidence of their impact in Diploma TESL classrooms in Kelantan remains scarce. This study addresses that gap by examining how drama sketch assignments can reduce alienation while enhancing engagement, participation, confidence, and literary understanding.

3. Significance of Study

This study is significant because it challenges the marginalisation of literature and drama in TESL education, where they are often regarded as peripheral rather than essential to student development. In KPTMKB TESL classrooms, social and knowledge alienation continue to weaken engagement, confidence, and academic growth, leaving many diploma students anxious, isolated, and reluctant to participate (Siti Nur Saadah binti Saadun et al., 2024). Although literature courses aim to build linguistic competence, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness, teacher-centred methods frequently reinforce exclusion. By introducing a drama sketch assignment, this study reframes literature as a collaborative and lived practice that empowers students to engage actively with texts and peers. Grounded in Constructivist Learning Theory, Social Interdependence Theory, and aligned with Outcome-Based Education (OBE), it demonstrates how drama can transform literature learning into an inclusive, participatory, and empowering process.

4. Research Questions

i. What are the key factors that contribute to social and knowledge alienation among TESL diploma students in the literature classroom?

- ii. How does the drama sketch assignment influence students' collaboration, confidence, and willingness to engage with literature?
- iii. What is the perceived impact of the drama sketch on students' learning experiences, including social interaction and comprehension of literary texts?

5. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine how drama-based pedagogy (DBP) can mitigate social and knowledge alienation among TESL diploma-level students in a Malaysian teacher education programme. Conducted at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) with a Semester 4 cohort enrolled in Introduction to Literature, the DBP intervention was embedded within the course. Two data sources informed the study: (1) open-ended questionnaires from six students after completing the drama sketch assignment, and (2) lecturers' observations. The questionnaires encouraged reflective, personalised responses on academic confidence, group interaction, verbal expression, and engagement with literary content, capturing emotional and cognitive shifts beyond standardised measures. In parallel, classroom observations were also linked to the Microteaching course with monitored participation, collaboration, confidence, and communicative competence, revealing whether DBP benefits extended across courses. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Constructivism and Johnson and Johnson's Social Interdependence Theory, the methodology highlights how collaborative, context-driven tasks foster active knowledge construction and interpersonal accountability. Aligned with Malaysia's Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework, which values autonomy, communication, and teamwork, this design offers a robust platform for evaluating DBP as a transformative instructional strategy for TESL literature classrooms.

6. Findings and Discussion

The study reveals that TESL diploma students initially experienced social and knowledge alienation in the literature classroom. Several admitted feeling disconnected, with P2 noting, "...I sometimes felt disconnected from my classmates and uncomfortable working in groups", while P6 shared that small circles made it "...harder to build trust or feel truly connected as a whole class." Such experiences reflect how disengagement stems from social positioning, linguistic insecurity, and epistemic disempowerment, often surfacing as silence, reluctance, and fear of mistakes (Khan et al., 2020; Okedigba et al., 2023). Classroom observations confirmed these patterns, as students avoided eye contact and limited their contributions. The drama sketch assignment, however, according to Gulzira (2023) and Kusmaryani (2022), transformed participation. It fostered collaboration, confidence, and stronger camaraderie, with P3 explaining, "...it encouraged teamwork, boosted our trust in each other, and made me feel more connected." Drama compelled interdependence and shared responsibility while deepening literary understanding (Dimililer & Atamtürk, 2019; McLaren et al., 2021; Ratih, 2019). As P6 highlighted, acting required "...understanding the characters' feelings, tone, and body language," illustrating how drama situates learners as active constructors of meaning and enhances fluency,

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retention, and motivation (Abdul Aziz & Shahira Mohd Raffi, 2020; Alshraideh & Alahmdi, 2020; Budiman & Ganap, 2024).

7. Limitations

This study is limited by its small sample size of six TESL diploma students from a single institution, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. The qualitative design, while offering rich insights, relies on self-reported data and lecturers' observations that may be subject to bias. Additionally, the focus on one course and a single drama-based intervention limits the scope for examining long-term impacts or comparisons with other pedagogical strategies. Future research should involve larger, more diverse cohorts and explore longitudinal effects across varied educational contexts.

8. Conclusion

This study reveals that TESL diploma students initially faced both social and knowledge alienation in literature classrooms, often feeling disconnected from peers and struggling to engage meaningfully with texts. The drama sketch assignment, however, transformed these challenges into opportunities for growth by fostering collaboration, building confidence, and strengthening peer relationships. Students reported deeper comprehension of literature through embodied learning, as acting required them to interpret characters, emotions, and contexts, making the material more relatable and memorable. These outcomes reflect principles of Constructivist Learning Theory, Social Interdependence Theory, and Outcome-Based Education, which emphasise collaborative, experiential, and purposeful learning. In essence, the findings underscore the pedagogical value of dramabased tasks in TESL literature courses, showing their potential to reduce alienation, enhance communicative competence, and empower learners to construct knowledge actively. Integrating drama into language education offers a dynamic, inclusive approach that promotes sustained engagement and meaningful literary learning.

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FROM PLANNING TO PRACTICE: COMPARING PRE- AND POST-PRACTICUM TESL STUDENTS IN CONDUCTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMMES

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Abstract

This study examines how practicum experience shapes pedagogical preparedness, instructional confidence, and event-management skills among Diploma in TESL students at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Kota Bharu, focusing on the Language Programme Planning and Development course. The course develops proposal writing, event planning, design, and reflective reporting, culminating in school-based English programmes. A comparative qualitative design contrasted Semester 5 students (pre-practicum) with Semester 7 students (post-practicum). Data from event observations and reflective reports were thematically analysed using Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Schön's Reflective Practice. Findings show pre-practicum students often hesitated, relied on code-mixing, and collaborated less effectively, which disrupted programme flow. Post-practicum students demonstrated clearer planning, adaptive decision-making, and stronger classroom management, resulting in smoother implementation. The study concludes that practicum is central to developing readiness and competence. Implications highlight the need for differentiated scaffolding within experiential courses to better align TESL curricula with graduate competency requirements and employability goals.

Keywords

Experiential learning, TESL student preparedness, reflective practice, practicum impact, KPTM

1. Background of Study

In multilingual societies like Malaysia, English is both a curricular subject and a crucial vehicle for socio-economic advancement (Misbah et al., 2017). Preparatory TESL instruction must therefore extend beyond theoretical frameworks to address the persistent gap between what is taught in training and what is required in classrooms, a challenge widely acknowledged in global teacher education (Salim Al-Jaro & Asmawi, 2019; M. M. Yunus et al., 2010). The practicum is recognised as an essential component that enables pre-service teachers to apply pedagogical knowledge in authentic contexts, refine their teaching identity, and build instructional confidence (Sathappan & Gurusamy, 2019). At Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Kota Bharu (KPTMKB), the Language Programme Planning and Development course is designed to operationalise this connection by requiring students to plan and implement English programmes for primary pupils. Through proposal writing, event coordination, and reflective practice, the course positions experiential learning as

central to teacher preparation. A clear contrast can be observed between Semester 5 students, who often demonstrate hesitation and fragmented collaboration, and Semester 7 students, who show stronger planning coherence, confidence, and adaptability. This study argues that practicum experience is indispensable in shaping competent and resilient TESL educators and should remain a core element of curriculum reform.

2. Statement of Problem

The Language Programme Planning and Development course is designed to prepare TESL students to plan and conduct English language programmes. Yet, its effectiveness differs between students who have undergone practicum and those who have not. Semester 5 prepracticum students, who rely primarily on theoretical preparation, often struggle to translate coursework into practice. They face difficulties in classroom management, hesitate in instructional decision-making, and lack confidence in sustaining learner engagement, which weakens the quality of school-based programmes and undermines their sense of readiness. In contrast, Semester 7 post-practicum students, having experienced real classroom contexts, demonstrate stronger planning coherence, greater adaptability, and higher instructional confidence (Nuraeni & Heryatun, 2021; W. N. M. W. M. Yunus, 2022). This contrast underscores practicum as a decisive factor in shaping competence and preparedness, a finding strongly supported in teacher education research (Farrell, 2016; Zeichner, 2010). Yet, within the Malaysian TESL context, little empirical work has directly compared pre- and post-practicum students in structured course-based settings. This study addresses this gap by examining how practicum influences preparedness, confidence, and performance, arguing that without recognising these disparities, TESL risks producing graduates who are academically qualified but classroomunready, weakening Malaysia's broader goals for effective English language education.

3. Significance of Study

This study is essential as it highlights the readiness gap between pre-practicum and post-practicum TESL students in conducting language programmes, an issue often overlooked in Malaysian teacher education. The Language Programme Planning and Development course examines how practicum experience shapes students' confidence, instructional approaches, and capacity to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic contexts. The findings will extend international scholarship on experiential learning while situating the discussion within Malaysia, where systematic comparisons of pre- and post-practicum cohorts remain scarce. Beyond theoretical contributions, the study offers practical implications for curriculum designers and policymakers by identifying the need for differentiated support that accounts for students' varying levels of preparedness. Ultimately, this study underscores practicum as an indispensable element in cultivating competent, confident, and adaptable English educators who can effectively meet the challenges of multilingual classrooms and support Malaysia's long-term goals in English education.

4. Research Questions

- i. What are the differences in preparedness, confidence, and performance between pre- and post-practicum TESL students in conducting English language programmes?
- ii. In what ways does practicum experience affect students' instructional approaches and classroom management during programme delivery?
- iii. How can the Language Programme Planning and Development course be improved to prepare pre-teachers for real-world teaching tasks better?

5. Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach to analyse the students' preparation and confidence towards their planning between two different groups of students. This study will look directly at how pre-practicum and post-practicum students approach preparing for language learning for a large scale of people, especially pupils at school, and how the approach implied can have an impact on the whole programme conducted. Being conducted at Kolej Poly-Tech Mara Kota Bharu (KPTMKB), this research will focus on two groups of students from two different cohorts, which are semester five (pre-practicum students) and semester seven (post-practicum students), who have their respective approaches based on their understanding and experience in teaching, planning and conducting the language learning. The instruments for the respondents included six openended questions directed towards eight students; four from semester five and another four from semester seven. The lecturer's insight will also be included in the research as a vital criterion for expanding the impacts of this planning into the real-world situation of students in educational settings

6. Findings and Discussion

The study depicts similarities and differences in approach by both students of Semester 5 and Semester 7. Findings clearly show that students without teaching experience encounter several problems, such as nervousness when conducting the event, while students with teaching experience have the confidence to utilise the programme. Other than that, Semester 5 students heavily relied on the code-mixing technique to guide the comprehension of the pupils, which became one of the debated factors in multilingual learning (Ismail et al., 2021). Meanwhile, for Semester 7 students, they applied a more critical approach since they have that experience in school with strategies like positive reinforcement, situational assessment and reward systems. However, both groups of students do agree that grouping the pupils into multiple teams improved the organisation and focused engagement (Kadir et al., 2023). Furthermore, they also agreed that encouraging and simple instructions could help the pupils learning better (El Kemma, 2019). The findings stated here confirmed that practicum experience at school enhances the competence and confidence of students while handling the challenges faced during the event (Soleas & Hong, 2020).

7. Limitations

This study has limitations that are also integral to its design. The small participant pool, drawn from TESL students at a single institution, was a deliberate methodological choice. In qualitative inquiry, fewer participants enable closer attention to context and allow each response to be interrogated in depth, which would be diluted in a larger dataset. Similarly, open-ended questionnaires, while vulnerable to personal bias and recency effects, were necessary to capture unstructured, authentic reflections that closed formats could not elicit. These decisions privileged analytic depth and the exploration of lived experience over statistical breadth. However, this inevitably restricts the transferability of findings. To strengthen future research, larger and more diverse samples, combined with triangulation through interviews and classroom observations, would extend validity while preserving the depth that qualitative analysis requires.

8. Conclusion

This study highlights a clear contrast in readiness between Semester 5 pre-practicum and Semester 7 post-practicum TESL students in conducting language programmes. Pre-practicum students, with limited classroom exposure, often showed nervousness, dependence on code-mixing, and difficulty maintaining programme flow, which affected both delivery and confidence. In contrast, post-practicum students demonstrated greater competence, employing adaptive strategies such as assessing pupil needs, applying positive reinforcement, and responding flexibly to challenges. Both groups, however, recognised the importance of organisation and collaborative grouping in enhancing pupil engagement, indicating that experiential learning fosters shared awareness of effective classroom practices. The findings underscore the centrality of practicum in building preparedness, adaptability, and instructional confidence among pre-service teachers. Future studies should extend to multiple institutions and examine long-term impacts of experiential learning on reflective adaptability, confidence, and pedagogical growth within TESL education.

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FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: CONTEXTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING (CTL) AS A PARADIGM FOR TRANSLATION INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) as a pedagogical paradigm in translation instruction, aiming to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real-world translation practice. Grounded in constructivist principles, CTL emphasizes the use of authentic materials, problem-solving activities, peer collaboration, and reflective learning. Drawing on student reflections from a translation project-based course, the findings reveal that CTL effectively enhances learners' engagement, critical thinking, and awareness of contextual, linguistic, and cultural factors in translation. Most students reported that translating real-world texts deepened their understanding of professional translation tasks, improved their problem-solving in language use, and motivated them to pursue further translation practice. Peer review, teacher guidance, and class discussions also contributed significantly to learning. However, challenges such as handling complex texts and sourcing clients were noted. Despite the limitations of a single cohort and subjective data, the study affirms CTL's potential as a transformative approach in translator education and calls for more longitudinal, comparative, and professionally integrated research to further validate its impact.

Keywords

Contextual teaching and learning, translation instruction

1. Background of Study

Translation pedagogy has evolved significantly over the past few decades, transitioning from prescriptive approaches focused on equivalence and linguistic accuracy to more holistic models that emphasize the social, cultural, and professional realities of translation practice (Kiraly, 2000; González-Davies, 2004; Colina, 2015). Despite this shift, many translation classrooms still rely on decontextualized exercises and artificial tasks, which fail to represent the complexity of real-world translation (Kelly, 2005; Pym, 2009). This disconnection between academic instruction and professional practice has raised ongoing concerns about the effectiveness of translator education in preparing students for actual work environments (Massey & Ehrensberger-Dow, 2011; Risku, 2016).

In response to these concerns, scholars have called for more dynamic, learner-centered approaches that bridge theory and practice. One such approach is Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), a constructivist-based educational framework that emphasizes meaningful learning through real-life application, collaboration, and reflection (Johnson, 2002; Sears,

2003). While CTL has been widely adopted in general education and vocational training (Hudson, 2016), its application in translator education remains underexplored. Previous research in translation pedagogy has highlighted the benefits of project-based learning (Kiraly, 2012), situated learning (Risku, 2010), and authentic task design (Göpferich, 2009), yet there is a lack of studies that systematically integrate the CTL paradigm into the translation classroom.

Moreover, while existing studies have demonstrated that authentic translation tasks can foster translator competence (Tiselius & Hild, 2017; Li, 2018), there is limited empirical evidence on how students perceive the learning process when CTL principles—such as contextual learning, collaboration, and reflection—are explicitly implemented. This gap suggests the need for further inquiry into how CTL-based instruction influences students' cognitive, affective, and professional development as translators.

2. Statement of Problem

The present study addresses this gap by examining how CTL principles were applied in an undergraduate translation course through a structured, project-based learning experience involving authentic texts. Drawing on student reflections, both quantitative and qualitative, this research explores how CTL facilitates the development of translation skills, problem-solving abilities, and professional awareness. It aims to contribute to the evolving landscape of translation pedagogy by offering empirical insights into the effectiveness of CTL as a guiding framework for instructional design in translator education.

3. Significance of Study

This study holds significance both theoretically and practically within the field of translation pedagogy and broader educational discourse. By investigating how Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) can be operationalized in a translation classroom, it addresses a pedagogical gap and contributes to the ongoing effort to align translator education with real-world demands.

4. Research Questions

There are several questions to be addressed in this study, as follows:

- 1. How do students perceive the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) in a translation instruction setting?
- 2. What kinds of learning outcomes—cognitive, affective, and professional—emerge from CTL-based translation projects involving authentic texts?
- 3. What challenges and benefits do students experience when engaging with CTL principles such as contextualized learning, collaboration, and reflection in translation practice?

4. How can student reflections inform the future design and implementation of CTL-oriented translation pedagogy?

5. Method

This study is based on a translation class project conducted with undergraduate students in an English Education Department. Students were tasked with translating authentic texts—including literary excerpts, news articles, promotional materials, and academic passages. The instructional design integrated CTL principles: authentic materials, real-client simulation, peer reviews, and reflective practice. Data were collected through a structured reflection form comprising Likert-scale items and open-ended questions.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1 Students' Reflections on the CTL-Based Experience

The quantitative data drawn from student reflections on the CTL-based translation project provide compelling evidence that the instructional approach successfully engaged learners in a meaningful, context-rich educational experience. The Likert-scale responses indicate overwhelmingly positive perceptions across multiple indicators aligned with the core components of Contextual Teaching and Learning.

A notable 95% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed that working with authentic texts helped them understand real-world translation tasks. This finding confirms that the integration of actual materials—such as literary works, news articles, and promotional texts—contributes significantly to the perceived relevance of learning activities. By encountering texts that mirror real translation briefs, students were better able to grasp the complexities of the translator's role in professional contexts, thus bridging the gap between academic training and market expectations (Kiraly, 2012; Risku, 2010).

Furthermore, strong agreement was observed in aspects related to problem-solving in language use, awareness of cultural and contextual factors, and the ability to handle unfamiliar vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. These results underscore CTL's capacity to cultivate critical thinking and linguistic agility through contextualized problem-solving tasks. Rather than relying on isolated grammar drills or synthetic sentences, students had to make informed lexical and stylistic choices based on the function, audience, and purpose of each text—thereby engaging in higher-order thinking and metalinguistic reflection.

In addition to cognitive development, the affective and social dimensions of learning were also positively impacted. Students responded favorably to the collaborative components of the course, with many expressing that peer review sessions and class discussions played an integral role in improving their translation skills. This affirms one of CTL's foundational assumptions: that knowledge is best constructed through interaction and dialogue (Johnson, 2002; González-Davies, 2004). The inclusion of peer feedback mechanisms

allowed students to reflect on their choices, articulate translation rationales, and learn from the strategies of their classmates.

Equally important was the role of the instructor, as reflected in students' agreement that clear guidance was provided throughout the projects. In a CTL-oriented classroom, the teacher's function transitions from knowledge dispenser to facilitator and mentor (Sears, 2003). The structured scaffolding offered by the instructor—including briefings, formative feedback, and rubrics—appears to have supported students in navigating translation challenges and managing project timelines effectively.

Overall, these findings suggest that the CTL framework not only supported the development of linguistic and translation competencies but also promoted a student-centered learning environment where reflection, autonomy, and engagement were actively encouraged. The high levels of student agreement across cognitive, social, and affective domains demonstrate the pedagogical value of contextual learning and its applicability to translator education.

6.2 Qualitative Responses from Student Reflections

The open-ended responses from students provide rich insights into how the CTL-based translation instruction was experienced on a personal and intellectual level. Thematic analysis of their reflections reveals four interrelated themes: (a) valuable lessons learned, (b) challenges encountered, (c) preferred texts and enjoyment, and (d) suggestions for future improvement. These themes further illuminate the nuanced ways in which students engaged with the translation process and contextual learning environment.

a. Valuable Lessons Learned

A prominent theme emerging from student reflections is the recognition that translation is a complex, interpretive act rather than a mechanical substitution of words between languages. Many students reported a shift in their understanding of translation as they engaged with authentic texts. As one student reflected, "I learned that translation isn't just about swapping languages. You need to understand the whole context and audience." This illustrates an important cognitive development consistent with CTL principles, which emphasize the importance of situating knowledge in real-life contexts (Johnson, 2002).

Students also acknowledged the polysemous nature of language—realizing that a single word might carry multiple meanings depending on textual, cultural, or situational contexts. As another student noted, "Now I realize that one word can have multiple meanings depending on the context. That was eye-opening." This heightened awareness aligns with findings in translation competence research that emphasize the importance of contextual sensitivity and decision-making skills (Nord, 2005; Göpferich, 2009). The reflective statements confirm that CTL-supported instruction can foster both metalinguistic awareness and strategic competence, which are core components of translator education.

b. Challenges Encountered

Despite the positive learning outcomes, students also encountered several challenges that underscored the cognitive and logistical demands of authentic translation work. A frequently mentioned difficulty was translating academic and literary texts, which often require a high degree of interpretive nuance and familiarity with specialized registers. Such genres presented both linguistic and cultural complexities that many students were not yet fully equipped to manage independently.

Another recurring challenge was dealing with ambiguity or insufficient context, especially in cases where texts lacked background information or clear communicative intent. This echoes existing literature on translation problem-solving, which identifies underspecification as a common difficulty for novice translators (Tirkkonen-Condit, 2005).

Additionally, students noted difficulties in sourcing clients or real translation briefs—particularly in simulating real-world professional interactions. While the class aimed to simulate translation projects, students' desire for more direct contact with clients or stakeholders suggests a need for even more professionally situated learning experiences, such as internships or service-learning translation projects (Kiraly, 2012; Risku, 2016).

c. Preferred Texts and Enjoyment

The variety of texts included in the project allowed students to engage with diverse genres, and their preferences often reflected their comfort levels and interests. Many expressed enjoyment in translating short stories or literary texts, which were perceived as opportunities for creative expression. One student stated, "Short stories were enjoyable because I could explore language creatively." This preference suggests that literary texts, while sometimes challenging, can foster student motivation and engagement when properly scaffolded.

Others preferred news texts, citing their relative simplicity and directness. As one student noted, "News texts were easier and more literal, so I felt more confident translating them." These reflections support the pedagogical value of including a balanced variety of texts—from structured and formulaic to more open-ended and stylistically rich—in translation instruction to accommodate learners at different stages of development.

d. Students' Feedback for Future Class

Students provided constructive feedback for improving the translation project experience in future iterations. One of the most common suggestions was to include a wider range of text types, such as advertisements, legal documents, and technical materials, to better simulate the diversity of translation work in professional settings. This aligns with the need for genre-based instruction in translation pedagogy (Colina, 2015).

There were also calls for more offline or hybrid collaboration sessions, particularly to enhance peer interaction and provide hands-on support during complex tasks. These

suggestions reflect CTL's emphasis on collaborative learning as a driver of knowledge construction (Sears, 2003).

Finally, students expressed interest in public feedback sessions or mini-seminars where their translations could be shared, reviewed, and discussed more broadly. Such events could serve as platforms for reflective practice, community engagement, and professional identity building—hallmarks of situated learning environments (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Kiraly, 2005).

Implications for Translation Instruction

The findings validate the integration of CTL as a pedagogical strategy in translation education. CTL's emphasis on active participation, reflective thinking, and contextual application resonates with the needs of future translators. Specifically, this approach (a) Enhances students' translational problem-solving abilities, (b) Facilitates the development of professional translator identities, and (c) Encourages collaborative and lifelong learning attitudes.

Curriculum developers and language instructors are encouraged to adopt CTL not merely as a method but as a pedagogical paradigm—one that reshapes how translation is taught and learned.

7. Limitations

While the implementation of CTL in this translation class yielded promising outcomes, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged.

First, the research was based on self-reported reflections from a single cohort in one institutional context. While students' voices provide valuable insight into their learning experiences, such reflections may be influenced by subjective perceptions, social desirability, or the novelty effect of the CTL approach.

Second, the scope of authentic texts used was limited by the availability of materials and time constraints. Although students engaged with a variety of genres—including literary, news, and promotional texts—there was limited exposure to more specialized texts such as legal, technical, or medical documents. This restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader domains of translation.

Third, the evaluation of translation quality relied more on formative feedback, peer review, and student perception, rather than a rigorous linguistic or professional benchmarking. Future studies could include comparative assessments of translation output before and after CTL implementation, using professional rubrics or expert panels.

8. Conclusion

The findings from this study demonstrate that Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) offers a robust and pedagogically sound framework for translator education. By integrating authentic texts, collaborative learning, reflective practice, and teacher facilitation, CTL fosters a learning environment where translation is not merely taught as a linguistic exercise but as a situated, interpretive, and purposeful activity. Students not only developed key translation competencies—such as problem-solving, contextual awareness, and lexical flexibility—but also engaged with the professional and interpersonal dimensions of translation practice.

One of the most significant outcomes of the CTL-based instructional approach was the observed shift in student perception: learners began to see translation as a meaning-making process that requires careful negotiation between language, culture, audience, and purpose. This represents a crucial step toward the development of their translator identities, a central aim of contemporary translation pedagogy (Kiraly, 2016; Pym, 2011). Moreover, the positive response to peer collaboration, teacher guidance, and authentic text engagement confirms CTL's value in promoting not only cognitive but also affective and social dimensions of learning.

However, the study also surfaces important pedagogical challenges. The difficulty students faced when translating literary and academic texts, managing ambiguity, or simulating client relationships highlights the need for more targeted scaffolding and extended exposure to diverse genres. Additionally, their feedback points to a desire for more immersive, professionally situated experiences, suggesting that CTL implementation can be further enhanced by integrating client-based projects, internships, or service-learning initiatives.

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GAMIFYING BUSINESS ENGLISH: ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ESCAPE ROOMS AND TIC-TAC-TOE

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Abstract

Game-based learning is a teaching approach that uses games as a tool to enhance learning. It entails the use of games, whether digital or not, that have been purposefully created or modified for educational purposes, with learning objectives included into the gameplay. This paper investigates how gamified learning techniques are used in a Business English classroom for first-semester Diploma in Business Administration students at Sunway College Kuala Lumpur. Students from a variety of educational backgrounds are served by the program, including those from SPM, Certificate, IGCSE, and UEC courses. To improve student engagement, vocabulary retention, presentation skills and communication competence, two interactive games, Escape Room and Tic-Tac-Toe, were incorporated into the curriculum in recognition of the material among first-year diploma students. The Escape Room activity was designed around business communication scenarios and required students to collaboratively solve language-based puzzles, decode business-related clues, and apply vocabulary in context promoting creative thinking, problem-solving and teambased collaboration. Tic-Tac-Toe was adapted as a revision game to strengthen linguistic abilities, where students constructed and answered language questions in a competitive yet supportive environment. Results indicate that among students with different skill levels, gamification boosted motivation, supported learner autonomy, and stimulated active engagement. The transformative potential of teacher-led innovation in ELT is highlighted in this study. Gamification may make business English classes more accessible, interesting, and learner-centred by redefining the teacher as a facilitator and learning designer. This is true for mixed-proficiency cohorts in postsecondary diploma programs where learning experience is empowered by innovation.

Keywords

Gamification, business English, learner engagement, ELT innovation, teacher agency

1. Background of Study

Game-Based Learning (GBL) refers to the use of full game environments where gameplay itself delivers the learning objectives, distinct from gamification which only layers rewards over traditional tasks (Checa & Bustillo, 2020). Current reviews highlight that GBL significantly enhances student motivation, engagement, and performance, particularly among teenagers who require interactive and participating methods to sustain interest (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019; Clark et al., 2016). Meta-analyses also report moderate to large

cognitive benefits, including improvements in problem-solving, memory, and sustained attention (Wouters et al., 2013).

GBL has gained traction as an innovative pedagogical approach that enhances learner engagement and retention. In English Language Teaching (ELT), gamification integrates learning objectives into gameplay, fostering active participation and contextual learning. Business English, often perceived as a basic subject by first-year diploma students. This study explores the use of Escape Room and Tic-Tac-Toe games in a Business English classroom, addressing the challenge of engaging mixed-proficiency learners from diverse educational backgrounds (SPM, IGCSE, UEC, Certificate). The integration of gamified activities aims to improve vocabulary retention, communication competence, and learner autonomy.

Thus, GBL not only addresses challenges of attention in technology-saturated environments in the class but also provides evidence-based pathways to enhance learning outcomes for teenagers.

2. Statement of Problem

Regardless of the increasing evidence that Game-Based Learning can improve students' motivation, engagement, and cognition, several gaps remain in the current practice and research. Current review states that although GBL increases attention, many implementations rely highly on extrinsic rewards such as points and badges, which may not sustain long-term motivation once novelty fades (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019; Subhash & Cudney, 2018).

Moreover, meta-analyses indicate variability in outcomes, with success often relying on careful design that aligns with independent, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This proposes a need for more empirical evidence on how GBL promotes sustained attention rather than brief periods of engagement.

At the same time, psychologists warn that teenagers' attention spans are increasingly disturbed due to prolonged exposure to phones, social media, and AI-powered applications (Mark, 2015). Current literature has not fully explored how GBL can serve as a countermeasure by transforming these same digital tools into structured, purposeful learning activities. Limited studies have examined how game mechanics such as flow, feedback loops, and goal-protected episodes specifically mitigate device-driven distraction.

Therefore, this study informs curriculum design and professional development, encouraging educators to adopt gamified strategies that promote autonomy, collaboration, and contextual language use.

3. Significance of Study

The study offers valuable insights into English Language Education by illustrating the impact of interactive learning tools on student motivation and performance in classrooms where digital distractions are dominant in this era. Besides that, it also offers evidence-based strategies for creating engaging and cognitively demanding English learning experiences by transforming mobile devices and AI tools from sources of distraction into instruments of purposeful interaction. The findings will guide educators in designing lessons that integrate flow, feedback, and autonomy-supportive elements, thereby promoting deeper language practice in reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking. In terms of the policy, the study highlights the potential of GBL as a framework for addressing declining attention spans among teenagers, offering practical models for curriculum development and digital literacy initiatives. Ultimately, the research highlights GBL's role in bridging technology use with pedagogical effectiveness, ensuring that English classrooms remain relevant, interactive, and aligned with the learning styles of today's learners.

4. Research Questions

- a) How do students perceive the integration of GBL in English language learning, particularly in relation to reducing distraction and improving focus?
- b) How does gamification affect learner engagement in a Business English classroom?
- c) How do students from diverse educational backgrounds respond to gamified learning experiences?

5. Method

A mixed-methods approach is used to investigate how Game-Based Learning (GBL) sustains attention and enhances participation in Business English lessons in this study. In 14 weeks of classes, two gamified activities which are Escape Room and Tic-Tac-Toe, were integrated into 4 lessons to cultivate collaboration, problem-solving, and authentic language use. Through this, the objective of the study was tested.

In terms of the qualitative aspect, classroom observations, student reflections, and subject expert notes were recorded. The observations captured indicators of attention, participation, and collaboration while student reflections provided insights into motivation and acquired skill development. The subject expert documented instructional strategies and classroom dynamics. These data were analysed thematically, with triangulation across sources to strengthen validity and reliability.

As for the quantitative aspect, participation frequency, task completion rates, and simple engagement scores were derived from an observation checklist. Descriptive statistics were used to measure levels of student attention and activity across sessions, complementing the qualitative findings. By combining qualitative depth with quantitative measures, this mixed-methods design provides a holistic understanding of how GBL mechanics such as

flow, feedback and autonomy guide to sustain attention, reduce distractions from devices, and promote meaningful Business English learning.

6. Findings and Discussion

Preliminary findings suggest that integrating Game-Based Learning (GBL) has generated high levels of excitement and motivation among students. Activities such as Escape Room and Tic-Tac-Toe prompted teamwork, as students collaborated to solve clues and complete puzzles. The competitive element encouraged learners to focus on accuracy and speed, creating a "restart mode" that equalized participation across different learner types. This aligns with prior research highlighting GBL's ability to foster collaboration and sustained attention through flow and challenge (Wouters et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Notably, students relied less on AI tools or external aids, instead turning to peers for support, explanation, and practice. This peer teaching process enhanced communication and reinforced vocabulary retention and writing formats, confirming claims that GBL promotes deeper cognitive engagement (Clark et al., 2016). While the activities were challenging, students reported persistence and enjoyment, contesting earlier assumptions that adolescents' fragmented attention spans hinder sustained focus in technology-rich contexts (Mark, 2015). Instead, findings suggest that when tasks are structured as meaningful, interactive challenges, attention is redirected and sustained.

Overall, these early observations indicate that GBL not only sustains attention but also improves teamwork and language development, supporting its value in English language education.

7. Limitations

This study has a potential limitation in its small-scale ongoing nature, which is a 14-week period of only two gamified activities. The predictability of the tasks is also another limitation which may lead to demotivation. Even though the findings are based on 5 groups of students, approximately 120 students, it may limit generalisability across the different cohorts and proficiency levels. Additionally, although initial observation highlights positive outcomes, long-term retention and transfer skills remain untested. Future studies should expand the sample size which includes diverse GBL designs, and adopt longitudinal approaches to strengthen the validity and assess sustained impact on language learning outcomes.

8. Conclusion

This study set out to demonstrate that Game-Based Learning (GBL) promotes excitement, teamwork, and sustained attention while reducing reliance on AI tools in Business English classrooms. Early findings show that collaborative problem-solving and competitive challenges enhance communication, vocabulary retention, and support claims that GBL promotes meaningful engagement. These results suggest that structured, game-driven

activities can redirect distractions toward purposeful language acquisition. As the study progresses, further data will clarify the long-term impact of GBL on skill development and retention. Future research should include larger and more diverse cohorts, integrate varied game designs, and implement longitudinal measures to assess sustained learning outcomes. Through this, the field can be better examined how GBL contributes not only to classroom engagement but also to broader curriculum design and policy using the English Language Education by ensuring alignment with the needs of today's technology-driven learners.

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THE STORY IS YOURS: A CASE STUDY ON 'CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE' ACTIVITIES IN THE ELT CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This study examined how Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) storytelling tasks influenced learner autonomy and motivation in a private Malaysian university's English Enhancement Programme (EEP) class of 23 students at CEFR A1 to B1. CYOA was explored as a means of empowering learners with limited proficiency by shifting classroom control away from traditional teacher-led instruction. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires with reflections, and classroom observations. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied, using inductive coding informed by Self-Determination Theory. Findings showed that learners experienced autonomy through choice-making and valued CYOA for giving them a sense of ownership. While the activity was described as "fun" and "exciting," students placed greater emphasis on tangible outcomes, especially vocabulary and grammar gains. This highlights the dual role of CYOA tasks in fostering learner agency while also meeting exam-oriented language learning needs in tertiary ELT.

Keywords

CYOA, learner autonomy, motivation, ELT innovation, curriculum design

1. Background of Study

Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) stories place readers at the centre of the narrative, where each choice leads to different consequences and outcomes (Bueno, 2019). Unlike traditional texts, CYOA insists that "you and you alone are in charge of what happens" (Chooseco, 2019, as cited in Bueno, 2019). This notion of individual agency aligns closely with the ideals of learner autonomy in education. When transferred to the classroom, the format symbolises a shift: students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge but active agents charting their own learning journey.

This study is anchored in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which identifies autonomy as a basic psychological need that fuels intrinsic motivation. Research confirms that when learners are given meaningful control, they become more motivated, creative, and engaged (Brandt, 2024; Noriey, 2025; Ponomariovienė, 2025). Yet, despite calls for learner-centred instruction, many classrooms, particularly in tertiary English Language Teaching (ELT), remain teacher-dominated, restricting student ownership (Bueno, 2019; Arseven et al., 2016).

CYOA tasks offer a potential solution. By embedding choice, consequence, and creativity directly into the learning process, they encourage students to take charge of their education. In this sense, CYOA does not merely tell a story; it models what learner-centred education could look like when autonomy and engagement are at the forefront.

2. Statement of Problem

As mentioned in the previous section, although educators often aim to adopt student-centred approaches, research shows that many classrooms remain teacher-centred in practice (Arseven et al., 2016). This limits learners' ownership of the learning process (Bueno, 2019). Moreover, learner autonomy, considered essential for effective learning, is often underdeveloped in classrooms dominated by traditional teacher-led methods (Benson, 2011). When students lack control over content or outcomes, their motivation and participation decline (Andri & Azis, 2025), especially in ELT contexts where they seldom choose learning materials. Choose-Your-Own-Adventure (CYOA) styled lessons offer a potential response to this challenge. By enabling learners to influence narrative development, CYOA tasks embed agency and autonomy in classroom practice, encouraging active participation and ownership of learning.

Nevertheless, motivation often declines when tasks lack relevance or interactivity (Barua, 2023; Hiver, 2020). Teachers also report difficulties in fostering autonomy due to institutional constraints, curriculum demands, and limited training (Napida et al., 2024). While digital storytelling has shown promise in enhancing learner agency (Abbott, 2024), interactive formats such as CYOA remain largely underexplored in Malaysian tertiary ELT contexts. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no published studies have yet investigated CYOA in Malaysia. This study therefore seeks to address these gaps by examining how CYOA activities can promote autonomy, creativity, and engagement through student reflections, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations.

3. Significance of Study

This study is significant because it addresses a gap in the literature: while Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) has been used in world language instruction (Murray, 2015; Ferlazzo, 2009), its application in higher education English classrooms remains underexplored. By integrating CYOA into an English Enhancement Programme, the study contributes to understanding autonomy, motivation/engagement, and creativity in ELT.

For students, CYOA lessons empower them to act as managers of their own learning, transforming them from passive consumers into "prosumers" who make decisions, collaborate, and create oral and written outputs (Mitchell, 2017; Murphey & Falout, 2013). This fosters ownership, motivation, and creativity. For teachers, the study offers a practical model for adapting narrative-based instruction to promote student-centred classrooms.

Pedagogically, it highlights the evolving role of teachers as facilitators who guide and scaffold learning. More broadly, it shows how student agency motivates English learners and offers implications for student-centred education beyond ELT.

4. Research Questions

- 1. To explore learners' perceptions of autonomy when participating in Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) activities.
- 2. To examine how CYOA activities influence learner engagement and motivation in a university-level ELT classroom.

5. Method

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore how Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) tasks foster learner autonomy and motivation in a tertiary English Enhancement Programme (EEP). Participants were twenty-three students from a Malaysian private university in Ipoh, with proficiency levels ranging from CEFR A2 to B1. They were selected through purposive sampling, as they were directly enrolled in the EEP and represented the target proficiency group for this investigation.

The lesson was conducted as an interactive storytelling activity. The teacher began by reading aloud the CYOA introduction, emphasising that "you and you alone are in charge of what happens," to foreground learner agency (Chooseco LLC, 2019, as cited in Bueno, 2019). Students collectively chose the initial story path, later making decisions in small groups and finally writing individual endings. Throughout, they were encouraged to use connectors (e.g., because, consequently) and new vocabulary in their written and oral outputs. The teacher acted as facilitator, guiding and scaffolding without dictating story direction.

Three qualitative instruments were employed: (1) semi-structured interviews with three students, (2) open-ended questionnaires with embedded reflections via Google Forms, and (3) structured classroom observations using an observation protocol.

All data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was both deductive, drawing from Self-Determination Theory, and inductive, allowing emergent categories. Themes included autonomy, motivation/engagement, barriers, and language learning outcomes. Triangulation across data sources enhanced the trustworthiness of findings.

6. Findings and Discussion

This study found that CYOA tasks promoted learner autonomy by giving students meaningful control over lessons. Learners reported feeling "more in control" when making story choices, with one noting, "I could decide what happened next, so it made me think more about the learning". Another explained that mistakes also became part of learning, as

"I can ask teacher for help and this can help me learn more things". Observation notes confirmed active decision-making and negotiation. These findings support Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which highlights autonomy as central to intrinsic motivation, and echo Benson's (2011) emphasis on choice in fostering responsibility.

In terms of motivation and engagement, learners described the activity as "fun" and "exciting." One reflected, "The story made me more interested in learning English because I can choose my own path...". Suspenseful elements sustained attention, consistent with research on the role of relevance and interactivity (Barua, 2023; Hiver, 2020). Yet reflections placed greater emphasis on vocabulary and grammar, as one explained, "It helped me a lot on writing skill or grammar mistake so that I know my mistake and improve my vocab".

This suggests that the learners prioritise concrete linguistic progress over affective enjoyment. In Malaysia's exam-driven tertiary context, students value measurable outcomes that support performance. CYOA was appreciated not only for novelty but for reinforcing grammar and vocabulary, contesting assumptions that narrative tasks are valued mainly for enjoyment (Murray, 2015). Overall, CYOA integrated autonomy, engagement, and language development, addressing gaps in interactive storytelling in tertiary ELT (Abbott, 2024).

7. Limitations

As a qualitative study, the findings are context-specific and not intended for statistical generalisation. The research was limited to 23 students in a single English Enhancement Programme class, which narrows its representativeness across wider tertiary ELT contexts. Only three interview participants were included, providing depth but limiting the range of perspectives that could be captured. Data also relied heavily on self-reported reflections and interviews, which may be shaped by learners' perceptions or willingness to share openly. In addition, time constraints during the CYOA lesson influenced how fully students could develop their stories, which may have restricted the depth of observed autonomy and engagement.

8. Conclusion

This study suggests that Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) tasks foster learner autonomy by giving students meaningful control over how lessons unfold. In line with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), learners reported feeling "in control" when making story choices, and this sense of agency encouraged active participation. While students described the activity as "fun" and "exciting," many highlighted practical benefits such as vocabulary growth and grammar awareness, showing that narrative tasks can meet exam-oriented needs while also enhancing intrinsic motivation.

Importantly, in contexts where students cannot choose prescribed materials, CYOA offered the chance to choose how the story developed, and that choice enhanced engagement. CYOA also transformed learners from passive recipients into "prosumers" (Murphey &

Falout, 2013), as they made decisions, collaborated, and co-created story outcomes. The model shows potential for embedding autonomy, creativity, and engagement in Malaysian tertiary ELT. Future research should examine CYOA with larger groups and explore how its principles can be adapted to regular lessons by simply offering students options for how a lecture continues.

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ENHANCING ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH SULAM: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE 1VOICEIMC PROJECT AMONG BELCOM STUDENTS AT FPBU, USIM

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of 1VoiceIMC, a project for Service Learning Malaysia (SULAM) in improving English communication skills among Bachelor of English Language with Commerce (BELCOM) students at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). For this project, students acted as assistants to small companies to promote their products and businesses online and face-to-face. A qualitative case study method (semi-structured interview) was used, involving five students from BELCOM, and the findings were analysed thematically. The findings show a significant increase in the students' motivation, communicative confidence, pragmatic competence, and vocabulary range. The results of the study suggest that using methods that require students to communicate with the community can bridge the gap between English language learning in the classroom and professional readiness, which might provide a suitable model to improve cultural competence and graduate employability in Malaysia.

Keywords

English communication, SULAM, higher education

1. Background of Study

In Malaysia, the society is globalized and multilingual and English is one of the languages that is often needed as an added value for professional readiness and graduate employability. Even with over a decade of formal teaching of English, most university graduates still show restricted fluency, low self-confidence, and inadequate pragmatic ability in employment situations (Hashim & Yusoff, 2018). The deficiency tends to stem from traditional, grammar-based teaching that emphasizes correctness over actual interaction. Hence, students are unable to translate the acquired knowledge in the classroom into real communicative contexts. Modern studies highlight that pedagogic practices involving authenticity, community, and experience ought to be employed to facilitate both linguistic and affective growth (Mahmud & Ismail, 2020; Nordin et al., 2021). In response to this, Service Learning Malaysia-University for Society (SULAM) is now a national initiative to weave community-based activities into curricula to enable students to meaningfully use English while addressing community needs (MOHE, 2020; Rahmat & Zaini, 2023). Recent studies emphasize the importance of instructional approaches that integrate authenticity, community engagement, and experience learning to foster both language and emotional growth (Mahmud & Ismail, 2020; Nordin et al., 2021).

In this context, the 1VoiceIMC project assigns BELCOM students the roles of promoters, emcees, and digital content providers, requiring them to communicate in authentic environments. Students need to help small business owners promote their products through online promotions and organising events. In the online promotion method, students need to produce digital content such as digital posters, reels, short videos, interviews, surveys and so on, while the face-to-face promotion approach is implemented through organising events, where students meet with the community to promote the relevant products and brands. By implementing this project, students are exposed to direct communication with other community members, providing opportunities and exposure that they cannot learn in the classroom alone.

2. Statement of Problem

The literature highlights the importance of experiential tasks and service learning in improving the quality of English language use. Many studies show improvements in fluency and confidence (Mahmud & Ismail, 2020; Nordin et al., 2021), but more detailed studies in this area are still lacking. Furthermore, although SULAM initiatives have demonstrated enhancements in speaking proficiency and motivation (Rahmat & Zaini, 2023), insufficient focus has been directed towards pragmatic competence and the applicability of skills in professional settings, domains this study seeks to explore. Several past studies have shown a significant increase in the use of technology in SULAM projects, and the combination of technology use with face-to-face community interaction is still understudied (García & Robison, 2020; Phuong & Medvedeva, 2022).

3. Significance of Study

The findings from this study show that community-based tasks can increase students' confidence to communicate, as well as increase vocabulary use and pragmatic competence, which sometimes cannot be honed by just learning in the classroom. By using English in real communication with the community face-to-face and online, students were exposed to real experiences in the field, where they need to navigate real-world interactions, adapting their language according to the needs of different community groups. This approach reflects the needs of students in their professional fields of work, and in addition, this early exposure exposes students to situations that they cannot learn from texts alone.

4. Research Question

How does the 1VoiceIMC project enhance BELCOM students' communicative competence?

5. Method

Five third-year BELCOM students involved in the 1VoiceIMC project were selected through purposive sampling and interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Before the interviews were conducted, participants were given a detailed explanation of the study and formal consent was obtained from them. The interviews lasted approximately 20-45

minutes each and were recorded for analysis. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the data obtained were then analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. All completed transcripts were read repeatedly for familiarisation, before codes were generated to capture the meaningful segments, and then grouped according to emerging themes. Patterns among the participants were also examined to see similarities and differences in their experiences.

6. Findings and Discussion

This SULAM 1VoiceIMC project has shown that exposure to the real context with the community can significantly improve communication skills among students. Among the main findings obtained is an increase in terms of vocabulary expansion, communicative confidence, motivation and pragmatic competence. Apart from that, the participants expressed the importance of code-switching as one of the strategic communication methods, which also highlighted the importance of adaptability in multilingual contexts. This project also demonstrated that authentic interaction with the community can reduce anxiety on a regular basis and maintain motivation and confidence in communicating.

These findings have confirmed and challenged existing assumptions at the same time. These findings support second language acquisition theories, for example, by Krashen (1985) and Vygotsky (1978), who emphasize the importance of reduced affective filters and authentic interactions as factors that improve fluency. However, the findings have contested exam-oriented and grammar-focused approaches that are more commonly used in this country and show that experiential learning can produce transferable and deeper communicative competence. Overall, these findings show the effectiveness and importance of the suggested SULAM Program in the learning system.

7. Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the small sample size, where only five students were selected for the purpose of the study, and this restricts the generalizability of the findings. As a study that uses the qualitative case study method, the results of this study present subjective experiences and may not reflect the trends practised by other undergraduate students in Malaysia. Apart from that, perhaps because the SULAM project carried out involves a period of time that is not too long, some may question the sustainability of skill gains and communicative confidence without continued reinforcement.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the 1VoiceIMC project, under SULAM, was found to improve English communication skills among students, by immersing them in socially relevant and authentic tasks. Improvement from the point of view of pragmatic competence, vocabulary and confidence shows that experiential learning is very important, in addition to common practice involving grammar-focused instruction.

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DEVELOPING AN ASSESSMENT METHOD TO CAPTURE STUDENTS' PERSISTENCE AND SELF-REGULATION IN AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

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Abstract

This study aimed to develop an assessment method for evaluating students' persistence and self-regulation in autonomous learning, as emphasized in Japan's national curriculum. To address the lack of practical tools for measuring these attitudes, a "Mission Sheet" was designed based on Self-Determination Theory, incorporating autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Over two years, junior high school students were engaged in self-selected "missions" with clear performance criteria and reflection activities. Qualitative data from student reflection sheets were analysed thematically, identifying key patterns in how students developed persistence and self-regulation. The findings highlight the potential of the Mission Sheet as a practical classroom tool for promoting and assessing learner engagement.

Keywords

Persistence, self-regulation, autonomous learning, learner engagement, assessment

1. Background of Study

Japan's revised national curriculum emphasizes "the attitude to engage in learning proactively," which includes persistence and self-regulation. However, teachers face challenges in evaluating these traits in a valid and consistent way. While reflection sheets are commonly used for self-regulation, persistence has received little direct assessment. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2017) suggests that autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster intrinsic motivation, which supports persistence in learning. Building on this, a "Mission Sheet" approach was implemented to create a structured yet flexible framework that allows students to set goals, select learning tasks, and monitor progress while receiving feedback. This study focuses on examining how such a tool can both promote and capture these attitudes through qualitative analysis of student reflections collected over two years of classroom practice.

2. Statement of Problem

Although learner engagement has been extensively studied, its assessment in secondary English classrooms, particularly persistence, remains underexplored. Existing tools tend to measure motivation or self-regulation in isolation, without addressing how learners sustain effort in challenging tasks. Moreover, most assessment frameworks are either too general for classroom use or too narrow to capture the complexity of students' learning behaviors.

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This study addresses this gap by developing and testing a practical classroom assessment tool, the Mission Sheet, which integrates goal-setting, choice, feedback, and reflection to assess persistence alongside self-regulation.

3. Significance of Study

Findings from this study contribute to English Language Education by offering teachers a concrete method to assess and promote persistence and self-regulation in everyday classroom practice. The Mission Sheet's design enables ongoing monitoring of students' learning attitudes and supports adaptive teaching decisions. By making these traits visible and measurable, the tool can enhance formative assessment practices and inform the design of a learner-centered instruction.

4. Research Questions

- 1. How do students demonstrate persistence and self-regulation when using the Mission Sheet in autonomous learning activities?
- 2. How can the Mission Sheet serve as an effective assessment tool for these traits in the classroom?

5. Method

This qualitative study was conducted over two academic years with 51 junior high school students. The Mission Sheet allowed students to select missions aligned with their goals, follow A–C performance criteria, and complete reflection entries before and after attempting missions. Reflection data from five open-ended prompts were collected and analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Initial codes were generated from students' descriptions, grouped into subcategories, and synthesized into main themes representing patterns in persistence and self-regulation.

6. Findings and Discussion

Thematic analysis revealed three overarching themes: (1) autonomous growth through strategic learning and sustained effort, (2) collaborative learning and relational support, and (3) varied awareness of change. Students frequently described diversifying learning strategies, persisting through challenges, and benefiting from peer and teacher support. However, a subset of students reported minimal perceived change, suggesting differences in engagement levels. These findings align with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on autonomy, competence, and relatedness, indicating that structured choice and feedback can enhance persistence in secondary English learning contexts.

7. Limitations

This study was conducted in a single school with one cohort, which may limit generalizability. Findings are based solely on self-reported reflections, without triangulation with observational or performance data.

8. Conclusion

The Mission Sheet offers a practical way to both foster and assess persistence and self-regulation in classroom contexts. While further research across diverse settings is needed, the approach demonstrates how teachers can integrate formative assessment of learner engagement into daily practice. Future studies could combine reflection-based assessment with performance metrics to strengthen validity.

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MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS AS A MEDIATOR IN THE EFFECTS OF MORPHOLOGICAL INSTRUCTION ON READING COMPREHENSION AND MOTIVATION ON LOWER SECONDARY LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT LEARNERS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Abstract

Limited vocabulary acquisition, restricted English exposure, and low English proficiency often hinder ESL learners' reading performance and motivation. Given the importance of reading proficiency in academic achievement and future opportunities, morphological instruction (MI), the study of words and their meaningful parts, serves as a promising instructional strategy. This study reports preliminary findings from a quasi-experimental pilot involving 34 lower secondary limited English proficient (LEP) learners in Malaysia. It investigated how morphological awareness mediates the effects of MI, delivered through Non-Digital Gamified (NG) and Digital Gamified (DG) approaches, on their reading comprehension and motivation. Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests using the Morphological Awareness Assessment Battery (MAAB), English Reading Comprehension Assessment (ERCA), and Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) were analysed. Pilot data revealed stable outcomes in morphological awareness and reading comprehension, with positive trends in reading motivation across both groups. Findings will inform educators and curriculum designers on tailoring English instruction to the learners' learning needs, aligning DG approach with digital goals and positioning NG approach for low-tech rural contexts.

Keywords

Morphological instruction, gamified learning, reading comprehension, reading motivation, ESL

1. Background of Study

Across the globe, reading proficiency is facing increasing challenges. The PISA 2022 report revealed declines even in primarily English-speaking nations, reflecting a broader global challenge in maintaining literacy standards (OECD, 2023). In Malaysia, where English is an L2, the nation's proficiency is often overestimated. As evidenced in the PISA 2022 (OECD, 2023), Malaysian 15-year-olds fall behind global peers in reading, Science, and Mathematics. Many learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are frequently deprived of opportunities to advance their learning progressively in the one-size-fits-all learning environment (The World Bank, 2024). To raise standards, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has adopted and adapted the Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR) since 2017. While teachers generally welcomed it, issues such as insufficient resources, classroom management difficulties, cultural factors in textbooks added challenges to its implementation (Paramjit & Mah, 2022). Moreover, explicit morphological instruction is often absent (Badawi, 2019), with ESL textbooks prioritising

communicative competence (Yaccob & Yunus, 2019). However, Ghasemi and Vaez-Dalili (2019) argued that L2 learners are less likely to develop automatic word recognition and hence must consciously focus on morphology. This study addresses these gaps by exploring how MI, delivered through both NG and DG approaches, can improve reading comprehension and motivation among lower secondary LEP learners in Malaysia.

2. Statement of Problem

Despite ongoing initiatives such as the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) and CEFR, Malaysian lower secondary learners continue to demonstrate weak reading skills, as reflected in PISA 2022, where only 42% achieved baseline reading proficiency. Their major challenge is the acquisition of English vocabulary and grammar (Yaccob & Yunus, 2019), an area where morphological instruction (MI) can play a supportive role by equipping learners with strategies to understand word formation, expand vocabulary, and strengthen grammatical awareness. Previous international research has established morphological awareness as a pivotal skill for language and literacy development (Meaux et al., 2020). However, the relationship between morphological awareness, reading comprehension, and reading motivation remains underexplored in the ESL context. Moreover, prior studies on MI in Malaysia have been limited to primary learners (Yap et al., 2020) and mixed-ability upper secondary students (Varatharajoo et al., 2015a, 2015b). This study addresses these gaps by investigating the effects of MI delivered through NG and DG approaches. In addition, it fills a methodological gap by examining how these approaches can enhance both reading comprehension and motivation among LEP learners. Apart from Qiao et al.'s (2023a, 2023b) studies, this is also one of the earliest to incorporate both non-digital and digital gamified elements into MI.

3. Significance of Study

This study advances English language education by addressing critical gaps in research on MI among lower secondary LEP learners in Malaysia. While previous local studies have focused on primary or mixed-ability upper secondary learners, this research uniquely explores MI's effects on morphological awareness, reading comprehension, and motivation within this underserved population. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings have practical suggestions for various stakeholders in English language education. For instance, educators and teachers can use the insights to incorporate effective MI strategies as a differentiation technique to help LEP learners. On a policy level, curriculum developers and policymakers can draw on this study to design more inclusive syllabi and textbooks that incorporate explicit MI elements. Furthermore, publishers may also develop supplementary materials that reinforce morphological concepts in context. By highlighting both DG and NG approaches, this study offers practical solutions to enhance engagement and literacy outcomes.

4. Research Questions

- 1. What are the effects of non-digital gamified (NG) and digital gamified (DG) MI on LEP learners' morphological awareness?
- 2. What are the effects of non-digital gamified (NG) and digital gamified (DG) MI on LEP learners' reading comprehension?

3. What are the effects of non-digital gamified (NG) and digital gamified (DG) MI on LEP learners' reading motivation?

5. Method

This pilot study employed a quasi-experimental design involving 34 lower secondary LEP learners in a Malaysian private school. Two classes of participants (Class 6 and Class 7) were randomly assigned to two experimental groups, NG and DG. The two groups of participants were given explicit MI intervention during their weekly reading lessons over a 3-week period within a 5-week study timeframe. The interventions were implemented by the researcher. Each group's intervention occurred on a different day within the same week. Data collection comprised pre- and post-tests using three instruments: the Morphological Awareness Assessment Battery (MAAB), the English Reading Comprehension Assessment (ERCA), and the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ). Quantitative data assessed measurable changes in participants' morphological awareness (RQ 1), reading comprehension (RQ 2), and reading motivation (RQ 3). They were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential tests (independent and paired-sample t-tests) to measure withinand between-group differences.

6. Findings and Discussion

RQ1: Morphological Awareness

The NG group showed a modest but non-significant gain from pre-test (M = 53.35, SD = 16.58) to post-test (M = 54.18, SD = 14.92), t(16) = 0.56, p = .588. The DG group's mean declined slightly from pre-test (M = 62.35, SD = 17.82) to post-test (M = 61.88, SD = 19.53), t(16) = -0.31, p = .764. An independent-samples t-test on gain scores showed no significant difference between groups, t(32) = 0.60, p = .550. These results suggest that morphological awareness remained largely stable across both interventions, with NG showing a small positive trend. This contrasts with earlier studies (e.g., Qiao et al., 2023a) that reported significant gains from gamified instruction. It might be due to the limited sample size and short intervention period in this pilot. The absence of significant differences indicates that NG activities may help sustain learners' morphological awareness, highlighting the need for a longer-term study with larger samples.

RQ2: Reading Comprehension

The NG group showed a slight decrease from pre-test (M = 25.65, SD = 3.10) to post-test (M = 25.12, SD = 3.90). Similarly, the DG group declined from pre-test (M = 26.76, SD = 4.27) to post-test (M = 25.82, SD = 4.97). Paired-samples t-tests indicated that neither change was statistically significant, NG: t(16) = -0.58, p = .571; DG: t(16) = -1.26, p = .225. These findings suggest that comprehension performance remained largely stable across both groups. While this stability does not show immediate gains, it highlights the challenge of obtaining measurable growth in reading comprehension during a short pilot intervention. This aligns with previous observations that comprehension development often requires longer instructional exposure to demonstrate significant improvements.

RQ3: Reading Motivation

Both groups demonstrated positive trends in motivation. The NG group increased from pretest (M = 114.18, SD = 34.38) to post-test (M = 117.94, SD = 32.72), while the DG group also showed a gain from pre-test (M = 123.88, SD = 25.05) to post-test (M = 126.53, SD = 31.79). Although paired-samples t-tests indicated that these improvements were not statistically significant (NG: t(16) = .79, p = .437; DG: t(16) = .53, p = .603), the upward trends suggest that both types of gamified instruction may enhance learners' motivation to read. This pattern aligns with previous findings (Qiao et al., 2023a; Qiao et al., 2023b) that gamification can foster interest, engagement, and positive attitudes toward language learning.

7. Limitations

This pilot study covered only 3 of 10 actual intervention sessions. The short timeframe may reveal initial effects but not the full or long-term impact of MI; future research could extend the duration and include delayed post-tests. Moreover, it focused on a small, specific population which was Malaysian lower secondary (aged 12 - 13) LEP learners. Hence, the generalisability was limited. Finally, the lack of comparable studies on MI's effects on intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation restricted validation. It highlighted both the originality and caution needed when interpreting results.

8. Conclusion

This pilot study investigated the effects of NG and DG morphological instruction (MI) on lower secondary LEP learners' morphological awareness, reading comprehension, and reading motivation. Findings indicated stable outcomes in morphological awareness and reading comprehension, with modest positive trends in reading motivation. The results suggest that gamification has potential for sustaining learner engagement even over a short intervention period. As an ongoing project, the study emphasises the importance of sample size, intervention duration, and test timing in capturing measurable learning effects. Future research should implement the full intervention, extend instructional periods, and include delayed post-tests to evaluate long-term impact. Despite its preliminary nature, the study contributes to English language education by addressing a research gap in the Malaysian context and by offering insights into how different forms of gamification may be integrated to support literacy development among LEP learners.

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TEACHER'S QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES IN PROMOTING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN PRIMARY ESL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental study examined the effectiveness of four questioning techniques; probing, prompting, wait-time, and reinforcement in enhancing critical thinking skills among pupils in an ESL classroom. Thirteen students participated, and the teacher incorporated these techniques into lessons, with observations documented through reflections, pupils' worksheets, verbal responses, and pre- and post-test scores. Data collection included document analysis, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed through descriptive methods and transcription. The results indicated that prompting was the most effective questioning technique for fostering critical thinking. Additionally, most pupils responded positively to the use of questioning strategies during lessons. The study's findings suggest that using targeted questioning techniques like prompting can significantly promote critical thinking skills and improve student engagement and learning outcomes in ESL environments.

Keywords

Questioning techniques, critical thinking skills, probing, prompting, wait-time, reinforcement

1. Background of Study

This research focused on questioning techniques used by teachers in primary ESL classrooms, aiming to enhance students' critical thinking skills through these methods. Although previous studies have explored various aspects of teacher questioning, this study specifically sought to assess how questioning techniques contribute to developing critical thinking in pupils. In the classroom, questioning serves as a vital tool not only to test students' understanding but also to facilitate active learning and higher-order thinking. The theoretical basis of this research aligns closely with Bloom's Taxonomy, which according to Forehand (2010), it categorizes levels of questioning that can lead to different cognitive responses. The study aimed to determine how each level within Bloom's Taxonomy promotes critical thinking skills, thereby providing insights into effective questioning strategies. Additionally, students' opinions and perceptions regarding the use of questioning techniques were considered important, as their views offer valuable feedback on how questioning impacts their learning experiences. By combining both instructional effectiveness and student perspectives, the research sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of questioning techniques in fostering critical thinking in ESL learners. Ultimately, the study emphasizes that well-designed questioning strategies based on Bloom's Taxonomy can significantly contribute to enhancing critical thinking skills and improving overall classroom engagement.

2. Statement of Problem

This research aligns with Malaysia's National Education Philosophy, which emphasizes holistic development—physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social—aiming to produce well-balanced individuals. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) highlights key attributes for pupils to be globally competitive, including knowledge, thinking skills, leadership, bilingual proficiency, ethics, spirituality, and national identity, all supporting 21st-century learning goals. Despite these efforts, some rural pupils still struggle to develop critical thinking and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), even with clear factual stimuli. According to Mustaffa et al. (2009), classroom interactions, ideally two-way and student-centered, are essential for fostering active participation and encouraging pupils to think critically and creatively. However, many teachers lack knowledge of effective questioning techniques and tend to ask questions merely to gain attention or confirm known facts, which does not promote deeper understanding or critical thinking. Proper use of Bloom's Taxonomy to vary question levels can help retain knowledge, expand pupils' schemas, and develop critical and creative thinking. The researcher aims to investigate the reasons behind these challenges, focusing on identifying suitable questioning techniques and understanding pupils' perceptions of their effectiveness in promoting critical thinking in the classroom. The goal is to improve instructional strategies that can better foster holistic development and critical thinking skills among pupils.

3. Significance of Study

This research explored the link between teacher questioning techniques and the development of pupils' critical thinking skills, aiming to add to existing knowledge. Initially, many teachers, including the researcher, viewed questioning as a way to check students' attention and understanding, often focusing on familiar topics to evoke correct answers in a low-pressure setting. However, questions should range from lower to higher order to stimulate critical thinking beyond students' current knowledge. Noor et al. (2012) stated that developing effective questioning skills requires practice, self-awareness, active listening, and engaging with students' responses, even when unexpected. Integrating critical thinking into daily instruction is essential to prepare students for academic success, college, careers, and real-life challenges. These skills help students reason effectively, make rational judgments, and solve problems independently. The study emphasizes that well-designed questioning techniques play a vital role in fostering critical thinking, which is crucial for students' holistic development and adaptability in an increasingly complex world.

4. Research Questions

- i. Which types of questioning techniques are effective in promoting critical thinking skills among pupils in an ESL classroom?
- ii. What are the pupils' views on the questioning techniques used by the teacher in an ESL classroom?

5. Method

This research employs various research instruments primarily administered by the researcher, emphasizing a qualitative approach. Document analysis involves examining teacher lesson plans, the Year 5 DSKP curriculum, and students' worksheets to gather background information and monitor classroom practices. Pre-test and post-test assessments using reading comprehension questions evaluate students' critical thinking development before and after instructional interventions. Semi-structured interviews with students will capture their perspectives on questioning techniques, providing qualitative insights into their experiences and opinions. Questionnaires are also used to gather students' views anonymously, accommodating those less comfortable with verbal responses. Data analysis includes thematic analysis for qualitative data, transcribing interviews into verbatim and coding themes, and descriptive analysis for quantitative data, comparing pre- and post-test scores and analyzing questionnaire responses. Additionally, data triangulation enhances credibility by combining multiple data sources and analytical methods, ensuring comprehensive validation of findings. Overall, the multi-instrument approach aims to assess both the effectiveness of questioning techniques in fostering critical thinking and students' perceptions, offering a holistic understanding of classroom dynamics and instructional impact.

6. Findings and Discussion

This research explored the impact of questioning techniques in developing students' critical thinking skills in an ESL classroom. Data analysis revealed that effective questioning, especially prompting techniques, significantly enhanced student engagement and understanding. Teachers must master questioning strategies to promote higher-order thinking, with prompting being particularly effective as it provides hints and scaffolding, fostering student confidence and independence. Conversely, probing questions sometimes confused students, while wait-time was often neglected by teachers, hindering deeper reflection. External rewards like praise and certificates increased participation but sometimes distracted from critical thinking. The study found prompting techniques resulted in the highest student success rates, especially for students with low English proficiency, supporting previous research by Rouse et al. (2014). Overall, students held positive views towards the questioning methods, appreciating the active learning and motivation it provided. The findings suggest that systematic use of prompting and reinforcement questioning techniques effectively promotes critical thinking. The research confirms that well-applied questioning strategies can enhance ESL teaching, encouraging student participation, responsibility, and higher cognitive engagement, ultimately fostering critical thinking skills in the classroom.

7. Limitations

This study incorporated four questioning techniques due to time constraints, although many techniques exist. The original plan was to include Year 6 pupils, believed to have better critical thinking skills, but permission was denied due to other school programs. Therefore, Year 5 pupils were selected as participants. In this school, pupils vary in English proficiency, but the study focused on those with good English skills to better develop critical thinking. Since most participants had weaker English skills, the research results may not fully reflect the potential of higher proficiency students.

8. Conclusion

This study investigated whether questioning techniques promote critical thinking among ESL pupils, addressing two key questions: which technique is most effective and pupils' views on these methods. Data were collected through document analysis, pre- and post-tests, questionnaires, and interviews, and analyzed via thematic and descriptive methods. The findings indicated that the questioning techniques used during eight lessons improved pupils' critical thinking, with positive feedback from participants. The study recommends future research to incorporate a broader range of questioning techniques to identify the most effective methods. Conducting larger-scale studies across multiple schools and districts can provide more generalized results. Additionally, focusing separately on verbal or written questioning patterns could offer deeper insights into their roles in developing critical thinking. Exploring different questioning patterns during classroom sessions may also enhance understanding of the strategies best to foster pupils' critical thinking skills in ESL settings.

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CHAT2COMPREHEND: AN AI-BASED APPROACH TO SUPPORT READING COMPREHENSION IN PRIMARY ESL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

The study investigates a practical approach to improving reading comprehension among lower-proficiency Year 6 pupils at SK Tawaiyari, Lahad Datu. Initial observations revealed that these pupils often remained passive and disengaged during lessons, particularly during text discussion activities, and were unable to respond effectively to comprehension questions. A preliminary assessment involving 10 Year 6 pupil s, consisting of 3 boys and 7 girls, at SK Tawaiyari, Lahad Datu supported these observations. To address this, the *Chat2Comprehend* method was introduced, using an Al tool to translate and simplify texts, while encouraging classroom engagement. Over four weeks, data was collected through comprehension tasks, checklists, and interviews. Findings showed that all pupils demonstrated improvement in answering comprehension questions and participated more actively during lessons. This suggests that *Chat2Comprehend* is an effective and adaptable method to enhance reading comprehension and classroom interaction.

Keywords

Al in education, reading comprehension, primary ESL learners, low-proficiency pupils

1. Background of Study

In Malaysia, the skills of reading in the English language tends to be one of the most challenging skills for lower-proficiency pupils, particularly those in rural areas. This difficulty often stems from limited exposure to the English language and the lack of opportunities to use it in their everyday lives (Sumathi, 2023). Additionally, it is also due to limited vocabulary and background knowledge (Smith et al., 2021). This is worrying as reading comprehension is one of the major keys to academic success across subjects. Additionally, with the recent integration of the CEFR-aligned curriculum in Malaysia, the need for more accessible and engaging approaches to teaching reading has grown. Thus, Chat2Comprehend, an innovative method designed to address this issue is developed by integrating ChatGPT. ChatGPT is a chatbot developed using extensive text data and refined to generate human-like conversational responses (Partha, 2023). The method aims to scaffold pupils' understanding through guided questioning, peer collaboration, and digital engagement. This study explores the impact of this method on improving reading comprehension among Year 6 lower-proficiency pupils.

2. Problem Statement

Chat2Comprehend focuses on overcoming the issue of poor reading comprehension skills among lower-proficiency pupils in the English Language classroom. Observations revealed

that a significant number of Year 6 pupils with CEFR Performance Level (PL) 3 and below in the skills of reading, struggled to understand basic texts, participate in discussions, or answer comprehension questions meaningfully. This issue particularly concerns pupils living in rural areas in Lahad Datu, who have limited exposure to English language outside the classroom. The lack of engagement and poor comprehension hinder their overall academic progress and reduce their confidence in language learning (Dodi & Khairul, 2020). A negligence to this issue could contribute to declining literacy development, persistent low academic performance, and a loss of interest in learning. Therefore, this study narrows its focus to exploring the effectiveness of the method in supporting and improving reading comprehension among lower-proficiency pupils.

3. Significance of Study

The findings of this study offer insights into how the AI-integrated method can be used to support reading comprehension in the ESL classroom, specifically among lower-proficiency learners. By demonstrating improved pupil participation and understanding, this study contributes to evidence-based practices that align with Malaysia's aim in integrating digital literacy in education. Additionally, it encourages educators to adopt technology as a scaffold for language learning, particularly in contexts where pupils face difficulties with text-based instruction. Furthermore, the study also shows that using different methods like *Chat2Comprehend* can help support learners with different ability levels, creating a classroom that is more inclusive and engaging for everyone.

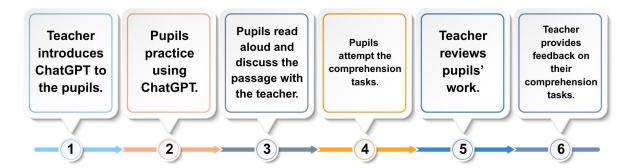
4. Research Questions

- 1. To what extent is the effectiveness of *Chat2Comprehend* in improving pupils' reading comprehension?
- 2. How do pupils respond to the use of Chat2Comprehend during English lessons?
- 3. What challenges are observed when using *Chat2Comprehend* in a rural-school classroom?

5. Method

Diagram 1

Step-by-step implementation of Chat2Comprehend



This study involved 10 Year 6 pupils with reading levels of PL 3 and below in their classroom assessment. A pre-assessment and post-assessment were conducted using the same reading text to measure improvement in comprehension. During the four-week implementation, pupils applied the *Chat2Comprehend* method by first translating or simplifying the reading text. Then, discussions on the main ideas of the texts were done together with the teacher before they answered comprehension questions based on the text passage. Observations were recorded, and short interviews were conducted to collect pupils' responses about the lessons. Data from assessments, classroom observations, and interviews were analysed to see patterns and themes. Thematic analysis was used to understand the pupils' feedback, while assessment scores helped show improvement.

6. Findings and Discussion

Figure 1

Pupils' Comprehension Task Achievements

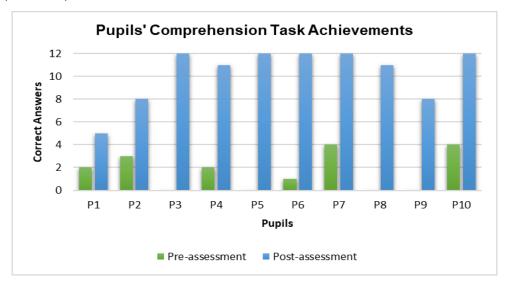


Figure 2

Pupils' CEFR Reading Performance Levels

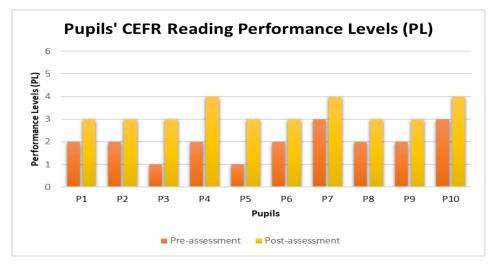


Table 1

Thematic Analysis on the Interview Responses

Theme	Exemplary Quotes	Findings
Improved Understanding	"I can understand easily." (P7)	Pupils found reading texts easier to understand after using Chat2Comprehend.
Confidence and Participation	"I feel more confident to answer because I understand better." (P4)	Pupils felt more confident and were more willing to participate in comprehension activities.
Ease of Use	"I can easily find the meanings and answers." (P1)	Most pupils found the tool simple and helpful after initial training.
Initial Challenges	"I took a long time to type the paragraph." (P2)	Some pupils struggled with typing or were unfamiliar with using digital tools.
Motivation and Enjoyment	"It makes reading fun and easy." (P9)	Pupils showed increased interest and motivation in reading.

According to the results shown in Figure 1, all 10 pupils demonstrated improvement in answering the comprehension questions. Consistently, pupils' PL have also increased as shown in Figure 2. The parallel rise in both measures indicates that the method has enhanced pupils' reading comprehension skills. Additionally, 8 out of 10 pupils showed increased active participation in classroom discussions. Pupils were more confident in expressing their answers after integrating *Chat2Comprehend* into lessons. Furthermore, Table 1 demonstrates that the interview responses revealed that most pupils felt the method improved their understanding of difficult words and increased their confidence to work independently. These findings have demonstrated that this method not only helped with reading comprehension but also played a role in improving classroom behaviour, motivation, and self-confidence. Pupils' feedback was analysed thematically, and assessment scores were used to demonstrate learning improvement. However, some pupils still face challenges in composing texts in English, indicating that further time is required to develop digital competency.

7. Limitations

Based on the findings of this study, several limitations were observed. Firstly, this study was limited by the small sample size. Results of this method may be strengthened with a larger sample size. Next, the implementation period of this study was relatively short, spanning only four weeks. A longer implementation period could provide a clearer picture of how consistent use of *Chat2Comprehend* affects reading comprehension over time.

Additionally, shared devices in group settings may have affected individual engagement, making it difficult to isolate the method's impact on each pupil's performance.

8. Conclusion

Chat2Comprehend provides a promising method for improving reading comprehension among lower-proficiency pupils through the combined use of digital tools and teacher guidance. The encouraging outcomes suggest that integrating the AI tool in the classroom can help bridge learning gaps, especially in rural schools. Future research could extend its application to other school subjects and involve larger groups of pupils to examine scalability and long-term impact. As this is part of an ongoing innovative method, there is still room for improvement, particularly in refining the approach and adapting it to different learning contexts. Thus, extending the implementation period may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of consistent *Chat2Comprehend* use on reading comprehension.

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ACTIVATING EFL TEACHER AGENCY TO DEVELOP TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM THROUGH CONTEXTUALIZED REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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Abstract

This study explores the role of EFL teacher agency in fostering teacher professionalism through the implementation of contextualized reflective practice. Drawing on qualitative data from classroom observations, focus group discussion, and semi-structured interviews with four EFL secondary teachers, the study examines how teachers exercise agency in responding to their specific teaching contexts. Findings reveal that when teachers engage in reflective practice that is grounded in their own teaching realities, such as students' needs, institutional policies, and cultural norms, they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership over their professional development. This contextualized reflective practice enables teachers to critically evaluate their instructional practices, adapt strategies to meet learners' needs, and pursue continuous improvement. The study concludes that activating teacher agency through reflective practice not only enhances individual teacher growth but also contributes to building a sustainable culture of professionalism within EFL communities. Implications for teacher education and in-service training programs are also discussed, highlighting the importance of empowering teachers as active agents in their professional journeys.

Keywords

EFL teacher agency, teacher professional development, contextualized reflective practice

1. Background of Study

Over the last decade, the role of teachers' agency on teacher professional development has been growing significantly as a subject of study. The main focus of the studies is elevating teaching performance to sustain teachers' awareness of their skills and knowledge as agent of change (Ahmad & Shah, 2022; Lem, 2024). The fact that maintaining teachers' agency is crucial, teachers as a part of its system must ensure that they meet the criteria to conduct highly complex instructional settings because agency is essential when addressing pedagogical challenge. This criteria can be reflected through teachers as an actor by involving their agency to the process of teaching for further improvement. Teachers must be aware of their active and agentic role as change agents in professional development (Insulander et al., 2019; Imants & Wall, 2020). Although it seems difficult to interpret, the factual use and implication of this agency remains underpinned by the government in order to develop teachers' skills and professionalism. Thus, this study emphasized on the undertaking of agency by EFL teachers in a part of Indonesia as an effort for developing their

professional development. In this study, the agency was exercised through the implementation of contextualized reflective practice.

2. Statement of Problem

Teacher agency has become an essential concept in sustaining professional development, as it positions teachers as active agents of change in their instructional practices (Ahmad & Shah, 2022; Cong-Lem, 2024). However, the enactment of agency in practice remains problematic. Many teachers encounter challenges due to structural, institutional, and pedagogical constraints, which limit their ability to fully exercise their professional autonomy (Insulander et al., 2019; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020). In the Indonesian EFL context, teachers are expected to manage complex classroom demands while continuously improving their professional skills, yet the means to strengthen their agency are not always clear or accessible.

Although government initiatives emphasize the importance of teacher professionalism, practical strategies that enable teachers to activate and sustain agency in everyday teaching are still limited. Contextualized reflective practice offers a promising approach by encouraging teachers to critically analyze their own teaching and make informed adjustments. Nevertheless, there is still little empirical evidence on how EFL teachers in Indonesia enact agency through such reflective practices. This gap raises the problem of how teacher agency can be fostered to enhance professional development in local EFL contexts.

3. Significance of Study

This study is significant in both theory and practice. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on teacher agency by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian EFL context, which is still underexplored. By focusing on contextualized reflective practice, it highlights how agency can be enacted as a dynamic process that supports teachers' professional development. Practically, the study offers insights for EFL teachers on how reflective practices can strengthen their agency in managing instructional challenges and improving pedagogy. It also provides guidance for teacher educators and institutions to design professional development programs that are more teacher-driven rather than top-down. At the policy level, the findings may inform initiatives aimed at fostering teacher professionalism by emphasizing the need to create spaces where teachers can exercise agency meaningfully. In this way, the study bridges the gap between policy expectations and classroom realities.

4. Research Questions

- a. What are EFL teachers' experiences in conducting teacher agency through contextualized reflective practice?
- b. To what extent does teacher agency develop teacher professionalism?

5. Method

Data were amassed through classroom observation, focus group discussions, and semistructured interviews. During the classroom observation, which involved four exemplary EFL teachers from distinct secondary schools, observers meticulously noted and documented any occurrences during the teaching and learning process. Focus group discussions were conducted both prior to and subsequent to the instructional activities, while the interviews were held at the conclusion of the agency process.

The three sets of data collected through different data collection methods were all in qualitative form. Thus, thematic analysis was used in both inductive and deductive method. Emerging themes became the sub-headings of the findings and discussion section and the main focus of the analysis.

6. Findings and Discussion

All of the four EFL teachers confessed that they never experienced being involved in agency before this study was conducted with them. The four teachers volunteered to be the model teachers at their own school with their own students and to be involved in the process of conducting contextualized reflective practice with their colleagues who acted as their observers. The process of reflective practice was undertaken before and after the class.

While implementing reflective practice was not a new activity to them, sharing how they implemented the contextualized reflective practice with their colleagues in a larger forum was a totally new and fruitful experience for them. To many of their peer teachers, the contextualized reflective practice was a new knowledge and skill. The four teachers' presence in the forum provided positive insights and generated enthusiasm among the audience, leading to many questions raised from the colleagues.

Activating teacher agency did not only develop the EFL teacher professionalism who exercised it as shown when one of them is invited the model again at another school project, but also influenced other teachers to have the sense of teacher agency.

7. Limitations

If longer time was permitted to conduct the study, more teachers could have been involved and more agency could have been exercised. The more the sense of agency was gained by the teachers, the more professional they become. That way, deeper and robust data would have been able to be gathered.

8. Conclusion

The study concludes that activating teacher agency through reflective practice not only enhances individual teacher growth but also contributes to building a sustainable culture of professionalism within EFL communities. While the study only involved four EFL teachers from four secondary schools in activating teacher agency limited to the practice of contextualized reflective practice, the implications of teacher agency should be able to

impact the other teaching methods and approaches. Sustainable and wider impact of the practice of teacher agency will be able to develop professionalism among the wider scope of EFL teachers in West Sumatra, Indonesia.

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EMPOWERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH DIGITAL CREATIVITY: THE USE OF CANVA FOR COMIC CREATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This study investigates how English language learning is empowered through digital creativity, particularly by utilizing Canva for comic creation. Amidst the rapidly evolving digital learning, the integration of technology in visual storytelling and design platforms, like Canva, into language instruction offers innovative ways to engage students in language learning. The research examines how Canva-based comic creation affect students' motivation and engagement in English learning as well as to see the students' perceptions on it. Qualitative-descriptive research was administered to explore insights into the issues. Data collection tools include students' observations, and semi-structured interviews. The research findings revealed that adopting Canva as a multimodal storytelling tool effectively enhances students' motivation, engagement, and language development while also fostering digital literacy. Generally, students believed that creating comics with Canva is a fun, inspiring, and useful way to learn English. They stated that they had demonstrated improvements in their confidence in using English, as well as enhanced creativity and enthusiasm for learning. This study is expected to contribute to growing field of study on digital tools in language education, foregrounding the pedagogical potential of integrating visual literacy with language learning.

Keywords

English language learning, digital creativity, Canva, comic

1. Background of Study

The incorporation of technology into language instruction in this era has fundamentally altered the way English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is taught and learnt. Educators are increasingly looking for novel strategies that combine language learning with creative digital technologies to promote student engagement, autonomy, and communicative competence. One such method is to leverage digital storytelling platforms like Canva to create educational materials that stimulate creativity and active engagement, interest, motivation, and confidence (Larasati, 2022; Sugiarni et al., 2024; Widiarti & Jamilah, 2024). Digital storytelling, particularly comic creation through Canva, provides a beneficial dynamic and multimodal way to improve foreign language skills (Alemi et al., 2022), which include both textual and visual features to convey meaning, to improve language and storytelling skills. Canva for Education is one of the platforms which is provided by the

Indonesian government for all students and educators for free. It is an online graphic design tool which has developed as a user-friendly platform that enables students to create professional-looking comics with huge template library for classroom practice. Upon these potential matters, this study looks into incorporating Canva-based comic projects to empower English language learning.

2. Statement of Problem

Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) schools still mostly use traditional, text-based methods, which may not fully engage students or accommodate their various learning styles. Students usually find it difficult to stay engaged, express ideas creatively, and use language skills in genuine and meaningful ways in these kinds of circumstances. Digital technologies present new opportunities for incorporating creativity into language learning as a result of the quick development of educational technology. By combining textual and visual elements with technology, like creating comics on digital platform, studies have shown to increase digital creativity and engagement among students in EFL classroom. Canva is one of the online platforms to empower this matter. The utilization of Canva to create comics may be effectively incorporated into classroom instruction to boost motivation, foster digital creativity, and enhance students' language proficiency.

This disparity poses important queries dealing with how Canva-based comic creation affect students' motivation and engagement in the English learning process as well as to see the students' perceptions of it. Without doing thorough research, teachers run the risk of misusing or underutilizing these resources, missing out on their potential to revolutionize EFL instruction.

3. Significance of Study

The findings of this study significantly contribute to many stakeholders in the field of English language education, especially in settings where English is taught as a foreign language. The study can provide EFL students with an innovative and pleasant medium for expressing ideas and honing language skills. Students can improve their vocabulary, grammar, and storytelling skills while also developing their creativity and self-confidence by creating comics with Canva. While for instructors, the study provides a practical, technology-enhanced approach to incorporating creativity into language training. Teachers can use Canva to create comics that promote active engagement, collaboration, and realistic language use. The findings of this study may help teachers conduct comparable technology-based projects, broadening their repertoire of teaching approaches and encouraging more student-centered learning settings.

4. Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How does Canva-based comic creation affect students' motivation and engagement in the English learning process?

2. What are the students' perceptions of using Canva for comic creation as a learning tool in the EFL classroom?

5. Method

This study used a qualitative-descriptive research approach to investigate the use of Canva-based comic production in EFL classrooms and its potential to improve English language acquisition. The design was chosen to provide detailed insights into students' processes, experiences, and views of using digital creativity tools for language acquisition. The data was acquired using the following instruments: (1) Observation Checklist - to document students' participation, engagement, and interaction throughout Canva-based comic creation activities; (2) Semi-structured interviews - to capture students' perceptions, challenges, and experiences with Canva for comic creation.

Qualitative insights, interaction patterns, and instances of cooperative behavior were used to interpret the observational data. This gave a clear picture of how the students participated in the learning process. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed why specific behaviors were listed on the observation checklist.

6. Findings and Discussion

This study looked into how combining digital creativity and language instruction using Canva-based comic creation can enhance English language learning in EFL classrooms. The findings show that adopting Canva as a multimodal storytelling tool effectively enhances students' motivation, engagement, and language development while also fostering collaboration and digital literacy. Students demonstrated their involvement in the learning process, showed greater enthusiasm, persistence, and ownership of their work. Compared to traditional learning process, the activity fosters independence, teamwork, and confidence, which leads to richer involvement and more consistent effort. In addition, students believed that creating comics with Canva is a fun, inspiring, and useful way to learn English. Generally, the students pointed out that they demonstrated improvement in their confidence in using English, enhanced creativity, and greater enthusiasm for learning particularly in comic creation. The findings are in line with several prior research (Sari et al., 2023; Damayanti & Rakhmawati, 2023; Putri & Rizal, 2024).

Overall, Canva-based comic creation proves to be an effective and motivating pedagogical approach for EFL learners. Future research should explore long-term impacts, examine effects across different proficiency levels, and investigate how this might further enhance speaking and pronunciation skills.

7. Limitations

This study attempts to provide significant insights on the integration of Canva-based comic creation in the EFL classroom. Some limitations must be acknowledged. The study included a small number of individuals from a certain educational level and institution. As a result, the findings may not be fully applicable to all EFL environments. Moreover, the activity's effectiveness was dependent on the availability of gadgets, reliable internet access, and students' familiarity with technologies. Thus, technical issues could have

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influenced certain participation and output quality. Other areas of English learning were not directly addressed and hence fall outside the scope of this study.

8. Conclusion

This study examined how digital creativity and language instruction through Canva-based comic creation can enhance English language learning in EFL classrooms. The results show that using Canva as a multimodal storytelling tool promotes teamwork and digital literacy while also successfully increasing students' motivation, engagement, and language development. Students demonstrated that they were more actively involved in the learning process. Students believe that creating comics with Canva is a fun, inspiring, and useful way to learn English. They showed improvements in their confidence in using English, enhanced creativity, and enthusiasm for learning. Notwithstanding the advantages, the study also noted several drawbacks, such as the number and scope of study, technological difficulties, and students' familiarity to the digital technology. Future research may explore further to reveal more extended findings.

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VOCAB BEST PRO APPLICATIONS ENRICH PUPILS' VOCABULARY

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Abstract

This innovation project aimed to improve the vocabulary knowledge of Year 3 students, strengthen their ability to spell and use English words correctly, and encourage them to become more active and independent learners. The study involved 65 students who were beginners in English and had very limited vocabulary. To address this challenge, an innovation called Vocab Best Pro Apps (Version 2) was introduced. The app combined three applications Vocab Fun, Vocab Fabulous, and Vocab Fantastic which provided flashcards, interactive activities, concise summaries, and a reward system to motivate learners. It was made available in both APK and Windows formats. Data collection was carried out through formative tests, observation checklists, and questionnaires. The findings revealed that the apps significantly improved students' vocabulary performance, boosted their engagement and motivation, and enhanced their digital literacy. The updated version, with improved structure and features, provided a more effective and enjoyable learning experience.

Keywords

Vocabulary, enrichment, English learners, gamified learning, Vocab Best Pro

1. Background of Study

The project was conducted at Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Titingan, involving 65 Year 3 students who were beginners in learning English. Observations revealed that these students had very limited vocabulary, which affected their ability to read, write, and communicate effectively in English. Their lack of exposure and confidence in using English vocabulary called for an engaging and structured learning approach. In response to this issue, the Vocab Best application was introduced as an intervention to support vocabulary development through interactive and fun learning experiences.

Based on the implementation of Vocab Best Apps, improvements were made to the existing application, resulting in the upgraded version called Vocab Best Pro Apps. Enhancements included the ability to reset player progress, the addition of more diverse and interactive activities, and the introduction of more complex games beyond basic quizzes. These improvements aimed to increase student engagement and provide a more enjoyable and effective vocabulary learning experience.

2. Statement of Problem

Despite growing interest in vocabulary learning via mobile apps, recent studies reveal important limitations in aspects such as self-regulation, engagement, and motivation.

Chen et al. (2024) developed a self-regulated vocabulary learning mobile application that allowed primary EFL students to set goals and monitor their learning. The results showed significant gains in both achievement and motivation, while also highlighting the need for features that support autonomy in vocabulary learning. Similarly, Teymouri (2024) found that mobile-assisted vocabulary apps that use algorithmic review prompts enhance learner independence and reduce reliance on instructor-led study routines.

However, many existing apps lack engaging structures, reward systems, and diversified interactive modules that can sustain motivation, especially among young beginners. There is a gap in research regarding how structured gamified modules, combined with rewards and varied content formats (flashcards, activities, summaries), can promote active, independent learning while enriching vocabulary. Our project addresses this gap by implementing Vocab Best Pro Apps (Version 2), a gamified, multi-module tool designed for beginner Year 3 learners, targeting vocabulary enrichment, engagement, independent learning, and digitally enhanced instruction.

3. Significance of Study

This project is significant as it addresses the vocabulary gap among beginner English learners in primary school. By introducing an engaging digital tool which is Vocab Best Pro, the study offers an innovative approach to help students build their vocabulary in a fun, interactive, and structured way. The improvements made in the second version, such as the ability to reset player progress, diverse activities, and more challenging games, cater to various learning styles and increase student motivation. The findings from this study can serve as a useful reference for English teachers seeking effective methods to support vocabulary acquisition among young learners.

4. Research Questions

- 1. Do Vocab Best Pro Apps help pupils to memorize the vocabulary?
- 2. Do Vocab Best Pro Apps help pupils to become active and independent learners?

5. Method

The project used three main data collection methods: document analysis, observations, and questionnaires. For document analysis, formative tests were given to assess students' vocabulary before (Pre-Test) and after (Post-Test) the intervention. Each test contained about 50 questions of three types: filling in blanks to complete a word (e.g., a_ana → banana), filling in blanks to complete a sentence (e.g., I have a __), and rearranging words to form correct sentences (e.g., ball / I / play / the → I play the ball). These tests helped identify areas where students struggled in vocabulary and sentence construction.

Observations were done using a checklist to monitor students' engagement and participation during the activities. This helped the researcher note changes in behavior and involvement while using the innovation. Questionnaires were also given through survey

forms to collect students' feedback on their experience with the Vocab Best Pro applications. The survey included six main questions to capture their views on the tool. An additional survey was also conducted to gather feedback on whether the project improved students' digital literacy. The implementation process had five stages: Pre-Test, Implementation of the Innovation, Post-Test, Survey Session, and Discussion and Conclusion. This structured process measured effectiveness through test results and feedback.

6. Findings and Discussion

The findings clearly show that the use of Vocab Best Pro Apps has significantly improved pupils' performance, motivation, and digital literacy compared to the traditional Chalk and Talk method. Firstly, pupils' grammar performance improved based on pre- and post-test results. The number of students achieving Grade A (80–100%) rose from 11 to 30, while those in Grade B (60–79%) increased from 15 to 26. Meanwhile, the number of students in Grade C (50–59%) dropped from 29 to 6, and Grade D (30–49%) reduced from 10 to 3, proving a strong positive impact on weaker learners.

Secondly, pupils' engagement and motivation also showed clear progress. Active participation increased from 28 to 61 students, interest and enjoyment rose from 24 to 63, and perseverance in completing tasks doubled from 30 to 60. More pupils responded positively to instant feedback (22 to 58) and were motivated by rewards (19 to 62). Thirdly, the app enhanced digital literacy. Almost all respondents (98.5%) agreed they became more skilled in using digital tools, while 96.9% reported confidence in learning independently through the platform. In conclusion, Vocab Best Pro Apps successfully enriched vocabulary learning, boosted pupils' academic achievement, and strengthened their digital literacy.

7. Limitations

Although the Vocab Best Pro Apps project showed positive outcomes, several limitations were identified. The study was limited to a small group of 65 Year 3 students, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to wider contexts. The participants were beginners in English, so the results may not reflect the needs of more advanced learners. Technical issues, such as limited access to devices, and the longer time required to conduct the project also posed as challenges during the implementation. In addition, the project only measured short-term improvements, without exploring the long-term impact on students' vocabulary retention and independent learning skills.

8. Conclusion

The findings of this project demonstrate that the Vocab Best Pro Apps (Version 2) successfully enriched Year 3 students' vocabulary knowledge, improved their spelling and word usage, and encouraged them to become more active and independent learners. The integration of flashcards, interactive tasks, concise summaries, and a reward system proved effective in increasing students' motivation, confidence, and engagement. Furthermore, the application enhanced digital literacy by exposing students to learning

through technology. However, to strengthen its impact, future projects should involve a larger and more diverse group of students to ensure broader applicability. Long-term studies are also recommended to measure vocabulary retention and continuous independent learning. In addition, further improvements to the app could include more advanced vocabulary levels, voice features for pronunciation practice, and adaptive learning functions to suit individual needs. Collaboration with teachers and parents is also encouraged to provide consistent support and maximize learning outcomes.

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RESISTING ALGORITHMIC NATIVE-SPEAKERISM: PROMPT DESIGN FOR LEARNER AGENCY IN EAL WRITING

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Abstract

The study underscores the critical role of Large Language Models (LLMs) in higher education, particularly for English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, by examining the ideological implications of their integration. It introduces the concept of "algorithmic native-speakerism," where AI systems promote a standardized form of English, potentially impacting linguistic diversity and students' language perceptions. The research employs a qualitative analysis of five sample LLM prompts, using a two-step method: rhetorical deconstruction and assessment against pedagogical dimensions via a Likert scale. Findings reveal that prompts framing AI as an "expert writer" reinforce native-speakerist norms, while those framing AI as a "mentor" with constraints foster learner autonomy. The study advocates for a critical approach to AI use in education to preserve linguistic diversity and enhance learning experiences.

Keywords

Algorithmic native-speakerism, prompt engineering; LLMs, EAL writing

1. Background of Study

The 21st-century educational landscape is being reshaped by the proliferation of Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, which have become fixtures in the academic toolkits of millions (Dwivedi et al., 2023). For students learning English as an Additional Language (EAL), LLMs offer the promise of a perpetually available and seemingly non-judgmental language tutor (Kohnke, 2022). However, this human-Al interaction is not ideologically neutral. The feedback an LLM provides is a statistical reflection of its biased training data, which over-represents standardized, Western-centric forms of English (Bender et al., 2021). This study investigates this problem through the concept of algorithmic native-speakerism—the operationalization of native-speakerist ideology through automated systems that present a dominant form of English as objectively correct. This is a critical issue as the Al's perceived objectivity can reinforce harmful linguistic hierarchies rooted in native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006) and marginalize the learner agency of students. The prompt itself becomes a critical site where this ideological negotiation takes place.

2. Statement of Problem

For decades, scholars in applied linguistics have worked to dismantle the harmful ideology of "native-speakerism" and the hegemony of a single "Standard English". However, these hard-won battles are now being re-fought on a new, digital frontier where the biases once

embodied by human gatekeepers are being encoded and amplified by algorithms. While universities are rapidly creating AI literacy guides for students, there is a gap in understanding how the recommended prompts themselves function as sites of ideological negotiation. Recent literature has identified the need for critical AI literacy, but less attention has been paid to the specific rhetorical strategies within prompts that can either reproduce or resist dominant language ideologies. The danger is that without critical intervention, the student-LLM interaction can function as a powerful, personalized echo chamber for linguistic bias, where a student's belief in a single "correct" standard is constantly reinforced by the LLM's output. This study addresses this gap by deconstructing the language of university-provided prompts to analyze how they shape the student-AI relationship and either uphold or challenge the tenets of algorithmic native-speakerism.

3. Significance of Study

The findings of this study contribute to advancing English language education by providing a critical framework for evaluating and designing AI interactions. For classroom practice, it moves the conversation beyond functional "prompt engineering" towards a critical AI literacy, offering concrete examples of "prompts of agency" that educators can use to foster metacognition and preserve students' authorial voices. This research directly impacts policy decisions by providing a clear rationale for why universities and writing centers should curate and recommend prompts that are pedagogically sound and ideologically aware, rather than those that simply default to a corrective or standardizing function. By making the ideological stakes of prompt design visible, this study helps practitioners guide the ethical and effective integration of LLM in a way that empowers, rather than subordinates, EAL writers.

4. Research Questions

- 1. How do university-provided AI prompts for academic writing reflect competing ideologies of native-speakerism and learner autonomy?
- 2. What specific rhetorical strategies (e.g., persona assignment, constraints) are used within these prompts to enact these ideologies?

5. Method

To investigate the manifestation of competing ideologies in LLM prompts, a qualitative analysis of university-recommended prompts was conducted. A purposive sample of five representative prompts was collected from publicly accessible AI literacy guides based on their relevance to the writing revision stage, institutional endorsement, and rhetorical variety. The analysis involved a two-step process. First, a qualitative deconstruction of each prompt was performed, informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This step focused on identifying and interpreting key rhetorical strategies, including the specific persona assigned to the AI (e.g., "expert writer"), the commands and constraints used to define the task (e.g., "improve my text," "Do not rewrite"), and the overall framing of the interaction (dialogic vs. transactional). Second, the insights from this deconstruction were systematized by grading each prompt using a 5-point Likert scale

across five pedagogical dimensions: Al Authority, Student Agency, Dialogic Process, Prescriptivism, and Student Cognitive Load. This process translated the qualitative interpretations into a comparable, quantitative format, allowing for the visualization of each prompt's ideological leaning.

6. Findings and Discussion

The analysis confirms that prompt design is a site of ideological negotiation, revealing two distinct clusters: Prompts of Subordination and Prompts of Agency. Prompts of subordination contest the assumption of AI as a neutral tool by actively reproducing native-speakerist norms. For example, the "Expert Writer" prompt assigns the AI maximum authority and focuses on "correctness," positioning the student as a novice with a deficient product. This creates a transactional correction flow, where the student learns what to change but not why, reinforcing a deficit view and an echo chamber of correctness.

In contrast, prompts of agency confirm that strategic design can resist these hegemonic norms. The Friendly Mentor and Constrained Editor prompts use collaborative personas and powerful negative constraints like "Do not rewrite the text." These strategies fundamentally alter the power dynamic, forcing the AI into an advisory role. This creates a dialogic learning loop where the student must reflect, evaluate suggestions, and retain ultimate authorial control. This approach empowers students, challenges the AI's default prescriptivism, and requires a higher degree of metacognitive labor, which is itself a valuable pedagogical exercise.

7. Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is the small, purposive sample size of five prompts. While chosen for their representative and rhetorical variety, they cannot be considered a comprehensive survey of all university-provided AI guidance. The findings are therefore illustrative and theoretical rather than statistically generalizable. Furthermore, the analysis focuses solely on the text of the prompts themselves, not on their real-world application by students or the actual output generated by LLMs in response. Future empirical research is needed to validate how these prompts function in practice with diverse student populations.

8. Conclusion

This study concludes that the design of an AI prompt is a powerful act of either resistance against or reproduction of hegemonic linguistic norms. Simple, corrective prompts create an "echo chamber" that reinforces native-speakerist hierarchies, while complex, dialogic prompts empower students to retain authorial control. The findings point to the urgent need for a pedagogical framework of critical AI literacy that moves beyond functional instructions to empower students to critically analyze and control their interactions with AI. For future research, this study opens avenues for longitudinal studies on the effects of sustained LLM use on student writing, large-scale analyses of LLM outputs, and action research projects to implement and evaluate critical AI literacy curricula in real-world classrooms.

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READY TO SPEAK? EXPLORING ESL STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY IN A MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

In Malaysia, there is a growing need for widespread English learning, especially spoken English, which holds significance in both formal and informal daily situations. Researchers have emphasized enhancing speaking skills for better interaction, crucial alongside other abilities. This study seeks to explore factors influencing secondary school students' English-speaking anxiety. A qualitative method was employed to gather in-depth insights from secondary school students in the northern district. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Form Two students chosen based on the selection criteria. The findings extended the factors influencing students' fear of speaking in English. Furthermore, this study was also beneficial for educational stakeholders, including teachers and policymakers responsible for curriculum and syllabus design, and for the betterment of English-speaking competency. This study provided insights for future studies to explore other potential factors that could lead to students' English-speaking anxiety among students in other schooling contexts.

Keywords

Speaking anxiety, ESL, Malaysian secondary school

1. Background of Study

Malaysian students' lack of communication skills has become a national issue. Nonetheless, instructors are still utilising textbook-based education and other conventional classroom methods (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Bistaman et al., 2018). The instructor is compelled to return to teacher-centered classroom practices because of the students' low English skill level (Spawa & Hassan, 2013). These conventional approaches frequently place more emphasis on grammar drills and memorisation than on interactive speaking and listening exercises, which restricts students' opportunity to practice communicating in real-world situations. As a result, students face challenges to interact well, express themselves clearly, and take part in meaningful discussions, a set of essential skills necessary for both academic performance and future employment (Hashim & Yunus, 2018). The 21st-century global workforce is expanding at a rapid pace, necessitating the need for people who can communicate effectively, especially in English, which continues to be the universal language. However, students' language development remains restricted by the ongoing disconnect between instructional methods and communicative demands. One issue highlighted by Alshumaimeri and Alhumud (2021) is the lackadaisical adoption of student-centred approaches such as virtual classrooms, which could increase the

unlikeliness for learners to develop effective communication skills, making them remain disengaged and passive in language use. Thus, resolving this issue is essential to provide Malaysian students with the communication skills crucial to meet the demands in the rapidly growing digital and globalised world.

2. Statement of Problem

Students are not given the opportunities to speak and practice the target language that they want to learn. They are forced to just adhere to the teachers' lesson, and oftentimes, teachers are unable to focus on students' speaking skills as they are busy preparing students for the test. Recent studies have relied on quantitative approach to determine the English-speaking anxiety among students (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Badrasawi et al., 2020; Mustapha & Uri, 2024). Moreover, studies have not adequately explored the issue of English-speaking anxiety particularly in public secondary school context as most of them were conducted in higher education context (James et al., 2020; Raja & Mimi, 2022; Sim et al., 2020), highlighting the little attention on secondary schools. More studies have been requested to examine factors that affect students' difficulties speaking English in a diverse geographic areas, classrooms, and racial backgrounds. Hence, the gap suggests the need for more in-depth studies to study the factors influencing English speaking among secondary school students in Malaysia.

3. Significance of Study

The exploratory findings contribute to the extended understanding of factors influencing English speaking anxiety among secondary school students. It is believed that teachers will increase their understanding of the hindering factors that cause speaking anxiety among secondary school students. The findings suggest effective classroom practices to enhance students' preparedness before they move to oral production in English language. This understanding enables teachers to modify their teaching strategies to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English. The findings also suggest trainings for teachers to understand the importance of offering students with sufficient support and preparedness before they can speak English. To advance English language education, teachers may include more dynamic class activities that boost student involvement.

Policymakers in our nation may consider to revamp or restructure the current curriculum, especially in secondary ESL classroom, to address the issue of heightened speaking anxiety and to increase students' exposure to speaking English during their learning process.

4. Research Questions

How do secondary school students perceive factors influencing their English speaking anxiety?

5. Method

This study employed grounded theory, an approach within the broader field of qualitative inquiry. Grounded theory is an inductive methodological approach that derives theory from

data collected by the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), seeking to provide an in-depth and intricate understanding (Gonzales et al., 2008) about secondary school students' perspectives on factors contributing to their speaking anxiety. Purposive sampling technique was used because the samples chosen were suitable participants who fulfilled the selection criteria, allowing the researchers to receive real-time findings from the participants' experiences and background knowledge pertaining to the topic (Bhardwaj, 2019). The participation was fully voluntary as the informed consent was granted before the participants took part in the study. All the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed into texts. The transcripts were analysed via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A systematic process of data coding, pattern identification, and theme development was conducted to uncover recurring ideas or topics. A coherent story from the data emerged by discovering the initial codes and prospective themes, then iteratively assessing and improving those themes, and lastly defining and labelling the found themes.

6. Findings and Discussion

The study revealed that, communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation are the main causes of the moderate degree of English-speaking anxiety that ESL secondary school students face. The results supported preconceived notions that students, particularly in formal or test settings, are self-conscious when speaking in front of their classmates and are afraid of criticism (Horwitz et al., 1986). In addition, this study identified several contributing factors: peer pressure, which deters even proficient speakers from using English out of fear of social rejection; low English proficiency, which decreases confidence; ineffective or unsupportive teaching methods; lackadaisical teacher support, which increases uncertainty and hesitation; and a preference for using their first language for clearer self-expression in social contexts. These insights affirm previous literature regarding self-consciousness and peer influence, while also challenging the assumption that proficiency alone guarantees willingness to speak. Social dynamics can cause even competent students to shy away from English, underscoring the value of encouraging surroundings and real-world speaking opportunities. The study emphasizes the necessity of pedagogical changes to foster confident language use and lessen speaking anxiety.

7. Limitations

Due to scheduling constraints, only a small number of participants were included in this study. As a result, the opinions obtained from these participants may not fully and accurately reflect the experiences of all secondary school students in Malaysia. Additionally, the depth of observations may have been constrained by the comparatively brief data collection period of little over three months, which may have affected the accuracy of the information gathered over time.

8. Conclusion

The findings extended the existing knowledge about the challenges hindering English speaking anxiety among secondary school students. Notably, the findings of this study call for effective interventions to improve secondary school students' English-speaking

competency. In the classroom, educators should keep in mind that positive emotional support must be sufficient for the students. A conducive and cooperative classroom environment should be encouraged so that students can be prepared to speak the target language (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). It is advised that future research be done in various settings because the current study solely focused on the sample within one specific secondary school in the northern region in Malaysia. A thorough grasp of the subject matter can be obtained from the differences in an array of educational contexts, resources, and demography. Examining these variations may provide important information about the elements affecting school students' speaking anxiety.

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"WE STILL CAN'T SPEAK PROPERLY": A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ESL STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN DIPLOMA PROGRAMMES

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Abstract

The continued inability of Malaysian diploma students to speak English fluently, despite over a decade of instruction, signals a critical failure within the national ESL education system. This study examines how affective, pedagogical, and motivational factors undermine spoken English development among students in a private diploma institution in Kelantan. Drawing on qualitative data from ten purposively selected learners, thematic analysis was conducted using Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory. Findings reveal three systemic issues: emotional barriers that suppress learner voice, exam-driven pedagogy that sidelines communicative competence, and a misalignment between student expectations and actual classroom practices. These interlocking problems perpetuate silence, disengagement, and linguistic insecurity. This study critiques the dominant instructional model and calls for an urgent pedagogical shift toward emotionally responsive, interaction-focused, and student-centred teaching. By amplifying marginalised learner perspectives, it offers critical evidence for rethinking how English is taught, valued, and institutionalised in Malaysia's tertiary ESL landscape.

Keywords

Spoken English proficiency, ESL learner perspectives, language anxiety, communicative language teaching (CLT), Malaysian tertiary education

1. Background of Study

Proficiency in spoken English remains a serious concern in Malaysia's education system. Although English is taught from primary through tertiary levels and positioned as essential for national development, global communication, and employability, many students still cannot speak confidently (Wang & Lee, 2024). This is especially apparent among diploma students in private higher education institutions, who often come from varied academic backgrounds such as business, early childhood education, and tourism. Despite obtaining passes or even high grades in SPM English, many report an ongoing inability to express themselves fluently in real-life situations (Arumugam et al., 2021; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018). The frequently repeated phrase, "We still can't speak properly", points to deeper issues within language instruction. This paradox reveals the limitations of existing teaching practices, which continue to prioritise written exams and grammar over oral communication (Ramarow & Hassan, 2021). Despite global shifts towards communicative and learner-centred approaches, many classrooms remain focused on form rather than

function. Students also face emotional challenges like language anxiety, low self-efficacy, and limited opportunities to practise English outside the classroom (Baharuddin & Md Rashid, 2014). While most studies emphasise test scores, few focus on learners' perspectives, especially those from non-elite institutions. This study addresses that gap by examining how ESL diploma students perceive their speaking difficulties, evaluate classroom practices, and express their expectations of English lecturers within a Malaysian private institution.

2. Statement of Problem

A persistent paradox continues to challenge English language education in Malaysia, where students receive over a decade of formal instruction, yet many still struggle with basic spoken communication (Too, 2023). This contradiction is apparent among diploma students in private higher education institutions, where learners from diverse academic fields and socioeconomic backgrounds consistently report difficulty expressing themselves fluently or confidently in English. Despite achieving good grades in national English examinations, sometimes these students remain unable to communicate effectively in real-life contexts. This disconnection between language knowledge and communicative ability points to deeper systemic issues (Zainuddin et al., 2019). Traditional classroom practices often prioritise grammar and exam preparation over authentic conversation, reinforcing a culture of silence rather than engagement. Emotional factors such as language anxiety, fear of judgment, and low self-confidence are frequently ignored, despite their apparent influence on students' willingness to speak (James et al., 2020; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018). Although national policies emphasise the importance of communicative competence, existing research rarely foregrounds learner perspectives, especially those from non-elite or rural institutions. As a result, the voices of diploma-level ESL students, captured in statements like "We still can't speak properly," remain underrepresented in both academic discourse and institutional reforms. Addressing this gap is essential for building a more inclusive, communicative, and learner-responsive English education system in Malaysia.

3. Significance of Study

This study exposes a critical flaw in Malaysia's English language education, namely the persistent neglect of spoken communication. Despite years of formal instruction, many diploma students still struggle to speak fluently. This is not a student failure, but a systemic one, rooted in exam-oriented teaching, emotional neglect, and limited communicative practice. Grounded in the Affective Filter Hypothesis, Sociocultural Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory, the study highlights how anxiety, low self-belief, and misaligned classroom expectations suppress student voice. By focusing on underrepresented diploma students in a private institution in Kelantan, it fills a research gap and challenges assumptions that learners lack motivation. The findings call for a pedagogical shift toward emotionally responsive, interaction-focused instruction that values fluency and learner agency. This study not only centres student perspectives but also demands institutional accountability for long-standing silence in English classrooms. It contributes urgent insights to reform language teaching into a more equitable, communicative, and learner-driven practice.

4. Research Questions

- i. What are the main factors that prevent ESL diploma students from speaking English fluently, despite long-term exposure to the language?
- ii. How do students view the effectiveness of current English teaching methods in improving their speaking skills?
- iii. What do students expect from their English lecturers in terms of teaching, support, and engagement?

5. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the challenges faced by ESL diploma students in developing spoken English proficiency, as well as their perceptions of classroom practices and expectations of English lecturers. A qualitative approach was selected to foreground student voices, enabling rich, descriptive insights into emotional, pedagogical, and contextual barriers often overlooked in quantitative studies. Data were collected using open-ended written questionnaires, which were distributed to ten diploma students from a private higher education institution in Kelantan. Participants were purposively selected to reflect a range of academic disciplines, SPM English grades, and linguistic backgrounds. All responses were anonymised to protect student identity. The questionnaire comprised six open-ended questions aligned with three research objectives and guided by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory. These theoretical lenses informed the design and interpretation of the questions, particularly concerning learner anxiety, motivation, and interaction. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the responses. Coding was conducted manually to identify recurring patterns and categories across the data. Themes were then interpreted in relation to the study's research questions to uncover underlying factors that hinder or support spoken English development in Malaysian tertiary ESL contexts.

6. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of student responses highlights three interrelated themes. First, affective barriers such as low confidence, anxiety, and fear of judgment were the most frequently reported obstacles to fluency. This aligns with prior studies showing that language anxiety significantly hinders oral performance among Malaysian undergraduates (Baharuddin & Md Rashid, 2014; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018). Several students described feeling insecure or awkward when speaking, echoing James et al.'s (2020) observation that fear of negative evaluation often silences learners. Second, pedagogical limitations were evident: while some learners found roleplays and presentations helpful, many indicated that classes did not sufficiently emphasise authentic communication. This supports Ramarow and Hassan's (2021) finding that exam-oriented practices demotivate learners from speaking and reinforce a culture of silence. Third, learner expectations underscored the desire for more supportive lecturers and emotionally safe environments. Students repeatedly mentioned that encouragement, patience, and a non-judgmental atmosphere increased their willingness to speak, reflecting Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's sociocultural emphasis on interaction (Zainuddin et al., 2019). These findings confirm that students' difficulties are rooted less in linguistic knowledge and more in the affective and pedagogical dynamics of the classroom.

7. Limitations

This study is limited by its small sample size and single-institution focus, which may limit the generalisability of findings as stated across diverse Malaysian ESL contexts. Moreover, studies with small samples may face replication issues when scaled up, as the initial findings may not hold true in larger, more diverse samples (McNeish, 2017). As data were self-reported through written questionnaires, responses may also be influenced by students' willingness to disclose personal challenges. Additionally, the absence of follow-up interviews limits the depth of clarification or elaboration. Future studies could incorporate multiple institutions, triangulate data through interviews or classroom observations, and examine lecturers' perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of spoken English development in tertiary ESL settings.

8. Conclusion

This study reinforces the persistent gap between students' exam-based proficiency and their real-world communicative competence (Arumugam et al., 2021; Wang & Lee, 2024). Despite years of English instruction, many diploma students remain unable to speak fluently because classroom practices continue to prioritise grammar and written assessments over oral interaction. The data reveal that students desire interactive, supportive, and emotionally safe environments where they can practise without fear of ridicule, in line with calls for more communicative and learner-centred teaching approaches (Too, 2023). To address these challenges, lecturers should integrate activities such as roleplays, peer discussions, and spontaneous speaking opportunities while adopting teaching strategies that lower anxiety and build self-efficacy. Institutions must also recognise their role in providing training and structural support for lecturers to create more communicative classrooms. Future research should expand to multiple institutions, triangulate student and lecturer perspectives, and employ classroom observations to provide a fuller understanding of the systemic barriers to spoken English development in Malaysia's tertiary education sector.

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COACHING AS CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

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Abstract

Coaching is increasingly valued in education for its capacity to foster trust, teacher agency, and reflective practice. Recognising this, CfBT introduced coaching as the cornerstone of its Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme for nearly 187 teachers across Brunei. The programme began with three formal training sessions delivered by Dr. Richard Churches, followed by two structured peer coaching cycles over two terms. Teachers were grouped in triads and supported by coaching supervisors, while impact was monitored through pre- and post-programme Likert-scale surveys, lesson observation data, portfolio submissions and end-of-year reflection templates. The results were significant: a 52.3% increase in coaching confidence, 41.3% improvement in teaching practices, and over 80% of participants rated learning gains highly across four domains: coaching skills, pedagogy, collaboration, and personal development. It demonstrates how embedding coaching into professional learning can transform teacher development from a top-down directive into a meaningful, self-sustaining culture of growth.

Keywords:

Coaching, professional development, reflective practice, teacher agency, CPD leadership

1. Background of Study

Coaching is increasingly valued in education for its capacity to foster trust, teacher agency and reflective practice. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stated that professional development models such as coaching, containing sustained and collaborative elements, often result in improvements in teaching practices. Whilst Lofthouse, Leat & Towler (2010) highlighted that peer coaching in the field of education allows for reflection on practice through engagement in professional dialogue and teacher-led questioning. According to Biesta et al. (2015), teacher agency refers to the ability to employ choice and implement informed decisions within a professional setting. Recognising the benefits linked to coaching and with the intention to increase teacher agency, CfBT introduced coaching as the cornerstone of its CPD programme for nearly 187 expatriate English language teachers in government schools in Brunei. Bearing in mind that school contexts in Brunei often differ, this results in the variation of developmental needs of teachers. This study serves to evaluate the impact of coaching as a CPD model, using a structured triad grouping to promote personalised, contextual target-setting, reflective coaching conversations, and shared accountability. The purpose of this initiative was to create a sustainable, scalable model of professional learning that prioritises agency, collaboration, and improved pedagogy.

2. Statement of Problem

Previous CPD models tended to follow a standardised approach whereby there was one focal area of development across the board. This focal area was often determined through the data derived from the evaluative teacher appraisal systems and did not always represent the varied developmental needs of all teachers. This top-down approach to the design and implementation of CPD programmes limited teachers' agency and negatively impacted engagement. Very often, with transmissive forms of CPD, teachers also prioritise the evaluative nature of the performance management systems over the developmental opportunity and are reluctant to show areas of practice that may require support when observed by their line manager. However, they are more open to being vulnerable with teacher colleagues. This study serves to address these limitations by allowing for peer coaching to open the dialogue to either the performance-driven or the self-identified pedagogical needs of teachers, as well as other challenges they may face in the classroom. Kennedy (2014) referred to CPD models which prioritise external standards at the expense of teacher empowerment as a transmissive approach to CPD, and advocated for more transformative CPD models, such as coaching.

3. Significance of Study

The finding of this study confirms learning gains across four domains: coaching skills, pedagogy, collaboration, and personal development. Whilst the medium of instruction in the Bruneian classroom is English, the large majority of students are not first-language English speakers. Coaching allowed teachers to engage in dialogue and reflection to address the targets, challenges, and areas of pedagogical development to better enhance their impact in teaching English in Bruneian Government schools. The triad grouping structure allowed for greater opportunities for collaboration as opposed to pairings, and within this presented exposure to a greater variety of coaching conversations as teachers engaged with two different clients and coaches across the programme. As teachers worked through the programme, the non-directive coaching approach encouraged teachers to take greater ownership of their professional learning and growth. These practices improved the quality of their instructions and also enhanced teachers' confidence, knowledge, and skills in coaching their expat colleagues.

4. Research Questions

- How does participation in a coaching-based CPD programme impact teachers' knowledge of and confidence in using effective coaching skills?
- 2. How does coaching impact teachers' perceptions of the value of collaborative support?
- 3. What is the impact of coaching on instructional and pedagogical practices of teachers?

5.Method

The coaching programme was implemented over four phases. The first phase involved the initial training of three formal training sessions delivered by Dr. Richard Churches. This was followed by two structured peer coaching cycles over two terms. Teachers were grouped in triads, whereby each had turns to coach, be coached, and observe a coaching conversation within their triad. In the second cycle, they swapped coaches. They were supported by coaching supervisors, the Education Development Managers at CfBT. A mixed-method approach was employed to monitor the impact of this CPD coaching programme. Quantifiable data was collected using pre- and post-programme Likert-scale surveys and lesson observation data, which helped gauge teachers' perspectives on the impact of the programme on their knowledge, skills and confidence in coaching, collaboration, pedagogical learning gains, as well as their personal development. It also provided information on the improvement of teachers' professional performance in formal lesson observations. Qualitative data were collected through portfolio submissions, progress review checkpoints and end-of-programme reflection templates, which assisted in tracking engagement and allowed for more consistent reflection at key stages in the programme. It also further supported learning gains identified from the quantitative data, highlighting reflections on teacher agency.

6. Findings and Discussion

Over 80% of participants rated learning gains highly across four domains: coaching skills, pedagogy, collaboration, and personal development. The pre- and post-programme Likert survey results indicated that 52.3% of participants noted an increase in their understanding of and confidence in using effective coaching techniques. 41.3% of participants noted improvements in teaching practices, which in turn led to enhanced learning outcomes in their English Language classrooms. The collaborative element of the coaching programme also yielded positive results, with 91.1% of teachers reporting that coaching has helped them build stronger professional relationships with peers, and 84.29% highlighted the value of collaborative learning and support through coaching for professional development. This was further supported by qualitative reports in the progress review checkpoints and end-of-year reflection templates, whereby the large majority of teachers stated that they valued working with peers within the triad, some making specific mention of how they felt free to discuss challenges in the classroom in a trustworthy, supportive environment. Qualitative data frequently made mention of shared ownership, and the autonomy element provided through the programme in establishing goals based on individual classroom contexts, and many indicated that they valued the fact that coaching conversations were client-or teacher-driven.

7.Limitations

It must be noted that whilst this CPD coaching programme was effective in positively impacting teacher growth, learning and development, as well as promoting teacher agency, challenges were also noted. Discussions with teachers during progress review checkpoints and end-of-year sharing sessions indicated that teachers experienced difficulties in

balancing the expectations of the programme and school duties. Scheduling meetings where all three members of the triad were available also presented a challenge due to teaching timetables. Teachers also noted time constraints when it came to the completion of paperwork.

8.Conclusion

This programme revealed that coaching, when rooted in collaboration and reflective practice, becomes a strong platform for teacher agency. Positioning teachers with the autonomy to drive coaching conversations based on their individual classroom challenges allowed them to explore solutions tailored to their context. These tailored solutions then opened the way for improved learning outcomes for students, positively impacting English language education in Bruneian classrooms. This study not only led to personal and professional improvements within pedagogical practice but also positively impacted teachers' knowledge and confidence in applying coaching models and techniques. For the purpose of sustaining meaningful engagement and increasing teacher agency, future CPD projects will investigate the creation of CPD working groups. The intention of this is to increase the involvement of teachers in decisions regarding CPD design, implementation and submission requirements, whilst still allowing for the refinement of their coaching skills.

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IMMERSIVE PATHS TO AUTONOMY: USING EXTENDED REALITY TO FOSTER STUDENT AGENCY IN LEARNING

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Abstract

This ongoing study explores how extended reality (XR) can enhance learner agency, autonomy, and engagement in the English language classroom through immersive, gamified experiences. To address the limited direct experiential learning opportunities in traditional classrooms, a gamified creative writing lesson focusing on descriptive language will be delivered using Spatial.io (a collaborative VR platform) and Padlet (a digital bulletin board). The study employs a qualitative design involving written feedback, student interviews, and classroom observations with a sample of 30 students. Data will be analysed using thematic analysis to uncover patterns in students' experiences and perceptions. Findings are expected to provide valuable insights into the potential of XR-supported instruction to foster student-centred learning, active participation, and higher levels of learner agency.

Keywords

Virtual reality, student-centred learning, learner agency, immersive education, gamification

1. Background of Study

Extended reality (XR), which includes virtual, augmented, and mixed reality, has gained attention in education for its ability to create immersive and interactive environments. A recent review found that XR enriches learning through simulation, visualisation, problem solving, and gaming (Burke, 2025). In language learning, XR has been shown to enhance oral proficiency, creativity, motivation, and multimodal literacy, particularly through role play and content creation (Christou, 2025).

At the same time, learner autonomy remains a key goal in second language acquisition. Defined as the capacity to take responsibility for one's own learning, autonomy is supported when teachers act as facilitators and designers of learning opportunities. Recent research emphasises its cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions and shows that autonomy supportive strategies foster intrinsic motivation and independent learning (Andri & Azis, 2025; Jin, 2025).

Despite promising evidence, little is known about how XR can specifically promote learner agency. This study addresses that gap by exploring gamified XR-supported instruction using Spatial.io and Padlet in English classrooms.

2. Statement of Problem

Extended reality (XR), which includes virtual, augmented, and mixed reality, has gained attention as a powerful way to reimagine learning. Studies show that XR can enrich language classrooms by creating immersive and interactive experiences, often leading to higher motivation, stronger oral proficiency, and greater creativity (Chen et al., 2022). Yet, much of this research has centred on cognitive outcomes such as task performance and self-efficacy, while giving less consideration to affective and behavioural aspects of learning, particularly learner autonomy and agency (Zhi & Wu, 2023).

Autonomy, understood as learners taking responsibility for their own progress, has long been seen as central to successful second language acquisition. Recent scholarship highlights not only its cognitive but also its affective and behavioural dimensions, stressing that teachers play a crucial role in enabling students to direct their learning (Andri & Azis, 2025). Strategies that support autonomy have been found to nurture intrinsic motivation and independence (Jin, 2025). However, English classrooms often remain teacher-directed, restricting space for student agency and creative exploration (Benson, 2021; Little, 2020; Nguyen & Gu, 2022).

Against this backdrop, little is known about how gamified XR environments might foster autonomy and agency in language learning (Parmaxi, 2020; Yang & Mei, 2023). This study seeks to address that gap through XR-supported creative writing activities using Spatial.io and Padlet.

3. Significance of Study

This study matters because it looks beyond the usual focus on how extended reality (XR) improves test scores or language performance and instead asks how it can help students take charge of their own learning. While XR has been shown to spark motivation, creativity, and engagement (Chen et al., 2022; Zhi & Wu, 2023), less is known about how it might create space for learner agency and autonomy. By using immersive, gamified tools such as Spatial.io and Padlet in creative writing lessons, this study explores how technology can shift the classroom from being primarily teacher-led to a more student-centred space (Nguyen & Gu, 2022).

The findings will be valuable for teachers who want practical ways to foster independence, creativity, and active participation in their students. More broadly, the study adds to ongoing conversations about XR in education, showing its potential as a catalyst for learner agency (Parmaxi, 2020; Yang & Mei, 2023).

4. Research Questions

1. How does the use of virtual reality in classroom settings support student-centred learning and learner agency?

- 2. What are students' experiences of engagement and meaning-making in VR-based lessons?
- 3. What specific activities and interactions within the Spatial.io environment do students perceive as most (or least) valuable for learning, and why?

5. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how extended reality (XR) can support learner autonomy and agency in English language classrooms. Thirty undergraduate students participated in a creative writing lesson delivered through Spatial.io, a collaborative virtual reality platform. The lesson focused on descriptive language and integrated gamified tasks to promote engagement and self-directed exploration.

After the session, students took part in semi-structured interviews to share their perspectives on how XR influenced their autonomy, participation, and creativity. Written reflections were also collected, while classroom observations provided additional insights into learner behaviours and interactions. Using multiple data sources allowed for triangulation and a richer understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The data were analysed thematically, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This process involved familiarisation, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of patterns across interviews, reflections, and observations, highlighting how XR contributed to learner agency, motivation, and classroom dynamics. This approach was particularly suited to capturing the complexity of students' lived experiences in immersive, technology-enhanced learning environments.

6. Findings and Discussion

Thematic analysis generated five themes on how virtual reality (VR) supported student-centred learning and learner agency.

- Autonomy and Choice. Most participants reported that VR enabled them to control
 pacing, select learning paths, and explore freely, which they associated with
 increased motivation and ownership.
- Hands-on Interaction. The manipulation of virtual objects and environments was described as engaging and informative, sustaining attention and curiosity.
- Immersion and Meaning-Making. Many students highlighted a heightened sense of immersion, noting that content felt more tangible and facilitated deeper understanding.

- Independent Problem-Solving. Over half described using trial-and-error, exploration, and self-guided strategies, which encouraged independence without teacher intervention.
- Barriers. Despite these benefits, participants noted challenges. Communication
 was sometimes hindered by the absence of body language, and technical issues
 such as lag and navigation difficulties disrupted learning flow. A smaller group
 reported distractions from non-instructional features.

Overall, students valued interactive tasks, spatial exploration, and problem-solving most, while technical issues and off-task elements were considered least beneficial. These findings suggest that XR can foster autonomy and engagement, though practical and communicative barriers must be addressed for its full potential to be realised.

7. Limitations

This study faced a few limitations. <u>Spatial.io</u>'s free version restricted access to only eight participants per room, requiring a paid membership that increased the cost. Moreover, integrating external platforms such as Padlet required coding; this inaccessibility disrupted immersion by taking students out of the VR environment. Communication within the platform was also challenging; the open mic feature allowed all participants to speak simultaneously, leading to frequent overlaps, and the chat box was difficult to manage with over 20 students. These constraints may have affected the fluidity of lesson delivery and the overall learning experience.

8. Conclusion

This ongoing study suggests that VR can meaningfully support student-centred learning and learning agency in English language education by providing space for autonomy, interactivity, and immersive engagement. Students valued opportunities for self-paced exploration and problem-solving, which fostered active participation and deeper meaning-making. However, technical limitations, communication challenges, and integration gaps with other tools constrained the benefits. Future research should explore platform designs that better support large-group communication, seamless integration of external resources, as well as adaptive pathways for differentiated learning. Long-term studies could examine how sustained use of VR can influence language acquisition, learner confidence, and collaborative skills. By addressing the current constraints, XR-based instruction has the potential to enrich English language classrooms through offering dynamic and authentic learning experiences that extend beyond traditional methods.

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WHAT TRIGGERS LEARNER UPTAKE?: A CASE STUDY OF JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' REFLECTIVE REPORTS OF THEIR LEARNING ITEMS

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Abstract

This case study investigates what triggers learner uptake in an EFL classroom by analysing first-year Japanese university students' reflective reports. Twenty-three non-English majors enrolled in a required reading and writing course submitted post-lesson reflections across 11 sessions, each listing three linguistic items they believed they had learned and reasons for recalling them. Quantitative analysis revealed the number and categories of 515 reported items, while qualitative coding identified recall triggers. Results show that three main triggers emerged: connection to personal experience, awareness at the moment of encounter, and engagement during class activities. Individual differences were evident in item type and quantity, with collaborative engagement and teacher input linked to richer reporting. Findings suggest that structured reflection, quality group work, and timely instructor input can sustain learners' attention and retention, offering practical implications for designing lessons to foster ongoing learner noticing and uptake in EFL contexts.

Keywords

Reflective reports, uptake, focus on form

1. Background of Study

The importance of learners' focus on form, or attention to and noticing of linguistic forms, is well established in second language acquisition (e.g., Schmidt, 1990; 2001). Even in large EFL classrooms, individual learners should actively attend to target items for effective learning. Many first-year Japanese college students, despite receiving at least six years of English instruction in junior and senior high school, continue to perceive English as a difficult subject. Less proficient learners, in particular, benefit most from individualised attention and support. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), for example, demonstrated that individualised, graduated feedback within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development enables greater awareness, reflection, and appropriate use of linguistic forms. However, in large mandatory EFL classes, providing such individual support is impossible. Instead, classroom instruction often blends teacher-fronted explanations with student-centred activities, such as peer discussion and collaborative tasks. Understanding what triggers learners to select, attend to, and remember linguistic items in such settings is essential for developing lesson plans that sustain learner engagement and promote autonomous uptake.

2. Statement of Problem

This case study seeks to deepen our understanding of how learners allocate attention to linguistic items in natural classroom settings. Rosa and Leow (2004) found that higher levels of awareness, such as noticing and understanding, were linked to more successful recognition and production of target forms. However, as Kunitz (2018) points out, observing and measuring learners' attention allocation in authentic classrooms is challenging. Consequently, there is a limited body of research examining what specific items learners notice and retain during regular classroom instruction, and why they remember them. Without such evidence, instructional designs intended to raise and sustain learners' attention may lack grounding in actual classroom processes. This study addresses this gap by investigating the linguistic items that Japanese university students report as having learned after each lesson in a semester-long reading and writing course, along with the reasons they provide for recalling these items.

3. Significance of Study

By identifying the triggers that lead classroom learners to notice and remember linguistic items, this study offers insights into the mechanisms that underlie learner uptake in EFL contexts. The findings can help language teachers design lessons that more effectively elicit and sustain learner attention, even in large classes. The study also provides practical implications for integrating reflection activities and targeted feedback into regular lesson cycles. Such measures may enhance learners' metalinguistic awareness, promote more active engagement with input, and encourage self-directed learning beyond the classroom.

4. Research Questions

- I. What linguistic items do college students report as uptake after each lesson in a semester?
- II. What reasons do students give for recalling these items, and what patterns, if any, emerge in their responses?

5. Method

Participants were 23 first-year students at a private Japanese university, all non-English majors, enrolled in a required reading and writing course during the second semester of the 2024 academic year. The course combined teacher-fronted instruction with student-centred activities, including peer discussion of texts and collaborative preparation of summaries or reflective comments for class presentations. After each lesson, students submitted a reflective report listing three linguistic items they thought they had learned, along with their reasons for recalling them. Reports were collected 11 times over the semester. Quantitative analysis examined changes in the number of items reported over time (total = 515 items). Qualitative analysis categorised the reported reasons for recall to identify underlying triggers.

6. Findings and Discussion

A total of 515 uptake recalls were reported. Analysis identified three main triggers for recalling items: (1) Connection to personal experience, (2) Awareness at the moment of encounter, and (3) Engagement during class activities.

Ongoing analysis of the reflective reports revealed notable individual differences. Some learners tended to report isolated word items, while others reported phrasal expressions as well. Those who seemed to have engaged in active and productive peer discussion appeared to report more extensively than those who hadn't. The instructor's intentional comments during the teacher-fronted lecture, though limited, were associated with the learners' reports.

The tentative findings suggest that quality of group work, teacher instruction and feedback, and guided reflection activities can help sustain learners' attention and memory of linguistic items over a longer period, highlighting the potential value of integrating such elements into regular classroom practice.

7. Limitations

This small-scale case study, conducted in a single university classroom, limits the generalisability of its findings. The self-reported nature of the data may also involve variability in accuracy and depth of reflection. Future research should examine similar questions across larger and more diverse EFL contexts.

8. Conclusion

Although limited in scope, this study offers evidence on how learners allocate attention to linguistic forms during natural classroom activities. Most items recalled were vocabulary introduced by the instructor, encountered in peer interaction, or initially recognised by learners as unknown. The identification of three primary triggers, personal connection, momentary awareness, and engagement in classroom activities, provides actionable insights for lesson design. Incorporating structured reflection and timely feedback may enhance learner noticing, foster sustained attention, and ultimately promote uptake in EFL classrooms.

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DESIGNING A CONTEXTUAL SPEAKING ASSESSMENT FOR ESTHETICIAN PROGRAM STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study explores the design and implementation of a contextual speaking assessment tailored for esthetician students in vocational education. Speaking assessments play a pivotal role in tracking learner progress and informing instructional strategies, particularly in vocational settings where language use is often task-specific. Effective assessment design requires not only theoretical understanding but also practical skills, such as familiarity with speaking constructs, the application of criterion-referenced testing, and the use of analytic scoring rubrics. In this research, a speaking test was developed based on the authentic communication tasks and language functions relevant to esthetician students' academic and professional experiences. The participants included 25 students enrolled in a vocational esthetics program. Findings indicate that the contextualized assessment improved alignment with curricular goals, increased topic relevance, enhanced student engagement, and helped familiarize students with the test format. Moreover, the task-based nature of the assessment supported learners in developing the specific speaking skills required in real-world esthetician contexts. This study underscores the importance of designing language assessments that reflect the authentic communicative demands of vocational fields. It also highlights the critical role of teachers in creating meaningful, goal-oriented learning experiences that bridge classroom instruction and workplace communication. The results contribute to a growing body of research advocating for context-sensitive approaches to language assessment in vocational education.

Keywords

Contextual assessment, speaking skills, esthetician vocational school

1. Background of Study

Normally, English teachers teach speaking skills to test the students' speaking achievement upon the course completion. Typically in the test, the students are given a task that requires them to use the language communicatively so the examiner-teacher can get samples of their speaking performance to be scored (Kotowicz et al., 2021), as Sharma (2018) and Farhady (2018) stated that speaking is the first way to interact with others in the social community. Ali and Hamid (2020) also mentioned that without a speech, language is reduced to a mere script. Those statements emphasized the significance of speaking in real communication. To pass judgment on the students' speaking performance, subjective scoring method should be in place, where correctness or acceptability of answers is a

matter of degrees. Two approaches to subjective scoring have been known to commonly take place: holistic and analytic approaches. Analytic scoring of a speaking test which separates speaking skill into its features or sub-skills to be scored separately, is more appropriate for classroom purposes than a holistic approach where scoring is just based on the rater's overall impression. Hashim (2018) further argued that today's learning is about accessing and assessing, so there should be space for students to get learning opportunities and feedback on them. The study reports the development and implementation of a speaking assessment at PGRI 1 Mejobo vocational school, which covers the issues of criterion-referenced test (CRT), speaking-skill construct, analytic scoring, setting-up of the criteria and descriptors, and grading guide.

1.1 Criterion-referenced testing

CRT is an important household tool in the big family of the teaching profession. This instrument functions as a test which measures a student's performance according to a particular standard or criterion which has been agreed upon even before classroom instruction is started (Richards et al., 1985; Cohen, 1994; Djiwandono, 2008), which is the objective of the instruction. CRT is produced to measure well-defined and fairly specific instructional objectives (Brown, 2005). Often these objectives are specific to a particular course, program, school district, or state. An example of a very strict instructional objective would be the following: "By the end of the course, the students will be able to underline the sentence containing the main idea of an academic paragraph of 200-250 words at the eleventh grade readability level with 60 per cent accuracy." However, objectives come in many forms. Other objectives might be defined in terms of tasks we would expect the students to be able to perform by the end of the term, or experiences we would expect them to go through. For example, "By the end of the term students will be able to watch at least five English language movies with no subtitles."

Brown (2004) suggests that criterion-referenced tests be also designed to give test-takers feedback, usually in the form of grades, on specific course or lesson objectives. Classroom tests involve the students in one class and are connected to a curriculum, hence the results of the tests are expected to be useful for the pursuit of teaching effectiveness in the class and the curriculum repair efforts, or what Oller (1979, as cited in Brown, 2004) called "instructional value." In a criterion-referenced test, the distribution of students' scores across a continuum may be of little concern as long as the instrument assesses the objectives. From the results of CRT, several decision-making, like classroom-level- level achievement decisions and classroom-level diagnostic decisions, can be based on. In terms of interpreting the test scores, the interpretation of scores on a CRT is considered absolute. Each student's score is meaningful without reference to the other student's scores, as in norm-referenced testing. In other words, a student's score in a particular objective indicates the percentage of the knowledge or skill in that objective that the student has learned. Moreover, the distribution of scores on a CRT need not necessarily be normal. If all students reach 100% of the objectives, then they all should receive the same score with no variation at all. Therefore, on a CRT final examination, students who have

learned all the course material should all be able to score 100 per cent on the final examination. Thus, very homogeneous scores can occur on a CRT. In other words, very similar scores among students on a CRT may be perfectly logical, acceptable, and even desirable if the test is administered at the end of a course. In this situation, a normal distribution of scores may not appear. In fact, a normal distribution on CRT scores may even be a sign that something is wrong with the test, with the curriculum, or with the teaching (Brown, 2005).

1.2 Speaking and Speaking Assessment

Speaking is frequently avoided by language learners. In fact, this skill is the main indicator of their progress in learning. The fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and feeling stressed were psychological factors that hinder students from performing speaking English in the class (Ariyanti, 2016; Suleimenova, 2013; Tuyet & Khang, 2020; Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014). To speak is to express ideas orally, to make a person's mind or thought known to and understood by others as the addressees. To make his oral expression known and understood well a speaker need to attend to factors bringing to oral message delivery success: (1) definite message, problem or topic to be delivered, (2) well organized message delivery, (3) clarity of message which can be established through implementing the right words choice and use, accurate grammatical rules, and intelligible pronunciation and appropriate fluency (Djiwandono, 2008). In addition, Harmer (1993) posits that speaking ability should cover interactive skills. Those components of speaking skills are decisive to successful communication, hence, should be taken into consideration when developing a speaking ability test (Jannah & Hartono, 2018).

1.3 Speaking Assessment Approach

Two approaches to productive-skills testing, the analytic approach and the holistic approach, are commonly used in testing practices for educational purposes (Akiyana, 2019). They are used for setting up criteria for measuring up the test-takers' performance in productive language skills. Holistic approach uses a single general scale to give a single global rating for each test-taker's language production (Djiwandono, 2008). In this approach, the rater judges the learner, say, speaking ability on the basis of his/her overall impression of the learner's oral performance without separating the speaking ability into its features. Qureshi (2017) said that the result of teaching and assessing speaking in EFL is that students carry the understanding of communication, where they can create speaking fluency. In the procedure of the holistic scoring approach, the rater directly comes to a single score which measures the aspects of speaking ability like content, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, etc., as one whole for concluding the test-taker's oral performance. A high level of rating skill is truly required to be able to apply this scoring approach responsibly and rightly for speaking ability judgment (Djiwandono, 2008), otherwise validity and reliability of the scoring results are at risk here. Although a holistic approach can be applied more easily and practically for scoring criteria, it is not easy to get explicit and specific feedback that can tell information about the areas of student's strengths and weaknesses in their speaking achievement.

An analytic approach, on the other hand, refers to a procedure of scoring the learner's speaking ability by separating the features of speaking skill into sub-skills. In this procedure, the rater scores each feature and then sums up the sub-scores into a final score (Underhill 1987). Perhaps some people would think that putting or designing the skill into more separate analytic aspects or components would be hard to implement, and the scoring would be too complicated to do for the rater. However, would a more discreetly separated feature of the speaking skill allow the rater to do the scoring in a more confident way? The rater would not experience problematic decision-making as happening when a single score should be assigned or given to assess or evaluate two or three components or sub-skills, which are treated and scored as a single unit. By doing so, the scoring can be done more objectively, hence, with a higher validity and reliability estimate.

1.4 Scoring and Weighting

In a speaking test, a judgment is called for on the part of the scorer, thus, the scoring is said to be subjective. In second and foreign language teaching, subjective marking is usually required for scoring writing and speaking tests (Henning, 1987; Underhill, 1987; Hughes, 2003). In subjective scoring, "examiners are required to make judgments which are more complicated than the right or wrong decisiontheir job is to assess how well a candidate completes a given tasks" (Alderson et al., 2002: p. 107). Related to scoring is weighting. Weighting refers to the values that are placed on certain test items within the test. Test items may be weighted differently. One item, for example, is weighted higher as compared to other items based on the consideration that the mastery of the objective tested with the first item reflects more learning than mastery of another objective measured with the latter test item (Cohen, 1990).

Speaking is basically an activity of transferring or conveying messages/ideas between persons involved in a communication. This ability to deliver understandable message content and understand delivered message content represents the communicative competence of the communicator. To be able to deliver an understandable content of a message and to understand the addressed content of a message, a person needs to make use of not only his linguistic competence, but also his discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence, which, when integrated together they make up a person's whole communicative competence (Savignon 1983). By understanding this nature of communication, consequently, the content factor should be the main consideration when judging or measuring a person's speaking ability. Thus, in developing a speaking test, content should be considered the most important criterion of speaking ability, which should therefore be given the most weight than the other components of speaking ability.

Grammatical or linguistic competence is the smallest construct of communicative competence as opposed to the other constructs of communicative competence, i.e., discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence (Savignon, 1983: p. 35-42). Agreeing with this theoretical stance, the grammar aspect should be

considered a less important criterion of measuring speaking ability. Thus, grammar criterion should be given a lesser degree of weighting in a speaking test development.

Pronunciation is phonological knowledge (Canale & Brown, 2002). In an analytic scoring approach, pronunciation may be isolated and scored analytically or separately from the grammar criteria. By treating it so, the examiner will be able to get practical benefit for measuring fairly and confidently the two components separately. Pronunciation may be given similar weighting as grammar criteria because they both represent linguistic competence.

1.5 Test Development

PGRI 1 Vocational School is one of the vocational schools that provides an esthetician program. Therefore, two series of English subjects of English 1 and English 2, are provided in the first and second semesters. In both classes, the students are taught and trained in speaking skills. The class used for this project is English 1.

Since the test to be developed is aimed at testing the speaking achievement of esthetician students, the vocational school curriculum was to be considered with some modifications adjusted to the specifications of the program. The general objective of Interchange 1 related to speaking skills is to make the students competent in talking about issues related to esthetics in general, such as "being healthy and beautiful", "healthy life vs lifestyle", and "the parts of beauty".

1.6 Test Topics

When a test is meant for measuring speaking ability, supposedly the speaking test measures the students' ability to speak about the topics which they once discussed to speak about during instructional activity. Therefore, four topics are selected from the aforementioned list of activity topics. But yet, the students should not know they are going to talk about the topics they once used during class activities. To add to the degree of spontaneity of their speaking performance, the students may be asked spontaneous questions prepared by the examiners about the chosen topic. Therefore, the four topics selected for test include: (1) Daily skin care; (2) The nerves of reflection; (3) Treating customers; (4) serving hospitality. The four topics were selected because they were given in the content lessons.

1.7 Test Tasks

The test tasks to be selected in the speaking test should be those relevant to the students' ability level and those with which the students were already familiar. The tasks used to obtain information or data about the students' speaking performance in the current speaking test model are recount and question-and-answer.

To recount is to tell somebody about something. Recount is used as a test task in the speaking test because the activities of telling and sharing stories, experiences, opinions,

knowledge, etc., are used as the main instructional activities during the learning process. Thus, in the recount session of the speaking test, the students told about their story, knowledge, experience, opinion, examples, etc., about the topic they have chosen. The students did the recount test task face-to-face with the tester.

Another task that can be used in combination with recount is a question-and-answer task. After telling about the given topic, the students should answer questions from the tester about the topics they have covered. Question-and-answer task is implemented because the task is believed to be effective for measuring spontaneous speaking ability. This task was also used since question and answer is a typical activity during group discussion, which is considered the main activity in the learning process in English class for esthetician students. The tester should have supplies of questions available for each of the four topics to be asked of the students. The questions developed are WH-questions that supposedly require elaborate explanations for the students to answer.

1.8 Set-up of Criteria and Indicators

When the speaking construct is classified into discrete components of content relevance, content completeness, grammar and pronunciation, these components become the criteria for referencing the students' speaking performance in the speaking test. Then, the test developer gives descriptions or indications each criterion covers. The following table shows the component criteria and each criterion descriptors or indicators.

Table 1. Criteria and criteria description of speaking assessment

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION/INDICATION			
CRITERIA				
RELEVANCE (OF	The speech content is relevant to the topic to be spoken		
CONTENT		about. The speech content of the answer is relevant to		
		the question asked.		
COMPLETENESS (CONTENT	OF	The speech content is supported with good knowledge, details, examples, facts, and other supporting arguments relevant to the topic to be spoken about and the question to be answered.		
GRAMMAR ACCURAC	CY	The oral language use applies accurate grammar that can deliver the clearest and most understandable meaning of the content.		
PRONUNCIATION (Intelligibility/fluency)		The pronunciation is intelligible. The speed speech or fluency is natural.		
(Brown, 2005)				

Each component is then graded into degrees or levels of mastery in a range of "very good," "good," "adequate" or "fair", "inadequate" and "poor", where very good category is given

score 5, good 4, adequate 3, bad 2, and poor 1. Thus, if the student could perform best in the tasks when the performance is referred the three components of content, grammar, and pronunciation, then he/she would be assigned the highest mark or score 5 for each component criteria. And, if the student perform so poorly in the speaking test when referred to the three components, then he/she would get the lowest score 1 for each component. The setting-up of descriptors or indicators for each level of mastery in each component criteria and the marking or assigning of marks to each component mastery level is shown in Table 3.

2. Method

This study applied quasi-experimental research design to look for the influence of certain treatments on others under controlled conditions (Sugiyono, 2013). Quantitative data was gained due to the research design (Aryadoust and Raquel, 2020). One group pre and posttest was employed to know the effectiveness of the speaking assessment constructed by the teacher. A total number of 10th grade students for about 160 students became the population and 32 students of X.1 were chosen was the sample through cluster random sampling technique. An oral interview test was administered to the students to investigate the assessment constructed and the students' speaking achievement. The following is list of questions used in the test.

3. Findings and Discussion

To begin the test, students were called one by one to sit for the speaking test face-to-face with the tester. After a short greeting, "good morning" and "how are you" to make the student feel comfortable or to ease anxiety in the test session, the student was asked to choose randomly one of the four faced-down cards containing one topic each (Appendix 1) that they were going to recount or tell about to the tester. After choosing the card, the student was asked to read the topic stated in the card loudly, for example, 'Daily Skin Care' and also the short instructions, 'Talk as much as possible for 2.5 minutes about the topic'. Then the examiners welcomed the student to begin talking about the topic, "Now please tell about your opinions about things to do for daily skin care" and inform him that, "The examiner would give notification when the time allotted for recount is up". When the students were doing the recount, the examiner should be listening attentively and not doing anything that could interrupt or annoy the students doing the task. Then, the test was continued for the next 2.5 minutes with a 'Question and Answer' session. The tester could use the list of ready-to-use questions already made available. The examiners should ask the questions to the students in well- articulated manners.

The tester rated the students' speaking performance through the analytic approach by using and referring to the score sheet he/she should have prepared. The score sheet contained the cells for each of the components scored: content, grammar, and pronunciation. Each component criteria was divided into five mastery levels. Each level of mastery of each component was described with defined indicators/descriptors. The tester checked " $\sqrt{}$ " in

the relevant cell under each descriptor's cell to measure each student's speaking performance in each component. The score sheet can be seen in the following table:

Table 3. The score sheet for speaking test

Component	Indicators				
	5	4	3	2	1
Component	Highly	Finely relevant with	Adequately	Inadequately	Poorly relevar
Relevance	relevan	the topic	relevant with	relevant with	with the
	t with		the topic	the topic	topic
	the				
	topic				
	$\sqrt{}$				
Content	Very well	Well supported	Adequately	Inadequately	Poorly
Completeness	support	with knowledge,	supported	supported	supported
	ed with	details, examples,	with knowledge,	with knowledge,	with
	Good	facts, and other	details, example,	details, examples,	knowledge
	knowle	supporting	fact, and other	facts, other	detail, exam
	dge,	argument	supporting	supporting	ple, fact,
	detaile		argument	argument	and
	d, exam				other
	ple,				supporting
	facts,				argument
	other				
	supporting				
	argume				
	nt				
	$\sqrt{}$				
Grammar	Highly	Very few	Some errors	Frequent	Almost every
Accuracy	approp	grammatical	in grammar use	Grammar errors,	sentence
	riate	error but meaning	which somewhat	many times	contains
	grammar	not harmed	disturb meaning	meaning is	error, meanin
	use,			difficult to	is hardly
	and			understand	under
	error-				stood
	free				
	$\sqrt{}$				
Pronunciation	Perfectly	Satisfactory	Slightly slow	Very slow speech	The speech
(intelligibility	intelligi	intelligible,	speed,	speed, many	speed is
and fluency)	ble,	natural speech	mispronouncing	hesitation,	too slow
	very	speed, very few	is occasionally	frequent	and full o
	natural	mispronouncing	causes less	mispronouncing	incompet
	speech	_	clear	_	nt

Each component of content, grammar and pronunciation was graded in a range of "very good," "good," "adequate," "inadequate," and "poor," with the scores of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. Thus, if the student could perform best in the tasks for the three component criteria, then he/she would be assigned the highest mark or score 5 for each component criteria. And, if the student performed so poorly in the speaking test when referred to the three components, then he/she would get the lowest score 1 for each component. The raw scores of each student get for each component criteria is multiplied with the weighting percentage each component bears: content relevance 30%, content completeness 30%, grammar 20%, and pronunciation 20%. Consequently, their marks on content relevance criteria and content completeness criteria were multiplied with 3, while the marks they received in grammar and pronunciation criteria were multiplied with 2, to get the students' scores for each component criteria. Each student's score in each component criteria was added up to generate the student's total score and thus the final grade. The marking, weighting, and scoring is shown by the following Table 4.

Table 4. The indicators, marking, weighting, and scoring system

Component	Indicators	Grade	Score	Weigh	Score
		Oldde		t	
Relevance of	Highly relevant with the topic	Very Good	5	Х3	15
Content	Finely relevant withthe topic	Good	4	Х3	12
	Adequately relevant withthe topic	Adequate	3	Х3	9
	Inadequately relevant with the topic	Inadequate	2	Х3	6
	Poorly relevant with the topic	Poor	1	Х3	3
Completeness	Very well supported with good knowledge, details, example, facts, other supporting argument	Very Good	5	X3	15
of Content	Well supported with knowledge, details, examples, facts, and other supporting argument	Good	4	X3	12
	Adequately supported with knowledge, detail, example, fact, and other supporting argument	Adequate	3	Х3	9
	Inadequately supported with knowledge, details, examples, facts, other supporting argument	Inadequate	2	Х3	6
	Poorly supported with knowledge, detail, example, fact, and other supporting argument	Poor	1	Х3	3

Highly appropriate grammar use, and error-free	Very Good	5	X2	10
Very few grammatical error but meaning not harmed	Good	4	X2	8
Some errors in grammar use which somewhat disturb meaning	Adequate	3	X2	6
Frequent grammar errors, many times meaning is difficult to understand	Inadequate	2	X2	4
Almost every sentence contains error, meaning is hardly understood	Poor	1	X2	2
Perfectly intelligible, very natural speech speed, free of mispronunciation	Very Good	5	X2	10
Slightly slow speed, mispronunciation is occasional causing occasional unintelligibility	Good	4	X2	8
Slightly slow speed, mispronunciation is occasional causing occasional unintelligibility	Adequate	3	X2	6
Very slow speech speed, so many hesitation, frequent mispronunciation very often affect intelligibility.	Inadequate	2	X2	4
Speech speed too slow and full of incompetent paucity, hardly intelligible	Poor	1	X2	2

Since the current speaking assessment model was based on a criterion-reference test, the grading system commonly used in norm- referenced tests was not applicable here. As known, a NRT test result is interpreted based on the concept of normal curve or normal distribution. Being so, the minimum passing grade is usually the scores which fall or scatter close around the mean score or between -1 and +2 standard deviation (SD) of the mean, usually is graded C. And the assigning of grades A, B, D and E is decided by how many standard deviations the scores lie from the mean. For example, the scores that fall 2 SD below the mean (normal tendency) is assigned as D, and the scores lying 4 SD below the mean or the normal portion are assigned as B, and the scores lying 4 SD above the normal portion are assigned as A.

As a criterion-referenced test, the deciding of minimum passing grade and the assigning of other grades on the students' speaking performance cannot be referred to the normal curve distribution concept and its grading system of using normal portion and standard deviations, but should be referred to the set up criteria. Each student's performance on a CRT was compared to a particular criterion in absolute terms, without reference to the other students' scores (Brown 2005). So, in the current test, as mentioned earlier, every level of ability for each content component had their own specified and formulated set of criteria. The grading, i.e., from A, B, C, D, to E, therefore, should be based on or referenced to the accumulated scores of the three components. Each grade indicates detailed specified criteria containing indicators that the test takers or the students should achieve. Thus, to generate total minimum acceptable score for the speaking test, the minimum acceptable scores of the three components should be added together. Thus, adding up the minimum acceptable content score (18) with minimum acceptable grammar score (6) and the minimum acceptable pronunciation score (6) results in the minimum acceptable speaking achievement test score (30). This score was the total minimum score for the current speaking test which represented the acceptable level and minimum criteria of performance in all the three components. The range of scores for each level of speaking ability and the assigned grades to be used for pass-or-fail and other decisions is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Grading system: conversion of score into grades

Range of scores		Grades		
44-50	VERY GOOD		Α	
37-43	GOOD		В	
30-36	ADEQUATE		С	
(MINIMUM	(MINIMUM	PASSING	(MINIMUM	PASSING
PASSING	CRITERIA)		GRADE)	
SCORE)				
20-29	INADEQUATE/BAD		D	
10-19	POOR		E	

4. Conclusion

Contextual speaking assessment allows students of esthetician program develop their ideas based on the activities in the content subjects. Furthermore, the assessment is possibly able to provide feedbacks that can tell the change direction for improving curriculum design, staffing, facilities, materials, equipment, etc.—which factors influence the teaching and learning endeavor. Using a criterion-referenced test instrument to measure students' learning achievement can generate trustable or valid results and information about the students' achievement, especially in speaking.

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