EXPLORING DIGITAL ASSESSMENT LITERACY IN MALAYSIAN ESL TERTIARY INSTITUTION INSTRUCTORS' INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY

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Abstract:

This conceptual paper aims to study the digital assessment literacy of ESL instructors in Malaysia. In education, assessment is one of the most crucial components in the teaching and learning process. Assessment allows the instructors to gather information of the students to determine the students' knowledge and to make improvements based on the data collected. With the digitalisation in education, it has propelled the relevancy of digital assessment. Despite the increasing use of digital assessments in educational settings, many educators lack the necessary digital assessment literacy skills to effectively create, administer, and interpret these assessments. Therefore, this study aims to explore the digital assessment literacy of ESL instructors. This study will use semi-constructed interview and analysis of documents. The type of sampling employed in this study is purposive sampling towards 15 ESL instructors in Malaysian Universities. The data will be analysed using thematic analysis. The expected result from this study is that ESL instructors will have knowledge of digital assessment but have areas of improvement in doing digital assessment. The researchers acknowledge that knowing how to use digital assessment tool is not sufficient, and teachers need to remain aware of how these tools are successful or unsuccessful. It is hoped that the outcome of this research will help the teachers to be knowledgeable in how they understand, conduct, and interpret digital assessments

Keywords:

ESL Instructors, Assessment, Digital Assessment, Assessment Literacy

Introduction

During the English colonial period in Malaysia, they had introduced a secular education system in which the classes were taught in English, and this later led to the development of vernacular schools in Malaya. The English educational interventions in Malaysian society were constructed with a similar curriculum to the British schools (Selvadurai. et al., 2015). The introduction of English in the education system led to the present Malaysian students being bilingual or even trilingual. However, this does not guarantee that they are fluent in the English language. In order to balance the domestic and international needs and challenges, Malaysia has introduced a language policy that can address these needs (Gill & Kirckpartrick, 2013).

Malaysia's effort to further develop its education system was to include English as one of the three compulsory pass subjects for the Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) examination, which is equivalent to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in the United Kingdom. This measure was implemented in the First Wave in the implementation of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The First Wave, which took place from 2013 to 2015, focused on strengthening and improving the current system. The Second and Third Wave focused on the structural changes which will take place from 2021 to 2025. The third wave of the Malaysian Educational Blueprint 2013-2025, focused on opportunities for excellence through increased operational efficiency (Iber, 2004; Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2013). Therefore, with the initiatives done by Malaysia, it cannot be denied that English plays an important role in Malaysia's education system.

As the education sector is undergoing reformation to meet the global market, government ministries and related bodies, including companies and employers have been called for the improvement in the quality of education. One of the most important elements of education is assessment. According to Saragih (2017), assessment is defined as various methods used to gather information on a learner's language skills and performance.

As the demand for competent teachers increases, so does the need for teachers to be well-trained in the practice of assessment (Melone, 2013). The ability to assess students' performance is one of the most important aspects of the teaching and learning process. The assessment conducted by the teacher provides data on whether the instructional design is of high quality and whether the assessments created are correlated with the learning outcomes (Bane, 2019). Therefore, the data obtained from student assessments have a significant impact on teachers' teaching, and this includes adjusting their teaching materials and goals based on assessments.

The COVID-19 pandemic which occurred in 2020 has increased the relevancy of digitalisation in the education sector, thus also affecting the relevancy of digital assessment in education. According to Shraim (2019), digital assessment is a system of conducting students' assessments by utilising the internet or integrating it into a component of the learning management system (LMS). Examples include Google Classroom and Schoology. Although the relevancy of digital assessment has increased in the current education scene, but this does not mean that teachers or educators are familiar with digital assessment. it has been stressed in a previous study that digital assessment is considered one of the most challenging elements in digital learning (Motala & Menon, 2020). Past research mentions that educators only integrate technology in teaching as a way to store information and search for resources on the internet, and to prepare PowerPoint presentations (Jang & Chen, 2010; Keengwe & Georgina, 2012).

To increase the usage of digitalisation in education, The Malaysian government has launched Frog VLE, a web-based learning website that aims to replicate traditional learning virtually (Kamalludeen, et al, 2016; Raman & Rathakhrishnan, 2018). This was an attempt by the government to integrate technology into secondary schools through the introduction of 1Bestari Frog VLE. However, it was not used nationwide and was only implemented in some schools. The failure of this program contributed to the literacy problems as there was a lack of training on how to implement the system in their teaching and learning (Siti, 2014; Chipps et al., 2015; Termit and Norma, 2015; Adegbenro et al., 2017).

The challenges in integrating digital assessment not only occur in Malaysian secondary schools, but this phenomenon is also occurring in higher education institutions. Several studies have looked into factors that could impede the integration of digital assessment into higher education. According to Mat Hussin, Idris, and Misnan (2020), communication barriers, network issues, and readiness issues, especially students' readiness are the factors that make digital assessment difficult to implement in higher education. Another study conducted by Judi (2022) discovered that there are issues related to security when conducting digital assessments in higher education. Due to the lack of monitoring technology that prevents students from sharing the exam questions, the potential of the leaking in examination questions exists as their students are able to share their test questions with other classmates as their students have submitted their examinations first. This affects the validity of the exam, however, if an instructor is literate in conducting digital assessments, they can prevent this phenomenon from occurring in assessments.

Although digital assessment presents some challenges, it cannot be denied that digital assessment has facilitated ESL instructors in teaching and learning. One of the advantages of digital assessment is the possibility of expanding the measurement range in an assessment (Awang, 2021). Digital technology has enabled ESL instructors to create assessments that test multiple skills simultaneously. This includes an assessment that can test students on skills that requires the students' sets of knowledge and cognitive process that were previously difficult to assess. An example would be an assessment that tests a student's technical computing skills, decision-making process, and strategic planning can be readily assessed through simulation exercises.

As the development of digital assessment is increasing rapidly, it is important to note that ESL instructors in Malaysia must be literate in conducting digital assessment and be able to effectively implement the use of digital assessment in their practices. For this reason, ESL instructors must be able to conduct digital assessments to ensure validity and reliability and that the assessment created by the ESL instructor is consistent with the learning objectives that have been set prior to the lesson. The lack of digital assessment skills is detrimental to teaching and learning as poor assessment practices can lead to inaccurate results, ultimately impacting students' learning outcomes. Therefore, ESL teachers should be literate in conducting digital assessments to ensure that ESL instructors do not make inaccurate decisions that can influence educational decisions and, in turn, lesson outcomes. Hence, the aim of this study is to discover the digital assessment practices carried out by ESL instructors in Malaysian higher education institutes.

Literature Review

Assessment is a crucial component in education, especially in ESL studies. According to Tontus (2020), assessment is the process of collecting and discussing information that draws from a variety of sources and activities to develop a better understanding of what students know, what students comprehend, and the application of knowledge based on their educational experience. The importance of assessment stems from how assessment can serve the instructor in the lesson and some of this includes setting a benchmark for the instructor, assessing the student's progress, motivating the students in their performance, providing diagnostic feedback for both the teacher and student (Herman, et al., 1992). In assessment, there are two types of assessments, which are summative assessment and formative assessment. These two assessments have very distinct purposes. Formative assessment is administered to give students numerical scores with minimal feedback (Glazer,2014) and formative feedback is able to give comprehensive feedback to the students, thus is able to improve the knowledge learned by the student (Alahmadi et al., 2019). Thus, as educators who are administering these assessments, It is crucial for the instructors to be literate in conducting assessments to ensure that the learners are able to meet the learning objectives.

Assessment Literacy

As assessment literacy in different fields of study has emerged over the years, it is crucial for assessment literacy in the language domain must be defined (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). Assessment literacy in the language domain is referred to (20) as the collection of skills and knowledge that allows individuals to comprehend, evaluate, design language tests, and interpret test data by utilizing appropriate assessment methods and tools effectively and timely (Pill & Harding, 2013). Meanwhile, O'Loughlin (2013) defines assessment literacy in language as the range of skills involved in the creation of assessments, interpreting and how to utilise the test scores obtained from the assessment, evaluating the tests administered, and developing a critical understanding of the purpose and importance of assessments in society.

Another perspective of assessment literacy according to Davies (2008) can be understood as a combination of skills and knowledge. The term 'skills' in this definition refers to the practical expertise in assessment and test construction, meanwhile 'knowledge' refers to a comprehensive understanding of measurement principles and language descriptions (Davies, 2008). Fulcher (2012) proposed a classification of language proficiency which includes practical knowledge (PK), theoretical and procedural knowledge, and socio-historical understanding. Fulcher in his paper further argues that practical knowledge serves as a foundation and plays a more important role than other aspects of language proficiency. Thus, these works of literature indicate that the conceptualization of assessment literacy in language learning has moved from a component-oriented perspective, which focuses on the skills in language learning (Inbar-Lourie, 2008) to a more developmental perspective which has shifted to be more holistic.

Digital Assessment

As digitalisation has penetrated almost all aspects of the modern world, digitalisation in education inevitably occurs as it can assist both teachers and learners in the learning process (Gill & Dalgano, 2017). In recent years, the method of assessing the students' progress has been evolving in the past two decades and this includes the shift from traditional assessment to digital assessment. Digital assessment refers to the utilization of technological devices to generate, administer, store, and/or communicate students' assessment scores and feedback (Appiah & van Tonder, 2018).

The digitization of assessment has created more opportunities in education but also creates new problems. Such opportunities and issues that have arisen due to digital assessment include issues persisting in validity, reliability, and plagiarism (Raaheim, 2019). As compared to traditional assessment, digital assessment is more flexible as it can be conducted through various Learning Management Systems (LMS) which is very convenient to both the instructors and the students. However, it is essential to bear in mind that technology does not hold inherent value and is only significant in the context of learning and assessment when employed to accomplish pedagogical objectives.

SAMR Model

The model that will be guiding this research is the SAMR model. The SAMR model is used to guide the integration of technology in education and digital learning. This model was developed by Dr Ruben Puentedura (Tunjera & Chigona, 2020) and it can be used to assist instructors when conducting digital assessments and how to integrate technology into their instructional practice. The model is a vertical diagram that consists of four levels (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition) and as the model advances, the integration of technology converts from enhancement (Substitution and Augmentation) to Transformation (Modification and Redefinition) (Hamilton, et al., 2016). However, the instructor is not obligated from the bottom of the diagram and can start at any level. The figure below will explain the SMAR model that was developed by Puentedura (2006).
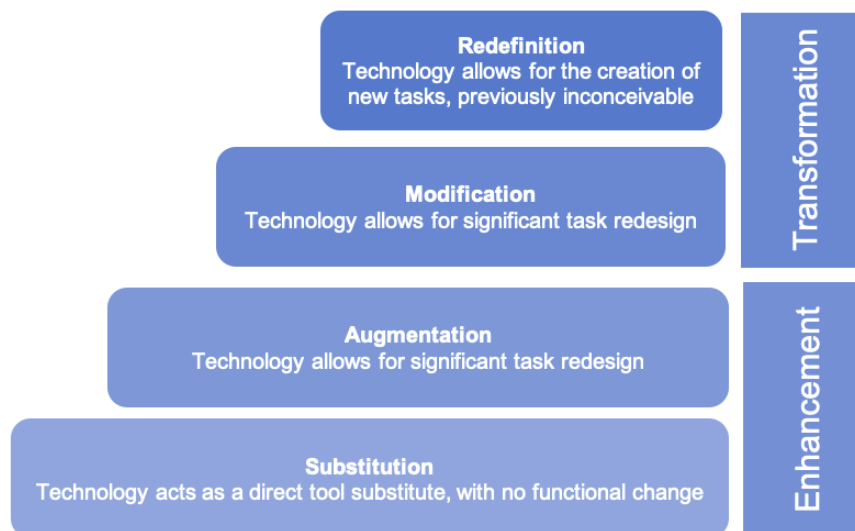

Figure 1 Visual representation of the SAMR Model (Puentedura ,2014)

The goal of the SAMR model is to encourage ESL instructors to move beyond the substitution and augmentation levels and strive for more transformative and innovate how they use of technology in teaching and learning. Applying SAMR in an ESL lesson highlights the importance of leveraging technology to engage students in a holistic learning experience learning experiences that promotes collaboration, and motivation among the students (Sarker, et al., 2019). It is important to note that the objective of the SAMR model is not about categorizing specific technologies or tools, however it focuses on the ways technology can be integrated into an instructors' instructional practice to encourage them to critically evaluate the integration of technology and to aim for a higher level of transformation in their teaching

Methodology

This paper will employ a qualitative approach in the study. The qualitative approach will use semi-structured interviews and document analysis in the collection of data. The phenomenological design will be the underlying design that navigates the study. A total of 15 ESL higher education institutes instructors in Malaysia will be selected through purposive sampling. The instructors must meet the requirements to be selected for this study.

The procedure of the study begins with the researcher receiving the consent of the participants and briefing the participants on the objectives of the study. Then, the researcher will interview the participants individually and the interview session will be recorded for the purpose of analysis. The recorded interview will then be transcribed by the researcher. The researcher will then have a follow-up interview if there is a need for further questions. After the completion of the interview session, the researcher will ask the participants for documents relating to digital assessment. The data collected from this study will be analysed thematically with the assistance of NVIVO which is a qualitative analysis software.

Expected Result

Based on the research questions in this study, the expected result from this study is that ESL instructors do utilise digital assessment, however, the assessment level varies, and they are unable to fully implement the transformation (Redefinition and Modification) level of the SAMR model in their digital assessment.

The results in this study should be consistent with the previous literature where the factors that affect the implementation of digital assessment are due to the instructors being unfamiliar with the university's learning management system (LMS) as a platform where the ESL instructors can conduct the digital assessment. The training given to the instructors is deemed to be insufficient, hence this contributes to the reason why instructors are not utilising digital assessment to its full capacity (Coleman & Mtshazi, 2017), thus the instructors are only using the LMS as a form of supplementation and not as a replacement for their instructional activities, including their digital assessment.

In order to achieve the expected results of this, the researcher should conduct this study precisely and it should answer the research objectives of this study. It is crucial to note that the selection of the sample in this study is omnipotent in influencing the results of this study.

Limitation and Recommendation of The Study

There are some limitations to the study that could affect the accuracy of the results acquired in this study. One of the limitations of the study is the sample size. Due to the small sample size, which is only 15 instructors, the results acquired may be an isolated case as it does not represent the majority of ESL instructors. However, the sample of this size is still relevant as the results of the study are relevant to this specific context. The second limitation that is faced in conducting the present study is in the sampling of data. Purposive sampling was employed in this study; thus, it may not fully represent the predefined population which is the ESL instructors and only represent a small and purposive sample of the population.

Therefore, for future research, the scope of ESL instructors can be increased to the context of Southeast Asia and not just Malaysia to investigate whether the findings in this study are consistent with the future study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study will be conducted relating to the digital assessment literacy of ESL instructors in Malaysia. The researcher aims to uncover the digital assessment practices that are carried out by Malaysian ESL instructors as this is relevant to the progression of education that is heading towards digitalisation. The implication of this study is that the researcher hopes that this study can assist other ESL instructors in conducting digital assessments and applying them in their lessons. This ensures that the digital assessment conducted by the ESL instructors can accurately assess the student's performance to ensure the validity and reliability of the assessment.

Acknowledgements

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