THE USE OF BLENDSPACE TO IMPROVE STUDENTS’ ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT
The high unemployment rate among fresh graduates can be caused by their poor command of English in answering the questions for job interview and unrealistic salary demands. The mastery of English does not seem to have been fully and successfully developed especially among the graduates from public institution in Malaysia. Thus, this research presents the results of a small scale research project which was undertaken in order to discover the students’ perception on the use of Blendspace, a web-based as a tool to improve English speaking skills in job interview. It was carried out among the 30 students of Year 1 Diploma in Electrical and Electronic under the Malaysia-Japan twinning programme in Selangor. The data was obtained from an online questionnaire. It was found that Blendspace helped them to improve their communication skills. There was a general agreement that Blendspace could develop the students’ skills in speaking the English language and positive attitude towards it. Additionally, the respondents have agreed that the materials on Blendspace meet their learning needs and consequently increase the level of self-confidence to converse in that particular language especially during the job interview. Hence, the findings of this research revealed the use of Blendspace could be an alternative tool in motivating students and is reliable for educators in planning the pedagogy which is suitable with the real-life context.

Keywords: Blendspace, English speaking skills, job interview

INTRODUCTION
In the 21st century, the importance of English language as a worldwide language is undeniable. As in the Malaysian context, the former Education Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Dato’ Haji Muhyiddin Yassin reported that the major factor that cause most of the graduates to perform poorly in the job interview session was due to their lack of proficiency to communicate in English since it is very necessary before entering the job market (Bernama 2015). Many research have been conducted in order to enhance students’ speaking skill in English by using technology such as video messaging and voice mail (Emilie 2010; Kim 2003). Nevertheless not many research has been carried out using the Web 2.0: Blendspace as a tool. With regards to these challenges, as an English educator, it is essential to provide sufficient practice which would enhance the students speaking skills to become more confident in answering the job interview questions. This is in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 where “the focus on the English language proficiency and leverage ICT to scale up quality learning across Malaysia” (MOE, 2012). Therefore, this research was conducted in order to explore the students’ perception on the use of Blendspace to improve students’ English speaking skill in job interview where the findings could be valuable to the other students to master the communication skills and at the same time it provides a useful insight for the educators in planning the teaching methodologies for speaking skills which is suitable with the students’ need.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Speaking Skills in English among the Undergraduate Students
Speaking skills in English language is very vital nowadays for the present generation to be competitive in this globalisation era. It is applicable in every aspect especially as career goals. Despite all the advantages to master English language speaking skills, it is perceived as the most difficult skill among students as it requires a good mastery of grammar, a wide range of vocabulary and the correct pronunciation of words. Lack of exposure, fear of negative evaluation and general feeling of anxiety are among the major factors that encourage students to feel worried about speaking in English. To overcome this problem, students are required to improve their speaking skills especially before they have completed their studies in tertiary level. In Malaysia, though English has been
introduced since young, yet the proficiency is still low among the students mainly in rural areas. Thus, there is a need to equip students with a good command of English by the educators. Kim (2003) investigated the effectiveness to use an email system to improve oral language proficiency among the students from Korea and pointed out that the utilization of this system had given a significant impact on fluency and accuracy in terms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Using technologies can be incorporated with all the English language skills (Levy 2009). Kasapoglu-Akyol (2010) highlighted the impact of using educational technology tools to enhance the students’ language and communication skills. Based on the research, ‘the results presented that technologies have been used for many purposes at the same time facilitated students and teachers to be more successful, efficient and practical people in their lives’ (p.225). This is line with the findings of Harlina (2014) on the utilization of technology to improve speaking skills. One of the research gaps that could be pointed out from the previous studies is the use of the current web tool like Blendspace to enhance speaking skills in English.

ICT in Teaching

Today’s workforce is evolving, hence it is a must for educators to implement the technology-based lessons. The use of ICT is very useful since these global digital citizens will be more actively engaged with the learning process if it is suits their interest (Yunus, 2007). The learning will take place better as students are encouraged to connect, interact, collaborate and share. Thus, as a result of these changes, educators should empower the ICT skills rather than implementing the traditional methods of teaching. This is in line with the suggestion by the Ministry of Education as well as the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia where encouraging educators to apply this platform in language learning process (Yunus et al. 2012). Besides, Stracke (2007) revealed on the student survey responses which showed the positive connection between actual class and virtual class could address the task given.

Yunus et al. (2013) remarked the use of ICT could attract students’ attention, assist students’ learning process, aid to improve students’ vocabulary and encourage meaningful learning. The research focuses solely on reading and writing skill where the researchers intend to investigate the effectiveness of using ICT in teaching ESL writing skills in Malaysian secondary schools. Based on the analysis, it was found that the application of ICT in the teaching of ESL writing was not prominent. It is undoubtedly that this particular field is widely researched yet more research could be done into other language skills as the findings do not cover all skills.

ICT: The Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is a web-based tool that is great for educators to promote productivity which uses the ICT platform. It could be listed down into four types of tools; Presentation Tools, Video Tools, Mobile Tools, and Collaboration or Community Tools. Yunus (2012) conducted the research on the benefits of using Web 2.0 technologies in English language learning (ELL) based on the perception and experience of gifted students. The research was administered through a close-ended, open-ended and semi structured interviews among the 80 Form 5 students from the PERMATA Pintar National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia (UKM). The results indicated that the Web 2.0 led to an interesting learning and boost up their confidence to use the language. Students have an opportunity to exchange their feedback as well. Besides, there is room for criticism as the notion of virtual critics helped these students’ self-evaluation of the language that has been used. Educators have to realize that each learner has different capability to learn and understand the messages or situations where each one of them comes from different personality. The learning pace on the languages might differ among the students. Consequently, educators have to promote the use of Web 2.0 efficiently in English language learning process (Yunus et al. 2012).

The social networking; Facebook seemed as the most common Web 2.0 tool investigated by the researchers nowadays. This is compatible with the research to explore ESL learners’ participation in an information-sharing task conducted via Facebook (FB) groups and their feedback on the use of FB groups as the platform for the activity (Omar, 2012). Data shows that even the participants are incompetent in language ability and technical problems, due to the stability of internet connection yet the contribution plays the main role to the group discussion. Communication skill is focused in this research as the finding reveals Facebook is helpful to enhance interaction in English language learning. However, it was suggested by the researcher to conduct a research with different size of sample population which is larger and a longer duration for more interactive tasks. Similarly, no research has been carried out on the use of Blendspace towards any language skills.

The Web 2.0: Blendspace In English Speaking Skills

Previous studies have shown that there is a minimal research on the use of the Web 2.0: Blendspace in English speaking skills. Nor and Kasim (2015) presented the usage of Blendspace in blended learning for the Public Sector Accounting course, offered at the MIA accredited university. The research intended to find out the frequency of the accounting students used the web tool, factors that influence the usage of it and how it could be improved. It was a qualitative research where the data was obtained through multiple data sources which were
from documents’ review, phone interviews and observation. The findings from this research have a similar result with Tselios, Daskalakis and Papadopoulou (2011) and Turner (2015). Blendspace is one of collaboration or community tools for teachers to collect varied resources in one place to form an interactive lesson for students or colleagues (Nguyen Van Cuong, 2015). It uses a drag-drop interface. Blendspace ideals to truly blend your classroom (Figure 1). Educators can collect and organize resources for English language learning in one place and share them with a single link. Moreover, students’ comprehension could be tested via built-in quizzes and students’ progress could be tracked upon their needs. This supports the features of the Web 2.0 tool in educational setting where the tool has to be accessible and practical for the students.

**Figure 1. Layout of Blendspace web-based tool**

To make the teaching process more effective, educators should know how to adapt the current development of technology in education, which could develop learning needs of their students. Hence, the use of Blendspace is strongly supported to be a great free-web tool in enhancing students’ acquisition in English language.

**METHOD**

**Research Methodology and Design**

For the purpose of this research, it is quantitative research which descriptive research design was employed which used a survey method. It used to assess respondents’ opinion on the use of Blendspace in improving English speaking skills as questionnaires were given to obtain meet the objectives. No interview was needed since it was conducted in a small scale.

**Respondents**

The research was carried out using a survey research design (Cohen/Lawrence, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007) where the 30 respondents needed to answer an online questionnaire at a Malaysia-Japan twinning programme in Selangor. A convenience sampling was employed since the respondents were easily accessible and to reduce bias in selecting the respondents. Besides, the respondents were under researcher’s supervision. Thus, the researcher could not say with confidence that the respondents are representative of the population. The respondents were academically talented students and were a highly diverse group of individuals. This group of students have an ability in one or more fields that is sufficiently advanced. Basically, they require adaptation in the ordinary environment that serves the needs of average students in their age, but many also learn differently (Sally M. Reis, 2004). The objective of this research was to discover the students’ perception on the use of Blendspace in improving students’ English speaking skills in job interview. The respondents were mainly excellent students who managed to score straight A for the ‘Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia’ (SPM) examination. Basically, the students were undertaking a diploma programme first in Malaysia for three years and will further their studies in Japan in another two years. Thus, the duration of studies is actually within five years where the programme is specialized on engineering field. Although they were going to pursue studies in Japan, the requirement to learn the English language is still compulsory. Even though all of them were outstanding in terms of their previous good result in SPM, nevertheless some of them still have not performed well during the English class in order to meet the requirements due to the inadequate class hours and the influence of Japanese language. Therefore, this research could be a tool to be used in order to improve students’ English speaking skills in job interview as a preparation before they enter a working life in the future.
Instrument
An online questionnaire was used to collect the data from the respondents. There were two sections of questionnaire prepared for the respondents to answer. The first section was asked to elicit respondents’ background. These included respondents’ gender, recent CGPA result, and family income, competency of using the technology, level of confidence of English speaking skills and the familiarity on the Blendspace web-based. Nevertheless, the questionnaire in the second section was adapted from Kwang Hee Hong and Keiko K. Samimy (2010). The English speaking skills in the questionnaire referred to the communication skills in answering the job interview. The significance of this questionnaire was to investigate more about the students’ perception on the use of Blendspace to improve students’ English speaking skills in job interviews. In this research, respondents were requested to rate the perceptions on the use of Blendspace to improve students’ English speaking skill in job interview based on the Likert Scale; 1 (Strongly Agree), 2 (Agree), 3 (Strongly Disagree) and 4 (Disagree). The rate given for all questionnaires have described about perception of the tool provided in preparing students’ a good command of English to succeed in a job interview session.

Procedures
In this Malaysia-twinning programme, there are three courses for English lesson which are English 1, 2 and 3. English 1 and 2 are specifically for matriculation students where English 3 is designed for Year 1 students. One of the topics to be covered in the syllabus of English 3 is job interview. The traditional method of teaching merely on lectures and PowerPoint notes. Students were assessed on their speaking skills by conducting a mock interview. Therefore, the lesson that has been taught was surely suitable for the students’ need in the real life context. However, for this research, all of the students which were the respondents were given lectures and notes for the first two weeks, then they were provided with Blendspace materials as their additional material or references for the interview assessment. They were given two weeks to practice their interview before the actual mock interview. In the Blendspace materials, the PowerPoint notes were given as well. The same goes to some videos on how to answer the job interview questions along with the Do’s and Don’ts in interview (Figure 2). The link of this website has been shared by the researcher by using the social networking website. After two weeks of lectures, the respondents had gone through the mock job interview. The following week, the online questionnaire was posted to obtain the data. Data collection was done online where the respondents were explained on the answering format and the objective of the study via students’ discussion group in Facebook. It took them only five minutes to complete in answering the questions. Descriptive statistics where frequency counts were tabulated and converted to percentages were used in analyzing the data.

Figure 2. Blendspace materials for English 3: Job interview

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Respondents’ Background
The researcher has prepared fourteen different items in the questionnaire. For question number one until number six, the questions were designed to get information about the respondents’ background. Since in this twinning programme, the students come from a diverse family background, there was a need to obtain this data in order to
determine whether or not these factors have influenced their English speaking skills. From 30 respondents who have answered the question, 43% were male where another 57% were female (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Gender of Respondents](image)

With regards to the family income per month (Figure 4), 10% of respondents’ family income was more than RM 10,000 and the rest of the respondents (90%) had less than RM 10,000. From the percentage shown below, 9% out of 90% of respondents come from poor family as the family income was only less than RM 1,000 monthly.

![Figure 4. Family income per month](image)

Furthermore, 73% of the respondents achieved 3.50 – 4.00 CGPA which could be categorized under the first class degree. Only 23% obtained 3.00 – 3.49 CGPA and 3% with 2.50 – 2.99 CGPA. In addition, majority of the respondents have a good level of confidence in English speaking skills where the percentage was 60%. 27% respondents responded as average while 13% claimed them in excellent level. The percentage is shown below (Figure 5):

![Figure 5. Level of confidence in English speaking skills](image)

The researcher tested the respondents’ level of competency of using the technology too in order to discover their expertise in utilizing the ICT tool. The level has been ranked as excellent, good, average and low. None of them
were in the low level, 57% consider themselves as good users, 37% as excellent users and only 7% was average (Figure 6). This might be different due to their exposure to ICT and have different family background. As has been mentioned earlier, not much research has been conducted using the Blendspace as a tool to improve students’ speaking skill in a job interview as it was proven based on the result, 90% of the respondents were not really familiar with Blendspace web-based before enrolling in this course. Thus, undoubtedly there is a research gap in the need to carry out this research as it is believed would be a great and reliable tool to be used in improving students’ English speaking skills.

**Figure 6. Competency of using the technology**

**Students’ Perception on the Use of Blendspace in Improving Students’ English Speaking Skills in Job Interview.**

In the questionnaires, question number seven until ten were included to discover the students’ perception on the use of Blendspace in improving students’ English speaking skills in job interview. The findings are shown as in Table 4.2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The use of Blendspace should be developed for every English speaking skills class on campus.</td>
<td>20% (6)</td>
<td>70% (21)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>10% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer’s use of Blendspace helps to provide authentic and supplementary learning materials to students in English speaking skills.</td>
<td>20% (6)</td>
<td>70% (21)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>10% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer’s use of Blendspace helps students to complete their classroom instruction.</td>
<td>13% (4)</td>
<td>80% (24)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer’s use of Blendspace makes English speaking skills more fun.</td>
<td>30% (9)</td>
<td>60% (18)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>10% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops my skill in speaking the English language.</td>
<td>27% (8)</td>
<td>70% (21)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. Students’ Perception on the Lecturer’s Use of Blendspace to Improve Students’ English Speaking Skills
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>23%</th>
<th>57%</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>20%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gives me more freedom in choosing an appropriate time to practice the English speaking skills.</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases my ability to participate effectively.</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials on Blendspace meet my learning needs in English speaking skills.</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops positive attitudes to me towards English speaking skills.</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases self-confidence in speaking the English language</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the table 4.2, the N for each item was indicated in the bracket. The results revealed that 97% of the respondents have agreed to develop on the use of Blendspace for English speaking skills class on campus. Another 3% have disagreed on this statement. This could be related to the level of competency of using the technology or familiarity on the Blendspace features. 95% were responded positively on the application of this tool could increase their self-confidence in English speaking skills due to the availability of materials provided which contained of some videos and script to be as the guidelines thus these respondents have a visual idea on how to communicate in English proficiently during the job interview specifically.

In addition, 90% of percentage agreed on the use of Blendspace should be developed for every English speaking skills class on campus. Similarly percentage has resulted from lecturer’s use of Blendspace helps to provide authentic and supplementary learning materials to students in English speaking skill. The significance of using the Blendspace in teaching the English speaking skills was to help students to complete their classroom instruction and make the English speaking skills more fun. It was unexpected there were some respondents disagreed with the statement as 17% of respondents from both statements gave negative response. Yet, 90% of respondents agreed that Blendspace could attract their interest and make them enjoy the lesson plus 93% agreed that Blendspace assisted them to a complement of assignments.

The respondents have a good response too in terms of time flexibility to utilize the web-based since 80% of them agreed on that nevertheless 20 have disagreed. This shown that, majority of the respondents prefer to have an informal setting of lesson which following their own schedule. The findings were consistent with Al-Ani (2013) and Nor and Kasim (2015). With regard to the improvement in participating the task given effectively, the same percentage has been analyzed. It is undoubtedly, the tool has its own features that are captivating and engaging with students’ interest. Besides that, a high percentage has been come out too from the statement ‘materials on Blendspace meet my learning needs in English speaking skills which was 94%. Additionally, 86% of respondents agreed that Blendspace has developed positive attitudes towards English speaking skills while only 13% have a negative perception about it as some students might have a tendency to be a dependent learner by too depending on the teachers to provide the materials in face-to-face communication. Therefore, there were shortcomings portrayed too from the findings of the research based on the results where some respondents chose to disagree with the statements.

**IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

In a nutshell, the findings gathered from this research has clear and significant implications for teaching and learning speaking skills in the English language classroom and opens up interesting opportunities for English language educators to explore when planning the development of their students’ speaking skills as many graduates find themselves lacking confidence when speaking English, despite years of attending university lessons in the English medium. Using the Blendspace has encouraged the development of students’ English speaking skills. This could be supported by the suggestion by the Minister of Education that universities should teach students how to prepare for job interviews, to boost their confidence. The use of ICT like Web 2.0
Blendspace created an authentic experience for the students. Besides, the knowledge of this skill could make the students more responsible and know how to be an independent learner (Liebowitz and Frank, 2011). The data which was obtained from the online questionnaires displays that the students responded positively to the use of the Blendspace to improve students’ English speaking skills in Job interview. There was general agreement that Blendspace could develop the students’ skills in speaking the English language and positive attitude towards it.

Additionally, the respondents have agreed to that the materials on Blendspace meet their learning needs and consequently increase the level of self-confidence to converse in that particular language. Even though some of the respondents have different perceptions as in the questionnaire, yet majority of the respondents showed a positive impacts. Based on the data, the shortcomings of the use of Blendspace as a tool to facilitate students’ English speaking skill probably due to the bad internet connection service and unfamiliarity with the use of Blendspace to be the material in a lesson process. The researcher has to take into consideration on this matter since some of the respondents might not really interested or familiar with the features of Blendspace. More tutorial should be done and the lesson itself could not fully rely on this Web 2.0 Blendspace where some students prefer to a conventional method of teaching which is solely on a lecture and tutorial in the classroom setting. This is supported by Moreno et al. (2007) who argued the most effective way to use technology in education need to have proven pedagogical and practical on the procedures. On the other hand, it is surely need a room for improvement. It is recommended the further research could be based on the existence findings which inform the design and implementation of the new model by applying the same tool incorporates all language skills with a larger scale of respondents or varieties of task.

REFERENCES


