

THE APPLICATION OF WEB 2.0 TOOLS TO DETERMINE RECEPTIVE SKILLS AMONG MALAY LEARNERS OF ARABIC LANGUAGE AT THE UNIVERSITI SULTAN ZAINUL ABIDIN (UniSZA)

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Submission date: 21st May 2018 Accepted date: 21 June 2018 Published date: 30th August 2018

Abstract

The application of modern technologies in educational fields thrills with a sudden shift in using of the internet from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 in the early 21st century. In the time various technological tools and social media sites evolved for social, and educational purposes. The application of such technological tools in teaching and learning of a language is termed computer-assisted language learning. This study aims to determine the performance of Malay undergraduate learners of Arabic as a foreign language at the universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin in reading, and listening skills using the online tool “QuizCreator”. The sample of the study comprises 30 Malay Undergraduate students that are learning Arabic as a foreign language at UniSZA. The data of the study were collected through test instrument designed and marked based on TOAFL (AL-ARABIA) marking scheme. The results indicated that only seven participants scored pass mark in reading skill test while seven participants scored pass mark in listening skill test. This result is supported by various empirical researches conducted at different levels and time, with different methods. This study recommends the use of web 2.0 tools in teaching and learning of Arabic language to the learners.

Keywords: *Arabic, language skills, Malay students, performance, Web 2.0 technologies*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of modern technological internet tools and pervasive development of social media sites are undergoing a profound transformation in the 21st century (Andriole, Cox & Khin, 2017). The W.W.W. sites have witnessed intense scrutiny and virtual changes with fast improvement of Social sites such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Edmodo, Youtube, QuizCreator and many others which marked a

transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0. (Belk, 2014). It also refers to learning administration frameworks (LMSs) web 2.0, virtual learning condition (VLE) or course administration frameworks (CMS) (Conradie, Moller & Faleni, 2014).

The world has realised the importance of having expertise in the foreign languages as an added advantage which becomes a vital in the world diplomatic strategies and for the purpose of accessing new technological inventions that come from different foreign countries. It is also crucially associated with the making of meaningful and constructive engagement in politics, security, global trade and education (Zubair & Sarudin, 2009). Arabic in its distinctive varieties, is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. It is estimated to have more than 400 million people who speak it as a first language or official language in twenty-two countries and more than 250 million people who speak it as a second or foreign language (Gelvin, 2017).

The Arabic language is used in Malaysian context for various purposes such as a medium of communication with non-Malaysian particularly tourists from the Arabian countries, tours expatriates, and official visitors. Arabic was initially introduced to Malaysia with the evolution of Islamic religion to Malaysian society in the 14th century (Arjomand, 2017). It is primarily used as a medium to propagate Islamic faith and to strengthen the understanding of the Islamic messages especially the Quran which is required to recite in five daily prayers in no any other language but Arabic language (Hamid, 2017). Moreover, Barghi et al. (2017) assert that Malaysian Ministry of Education provides a provision to teach the Arabic language as a subject in the primary and secondary school levels. However, at tertiary institutions, there are quite a number of Malaysian universities both government and private universities that offer degrees in all categories of undergraduate, masters and doctorate degrees. It is a mandatory course for undergraduate students that read Islamic studies especially they are to learn four fundamental Arabic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing— for the first two semesters in separate courses (Baharudin, 2017).

The Arabic language is one of the foreign languages included in the Malaysian national curriculum as it was enshrined in Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025) designed by Malaysian Ministry of Education (Joseph, 2017). Acquiring language skills is needed across all levels of education as they help students to communicate in a good and clear way which is unequivocal and unambiguous needed by all language learners to attain proficiency in language skills (Saville & Barto, 2016). Moreover, the students' performance in learning language is measured on those skills. Accordingly, their performance can be affected negatively or positively impacted by various factors (Cohen, 2014). Many empirical studies indicate that Malay learners of Arabic as a foreign language have deficiencies in term of Arabic language skills as a result of various factors such as motivation, L1 transfer, anxiety, lack of practice or improper learning strategies (Abdullah & Omar, 2016; Sahrir et al., 2016). Some studies associate the difficulties and challenges faced by Malay learners of Arabic language with the poor performance of the students in the Arabic language skills (Mei, Ramli & Alhirtani, 2015). Recent studies stated that the issues of bad performance are persisted among Malay Arabic undergraduate learners, despites efforts made by government policies and different models and approaches adopted by many researchers (Alhirtani, 2018; Mohad, Mokhtar & Omar, 2018; Zailaini et al., 2018; Rahman, 2017).

It could be argued that most of the previous studies did not investigate the students' performance across the Arabic language skills according to the international standard in most of Malaysian universities that offer Arabic program, which is important in two ways, one it can help in knowing which skills that require more attention by from learners and their lecturers, and secondly it allows for generation so that the language policy makers can use it in planning an intervention program. Therefore, this study aims to determine the performance level of Malay undergraduate learners of Arabic as a foreign language at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin in listening and reading skills according to the standards of United Certification Services

Limited (UNICERT). The UniCert is an international organization of certification and authorization for various languages learnt in university background. The essential goal of UniCert is to support language education for universities and to offer an acknowledged certificate that attests language knowledge outside universities (Ruane, 2003).

2.0 LITERATURE STUDY

There are a lot of studies done by second language researchers to explore and observe the performance of second language learners outside and inside Malaysian context. However, in learning Arabic as a foreign language, the studies are very rare, particularly in this aspect. Nevertheless, Maskor et al. (2016) mentioned various factors affecting the performance of Malay Arabic learners in reading skills as follow, work consumes their time, the impact of the environment, the prices of books which are measured expensive and the attitude or considering the reading as insignificant. Findings show that few in the Malay students are eager to read because they do not get pleasure from reading. This is because they assume that reading does not promote them in any way when compared to other matters.

According to Samah (2015) the reading of additional books by undergraduate students in Malaysia is left far behind while compared to students of foreign countries, specifically, they read an average of only twelve books during three or four years of study. The major factor which creates different tribulations to students' performance in reading Arabic can be perceived in their intention for reading Arabic text (bin Samah et al., 2016). Furthermore, the chance of increasing language ability and vocabulary by reading Arabic text during free time is discarded by the students (Ab. Halim, 2009; Ismail, 2008; Samah, 2012). Reading Arabic text is done only for certain or compulsory purposes such as making assignments or looking for answers. Mustapha, Mustapha and Chik (2017) stated that most of the performance problems face by Arabic undergraduate students in reading skills are correlated to the text comprehension.

A study conducted by Maskor et al. (2016) also shows that students' lack of referring to customary books and current Arabic reference books is the causes of their failure in mastering the Arabic language skills. Upon asking the explanation for this occurrence, many excuses are given by the students, such as lack of time, simply bored and tired, incapability to concentrate due to the noisy environment, difficulty in understanding the meaning of words or sentences, as well as difficulty in understanding Arabic text which is typically not vowel-marked. Nevertheless, there are also students who offer the reason for advancement and many words in the text are difficult. These reasons led them to be more tending to go for a shortcut, fast and safer according to their perceptions, that is, to refer to Malay reference books either originally written in Malay or translated from Arabic. Some of the students also feel lazy to refer to a dictionary if words are unknown to them (Baharudin, 2017).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

A quantitative method is utilized in this study. The sample of the study comprises 30 Malay undergraduate students that are learning Arabic as a foreign language at the University Sultan Zainal Abidin Terengganu, Malaysia. The students are in their final year of a bachelor of Arabic language, including 19 female 11 male. The data of the study were collected through test instrument designed and marked based on *Al-Arabia* scheme. *Al-Arabia* is one of the Tests of Arabic as a Foreign Language TOAFL centres under the UNICERT. All the participants were registered by the researchers with "QuizCreator" platform. Quiz Creator (WQC) is a powerful online platform that assists educators, teachers, researchers and many more to generate interactive flash-based quizzes, tests, surveys, and assessments easily (Siregar, 2017). All tests were conducted at computer laboratory in the Faculty of

Languages and Communication UniSZA. And prior to taking the actual tests, hands-on training of one hour was given to the participants. All the questions are given in the Arabic language. Their performance in each skill is determined and automatically scored, besides the frequencies were calculated at the same time.

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The performance of the students participated in this study based on the two receptive skills as scored and calculated in the “QuizCreator” indicated that there are 30 participants registered for both tests. Out of those participants, 30 are regarded as unique users during the reading test while 27 are regarded as unique users during the listening test as they actively participated in the tests. *Unique users* are the participant whom their answers are used in this study because they answered all questions and submitted it without any issue. The results also indicated that there are ten questions for each skill.

Moreover, the marking scheme showed that there are 25 points for each reading and listening test. Whereas, scoring 20 points (which is equivalent to 80 % of the total score) is regarded as the passing benchmark score based on the TOAFL (AL-ARABIA) marking scheme. Furthermore, the result indicated that the participants were given 30minutes to respond to 10 questions in each test. However, the average time taken by the participants was 28minutes for reading skill test and 27minutes for listening skill test. Furthermore, the results indicated that only seven out of thirty participants scored pass mark in the reading skill test, and eight out of thirty participants scored pass mark in listening skill test.

In reverse case, twenty-three participants out of thirty failed reading skill test and twenty-two out of thirty participants failed in listening skills test. Though, three out of thirty participants did not submit their answers in the listening skills test which make them not to be among the unique users, although they were counted among the failed participants. Hence, the results revealed that the highest score in reading skills test is 19 points and 21 points in listening skills test, while the lowest score is 6 points in reading skills test and 7 points in listening skills test. The results of this study are presented in the following table.

Table 1: Students scores in the two receptive skills (listening and reading)

Phase	Reading	Listening
Total users	30	30
Unique users	30	27
Total questions	10	10
Full score	25 pts.	25 pts.
Passing score	20 pts.	20 pts.
Passing rate	80 %	80 %
Time limit	30:00 min	30:00 min
Average time taken	28: 00 min	27:00 min
Pass	7	8
Fail	23	22
Highest score	19	21
Lowest score	5	7

Pts. = Means points

4.1 Discussion

The result of this study shows that students levels of performance in the receptive skills based on the international standard test TOAFL (AL-ARABIA) was poor because only seven out of thirty participants scored pass mark in the reading skill test, and eight out of thirty participants scored pass mark in listening skill test. The results can be supported by various empirical studies conducted with Malay students who are learning Arabic as a foreign language at different levels. Such as the study conducted by Haron, Ahmad, Mamat and Mohamed (2010); Maskor, Baharudin, Lubis and Yusuf (2016) in which they indicated that many of Malay AFL learners have bad performance in the Arabic language skills. A research conducted by Alobaydi, Alkhayat, Arshad and Ahmed (2017); Gharawi and Bidin (2016) also stated that unsatisfactory performance by Malay AFL learners in the Arabic language skills is caused by lack of vocabularies, which can be easily solved if the learners use internet website and other e-dictionaries to abstain the Arabic vocabularies. Rahman (2017); Al Omari (2016, p. 154) declared that the best students with good Arabic speaking skills performances are those who frequently use internet website in learning the Arabic language, while the majority of the learners have poor performances because they mostly depend on local learning approach.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORKS

This study was empirically conducted to investigate the performance of Malay undergraduate learners of Arabic as a foreign language in two receptive skills. In this study, an online tool "QuizCreator Online" was used to conduct and analyse the tests. This is part of computer-assisted language learning systems also known as web 2.0 as it was a web-based tool. In summary, the results revealed that the performances of those undergraduates used as samples in this study were not encouraged if scored based on the TOAFL (AL-ARABIA) marking scheme. This study recommends that the Arabic learners should be encouraged to use web 2.0 tools such as Blogs, Edmodo, Facebook and QuizCreator Online tools in learning Arabic in order to be more familiar with the system.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Faculty of Languages and Communication of Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin for permitting us to conduct this study in its computer laboratory. We also thank the participating students for actively responding to the questions and maintaining the order during the test.

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