POCKET E-Li: LISTENING ASSESSMENTS MADE EASY

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Abstract

Listening skills should be given more attention as listening takes precedence over anything else when it comes to acquiring a language (Putriani, Sukirlan & Supriyadi, 2013). Even with the expansion of various technology to facilitate teaching and learning of listening skills in class, the assessment conducted to identify students' level of understanding of a certain topic is still not up-to-date and not parallel with the advancement of technology. The current studies show that the use of mobile apps for listening purpose is proven to be effective in reducing students' anxiety (Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015), sustaining students' motivation (Read & Kukulska-Hulme, 2015), and improving students' linguistic competencies (Ramos & Valderruten, 2017). This study is aimed to investigate the students' perceptions on the use of mobile application for listening assessment. 50 Diploma students from various faculties in UiTM Shah Alam were randomly chosen to answer listening comprehension questions via the prototype developed, named Pocket E-Li. Their feedback on the experience of using mobile application prototype for listening assessment is collected via Google Form. The results demonstrate that the majority of the students provided positive response towards the implementation of mobile application for listening assessment. Almost all of the respondents agreed that listening assessment should be conducted via mobile application in the future. It can be concluded that listening assessment via mobile application is beneficial to students since it meets the students' demands and needs which is equivalent with the use of current technology.

Keywords: *audio only, video media, listening assessment, mobile application*

INTRODUCTION

Listening skills are unquestionably essential in learning a second or foreign language. These skills should be given more attention as listening takes precedence over anything else when it comes to acquiring a language (Putriani, Sukirlan & Supriyadi, 2013). Moreover, Machado (2010) says the success of children's speaking, reading and writing skills depend on their listening abilities. In order for students to write an essay or speak about his or her view on one particular topic, he or she should have some level of knowledge and vocabulary related to that topic. In the past decades, educators had no problem supplying the students with relevant reading materials related to the topic. But frequently, teachers failed to supply the students with relevant listening materials. The challenges arouse when they had to supply them with listening materials but there was no native speaker to talk about the topic, limited number of radios and insufficient computers to play the listening audio in class. In other words, the real obstacle in listening lesson was due to the non-existence of sophisticated technology to facilitate the lesson. As a result, little attention has been given to listening skills (Solak & Erdem, 2016). Recent findings found that using images with audio e.g., a video or a film can greatly enhance students' listening results (Yasin, Mustafa & Permatasari, 2018). A video has advantages for various learners especially visual learners as it is contextual and shows body language, and it can help students with short attention spans (Wilson, 2008). In language testing, videos have been claimed to have greater validity compared to audio

(Nation & Newton, 2009). As a result, educators started to consider mobile devices as the 'next big thing' for language learning and testing (Kim, 2013).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Even with the expansion of various technology to facilitate teaching and learning of listening skills in class, the assessment conducted to identify students' level of understanding of a certain topic is still not up-to-date and not parallel with the advancement of technology. This can be illustrated with the use of pencil and paper and also radio to play the audio CD in assessing listening skills. For example, International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and Malaysian University English Test (MUET). Considering current technology developments, the use of audio materials in the instructional process for learning listening skills seems rather inefficient (Chen, Wang & Xu., 2014). The current method and materials are considered as irrelevant since millennials are exposed to variety of listening materials with images via social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. In addition, the differences in terms of learning styles and proficiency level (Norazean, Ahmad Mazli, Nurul Nadiah Dewi, Zulaikha & Salwa, 2017), motivation (Read & Kukulska-Hulme, 2015) and schemata (Bao, 2016) may affect students' performance in listening skills.

While the issue on the use of video media is still being debated, technology is advancing at a tremendous rate. The development of mobile applications in learning is thriving and taking the education system to the next level. While students having all the necessary devices such as smartphones, earphones and also the access to the inter-net, the teaching and learning process in the classroom somehow does not challenge the present-day generations' learning styles. The same dilemma also occurs in the implementation of present listening assessment. Considering the students' current needs and access, using mobile apps in listening assessment should be ventured into.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many arguments related to listening skills being put forward for the past few decades especially regarding the integration of visual to assess listening. On top of that, the emergence of technology has given greater emphasis to the matter at hand.

The Use of Video Media in Listening Assessment

Many research have been done to explore the use of video media in listening assessment. Wagner (2013) and Wootipong (2014) proven that students' performance was positively influenced by the use of video media in listening assessment. On the contrary, it was found that there is no significant difference in students' performance with the use of video (Batty, 2015; Kim, 2015). Meanwhile the other research show that the channel of input in listening tests does not affect the students' listening test's performance (Başal, Gülözer & Demir, 2015; Göktürk & Altay, 2015). Despite the negative results highlighted in some previous studies, video media has a lot to offer in regard to visual elements, authentic input and interactive aspects.

The Use of Mobile Apps for Listening Assessment

The use of mobile apps to assess students' listening skills is relatively new in Universiti Teknologi MARA since no assessment has even been conducted by using mobile application. At present, the use of mobile apps is only for learning process and not for summative assessment. Excessive number of issues have been debated on the use of technology for assessment such as technological issue (Elaish, Shuib, Abdul Ghani, Yadegaridehkordi, & Alaa, 2017), distraction (Heick, 2016), and no significant difference in students' performance (Harven, 2013). However, the current studies show that the use of mobile apps for listening purpose is proven to be effective in reducing the students' anxiety (Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015), sustaining students' motivation (Read & Kukulska-Hulme, 2015), and improving students' linguistic competencies (Ramos & Valderruten, 2017). The debates are expected to continue but the current students' needs should be set as priority for the education system to be aligned with their capacity and ability.

In conclusion, there are contrasting views highlighted by the previous researchers on the use of video media and mobile application for listening assessment due to the issues raised. However, issues are meant to be solved and therefore, this innovation is anticipated to fill in the gaps stated by the previous studies and discover the possible method to be implemented in assessing listening skills in the new era.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed quantitative method with the use of online questionnaire for data collection. A prototype of listening assessment, named Pocket E-Li was developed by using ProProfs Quiz Maker for both Android and IOS mobile phone users. The listening assessment prototype was developed with 15 listening comprehension questions based on three videos (news item, talk show and interview) from Youtube. 50 diploma students from various faculties in UiTM Shah Alam were randomly chosen to answer the questions. The respondents were from six different faculties; Faculty of Health Science, Faculty of Art and Design, Faculty of Film, Theatre and Animation, Faculty of Sports and Recreation, and Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies. Their feedback on the experience of using mobile application prototype for listening assessment was collected via Google Form. The students were given a link (Pocket E-Li prototype) to answer the test before they can answer the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consists of three (3) parts;
      1) Students' perceptions on the content of the listening test
      2) Students' perceptions towards listening assessment via Mobile App
      3) Students' perceptions towards the future of listening assessment via Mobile App

The data obtained were then analysed by using google form analysis where the percentage is used as the data presentation. This study focuses only on students' perceptions (experience) on the use of mobile apps for listening assessment but not on students' performance.

RESULTS

Table 1: Students' perceptions on the content of the listening test

Categories	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Test difficulty	79%	14%	7%
Interesting, up-to-date and meaningful context	84%	16%	0%

Based on Table 1, the results show that the majority of the students (79%) agreed that the difficulty level of the test is suitable with their level of English language proficiency. In addition, a very high percentage of the students (84%) also agreed that the video used in Pocket E-Li is up-to-date, interesting and meaningful.

Based on the results above, students perceived the content of the test to be appropriate to their level of understanding. This is due to the fact that the content was prepared according to the syllabus content for Diploma students. Besides, Pocket-Eli provides interesting, up-to-date and meaningful context as it is relevant to the current technology advancement.

Table 2: Students' perceptions towards listening assessment via Mobile Apps

Categories	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I enjoy using the listening mobile app	77%	23%	0%
I can use the listening mobile app anytime and anywhere	86%	9%	5%
The listening mobile app offers interactive features	81%	19%	0%
I prefer to use the listening mobile app for future listening assessment.	79%	21%	0%
I would recommend this listening mobile app to my friends.	77%	21%	2%

In regard to students' perception towards listening assessment via mobile application, the majority of the participants (77%) agreed that they enjoy using the listening application while 23% of the participants felt neutral about using the application. 86% of the participants also agreed that with the mobile application, they are able to use it at anytime and anywhere. 9% felt neutral about the accessibility of the mobile application whilst 5% disagreed that the mobile application serves the convenience of accessibility. On the other hand, 81% of the participants agreed that mobile application offers interactive features while 19% of the participants disagreed to this statement. A high percentage (79%) of the participants also agreed that listening mobile application would be their future preference as the medium for listening assessment. However, 21% of the participants were neutral about the use of this medium for the future listening assessment. 77% of the participants agreed that they would recommend this listening mobile application to their friends while 21% of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed to this statement and only 2% disagreed in totality that they would recommend this listening mobile application to their friends.

From results attained above, it can be concluded that the majority of the students responded positively towards the presence of visual and the incorporation of technology as they help the listening assessment to be more enjoy-able, interactive, and convenient. This is supported by findings by Rahimi and Soleymani (2015) and Read and Kukulska-Hulme (2015) where it is established that mobile applications can reduce students' anxiety and sustain students' motivation.

Table 3: Students' perceptions towards the future of listening assessment via Mobile App

Categories	Agree	Disagree
Listening assessment via mobile apps	91%	9%

Based on Table 3, a high percentage of the students (91%) agreed that the future of listening assessment should be conducted via mobile application while 9% of the students disagreed. In regard to future listening assessment via mobile application, the majority of the students showed positive response to the use of mobile apps for their listening assessment. Even though it is something new for the students, they viewed it positively due to the integration of current technology. The findings by Read and Kukulska-Hulme (2015) clearly showed the facilitation effect of the social media on students' motivation as students perceived technology positively to be used in their learning.

In relation to novelty, this study is a continuation of previous studies on video media where two journal articles have been published. Besides, the content is newly developed and validated by Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) experts as the content has to be CEFR aligned to match the current curriculum in UiTM. The content is developed at B1 level (Intermediate Independent Learner) to match the syllabus level for Diploma students in UiTM. Other than that, the content created is based on new curriculum standard to cater to the current students' needs. To further strengthen the study, the prototype developed serves as a modern version to the current traditional assessment method which uses audio-only method. Not only that, this prototype is up-to-date with the current advancement and evolution of technology.

The mobile application for listening assessment can benefit students since the content matches the CEFR level for Diploma students. Besides, it meets students' demands and needs with the use of current technology. The assessment can be conducted easily because it doesn't require computer labs, computers or even staffs' assistance during the process. Based on the feedback obtained, all students own a smartphone equipped with mobile data and earphones. Consequently, together with the on-the-go nature of mobile application, the assessment will only involve small cost from the university.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, students perceived Pocket E-Li as an interesting, up-to-date and convenient listening tool. Besides, the use of videos provides meaningful context to the understanding of the listening content. It can be concluded that students are positive towards the implementation of mobile app as a tool for future listening assessment. For future direction, there are some features that will be included in Pocket E-Li such as interactive practices, intriguing notes, and gamification to further enhance this innovation. These new features are anticipated to attract students and help to improve their listening skills.

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