FROM BOOKS TO E-BOOKS: ESL LECTURERS' VIEWS ON THE SHIFT

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study was conducted with the specific aim to gain understanding with regards to ESL lecturers' implementation of e-Books in a TVET public institution in Malaysia by exploring their views on the utilization of the technology in their own teaching context.

Methodology - Inspired by Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a lens for us to gain insight into this phenomenon, open-ended questions and semi-structured interview sessions were carried out with four ESL lecturers to elicit the required data regarding their views on the usefulness and ease of use of e-Books in their own teaching context.

Findings - The findings revealed that ESL lecturers had a good perceptions with respect to the usefulness and accessibility of e-Books as a potential tool to support and enhance the teaching and learning process. Nevertheless, their responses also revealed several challenges which were largely related to lack of access to technology and the internet which could hinder further development and effective utilization.

Significance - The findings of this study will redound to the students and teaching staff of the institution as the participants' data revealed the need to improve technology and internet facilities so as to support the use of eBook technology in its teaching and learning context. The English Language Unit will also be able to make rooms for improvement with respect to the construction of the contents of e-Books based on the responses given by the participants. For the researchers, this research will help them uncover critical areas in the educational field which have not been explored in their own and unique context.

Keywords - e-Book, technology, ESL teaching and learning, TVET

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Global education emphasizes on the development of ICT skills alongside other 21st-century abilities such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration that today's students need to succeed in their careers during the information age. Utilization of technology such as eBooks in classrooms today is a trend which is in lieu with the imperative for learning institutions to comprehend 21st century learning in which teachers assist students to learn and live productively in a global society. This is where precise and contemporary information becomes a meaningful part of everyday learning. In response to this aspiration, the English Language Unit (ELU) of Politeknik Port Dickson introduced the use of eBooks in its ESL teaching and learning context in early 2019.

1.2 Problem statement

A number of scholars propose several advantages of eBook that could enhance students' learning experiences as they are portable, affordable, convenient to use etc. Plus, its utilization will develop students' technological skills, along with communicative skills, as intended by the course module. ESL lecturers, are the key players in the successful implementation of e-book to nurture a practical yet balanced explanation in the convincing and ambient classroom environment. However, their lack of understanding on the affordance of eBooks and their role as key players could lead to ineffective implementation which could affect the development of 21st century abilities in their respective students.

1.3   Research aims/objectives

Since all ESL lecturers are expected to use this technology in innovative and effective ways, this study was conducted with the aims to gain understanding with regards to ESL teachers' implementation of eBooks by exploring their views in terms of usefulness and ease of use of the technology in their own teaching context and also to suggest on possible actions for rooms of improvement.

1.4   Research question(s)

The specific question that we asked was "How does the implementation of eBooks viewed by our ESL lecturers in their teaching context?".

1.5   Significance of the research/study

The findings of this study will redound to the students and teaching staff of the institution as the participants' data revealed the need to improve technology and internet facilities so as to support the use of eBook technology in its teaching and learning context. The English Language Unit will also be able to make rooms for improvement with respect to the construction of the contents of eBooks based on the responses given by the participants. For the researchers, this research will help them uncover critical areas in the educational field which have not been explored in their own and unique context.

1.6   Limitations of research

This study is limited in terms of its participants as only 4 participants could be arranged for responses. Time was also a big constraint as both participants' and the researchers' busy schedule made the gathering of information a very challenging one. This study too, relied heavily on lecturers' words and not actions, due to their unwillingness of being observed in their classrooms, hence, not allowing other research instrument like observation to be carried out to triangulate and verify the data gathered from the open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews.


2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

E-Books can present any type of auditory or visual materials – including speech, text, music, animations, photographs, or videos – alone or in different combinations. EBooks can link different types of representations such as pictures with sounds, oral readings with written text, videos with subtitles, or any other combinations that could reinforce teaching and teach (Casey, 1994). Scholars have contrary views about the value of academic eBooks. Advocates such as Lemken (1999) argued that the technology should "fill the gulf between printed and digital information" (p. 4). A number of advantages have been widely claimed to be associated with this form of technology. Hernon et al. (2006) named a few advantages such as convenience, economy, portability and materials being more up to date. Shiratuddin et al. (2003) stated that students can build their own personalised digital libraries. Lam, Lam and McNaught (in press) mentioned several potential advantages of using eBooks namely access to more readings, remote access, searchable readings, potential links to allied multimedia resources, portable resources and optimising reading time (e.g. during travel). Also there is empirical evidence which indicates that, once students can connect to the technology, they read faster (Wilson, 2003) and they enjoy it (Simon, 2002)

Nevertheless, there are also negative revelations of the use of the technology in the academic setting. Not all students can feel comfortable with the technology. For instance, some studentsfind reading long text on a small computer screen tiring, less efficient and even 'painful' (Wilson, 2003, p. 11) compared with reading paper based text. Wilson (2003) also reported complaints about the ineffective navigational controls on eBook readers, as being "awkward, difficult or time-consuming to use" (p. 14).

The success of the eBook technology seems to depend heavily on the ease of the reading process. Malama, Landoni and Wilson (2004) discovered that users regard the ease of navigation through a clear user interface, and a clear and logical structure to support readers' sense of place in the eBook and layout of the eBook on screen as a strong motivating force; also important are . The optimal use of screen real estate is even more important with mobile eBooks than with laptops or desktop computers. Wilson, Landoni and Gibb (2002) used the book metaphor as a crucial design feature, including having a cover, a table of contents, a consistent and tidy typographical style, simple classification of book sections, and cues for reading progress.

EBooks have extensive features such as page turning, scrolling of text, and searching. More advanced eBook-related functionalities are constantly being developed. Wilson (2003), gathered user feedback on using eBooks, found that users appreciate a quick and accurate search function, an annotation function, and the inclusion of hypertexts and dictionaries on the reader. Lam, Lam and McNaught (in press) evaluated the perceived usefulness of the functionalities on four popular eBook readers on the market which can be used on PCs and PPCs and found them, in general, to be acceptable.

**Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989)**
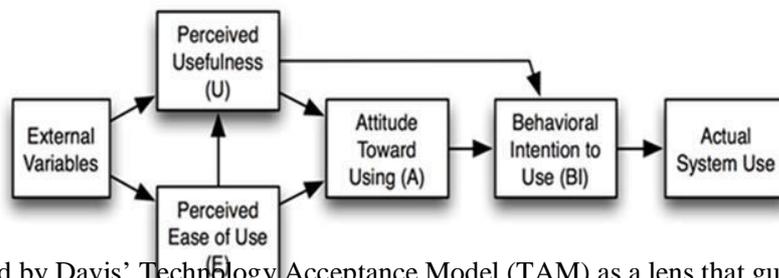
We were inspired by Davis' Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a lens that guided our investigation right from the beginning until the end. This model suggests that when users are presented with a new technology, a number of factors influence their decision about how and when they will use it, notably: Perceived usefulness (PU) – This was defined b Davis as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance". It means whether or not someone perceives that technology to be useful for what they want to do. Perceived ease-of-use (PEOU) – Davis defined this as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort". If the technology is easy to use, then the barriers conquered. If it's not easy to use and the interface is complicated, no one has a positive attitudes towards it. External variables such as social influence is an important factor to determine the attitude. When these things (TAM) are in place, people will have the attitude and intention to use the technology. However, the perception may change depending on age and gender because everyone is different.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is informed by the philosophical assumption that there is no single reality or knowledge, that reality is not an objective phenomenon, but is constructed through the interpretations and understandings which were developed socially and experientially. It is "subjective and multiple, as seen by participants of

the study" (Creswell, 1998. p.75). The nature of our research question led us to employ and then present a detailed scene of the participants' views about eBook technology in their teaching contexts and to explore how these influence their decision about how and when they would use the technology. We hope that by exploring, investigating and understanding the phenomenon through the participants' perspectives, explanations are presented at the level of meaning rather than cause (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Exploratory methodology allows researchers to discover and uncover/find out the participants' beliefs and how this link to their actions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), searching for meanings in their words and practices.

We generated our data for this study using two qualitative instruments, i.e. open-ended questions and semi-structured interview. At the start of this investigation, we invited a number of ESL lecturers and initially, 6 of them agreed to participate in this study. However, due to personal constraints, 2 lecturers had to withdraw, leaving us with 4 participants to work with until the completion of the study. They were asked to write their responses to 3 open-ended questions which were sent via Whatsapp. After analyzing their answers, we carried out online semi-structured interview sessions to further generate more detailed and relevant data from the participants. We then analysed all the data using six steps which we adapted from Braun and Clark's Thematic Analysis (2006) approach as our analytical framework (Figure 1) which involved the processes of familiarizing ourselves with our data, generating initial codes after we have generated an initial list of ideas about what was in and what was interesting about the data, searching for suitable sub-themes when all data have been initially coded and collated, reviewing and refining the sub-themes generated in step three, defining and naming the sub-themes which were then further refined and put under the elements of TAM as overarching themes and finally producing the report once we have a set of fully worked-out data.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework
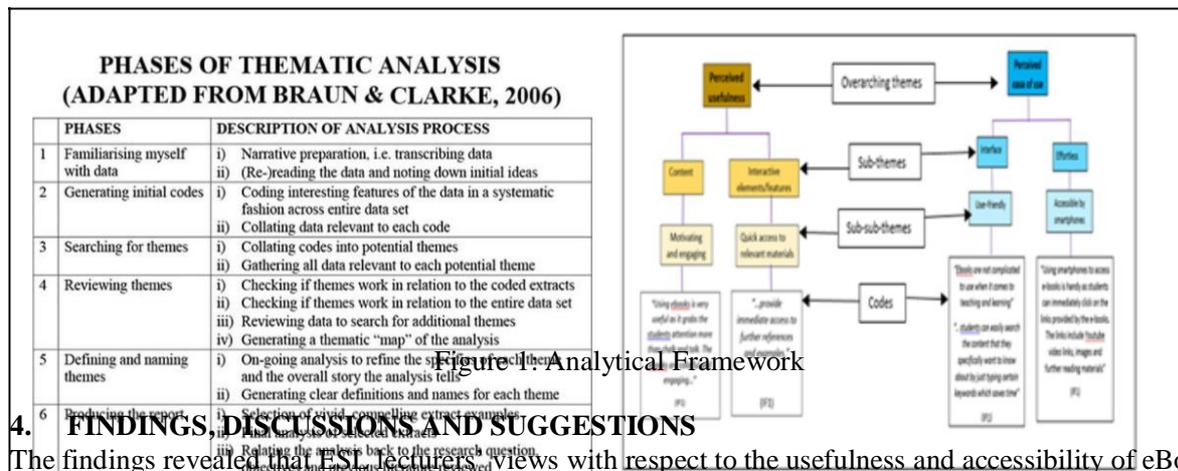
4. FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings revealed that ESL lecturers' views with respect to the usefulness and accessibility of eBooks as a potential tool to support and enhance the teaching and learning process, worked hand in hand with a number of contextual influences in affecting the actual utilization of the technology in their respective context. These realities agree with TAM's proposal by Davis (1989) where people's perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of technology, together with external variables (contextual influences) contribute to actual usage of the technology in their own context.

Views on usefulness and non-usefulness of e-books:
- Motivating and engaging contents
- Allow quick access to relevant materials (as they have interactive elements/futures)
- Save students' money (from having to buy printed course modules)
- Contents lack of relevant and interesting notes

Our data revealed mixed-views about the usefulness of eBooks in ESL lecturers' teaching context. Some participants found eBooks useful as the contents are motivating and engaging. They also stated that eBooks allow quick access to relevant materials online as they have interactive elements or features. Apart from that, as eBooks come in the form of softcopies, hence students did not have to spend a lot of money on buying printed course books for every subject they enrolled.

"Using eBooks is very useful as it grabs the students' attention more than chalk and talk. The eBooks are colorful and engaging and provide immediate access to further references and examples" (FI1)

"It is very useful because students don't need to have and carry the hardcopy of the notes, so save their money a little bit from having to pay for printing/photocopy, can easily add the URL of the e-notes link to PPD Cidos platform and use the Moodle app to retrieve the notes." (JI1)

This supports what scholars listed out as advantages of eBooks which make them useful for teaching and learning activities (Lemken, 1999; Hernon, 2006; Shiratuddin; 2003, Wilson, 2003 and Malama, Landoni and Wilson, 2004). EBooks can present any type of auditory or visual materials – including speech, text, music, animations, photographs, or videos – alone or in different combinations. They can also link different types of representations such as pictures with sounds, oral readings with written text, videos with subtitles, or any other combinations that could reinforce teaching and teach (Casey, 1994).

However, there were also responses which disagreed with the usefulness of eBooks as their contents lacked items which were relevant to students' requirements and curiosities.

"Not useful. I find that the notes in eBooks don't cater to the students' needs and interests." (BI1)

Views on ease and non-ease of use of e-books:
- User-friendly interface
- Accessible by smartphones – near effortless
- Reduce time constraints
- Re-inventing contents (to meet own students' learning needs)
- Limitations of technological devices

The participants' responses also revealed mixed-views regarding the convenience of using eBooks in their context. Some agreed with scholars' (Wilson, Landoni and Gibb, 2002; Wilson, 2003 and Malama, Landoni and Wilson, 2004) proposals about the user-friendly interface that allows then to use various features of the eBooks hardware and software, such as functions related to changing the display format, navigating through the text, manipulating the toolbar, searching within the eBook, and operating other devices that are linked to it. There were also responses that revealed eBooks reduce time constraints when it comes to preparation for teaching materials.

"EBooks are not complicated to use when it comes to teaching and learning" (FI1)

"Using smartphones to access eBooks is handy as students can immediately click on the links provided by the eBooks. The links include YouTube video links, images and further reading materials" (FI1)

"I can retrieve the notes at any time & anywhere when I needed it, and I can also ask my students to do it also when needed. I can also use it if I am having my laptop, projector & internet connection like on the go source of information" (JI1)

"Having eBooks is helpful especially if I didn't have enough time to prepare my teaching materials for my classes. Altogether I have 5 classes so with eBooks it saves time actually, but I'd prefer to use my own teaching aid if I have time to prepare" (NI1)

However, there is also evidence of non-ease of use of eBooks which scholars refer to as "negative revelations of the use of the technology in the academic setting" (Lam, Lam, Lam and McNaught, 2008) which could affect the way the technology is used in one's context (Davis, 1989). For example, insufficient and irrelevant contents in the eBooks appeared to be problematic to a participant, causing her to have to simplify the content in order to meet the requirements of her own students. Another participant revealed a disadvantage of eBook where students could not write important notes on the screen of their devices such as mobile phone which they could use as a reference in the future. Participants' responses also revealed that it was not easy for ESL lecturers to control how students' use their devices while they were supposed to be working on exercises in their eBooks which were opened using their smartphones.

"Often times, I have had to simplify the notes or add in my own notes according to syllabus/ learning outcome requirements because the notes in the e-books were not sufficient/ not relevant" (BI1)

"All classes have mixed level students and therefore I have to come up with materials that can cater to all levels". (FI1)

"Some contents are better in the form of hardcopy. For example (especially when it comes to grammar rules). Unless students have touch-pens so they can write on screen and save it for future reference" (NI1)

"From hp screen. So in a way, I can't control what they see. Maybe they read their messages in WhatsApp." (NI1)

Views on other external/contextual influences:
- Lack of access to technology and the internet

Our participants' responses also revealed several challenges they experienced while using eBooks in their classrooms, which were largely related to lack of access to technology and the internet. This issue, if remained unresolved, could hinder further development and effective utilization of the eBooks.

"Politeknik Wi-Fi is slow and therefore most students just use their own cellular internet or data to access online eBooks. Those who can't afford data would face problems" (FI1)

" Limitations: Our politeknik does not provide LCD projectors in all classrooms, so that we can project the contents of eBooks on a bigger screen like the whiteboard" (NFI1)

- Professional Development session for lecturers to use and develop better e-booksTraining serves as a significant element in providing lecturers with both technological and pedagogical understanding in using the eBook technology efficiently in their own teaching context. Responses from some participants seemed to suggest that training on the pedagogical aspects of eBooks usage needs to take place more often so as to support lecturers' technological skills in creating eBooks for a more effective implementation.

"Teachers are also provided training to cope with the technological enhancement in education, but in this (eBooks) case, it needs to happen more" (FI1)

"We were instructed to start using it (eBooks) after attending a workshop on the creation of eBooks" (BI1).

- Students' technological skills and ability to use the e-books

Students' possession of technological devices such as smartphones and laptops and their technological skills in using both hardware and software in their subjects seemed to have strong influence in ESL lecturers' view and decision to use and continue utilizing eBooks in their teaching context.

"Most of the young students nowadays are technology savvy and therefore have no problem in utilizing eBooks to the maximum potential" (FI1)

ESL lecturers' usage of eBooks:

The participants' responses revealed that their usage of eBooks was in lieu with TAM's proposal where the way they view the usefulness and ease of use of eBooks, together with external variables (contextual influences) contribute to actual usage of the technology in their own context.

Actual usage of e-books:
- **During pre, while, and post-lessons**

"I would discuss the content of the eBooks with my students and if the eBooks contain exercises, we would do them together and discuss the answers" (FI1)

"As starting new Unit, I will ask the students to read the e-book, while in the classroom will ask the students to refer to it when necessary as to complete activities, refer to link info or to show sample of format or templates of resume and cover letter using their own smart phone." (JI1)

"Two ways: read prior to class and discuss about them in class" (NI1)

- **Use of e-books as a result of personal views and contextual influences**

"No" (no usage in the classroom). The eBook links are given to students for them to read at their own time (optional reading material). (BI1)

5. CONCLUSION

This study suggests that when ESL lecturers are presented with a new technology such as eBooks, a number of factors influenced their decision about how and when to use it in their teaching context. In order for us to encourage them to continue utilizing the eBooks and increase the effectiveness of the implementation of eBooks in their very own context, the English Language Unit (ELU) team needs to sit together to identify issues and work on the factors that act as barriers to the implementation. This could probably be achieved by providing a specific guidelines which the lecturers could refer to every time they encounter some problems and conducting several relevant professional development sessions particularly at the beginning of the semester so as to provide both technological and pedagogical knowledge for effective implementation.

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