STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF STUDENT RESPONSE SYSTEMS (SRS) IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: This study was carried out to find out the students' perceptions on the use of student response systems (SRS) in English language classrooms. This qualitative study gathered data through semi-structured interviews with 23 undergraduate students from a local university. The data from the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed qualitatively using the thematic analysis approach. The findings revealed that all the students positively support the use of SRS in classroom activities due to various reasons. Students attested that the lessons with SRS encouraged in-class participation and promoted positive engagement while doing their activities. The results of this study also indicated that SRS could be used to motivate students to be further engaged in English language classrooms.

Keywords: classroom activities, engagement, English Language, perception, student response system (SRS)

INTRODUCTION

The Malay language, or Bahasa Melayu, is the national language of Malaysia and is widely used in the Malaysian education system as the main medium of instruction, especially in public schools and universities. Because of the aspiration and the need to move into a new era of innovation and knowledge-based, the government has allowed English to be used extensively as an alternative medium of instruction, especially in private-based Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The necessity of using the English language in Malaysia, especially in the education sector, has always been a priority as the language is considered the dominant lingua franca of the academic world (Faber, 2010).

Malaysian students studying in higher education institutions are ideally competent English language users who can communicate and use the language with ease. Prior to their tertiary education, the students have undergone 11 years of formal English language learning which should have resulted in them achieving at least a 'B2' level of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The B2 level suggests that they should be able to understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity as well as being able to produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain viewpoints (North, 2015). However, a report by The National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 commissioned by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education highlighted that more than half (54%) of undergraduate students from six Malaysian universities displayed a limited command of English language.

Even the former Higher Education Minister, Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh admitted that most of the current undergraduates who are enrolled in undergraduate studies fall under the CEFR B1 level, which is, having the ability to use the language only with limited vocabularies and interact on familiar matters (Menon, 2017). The English competency of most tertiary level students is not up to par compared to what is expected of them when they enter universities or colleges. As such issues keep on occurring, the former Education Minister suggested recently that Malaysia should aspires to strengthen its education system by emphasizing a more humanistic and values-driven education (The Star, 2019).

Findings have shown that when social and emotional learning is promoted as part of daily classroom life, it fosters positive working relationships, increases student engagement, and models constructive behaviors, all pertinent elements for students to thrive in the 4th Industrial Revolution (The Star, 2019). The education minister at the time emphasized that all educators should create a fun, safe and positive learning environment where the social and emotional wellbeing of our children are prioritised. Implementing fun teaching and creating a positive learning environment could prove to be an effective method in solving student disengagement in the classroom, especially in the tertiary level education.

Student response system (SRS) could be the tool educators need to bring back engagement in their classroom lessons. SRS is an interactive remote answering system that offers instructors a way to gain some simple real-time feedback from the students (Egelandsdal & Krumsvik, 2017). It is a technological platform that is used by both educators and students with the aid of the internet and personal gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, laptops etc.

In line with this view, this study intends to investigate the impact of Student Response System (SRS) tools on students' engagement in English language classrooms at a higher learning institution in Malaysia. The study was carried out by interviewing students who had experienced the use of SRS in their language classrooms and how it impacted their perceptions

towards English language teaching and learning, as compared to other educational tools and materials commonly used in a language classroom.

The focus of the study was to investigate students' perspectives regarding the use of student response systems (SRS), especially in the terms of how it helps to promote classroom engagement among students as compared to other conventional classroom teaching tools. This study also hoped to explore how the choice of tools might have impacted the students' behavior in response in terms of their engagement during English lessons.

Studies on SRS impact on students' engagement and their perceptions on the use of SRS tools such as Kahoot, Quizizz and Mentimeter are not scarce (Plump & LaRosa, 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Woldemichael, 2018; Pooveneswaran & Maizatulliza, 2021). Most of these studies collected data through surveys or questionnaires resulting in quantitative data describing perspectives and preferences. The current study method of data collection, however, involved student interviews resulting in in-depth qualitative data of students' perceptions on the use of SRS tools in their tertiary level English language lessons.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A student response system (SRS) is a set of software platforms or tools used to facilitate teaching activities by 'gamifying' common educational activities and interactions (Wang, 2015; Wang et al., 2016; Gressick & Langston, 2017). SRS is an interactive remote answering system that offers instructors a way to gain some simple real-time feedback from the students (Egelandsdal & Krumsvik, 2017). It is a technological platform that is used by both educators and students with the aid of the internet and personal gadgets such as smartphones, tablets and laptops.

Although there are many types of SRS available, most of them function in a similar manner in a classroom. Different types of SRS platforms are available for educators to utilize in their classrooms. Some of the common choices of SRSs that are commonly adapted for educational use are Kahoot, Quizlet, Quizizz, Socratives, Mentimeter and many more. Apart from the minor differences in the application features, most of these SRS have the same modus operandi for educational use.

A teacher poses a question or task to his or her students via projector. Students, on the other hand, provide an appropriate response for the task given using a handheld transmitter or a 'clicker' (Thomas et al., 2015). Technology-backed learning environment like this will trigger an interactive classroom, motivating students to participate and interact with others in the learning process (Fui-Theng & Mai, 2014).

Studies related to the use of SRS tools in exploring various aspects; mainly on student engagement; had been widely adopted by many research studies (Gressick & Langston, 2017; Plump & LaRosa, 2017; Shin et al., 2017; Woldemichael, 2018; Wang & Tahir, 2020; Pooveneswaran & Maizatulliza, 2021). Most of the studies on SRS tools revealed that the use of SRS tools was positively accepted and best utilised in the educational setting due to the integration of game elements (Gressick & Langston, 2017) like rankings, scores and awards. SRSs are blooming as one of the most applied educational tools of the 21st-century simply because of its' ability to facilitate teaching activities by 'gamifying' educational activities and interactions (Wang et al., 2016).

Even though many students and researchers perceive the use of SRS as positive and effective, several researchers highlighted some problems associated with the use of SRS in the classrooms (Wang 2015; Baker et al., 2010). These scholars focused on the wear-out effects of a game-based student response system (Wang, 2015) which leads to boredom in computer learning environments, which is shown to be associated with poorer learning and problem

behavior (Baker et al., 2010).

However, Wang (2015) also discovered that the game-based SRS still boost students' engagement, motivation and learning when utilized repeatedly for five months. Baker et al.'s (2010) study also found that students' frustration in the classroom was less associated with poorer learning, especially when it is compared to the feeling of boredom in the classroom. All these studies support and encourage the application of SRS as a tool of education.

This study aims to further contribute to the findings related to a similar scope of study by conducting an in-depth interview with the students that were exposed to use of SRS tools in their English language lessons. However, unlike the previous studies mentioned, this study was carried out with a sole research objective on exploring students' in-depth perceptions and preferences on the use of SRS. Similar studies (Shahba, Soufan, Altwijri, Alsadoon, & Alkathiri, 2023), (Finefter-Rosenbluh & Berry, 2023), (Spencer & Temple, 2021) and (Devendren & Nasri, 2022) revealed that the aspect of student perception was often studied as an accompanying research objective and can be regarded as supplementary data to its core research focus.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using interviews as the data collection method. Using semi-structured interview questions, the volunteering students were interviewed on their perception about the use of SRS tools throughout their English language classroom lessons.

Data Collection Method

The interview method was chosen for the purpose of the study. The qualitative research method was carried out through interview sessions which was also audio-recorded for the purpose of verbatim transcription and coding. The analysis on the transcript of the interviews were based on the thematic coding of the responses from the participants. This study used a semi-structured interview protocol whereby some of the core questions had been pre-prepared before the interview sessions with the selected students. Some of those questions were adapted from Koltai (2012), which emphasized questions related to the students' motivational characteristics.

The interview questions were generally based on the core elements of the study such as students' demographics, their engagement in language activities (with vs without SRS) and the perception of applying SRSs in their language lessons to promote classroom engagement. Additional follow-up questions were also asked to gather an in-depth understanding of students' responses. This research method was most suitable in eliciting students' views on the use of SRSs in the tertiary educational setting. The following were some of the guided questions asked to the participants:

• Are there any other English language classes you have attended at the university?
• Have you been exposed to or introduced to SRSs before?
• Do you enjoy your recent English classes? Describe and explain why.
• For the past few weeks, what do you think about the language activities?
• What is your opinion about the use of SRS in English classrooms/activities?
• Would you prefer the use of SRS in your English classes/activities?

Participants

Convenient sampling method was used and a total of 23 students from a local university in Malaysia undertaking a compulsory English proficiency course were interviewed in this study. The participants were also students who have been exposed to the use of different SRS tools throughout their English language course of study.

These samples were selected because they were easy to recruit, and the researchers did not emphasize a sampling procedure that seeks to represent the entire population. Choosing this sampling method is justified as it will resolve the issues regarding participants' availability, accessibility and cost-efficiency (Adi Bhat, 2019). Only students that were willing to participate were included in the interview, honoring the ethics of research and the participants' right to exclude themselves. The study followed the interview protocol strictly and ensured that the students were duly informed about the purpose of the interview and details regarding their consent and privacy of data.

Data Analysis

All the interviews conducted were audio-recorded for the purpose of data analysis through thematic analysis. The audio-recorded files were transcribed to be thematically coded and analyzed. The study ensured that the anonymity of the participating students was secured by referring them as Candidate and assigning a number, according to their interview turn. They were referred to as Candidate 1, Candidate 2 until Candidate 23. The interview data were coded based on the themes needed to support the study. All the interview transcriptions were transcribed in the form of verbatim to ensure that there are no changes in the words and meaning uttered by the sample participants during the interview.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed three main themes related to the students' perceptions of SRS. The themes are; students' inclination towards English classes, students' preference towards the use of SRS-based activities, the impact of SRS-based language activities.

Students' Inclination towards English Language classes

This study opined that understanding students' personal opinions and views on English language learning may provide additional insights regarding their opinions and feelings on the use of SRS during their English lessons. Knowing whether the student was positively or negatively inclined about their language classes may influence the candidates' overall perception about their English language learning, irrespective on the usage of SRS.

Based on the interview data, it was concluded that all the students had a highly positive acceptance of learning the English language. This study discovered that all the participants agreed on the fact that the English language is important to be learnt, although it is considered only as a second language after the national language, Malay. For instance, Candidates 6 and 8 said that they were able to accept the learning of the English language because of its status as a lingua franca. Those candidates consider English is important, interesting and beneficial, especially for their future careers.

During the interview, Candidate 14 said that *'English not easy like Malay but I can understand. I can use… a bit la'.* Based on the excerpt, the candidate showed willingness to accept the use of the English language although it was hard to learn. As for Candidate 13, she

has a positive acceptance of the language due to its importance for her future career. According to her, learning English is *'very very important for us… in future, if we wanna have good job, we must learn English. That's why I learn English and try to use…'*.

When narrowed down to the scope of their English Proficiency (EP) class that they were currently involved in, all participants agreed that they have a positive view towards the class lessons and the lecturer who taught them. Most of the students used terms such as fun, easygoing, relaxing and interesting to describe how they perceived their English Proficiency (EP) lessons in general. Candidate 2 described the EP class as *'…fun when we play games and do activities*. Similarly, Candidate 21 also uttered a similar response when he said that the team-based activities and language games make the EP class truly interesting to attend and participate in. According to him, the class was '… *so exciting when my lecturer does fun activities and games like the Kahoot! And Quizizz. I was having so much fun in my group. My lecturer is the best for this semester!'*.

However, some students did mention that English language learning proved to be difficult and confusing at times. During the interview, one of the candidates (Candidate 17) mentioned the following about their class:

"English is not too…not too difficult, it's too easy, but some, uh, some of the subjects is a bit difficult. Some are easy."

Another aspect of the questioning that the study emphasized under this theme was about the students' acceptance and perception towards their lecturer. It is believed that the lecturer's conduct and style of teaching also have a corresponding influence on how students perceive their language classroom lessons. One of the candidates (Candidate 5) mentioned that *'…the lecturer makes sure how the class goes. If the lecturer is sporting and fun, class also great for us…'*.

Similar responses were also found in the transcript of other candidates. Candidate 9 showed great liking towards her EP lecturer when she said *'….my most favourite class of all my other English classes… Because the lecturer is so nice and beautiful. I like a lot because she is so sporting and do fun activities with us'*. The candidate expressed a profound liking towards the EP classes and the instructor who had conducted the study's lessons during the classroom observations.

The study also noticed that the perception of students towards their English Proficiency class was also largely affected by their perception towards the lecturer that finds out how students perceive their lecturer, the students were also asked whether they like their EP lecturer. As it turns out, all the nine candidates that volunteered have constructive viewpoints towards the approach the lecturer applies in the classroom. To be precise, Candidate 23 had the following answer during the interview:

"I enjoy because this madam is sporting and I like the way her teach. EP1 and EP2 also with her. It's just my friends who are not with her, they said another one not sporting. I get the sporting; she is the best."

Based on the overall findings, it can be concluded that the student's attitude was mainly positive towards the EP class sessions, the learning of the English language and their perception towards the lecturer. By establishing this finding, the study was able to presume that any negative perceptions on the use of SRS tool, if there is any, cannot be directly attributed to the candidates' negative attitudes towards learning of English language or their lecturer. Based on the derived thematic code, the study had found that the students, in general, have positive feeling towards their English language classes and consider the learning of English language as crucial and beneficial.

From students' perceptions regarding their English language classes, it can be concluded that all the students had a highly positive acceptance of learning the English language. Overall, all participants agreed on the fact that the English language is important to be learnt, although it is considered only as a second language. It was evident that the students' attitude was mainly positive towards the EP class sessions, the learning of the English language and their perception towards the lecturer.

The findings also support the notion that the use of SRS tools during the classroom activities promoted students' engagement, as observed through the students' behaviors.

Students' Preference Towards the Use of SRS-based Activities

Data from the interview indicated that all the candidates chose SRS-based activities as their preferred choice of activities throughout the study period. When asked if they preferred to have more SRS-based activities in the language classes, all the candidates expressed their eagerness to have more activities that include different SRS platforms.

According to Candidate 3, the preference of SRS-based activities was due to the reason *'… the flow of class is nice. I learn first and then… I can play the Kahoot game'*. Candidate 14 also stated that the SRS-based activities were *'…so much more fun to learn… if compared to the other activities'*. Even Candidate 17 expressed high regard for the use of SRS as the preferred activities because SRS have *'…visuals like the colour and the sounds were so good and interesting when we were doing the activities'*. The following were some of the reasons why the respondents chose SRS-based activity lessons as their preference.

Each candidate had different reasoning for their choices. For instance, Candidate 9 shared how students were often not bothered in doing any activities that did not contribute to their coursework marks. He said that *'…doing the activities like the handout and online website was not exciting. Some of my friends don't even care if get wrong'*. Some students, like himself, only do the activity for the sake of getting through the lesson or following the lecturer's instruction. But in SRS games, he behaved differently as he cared whether his answers were right or wrong due to the scores and rankings that were involved.

As for Candidate 17, he felt that all the non-SRS activities were done without any rush and in a relaxed manner. During the non-SRS activities, the candidate realized that *'…everyone was doing the activities slow and… not rushing at all. We take time to finish because no time limit'*. However, he ended feeling sleepy and was easily distracted halfway through those activities. It was a total contrast to when SRS-based activities were played. He was feeling *'…really energy and excited because the game was fast and had time-limit. Everyone wanted to win…so all tried the best to do the game activities'*.

According to Candidate 22, SRS-based activities are preferred because one can never be bored with such activities. The excerpt from the transcript is shown below:

> *"To be honest that, uh… the writing activity, I think that uh… if I do it every day, repeat it and everything, maybe I will get bored. But with Kahoot, uhm… You always get the adrenaline, and it always be fun for all of us. No matter how much we repeat it."*

Another reason mentioned by Candidate 5 for choosing SRS-based activities as the preferred choice is the activity is fun and enjoyable.

> *"It's more fun, everyone gets more cheerful… the class environment gets more cheerful, once we are playing, uh, online quizzes, like in Kahoot and etc…"*

The findings revealed that all the candidates chose the SRS-based lessons as their preferred lessons, unanimously. It can be generalized the all the students chose SRS-integrated lessons since it has numerous characteristics that made them engaged and excited.

On the aspect of students' preference, it is determined that all the candidates chose SRS-based activities as their preferred choice of activities throughout the study period. When asked if they preferred to have SRS-based activities in future, all the candidates were eager to have more activities that might include different SRS platforms. Although each candidate had different reasoning for their choices, all the candidates opt to have SRS-based activities as compared to the activities without SRS.

The findings above aligned with the study that was recently carried out by Wang & Tahir (2020). The findings indicated that students have positive perception on the use of Kahoot! in learning, and these results include a positive effect on motivation, engagement, concentration, perceived learning, attention, enjoyment, satisfaction, and confidence.

Impact of SRS-based Language Activities

The study found that almost all the candidates (22 candidates) had mentioned positive-oriented impacts only one mentioning the negative impacts. However, when compared to some of the language lessons without SRS, all 23 candidates seemed to agree that SRS-based activities were the ones that made them more focused and invested in their classroom learning.

Candidate 6 said the focus in the class activities were *'...better and can maintain longer because it was fun for me'*. Similarly, Candidate 19 was so focused on the SRS-based activity. The candidate said *'...so excited to become No.1 in the game... That's why I focus so hard... to win'*. Similar responses were also reported by Candidate 8, 9, 11, 15 and 20.

Based on the data, the improvement of focus during the SRS-lesson activities was evident and impactful to the respondents. The candidates either experienced a sudden rush in competing or felt more excitement during the SRS activities as compared to the ones without any SRS. The candidates stated that although lessons without SRS activities had also integrated ICT and educational technology such as PowerPoint Slides, WhatsApp & Educational websites, none of those activities made them feel excited to participate and wanted to be competitive in the activities.

Candidate 5 gave the following response when asked about the comparison between the use of technology in the activities without any SRS integration and with SRS. The candidate responded by saying:

> *'Yes. There is technology... for activities with WhatsApp and the websites. But... it was not fun like Kahoot... like the other game also. I like that more... it's more fun and interactive. It's like competition...'*

Most of the candidates were informed that SRS increased their level of interest, focus, understanding, remembering, energy and most specifically, competitiveness. Through the responses, it can be concluded that the game elements in the SRS-based activities were highlighted as the positive aspect in motivating the students and improving their engagement supporting the positive effects that they experienced using SRS due to its game-like features.

Candidate 19 said *'the game was so fun because it has points and we must get high scores and answer fast before time finish'*. The SRS features such as attractive visuals and audios, scoreboards, rankings, point rewards and time-countdowns had allowed students to be immersed and engaged in those activities.

However, negative impacts were also described by Candidate 2. He said the following:

'I think the Kahoot was an adrenaline rush. Because, uhm, people are not focusing on learning. They are focusing on becoming number one in the game. Hahaha… So, that's the main, the only main goal.'

When asked further, the candidate explained that SRS did not make one feel like they were learning. But he mentioned that he might have subconsciously learned when he tried his best to complete the SRS quiz correctly. The same notion was brought up by Candidate 9, where he said that students' focus was not directed in learning anymore but winning the game.

According to the candidate, the activity with SRS was *'…not like learning at all and was more like… like playing quiz in the phone… with friends'*. Although it seems detrimental, further questioning showed that the candidates did not view their shift of focus from learning to the SRS gameplay as somewhat negative, but rather as an encouragement or enjoyment.

It can be generalized that the students viewed the use of the SRS tool in the lessons as an added value in their learning experience. Based on the students' responses, all 23 candidates mentioned a form of positive impact towards their language learning. All the positive impacts mentioned by the candidates revolved around the aspects of engagement, interest, feelings etc. Although the transcription data analysis did reveal possible negative impacts from some of the candidates (Candidate 2 & 9), the data from all the 23 candidates evidently showed that the integration of SRS in the language-based activities were favorable in creating a positive learning atmosphere.

Candidate 1 thought it was *'…easier than doing the books'*. Candidate 2 said it *'…made me feel energy in class'*. Candidate 3 also showed positiveness by stating that SRS was making the students *'…feel passionate about doing the quiz…activities'*. Positive responses as such regarding the impact of SRS use were continuously found in all 23 candidates that were interviewed for the purpose of this study. These responses prove that SRS tools had played a part in inducing a sense of engagement in their language classrooms activities. It is because the statements given by the candidates indicated the ways SRS had impacted them during the activities were positive, and those actions were corresponding to elements of engagement and motivation.

Looking at the impacts of SRS, all the candidates agreed that SRS-based activities were the ones that made them more focused and invested in their classroom learning when compared to the activities without SRS. The candidates either experienced a sudden rush in competing or felt more excitement during the SRS activities as compared to the ones without any SRS. The candidates stated that although lessons without SRS activities had also integrated ICT and educational technology such as PowerPoint Slides, WhatsApp and educational websites, none of those activities made them feel excited to participate and wanted to be competitive in the activities.

Most of the candidates informed that SRS increased their level of interest, focus, understanding, energy and specifically their competitiveness. Most of the candidates annotate the positive effects that they experienced using SRS to its game-like features. The researchers were able to generalize that the students viewed the use of the SRS tool in the lessons as an added value in their learning experience. The statements given by the candidates indicated that SRS tools had played a part in inducing engagement in their language classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to explore students' perceptions on the use of Student Response Systems (SRS) in English language classrooms at a higher learning institution in Malaysia. The core objective of this study was to further extend the findings related to the current scope of

study through in-depth interviews with the students that were exposed to use of SRS tools in their English language classrooms. The findings had indirectly attributed to the problem statement of this study, which was the need to create a fun, safe and positive teaching and learning environment could prove to be an effective method in solving student disengagement in the classroom, especially in the tertiary level education.

Through the interview transcripts' analysis, it was evident that the students' attitude is highly positive whereby they reported their positive views about the use of SRS in English language classroom lessons or activities. Most of the candidates annotated the positive effects that they experienced using SRS was due to its game-like features.

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