

**Implementation of Digital Tools for Undergraduates' English Classes**

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### **Abstract**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which took place in early 2020, had a huge impact on online learning throughout the world. In Malaysia, all the students from the primary level to the postgraduate level had to cope with emergency remote lessons (ERL), where it was a necessity for students to equip themselves with digital devices such as desktop computers, laptops, tablets, mobile phones, and other relevant gadgets with sufficient internet connection for their education. However, as Malaysia entered an endemic phase in April 2022, online learning remains relevant in higher education institutions, as COVID-19 redefines teaching and learning in the 21st century. Therefore, the objective of this study is to find out the significant effects of implementing Microsoft Teams, the digital tool in the English language reading and writing skills in two Malaysian private institutions. The study seeks to find out if implementation could enhance their classroom participation and involvement in these areas during the endemic phase using the individual action research method. During the Covid-19 period, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman and Segi University used Microsoft Teams as the secondary digital tool to post announcements, class activities and as an additional discussion platform for communication and feedback besides the primary Learning Management System (LMS) set by the university. During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote and online learning with digital tools and devices showed positive outcomes. Future activities should incorporate technology, such as mobile phones, to enhance students' learning abilities, particularly in teaching writing.

**Keywords:** endemic phase, digital tools, digital devices, reading and writing skills, quality education.

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## **Implementation of Digital Tools for Undergraduates' English Classes**

The use of technology in the education sector has greatly disrupted the modes of traditional teaching and learning activities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moving to the endemic phase in April 2022, blended learning, online learning, e-learning, mobile learning and usage of digital tools in classrooms are some of the things that can be implemented to enhance technology in the education field. In order to encourage students' engagement, technology has allowed channels of communication such as social media, video projections in the traditional classroom, and remote learning via video conferencing to take place. The incorporation of technology into education is simply termed as educational technology. According to Pellegrini et al. (2020) and Byun et al. (2020) (as cited in Mayoob, 2020), "online learning is facing lesser challenges because both the learners and teachers have experienced the excellent opportunity of knowing and interacting with educational technology tools such as mobile-based learning, computer-based learning, and web-based learning" (p. 353). Also, e-learning has provided various technological tools in the field of education (Chhabra, 2012).

According to Oikonomou and Patsala (2021), digital tools have been defined as "software, programs, applications, platforms, and resources which are online and offline that can be used with computers, mobile devices and any other digital devices that help people to complete a task" (p. 254). As Moorhouse and Yan (2023) posits, the "learning-management-oriented digital tools provide educational affordances for English educators such as offering multiple communication channels, a platform for organizing, creating and sharing materials and activities with other students directly, ways to personalize, enhance and support activities with the multimodal activity materials, and most importantly being accessible in class and home contexts where there are features that allow teachers to assign tasks to students." Lint (2017)

states that “a broad term for using a tool or characterized by technology can be classified as digital tools (Merriam-Webster)” (p. 5). She added that this could include a website, an app on a phone or tablet, a social networking site, a computer program, learning management systems, and these tools can help generate, process, and store the data. Barltrop (2018), as cited in Joseph and Khan (2020), added that resources such as tablets or desktop computers, laptops, smartphones, interactive whiteboard, audiobooks, digital dictionaries, digital libraries, and multimedia are effective digital literacy resources which students and educators use to communicate, teach, express in the contemporary teaching-learning process.

Several famous tools or apps like Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom, Google Meet, and Messenger Rooms are widely used nowadays for the purpose of video conferencing in various fields such as education, work, and social. There are two sides, the limitations and benefits, when discussing about a tool, or issue. Although all the apps have similar working principles, such as video conferencing with the aim of connecting people from various locations, it cannot be denied that some apps may not be efficient compared to the other. Also, considering that the spread of COVID-19 has limited the conventional learning methods used in classrooms, it is a fact that apps are now being used widely in the education system. Along with the challenges faced, educators and students have learned to be highly adaptable, adjustable, flexible, and innovative in their approaches in the teaching and learning environment (Sasson et al., 2021). In general, it can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many educators to redefine their teaching towards online teaching; hence, began implementing digital tools in their classroom.

## **Problem Statement**

The use of technology in education has altered the way that individuals teach and learn (Lai & Hashim, 2021). As a result, there is an increasing need for suitable digital tools that may be employed in language teaching and learning processes, particularly for English language learning (Jong & Tan, 2021). As the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) is a compulsory test in all the public universities in Malaysia, it is a fact that a few private universities have made it a prerequisite for those who wish to pursue their first degree (Sani, 2020). MUET scores are classified from band 1 to band 6, where band 1 represents “an extremely limited English user” and increases gradually to band 6, which represents “an advance English user” (Zulkifli et al., 2011). According to the Malaysian Examinations Council (2017), more than half of the students who sat for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) in November 2016 were unable to attain band 4 and above. In addition, “English proficiency still a big problem” (2017) also stated that the deficiency of English language proficiency among Malaysians has been a major reason they do not get job offers from international companies. One of the main factors for this is the low level of English proficiency among the graduates. “Listening and reading are often the most challenging for students sitting for MUET” said Dr Potchelvi Govindasamy, one of the MUET teachers from SMK Sri Serdang. She mentioned that this is because for the reading paper, students need to be knowledgeable about many areas, including social issues, technology, medical discoveries, agriculture, and environment. On the other hand, her colleague stated that the writing component could be strenuous for students who are less proficient and lack general knowledge. She further added that “The ungrammatical sentences aside, they would merely state the points in general without elaborating. The lack of clarity makes their essays less informative and not conclusive. All these are graded for their task fulfilment and language usage. In order to perform better in writing, students need to read extensively” (Sani, 2020).

Based on the experiences of researchers for the particular subjects that are taught, English reading and writing skills can be a sort of challenge to some of the second language users as some of the undergraduates have their mother tongue as their first language. According to Pheng et al. (2021), code-switching, code-mixing, and first language interference affect the English proficiency of university students in Malaysia positively. Hence, modern, cutting-edge methods for teaching and learning languages can be provided through the use of digital technologies, which will make class activities more student-centred and allow for autonomous study at the student's own pace and ability level. Although incorporating digital resources into English lessons may encourage students to participate actively in class activities, not all students have access to the internet or the resources to purchase a laptop or smartphone (Pheng et al., 2021). Due to their perception that digital technologies have a significant influence on pedagogical practices, higher education institutions are using them more and more in their instruction. Private universities in Malaysia are scarcely an exception. Both advantages and disadvantages of technology use in education exist. Educators must consider the likelihood that certain students may become so interested in the subject that they occasionally are unable to understand the fundamental ideas of the actual context, even though it does boost students' enthusiasm to learn. In addition, some students still don't own cutting-edge equipment, despite the advancement of technology (Azar & Tan, 2020). As code-switching, code-mixing, and interference of first language are common among students who undertake compulsory English courses, this research would focus on the implementation of a digital tool for reading and writing skills compared to the conventional teaching method.

### **Objective of Research**

According to Ramamuthie and Aziz (2022), some educators still use the conventional teaching method to teach writing skills despite the evolution of technology. This may cause students, especially the millennials, to lose concentration and be unsuccessful in mastering reading and writing skills. Hence, the main objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1.) To investigate the effects of implementing digital tool, Microsoft Teams, in the English reading and writing skills of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) students in higher educational institutions.
- 2.) To analyze if the implementation of digital tools enhances engagement and collaborative skills among peers during and after regular classes.

As highlighted in the review, many studies have focused on various types of digital tools such as Kahoot, Padlet, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter etc.; thus, this research will highlight the significance of implementing Microsoft Teams for the reading and writing skills in English classes during the endemic period on university undergraduates.

### **Research Questions**

This research is written to answer the two stated objectives. Firstly, this research will answer the following questions:

- 1.) What are the effects of implementing a digital tool (Microsoft Teams) in the English reading and writing skills of ESP students.
- 2.) Does the implementation of digital tools enhance engagement and collaborative skills among peers during and after regular classes?

These two questions will be researched and discussed in the findings.

### **Literature Review**



In a detailed review on “Digital Literacy Tools to Enhance English Reading and Writing Skills,” a combination of socially shared cognition theory DLTCTC Framework and TPACK teaching model (Joseph & Khan, 2020) was suggested to teachers in order to make a transformation in the teaching-learning process by engaging learners, creating interest, and to improve English reading and writing skills. On the other hand, the process-based approach implementing the usage of digital tools such as Google Classroom was suggested as it is less popular when it comes to reading and writing skills (Ramamuthie & Aziz, 2022). This section highlights the past research conducted related to the implementation of digital tools in the classroom, challenges in the implementation of digital tools, and the advantages of implementing digital tools.

### **Digital Tools in Classroom**

The use of technology in language training is not new. Tape recorders, language labs, and movies have been used in classrooms all around the world since the 1960s and 1970s. The 1980s and 1990s saw a shift in the direction of language teaching due to the emphasis on authentic materials and meaningful involvement. Levy (2018), as cited in Joseph and Khan (2020), states that digital literacy tools (DLT) aid teachers in organizing, planning, motivating, teaching, guiding, encouraging, and initiating the students to engage during the teaching-learning process. She added that the use of digital literacy tools enhances educators' and students' communication skills, critical thinking skills, practical skills, research skills, assessing skills, social skills, and especially creativity (Levy, 2018, as cited in Joseph & Khan, 2020). As a result, the importance of using technology in the classroom has increased in the teaching and learning field. The spread of modern technology has caused a paradigm shift in English education in Malaysia (Lai & Hashim, 2021). The Malaysian Ministry of Education launched a course called Instructional

Systems Technology for the practicum teacher education program back in 1981 to improve the educational system with a focus on the teaching and learning process (Azar & Tan, 2020). Since then, there has been a lot of innovation in the field of educational technologies. One of them is the invention of digital tools. Teachers may provide their students with an immersive learning environment with the assistance of digital tools. There are numerous online resources accessible to enhance language study and teaching. In order to keep up with the rapid advancement of technology, the Ministry of Education has advised educators to make use of most of the digital technologies to improve teaching and learning (Arif et al., 2020). The Malaysian Education Blueprint, which highlights the incorporation of technology in one of its eleven changes intended to transform the educational system, demonstrates the need for this.

The Malaysian educational system has also undergone a change as a result of its prominence. Utilizing cutting-edge technology, the culture of memory-based education is changed to one of informing, thinking, creativity, and caring. As cited in Joseph and Khan (2020), Lee (2000) and Young (2003) indicate that digital literacy tools have brought positive changes, especially for students in terms of their learning, communication, motivation, reducing absenteeism, enhancing thinking and most importantly, encouraging the introvert students to be more confident and communicative. Wordle is an application that assists in the thinking of meaning, relationship, and importance of the word (Trelease, 2006, as cited in Joseph & Khan, 2020). Furthermore, Mc Naught and Lam (2010) implemented Wordle in their study which was done on K9 and K10 students. There are many studies related to reading skills conducted by researchers. The English reading skill reviews consist of studies using different research methodologies (Erten, 2018, as cited in Joseph & Khan, 2020). In addition to that, the samples involved in the studies cover a wide variety of population, ranging from ESL, EFL and grade 1

students to postgraduate learners. The objectives of the research include reading proficiency, vocabulary, and phonic awareness, reading comprehension, communication, and reading skills. Reading fluency, which is a critical skill, can be achieved through digital learning tools like tablets and computers. It is considered to be the junction between vocabulary and the text. The systematic review done on the effectiveness of digital tools in classroom shows essential positive outcomes (Ramamuthie & Aziz, 2022). However, there are some challenges experienced by the educators which is highlighted in the following section.

### **Challenges in the Implementation of Digital Tools**

Despite all the positive reviews and advantages uncovered by several empirical studies, there are still a number of challenges that must be overcome in order to completely benefit from the effectiveness of integrating contemporary technology in classrooms. These technologies haven't been utilized to their full potential in schools due to a number of obstacles. Numerous empirical studies have shown that obstacles to the instructor's ability to effectively integrate technology into language teaching and learning can stem from both internal and external problems. Also, most teachers despise utilizing computers due to their elderly age. Even with adequate technology access, effective professional development is imperative to increase the level of technology integration in classrooms. Little is understood about what these experiences might look like for teachers “on the ground,” during the implementation of technology-integrated professional development (Wilkerson et al., 2016). They think that older professionals no longer need to learn how to use them and instead expect younger ones to do so (Khodabandelou et al., 2016). Due to the time commitment required by employing technology in the classroom, they were unable to complete the required coursework. The usage of technology in the classroom is something they perceive negatively due to the amount of time in planning as well as acquiring

related skills while the short trainings are considered not really effective. This kind of learning-teaching strategy, which takes place outside of the classroom in remote regions, may not have the teachers' full commitment. Due to the time spent in organizing lessons, the administration's support and appreciation are the concerns when the lengthening of the language teaching and learning process takes place. Next, because new technologies potentially create more problems than they resolve, such as low bandwidth and network concerns, most educators have stopped implementing them in the classroom. Additionally, because some Malaysians are still computer illiterate, the digital gap among Malaysians has hampered the full utilization of contemporary technology (Ahmad et al., 2019). Students cannot be focused and organized when learning online and using computers since the use of digital tools promotes independent learning under unsupervised and unmonitored conditions. This is due to the fact that when students are learning remotely, the teacher is unable to interact with the class in person and cannot acknowledge the students' work without appearing inattentive or lazy. Consequently, this is a hurdle to the use of digital resources in language learning and teaching (Khodabandelou et al., 2016).

### **Advantages in Implementation of Digital Tools**

People believe that because new technologies enhance user comprehension and communication, they will benefit the educational system in the future (Khodabandelou et al., 2016). There is no denying the benefits of using digital technologies in teaching. Both educators and students favor incorporating technology into the educational process. The use of technology in the classroom is able to accommodate many learning styles and methodologies, as well as provide learners with a fresh, imaginative, enjoyable, and exciting learning environment (Rong & Noor, 2019). The use of digital resources in schools and universities can lead to richer curricula, improved pedagogies, and increased teacher productivity. Teachers now place a

greater emphasis on using technology in the classroom. With the use of technology, educators may produce custom learning materials for each of their pupils. Additionally, they can use the tools to help with student evaluation, which includes developing examinations, distributing grades, monitoring assignments, and other duties (Murugaiah & Hwa, 2018). Many studies which were done related to the effectiveness of digital tools towards English as Second Language learners highlighted countless positive effects from the students' point of view compared to educators' output. However, it can't be denied that educators have also benefitted from the usage of digital tools when it comes to language learning. According to Azmi (2017), the usage of digital resources in language classes has enhanced students' attitudes toward language learning. They become inspired and motivated to pick up the language. The most important benefit of using digital tools in reading and writing instruction is their capacity to engage students, support their learning process, expand their vocabulary, and promote meaningful learning (Hillson et al., 2019). Students' acceptance of its value might raise gratitude for the promotion of meaningful learning, which may also encourage them to adopt diverse technologies as learning aids. Computers and other digital tools could be used in writing and reading programs to help pupils write more effectively and with fewer mistakes. As a result, teachers have started using technology in the classroom to help with language teaching and learning (Jong & Tan, 2021).

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

This paper adopts the TPACK framework, which is an amalgamation of teachers' knowledge of curriculum content, general pedagogies, technologies, and contextual factors that influence learning (Koehler & Mishra, 2008, as cited in Ndongfack, 2014 ). This framework serves as a guide in developing teachers' knowledge of technology and integrating it into their

lessons, and many researchers have adopted this framework to support the professional development of educators as well as an ICT tool. The rationale of adopting this framework is on the premise that the teachers understand the relationship between technology adoption and the content to incorporate the appropriate pedagogy for the students. TPACK framework integrates Content Knowledge (CK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Technological Knowledge (TK) as well as the intersections with each other (Ndongfack, 2014). This theory was adopted as the suitable framework for the study, as the theory demonstrates a strong understanding of pedagogical knowledge and its implications on students' learning.

### **Method**

This study examined the implementation of a digital tool known as Microsoft Teams in 2 different Malaysian private universities, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman and Segi University. This study utilized the participatory action research (PAR) method, where both researchers identified the issues related to reading and writing skills as mentioned in the statement of problem within two English courses in both the universities. One of the pre-requisite courses that is offered by UTAR Lee Kong Chien, Faculty of Engineering and Science, is the English for Professional Communications. In this course, students are tested on their reading and writing skills. This course is designed to expose students to use English Language appropriately in professional settings. The outcomes of this course will enable students to develop an understanding of the key aspects of formal language for professional purposes. Students will learn how to skim and scan the text and do mind mapping based on the skimming and scanning for the reading course. For the writing course, the objective is to enable students to understand the text structure in terms of introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion, as well as the pragmatic choices of the language and the use of appropriate language in their writing.

For the reading skills, students were taught to identify the following skills:

1. Practice techniques like skimming and scanning to have better reading skills and comprehension.
2. Summarize the reading texts given to them.
3. Recognize the style of the reading text, identifying the intended audience for which the text is written.

For writing skills, students were taught to plan, outline, edit, and revise their writing. The topics involved writing practice that focused on:

1. Examine different audiences and purposes for writing.
2. Identify the correct sentence structure and generate mind map based on their reading.
3. Develop effective focused topic sentences.

This course goes on for 14 weeks, in the January and May semesters, and is comprised of students from various engineering and science programs. Both researchers had about 20 to 25 students in each class. This research will only focus on the reading and writing skills; hence, students are supposed to achieve the related learning outcomes as mentioned above.

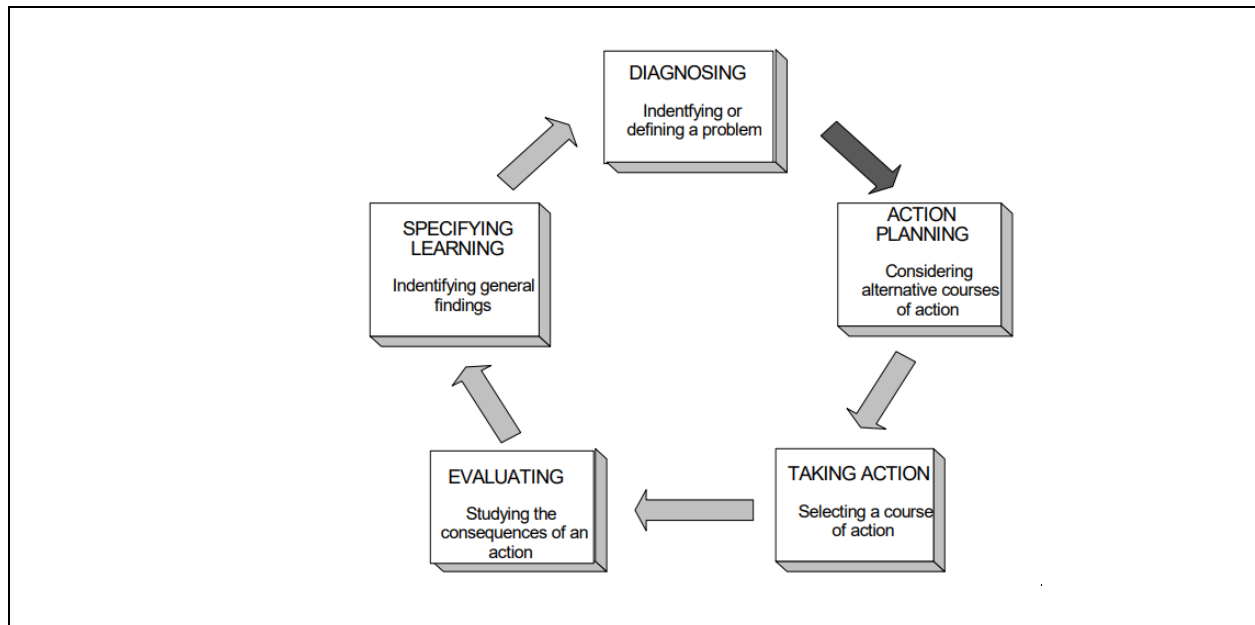
### **Sampling Method**

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) method based on Susman's 1983 model was adopted as the model of this study. Based on the model identified by researchers, the statement of problem was examined using this model. As the PAR model is used, this research involves the collaboration of participants and researchers in order to make a change in the teaching and learning process, especially the reading and writing skills. The samples were selected using convenience sampling. This research was discussed, planned, and executed carefully,

implementing the chosen digital tool, Microsoft Teams. The PAR cycle composes the following phases as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*The Action Research Model Adopted from Susman (1983)*



The PAR method by Susman (1983) consists of five phases. The PAR has been used in schools since many years ago. As technology has been progressing rapidly in the education field, especially during and after the COVID-19 period and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both researchers conducted a study on the implementation of a digital tool for reading and writing skills in 2 different private universities. The PAR method was chosen for this study because it focuses on solving real problems. In addition to that, the PAR method emphasizes improving learning by means of a self-reflecting process, exploring (McNiff, 1988, as cited in Yasmeen, 2008). The researcher (teacher) becomes essentially a facilitator or catalyst, and participants (students in this study) become co-learners in PAR; nobody is considered the expert (Walker, 1993, as cited in Yasmeen, 2008).



The phases of PAR for this study are described as below:

**Table 1**

*The Phases of Current Research Adapted from Susman (1983) Action Research Model*

<b>Methods using PAR Model</b>	<b>Happenings</b>
1. Planning	Both the researchers identified and defined the problem within the classroom, considering the attachment towards electronic devices during classes. The two researchers collaborated often to discuss and plan to implement the research based on the current issues during the endemic period.
2. Consideration of Actions	Once the problems were identified, discussed and defined, the researchers considered-alternative actions to overcome it based on previous studies. Discussions were done on the lessons and topics that were useful for action research. The researchers considered the topics and the plans that can be implemented in the classroom to enhance reading and writing skills, which was the chosen lesson and topic for PAR. Activities & tasks which involved reading and writing skills were planned carefully using different approaches.
3. Taking Action	The topics related to reading involve skimming and scanning techniques. Also, the two types of skills according to Bloom's Taxonomy, Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), were exposed to students. On the other hand, the introduction to text, paragraph, thesis statement, topic

	<p>sentence, supporting details, concluding sentence, and conclusion are exposed to students. These were implemented into their lessons. Prior to the lessons, students were informed to download and prepare the Microsoft Teams app for classroom usage. As both the universities implemented the usage of Microsoft Teams during the COVID-19 period, it was something existing and easy for the students to do. At the same time, the facilitators created the virtual classroom for the respective classes where students were given a text of 1.5 pages, for discussion when the lessons on reading skills were done. Also, the aspects mentioned above were implemented accordingly when the lessons on professional correspondence were done using the Microsoft Teams app. These were done in small groups of face-to-face classes. Students were guided on the planned lessons, then given exercise and topics to implement what they have learnt. Students were given time to discuss during class, and prepare the PowerPoint in the class using the digital tool. Lastly, each group was given about 5-8 minutes to present their items based on given tasks. Students were given feedback and informed to have a post-discussion at home via the digital tool after the feedback session if necessary.</p>
<p>4. Reflecting</p>	<p>The researchers discussed about the observations from time to time to align with the objectives of the study. The facilitator participated by giving comments and feedback based on their discussions and</p>

	presentations that were done during the class. At the end of the day, after the students finished their classes, they uploaded their slides on the respective platform so that they get to share, see each other's work, provide feedback, and discuss it online if they have done it correctly. This encouraged peer feedback among classmates.
5. New Planning	The researchers identify the implications for the stakeholders and identify areas for further research.

In addition to that, the facilitator had participated by giving comments and feedback based on their presentation and discussions. At the end of the day, students managed to upload their slides on the respective platform to ensure all the students get to share, see each other's work, provide feedback, comments, and discuss it online if they have done it correctly.

The action research was also useful for topics related to presentation skills because the recordings of the presentation that were done during the sharing session can be used for the topic on presentation skills. Active and professional feedback was encouraged among the learners and the facilitator to ensure that students were able to understand the lessons which were done during class.

### **The Selection of Participants**

Once the issues were identified, both the researchers discussed and devised a plan together. Following that, they carried out the plan in their respective organizations, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman and Segi University. The collection of data was done based on the observation and plan that was carried out during the English classes using the convenience

sampling method which involved 34 students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman and 30 students from SEGi University, respectively.

As both the researchers were from two different universities, the participatory action research method using the plan that was devised together was used to collect data. Finally, the outcomes of the plan were shared among each other. To sum up, this section highlights the flow of method that was used to conduct research, details of research, and the targeted participants involved.

The participants were informed of the analysis to confirm the data (member-checking) to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, and the interview followed the protocol (Patton, 2002).

### **Findings and Discussion**

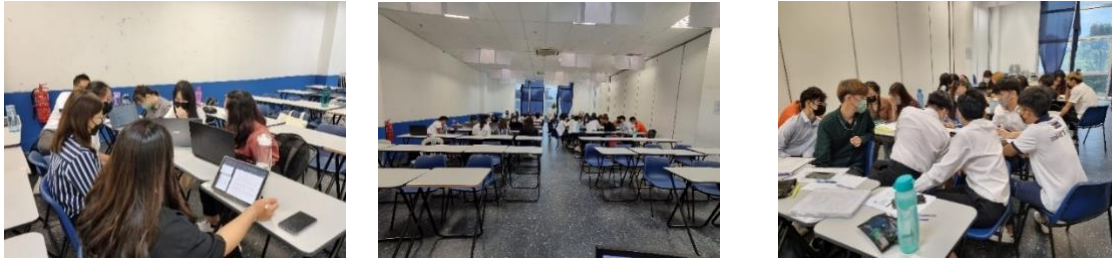
From the participatory action research that was conducted, there were a few significant effects when the digital tool was implemented in the reading and writing skills during the physical classes. Using the PAR method, both the researchers discussed and shared the outcomes of the implementation. In order to find out the significant effects and enhancement of the digital tool, the presentations were evaluated in terms of content if students were able to complete the reading and writing activity accurately. In order to find out if students were able to collaborate and provide constructive comments and feedback to each other, the slide preparations which consist of the answers for the discussion on the topics learnt (reading and writing) were posted via Microsoft Teams. These outcomes were analysed and shared among each other. There was no specific design used in the PAR. However, the observations and reflections are the most important items in PAR, where the evidence of outcomes was kept to validate the research. The

first part of the finding below which shows Figure 2 addresses the first objective of this research, while the next part which shows Figure 3 addresses the second objective of this research.

## The Effects of Implementing Digital Tool

### Figure 2

#### *Samples Taken during Research*



Firstly, the outcome of the action research shows that students had a positive attitude towards the incorporation of the digital tool. In addition to that, the digital tool has been considered a good way to monitor, share, and evaluate students for class activities during the endemic period. Hockly and Dudeney (2018) reasoned that technology can develop and transform the teaching and learning field. On the other hand, Vygotsky (1978) initially stated that humans are unique as they have the capability to use the tool. In addition, Jones and Hafner (2021) added that tools not only permit humans to do new things, but are also present to outline humans in some basic ways (p. 3). Selvaraj (2023) stated that the implementation of a digital tool in the reading and writing skills has helped students learn, collaborate, participate and provide feedback. In this case, using digital tools increased their active learning in the classroom as well as provided them with more opportunities to access learning materials and incorporate them into their writing tasks. As one student described, “It gave us ample opportunity to interact with other learners and we enjoyed this collaborative space.”

Next, it is a fact that most of the students these days own at least a digital device such as laptop, a tablet and a mobile phone. Furthermore, researchers found that the students who live in the digital era were more confident and independent in sharing their ideas on the Microsoft Teams platform using their devices. As researchers have mentioned that students can be addicted to mobile phones (Olebara et al., 2021), the finding from this research supports Rong and Noor (2019)'s study, which states that learning can be interesting where it can accommodate various learning styles when technology is being implemented in the classroom. It cannot be denied that different tools have different ways of it being used. Thus, by considering the social and professional purposes, an individual or community may recognize the tool's affordances and adapt it to their needs, which create the "cultures-of-use" (Thorne, 2003, in Moorhouse & Yan, 2023).

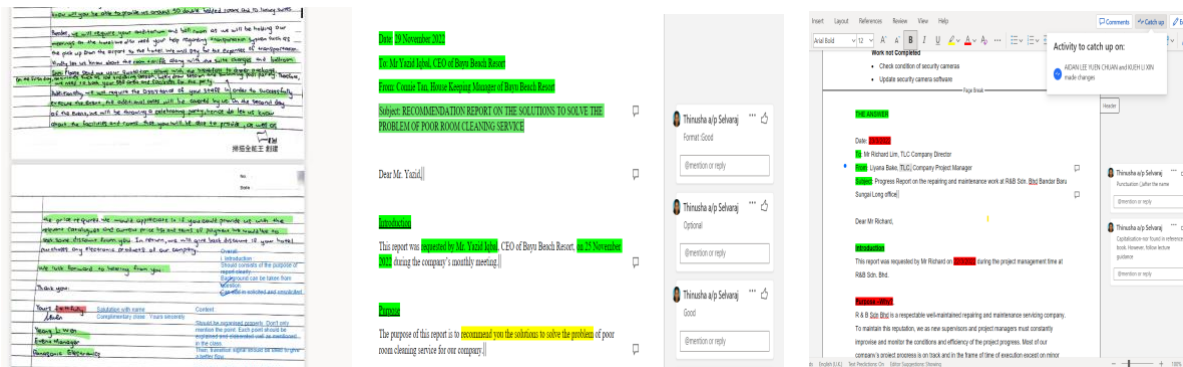
Thirdly, the findings show that the feedback was useful for revision and other components in the English lesson as students also feel comfortable clarifying their doubts. It shows that students are motivated and learned to write better from the feedback and use this tool to post the doubts that arise. This supports the study by Azmi (2017) which states that usage of tools enhances students learning in language classes. Furthermore, quite a number of students felt encouraged when they received feedback from lecturers using the tools to discuss and post comments and feedback. The oral feedback was provided in real-time during class, and written feedback after classes where the students had a chance to review their writing. It also enabled them to understand the feedback and seek further clarification in class. This has inspired and motivated other students to submit their work via the tools. As mentioned by Azar and Tan (2020), there were a few students who still don't own cutting-edge equipment despite the

advancement of technology. These students took the initiative to write out and post their answers onto the platform using their mobile device and devices owned by their peers.

The samples below show the submission of work by students and feedback by educators.

**Figure 3**

*Samples Taken from the Digital Tool Used in Class during the Lessons on Reading and Writing Skills*



## The Significance of Implementing a Digital Tool in Enhancing the Engagement and Collaborative Skills

Based on the second purpose of this action research in developing collaborative skills, it was found that students were willing to collaborate and engage themselves in groups after the physical lessons. With the devices that they own, students were willing to work in teams while completing the activities using the digital tool. Those who do not own a proper learning device took the effort to participate using papers and pencils while making good use of their mobile device to post and share their work. Also, peer feedback among groups was encouraging where students managed to post their works; also, provide and receive constructive feedback from peers and the educator. This supports the study conducted by Jong and Tan (2021), where tools can be helpful for students to read and write better while making learning interesting. This study highlights that students managed to become autonomous learners after a period of time. The

lecturers who participated in this research also noticed that motivation, encouragement, and proper guidance and instructions had to be given to students in order to get their participation in the activities conducted using the digital tool. With proper encouragement and guidance, it can be said that the lecturers who are the researchers managed to find out the strengths and weakness of the pedagogy used during class. The researchers also observed that the participants worked well in a collaborative group as it improved their communication and gave them a sense of purpose. In checking their revised drafts, the researchers noticed changes made to the structure and the vocabulary of the written text, which has enhanced their overall writing task. One of the students mentioned, "I can identify the relevant materials and I was able to identify the different sources available to us. I also communicated with the use of digital tools with other students and worked collaboratively."

Overall, the researchers found that the implementation of digital tools has shown significant effects and enhanced collaborative skills among peers for reading and writing skills in English class. These tools and systems are used to make learning more interesting, motivating, stimulating, and meaningful to the students. The study also found that teamwork was enhanced using digital tools. In addition to that, Clum et al. (2022) further added that educators have learned to practice the resilient pedagogy. It is a fact that digital tools such as mobile phones, tablets, and laptops have become a prevalent tool for learning during the period of COVID-19, and it is quite likely that educators may prefer to do some things differently now compared to the past. "The use mobile devices as tool for digital classroom aims at deploying systemised, organized, curriculum-based knowledge seeking and knowledge involvement without time or space restrictions" (Olebara, 2022).

### **Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Study**



Overall, this study highlights three effects which addresses the first research question. Next, the significant effects of the implementation, which addresses the second research question, were also highlighted. These were discussed in the findings accordingly. Although English reading and writing skills can be quite challenging to second language learners, proper teaching, support, and guidance in using the appropriate digital tool for both parties, educators, and learners, may encourage and enhance students' participation in classroom activities. In addition to that, creativity and interesting methods could encourage students to participate and do better in classroom activities. The implementation of digital tools will help keep students engaged in class activities and discussions, indirectly reducing the addiction to mobile phones. Also, it can be said that the "COVID-19 pandemic has redefined teaching and learning to such a degree that the highly significant differences between the pre and post-pandemic educational environment must be acknowledged" (Clum et al., 2022, p. 324).

This study has highlighted the significant effects of implementing the Microsoft Teams digital tool on reading and writing skills. The study also highlighted the enhanced collaborative skills among peers and educators. Although this study addresses the research questions, it consists of limitation where it only looked at one type of digital tool, Microsoft Teams, using the participatory action research method. Next, this study only focuses on two different HEIs, which are Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman and Segi University. In addition, this research focuses only on English reading and writing skills, which involves a small group of participants, undergraduate students, and the respective lecturers who are also the researchers of this study. Hence, more samples and different methodologies/approaches (quantitative/qualitative study) could be implemented in future studies. Further studies could be implemented to find out if educators and learners are ready and willing to implement digital tools in their teaching process

after the endemic period, especially in developing countries like Malaysia. Despite the constraints and challenges (facilities and internet speed), it would be good to explore and find out more about ways to observe and implement relevant and different types of digital tools in order to enhance communication, cooperation and teamwork to keep up with the latest progress for English lessons in the education field of the 21st century. Policymakers could decide if digital tool can become a part of the teaching and learning tool besides the learning management system set by the university.

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