

WEB-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL FOR ENHANCING EET SPEAKING TEST PERFORMANCE

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Web-based instructional (WBI) tool was developed as a digital innovation in English language teaching (ELT) is to assist students in their preparation for the speaking component of the English Exit Test (EET). The scope of this product is aligned closely to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) initially proposed to the EET test-takers in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Penang Branch. This WBI tool is created by following a theoretical-and-pedagogical framework, namely WeCSI, which is a modified version of an award-winning e-framework called Web-based Cognitive Writing Instruction (WeCWI). WeCSI is an acronym that stands for Web-based Cognitive Speaking Instruction that focuses on the processes of watching, discussion, and speaking through a digital platform to foster interactions among learners, learners to the instructor, and learners to contents.

To measure the feedback from the users for this innovation, an adapted unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) formulated by Venkatesh was applied apart from the prepared tasks of EET speaking test.

Speaking task 1 up to task 3 comprise four different sets, which the students can easily access at the order or instructions of their instructors. The instructors also can benefit from this tool since the test-takers' audio recordings have been uploaded and are retrievable via the embedded hyperlink. The findings suggest that there is definitely a fervent need for the test-takers to use such facility in preparing them for their speaking test as well as honing their speaking skills. In conclusion, if the test-takers can optimise and maximise their potentials via the use of this WBI tool, they will be able to obtain a better grade in their EET speaking component.

Keywords: WBI, EET; CEFR; WeCSI; UTAUT; speaking tasks

INTRODUCTION

Workplace communication is highly indispensable as one of the employability criteria required of an employee. Of late, the Higher Education Providers (HEPs) are playing a more effective role bridging the gap and expectations between the industries and employers by preparing the future graduates to be more adept and eloquent where communicative ability is concerned. The future graduates who happen to be the second language learners (L2) have been criticised to be having poor language proficiency and low employability rate, which have been quite alarming. As such, HEPs have taken some positive measures to arrest the language proficiency problem in speaking skill, particularly so that more job opportunities can be created for future employees.

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) introduces the English Exit Test (EET) as an initiative in preparing the undergraduates for possessing a better and more effective workplace communication skill prior to graduation. By using CEFR as the basic guideline descriptors in categorising their speaking proficiencies, this will provide the information about the job seekers' communication abilities to future employers.

Undoubtedly, numerous approaches are made available to improve L2 learners' language proficiency; however, their poor speaking ability and performance can be further enhanced with the intervention of technology-enablers. Barrett & Liu (2016) put forward how oral communication is affected by learning technology (LT) from the adoption of Web 2.0 tools and computer-mediated techniques that have put the learners at an advantageous position, where their oral communication skills are concerned.

Problem Statement

Despite the presence of technology-enabler learning tools (TELT), poor speaking skills among graduates remains unsolved. No studies were found focussing on oral assessment and workplace readiness or occupational purposes. Thus, an issue was raised: Despite having the imposing presence of these TELT, the graduates are still unable to speak independently or efficiently. In fact, all HEPs are equipped with such tools to enhance the learners' learning process. Thus, the question addressed in this study is whether with the advancement of technology-enabled tools for language learning assistance, the graduates' communicative competence especially the speaking skill can be further enhanced by giving the relevant exposure of WBI.

Objectives

Three specified objectives being addressed in this study are:

1. To enhance the undergraduates' speaking skills via the use of WBI for workplace readiness;
2. To design and develop a WBI tool in assisting the EET candidates in the speaking component aligned closely to CEFR; and
3. To measure the feedback from the users of the WBI tool.

Significance of the study

This study caters to the exit policy of Ministry of Education (MOE) to produce graduates who can “cope in the international job market using English whenever necessary, both at home and abroad” (Zuraidah Don, 2016), which the target falls on the university students to have a score at least of B1/C2 as the university entry point level is at low B2 while the exit point is at B2/ C1 (Zuraidah Don, 2016). In addition, the developed WBI tool can be served as a supplementary EET training platform developed using the contemporary web tools with mobility features and designed via theoretical-and-pedagogical approaches on speaking, discussion and watching processes.

METHODOLOGY

The research design applied in this study is quantitative in nature by adopting an online survey as the method for collecting the data. The UTAUT questionnaire formulated by Venkatesh, Morris, Davis & Davis (2003) was chosen as the research instrument since the aim is to investigate the acceptance among the selected respondents in the choice of instructional medium for EET Speaking Component skills and its contents to be exposed to them. The sample of the population was made up of 50 undergraduates from two intact groups from Hotel and Tourism Faculty, UiTM Penang Branch. The response rate reaches 96%, whereby a total of 48 out of 50 students responded to the survey.

FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

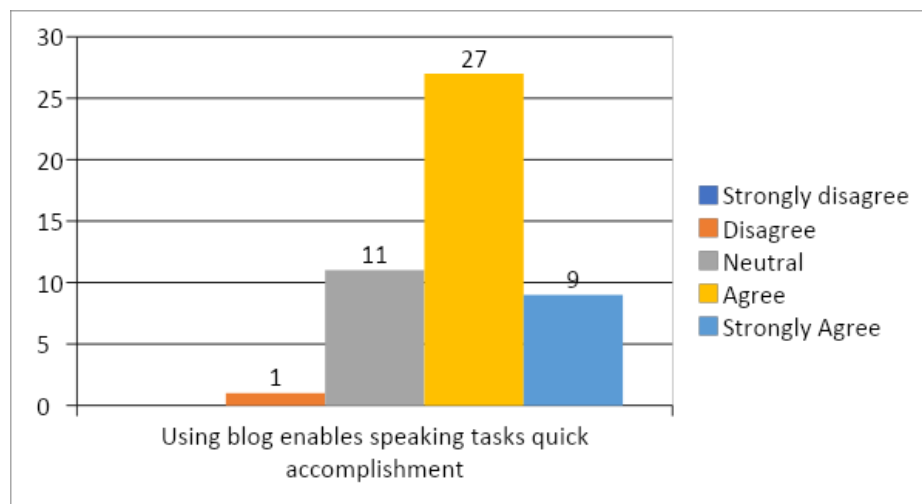


Figure 2. Using blog enables speaking tasks quick accomplishment

Most of the respondents agreed that using blog enables them to quickly accomplish the speaking tasks provided in the treatment. Nine respondents also recorded their strong agreement on the process on how using such medium will enable them to fulfil the tasks provided in a quicker way which could be their familiarity with the respective medium and its ease of use.

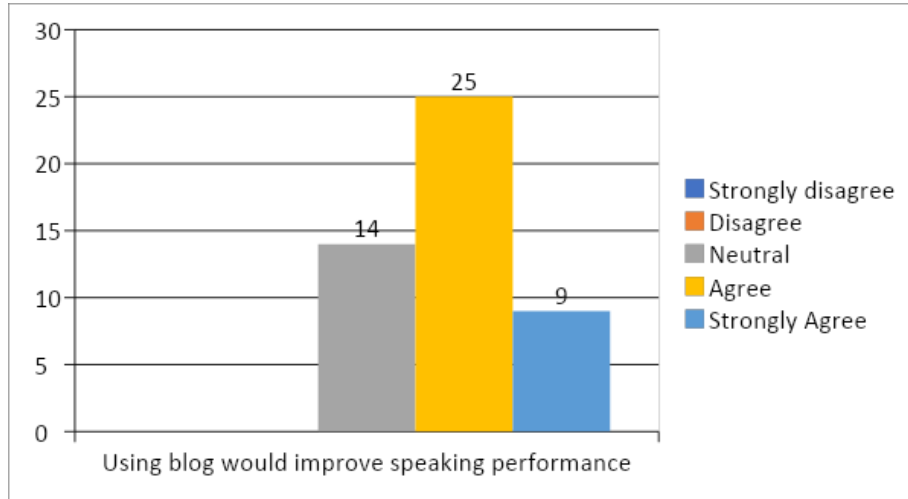


Figure 3. Using blog would improve speaking performance

Figure 3 shows the response from the respondents in terms of their speaking performance and how they perceived that using blogs would help them to improve their respective performance. A total of 34 students recorded their agreement that via the use of blogs, their speaking performance will see an improvement.

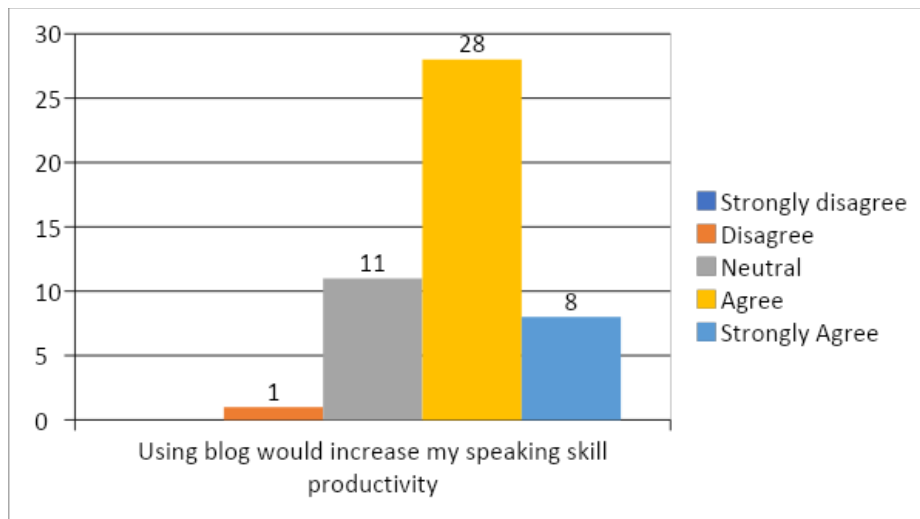


Figure 4. Using blog would increase my speaking skill productivity

Figure 4 indicates that a quarter of the respondents have stated their disagreement on the usefulness of blogs in increasing their speaking skill productivity. In addition, 28 respondents recorded their agreement that their speaking skill productivity would be enhanced with the use of blogs.

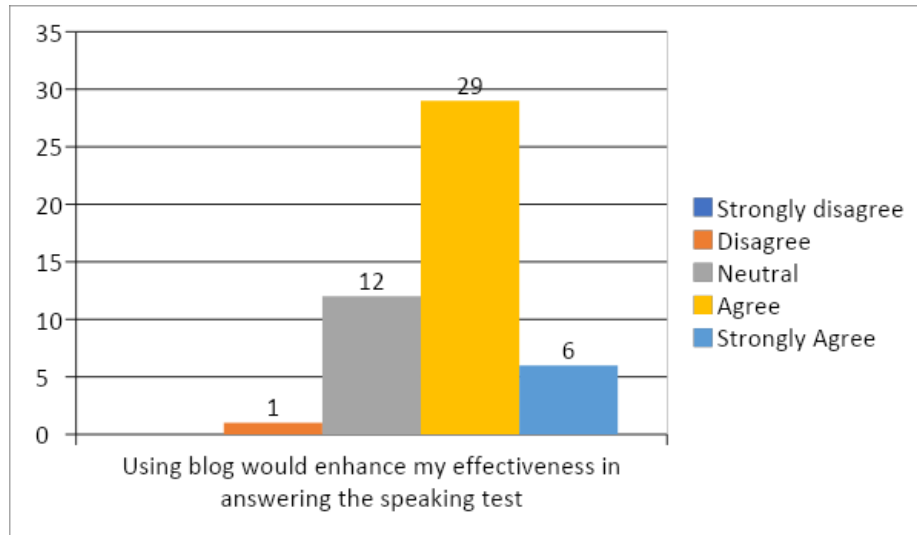


Figure 5. Using blog would enhance my effectiveness in answering the speaking test

While 12 respondents disagreed that blog usage would enhance their effectiveness in answering the speaking test, triple the number of respondents believed in the opposite. Exposed to the blog, they could have found that it would aid them in attempting the speaking test and more effectively to answer the test.

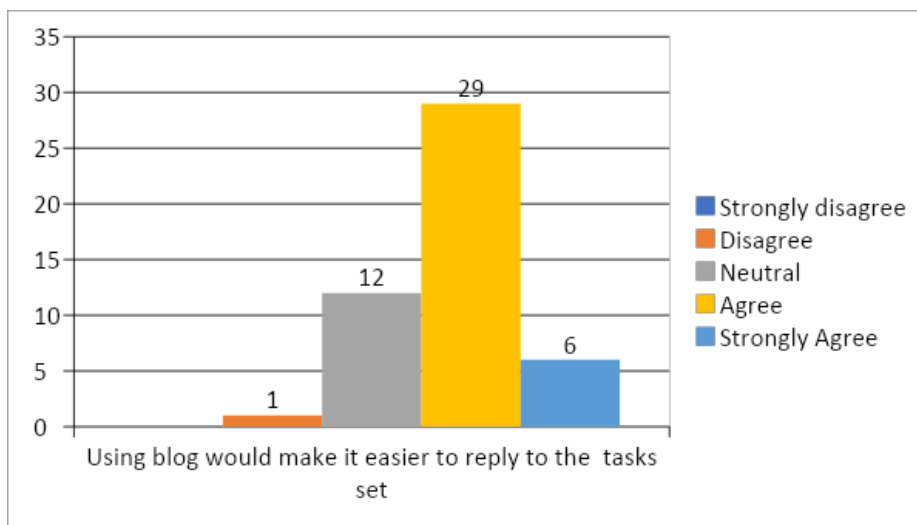


Figure 6. Using blog eases replying to the tasks set

Based on Figure 6, a majority of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that using blog eases them in replying to the tasks set in the EET format. In addition, 13 respondents stated their disagreement that using the blog does ease their part in answering to the set tasks made available via the blog.

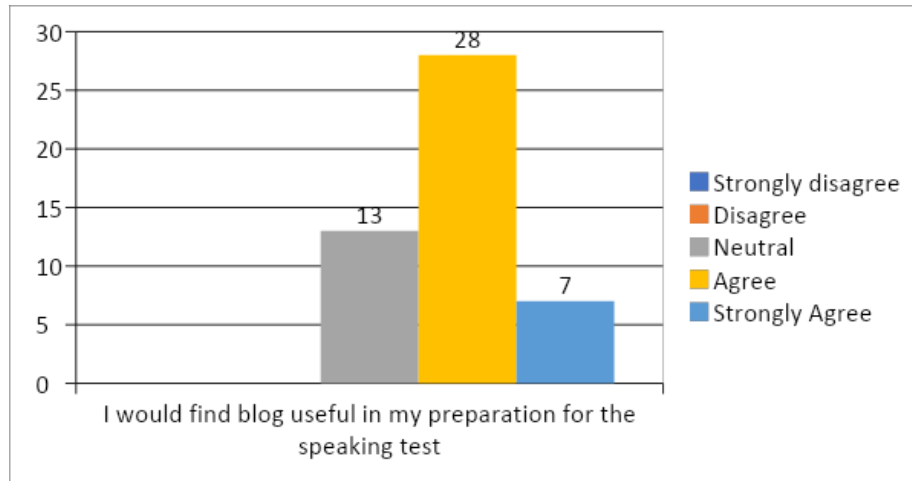


Figure 7. Blog is useful in my speaking test preparation

As many as 35 respondents recorded their agreement that they would find the blog of use in their preparation for the speaking test as compared to 13 who stated otherwise. The overall findings indicate that more than 50% of the respondents agree that WBI could help them to prepare for the test, accomplish the tasks, and improve their speaking skill productivity and performance.

CONCLUSION

There is definitely a fervent need for the test-takers to use such facility in preparing them for their speaking test as well as honing their speaking skills. If the test-takers can optimise and maximise their potentials via the use of this WBI tool, they will be able to obtain a better grade in their EET speaking component. More importantly, this WBI tool is created by following a framework namely WeCSI which emphasises on the processes of watching, discussion, and speaking to inculcate and promote interactions among learners, between the learners and instructor, and between learners to the contents imparted. In fact, this tool is created in mind exclusively for all UiTM students sitting for their EET.

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