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Sustaining the Provision of Quality ESL Instruction during the Pandemic via G Suite Education Applications

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has made remote teaching and learning the current norm. However, the sudden and rapid transition to remote teaching and learning around the world brought about ambivalent teaching instructions with the use of various online teaching tools. The quality of an instruction in all disciplines including English as a Second Language (ESL) when supplemented with an online teaching tool is uncertain due to each online teaching tool operating in different forms providing different functions with its share of pros and cons. The application that recently made headlines in the teaching and learning world is Google Classroom from G Suite for Education applications. In fact, Google Classroom has been embraced as the main online teaching and learning platform by most public schools in Malaysia. Consequently, tertiary institutions have included G Suite for Education applications as a viable teaching tool for pre-service teacher training programmes. This paper will discuss to what extent G Suite for Education applications can help sustain the quality of ESL instruction. This qualitative case study was conducted in a private university in Malaysia. It explored the perspectives of four ESL lecturers who have employed G-Suite Education applications over the past few years based on constructs under TAM (Technology Acceptance Model). The data were collected via face-to-face interviews and analysed using thematic approach. The main findings from this study were lecturers perceived G Suite for Education applications easy to use, useful and effective while the challenges they faced were lack of awareness and training.

Keywords: sustaining, quality ESL instruction, G Suite Education Applications.

1. INTRODUCTION

The English language is considered the globalised world's lingua franca; acquiring the language to new heights of information and knowledge to see the world. Essentially, the English language can be used as a tool to understand evolutions in world trends. It influences trends in commerce, education, and culture while connecting people across disparate groups and communities, even more so with the assistance and integration of technology.

In Malaysia English is taught as a second language (ESL, hereafter) and it is a compulsory language in all public schools. Therefore, it is important for Malaysians to learn English to develop good command and fluency in the English language. However, due to the cultural differences and different learning environments, students attain fluency in English at different rates.

Today technology bridges the gap in the 21st century classroom transforming how we communicate, teach and learn. In the world of education, technology can be a dynamic and influential tool in transforming the teaching and learning process by evolving curriculum and instructional design for sustainable development. The Internet especially plays an essential role in education today, as it helps to

facilitate a 21st century classroom. Keeping in line with the learning environment of Education 4.0 and 21st century classrooms, there are various tools and applications that can facilitate the learning environment whilst sustaining the provision of quality online teaching and learning. Students can learn on their own to enhance their language abilities by using G Suite for Education applications technology and in Malaysia, schools are already incorporating and utilising Google Classroom which is a part of G Suite for Education applications.

The aim of this study is to investigate lecturers' perceptions on G Suite for Education applications as teaching and tools in the English as a Second Language classroom, specifically a case study of lecturers from the Education faculty in a private university.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Covid-19 pandemic coerced teaching and learning to remote learning with the use of various online tools and applications in the ESL classroom. Consequently, curriculum and instructional design have evolved to match the necessary changes. Whilst there is a change in the curriculum and instructional design, sustainability in the provision of quality education through the means of remote teaching remains to be ascertained. There are some factors that lead to a lecturer's acceptance towards technology.

Online Teaching and Learning

Online teaching and learning utilise technology in education, such technologies include, document creation applications, pre-recorded audio and video files, email, chat and video conferencing applications for the purpose of communicating all through the Internet. Online teaching and learning are often called remote teaching and learning among other terms but it is not just purely remote teaching and learning, it is the utilisation of the various tools and applications to facilitate the classroom or lesson in the form of computer-assisted instructions (Adebo, 2018).

In order to facilitate the 21st century learner and classroom, an entire industry has emerged to cater to the needs of remote learning. The emergence of this industry has led to the creation of various tools and applications including G Suite for Education applications and learning management systems (LMS) that are designed purposefully with the ability to design and deliver courses within a flexible framework to enable learning and communication.

Moreover, online teaching and learning methodology caters to the requirements of a 21st century classroom and learner. It supports the 21st century classroom by providing an environment that promotes the use of technology in the classroom through the use of computer-assisted instruction while supporting the 21st century learner by ensuring the learners develop digital literacy and further enhance it to be more effective learners through online teaching and learning methodologies.

Advantages of Online Teaching and Learning

Through online learning tools, lessons often become more interactive promoting student-to-teacher or student-to-student interaction and discussions. These interactions lead to a more student-centred learning environment that is less passive listening and more active learning (Davis, Gough & Taylor, 2019). Furthermore, students are able to learn at their own pace according to their own convenience with the use of online learning tools aiding them with the ability to comprehend under the students' own conceptual information base.

The use of pre-recorded videos to deliver content to students prior to the online lesson has also shown to be more effective in the online class, enabling students to have learner-to-learner interaction via discussions regarding the content (Tang et al., 2020). The purpose of the pre-recorded videos as a method of content delivery is to also allow students to watch and learn at their own pace. Once the students have watched the content, they can then discuss with their peers regarding the video to develop questions pertaining to the content to ask the instructor to which then encourages learner-to-

instructor interaction. These interactions lead to a more active learning environment which is facilitated by the instructor in the form of a pre-recorded video for delivery of content.

Theoretical Framework (Technology Acceptance Model)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was created by Davis in 1989 to which was a derivation from the Theory of Reasoned Action by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975. This model highlights the users' motivation on using technology based on four constructs which are Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Behavioural Intention to Use and Actual Usage.

According to Davis (1989) Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) in this model is defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort". Effort is a finite resource from an individual to conduct and complete a multitude of tasks, the system that the individual perceives easy to use indicates a higher probability that the system will be used and accepted. Perceived Usefulness (PU) is defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance their job performance". Usefulness in this context explains that the system used is advantageous and beneficial which will lead to an existence of a positive performance-use relationship. Furthermore, Behavioural Intention to Use (BITU) are the factors based on the individuals Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU) leading to the usage of the system. Lastly Actual Usage (AU) means the actual system use by the individual.

These constructs help to identify and determine favourableness and unfavourableness towards technology. The TAM is a widely used and cited model when it comes to research in technology acceptance. The model can be seen in Figure 1 below.

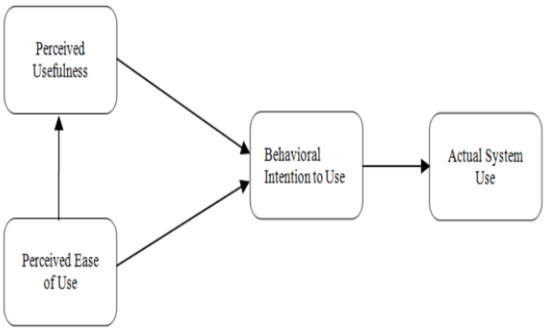

Figure 1: *Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)*

G Suite for Education Applications

G Suite for Education applications is a suite of applications tailored for educators and students for the purpose of the teaching and learning process via online classrooms which is an aspect of the 21st century classroom. Online classrooms allow educators and students to teach and learn remotely, meaning that the need for a physical classroom is not required. G Suite for Education applications consists of five categories of applications that serve different functions; the five categories include document creation applications, communication applications, classroom management applications, organisational applications and an administrative application.

The document creation applications consist of a word processing tool known as Docs, a spreadsheet tool called Sheets and a presentation tool which is Slides. These applications allow educators to create content with text and images for the purpose of teaching the students while students can use these applications to write their assignments or illustrate their presentations.

The communication applications that are in G Suite for Education are Gmail, Meet and Chat. Gmail functions like any other email application. Meet is a newer addition to G Suite for Education; the function of Meet is that it uses the webcam function of devices to enable a more personal teaching and learning process. The Chat application serves primarily as a text-based application; as in the name of the application, users using this application can chat with each other at any point in time.

G Suite for Education classroom management applications consist of Classroom, Assignments and Forms. Classroom serves as a virtual classroom where the educator in charge of a subject can manage the students in terms of student enrolment into the subject and the subject content to be shared. Assignments and Forms have similar functions in terms of educators creating formal and informal assignments.

Keep and Calendar are organisational applications that both the educators and students can utilise to manage their to-do list of tasks by setting reminders alongside scheduling meetings according to their availability. Lastly, Admin is a tool primarily used by the educator to manage students, devices and security.

Advantages of G Suite for Education Applications

Towing in-line with the online classroom aspect, the ability to conduct lessons via remote learning not only bridges the gap for students who are unable to physically attend lessons but it also makes the lesson paperless. Students can take down notes of the lesson using Keep or Docs and complete tutorials given by the educator via Assignments or Forms which essentially eliminates the need of printed worksheets for the students (Constantinou, 2019). The online classroom is often conducted as a live session between the educator and students, this enables students and educators to ask for feedback in real-time simulating an actual physical class.

Moreover, G Suite for Education applications exist as a suite of applications for a reason which is to serve as a virtual collaborative environment (Romero et al., 2018). The applications function well on their own and as they should but serving as a virtual collaborative environment makes it a step above other systems through its highly integrative functions. This virtual collaborative environment enables educators with students, educators with educators and even students with students to collaborate making this suite of applications highly functional and worthwhile to utilise. Students can discuss with each other regarding the lesson, tutorial or assignment while educators can work with each other to refine their lessons or share resources to facilitate the lessons.

According to Beis (2018), G Suite for Education assists in simplifying e-resources workflow with the high integration and high collaborative function within the suite of applications. The simplified workflow increases the efficiency of educators and students and also helps to better organise themselves.

Sustainability of online ESL instructions

The Covid-19 pandemic negatively impacted the education sector over the past year. Many learning institutions were not prepared nor well equipped for online teaching and learning exclusively (Coman, Țîru, Meseșan-Schmitz, Stanciu & Bularca, 2020). Due to the inadequate preparedness of the learning institutions, the advantages of online learning diminished while the disadvantages became more prominent.

Moreover, ICT competency among educators and proper infrastructure to facilitate the online working environment is necessary before ESL educators make any commitment to adopt online educational technologies (Yew & Hua, 2020).

During this pandemic, the trend in utilising online meeting applications to conduct the teaching and learning is growing and it allows both educators and students to achieve learning goals remotely (Pratama, Azman, Kassymova & Duisenbayeva, 2020). Along with online meeting applications, there is a vast library of online teaching and learning materials on the Internet that can help ensure the sustainability of online ESL instructions; however, it is necessary to explore other technologies that can support and supplement online learning (Mohd Noor, Yahaya & Abdullah, 2021).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive case study research design with a qualitative

approach to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon investigated. The study was set in a private university located in the Klang valley.

Purposive sampling was used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon investigated. In this case study, four (4) lecturers from the Faculty of Education were participants of interest. They were chosen as the faculty was training pre-service teachers at the Diploma and Bachelor of Education degree levels. The pre-service teachers at this faculty had to undertake one compulsory course, namely Technology in Education whereby pre-service teachers were exposed to the use of Google Classroom as a platform for teaching and learning.

The instrument used to collect data for this study was a semi-structured interview sectioned into three sections. The first section of the interview protocol examines the respondents' demographic profile. The second section investigated the respondents' perceptions of G Suite for Education applications as a teaching and learning tool based on the constructs under TAM (Technology Acceptance Model). The third section explored the respondents' views of the challenges in using G Suite for Education applications in teaching and learning.

In terms of validity and reliability, this qualitative case study investigated the aspect of trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. To establish credibility the researchers employed member-checking whereby all interview transcriptions were sent to the respondents for verification. In terms of transferability the researchers examined thick descriptions and employed purposive sampling ensuring respondents who were chosen had a good knowledge of G Suite for Education applications. To ensure the reliability of the data extrapolated, an inter-rater reliability test was conducted with a research assistant to ensure homogeneity of the thematic analysis. The exercise yielded an 88% level of agreement on the codes and themes.

Keeping in line with ethics in research, whereby prior permission through the means of a consent form to collect data from the participants while the identities of the participants and setting were kept anonymous and confidential; replaced with pseudonyms, and lastly, all data collected and coded and kept in password encrypted devices accessible only to the researchers.

IV. FINDINGS

This study involved four lecturers in the field of education to answer the research question lecturers' perceptions of G Suite for Education applications as a teaching tool in the ESL classroom with regards to TAM, namely Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Behavioural Intention to Use and Actual Usage. Below is the summary on the profile of lecturers.

A. Demographic Profile of Respondents

All four respondents chosen for the study based on purposive sampling were female lecturers and in terms of age, all were between their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. All four have been working at the faculty for about three to six years. All four admitted that they were interested in embracing the latest technology in the field of education. Given below is a brief description of the four respondnets.

i. Lecturer A has six years of experience teaching at tertiary level with a few extra years of teaching experience under Early Childhood Education. Lecturer A views technology as fun and entertaining and has great potential to be integrated in the 21st century classroom with the new generation of tech-savvy students. She also rates her technical skills a 7 out of 10 as she is quite familiar with some tools and applications.

ii. Lecturer B recently transitioned to her teaching position with her expertise in research and Early Childhood Education. Although she has two years of teaching experience, she makes it up with her youth and fervour, giving herself a high rating (8 out of 10) on her

technical skills as she tries to keep up with new technological tools and applications.

iii. Lecturer C has been teaching at the tertiary level for about seven years with her expertise leaning towards Early Childhood Education. She mentioned that she is familiar with the technological tools and applications she uses often but struggles with a few latest technological innovations; giving herself a mediocre (5-6) rating on her technical skills.

iv. Lecturer D was well composed and authoritative during the interview. She has close to a decade of teaching experience in the tertiary level in Teaching English as a Second language. She is also a Google certified educator. She rated herself high (9-10) in her technical skills as she is highly interested in technological tools and applications.

B. Perceptions of G-Suite for Education

The second aspect investigated in the study was respondents' perception of G-Suite for Education applications as a teaching tool in the ESL classroom. The respondents' perspectives were viewed based on the constructs of TAM. Given below are some of the main findings:

i. Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)

All four lecturers perceived the applications were easy to use because the layout of the applications were clear, attractive and easily navigable. This was highlighted by Lecturer D when she stressed, "If you compare it with its counterpart with Microsoft, it's much much simpler and everything is laid out very clearly".

Lecturers also perceived the applications to be user-friendly which was evident when Lecturer D mentioned, "Google online support is very good… they do everything on the cloud". She also compared it with Microsoft's online support, which was "still not that complete yet".

ii. Perceived Usefulness (PU)

Lecturers perceived G Suite for Education applications to be useful in terms of facilitating classroom management. This statement was supported by Lecturer C. She said that the application are "very ideal for normal discussions and tutorial." To this Lecturer D added that "Google's plagiarism checker is available and it works but it is still not that complete as compared to Turnitin".

As for its collaborative capabilities, Lecturer D mentioned that the ability to collaborate easily comes from the user-friendliness of G-Suite for Education making it effective for collaboration by quickly and easily sharing materials with other lecturers and students. She stressed that, "It is also very good and easy to share all our materials with one another and our students.".

When it comes to the interactive capabilities, Lecturer B mentioned that the Slides function application is "quite well-integrated for presentation" and "can be very interactive and fun". Lecturer A added that with JamBoard, an interactive application, "I'm more of a graphic and visual person, so I need to draw and scribble to explain concepts to students. I find it useful that I'm able to show students using mind-map forms using JamBoard".

iii. Behavioural Intention to Use (BITU)

The effectiveness of the applications were highly regarded by the lecturers due to its ability to help students improve their thinking skills. This factor leading to the lecturers' intentions to use the applications was supported by evidence from all four lecturers.

For instance, Lecturer A highlighted that "I find it very effective from my past try-outs…Students really improve and I'm really able to help them, to bring them ahead in terms of their critical thinking and in terms of their higher order thinking skills, so I really see learning happening when I'm using G-Suite applications in teaching".

As for the accessibility, G-Suite for Education does not require any form of payment to use its services which is a leading factor for Lecturer C to use and encourage the use of G Suite for Education. She pointed out that "during the RMCO… I had one student where she did not have access to any of the google software application and hence she needed to install, … I

explained to her – it is easy …it's just like, just a click away…because it's free".

iv. Actual Usage (AU)

The commonly used G-Suite for Education applications by lecturers as teaching tools in the ESL classroom are search engines, word processor applications and presentation software. They often use Google and Google Scholar for their work and research. This was also echoed by Lecturer D when she emphasized that "Google Scholar is one of the biggest… places to look for latest journals, highly-cited papers…and of course if you are searching for a particular scholar or particular person who has written a lot of articles on that, then Google Scholar is one of my first choice."

The four respondents also added that Google Slides were used more often for teaching purposes by presentation while Google Docs were viewed as better suited for giving tutorials to students.

C. Challenges in Using G Suite for Education applications

The third aspect examined during the interview sessions was the challenges that users (both students and lecturers) will experience when using G-Suite for Education applications as a teaching tool in the ESL classroom.

Based on the thematic analysis of the data collected the following were cited as the main challenges:

i. Lack of Awareness

All four respondents highlighted that a large majority of both students and lecturers are not aware of the true potential of G-Suite as a teaching and learning tool. They drew attention to the fact that educators

were either not interested to learn to update themselves or completely unaware of its existence.

For instance, Lecturer D claimed that, "A lot of people don't know about it… students are not told about it as well… the problem is for students to get to know about it and sometimes I feel it is important for me as an educationist to inform the relevant people about the potential of G-suite in teaching and learning and also inform the administration personnel how G-Suite applications can help them manage administrative work . . . as for me the people who are with me this semester, I make them aware of the potential and need to use our G-suite for Education account for example I will stress to my students … "please activate these and give them passwords".

Lecturer B also echoed that the lack of awareness is one of the biggest challenges faced by both students and lecturers alike when using G Suite for Education applications as a teaching tool. She stressed that "to be able to use something, you need to be aware of it. You need to be very well informed of how to use it… only when you spend time and explore you will realise the potential. . . so I feel all educationists need spend some time exploring it".

ii. Lack of Training

All four also emphasized they lack training in realizing the true potential of G Suite applications. All lecturers mentioned and believed that they require more workshops and practical training to help everyone better utilize the applications. Lecturer B emphasised that, "I think my main challenge I would say is the exposure and the training… not being able to fully utilize the potential G-Suite has to offer." Moreover, she also faced some challenges in terms of the inability to employ and fully utilise G-Suite applications like Google Classroom to control a large class. She highlighted that she had trouble with "allowing a lot of people to be working on one document at the same time… the control might be a little bit more difficult".

Lecturer A further added that, "I have no idea what else I can do more using these two things to improve further and create excitement for the students as well … so I guess more structured training is lacking."

iii. Lack of Facilities

In terms of facilities, all four respondents felt that internet connectivity is a major issue when it comes to teaching with technology. They

pointed out that an unstable connection can be rather disruptive and can interfere with the online lessons.

Lecturer A felt that such a situation often leaves both the students and lecturers frustrated as it delays the teaching and learning process. To quote Lecturer A "very often I have to get my students to resort to using their mobile devices. . . here again it is rather problematic as some students may not have sufficient data to run certain programs." Lecturer C however, focused more on the tools that were lacking, such as "assignments part that would be, because of the Turnitin that was lacking". To add on, she also felt that "I don't really find any challenges because… it's very user-friendly… and I have full control, so I don't have to wait for others, so it's very effective."

iv. Lack of Interest and Resistance to Change

Lack of interest in utilizing technology in teaching is sometimes due to complacency. This aspect was pointed out by Lecturer D when she claimed that "most lecturers… still prefer… offline storage in terms of storing it in their computer or USB drive. . . this group of lecturers are happy with what they have been doing in the past so they have little interest in utilising the latest technology."

Another aspect emphasized by the respondents was the resistance to change among some lecturers. All four felt that there will always be a few who will resist change especially if top management does not stress the need for change. Lecturer A stated that younger lecturers are more adaptable, flexible and prepared when it comes to utilizing these applications, "but when it comes to… senior lecturers… I can see they are really struggling and they are not ready at all to use technology applications".

Nonetheless, all four felt that the positive side of the global Covid-19 pandemic had pushed boundaries resulting in both junior and senior lecturers embracing online teaching and learning tools. So the current resistance is 'slowly fading' and some senior lecturers are beginning to embrace the potential of technology in education including G-Suite applications. Lecturer D concluded that 'overnight everyone embraced the change . . .hopefully both students and lecturers will use more G-Suite applications in their teaching and learning process."

V. DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to investigate lecturers' perceptions on G Suite for Education applications as teaching tools in the ESL classroom with regards to the four constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), Behavioural Intention to Use (BITU) and Actual Usage (AU). Lecturers' perceptions on G Suite for Education applications as teaching tools in the ESL classroom were easy to use in terms of easily navigable, clear and attractive layout with good user-friendliness that sports customisation and good online support which is in line with the findings from Beis (2018).

G Suite for Education applications were perceived to be useful by all the four lecturers because they found that its collaborative functions enabled for easy sharing through working over a cloud-based storage and this is aligned with the findings from Romero et al., (2018). The G-Suite applications also enabled the lecturers to create and provide a more interactive class with the lessons being more engaging for the students. Lecturers also found that it was useful in facilitating classroom management when conducting discussions and tutorials as students were grouped together easier and faster supporting the findings from Nirmala et al., (2020).

As for the factors that lead lecturers to use G Suite for Education applications as teaching tools in the ESL classroom, lecturers find that the suite of applications was effective in delivering the concept of their lessons as it helped students to visualise improving their thinking skills through the implementation of audio and visual aids. G Suite for Education applications are also a suite of applications that

are open-source and highly accessible to which lecturers encourage students to use the suite of applications. A similar view was also recorded by findings from Dhull & Arora, (2017) who highlighted that users of G Suite for Education can access their files anywhere at any time on any device as long as they are connected to a network to access the Internet.

G Suite for Education applications that lecturers often utlise as teaching tools in the ESL classroom, are search engines, word processor application and presentation software. Lecturers use the search engine often to search for information and locate materials for their lessons. Lecturers' use case for word processor applications is primarily to write their work but also to collaborate with others by sharing the documents. As for presentation software, lecturers most frequently use Slides when conducting a lesson as it allows them to present text, image, video and audio to aid and facilitate the lesson. Being able to share materials and information enables them to bridge the gap of remote learning to be as close as a physical classroom.

VI. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Curriculum and instructional design evolved to overcome the challenges that arose from the pandemic with the use of G Suite for Education, helping to fulfil the needs of lecturers to sustain the provision of quality education.

The study highlighted lecturers' perceptions on G Suite for Education applications as a teaching and learning tool in the ESL classroom in a private university in Malaysia with regards to the four constructs on TAM which are PEOU, PU, BITU and AU. The findings from the study showed that lecturers find G Suite for Education applications easy to use and can be adopted as teaching and tools. They felt that it has a simple and straightforward layout. G Suite for Education applications is also shown to be useful by lecturers because they find it effective in conveying concepts in their lessons and it has shown to enhance learning abilities in students. Factors that led to the use of G Suite for Education applications were its highly accessible applications, the effectiveness of its applications and for students as a learning tool a gateway to boundless knowledge. As for the Actual Usage of G Suite for Education applications as teaching and learning tools in the ESL classroom; search engine, word processor application and presentation software were the common use cases.

The study also explored the challenges faced by lecturers in using G Suite for Education applications as a teaching tool in the ESL classroom which revealed the lack of awareness of the potential of G Suite for Education by lecturers and the lack of facilities such as internet connectivity as some of the major challenges to facilitate the effective employment of G Suite for Education effectively and on a wider scale.

The findings in this study imply that there is great potential of employing G-Suite for Education in today's 21st century teaching and learning process, more so when remote learning has become the new norm. Therefore this study recommends that G-Suite for Education applications be embraced by alle ducation institutions so that we can provide sustainable provision of quality education for all in the 21st century classrooms.

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