

Using Digital Multimodal Composing Technique to Enhance the Speaking Performance of Low-Proficiency Students: A Conceptual Paper

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ABSTRACT

Issues and challenges surrounding the area of speaking skills are seems to be more demanding. However, the advances in technology have provided more opportunities for ESL learners to explore their academic potential as it offers multimodal spaces to boost learning. Technology is known for being capable to cater to various learning styles. One of the technological advances to enhance learning ability is through the digital multimodal composing technique. It incorporates images, sound, animation, and texts into their tasks, thus promoting creativity among learners. Therefore, this paper will propose a conceptual framework to visualise a research project and the way it puts into action. The proposed framework has been developed based on the digital multimodal composing (DMC) technique into the speaking classroom. It is believed that DMC technique could potentially enhanced speaking performance among the low proficiency students. Based on the framework, the DMC technique will serve as the treatments by incorporating the basis of multimodal approach into the speaking tasks. Tasks are designed based on the current social media trends so that students could relate their existing knowledge into learning. More interestingly, DMC speaking tasks could be completed using their own gadgets to create more opportunities for students to explore learning inside and outside classroom context. The proposed framework would benefit the English teachers in the multimodal-based instructions and provide ways to improve necessary aspects in the use of educational technology for more impactful ESL classroom teaching and learning.

Keywords: speaking, students, technology, DMC, digital

INTRODUCTION

The access to digitalization as well as the rapid development of industrial revolution 4.0 has caused everyone to strive towards coping with challenges surrounding their fast-moving society. Thus, the use of technology in Malaysian education has gradually become more prevalent these days. The idea of allowing technological access to various learning applications seems ambitious, but it is likely capable of decreasing the academic gap between students from different areas and background (Zainal & Zainuddin, 2020). Therefore, teachers should take responsibility in innovating and creating teaching practices that manifest in the 21st century classroom (Khaizer & Rizal, 2023).

The emphasis on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been included in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 in which school students are required to learn how to use technology and effectively utilise it to improve their learning. The blueprint has currently reached the Wave 3 (2021-2025) and it is time to optimise ICT in the classroom pedagogy and practices.

Technology integration can be defined as the efficient use of information ICT and the proper application of technology in education to achieve targeted learning outcomes (Rahmadi, 2021). The 21st century education demands teachers to be adaptable in their teaching approaches in order to improvise teaching to meet the current needs. They need to be knowledgeable in new methodologies to be able to cope with the fast-changing trends in technology and digitalization. This is because the integration of technology could revamp and innovate the traditional teaching and learning method as well as create opportunity for students to master their studies with their own learning strategies using any apps or tools (Hasin & Nasir, 2021). This could boost critical thinking and creativity among students, thus allowing them to grasp substantial and comprehensive learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the rapid development of technologies around the world, second language (L2) speaking skills have become a long debated national issue. There are students who still struggle to speak in English despite years of learning English as a required subject in school. Firstly, one of the factors that contributes to low speaking proficiency among the students is the fact that English is not their first language. Kachru (1992) has classified the world Englishes into three; inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle. Malaysia is identified as outer circle and it is notable that English is not our first language but still significant as communication as well as education purpose (Suzieanna et al., 2020). For that reason, students normally use, learn and speak the language during English lesson and back to their first language when they are outside of the classroom setting (Adickalam & Yunus, 2022). Therefore, they do not have ample practices to articulate words, phrases or even sentences of English in their daily lives.

Secondly, while the four skills are taught in schools, the gravity of teaching speaking and listening skills is less compared to reading and writing skills (Kandasamy & Habil, 2018). Although examinations focus on all four skills, Malaysian national standardise assessments such as Malaysia Certificate of Education or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) has a greater emphasis on reading and writing compared to speaking and listening tests (Ramalingam et al., 2022). Thus, inadequate of students' participation in real or mock presentations and speech-based activities will slow down their mastery of speaking skills (Liang, 2023), hence delay the development of students' communication skills as this skill is flourished and empowered by practice (Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021).

Thirdly, most teaching speaking practices these days are too teacher-centered (Krish et al., 2019). Kashinathan and Abdul Aziz (2021) assert that teachers persist in using traditional classroom practices to prepare students for examinations despite their motivation to create communicative language teaching into their classrooms. In addition, the School-Based Oral Assessment (SBOA) is administered by the schoolteachers themselves. This has created a shortcut method among teachers by using traditional scripted speech which lacks spontaneity especially to the low proficiency students (Rashid et al., 2017). Scripted speech can cause speakers to get nervous when they forget the parts they have memorized. It leads to hesitation and leaves a lot of gaps in their speaking since they are trying to recall what has been memorized. Thus, it shifts away from the real speaking nature.

Finally, despite the advancement of technology worldwide and the advantages of it being well-known around the world, teachers' resistance is one of the challenges to pursuing technology integration into the classroom. Although local studies involving younger generations benefited from the use of technology to improve speaking skills such as Fauzi et al., (2023) and Santhanasamy and Yunus (2022), the negative attitudes among teachers towards technology are still prevailing. Some of them believe that education technology is not

convincing, hard to discard the traditional and prevailing culture in education, do not see the significance of technology-assisted learning, lack encouragement to apply technology in the classroom and least awareness in which part of technology can be utilised in the classroom (Scherer et al., 2021).

One of the most common practices in digital technology these days is digital multimodal composing (DMC). Although the term is less familiar in the mainstream education, the use of DMC is applicable to learners who own mobile phones and social media accounts. The dominant scholars behind DMC such as Hafner and Ho (2020) and Kim et al., (2023) defined it as a form of instructional activity that includes learners with the fusion of texts and other semiotic modes like images, movement, and sound by using digital tools. The use of DMC is one of the most recent strategies to showcase meaning to the audience in the form of multiple modes (Hafner & Ho, 2020). In today's world, we could identify DMC in social media features such as reels, videos, or photos where the user incorporates texts, emojis, stickers, and memes in their posts using various styles and colours.

Therefore, as the world becomes more multimodal, ESL education has the urgency to diffuse the current technology into classroom context due to the development of more multisemiotic digital input in the ESL learners' lives (Belcher, 2017). However, the multimodal approach in the ESL speaking classroom in Malaysia is still underexplored despite the surge of interest in the past years. Therefore, this study will propose DMC technique to further explored the impacts of DMC towards the speaking performance of low proficiency ESL secondary school learners. Below is the conceptual framework of the study.

Conceptual Framework for DMC Task-Based Treatments

A conceptual framework can visualise research agenda that will later notify stakeholders to be aware of the full potential of DMC technique in the speaking classroom. Thus, this paper proposed a conceptual framework surrounding learning theories especially the principles of multimodality into classroom tasks. The development of the framework requires a great understanding of complexities surrounding the way people learn these days and the impacts of technology into formal learning.

Research shows that proliferation of information in modes such as visuals, gestures, audio and text-based could create various approach of learning (Nouri, 2018). In addition, the advance of technology has expanded opportunity for individuals including learners to convey and communicate information using numerous modes (Blum & Barger, 2018). Therefore, as students are increasingly diverse in their communicative approach, digital multimodal composing could help in expanding learning opportunity.

The proposed framework below (Figure 1.0) is intended for secondary school students who are empirically low in their speaking performance. Low- proficiency students are the best fit as it allows us to identify the contrast of findings before and after the treatment. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to propose a conceptual framework to guide educators about the DMC technique to increase speaking performance and to develop a research agenda for DMC speaking tasks as a treatment.

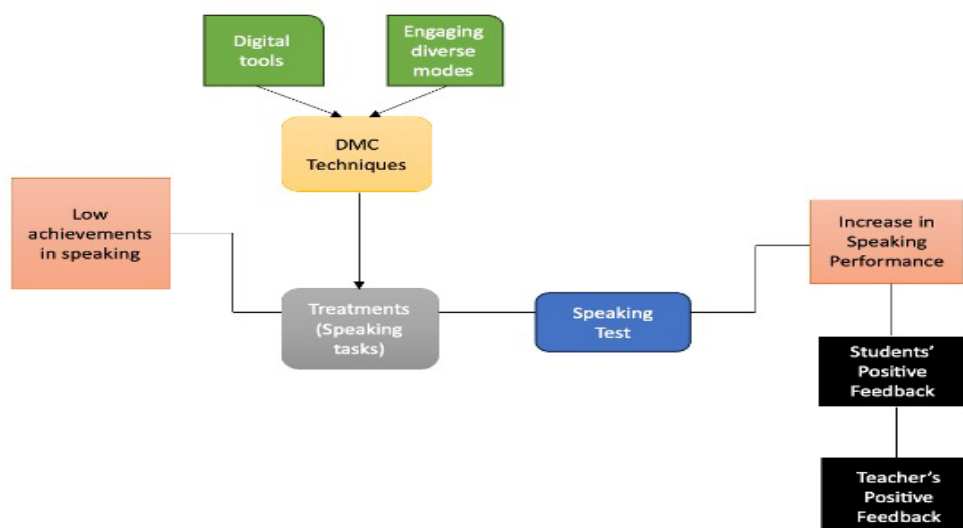


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Research

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework for DMC technique used in the speaking task to increase speaking performance. The image presents the flow of the way DMC techniques implemented into the speaking tasks and conducted them to the low proficiency students. Digital tools and diverse modes are necessary elements to create a DMC-based task. These tasks will serve as a treatment. The selection of digital tools is depending on the preferences of students and the availability of facility to support the tasks. In this paper, mobile phones will be the main source of digital tool as there are more common these days. The data from the speaking will serve as the basis for more research exploration such as interviews.

Low Achievements in Speaking Test

The lower achievements in a speaking test often caused by several factors. One of the most common issues is the lack of speaking practice. The little amount of practices has led students to be lack in the mastery of vocabulary, mistakes in grammar and poor pronunciation (Chand, 2021). Moreover, speaking test has more technical measures such as pronunciation, range, grammar, vocabulary and context. This can be referred at Appendix 1, the Common European Framework Rubrics (CEFR) for speaking test, which is currently used in the standardised school examination. It consists of five elements to be fulfilled namely range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence. Consequently, lack of practices cause fear and nervousness among students which finally affect their performance in the test.

Digital Multimodal Composing

The term Digital Multimodal Composing (DMC) initially borrows from the notion of multiliteracies generated by The New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996). It highlights how literacy teaching may prepare learners for a changing world (Tour & Barnes, 2022). This is parallel with the technological advancement in language learning that many teachers utilize digital texts which are varied in modes (audio, visual, images, gestures, etc). Those digital texts contain semiotic resources which are called digital multimodal which gives rise to the meaning-making of the texts as literacy practices, including DMC (Unsworth & Mills, 2020).

DMC in ESL education is concerned with the activities that encourage students to use digital technologies to create texts in a variety of semiotic modalities including texts, images, and sound (Hafner & Ho, 2020). In addition, Jiang and Ren (2021) proposed that using DMC by teachers in ESL classrooms can provide a variety of ways for learners to display and

negotiate their identities, thus encouraging greater commitment to their learning. Therefore, the DMC technique used in the treatments will be specified into different modes. For instance, treatment phase one will be focusing on two modes, e.g., texts and audio. The ideas to blend different modes will boost specific skills and promotes critical thinking in each phase of the treatment.

Speaking Tasks

A task is something that students need to accomplish using scaffolded language resources or some pre-existing knowledge or skills. According to Ellis (2003), there are four criteria of task, (i) the main focus would be on meaning, (ii) a 'gap' must be recognised, (iii) students used their available resources and (iv) the outcomes are not necessarily language based. Hence, task is selected among any other learning practices, i.e., activity, exercise and project, because it does not have strict control on monitoring students but promote scaffolding. Also, it has more balanced classroom atmosphere which has smaller range of physical movement and yet not strictly performed in a passive motion as well. Thus, teacher has more controlled towards teaching and learning but still allowing students to optimise their interaction and spaces with their peers.

As the framework proposed treatments with the fusion of DMC techniques, all tasks will be designed based on the principles of DMC. Students are allowed to use their mobile phones to complete the tasks. Tasks are different for each phase of treatment so that students are exposed into diverse problem solving and critical thinking. Educators may use theme contained in the speaking syllabus to design the task. It helps students to be more familiar with topics surrounding speaking syllabus. DMC task-based treatments will be the main idea in the framework to identify the effectiveness of multimodal learning approach with the use of technology.

Speaking Tests

Speaking tests will be conducted to find out the effects of DMC techniques used in the treatments. It will be conducted before and after the treatments. Generally, testing is a part of learning by letting students recognize their present knowledge and skills (Ellis, 2003). Meanwhile, the results of the test portray their strengths and weaknesses in particular topics or areas (Bui & Tai, 2022). Therefore, the role of test presented in the framework is to identify any improvements in the students' speaking performance before and after receiving the treatments. The framework suggests that speaking test can be designed based on the real school speaking test such as School Based Oral Assessment (SBOA). It offers higher validity as it uses an established test paper. In this paper, empirical data serves as a solid foundation for further data collection such as interviews.

Speaking Performance

Chomsky (1996) has stated that performance is related to the term of competence and is defined as the specific application of a particular language in the production and understanding of utterances. On the other hand, Brown (2000) defined performance as an observable and solid exhibition or recognition of competence. Meanwhile, Ellis (2003) has more specific claims about language performance which proposed the use of grammar in the comprehension and production of language which eventually sees performance based on grammar and content of language. These definitions indicate that performance can be examined by the actual action of something. Thus, the highs and lows of someone's competence can certainly be measured by their performance.

Nonetheless, speaking performance is then understood as the act of conveying messages from the speaker to the listener through words, utterances, and sentences where their performance in speaking will automatically show their high, intermediate and low competence (Novitasari,

2020). Therefore, this paper will use CEFR as the main rubric to measure students' performance as it now regarded as the main rubric in the standardise English examination.

Feedback

Feedback proposed in the framework refers to the students' opinions regarding the DMC technique applied in the tasks and the way it affects them positively or negatively in their speaking performance. It is important to acknowledge their thoughts as they give insightful perspectives on the impacts of multimodal approach towards speaking skills. Also, it offers greater understanding on the areas that need future improvements. Meanwhile, teacher's feedback is also important as teacher is more experienced in noticing situations happening during the treatments. Also, her opinions matter as she is the one who will conduct the speaking test. By combining feedback and test scores, this framework will be able to propose substantial findings for future reference.

CONCLUSION

Derived from the basis of multimodal-based instruction, DMC could potentially expand the teaching and learning potential in the field of ESL. Although the use of DMC in the area of speaking is still in the Malaysian context, it is the right time to explore more opportunities for ESL enhancement. The notions of fast changing trends in digital technologies should not be neglected as many literatures have supported its capability to develop conducive and impactful learning environment. Therefore, studies surrounding DMC should be executed as it could possibly provide better and equal learning opportunities to all level of learners.

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Appendix 1
CEFR rubrics

Table 5.5: ORAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA GRID (CEF Table 3)

	RANGE	ACCURACY	FLUENCY	INTERACTION	COHERENCE
C2	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.
C1+					
C1	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
B2+					
B2	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he or she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some "jumpiness" in a long contribution.
B1+					
B1	Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used "routines" and patterns associated with more predictable situations.	Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.	Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding.	Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.
A2+					
A2	Uses basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.	Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.	Can ask and answer questions and respond to simple statements. Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.	Can link groups of words with simple connections like "and", "but" and "because".
A1+					
A1	Has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations.	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a memorised repertoire.	Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.	Can ask and answer questions about personal details. Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition, rephrasing and repair.	Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like "and" or "then".
Below A1					