

Investigating Pre-University Students' Perceptions of Using the *Among Us* Video Game as an ESL Teaching Tool

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Abstract

The integration of video games into educational contexts, particularly *Among Us*, has gained significant attention for its potential to engage and enhance students' learning experiences. In response to the global demand for English language proficiency, educators are constantly exploring innovative methods to make language learning more engaging and enjoyable. Traditional teaching approaches often struggle to captivate students effectively. This study explores pre-university students' perceptions of using *Among Us* as a tool for teaching English, highlighting how their views can inform and enhance pedagogical strategies to make learning more engaging and effective. Understanding these perceptions can bridge the research gap and contribute to developing innovative teaching methods. Using a quantitative research design, this study collected data from pre-university students through a questionnaire. The findings revealed that students widely believed that *Among Us* positively contributed to their language proficiency and communicative competence in ESL. The game's interactive nature, requiring communication and collaboration, proved effective in fostering language skills and enhancing motivation. Furthermore, the research explored potential gender differences in students' perceptions of *Among Us* as an ESL teaching tool. The results indicated that gender did not significantly influence students' views on the game's effectiveness, highlighting its inclusivity. In summary, this study provides valuable insights into the potential of *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool for ESL. It demonstrates its positive impact on language learning and suggests that it can engage students regardless of their gender. These findings offer educators a compelling avenue to create dynamic and interactive ESL classrooms, ultimately enhancing language proficiency in an engaging and enjoyable manner.

Keywords: *Language learning, Pedagogical tool, ESL (English as a Second Language), Gamification, Among Us*

Introduction

The incorporation of video games into educational settings has recently garnered significant attention due to its potential to engage and motivate students (Takbiri et al., 2023). Among the panoply of innovative approaches in this domain, *Among Us*, a widely popular multiplayer online video game, has emerged as a promising pedagogical tool (Frazier, 2021). This study endeavors to explore the perspectives of pre-university students regarding the utilization of *Among Us* as an instructional tool for the acquisition of English as a Second Language (ESL). In today's increasingly globalised world, the acquisition of English language proficiency has assumed critical significance, prompting educators to continually seek novel and effective methodologies to enhance the language learning process, making it both engaging and enjoyable (Otto et al., 2023). Traditional pedagogical approaches, often characterised by rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules, frequently fall short in terms of captivating students and instilling enthusiasm for language learning (Otto et al., 2023). However, the integration of educational video games, such as *Among Us*, presents an enticing opportunity to effectively address this pedagogical challenge.

In recent years, English language acquisition has become an indispensable skill, facilitating cross-cultural communication, and offering access to a multitude of global opportunities. In recognition of the growing importance of English proficiency, educators have embarked on an exploration of diverse strategies to enhance language learning experiences. Among these strategies, the integration of video games into ESL classrooms has garnered significant attention. *Among Us*, with its immersive gameplay and interactive features, has risen to prominence as an influential candidate for enhancing language proficiency and communicative competence among pre-university students. Conventional language teaching methods have often faced criticism for their limited ability to effectively engage students, particularly within the ESL context. Pedagogical practices centered on rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules have proven to be uninspiring and have failed to ignite students' interest (Otto et al., 2023). In contrast, video games such as *Among Us* offer a dynamic and immersive learning environment wherein students are actively encouraged to collaborate, strategise, and engage in effective communication. This transition from passive learning to active participation aligns with contemporary pedagogical principles that emphasise student-centered and interactive approaches to education.

This study is driven by a fundamental objective: to investigate the perceptions of pre-university students concerning the effectiveness of the *Among Us* video game as a pedagogical tool for ESL. In the pursuit of this objective, two specific research questions have been meticulously formulated: (1) To what extent do students believe that the use of *Among Us* video game enhances their language proficiency and communicative competence in ESL? and (2) Is there a significant difference between gender, and students' perception that the use of *Among Us* video game enhances their language proficiency and communicative competence in ESL?

Through the systematic examination of these research questions, this study endeavors to provide a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted aspects associated with the deployment of *Among Us* as an ESL pedagogical tool and its potential ramifications for language learning outcomes among pre-university students. Ultimately, this research aspires to make a meaningful contribution to the ongoing discourse concerning the integration of innovative technologies into the ESL classroom.

Literature review

In recent years, the integration of digital games into educational contexts has garnered significant attention as educators seek innovative approaches to engage and motivate students. Among the myriad of digital games, *Among Us*, a popular multiplayer online game, has emerged as a promising pedagogical tool, particularly in the domain of English as a Second Language (ESL) education. Sociocultural theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky, underscores the role of social interactions and cultural context in learning and cognitive

development (Southwood et al., 2021). It posits that learning is fundamentally a social process, with language acquisition occurring through interactions with others. In the context of *Among Us* as an ESL pedagogical tool, sociocultural theory emphasises the game's potential to create a collaborative and interactive learning environment (Xia, 2023). This framework underscores the importance of communication and negotiation among players, elements that can significantly contribute to language development and cross-cultural understanding. Gamification theory, as outlined by Licorish et al. (2018), draws from game design principles and applies them to non-game contexts to enhance motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. It posits that introducing game elements such as challenges, rewards, and competitiveness can boost learners' intrinsic motivation, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective. Applying gamification principles to *Among Us* as an English teaching tool holds the potential to heighten students' interest and active participation, ultimately leading to improved language learning outcomes. Digital games, due to their immersive and interactive nature, have gained increasing recognition as effective tools for language learning. These games offer dynamic learning environments that can facilitate vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, and the development of communication skills (Syahida Mohtar et al., 2022). Furthermore, digital games provide learners with opportunities for autonomous learning and self-paced progression, allowing them to practice language skills at their own convenience. *Among Us*, known primarily for its entertainment value, possesses unique gameplay mechanics and social interaction elements that render it a potential pedagogical tool for language learning (Frazier, 2021). By integrating *Among Us* into ESL education, instructors can leverage its immersive experience to engage pre-university students in language practice and learning (Emihovich et al., 2020).

Empirical research has indicated that students often find *Among Us* to be an engaging and motivating platform for language learning (Calvo-Ferrer & Belda-Medina, 2021; Forutanian, 2023; Kaur & Azlina Abdul Aziz, 2020; York, 2020). According to these studies, students have reported a heightened interest in participating in language-related tasks when integrated into the game. They find the gameplay, with its focus on communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, to be particularly conducive to language production and vocabulary expansion. Moreover, students have expressed positive sentiments regarding the autonomy and self-pacing opportunities afforded by *Among Us* in language learning (Calvo-Ferrer & Belda-Medina, 2021). They appreciate the flexibility to practice language skills at their own convenience, contributing to a more personalised and effective learning experience. However, it is crucial to explore potential variations in students' perceptions, such as differences based on gender or language proficiency level (Debajyoti Pal & Syamal Patra, 2021). These insights will provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of *Among Us* as an ESL pedagogical tool on students' language learning experiences. While theoretical frameworks and educational principles support the integration of *Among Us* into ESL education, it is essential to consider students' perceptions to gauge the practical effectiveness of this approach. Pre-university students' perspec-

tives reflect their engagement, motivation, and overall satisfaction with *Among Us* as a language learning tool, shedding light on its potential as a valuable asset in the ESL classroom.

Problem Statement

The integration of digital technology into educational practices has witnessed a remarkable surge in popularity over recent years. Educators, in their quest for innovative and compelling methodologies to enhance the learning experiences of their students, have cast their gaze upon diverse technological solutions. Notably, the multiplayer video game *Among Us* has emerged as a subject of considerable interest, specifically regarding its potential utility as a pedagogical tool across various educational domains, including the realm of English language acquisition (Frazier, 2021). However, within this burgeoning discourse, there exists a discernible void, a gap that pertains to the dearth of empirical insights into the perspectives of pre-university students concerning the integration of *Among Us* as a pedagogical instrument for English language learning, as the majority of research has concentrated on elementary and middle school levels (Navarro-Espinosa et al., 2022). To elucidate this pivotal issue, this study embarks on a rigorous exploration of pre-university students' viewpoints, an often-overlooked segment of learners. While gamification research predominantly tends to focus on adolescents and teenagers, the unique experiences and needs of pre-university students have received comparatively limited attention. This research aims to redress this imbalance by homing in on the specific population of pre-university students, whose educational context may significantly differ from their adolescent counterparts.

The central inquiry of this study revolves around uncovering the nuanced perspectives and attitudes of pre-university students regarding the utilization of *Among Us* as an educational tool for English language acquisition. By shifting the spotlight onto this distinct demographic, we seek to illuminate their perceptions, experiences, and any potential challenges encountered in the integration of this video game within the ESL classroom. Consequently, this research aspires to fill a critical void in the existing scholarship and contribute valuable insights into the broader discourse surrounding the use of *Among Us* as an ESL pedagogical tool, thus affording educators and researchers a more comprehensive understanding of its implications within the specific context of pre-university education.

Methodology

The chosen research method is quantitative, involving the collection and analysis of numerical data to address the research questions. Quantitative research offers a systematic and objective examination of relationships between variables, providing statistical evidence to substantiate or disprove assertions (Apuke, 2017).

This study employs a descriptive correlational research design, aiming to describe the current perceptions of pre-university students and explore potential relationships between variables.

Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, was employed for participant selection. This method involves the deliberate selection of participants based on predefined criteria, characteristics, or attributes of interest to the study. For this research, the criteria included pre-university students from a private college in Klang Valley who have experience playing *Among Us* and are currently enrolled in English courses. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, 76 participants are needed based on the 95 pre-university students in the college. However, only 36 participants participated in the study as some students had not used *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool. This approach allows us to focus on specific subgroups within the target population that are most relevant to our research objectives. As emphasised by Yusuf (2021), pre-university students represent a suitable and relevant sample for this study due to their transitional phase from secondary education to higher education. This transitional status renders their perspectives and experiences highly pertinent to the research focus. Furthermore, the relatively consistent educational backgrounds of pre-university students enable more controlled comparisons among participants. This demographic also typically falls within a similar age range, reducing the potential influence of age-related variables on the research results (Chopik et al., 2018). Given the generation's affinity for gaming and technology, pre-university students are more likely to be familiar with video games, including *Among Us*. Importantly, this stage of education marks a critical phase in language acquisition and proficiency development, rendering pre-university students a pertinent demographic for exploring the effectiveness of innovative teaching tools.

Data were collected through the administration of a questionnaire, designed using Google Forms, to pre-university students. The questionnaire encompassed both closed-ended and open-ended questions, aligning with the research objectives. Participants were provided with a link to access and complete the questionnaire online. Comprehensive instructions were presented to ensure response clarity and consistency. To promote candid and unbiased responses, the questionnaire did not solicit personal information, such as the participants' names or affiliated institutions, thereby ensuring anonymity. The instruments employed for data collection in this study were adapted from the questionnaire presented in Assim S. Alrajhi's (2020) research article. The adapted questionnaire encompassed multiple sections, including demographic information, gaming habits, and perceptions of the *Among Us* video game as a pedagogical tool. The Likert scale was utilised for assessing participants' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions. Open-ended questions were incorporated to allow participants to provide in-depth explanations, suggestions, and illustrative examples.

Informed consent was obtained at the onset of the questionnaire, transparently outlining the study's purpose and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. To safeguard privacy, personal identifying information was not collected. Data gathered were exclusively intended for research purposes and were stored securely. Ethical guidelines and

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regulations associated with research involving human subjects, as articulated by Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), were meticulously adhered to, encompassing principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, and data protection.

The data analysis involved the application of descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency such as mean, median, and mode, and measures of variability encompassing standard deviation and range for the closed-ended questions. Correlation analysis was undertaken to explore the relationship between variables, specifically gender and students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the *Among Us* video game. To address the second research question, independent sample t-tests were utilised. For the open-ended questions, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the data collected.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was employed for data entry, data cleaning, and statistical analyses. Recognised for its user-friendly interface and expansive array of statistical procedures, SPSS proved invaluable for conducting quantitative data analyses. The software facilitated the input and organization of the collected questionnaire data, entailing coding and the assignment of values to different variables and response categories.

In conclusion, this research design, founded upon a questionnaire-based quantitative approach with purposive sampling, is particularly well-suited for evaluating the effectiveness of incorporating the *Among Us* video game as an educational tool for teaching English to pre-university students. By systematically analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, this study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the potential of video games in educational contexts, thereby augmenting the existing scholarly literature in this domain.

Findings**Table 1: Gender**

Valid	Male	17	48.6	48.6	48.6
	Female	18	51.4	51.4	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	17	48.6	48.6	48.6
	Female	18	51.4	51.4	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: How Often Have You Played *Among Us* Before?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rarely	16	45.7	45.7	45.7
	Occasionally	16	45.7	45.7	91.4
	Frequently	3	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: How Comfortable Are You with Playing Video Games in General?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not Comfortable at All	1	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Not Comfortable	1	2.9	2.9	5.7
	Neutral	10	28.6	28.6	34.3
	Comfortable	10	28.6	28.6	62.9
	Very Comfortable	13	37.1	37.1	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

The demographic characteristics of the respondents in this research, conducted to investigate the perceptions of pre-university students regarding the effectiveness of the *Among Us* video game as a pedagogical tool for ESL, are summarised in Tables 1 through 4. Table 1 presents the gender distribution, indicating that the sample consisted of 35 respondents, with 48.6% being male and 51.4% female. In Table 2, the age distribution of respondents reveals that 45.7% rarely played *Among Us*, while another 45.7% played occasionally, and 8.6% played frequently. Table 3 assesses the respondents' comfort levels with playing *Among Us*, with 37.1% expressing being very comfortable, 28.6% feeling comfortable, 28.6% having a neutral stance, and 2.9% each not being comfortable and not comfortable at all. Lastly, Table 4 explores the respondents' comfort levels with playing video games in general, demonstrating that 37.1% were very comfortable, 28.6% were comfortable, 28.6% held a neutral position, and 2.9% each were not comfortable and not comfortable at all. These demographic insights provide a foundation for understanding the composition of the research sample, which encompasses pre-university students with varying levels of familiarity with *Among Us* and video games, thereby informing the subsequent analysis of their perceptions regarding the pedagogical use of the game in ESL instruction.

Research Question 1: To what extent do students believe that the use of *Among Us* video game enhances their language proficiency and communicative competence in ESL?

Table 5: Participants Agreement Regarding the Usage of *Among Us* as a Pedagogical Tool

		Playing <i>Among Us</i> in class help you to improve your speaking or listening skills	Playing <i>Among Us</i> is a fun way to learn English
N	Valid	35	35
	Missing	0	0
Mean		3.74	4.09
Median		4.00	4.00
Mode		4	4
Std. Deviation		.950	.951
Variance		.903	.904
Minimum		1	1
Maximum		5	5

Table 6: Is the Language Used in *Among Us* Helpful for Your Language Learning?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Valid	Yes	28	80.0	80.0	80.0		
	No	7	20.0	20.0	100.0		
Total		35	100.0	100.0		1.20	.406

Table 7: How the Participants Feel About Using *Among Us* in Their ESL Classroom?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Valid	Excited	29	82.9	82.9	82.9		
	Indifferent	6	17.1	17.1	100.0		
Total		35	100.0	100.0		1.17	.382

Table 8: What Are the Disadvantages of Using *Among Us* for Language Learning?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	It may be distracting and disruptive	9	25.7	25.7	25.7
	It may not be accessible to all students	3	8.6	8.6	34.3
	It may not be suitable for all language learning goals	17	48.6	48.6	82.9
	It may be difficult for some students to use	3	8.6	8.6	91.4
	None	3	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

In response to Research Question 1, which investigates the extent to which students perceive the *Among Us* video game as a catalyst for enhancing their language proficiency and communicative competence in ESL, a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) was thoughtfully employed (Kaur & Azlina Abdul Aziz, 2020). This instrument effectively captured participants' nuanced perspectives on the effectiveness of *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool designed to enhance their speaking and listening skills (Kaur & Azlina Abdul Aziz, 2020). The analysis of this data reveals a clear consensus among participants, with an average score of 3.74 (SD = 0.950), affirming their collective belief in the positive impact of *Among Us* on their language skills. This finding is in line with the concept that video games, like *Among Us*, foster vocabulary development and language learning (Calvo-Ferrer & Belda-Medina, 2021).

Additionally, participants expressed a shared viewpoint, with an average score of 4.09 (SD = 0.951), indicating that *Among Us* not only enhances language learning but also fosters an enjoyable environment for learning English (York, 2020). This aligns with the idea that video games, such as *Among Us*, offer a satisfying and engaging means of language learning (York, 2020). The positive perception of enjoyment and language acquisition through the game supports the notion that video games can be a valuable tool for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (York, 2020).

Moreover, participants' emotional responses to using *Among Us* in their ESL classrooms were examined (Original Study). The data shows that the majority of participants either felt excited (82.9%) or were indifferent (17.1%) regarding the adoption of *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool (York, 2020). This enthusiastic response aligns with the idea that video games, including *Among Us*, create engaging and enjoyable learning experiences (Forutanian, 2023). The game's ability to engage students and elicit excitement sup-

ports the concept that games can lower the affective filter and promote learners' engagement in language learning tasks (Forutanian, 2023).

In reference to Table 8, participants generally expressed a positive stance toward the integration of *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool. However, they were also invited to provide insights into potential disadvantages associated with the utilization of *Among Us* in an educational context. This inquiry resonates with the caution mentioned by Calvo-Ferrer & Belda-Medina (2021) which suggests that the effectiveness of video games in language learning can vary (Klimova & Kacet, 2017). The concerns raised by approximately 48.6% of participants regarding the suitability of *Among Us* for diverse language learning objectives align with the need for careful consideration when using video games in language education (Calvo-Ferrer & Belda-Medina, 2021).

These diverse perspectives offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of integrating *Among Us* into language education, and they underscore the importance of considering both the potential benefits and challenges associated with this innovative approach. This enriches the ongoing discourse surrounding technology-enhanced language learning and highlights the value of participants' perceptions in shaping effective pedagogical strategies, supported by relevant research (Calvo-Ferrer & Belda-Medina, 2021; Forutanian, 2023; Kaur & Azlina Abdul Aziz, 2020; York, 2020).

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference between gender, and students' perception that the use of *Among Us* video game enhances their language proficiency and communicative competence in ESL?

To investigate Research Question 2, which explores the potential gender-related differences in students' perceptions of using *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool in their ESL classrooms, a statistical analysis was conducted. An independent sample t-Test, facilitated through SPSS, aimed to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between male and female students' perceptions regarding the use of *Among Us*.

The hypotheses guiding this examination were as follows:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no statistically significant difference in students' perceptions of using *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool between male and female students.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a statistically significant difference in students' perceptions of using *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool between male and female students.

Table 9 presents the mean scores for male and female participants, forming the basis for the subsequent statistical analysis. To ensure the validity of the results, the equality of variances was assessed using Levene's test. Following this, the independent sample t-Test for equality of means was conducted, as displayed in Table 10, with a pre-established significance level (α) of 0.05.

Table 9: Mean Scores Between Male and Female Participants

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
How do you feel about using <i>Among Us</i> in your ESL classroom	Male	17	1.18	.393	.095
	Female	18	1.17	.383	.090

Table 10: Independent Sample t-Test Between Male and Female Participants

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
How do you feel about using <i>Among Us</i> in your ESL classroom	Equal variances assumed	.022	.882	.075	33	.941	.010	.131	-.257	.277
	Equal variances not assumed			.075	32.773	.941	.010	.131	-.258	.277

The results of the independent sample t-Test indicate that the computed p-value exceeds the 0.05 threshold, implying the rejection of the Alternative Hypothesis (H1). This outcome suggests that there is no statistically significant distinction in perceptions between male and female students concerning the use of *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool. These findings are consistent with a study conducted by Norah Almusharraf et al. (2023), titled *Gender differences in utilizing a game-based approach within EFL online classrooms*, which also concluded that gender exerts a limited influence on student motivation and engagement in game-based educational environments.

Supporting these findings, Debajyoti Pal and Syamal Patra (2021) posits that individual characteristics, including gender, have a less significant impact on student perceptions of technology-based learning environments than the technology's characteristics. In the context of new literacies in foreign language learning, Huertas-Abril (2021) reveals that gender is not a differentiating factor in students' motivation to use digital tools and engage with technology in education. Similarly, Razami and Ibrahim (2021), focusing on online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasises that the gender-based differences in students' perceptions of remote learning challenges and preferences are not significant. These studies collectively align with the conclusion that gender plays a limited role in influencing students' perceptions of pedagogical tools and technology-enhanced learning environments.

These supportive findings highlight the consistency of the research regarding gender-related differences in educational technology and emphasise that the impact of gender on student perceptions is often minimal or non-significant (Debajyoti Pal & Syamal Patra, 2021; Huertas-Abril, 2021; Razami & Ibrahim, 2021).

Discussion

The incorporation of *Among Us* as a pedagogical tool for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) proved to have a significant and positive impact on pre-university students, as reflected in their perceptions and experiences.

One of the core objectives of this study was to assess the extent to which *Among Us* contributed to the enhancement of students' language proficiency and communicative competence in ESL. The results suggest that students overwhelmingly recognised the benefits of using *Among Us* for language learning. Participants concurred that the game improved their speaking and listening skills, with a mean score of 3.74 on the Likert scale, and expressed that it was a fun and engaging way to learn English, as indicated by a mean score of 4.09. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the effectiveness of digital games in promoting language development (Kaur & Aziz, 2020).

In their interactions within the *Among Us* gaming environment, students were able to apply language skills in a practical context, fostering communication and collaboration. The game's requirement for players to engage in discussions, express their thoughts, and cooperate with peers to accomplish common objectives reinforced their language production skills, vocabulary, and critical thinking abilities (Frazier, 2021; Emihovich et al., 2020). The interactive nature of *Among Us* provided students with a dynamic platform to practice English, ultimately enhancing their language proficiency and communicative competence.

This study also aimed to explore whether gender played a significant role in students' perceptions of the effectiveness of *Among Us* as an ESL pedagogical tool. The analysis did not reveal any substantial dif-

ferences in the perceptions between male and female students. Both male and female students demonstrated a similar positive outlook on the game's contribution to language learning, with mean scores of 1.18 and 1.17, respectively. These findings corroborate with studies suggesting that gender does not exert a notable influence on student motivation and engagement in game-based classrooms (Norah Almusharraf et al., 2023).

While the majority of students acknowledged the benefits of using *Among Us* for language learning, it is essential to acknowledge potential limitations. A few participants expressed concerns regarding the suitability of the game for all language learning goals. Some students noted that *Among Us* might be distracting and disruptive, while others questioned its compatibility with specific language learning objectives (Klimova & Kacet, 2017). These concerns indicate that careful consideration is needed when integrating gamification elements into language education.

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that *Among Us* can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool for teaching English as a Second Language in pre-university classrooms. The game's immersive and interactive nature positively impacted students' language proficiency and communicative competence, offering an engaging and enjoyable approach to language learning. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that the game's effectiveness in language learning is not influenced by gender, as both male and female students exhibited similar positive perceptions. Despite the potential limitations and challenges, the study provides valuable insights for educators seeking innovative ways to engage students in ESL classrooms and enhance their language skills.

These results support the existing literature and underscore the potential of using digital games, such as *Among Us*, as effective tools in language education. Future research can explore the optimal strategies for integrating *Among Us* and other digital games into the ESL curriculum, ensuring that language learning objectives are met while maintaining student engagement and motivation.

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Data availability statement

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study is available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials.

Conflicts of interest

The author affirms that they have no competing interests or conflicts of interest to disclose.

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A Figurative Analysis of Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*

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Abstract

This paper investigates the various forms of figurative language employed in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey* and analyses the context in which these literary devices are utilised. The poet Kaur received mixed reactions from critics for her concise and free-form poetry as well as its emotional impact on society. Her controversial writings explore issues on sexual assault and violence, and it was reported that *Milk and Honey* is one of the most banned books in the U.S. Thus, this paper aimed to highlight the significance of context in increasing the comprehension of a literature text. The data extracted in this research are based on the four sections in *Milk and Honey*, namely 'the hurting', 'the loving', 'the breaking' and 'the healing'. A descriptive qualitative method is employed for the study where data was gathered and analysed through observation and library research. Mainly, the frameworks used in this study were developed by the Knickerbocker and Reninger theory and the Halliday theory in classifying the various figurative language in *Milk and Honey*. The findings show ten types of figurative language, namely metaphor, personification, irony, hyperbole, allusion, dead metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, simile and paradox used in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*. The most utilised figurative language was a metaphor and the lowest were dead metaphors and allusion. This study offers insights for educators, which may serve as a pedagogical tool to help students gain a deeper understanding of literary works. Future researchers are suggested to discuss other works by Kaur or other rising poets, focusing on other frameworks, and examine how Kaur's works are effective at empowering women for the benefit of potential readers.

Keywords: *figurative language, literary device, poem, metaphor, allusion*

Introduction

Language is an essential tool for human communication, it functions as to enable individuals to convey thoughts and emotions through speeches or written expressions. Fasold and Connor-Linton (2018) emphasise that language consists of a limited set of elements and principles that allow speakers and writers to construct sentences for various communicative purposes. Communication commonly stems from spoken words, written text, or even non-verbal signs such as body language. Apart from that, one of the ways to communicate is by using figurative language.

Figurative language is found to be used widely in novels, poems (Tiarawati & Ningsih, 2020) and other works, often extending beyond the usual literal representations. It has been extensively studied, even being referred to in Grice's theory of conversational implicature as a departure from conversational norms.

However, figurative language is inherently subjective, resulting in numerous meanings and interpretations. Various related theories, including Knickerbocker and Reninger's theory (1963) as cited by Gayatri Manuaba et al., (2019), and Halliday's theory (1985), contribute to the understanding of this linguistic phenomenon. In contemporary society, poems have become a favoured means for individuals to alleviate stress (Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 2022) and tension that offer a complex form of expression, capable of soothing and conveying profound meanings. In other words, language, particularly in its figurative and poetic forms, continues to be a powerful tool for human expressions and connections.

Figurative language holds a strong appeal to the imagination, provoking fresh perspectives and new insights. This type of language, including metaphors, similes, and hyperboles, finds common use in poetry, just as seen in one of Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*. The book contains four distinct sections namely The Hurting, The Loving, The Breaking and The Healing. Thus, analysing the verses and allegorical language in *Milk and Honey*, allows individuals to witness the enduring presence and significance of poetry in a literary world filled with profound meanings embedded in the writings. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the types of figurative language used in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey* poem?
2. What are the contextual meanings of the figurative language used in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*?

In terms of research objectives, this study specifically seeks to:

1. identify the types of figurative language found in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey* poem; and
2. clarify the contextual meanings of the figurative language used in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*.

Literature review

Concept of Figurative Language

Figurative language sustains various expressions that are significantly distinctive from a semantic and syntactic perspective (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2021). Authors also added that, figurative language serves both functional and artistic purposes which are, as the semantic indicator in texts, and adds beauty to literary works. Traditional theories of figurative language focused on proving figurative language as a literal meaning expression (Colston & Gibbs, 2021). Besides that, authors also established that new models of figurative language theories suggest when and how context prompts figurative meanings during linguistic analysis. In general, figurative language is defined as words or phrases that have meanings but are necessarily accurate. According to Perrine (1977), it is not always enough to express something about a poem's subject. Thus,

metaphor, personification, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, apostrophe, understatement, allegory, symbol, overstatement, paradox, and irony are all used by a poet to make his words strong.

Knickerbocker and Reninger's Theory

According to Knickerbocker and Reninger (1963), figurative language, often known as metaphorical language or metaphor, involves carrying meaning beyond its literal interpretation, as suggested by its Greek origin 'Metapherein'. The primary goal of literary devices is to convey the meaning of metaphorical texts, regardless of the specific device categories. The theory presents ten figures of speech for figurative language, including allusion, metaphor, simile, synecdoche, metonymy, hyperbole, irony, paradox, dead metaphor, and personification. The study's core analysis revolves around the theoretical framework's hypothesis of these ten types of figurative language. Additionally, Halliday's theory complements and further elaborates the theory proposed.

Halliday's Theory

Another theoretical framework pertaining to figurative language is proposed by Halliday concerning rhetorical devices. According to Halliday (1985), metaphor is deemed to be one of the figures of speech acknowledged in rhetorical theory, in other words, it is also recognized as the general term for figures of speech. Besides, Halliday categorises figures of speech into three groups namely metonymy, synecdoche, and metaphor. This classification serves as evidence supporting the primary hypothesis proposed by Knickerbocker and Reninger (1963).

Contextual Meaning in Poetry

According to Gazdar (as cited in Thomason, 1995), contextual meaning is a sentence-context correlation. It is the interpretation of a message or an action in linguistics considering situational, social, and interpersonal factors related to a text or a discourse. There are several related studies found to have employed various frameworks to investigate the use of figurative language in poems. For instance, a study done by Preethi and Gayathri (2022) which highlighted the prevalence of repetition as a central element in Maya Angelou's works. Ferawati and Iskandar (2021) have also discovered eight types of figurative language, including simile, metaphor, personification, epithet, synecdoche, metonymy, apophasis, and alliteration, in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*, specifically in a section titled The Hurting. Their study concluded that Kaur utilized figurative language in her poetry to express her thoughts and emotions regarding sensitive subjects like sexual assault and domestic abuse.

Conversely, Heda and Bram (2021) found four types of figurative language namely personification, simile, hyperbole, and metaphor in Kaur's selected poems. By synthesising these various studies, a compre-

hensive understanding of the prevalence and diverse use of figurative language in poetry is achieved, with each study shedding light on different aspects of this expressive form.

Rupi Kaur has influenced her audience in terms of issues like women of colour, abuse, and harassment. According to a study conducted by Tarigan et. al (2021), Rupi Kaur's poems depict women's body rights through the themes of objectification, ownership, and self-acceptance. This suggests that literary devices also play a crucial role in conveying revolutionary messages in literature. Additionally, Jindal (2017) asserted that Kaur employs symbols, like fire, to represent her emotions and struggles as a woman.

Methodology

This paper employed a descriptive qualitative approach, utilising content, and thematic analysis to interpret figurative language used in *Milk and Honey*. Techniques such as collecting open-ended data, analysing drawings and text were presented through tables and figures. Data were also gathered according to trends using thematic analysis. It was found that there are 104 occurrences of figurative language in this writing. Aside from that, a purposive sampling technique is utilised in this study focusing on a figurative analysis on Rupi Kaur's four chapters in *Milk and Honey* namely, The Hurting, The Loving, The Breaking, and The Healing. In the analysis, the method of code-scheming is adapted to ensure that the data is organised and shows patterns or themes for an easier result interpretation as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Code-scheming template

No.	Types of Figurative Language	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
1.	Metaphor	n	%
2.	Irony	n	%
3.	Simile	n	%
4.	Synecdoche	n	%
5.	Hyperbole	n	%
6.	Paradox	n	%
7.	Personification	n	%
8.	Metonymy	n	%
9.	Dead Metaphor	n	%
10.	Allusion	n	%
Total			

Data was analysed by using Knickerbocker and Reninger’s (1963) as well as Halliday’s (1985) theory. The ten types of figurative language delineated in the initial theory were further elaborated in Halliday’s framework leading to the adaptation of both theories in this study. To ensure the validity of this research, this study is anchored to maintaining the definitions of terms and figurative language throughout the entire data analysis procedure. The results of the current study were compared with those from earlier studies as part of the cross-checking process.

Findings

The table below showcases the types of figurative language found in Rupi Kaur’s *Milk and Honey* poems. Metaphor, irony, simile, synecdoche, hyperbole, paradox, personification, metonymy, dead metaphors and allusion are among the list of figurative language applied.

Table 2: Types of Figurative Language used in Rupi Kaur’s *Milk and Honey*

No.	Types of Figurative Language	Occurrence	Percentage (%)
1.	Metaphor	37	35.6
2.	Irony	13	12.5
3.	Simile	13	12.5
4.	Synecdoche	11	10.6
5.	Hyperbole	10	9.6
6.	Paradox	8	7.7
7.	Personification	5	4.8
8.	Metonymy	3	2.9
9.	Dead Metaphor	2	1.9
10.	Allusion	2	1.9
Total		104	100

It was found that metaphor has the highest percentage (35.6%) among all the types of figurative language utilised by Rupi Kaur. Meanwhile, the second leading type of figurative language employed by the author were both irony and simile as the two types of figurative language were found to have similar number of occurrences (12.5%). Further, synecdoche was identified to occur 11 times (10.6%) in *Milk and Honey*, classifying it as the third most significant type of figurative language. Dead metaphor and allusion were found to be the least used of figurative language, where both were found to have only occurred twice in the whole

book. Hyperbole, paradox, personification and metonymy were found used at 9.6%, 7.7%, 4.8% and 2.9% respectively. Table below depicts among the leading types of figurative language identified in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*.

Table 3: Evidence of the Leading Figurative Language Types in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*

No.	Figurative Language	Chapter	Words/Phrases
1.	Metaphor	The Breaking	<p>“she was a <u>rose</u> in the hands of those who had no intentions of keeping her”</p> <hr/> <p>“you are a <u>war</u>”</p> <hr/> <p>“<u>milk and honey</u> dripped from my lips as i answered”</p> <hr/> <p>“<u>the border</u> between two countries”</p> <hr/> <p>“<u>the art of being empty</u> is simple”</p>
2.	Irony	The Hurting	<p>“every time you tell your daughter you yell at her out of love you teach her to confuse anger with kindness which seems like a <u>good idea</u>”</p> <hr/> <p>“you pinned my legs to the ground with your feet and demanded <u>i stand up</u>”</p> <hr/> <p>“you pull the lump in your throat out with your teeth and <u>say fine numb really</u>”</p>
		The Breaking	<p>“if it was meant to be. fate will bring us together. for a second i wonder if you are really that <u>naive.</u>”</p> <hr/> <p>“love <u>made the danger in you look like safety</u>”</p>

3.	Simile	The Hurting	“till she grows up to trust men who hurt her cause they look so much <u>like</u> you”
			“trying to convince myself i am allowed to take up space is <u>like</u> writing with my left hand when i was born to use my right”
		The Healing	“i find hair beautiful when a woman wears it <u>like</u> a garden on her skin”
			“if you let it go slowly <u>like</u> a broken promise let it go”
		The Breaking	“you treat them like they have a heart <u>like</u> yours but not everyone can be as soft and as tender”
4.	Synecdoche	The Loving	“ <u>your name</u> is the strongest positive and negative connotation in any language”
		The Healing	“do not look for healing at the <u>feet of those</u> who broke you”
			“our <u>backs</u> tell stories no books have the spine to carry”
			“my heart ached for <u>sisters</u> more than any- thing it aches for women helping women like flowers ache for spring”
		The Breaking	“the night after you left i woke up so broken the only place to put <u>the pieces</u> were the bags under my eyes”

Discussion

In this study, Rupi Kaur has utilised all ten types of figurative language, namely the metaphor, irony, simile, synecdoche, hyperbole, paradox, personification, metonymy, dead metaphor, and allusion (as shown in Table 2). According to Colston and Gibbs (2021), figurative language mainly delivers various contextual meanings effectively, displays politeness in writing, visualises an imagery, triggers an idea or emotions and avoids ambiguity on literal meanings (as cited in Peel et al., 2023). The aspects mentioned are seen to be illustrated in the Rupi Kaur's poems in which, based on the evidence above, contexts elucidate the usage of figurative devices in author's writing. Besides, politeness is typically employed in writings to avoid from offending readers. As *Milk and Honey* involved several taboo topics particularly relating to women, the author is believed to be using figurative language and politeness in her writing to be moderate and tactful in mentioning certain words or phrases regarding taboo topics. In addition, the author appeared to be utilising figurative language aiming to create a more concrete imagery in words. Creating clearer imagery can as well trigger an idea or emotion that may encourage readers to have a certain attitude or involvement as they read. Lastly, the use of figurative language in the book may help readers to understand a topic or situations illustrated as the author used the mentioned types of figurative language when describing actions and imaginations.

Based on the findings in Table 2, it is found that Kaur mostly brought out her intention of conveying messages metaphorically in her book. Metaphor is used to concisely compare two different things, in accordance with the similarity between their literal meanings and the situation being described metaphorically, without using *like* and *as*. Burkley (2017) concurred that it is more convenient to describe an abstract, hard-to-understand idea and compare it to a simple, concrete one with the use of figurative language. This can be seen in the first section of *Milk and Honey*, *The Hurting*, Kaur described a woman being taken advantage of by comparing her to a rose. As according to Gruber (2014), rose symbolizes purity. Hence, it was found that Kaur (2015) compared a woman to a pure soul suggesting vulnerability.

“she was a rose
in the hands of those
who had no intentions
of keeping her”

By using metaphor, Kaur seamlessly conveyed hidden messages, allowing contextual meaning to be understood without explicitly stating the literal meaning (Larsson, 2023). Secondly, metaphor may also demonstrate actions without mentioning it. This assists readers to understand that concept and physical ref-

erent bear resemblance which helps readers to understand the meaning behind each poetry (Larsson, 2023). Ultimately, metaphor goes beyond a reference and a concept as it can alter a reader's perspective unconsciously (Burkley, 2017). This is supported by Gibbs (1994), where metaphors can be necessarily powerful, especially in enhancing a reader's understanding on the relationship between language and concepts.

The second most prominent figurative language utilised by Kaur are both irony and simile, each occurring up to 13 times in the book. Irony is portrayed when Kaur wrote about satire topics such as modern love and parenting. As depicted in the first section, *The Hurting*, Kaur discussed about toxic parenting which is portrayed satirically as a guise of love when she said *you teach her to confuse, anger with kindness, which seems like a good idea*. The usage of *good idea* in her writing is to represent irony. As according to Witek (2022), irony is commonly used to imply sarcasm.

“every time you
tell your daughter
you yell at her
out of love
you teach her to confuse
anger with kindness
which seems like a good idea”

Meanwhile, simile is employed by Kaur in describing any similar notions or resemblance (Samadova, 2022) using the terms *like* or *as*. Among the topics discussed by Kaur involving the usage of simile are pertaining to womanhood, breaking-up, absence of parents and relationships. Author compared the topics using simile as she intended to mention them indirectly. As an instance, in the last section, *The Healing*, womanhood is compared aesthetically to nature using simile.

“i find hair beautiful
when a woman wears it
like a garden on her skin”

The last leading type of figurative language identified in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey* is synecdoche that was found to occur 11 times in the book. According to Ibrahim (2021), synecdoche can be regarded as words that are employed to represent something. Therefore, Kaur implies that the person that she is referring to in her poem could elevate or lower the mood. In this context, *your name* illustrating synecdoche because it represents a person.

“your name is
the strongest
positive and negative
connotation in any language”

Conclusion

The study aims to identify, analyse, and elaborate the contextual meaning of the types of figurative language found in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*. Based on the theoretical framework used, the results highlighted that context is an essential element in analysing the figurative words or phrases found in Kaur's writing. Besides that, this study has clearly answered the two research questions proposed; 1) What are the types of figurative language used in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*? and 2) What are the contextual meanings behind the figurative language used in Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*? Ten types of figurative language, which are metaphor, irony, simile, synecdoche, hyperbole, paradox, personification, metonymy, dead metaphor and allusion were utilised in Kaur's writing. Apart from that, the contextual meanings of each type of figurative language were also discussed and described in response to the second research question. Based on the analysis, *Milk and Honey* represents a woman's journey in life based on distinct aspects such as the process of growing up, having a family, friendships, relationships and self-love. Additionally, there are also some issues addressed by Kaur in *Milk and Honey* such as feminism, double standards, modern love, abuse and survival. Therefore, the results of this study may contribute particularly to providing a better comprehension about the concept of figurative language and its context. By analysing the types of figurative language and its use, students' skills in interpreting literary works can be enhanced and broadened, which can also enable educators to apply this analysis in the classroom. Figurative analysis can improve readers' comprehension of complex literary texts, deepen their knowledge of literature and help them interpret beyond the literal meaning.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, N.N.K.L.; methodology, W.I.; validation, D.A.A.R., Z.B. and N.M.L.; formal analysis, N.N.K.L.; investigation, N.N.K.L.; resources, W.I., D.A.A.R., Z.B. and N.M.L.; data curation, W.I., D.A.A.R., Z.B. and N.M.L.; writing—original draft preparation, N.N.K.L.; writing—review and editing, W.I.; visualization, D.A.A.R.; supervision, D.A.A.R.; project administration, W.I. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The data analysed in this study were extracted from *Milk and Honey* book by Rupi Kaur, published by Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. The book is available for purchase or can be accessed through libraries.

Conflicts of interest

None declared.

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Fluencemes in EFL Learners' On-screen Communication

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Abstract

Nowadays, on-screen communication is more popular than face-to-face communication. Since people have an advanced communication facility, communication is unlimited, and people-to-people connections are made from home with computers and telephones. Through on-screen communication, people are more accessible to express themselves. Nevertheless, hesitation is always present. Fluency-enhancing strategies are present to lessen hesitations through fluencemes. Fluenceme is the disfluency in the flow of conversation. However, fluencemes are not always hesitant. Indeed, they act as strategies. This qualitative study identified the types of fluenceme while ELF learners were making on-screen communication and the functions of fluenceme in enhancing the strategy of fluency. Ten pairs of EFL fifth-semester students were taken by adapting a purposive sampling approach. The observational method was applied for data collection by watching and listening to video recordings and noting the dialogues. By applying the identity method, the utterances which show fluenceme issues were analysed by identifying and revealing them to classify their types. The finding was described descriptively. The investigation uncovered that the participants naturally presented filled pauses, discourse markers, explicit editing terms, false starts, identical repetition, modified repetition, and morphological substitution. They had relaxed conversations because there was speaker-and-hearer-only on screen. Thus, the disfluency was not a hesitancy but a strategy to cover disfluency. Hoping that future researchers may explore a wide variety of fluencemes and develop a solution to avoid the excessive fluencemes use in communication. Finally, this study may become an incentive for further research to describe profound insight of fluenceme as a wealth of linguistic knowledge.

Keywords: *disfluency, fluencemes, hesitation, on-screen communication*

Introduction

“Well, **um**, the deputy secretary, **I think** would be the best person to answer what’s going to happen on the trip and **um**, so, we’ll see **it’s a**, it’s a couple ten days away and **am**, with regard to the second question again. **I think, um**, the vice president and others will probably...” This quote was taken from the new ambassador to Australia, Caroline Kennedy's answer, on July 25, 2022, in Canberra. In identifying the speech, there are some unimportant words or sounds. As a native speaker, she sprinkled her speech with **um**, **am**, and **I think**. These sounds, words, phrases, or sentences were not related to the speech.

Furthermore, in English as a native language, these unimportant words occur with considerably high frequency (Wolk et al., 2021). However, these unimportant words are able to help the speakers negotiate their way of thinking (Carter & McCarthy, 1997; Fatimah et al., 2017), and they reflect the speaker's strate-

gy to control speech production (Clark & Tree, 2002) because speakers while delivering their thoughts, experiences, and assessments, are required to continuously employ a variety linguistics markers and constructions as well as non-verbal means (Ogi, 2017). Muller (2005) said this is a pragmatic signaling or the sequential relationship between the current basic message and the previous discourse. In line with Schiffrin (1987), she stated that these sequentially-dependent elements bracket units of discourse.

The failure to maintain the flow of overt speech through error repair and hesitation has been the focus of a growing number of studies within speech production (Lickley, 2015). Arrasul et al. (2024) stated that the nervousness of 4th and 6th-semester learners of the English Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Luwuk when speaking was indicated by their fillers. Soma (2023) described that the English major students at public universities in Jambi experienced disfluency when speaking English because they mostly did repetition. EFL learners of Taiz University showed hesitation and disfluent speech from their filler production (Alghazali, 2019). English Education Master Programme students produced speech disfluency in their presentation performances due to the filler production (Sanjaya & Nugrahani, 2018).

Yule (2020) addressed this phenomenon as fillers and agreed that fillers are a break in the flow of speech. Although this issue shows hesitation and disfluency, some scholars agree that these fillers benefit speech. **Y'know** is the filler that many Americans produce while doing some speeches. Moreover, **you know** is the most frequent filler in British Academic Spoken English (BASE) (Farahani & Ghane, 2022). The 45th United States American President, Donald Trump, produced the fillers in his speech: "**Look at...** What happened last week in California. **With... with... you know...** 14 people died". Fillers are very important while speaking. The function of fillers is to spin out the time. In English, the most common filler sounds are **uh** and **um**. Among speakers, the fillers **like, you know, I mean, okay, so, actually, basically, and right** are among the more prevalent (Stenström, 1994).

Additionally, for native speakers, fillers mainly occur at the beginning of the utterances or utterance boundaries (Biber et al., 2007). Tabitha and Bram (2024) discovered that Elon Mask produced 932 fillers in his spontaneous speeches, and they stated that fillers are the essence of speaking and are able to enhance verbal exchanges. Finally, Kharismawan (2017) mentioned the importance of fillers in interactions in Obama's speeches,

People, in their daily lives, naturally use these fillers or discourse markers in their conversations without realising them, as many fillers are produced in different languages (Gao, 2023). Schiffrin (1987) claimed that these linguistic expressions establish discourse expression. *Hasa* (now) is the Jordanian Arabic filler (Kayed, 2021). The Japanese interactive markers are *ne, na, yo, sa, wa, zo,* and *ze*, known as *shuu-josi*, "sentence-final particles" (Ogi, 2017). Turkish children often produced three discourse markers *şey* (uuhhh), *yani* (I mean), and *işte* (y'know) in oral Turkish narratives (Furman & Özyürek, 2007). Çetin & Yildiz,

(2021) mentioned the Turkish fillers are *işte*, *şey*, *evet*, *ya*, and *şimdi*. Mexicans produced *este*, *o sea*, *wey*, *mmm*, *ok*, *y este*, and *estudem* as their fillers in their conversation, *si*, *ya*, *ok*, *entonces*, *eehh*, *pues*, *¿me hago entender?* and *¿cierto?* are the fillers used by Colombians, and Spaniards produced *¿sabes?*, *¿entiendes?*, *¿no?*, *pues*, *es decir*, and *¿sí o qué?* (Santos et al., 2016). Mutiara (2019) addressed the discourse markers in colloquial Jakartan Indonesian as *deh*, *dong*, *kan*, *kek*, *kok*, *loh*, *mah*, *masa*, *nah*, *nih*, *tuh*, *sih*, *ya/yah*, and *yuk*. Nugraha and Tarmini, (2023) added that fillers produced in Bahasa Indonesia are *menurut saya*, *saya pikir*, *maksudnya*, and *kalau tidak salah*. *Ano* (what) is also the Filipino filler (Evangelista–Pelaez et al., 2018). In Ukraine, fillers are *ну* (well), *що ж* (what), *так* (so), and *вочевидь* (obviously) are known as parasite words (Viacheslav et al., 2021). Then, there are French fillers such as *bien*, *bon*, *euh*, *donc*, *alors*, and *ça va?* (Santos et al., 2016).

This study investigated the typologies of fluencemes produced by ELF learners during on-screen communication. This study adopted the fluencemes theorised by Crible (2018), and they have been famous by other terms, i.e., discourse makers (Schiffrin, 1987), disfluency markers (Ferreira & Bailey, 2004), or fillers (Yule, 2014). Fluencemes are no longer considered disfluency phenomena between fluency and disfluency, but they contribute to the smoothness and flow of the interaction (Kosmala & Crible, 2022). Some studies discussed the issue of speech disfluency when speaking English publicly or in impromptu speeches, indicated by speakers' nervousness or hesitation and producing filled or silent pauses such as gaps in spontaneous speech (Gósy, 2023), stuttering-like disfluency when Spanish-English bilingual children spoke English (Rojas et al., 2023), a student's disfluency while speaking English due to showing fillers, repetition, and prolongation (Permana et al., 2021), and disfluency spontaneous speech or cluttered speech due to repetition (Bóna, 2019). Filled pause or silent pause, which shows disfluency, definitely appears when EFL speakers speak English publicly (Ambalegin et al., 2023; Ambalegin, 2023; Ambalegin et al., 2024) because of their nervousness, anxiety, or hesitation (Miller et al., 2018; Gandeza, 2023). Nowadays, communicating virtually is more comfortable, and speakers freely express their ideas (Ambalegin et al., 2024). Thus, this study captures the use of fluencemes in cyberspace where the EFL learners feel free and comfortable because there were only two speakers in the virtual room. The typology of fluencemes includes ten phenomena proposed by Crible (2018). In this study, the fluencemes are not problematic but reflect the cooperative search for optimal utterance. Crible (2018) mentioned that fluencemes are signals of processing and monitoring. Fluenceme contributes to fluency and disfluency, which does not always involve an error or hesitation (Crible, 2018). This fluenceme is a very promising and fruitful candidate to be more greatly emphasised in EFL because of both the theoretically great possibility for learners to acquire a nativelike proficiency and because of its contribution to perceptive fluency when learners' speech is assessed by native speakers of English (Götz, 2013). Finally, the EFL learners created fluencemes in on-screen communication to show strategy or hesitation.

The fluenceme issues produced by the EFL learners through the on-screen communication are as follows.

- Nurhana - “**Ee**... Do you live with your parents? Or friend?”
Laila - “Yeah, **my parent**...**eh**...**my parents**.”

There are two phenomena identified. **Ee** is sounded at the start to continue the question. The speaker filled the pause to avoid the blank or empty situation. This phenomenon depicted that the speaker thought to create the appropriate question. It is grouped as a filled pause (Crible, 2018). The repetition of the phrase occurred in the next utterances. This repetition was bridged by sound **eh**, which showed that the interlocutor grammatically corrected the previous responses **from parent to parent**. This phenomenon is grouped as a modified repetition (Crible, 2018).

Literature Review

The terms of fluenceme are not very well-known among the fluency or disfluency discussions. Lexically, the word fluenceme cannot be found in the Oxford dictionary. Crible (2018) and (Götz, 2013) discussed fluencemes and the typology of fluencemes. Fluencemes are used in a fluency-enhancing function (Wolk et al., 2021). A fluenceme is an abstract and idealised feature of speech that contributes to the production or perception of fluency, whatever its concrete realisation may be, and fluencemes build the basis for the distinction between productive, perceptive, and nonverbal fluency (Götz, 2013). She said that the abstract categories of fluency are fluencemes of production, i.e., silence, repeats, filled pauses, and discourse markers; fluencemes of perception, i.e., intonation, accuracy, accent, sentence structure, and pragmatic features; and nonverbal fluencemes, i.e., gestures, facial expression, emblems, and looks (p. 9).

Götz (2013) said that the fluenceme of production embraces a speaker's verbal strategies to minimise the planning pressure and enhance the speaker's fluency (p. 9). In his research, Gandeza (2023) mentioned that the participants used fillers to connect ideas, thoughts, and experiences. Götz (2013) mentioned that the fluencemes of perception subsume to establish nativelike fluency on the listeners' side. In their research, Khau and Huynh (2022) mentioned that the participants tried to become native speakers through the intonation or suprasegmental aspect of pronunciation. Finally, Götz (2013) said nonverbal fluencemes carry semantic or syntactic meaning that accompanies speech unconsciously but systematically. Kosmala et al. (2019) stated in their research that (dis)fluency speech and gestures could be synchronised, and gestural features indicated pragmatic planning functions associated with (dis)fluency.

Typology of Fluencemes

Crible (2018) typologies fluencemes into ten types, i.e., silence or unfilled pause, filled pause, discourse marker, explicit editing term, truncation, false start, identical repetition, modified repetition, morphological substitution, and propositional substitution. These fluencemes appear in oral conversations. Some scholars developed this with different terminology. Aijmer (2002) labeled these interactional signals and discourse markers as discourse particles. Muller (2005) stated that this phenomenon is a discourse marker. Watanabe et al. (2005) and Gósy et al. (2014) addressed this phenomenon as mazes, delay markers, editing pauses, unlexicalised filled pauses, fillers, interjections, delays, and even noises. Baleen (as cited in Navratilova, 2015) stated that they are generally known as filler words.

Silence or Unfilled Pause

Speakers experience silence while speaking. It means that the speakers produce no sound at all in milliseconds. Akhavan et al. (2016) stated that silent pauses are periods of silence longer than those in equivalent fluent utterances. Kosmala et al. (2019) gave an example of silence when the American speaker spoke French. It contains prolongation *de:e*, silence (1650ms), and self-repair *de:e* (1650) [//] *d' être*, e.g.,

“Je suppose que c'est important de:e (1650) [//] d' être là pour ton ami.”

Filled Pause

Vocalisation **ee**, **aa**, or neutral phonetic forms **hmm**, **uh**, and **amm**, produced in conversation functions to support the ongoing speech. This vocalisation was produced by Barack Obama when he visited Indonesia. This indicated that this filled pause gave the speaker time to think about what to say next (Kharismawan, 2017), e.g.,

*“Most of them give way to the unpaved roads and **see** the *kampongs*.”*

Discourse Marker

A discourse marker is a fluenceme that shows parts of speech as fillers. Schiffrin (1987) stated that discourse markers are sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk. In line with Muller (2005), discourse markers signal a sequential relationship between utterances. Amalia and Heryono (2024) showed an example of discourse markers in their research. It functioned to connect two contradictive segments and was applied to the speaker's previous segment adjustment, e.g.,

*“Oh women! Not all women. **I mean**, the old-fashioned one. The ones with wombs.”*

Explicit Editing Term

This term is a fluenceme, which verbally shows that the speaker wants to say something he or she forgets by starting with a filler. Lickley & Bard (1988) inserted the filled pause to edit sentence with phrases, e.g., original utterance-editing term-continuation, e.g.,

“Come down until you are in- ...**uh** two to three inches above that”.

Yule (2020) said that the fillers were placed before and after verbs rather than at the end of the sentence, as the speaker attempted to remember until the speaker said the part after each pause, e.g.,

“I mean his other... **em his later film was much more**... er really more in the romantic style, and that was more what what he was... you know... em best at doing.”

“**e-e-em** What do you call this?” (Siswoyo et al., 2022)

Truncation

Truncation is a fluenceme in which a speaker says an incomplete word and then says the next complete. While speaking, the speaker truncates or breaks the spelling of the words by pronouncing one of the syllables in a word more than once. Stuttering is classified as truncation. Stuttering is known for repeating or prolonging the sounds, syllables, or words or pausing disrupts the rhythm of speech (Laiho et al., 2022). Truncation, in this case, is about the hesitation or anxiety of normal people, not about language disorder. Faiuz et al. (2022) identified truncation in their study. There were a few words pronounced incompletely by repeating the initial syllable, e.g.,

“Yes, **i-i-i** I agree, but to guarantee [//] that the H2O is purified, **i-i-i** it is good to use [//] the heating source, **s-s-s**-Sterno. It's like my mom always says, **b-b-b**-better safe than than sorry.”

Johnson (2008) shows an example of a conversation with truncation.

Wayne - "You almost let your friend drown out there in the river."
Kid - "I'da rather **d-d**-died then do that."
Wayne - "And you're a liar!"
Kid - "It ain't my fault I stutter."

False Start

The speaker does not continue the first sentence or idea by shifting it into a new sentence with no relation to the idea of the first sentence. The speaker leaves the first sentence and then changes to the new sentence semantically and syntactically. A false start is an adjacent repeat (Williams, 2022). When the speaker realises before articulating the complete words that they do not correspond with the target words, the utterance is stopped before the end of the complete production of the given words (Gyarmathy & Neuberger, 2013). The new utterance takes place when the words are already articulated, e.g.,

“We are going to **spring**; I mean Easter **holiday**.” (Gyarmathy & Neuberger, 2013).

“**That is one** of uh; **there is an example** of punishment that...” (Abimanto et al., 2021)

Identical Repetition

The speaker repeats the same words or says similar words or phrases in one single utterance. To strengthen the statement, repetition needs to be used in conversation. Sanjaya and Nugrahani (2018) found identical repetition in the EFL students' English presentations. They assumed that the use of this term is to emphasise the speaker's statement, e.g.,

“So that ee we... **manage our feelings... manage our feelings** to ee conscious thinking.”

Annisa et al. (2023) discussed the hesitation phenomenon produced by Jackie Chen in Good Morning America. As a non-native English speaker, he used some fillers and repetition in his interview, e.g.,

Michael - “What happened?”

Jackie - “**I was** uhh **I was** accident always... easy things. I was doing jet ski; there behind me, I'm safe, the girl.”

Modified Repetition

The speaker modifies the incorrect word or phrase in his sentence, then repeats the sentence by deleting the incorrect word or phrase and inserting the new one to change the content. The speaker does not delete a whole sentence but a word or phrase in it by repeating it, e.g.,

“She **went** ... she **was chewing** betel nut, and it's not something we do in Kiribati.” (Nugrahani & Bram, 2022).

Modified repetition occurred in the EFL English presentation, and Sanjaya & Nugrahani (2018) assumed that the speaker thought the following words were going to be said, e.g.,

“And I was I was sad **I was sad, I was devastated**, I was I couldn't I couldn't cry but but thank God.”

Morphological Substitution

Morphological substitution is a fluenceme in which the speaker replaces one of the words in a previous utterance to continue the next utterance corresponding to any morphological modification. In this repetition, the speaker corrects the structure and lexis of the sentence, e.g.,

“And **I... they** don't understand.” (Krisdianata & Bram, 2022).

“Um there **is** um as you go into another community there **are** bound to be changed.” (Nugrahani & Bram, 2022).

“She ah he **gived**... he **gave**.” (Alghazali, 2019).

Propositional Substitution

The speaker replaces the word in the middle of the utterance as there is a connection between the previous and the next. The substitution fixes the whole sentence in terms of the meaning. Clark & Tree (2002) illustrated that incorrect information is corrected by substituting one word in the sentence.

Announcer - “**Seventy-two** degrees Celsius. I beg your pardon. **Seventeen** degrees Celsius. Seventy-two would be a little warm.”
“So that’s how we use **positive emotions in a positive way**” (Sanjaya & Nugrahani, 2018).

Theoretical Framework of Fluencemes

There are many different factors or reasons to contribute to fluency. Moreover, it is important to understand how fluencemes are applied to indicate hesitation and strategies or how fluencemes build fluency on the part of the speakers. The elements of fluency in speech are classified into three categories of fluencemes (Götz, 2013): fluencemes of production, perceptive fluencemes, and nonverbal fluencemes. Fluencemes of production connect to speech production and cognitive planning pressure to build up temporal fluency, covering the speech rate, mean length of runs, unfilled pause, and phonation time ratio. Perceptive fluencemes established nativelike fluency, covering notions of accuracy, idiomaticity, intonation, and accent. Finally, nonverbal fluencemes carry semantic or syntactical meanings such as facial expressions and gestures. The typology of fluencemes proposed by Crible (2018) stands on fluencemes of production sub-category fluency-enhancement strategies, which are silence or unfilled pause, filled pause, discourse marker, explicit editing term, truncation, false start, identical repetition, modified repetition, morphological substitution, and propositional substitution. The typology of fluencemes is summarised in a fluency framework.

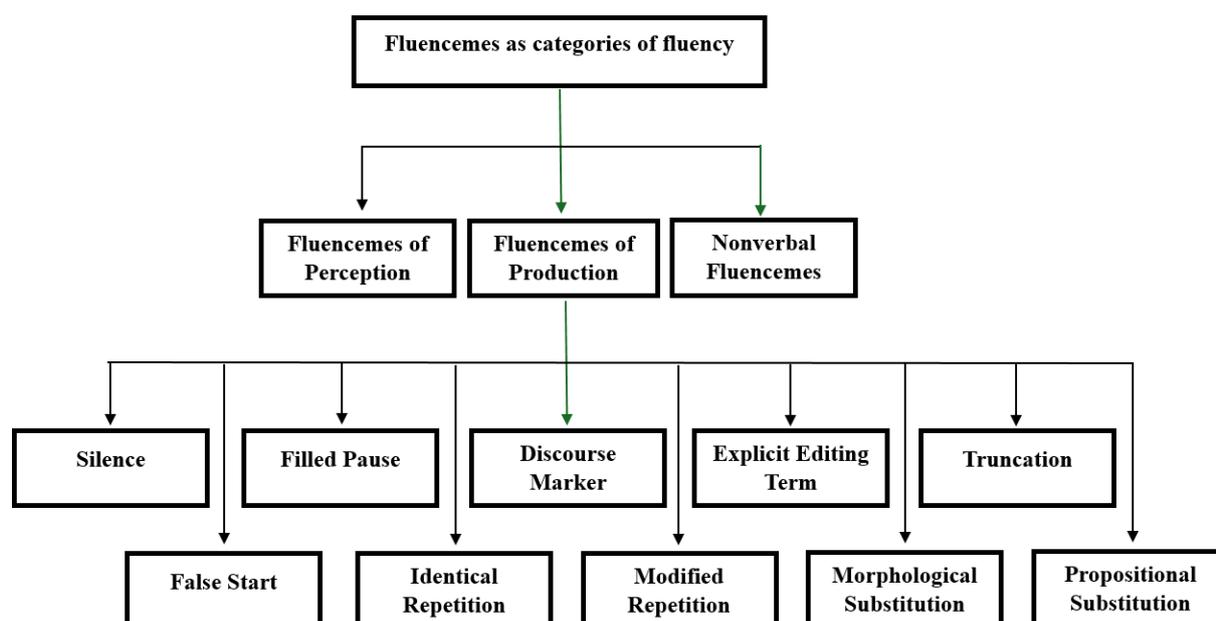


Figure 1. Typology of Fluencemes (Crible, 2018; Götz, 2013)

Methodology

Naturalistic qualitative research involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The result of this research was displayed descriptively. The data taken from the EFL learners' English conversations in on-screen communication were the utterances that accommodate the ten fluencemes (Crible, 2018).

Purposive Sampling Approach and Data Collection

The data were collected from ten pairs of EFL learners' English conversations in on-screen communication transcripts. The students spoke English in two via video call on Teams platform to consolidate and collect primary qualitative data. The EFL learners were the twenty-fifth-semester students of English Literature AY-2023/2024 at Universitas Putera Batam, Batam. Each conversation was made by one pair of students, in which the theme of the conversation was about their daily activities. The duration of the conversation was about thirty minutes. The students were asked to speak naturally by saying no impact to scores or anything related to their studies.

This research applied observation and participatory techniques to collect the data proposed by Sudaryanto (2015). While collecting the data, the researchers carefully observed the students speaking English on video. The researchers did not interfere with the participants in getting the original and natural data. The students' oral activities were converted into written scripts. There were ten students' English conversation scripts. From ten scripts, 151 utterances were identified following the reference to the theory. These identified utterances were highlighted as raw data.

Data Analysis and Research Result Display

The research is designed by adapting the identity method and referential identity technique (Sudaryanto, 2015). This research identified the English conversation in on-screen communication as the data that encompasses the EFL learners' behavior when speaking English. The participants' utterances as the reference are the accurate qualitative data in this analysis. The main point of the research is the information related to the fluencemes in terms of personal action and experience illustration in terms of English conversation. The data were sorted to ease the analysis. The reduction was used to avoid capturing the same data.

The highlighted data were carefully classified based on the reference of the theory into ten types. To divide the data into different types, competence in theory equalising was referred to get the correct result. Observing the participants' expressions on the video while analyzing the fluencemes is a way to get crucial information. This information provided ideas on the speakers' conditions for completing the analysis. Seven types were revealed based on the typology of fluencemes. One data represented one type to be declared. Finally, the research result was presented descriptively.

Findings

Ten English conversations in on-screen communication produced 151 utterances containing fluencemes divided into seven types, i.e., filled pauses, discourse markers, explicit editing, false-start, identical repetition, modified repetition, and morphological substitution. The conversations did not identify three types, i.e., silence, truncation, and propositional substitution.

Among the seven types, filled pauses were the most frequent in the conversation as the participants attempted to correct the previous idea and thought about what to say. It occurred because the participants used English, which is not their language. Followed by discourse markers were produced because the participants agreed with the statements and attempted to emphasise the ideas. The third most frequent occurrence was identical repetition. The participants repeated words, phrases, or sentences to emphasise the ideas.

There were six utterances consisting of morphological substitution in the conversations. To make the previous information correct, the participants substituted the words morphologically. Next, the participants attempted to emphasise the ideas by modifying the words, phrases, or sentences through repetition. Then, the participants attempted to correct the previous ideas by editing the words, phrases, or sentences explicitly, clearly, exactly, and openly. Finally, the false start was the fewest appearance in the conversation. Two utterances showed this expression. The participants attempted to correct the previous ideas.

The fluenceme expressions appeared spontaneously, and the participants produced them based on the functions. Physically, these expressions appeared in any position and different shapes regarding words, phrases, or sentences, which participants had not thought of before. These expressions were produced when needed and worked to achieve the goal of communication, so the participants found using these expressions reasonable. Therefore, one function of these expressions can be depicted by multiple types of fluenceme. Table 1 shows the information on fluencemes from the EFL students' English conversations in on-screen communication.

Table 1: *The Fluencemes in On-screen Communication*

No	Utterances	Fluencemes Types	Expression Samples	Functions
1	70	Filled pauses	mm, ee, uhmm, hmm, aa, ahh, uh, oh, umm, err...	to correct the previous idea to think about what to say
2	36	Discourse marker	okey, oh, I mean, so, yup, like, a kind, it is like, you know.	to agree with the statements to emphasise the ideas
3	32	Identical repetition	but, if you want... if you want, you have to visit Batam also. You have to visit.	to emphasise the ideas

4	6	Morphological substitution	I'm, I make friends	to correct the previous information
5	5	Modified repetition	I don't, I don't, I don't really know.	to emphasise the ideas
6	4	Explicit term	I know, I don't really know...	to correct the previous ideas
7	2	False start	The type is a... the type is Persian.	to correct the previous ideas

Discussion

The fillers were analysed to find out the phenomena of fluencemes in 151 utterances. The discussion explained the characteristics of each fluenceme phenomenon. There were seven phenomena portrayed in EFL students' conversations.

Filled Pause

- Nurhana - “**Ee**...What movie do you watch...**ee**...recently?”
 Laila - “**Ee**... K-drama and Netflix.”

It was identified that the participants vocalised the filled pauses in the utterances. The participants did not keep silent to start or continue the next utterance, but they filled the empty room by producing **ee**. The participants produced it spontaneously. They tried to create the gap by producing filled pauses. It showed that the participants were not ready to utter. The participants showed disfluency, but they did make a strategy to cover the hesitation or the unreadiness in conversation. Based on the characteristics of the filler, it is grouped as filled pauses. Crible (2018) determined that the filler transcribed as vocals or vocal-consonant sounds **mm**, **ee**, **hm**, or **uh** is categorised as a filled pause. Götz (2013) said that the listeners are more tolerant and perceive them, which is a normal pattern in lengthy connected discourse. However, Wolk et al. (2021) said filled pauses cannot always be accepted as fluencemes. Nugraha and Tarmini (2023) stated that **oh** or **ah** are not hesitant, and filled pauses influence fluency and disfluency.

Discourse Marker

- Daffa - "Hmmm, my favorite food in Indonesian, I think, is fried rice."
 Winema - "Fried rice?"
 Daffa - "Yeah."
 Winema - "Just, just one?"
 Daffa - "Uhhh I think so, because, **I mean**, I like uhhh every food in Indonesia but I like the most is fried rice."

The utterance above was revealed to have the fluenceme of discourse marker. As the one who was asked, the participant did not directly answer. However, the participant said **I mean** in between the utterances before continuing to deliver the utterance. It indicated that the participant showed disfluency, which led to filler production. Filler in the utterance was presented to deal with the blank caused by the unreadiness. In other words, the participant attempted to bind the words together into an utterance by saying **I mean**. In reference to the filler criteria, the filler of the utterance above has a similar criterion as the discourse marker. Crible (2018) argued that discourse marker refers to the filler that presents the words **so, because, well, or I mean**. Tabitha and Bram (2024) stated that **I mean** is used to simplify the preceding statement and self-corrector. Kharismawan (2017) agreed with the importance of clarifying speech.

Explicit Editing Term

- Winema - "Eh, and umm graphic dis, do you know graphic designer?"
Daffa - "**I know, but I don't really know about it. I know the name, but I don't really know about the activity.**"

It was found that there is a fluenceme of explicit editing terms. The participant signaled trouble regarding the utterance, which does not relate to the characteristics of a filled pause or discourse marker. The participant first stated that the participant did not know about the graphic designer. Then, the participant edited the utterance by declaring that the participant knew the name but not the activity. The participant declared it spontaneously, and the edited utterance came after the previous utterance. It was edited because the participant felt doubtful about what was previously said. It is categorised as explicit editing terms in conformity with the filler characteristic. As admitted by Crible (2018), explicit editing consists of any lexical expressions used to signify a production problem that has not been discovered as a discourse marker or filled pause. Gandeza (2023) said that for EFL learners, it makes a constructive way to speak more fluently, but overusing them can annoy them. However, Santos et al. (2016) said that it indicates a cognitive activity for the speaker. However, Lickley & Bard (1988) inserted the filled pause to edit the meaning explicitly ("Come down until you are in- ...**uh** two to three inches above that.")

Identical Repetition

- Rohit - "Yes. Oh, yeah... Um..., I am from Timor, Indonesian... uh... as Indonesian. And..., you, uh, have you ever been to..., like Makassar or Timor Indonesian?"
Desinta - "No, I never."
Rohit - "Oh..."
Desinta - "**I just went, I just went** to North Sumatra, to Batam. **I just went** to uh..., I don't know,

maybe, maybe only two places. Because I actually I, **I come from Pekanbaru, Riau. Have you ever heard, have you ever heard** about Pekanbaru, Riau? But actually, **I come from Pekanbaru, Riau.**”

In the utterance above, it was found that the participant conveyed the identical repetition. It appeared in four different words of the utterance. The participant repeated the exact words several times, and each word was contiguous. In other words, the participant did not say something different to represent what the participant said. Instead, the participant repeated the same words because the participant got blank and unready as the things that signaled disfluency. Even though there was disfluency, the participant handled it by repeating the conversation. Referring to filler criteria, the utterance above has the same criteria as identical repetition. As Crible (2018) specified, repeating a similar word and being presented in a close position is an identical repetition. Similarly, Sanjaya and Nugrahani (2018) stated that the speakers repeated the words, phrases, or sentences to emphasise what to say. Differently, Faiuz et al. (2022) found that whole-word repetition, besides showing disfluency, the speaker was angry and upset, making him unable to control his emotions.

False Start

Rohit - “Yeah... I was born in nineteen ninety-nine.”
Desinta - “**Nineteen ninety-nine?** Uh...**no**, but actually, I was in born nineteen ninety-eight.”

It was discovered that the participant vocalised false starts. While talking, it was discovered that the participant vocalised false starts. While talking, the participant interrupted by leaving an incomplete segment, and there was no connection with the previous utterance. The participant left the utterance by saying **no**, a word not in the previous utterance. The participants produced it simultaneously, and it infers that it was directly conveyed. By producing the filler, it describes that the participant was unready to respond to the question as the answer was not true. The unreadiness caused the participant to produce filler in the utterance. The participant devised a strategy for utterance to deal with the unreadiness. From the characteristics of the filler, it is evident that there is a false start in the utterance. Crible (2018) acknowledged that false starts are interruptions that leave incomplete segments in a semantic and/or syntactic way, and there are no elements from the previous utterance. Gyarmathy & Neuberger (2013) identified that the existence of false starts between children and adults was due to disfluencies and self-repairs, and it was found that the children produced more false starts. Alghazali (2019) found out that the participants made a false start by correcting the grammar by changing the whole message.

Modified Repetition

- Imelda - "Yup! What's horror film do you love the most like, your horror film favourite?"
Ervina - "Me recommend film genre, horror film. **I like the horror film; I like the horror movie**
"The Conjuring" you know the Conjuring?"

The participant of utterance did the vocalisation of modified repetition. As seen in the utterance, the participant repeated the same word to talk. However, the speaker repeated by also using the insertion of **I like** as the words that modified the previous words **horror film**. The word was indeed repeated the same, but the content was changed. It is considering the participant inserted the different words. Hence, the insertion caused the lexical insertion to happen in the utterance. In repeating, the participant did it spontaneously, which infers that the filler production was produced in the same utterance. The participant repeated this, seeing there was hesitation in stating, which became the disfluency indication. Concerning the characteristic, the utterance was identified to have lexical insertion, indicating the modified repetition involvement. Crible (2018) declared that modified repetition is repeated partially and changes the content through lexical insertion, deletion, substitution, and truncation. Similarly, Sanjaya & Nugrahani (2018) stated that the speakers repeated the text because they wanted to emphasise the statement.

Morphological Substitution

- Winema - "You like to swim. eemm how old are you when you uhm start swimming, start learning swimming?"
Daffa - "Aa, I started swimming **when I'm when I was** 17 years old."

The utterance highlights that the participant vocalised the morphological substitution. The participant continued to say the utterance by substituting the word **I am** became **I was**. This infers that there is a morphological modification in the utterance. The utterance was conveyed directly without having the participant fill the blank with other fillers. By saying the different words, the participant tried to substitute the previous word before continuing to answer the question. The participant indeed showed disfluency as he was unready and hesitated.

On the other hand, a substitution was used to overcome the disfluency. By the characteristic, it is recognised as a morphological substitution. Crible (2018) believed that morphological modification is the filler characteristic of morphological substitution. Similarly, Sanjaya and Nugrahani (2018) stated that substitution is used to correct the mistakes in the information. However, Ghazali and Arden (2022) identified that substitution functions to fill in the gaps in the speech due to hesitation, not mastering the topic, and lack of preparation.

Conclusion

Fluencemes always occur in each speaker's output (Götz, 2013). While non-native English speakers speak English, these fluencemes appear in their conversations. There are many reasons for these fluencemes appearing in conversation, whether the speakers are anxious, hesitant, or doubtful, whether the speakers are unknowledgeable, whether the speakers are stammerers, or whether the speakers make a strategy. In this study, the participants spontaneously produced the fluenceme expressions due to agreeing on the ideas, emphasising the ideas, correcting the previous idea, and thinking about the correct ideas. In accordance with the findings, it was found that there were seven types of fluenceme in conversation through on-screen communication, which contained filled pauses, discourse markers, identical repetition, morphological substitution, modified repetition, explicit editing term, and a false start.

Based on the reasons for producing the fluencemes, the participants made a strategy to let the conversation run smoothly. The participants felt relaxed, as shown by their facial expressions in the videos. The participants said that they enjoyed the on-screen communication with their classmates and were not stressed when speaking because the topics discussed were their daily activities. Despite the fact that they were able to respond, they presented the fluencemes because they needed to answer in English. The participants had to think about the grammar, word choice, and pronunciation, which produced the fluencemes.

Three types of fluenceme were not identified, i.e., truncation, silence, and propositional substitution. There is no truncation in that the participants did not stutter the words because no single word sounded incomplete in conversations. There is no silence because the participants used to fill the pauses with other fluencemes. Moreover, there is no propositional substitution because the participants had already thought about what words appeared at the beginning. That is, the participants produced identical repetition, modified repetition, and a false start.

From the explanation above, the participants produced the fluencemes to show a strategy in conversation. Several factors, such as interlocutors, settings, topics, languages, times, or facilities, influence the production of fluencemes. In this study, filled pauses were produced the most because the participants accepted the spontaneous questions that the hearers had just received. Thus, the participants logically needed space and time to find the answers by filling the voids with lexicalised or unlexicalised fillers. As agreed by Wolk et al. (2021), when EFL learners speak, the planning pressure of formulating an utterance is naturally higher than the native speakers do, and to overcome these planning phases, filled pauses or discourse markers can serve as elegant fillers in comparison to alternative planning strategies while, at the same time, their use can increase the length of a speech run.

Fluencemes (Crible, 2018; Götz, 2013) is a linguistic issue which is crucial to the development of languages, and they needed to be explored through the different and varied interlocutors, settings, topics, languages, times, or facilities so as the findings could be compared. This study has only certain participants

and conditions, which might limit the findings. However, it is hoped that this study can be a reference for the next research and contribute to developing speaking skills. Several experts' theories about this issue enrich the researchers' insights by digging up this issue through research. The next researchers should conclude those ideas into inseparable writing. Not only the researchers, the readers, the EFL learners, language teachers, and those interested in learning languages may use this study as their reference to learn the language, especially fluencemes. On the other hand, reading more articles teaches the readers to control the production of fluencemes, e.g., excessive fillers can distract the optimal comprehension of the message and the audience's concentration (Seals & Coppock, 2022).

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Conceptualisation, data collection, and analysis, AA; article draft preparation and writing, AA; review and editing: N.D.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available in the public domain.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Jargons in Immunisation Brochures and Its Influence on Students' Vaccination Intention

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Abstract

This qualitative study identifies the in the Ministry of Health's National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure and explores the influence of the jargons on university students' vaccination intentions. Through content analysis, key jargon terms were identified and categorised based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, specifically the ideational metafunction. Following this, semi-structured interviews with three university students revealed varying levels of comprehension regarding technical terms and their influence on vaccination decisions. Findings also indicate that while the brochure conveys essential scientific information, its complex language may hinder understanding, emphasising the need for clearer communication to foster vaccine acceptance. This study also highlights the importance of accessible health messaging in promoting public health initiatives.

Keywords: *jargon, systemic functional linguistics, vaccination, health communication*

Introduction

In late 2019, the global community was unprepared for the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, which originated in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organisation (WHO) acted quickly, assembling scientists from around the world to accelerate vaccine research and development. By early May 2021, several COVID-19 vaccines were made available, and at the same time marking a historic achievement in vaccine science and public health (Thanh Le et al., 2020). This unprecedented situation underscored the critical role of vaccination in controlling infectious diseases and safeguarding public health. Vaccination campaigns become an essential instrument in the fight against the virus and to communicate with the public about the importance of vaccination.

An important strand of the vaccination campaign is the realisation of the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme which is an important strategy formed by the government in ensuring all Malaysians are vaccinated from the COVID-19 virus. However, effectively conveying scientific and health-related information to the public is challenging, particularly when technical jargon is involved in the information. In many cases, the use of jargon can obscure important information, thus this will lead to confusion and potentially influencing people's decisions about vaccinations (Eckles & Aral, 2021). Furthermore, when health in-

formation is not easily understood, it can increase the existing disparities in health literacy among individuals who do not have a background in the medical field.

Moreover, one major barrier to vaccine acceptance is vaccine hesitancy, which has been identified as a significant public health challenge by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Vaccine hesitancy can be influenced by a variety of factors as reported in the literature. These include misinformation, distrust in the healthcare system, and a lack of understanding of vaccine-related information (Ye & Shi, 2023). It is noted that health communication by authority plays a key role in addressing these issues, but the complexity of scientific language or technical jargon often hinders its effectiveness. In particular, younger populations, such as university students, may struggle to understand certain jargon used in official health materials such as brochures, and this will lead to lower vaccination intentions among them (Eyer, 2021).

Due to this, despite the growing body of research on vaccine hesitancy, there has been little attention paid to how specific linguistic features, such as jargon, in public health materials impact vaccination decisions, particularly among university students. This gap in literature is relevant in the context of the Ministry of Health's National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure, which plays a key role in disseminating vaccine information to the public. Moreover, understanding how the language is used in this brochure influences university students' vaccination intentions is important for improving the effectiveness of future health communication strategies.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by analysing the impact of jargon identified in the Ministry of Health's National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure on university students' vaccination intentions. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the jargon present in this brochure and how it influences university students' vaccination intentions. Thus, this study hopes to contribute to more effective health communication strategies that can encourage greater vaccine uptake among them.

Literature Review

Vaccination Intention

Understanding vaccination intention is a critical component of public health efforts, especially in the context of ongoing COVID-19 virus. Studies have consistently highlighted the significance of clear communication in enhancing vaccination intentions. For instance, Sherman et al. (2020) conducted research in the UK that revealed a strong correlation between clear messaging about vaccine efficacy and increased willingness to vaccinate. Their findings emphasised that when individuals receive straightforward information about the benefits and safety of vaccines, then they are more likely to accept the vaccination. Similarly, Graupensperger et al. (2021) focuses on college students and found that transparency in communication regarding vaccine safety plays an important role in reducing hesitancy. Their research also demonstrated that detailed ex-

planations of vaccine development processes significantly bolster students' confidence in receiving vaccinations.

Misinformation has also emerged as another critical factor influencing vaccination intentions. For instance, a study by Ruiz and Bell (2021) explored the landscape of vaccine hesitancy in the United States and identified misinformation as a significant barrier to vaccine acceptance. Their study indicated that individuals exposed to conflicting information or myths surrounding vaccines exhibited a lower intent to vaccinate. This finding underscores the necessity for public health campaigns to address misinformation directly and provide accurate, evidence-based information to counteract these false narratives.

In the Malaysian context, a study by Syed Alwi et al. (2021) highlights valuable insights into how language and communication influence public perceptions of vaccination. Their study revealed that while there was a general receptivity towards the COVID-19 vaccine, complex medical terminology often hindered understanding. The participants of this study expressed confusion over technical jargon, which then negatively impacted their confidence in vaccination decisions. Furthermore, this also aligns with the findings of Evans et al. (2017), who argue that the use of specialised language without an adequate explanation can create barriers to effective communication, particularly among individuals without a specific background.

Thus, these previous studies on vaccination intention indicate a clear need for effective communication strategies tailored to the target audience. For instance, the current study focuses on the jargon used in the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure. By examining how this technical language affects university students' understanding and their intentions regarding vaccination, this study aims to address a significant gap in the literature.

The Use of Brochures in Malaysia's Healthcare

In the complex field of healthcare communication, brochures play a crucial role in delivering important information, especially in Malaysia's diverse society. These printed materials not only present the health-related facts, they also embody a crucial link between medical knowledge and societal norms, expectations, and traditional healthcare beliefs (Mårtensson et al., 2020). Despite the rise of digital media, brochures remain significant in Malaysia, effectively reaching a broad spectrum of the population across various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and differing levels of digital literacy. This accessibility also makes brochures invaluable, serving as readily available, portable, and trusted sources of information (Sokey, Adjei & Ankrah, 2018).

Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance of brochures has notably increased, becoming key tools for disseminating knowledge and promoting vaccination efforts. The Ministry of Health has also adeptly utilised these traditional communication mediums to address vaccine hesitancy and dispel

myths, strategically distributing brochures in healthcare centres, community gatherings, and religious venues. By providing scientifically sound advice that resonates with the community's cultural and religious sensibilities, these brochures also effectively counteract any misinformation. What makes these brochures unique is not only their content but also the careful way the language is used. The National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure carefully chooses words, by using the specific terms and quotes from respected figures in order to strike a balance between scientific accuracy and cultural sensitivity.

Jargon in the National Immunisation Programme Brochures

The complex dynamics between specialised medical terminology in COVID-19 vaccine and its influence on people's willingness to get vaccinated reveal significant insights. For instance, the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure from the Ministry of Health (MoH) serves as a prime example, introducing terms such as "viral vector" and "mRNA vaccine". While these terms are accurate in the scientific and health fields, they may not resonate with the general public without further simplification. This is because while jargon is necessary to convey accurate medical information, it will often create barriers for those without a specialised background (Paasche-Orlow et al., 2020). Thus, this can lead to confusion, lower the people's trust in health communications, and reduce their vaccination intent as well (Kim & Kreps, 2020).

Furthermore, simplifying the complex terms in health brochures has been shown to improve public comprehension and engagement. For instance, research by Obregon and Waisbord (2021) highlights how health communication that integrates layman's language can bridge the knowledge gap between the scientific experts and general population. In the Malaysian context, incorporating local dialects or culturally resonant language in the Ministry of Health's brochures can further ensure that key messages reach a broader audience, especially in a country with diverse ethnic and linguistic groups (Lee & Nguyen, 2017).

In addition, the impact of jargon is also particularly notable among university students, who are often literate but not specialised in any of the medical terms. For instance, a study by Cha et al. (2022) found that younger individuals and students can struggle with understanding technical health information, which can negatively influence their health behaviour, including their vaccine uptake. This also underlines how important it is to carefully balance scientific accuracy with clarity and simplicity in health communication materials (Nagler et al., 2020).

Therefore, the role of jargon in the Ministry of Health's vaccination brochures is a critical factor to consider when aiming to foster better public health outcomes. By using clear, simplified language and culturally relevant communication strategies, these brochures can play a pivotal role in encouraging informed decision-making as well as increasing the vaccination rates in Malaysia.

Theoretical Framework: Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics

To analyse the jargon used in the Ministry of Health's National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure, this study draws on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, particularly focusing on the ideational metafunction. SFL asserts that language is a resource for making meaning, and the ideational metafunction specifically examines how language represents ideas and conveys meaning about the world (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In health communication, understanding how specialised terminology shapes public perceptions is crucial, as jargon can either facilitate or hinder comprehension. By applying this theory, the study will assess how the Ministry of Health's National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure utilises specific jargon to communicate complex health concepts effectively, thus directly linking to the research question regarding its impact on university students' vaccination intentions. This approach not only enhances the understanding of the language used in health communication but also sheds light on how such language impacts individuals' health decisions.

Methodology

This qualitative study aimed to explore the influence of the jargon used in the Ministry of Health's National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure on university students' vaccination intention. The methodology also comprised two primary phases: (1) the identification of jargon and (2) content analysis of university students' perceptions of the jargon through interview.

Data Collection

The first phase involved a content analysis of the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure, sourced from the Ministry of Health's official website. The brochure, consisting of 26 pages, was thoroughly examined to identify the key jargon terms that were related to vaccination technology as well as medical science. Next, the identified jargon included terms such as "mRNA", "viral vector", and "pathogens", which then were categorised into relevant themes based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, specifically focusing on the ideational metafunction. This approach facilitated an understanding of how these terms represent specific concepts and processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

For the second phase of this study, purposive sampling was employed to select three university students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam, representing different courses and varying proficiency levels in English, as indicated by their Malaysian University English Test (MUET) scores. This approach ensured diverse perspectives on the comprehension of the jargon identified in the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure. While the sample size is limited, it was deemed sufficient for obtaining in-depth qualitative insights that reflect diverse perspectives on jargon comprehension within the university student population (Guest et al., 2006; Cresswell, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants to gather qualitative data regarding their perceptions of the jargon used in the brochure. Each interview lasted approximately not more than 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Furthermore, the participants were asked open-ended questions about their understanding of the brochure's content, specific jargon terms, and how these terms influenced their attitudes towards vaccination. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participants' thoughts and feelings regarding the jargon in the brochure (Creswell, 2014).

The audio recordings of the interviews were then transcribed and analysed using Atlas.ti software. The analysis involved coding the responses to identify recurring themes related to the participants' understanding of jargon and its influence on their vaccination intention. Each jargon term was categorised based on its perceived clarity and relevance, as well as its impact on the participants' confidence in the vaccination process.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants were also informed about the study's purpose, and consent was secured prior to the participation. In addition, their anonymity was ensured throughout the study, with the pseudonyms assigned to protect their identities.

Findings

Research Question 1: To identify the jargon present in the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure

The National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure includes various scientific and technical terms. A detailed content analysis revealed twelve (12) key jargon terms in the brochure. These jargon terms were then categorised into three groups: Medical Science, Vaccine Technology, and Scientific Processes and Data. This categorisation helps to illustrate the different levels of technical language used within the brochure. The table below provides a summary of the jargon identified, including the frequency of occurrence for each term. By understanding how frequently these terms appear, the complexity of the information being communicated in the brochure to the readers can be determined.

Table 1: Identified Jargons in the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme Brochure

Jargon	Category	Frequency
Antigens	Medical Science	1
Viral vector	Vaccine Technology	6
RNA genetic sequencing	Vaccine Technology	1
Protein sub-unit	Vaccine Technology	1
Pathogens	Medical Science	1
SARS-CoV-2	Medical Science	1
Inactivated virus	Vaccine Technology	2
mRNA	Vaccine Technology	5

Deactivating virus	Vaccine Technology	1
Synthetically produced	Scientific Processes and Data	1
Epidemiology of the disease	Public Health	1
Geo-Big Data information	Scientific Processes and Data	1

This analysis is grounded in Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the ideational metafunction, which focuses on how language represents ideas, processes, and experiences (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In the context of this study, the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure utilises technical jargon to convey essential scientific concepts related to vaccination.

For instance, terms like “viral vector” and “mRNA” were frequently mentioned but also lacked further clarification in the brochure. These terms represent crucial aspects of vaccine technology, but their specialised nature may create barriers for readers that are unfamiliar with such terms. According to Evans et al. (2017), the use of complex scientific terms without an adequate explanation can hinder public comprehension, particularly among those without a science background.

Furthermore, the ideational metafunction explains that while brochure successfully represents scientific processes, it may not be fully effective in communicating these processes to its target audience. The absence of simpler explanations or analogies creates a communication gap, thus limiting the reader’s ability to engage with such material. As stated by Rudd (2018), public health communication is most effective when the technical language is also balanced with accessibility, ensuring that critical information is conveyed clearly. Thus, while the brochure excels in representing accurate scientific information, the frequent use of jargon, but without any definitions or clarifications in the side, may pose challenges for understanding. This will potentially affect the reader’s confidence in the vaccine, leading to confusion and vaccine hesitancy.

Research Question 2: To analyse the influence of identified jargon in the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure on university students’ vaccination intentions

To explore the influence of jargon on vaccination intentions, three participants from a Malaysian public university were interviewed. Table 2 summarises the participants’ demographic backgrounds:

Table 2: Participants Demographics and Jargon Perception in Vaccination Intentions

Participant	Course	MUET Band	Key Jargon Issues	Vaccination Intention
Participant A	English	Band 4	Confusion with “pathogens”, “RNA genetic sequencing”	Confident, but sought clarification on the terms in the brochure
Participant B	Bahasa Melayu	Band 3	Unfamiliar with “synthetically produced”, “mRNA”	Hesitant due to the unfamiliar brochure in the brochure
Participant C	Bahasa Arab	Band 4	Partial understanding of “viral vector”	Willing to vaccinate but recommended simpler terms

Key Themes from the Interviews

Understanding of Brochure Content

All the participants recognised the brochure's intention to inform the public about COVID-19 and the vaccination process. However, their ability to articulate specific details varied. For instance, Participant A summarised the content but expressed uncertainty about specific terms, thus reflecting a superficial understanding. This variation suggests that while the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure serves its primary purpose, the technical language employed may hinder their deeper comprehension of the brochure.

Perception of Jargon

The participants struggled with specific jargon, such as “synthetically produced” and “RNA genetic sequencing”. For instance, Participant B stated, “*It's confusing because I've never heard of it before,*” thus indicating the challenges posed by technical terminology. To elaborate, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, particularly the ideational metafunction, illustrates that when jargon is used without an adequate simplification, it fails to represent concepts effectively for readers, leading to confusion and disengagement (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Influence of Jargon on Vaccination Intentions

The presence of unfamiliar jargons in the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure contributed to hesitancy among the participants. For instance, Participant A stated, “*It makes me think twice about getting the booster,*” thus highlighting how technical terms can create doubt as well as uncertainty. This also aligns with the findings by McCoy et al. (2020), which suggest that understanding complex terminology is crucial for informed decision-making regarding vaccinations.

Desire for Simplified Explanations

Across all the interviews, participants had expressed a strong desire for clearer explanations of the jargon mentioned in the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure. For instance, Participant C stated, “*If they could add more explanations to the jargon, it would be helpful.*” This feedback underscores the need for health communication to prioritise accessibility and clarity as underlined by Rudd (2018) that simplifying medical language enhances the public understanding and engagement, suggesting that the inclusion of layman-friendly explanations could improve the effectiveness of the brochure.

Discussions and Conclusion

The first research objective focuses on identifying the jargon present in the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure. The findings show that the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure contains complex jargon, including terms like “viral vector”, “pathogens”, and “RNA genetic sequencing”. From Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective, these terms align with ideational metafunction, which is concerned with representing processes and experiences in the world (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The use of such technical terms reflects the Ministry of Health’s attempt to communicate detailed scientific processes to the public. However, this complexity also raises questions about accessibility of the readers in understanding the intended message.

The high frequency of terms such as “viral vector” and “mRNA” suggests that the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure prioritises in conveying accurate vaccine technology. Both terms are central to understanding the types of vaccines used, however, the lack of explanation for these terms in the brochure limits its effectiveness in communicating with readers that are not from science or health background. This aligns with studies by Evans et al. (2017) and Syed Alwi et al. (2021), which argue that excessive technical language in health communication can alienate the general public, especially those with lower health literacy. From Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) viewpoint, this means that while language in the brochure is effective at representing scientific knowledge, it fails to consider the experiential context of the general public, who may not have the background knowledge to fully understand these terms. This limitation emphasises the importance of aligning scientific terminology with the linguistic and experiential capacities of the readers. Thus, by providing the simplified explanations or even analogies, the brochure could fulfil its ideational function while also enhancing its accessibility.

The second research objective aims to analyse the influence of the identified jargons in the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure on university students’ vaccination intention. The interviews with the three participants revealed that unfamiliar jargon had a mixed effect on their vaccination intentions. From Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective, the experiential meaning of the jargon was not successfully conveyed to the participants, thus creating a gap in understanding. For instance, Participant B, expressed confusion over terms like “synthetically produced” and “mRNA”, which contributed to hesitation about getting a booster shot for COVID-19. This aligns with research by McCoy et al. (2020), which highlights that technical language can lead to disengagement and mistrust, especially in health communication.

However, despite this confusion, some participants also indicated willingness to vaccinate, thus suggesting that trust in government recommendations still plays a vital role in their decision-making process. For instance, Participant C mentioned, “*Even though I don’t understand all the terms, I’ll still follow the government’s advice,*” thus reflecting an underlying confidence in institutional authority. This finding un-

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derscores the importance of combining technical language with accessible explanations to enhance the reader's understanding and reduce vaccine hesitancy.

Overall, this study highlights the significant role that jargon plays in shaping the university students' understanding and intentions regarding vaccination. While the National COVID-19 Immunisation Programme brochure provides essential scientific information, the complexity of its language may hinder effective communication. Thus, by focusing on simplifying the jargon and providing contextual explanations, it could improve comprehension for the readers. This will encourage greater vaccine uptake among the university students.

Future research should consider expanding the scope of this study by examining how different demographic groups, such as older adults or individuals with varying educational backgrounds, respond to health communication materials containing jargon. Additionally, exploring effective strategies for simplifying technical language in health brochures could also enhance the public understanding. Longitudinal studies assessing changes in vaccination intentions in response to an evolving public health messaging would also provide valuable insights into how communication can be tailored to improve the engagement and compliance with vaccination programs.

Author contributions

The main author led the data collection and analysis as well as the primary writing of this article. The second and third authors played an important role in cross-checking the interview questions and data analysis to assure reliability. The fourth author is responsible for editing and proofreading the manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The brochure analysed in this paper is publicly available. However, results of analyses conducted during the study are not available for public access.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest concerning this publication. All authors have disclosed any potential conflicts, and no financial or personal relationships could have influenced the research.

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'Break the Silence': A Tool in Enhancing English Presentation Skills among Second Language Learners

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Abstract

Proficiency in delivering oral presentations is one of the most crucial skills students are expected to develop throughout their educational journey. However, previous research has shown that oral presentation tasks are typically difficult for second language learners to complete. Some of the many reasons for this difficulty experienced by learners during oral presentations were forgetting what to say, and not being confident talking in public. Hence, 'Break the Silence' is an innovation tool developed to assist students in structuring their oral presentation, specifically in informative speech. It offers a distinct advantage through presentation phrases tailored to specific topics useful for structuring students' thoughts in oral presentation. This study aims to i) explore students' perceptions regarding the usability of 'Break the Silence' as a learning tool; and ii) investigate students' perceptions on the influence of 'Break the Silence' to enhance their oral presentation. 12 students from Universiti Teknologi MARA were chosen to try the 'Break the Silence' tool and share their experiences from using it. Findings revealed that students demonstrated a positive outlook on the usage of 'Break the Silence' as a learning tool. With its interactive features, the tool is easy to be used and navigation is not an issue for students. The study also discovered that the tool has managed to assist students in structuring their presentation and boost their confidence in speaking. It is envisioned that the 'Break the Silence' will continue to provide support to students in delivering an effective oral presentation.

Keywords: *oral presentation; communication; innovation tool; second language learners; English language*

Introduction

Mastering effective communication skills is important as it has huge significance in personal, professional and social interactions. When individuals possess strong communication skills, they will be able to express information, ideas and thoughts clearly and completely. This is fundamental in the communication process that prioritises comprehension of the messages delivered, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation of the messages. Oral presentation is a form of spoken communication that requires speakers' ability and creativity to express their ideas and knowledge (Oudeh, 2021). The speaker can perform the task in numerous contexts including academic and professional settings. However, the key components of the mission usually include preparation of accurate content and successful delivery of the presentation. Generally, the common purpose of the oral presentation is most likely to inform, persuade, or entertain the audience through words, physical

delivery and visual or audio aids (Tucker et al., 2019). Tareen, Haand and Muhammadi (2023) stated that oral presentation is a preferred choice of educators of higher learning institutions to offer students the opportunity to enhance their speaking skills.

In this 21st century, one of the abilities that students must develop over their academic years is the capacity to give oral presentations (Aziz, Wan Mohamed & Mohammad Nor, 2022). For this reason, oral presentation has become a vital element of assessment in higher learning institutions. Indriyani, Jasmienti and Fendi (2024) stated that participating in oral presentations can be a source of motivation for students to improve their skills as they can observe the effort that they put in for successful presentations. Other than improving learners' skills to communicate ideas clearly and effectively, the assessment method is expected to build confidence and provide valuable experience that will help them stand out in their working life. According to Razawi, Zulkornain and Razlan (2019), this common assessment, particularly in ESL/EFL programs at higher learning institutions, offers countless benefits in preparing learners for a real work environment. Furthermore, Hanifa, and Yusra (2018) emphasised that a key factor to attain success in the current era is becoming a skilled communicator during presentations. Simply put, acquiring good presentation skills means acquiring good communication skills which can be referred to as 21st century skills. Hence, oral presentation must become an element looked forward by learners as it not only facilitates academic experiences but also assists them in becoming effective and confident communicators.

Though mastering effective oral presentation skills promotes impactful communication, personal and professional growth, studies revealed that students face difficulties to orally present well (Tareen, Haand & Muhammadi, 2023; Razawi, Zulkornain & Razlan, 2019). Tareen, Haand, and Muhammadi (2023) pointed out that students become anxious when they are assigned to present orally to the audience because they do not perceive the task as easy. Additionally, the study also highlighted that one critical issue that has become higher learning institutions' concern is having graduates with impressive results but remain less proficient in presenting orally in English. Lack of oral presentation skill can affect graduates' performance when they present ideas in professional environments. It will be challenging to collaborate with others and lead projects as well. As a result, due to their incapability, they might face limited opportunities for career growth. In addition, Razawi, Zulkornain, and Razlan (2019) highlighted apprehension, fear of public speaking, and negative perceptions on oral presentations as the factors that hinder students from performing oral presentations skillfully. The consequences would be students becoming doubtful of their abilities and continuing to struggle in performing oral communication tasks.

Calculative effort has been put forth by previous researchers on studies exploring strategies to improve presentation skills (Mahdi, 2022; Lisnawati, 2021; Hanifa & Yusra, 2018). It was agreed that mainly mastering the contents of the presentation was the key factor of success (Hanifa & Yusra, 2018). Next, the study recommended speakers to practice presenting frequently as it not only helped them to identify their

weaknesses but also to boost their confidence and improve body language. Moreover, the feedback received after practice was found to be effective in improving their presentation overall. A study by Lisnawati (2021) highlighted the importance of multimedia use to facilitate students' speaking practices. Teachers were recommended to employ various multimedia as appropriate learning resources for speaking activities. Though the primary goal of incorporating multimedia was to enhance students' communicative ability, it also offered more flexibility and creativity in teaching and learning in general. Similarly, the study by Mahdi (2022) revealed positive findings related to incorporation of multimedia in facilitating learning. The findings showed that the practice of multimedia approach improved speaking fluency skills among students. While these findings highlighted the necessity of using multimedia in facilitating learning, there is a noticeable lack of research focusing on innovating suitable multimedia tools that can assist students in improving their oral presentation skills.

Therefore, the 'Break the Silence' is developed to address the above mentioned. It is an interactive tool with user-friendly features to provide fun experience to students in doing their oral presentations. This innovative tool aimed at enhancing students' oral presentation skills by providing presentation structures and prompts in the form of useful phrases tailored to specific topics for students to choose from. Hence, this study aimed to investigate how the 'Break the Silence' tool can enhance English presentation skills among second language learners. Thus, the research objectives of this study are to:

- i) explore students' perceptions regarding the usability of 'Break the Silence' as a learning tool; and
- ii) investigate students' perceptions on the influence of 'Break the Silence' to enhance their oral presentation.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative research design to explore learners' perceptions and experiences of using 'Break the Silence' tool. The ADDIE model was applied in this study as it was suitable to construct the oral presentation tool (Segara, Yana & Febianti, 2018). There are five stages in this model which are Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation. In the 'Analysis' phase, learners' struggles to perform oral presentation were identified. After identifying the common challenges, the 'Design' phase was conducted. In the 'Design' phase, the key factors in oral delivery were determined. By considering the challenges found in the 'Analysis' phase, in the 'Design' phase, suitable words and phrases as parameters to enhance oral communication were given focus in designing the tool. Next, in the 'Development' phase, all researchers of this study convened to revise the tool with knowledge possessed and recommendation from experts. In the 'Implementation' phase, the trial of the tool was carried out among selected learners. Finally, in the 'Evaluation' phase, the effectiveness of the tool was assessed. This included observing learners' oral presentation performance while using the tool as well as interviewing them to obtain insights to improve the tool.

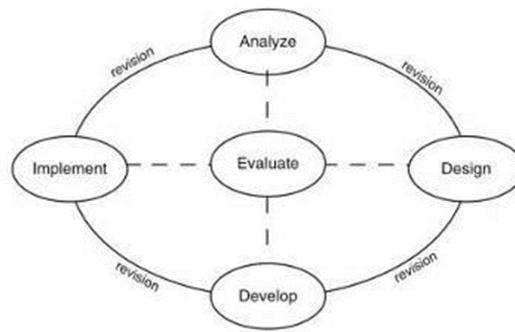


Figure 1: The ADDIE Model (Adapted from Branch, 2009)

Applying convenient sampling, 12 students were chosen from different faculties from Universiti Teknologi MARA to try the tool and elicit their experiences from using the tool. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 20 years old and included an equal number of male and female learners. Informed consent was obtained from all participants on their voluntary participation.

The 'Break the Silence' tool is a PowerPoint slide consisting of specific themes and topics suitable for an informative speech together with relevant words phrases that can be adopted by speakers in their delivery. Figure 2 shows the components of informative speech contained in the tool:

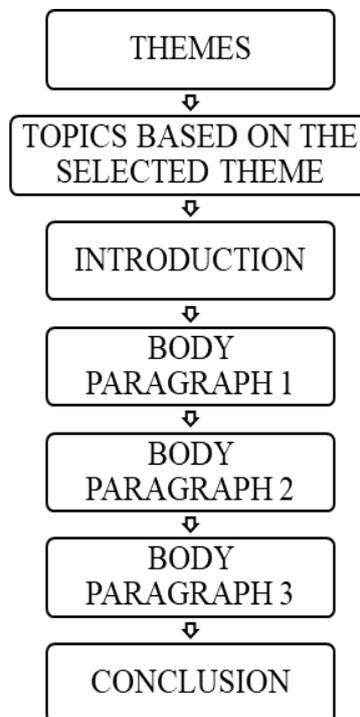


Figure 2: Components of an Informative Speech

The following Table 1 shows the distribution of items under each theme.

Table 1: Distribution of Items for each Theme

No.	Theme(s)	No of Topics	No of item(s) for introduction	No of item(s) for each body paragraph	No of item(s) for conclusion
1.	Person	4	4	4	4
2.	Health	4	4	4	4
3.	Global Issues	4	4	4	4
4.	Celebration	4	4	4	4
5.	Sports	4	4	4	4
6.	Technology	4	4	4	4
7.	Cosmetics	4	4	4	4
8.	Vacation	4	4	4	4
9.	Games	4	4	4	4
10.	Fashion	4	4	4	4

The tool consists of 10 different themes, suitable to the students’ proficiency level (intermediate level), with each theme consisting of four different topics that participants can choose from (as shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4).

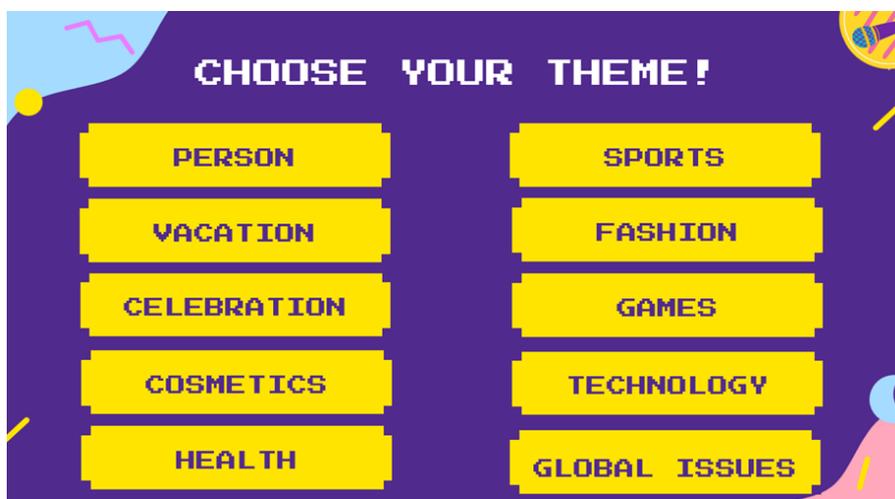


Figure 3: Themes in ‘Break the Silence’ tool

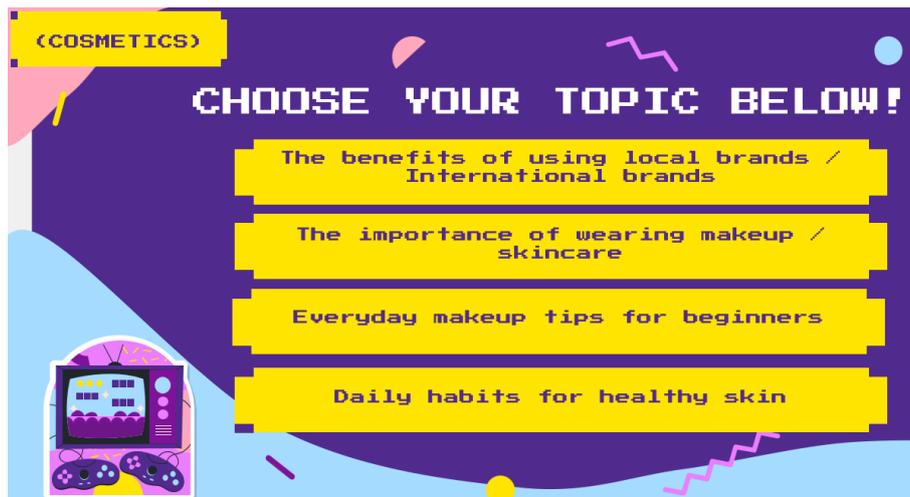


Figure 4: Topics for the theme 'Cosmetics' in 'Break the Silence' tool

During the data collection process, the students tried out the tool with close observation from their lecturers who assumed the role of the researchers in this study. The researchers first demonstrated to the participants using the 'Break the Silence' tool. Then, the respondents were instructed to do an oral presentation using the tool developed.

After the completion of each presentation by the students, a semi-structured interview was undertaken to elicit their experiences in using the tool. The seven main questions asked during the interview were:

1. Do you think the 'Break the Silence' tool improved your speaking skills? If yes, in what way did the tool help you?
2. How would you describe your overall experience using the 'Break the Silence' tool? (Engaging? Enjoyable?)
3. Was the tool easy to navigate and use? Why or why not?
4. What did you like most about using the tool?
5. Do you have any suggestions on how the tool could be improved?
6. Would you continue using this tool in the future? Why or why not?
7. Would you recommend this tool to other students? Why or why not?

These questions were asked to participants to know more about their feelings and attitudes after using the tool as well as their suggestions to improve the tool for future use.

The final phase of the research involved the analysis of students' interview responses and lecturers' observational notes. Data gathered from the interviews were transcribed and analysed. The responses were grouped and coded into themes related to the research objectives: 1) perceptions of the usability of the tool and 2) perceptions on the influence of 'Break the Silence' to enhance their oral presentation. Additionally,

researchers' observational field notes that captured detailed accounts of the students using the 'Break the Silence' tool which included students' behaviour and responses towards the tool were also analysed.

Findings and Discussions

From the lecturers' observations it was evident that the tool managed to increase students' interest in doing oral presentations. In addition, students were also able to improvise their speech based on the given structures and add more sentences to the body of the presentation.

However, a few suggestions on the improvement of the tool were put forth by the lecturers. Firstly, the prompts provided for each topic have to be specified based on the given topics. This stems from the students' responses that were unrelated to the topics that they have chosen but simply relying on the prompts provided. Hence, if the tool is to be used in the future, prompts provided have to be tailored based on the specific topics. Secondly, topics provided under each theme have to be revised based on the students' proficiency level. Given that most of the respondents were students with an intermediate level of proficiency, some of the topics are challenging for them. For example, topics under the theme of *Global Issues* are challenging for them. This has caused difficulties in doing the oral presentation. The findings corroborate with Krashen's acquisition model (1992) as he argues that the input materials should be interesting and relevant to learners and only if the input is interesting and closely related to the learners will it stimulate their interest in learning. Therefore, no matter the teaching materials or teaching content, interesting and relevant materials should be the concern of teachers (Li et al., 2023).

From the analysis of the interview data, it was discovered that most of the students enjoyed using the tool for various reasons. Students testified that the tool is fun and interactive hence made the students more relaxed when presenting. Additionally, the variety of topics provided as options interested them as most of the topics were relatable and students did not have to come up with their own. However, some of the students also felt the pressure as they were forced to speak and they felt obliged to use the phrases given. Apart from that, students also felt difficulty in connecting their ideas with the prompts provided

Student 2: "I think it is fun because it is interactable, you can interact with the tool as that can help me focus"

Student 3: "I would rather say it helps me to improve my engaging skills and speaking and it helps me to get better in speaking with other people"

Student 4: "I will continue using this because my problem in speaking in English is I don't have any idea what to talk about. So when I look at the topic I think it helps me find what topic I wanna talk"

Student 6: "It is a little bit pressure I think, because yeah is a random and random and we we need to think more and to think the idea but I think its enjoyable and can improve our communication skill"

Student 7: "Probably improve the words given to help students because when, I look at the words given I feel like I was obligated to use the words, but I can't "

The summary of the findings based on the research objectives can be seen in the following table:

Table 2: Usability and Influence of using the 'Break the Silence' tool

Objective 1: Usability	Objective 2: Influence
Easy to use	Boost confidence in speaking: prompts (phrases) provided
Easy to navigate: features	Organised speech: presentation structures, linkers, connectors,

From the interview data, with regards to the usability of the tool, students testified that the tool is easy to use and navigation is not an issue as well. The features of the tool are not that hard to use which made it easier for them to navigate through the tool while they were presenting.

Student 7: "Yes, I think it is easy because it has step by step, can follow the words that they give to us"

Student 9: "Oh yes, it was easy to use"

In relation to the second objective on the influence of the tool in enhancing students' speaking skill, the students believed that the tool is helpful to boost their confidence in speaking. This is because the tool provides everything that the students need to include in their speech which is useful as they sometimes tend to forget what to say when they are presenting and the tool helps them to stay on track. Moreover, the presence of the prompts serves as a guide for them to construct their sentences as they present. Students also find the tool helpful as it helped them in organising their speech. The tool provides step by step guidance in doing oral presentation namely introduction, body and conclusion. In addition to that, prompts were also provided for each of the structures. These features helped the students to connect their thoughts and deliver their speech in an organised manner.

Student 1: "For someone that is introvert, Break the silence tool boost their confidence"

Student 2: "I think it is the organization of the topic. You can choose what you want and...the thing that help me the most is the one, the prompt that help me"

Student 7: "Yes, I think it is easy because it has step by step, can follow the words that they give to us".

Student 4: "What I like the most is the multiple lines that are used as a guide like there are multiple phrases uses in blanks which are optional to use too"

The above findings concurred with the discovery from various research. For instance, Mahdi (2022) and Lisnawati (2021) revealed positive findings related to incorporation of multimedia in facilitating learning and educators integrate diverse multimedia resources into speaking activities to enhance students' oral presentation skills. In addition to that, Gilakjani (2012) pointed out in his study that multimedia tool is effective as it allows learners to control the pacing of their presentations by slowing it down or breaking the presentation into segments. Hence, innovating teaching methods by utilising technological tools like multimedia and computers continuously will enable teachers to boost students' enthusiasm for learning (Wu, 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the students perceived the 'Break the Silence' tool as highly helpful and effective in enhancing their oral presentation skills. It is envisioned that continuous use of the 'Break the Silence' will be able to boost learners' confidence in doing oral presentations. Not only that, this multimedia tool also offers students opportunities to engage with course content in interactive and immersive ways, which can significantly enhance their learning experiences. Moreover, the tool is expected to facilitate learners to maintain coherence while delivering ideas during a speech presentation as it offers learners the opportunity to see the process of constructing proper sentences and putting their ideas in an organised manner. However, there are also discrepancies of the tool that require further improvements to produce a refined version of the tool to further assist students in developing more structured and effective oral presentations. Despite this, the tool is highly recommended as it can assist educators to create more enriching classroom environments that promote interactive and engaging classroom sessions. Hence, the tool has the potential to be adopted by other institutions in the future. With the novelty it offers, 'Break the Silence' also opens for collaboration potentials with other researchers to further look into the usability of the tool and explore its potential to be utilised by students with different proficiency level.

Author contributions

Abstract, N.A.; Introduction, S.S., and S.K.; Methodology, S.S., and N.A.; Findings, N.A., and N.E., Formal analysis, N.E., S.K., and S.S., Original draft preparation, N.A., N.E., S.S., and S.K., Review and editing, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2025

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Data availability statement

The contents of this paper which comprised of data analysis and findings from the innovation will be available on the platform of an online journal under Akademi Pengajian Bahasa (APB), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) which is International Journal of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics (IJMAL).

Conflicts of interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Nur Ashiquin C. Alih, Nabila Eizati Komarudin, Siti Syairah Fakhruddin, Shabina Kumari Subramaniam & Anealka Aziz Hussin
'Break the Silence': A Tool in Enhancing English Presentation Skills among Second Language Learners

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Exploring Gen Z's Career Decision-Making: A Case Study of Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia

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Abstract

The rise of new forms of employment has significantly contributed to the growth of the gig economy, where workers, often freelancers, engage in brief, temporary tasks or agreements independently or with multiple employers. This case study aims to explore Higher Education Institution (HEI) students' perceptions of social media influencing a career choice within the gig economy using a qualitative approach. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 participants from three Malaysian HEIs and analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis revealed a complex landscape of opinions, highlighting the allure and challenges of this career path. Key themes identified from the thematic analysis include career viability, social perception, sustainability, excitement factors, advantages, and disadvantages. While the potential for fame and financial reward is acknowledged, concerns about job security and online harassment are also prominent. This duality underscores the need for a balanced and strategic approach to pursuing a career in social media influencing.

Keywords: *Gig Economy, Social Media Influencer, Career Viability, Malaysian HEI, Job Security*

Introduction

The exponential rise of the digital economy due to the utilisation and existence of myriads of social media platforms has been altering trends in business and marketing worldwide. This phenomenon has positively impacted Malaysia as it permeates the nation's growth in economic productivity. These businesses and marketing transactions have created opportunities and jobs for individuals nationwide through social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Telegram. As the Department of Statistics Malaysia reported in 2022, the Malaysian digital economy made up 22.6% of the country's GDP, experiencing a growth of 10.4% and reaching RM320 billion. This signals that the digital economy plays a gigantic role in providing individuals with career opportunities and assisting in generating the country's economic growth.

As a result of the booming economy due to these social media platforms, companies and organisations have been actively recruiting highly influential individuals known as social media influencers to pro-

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mote, market and advertise their businesses and products to the masses (Susanto et al., 2021). The employment of social influencers has been identified to enhance business companies' sales while reducing costs substantially, given that it is a more cost-effective approach than other marketing methods. Who are these social media influencers? According to (Ki et al., 2020), a Social Media Influencer (SMI) is characterised as an individual on social media platforms who has cultivated a substantial following by sharing their daily experiences and crafting online content that motivates their followers, thereby granting them the ability to exert influence over their audience. SMIs can also denote individuals who can impact or modify people and their actions via social media platforms. This emergence of SMIs is a part of the gig economy context, the 'do-it-yourself trend' that has experienced significant growth in the past few decades.

The gig economy is a labour market marked by the dominance of short-term, freelance, temporary, or on-call work setups, frequently enabled by digital platforms and technology. In this economic model, individuals, commonly known as "gig workers" or "freelancers," participate in a variety of assignments, projects, or jobs with flexibility, and they typically receive payment for each specific "gig" or task they undertake (Snider, 2018). The gig economy attracts Gen Z as the flexibility in doing freelance work does not bind them to have long-term contracts with their employers (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). It offers them flexibility, embracing digital technology, aligning with their entrepreneurial spirit, providing economic opportunities, leveraging their skills and interests, and accommodating their desire for independent work arrangements. However, despite its positive economic growth, this gigantic shift in career decision-making by Gen Z could result in devastating financial consequences for the nation as there will be a shortage of skilled labour and cause brain drain in Malaysia. Therefore, this study attempts to examine the perceptions of students from higher education institutions of being a social media influencer as a sustainable career choice in Malaysia's currently evolving gig economy. By analysing their responses, we seek to uncover the factors influencing their views and the potential advantages and disadvantages they associate with this career path.

Literature Review

Gig economy, Millennials, and Gen Z

A gig economy is characterised by a workforce predominantly composed of independent individuals and freelancers who hold temporary and part-time roles, as opposed to being composed mainly of permanent, full-time employees. According to (Montgomery & Baglioni, 2021), for some individuals, the gig economy represents a chance to enjoy flexibility, generate extra earnings through short-term gigs, and reap concrete advantages. This indicates that the gig economy has a major impact on increasing the economic quality of those actively participating. As addressed in a systematic study conducted by Ghazali and Muhammad (2021), even though the gig economy is not a new concept in Malaysia itself, its rapid evolution and growth

were observed to be booming primarily due to the job losses caused by the pandemic. The gig economy significantly impacts Millennials and Gen Z, two generations known for their tech-savvy nature and desire for flexibility in work. Given the Movement Control Order (MCO) imposed, Malaysians increasingly turned to digital social media platforms to make money and support their families. Many gig workers from younger generations are well-versed in modern technology, including mobile apps, and are socially active on various social media platforms. This led the Malaysian government to identify the gig economy as a new potential source of economic growth. As addressed earlier, according to the 2022 report from the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the digital economy of Malaysia accounted for 22.6% of the nation's GDP, marking a 10.4% increase and reaching RM320 billion, which significantly indicates the major impact that the gig economy brings to this country. However, Nursilah Ahmad et al. (2020) addressed that in discussing the gig economy in the context of students or recent graduates in Malaysia, the conversation tends to revolve around the job prospects for graduates and how the younger generation is grappling with the prevailing economic difficulties. A recent survey conducted by UCSI University Poll Research Centre in March 2023 indicates a worrying trend among a large population of Malaysian SPM school leavers. It was identified that these school leavers were perceived to be lured into becoming social media influencers instead of pursuing their education to higher levels due to the selected success of the SMIs that they see on social media platforms. The survey found that only 51 percent of the 1,000 school leavers opt to continue their education. In contrast, 49 percent intend to become social media affiliates or influencers, join the gig economy, start businesses, and have no plans. The remaining 49 percent, however, have different plans. This group is divided among several alternative paths. Some of these individuals plan to build careers on social media platforms by promoting products, creating content, and engaging with audiences to earn revenue. Others intend to participate in the gig economy, taking on freelance or short-term jobs such as ride-sharing, delivery services, or freelance work in various fields.

Gen Z's phenomena and career choices differ from previous generations pursuing higher education to secure sustainable career choices where they strongly associate their identity with their careers, fostering a sense of uniqueness and loyalty to the (Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). This could be explained by examining how Gen Z individuals perceive their career choices and reasons for choosing them. In a study conducted by (Mahapatra et al., 2022), the researchers identified that young individuals today prefer careers characterised by flexibility and minimal stress, such as engaging in influencer roles or participating in the gig economy. This inclination is driven by a desire for substantial returns commensurate with their efforts. There is also a discernible weariness among them regarding the traditional approach of memorising information and a reluctance to endure additional academic pressures. To add, according to Barhate and Dirani (2022), Gen Z, born between 1995 and 2012, values both intrinsic and extrinsic factors in their career aspirations. They are motivated by personal fulfilment, entrepreneurial attitudes, and self-confidence. Key expectations include

work-life balance, meaningful work, and continuous learning, with less emphasis on salary compared to older generations.

Gen Z, as digital natives, expects workplaces to be tech-driven and offer flexible environments that encourage collaboration, yet they are also comfortable working independently. They prefer lateral career growth and emphasize the importance of mentoring and career development. Organizations must adapt their strategies to attract and retain this generation by focusing on flexibility, meaningful work, and growth opportunities. Furthermore, some perceive a limited prospect in pursuing higher education. In addition, in examining Gen Z's perspective on their career choices and preferences, several studies have obtained similar findings related to this generation of young individuals. These individuals share similar traits in terms of their career choices and preferences, such as the need to have flexible work settings that allow them to work at any time and from any location, create and decide their career paths rather than having them predetermined (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017). Millennials and Gen Z have been significant contributors to the gig economy's growth, leveraging its flexibility and technology-driven opportunities to navigate the modern work landscape. Despite these benefits, they also face unique challenges within this evolving employment model, which calls for a deeper understanding of how they navigate the balance between flexibility and sustainability in their careers. In conclusion, the rise of the gig economy, particularly among Gen Z and Millennials, reflects a shift in career preferences towards flexibility, autonomy, and a technology-driven work environment. While this model offers many benefits, such as independence and adaptability, it also presents challenges regarding job security and long-term career sustainability, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to career planning and development in this evolving landscape.

Labour Shortage and Brain Drain

Whether becoming a social media influencer is a suitable career choice depends on individual circumstances, goals, and risk tolerance. For those passionate about content creation, willing to navigate the uncertainties, and capable of building a strong personal brand, it can be a rewarding and lucrative career. However, it's essential to approach this path with a clear understanding of the challenges and to have backup plans or diversified income streams to ensure long-term sustainability and security. However, if this phenomenon persists, it could lead to a major issue of shortage of experts in our country. As addressed by Dr V. Subramaniam, a senior lecturer from the Faculty of Business Management, UCSI University, in an interview with *Bernama* as a part of a survey on this matter, it was stated that the technology-driven environment allows and promotes Gen Z to participate and join careers that do not require them to be tied to any structured working environment. Other than that, as addressed, other lucrative factors that attract these youngsters to join the gig economy include escape from the pressure of studies, financial constraints due to the high cost of education, and high cost of living. Many high school students flocking into the gig economy and escaping

from enrolling in higher education will cause the nation to experience a shortage of local experts, especially in Malaysia's science and technology field. According to the Statistics Department, 97.71% of individuals engaged in p-hailing services are young adults aged 15 to 30, with the remaining being senior citizens aged 60 and above. Among these young adults, approximately 40% are high school graduates holding either Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) or Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokasional (SPMV).

Additionally, 23.24% possess a diploma or equivalent, while the remaining 11.79% hold a bachelor's degree. The gig economy's employment structures provide a swift entry point into the job market, which appeals to students with limited formal education qualifications. A study conducted by N Ahmad et al. (2020) to gather preliminary data concerning the level of awareness among the younger generation on the usage as well as future expectations of the platform economy revealed that most of the respondents were found to be unaware of the jobs market changing patterns and the effects of the gig economy on the labour market in future time. Although gigs provide a means to cover expenses and earn extra money, they are transient and lack the stability and security in permanent jobs. The unpredictable nature of the gig economy can lead to irregular incomes, presenting challenges for young people with minimal savings to prepare for the future or address growing financial responsibilities. Thus, If the current trend of young people opting for gig economy roles over higher education continues, then it could exacerbate labour shortages and contribute to a brain drain, particularly in critical fields like science and technology, and consequently hinder the nation's long-term economic and developmental growth.

Social Media Influencers

Many students today are drawn to the idea of becoming social media influencers. The allure of working as a social media influencer appeals to students for its flexibility, creative expression, income potential, networking opportunities, and learning experiences. Social media influencers have gained trust, expertise, and a substantial following on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter. They typically focus on specific topics such as fashion, beauty, fitness, travel, lifestyle, gaming, or technology, creating content relevant to their chosen niche. Using their social media presence, influencers interact with their followers, sharing content like photos, videos, blogs, and live streams. They also leverage their platforms to promote products or services to their audience. According to a study by Duffy (2020), to earn income, they hype branded goods and services to their communities of followers; such promotional communication takes the form of information, advice, and inspiration. Often, influencers collaborate with brands, businesses, and advertisers to develop sponsored content, endorse products, and run marketing campaigns, all aimed at connecting with their followers authentically and compellingly. For example, a study by Hermawan (2023) underscores the potential of influencer marketing, especially on YouTube, as an effective strategy for engaging Generation Z consumers. Brands can harness this trend by utilising social media influencers on YouTube to promote

products and deliver marketing messages to their audience. The study's findings reveal that Gen Z viewers on YouTube are active users who favour certain types of content and are inclined to share and comment. This suggests that influencer marketing on YouTube could be a successful approach for companies to attract and engage young consumers. By partnering with social media influencers on YouTube, brands can leverage the influencers' credibility and reach to promote their products or services effectively to a large audience.

Additionally, Pratama (2023) emphasises the significance of micro-influencer characteristics in meeting the information needs of Gen Z audiences on social media platforms such as TikTok. The study's results indicate that Gen Z followers are influenced by micro-influencers who reflect their preferences and values, highlighting the critical role of relatability and trust in shaping information-seeking behaviours within this demographic. However, according to Bareth (2023), the content that influencers promote is not always positive or healthy. They also promote materialism and consumerism, encouraging their followers to buy products they do not necessarily need or cannot afford, eventually leading to minimal savings. Duffy and Pooley (2019) asserted that modern-day influencers engage in narratives of self-branding tailored to resonate with consumers' economic uncertainties within the gig economy context. Singh and Bushan (2023) emphasises the importance of addressing challenges related to fair wages, employment rights, and social security in the digital era to ensure a balanced future of work. It discusses the evolution of digital labour platforms globally and in India, emphasising the effects of digitalization on the work world and the paper finally concludes that recognition of digital labour is crucial as it can lead to the provision of rights-related benefits for gig workers, highlighting the significance of legal frameworks in protecting workers in the evolving work landscape. The Influencer Industry (2022) chronicles the journey of early digital creators facing economic uncertainty during the Great Recession. They began focusing on building and monetizing their personal brands to take control of their professional destinies. Ultimately, the study reveals how the influencer industry has shifted how authenticity is constructed and perceived in a profit-driven communications environment, blurring the lines between reality and the curated personas presented on social media platforms. The line between personal life and work can become blurred, leading to difficulty maintaining a healthy work-life balance. The expectation to be constantly online and available can lead to burnout and a lack of downtime.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights into the factors influencing students' views on a career as a social media influencer. The research was conducted at a higher education institution (HEI) in Perak, Malaysia, involving a sample of 30 students. The

semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in exploring various aspects of the respondents' perceptions while maintaining a consistent framework for comparison.

Participants

The study involved 30 students from a higher education institution (HEI) in Perak, Malaysia. The selection criteria were intentionally designed to ensure diversity, encompassing students from various academic disciplines and backgrounds. This purposive sampling approach aimed to gather a wide range of perspectives on the career of a social media influencer. The decision to involve 30 participants aligns with Creswell and Creswell (2017) guidance on qualitative research, where it is suggested that a sample size of 20 to 30 respondents is appropriate for semi-structured interviews. This range is typically sufficient to reach data saturation, the point at which no new themes or information emerge. By selecting 30 students, the study ensures a balance between depth and diversity of responses, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the topic while maintaining manageability. Creswell emphasises the importance of focusing on quality over quantity in qualitative research, and this sample size supports the goal of obtaining rich, detailed insights from the participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-person interviews, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. The interview guide featured open-ended questions designed to explore the factors shaping students' perceptions of a career as a social media influencer, as well as the potential advantages and disadvantages of this career path. The semi-structured format encouraged participants to share their thoughts and experiences openly, generating rich qualitative data for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved using thematic analysis to systematically examine the semi-structured interview transcripts. Initially, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read multiple times for familiarisation. This step was followed by importing the transcripts into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software designed to facilitate systematic coding and thematic exploration. In ATLAS.ti, the data analysis began with highlighting significant text sections that captured key ideas. Using the software's coding feature, these segments were assigned initial codes that reflected the core content. ATLAS.ti allowed for efficient organization and retrieval of these codes, facilitating the next step in the process: grouping related codes together to form potential themes. Once the initial themes were identified, they were reviewed and refined within the software. ATLAS.ti's tools for creating networks and visual representations of codes were used to examine relationships between codes, ensuring that the themes were co-

herent and accurately represented the data. Each theme was then defined and named within the software, and detailed analyses were written to describe their significance, supported by memos and notes.

Limitations

While the semi-structured interview method provided valuable insights, it also posed certain limitations. One limitation is the potential for interviewer bias, where the interviewer's questions or demeanour could influence the respondents' answers. Additionally, the semi-structured format, while flexible, may result in varying depths of information across different interviews. The relatively small sample size of 30 respondents from a single HEI may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or populations.

Another area for improvement is the time-consuming nature of conducting and analysing qualitative interviews. Each interview requires significant time for transcription and coding, which can be resource intensive. Furthermore, the subjective interpretation of qualitative data can introduce bias, and efforts were made to mitigate this through rigorous coding and theme validation processes.

Results

The analysis of the perceptions of Malaysian Higher Education Institution GenZ students regarding a career as a social media influencer revealed several emerging themes. These themes are derived from the participants' responses and provide insight into their attitudes, beliefs, and concerns about this career path. The identified themes include *perceived viability and sustainability*, *advantages and disadvantages*, *societal perceptions* and *peer views*, and *motivating elements for becoming influencers*.

Perceived Viability and Sustainability

Career Viability

Many respondents consider social media influencers as a viable career option. They highlight the potential to gain followers, engage in business opportunities, and utilize their social networks. For example, one participant noted, "*Because we can gain more followers by doing business activities,*" emphasising the entrepreneurial opportunities linked to social media influencing. Another respondent shared, "*Because it is easy to start our career and we can positively influence people,*" underscoring the accessibility and potential for positive impact within the field. Others emphasized the advantages of networking, stating, "*Networking, the influencer industry offers opportunities to connect with different brands and people,*" reflecting the industry's capacity to build valuable relationships. However, some were more cautious, such as the respondent who remarked, "*I don't think I can become a social media influencer but it has potential for those who are*

consistent and creative," suggesting that while it may not be for everyone, those with the right traits can succeed.

Additionally, a participant highlighted the influence of social media in gaining popularity and creating business opportunities, saying, *"Because the influence of social media can cause someone to gain popularity and business opportunities."* Another respondent noted, *"I think Social Media Influencer can become a career because it allows one to share content and attract a large audience,"* pointing out the career's potential to reach and engage with a broad audience. This perception is fueled by the visible success of well-known influencers who have turned their online presence into profitable careers. The ability to leverage personal branding and digital marketing skills makes this an attractive career choice for many digitally savvy and entrepreneurial-minded students.

Sustainability Concerns

There is a significant concern about the long-term sustainability of a career as an influencer. Some respondents believe the career is not sustainable due to lack of job security, market saturation, and the transient nature of online popularity. As one interviewee mentioned, *"Certainly not, I don't see a career as a Social Media Influencer as a sustainable one."* These concerns are valid given the fast-paced nature of social media platforms, where trends and audience interests can shift rapidly. Additionally, the reliance on algorithms and the unpredictability of platform policies can add to the instability of this career path. Fame and income generated from social media can be fleeting, making it a risky long-term career option. The sustainability of a career as a social media influencer encompasses several aspects: economic, social, environmental, ethical, and personal development.

Students are aware that despite the potential for financial rewards and creative freedom, it is crucial to address the challenges of income instability, mental health issues, environmental impact, ethical concerns, and limited career longevity. To enhance the sustainability of this career path, influencers should diversify their income sources, establish clear work-life boundaries, promote responsible consumption, and continuously expand their skill set. While many see potential, the concern about sustainability is echoed in various responses. For instance, one respondent noted, *"Because we can gain more followers by doing business activities,"* highlighting the entrepreneurial aspect of influencing. Others emphasized the accessibility and impact, such as, *"Because it is easy to start our career, and we can positively influence people."* The potential for networking and business collaborations was also mentioned: *"Networking, the influencer industry offers opportunities to connect with different brands and people"* and *"For me, becoming a social media influencer also means getting opportunities for business collaborations and sponsorships."* Despite the concerns, some respondents recognize the opportunities for financial gain, creative expression, and audience engagement. Comments like, *"I think Social Media Influencer can become a career because it allows one to share con-*

tent and attract a large audience," and *"Because the influence of social media can cause someone to gain popularity and business opportunities,"* reflect the positive aspects of this career. Moreover, the potential to earn money quickly was noted by one participant who said, *"Because you get a chance to get more money in less time compared to traditional jobs."* These mixed sentiments illustrate that while the allure of a career as a social media influencer is strong, there is also a recognition of the inherent risks and the need for careful consideration of long-term sustainability.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantage: Flexibility and Freedom

Many respondents appreciate the flexible nature of being an influencer. They value the ability to set their schedules and the potential for work-life balance. One respondent stated, *"We can have a more free schedule because it is our career."* This flexibility particularly appeals to those who value autonomy and the ability to manage their own time. It allows influencers to pursue other interests, travel, or spend time with family, which is often impossible in traditional 9-to-5 jobs. This sentiment is echoed by others who emphasize the freedom and flexibility inherent in this career path. For instance, one respondent highlighted, *"Flexibility, many influencers enjoy the freedom to work on their terms and schedule."* Another respondent stated, *"Extra income, have work-life balance and more freedom in choosing what to do,"* illustrating the appeal of balancing work with personal life while also having the opportunity to earn additional income. This combination of flexibility and potential for financial rewards makes social media influencers attractive for those who prioritize a balanced and self-directed lifestyle. However, while freedom and autonomy are enticing, aspiring influencers must weigh these benefits against the potential challenges of income stability and long-term career sustainability.

Advantage: Financial Benefits

Some participants see the financial advantages, including the possibility of earning extra income and the benefits of business sponsorships. For example, *"Extra income, have work-life balance and more freedom."* A strong motivator is the potential to earn significant income through brand deals, sponsored content, and merchandise sales. Earnings can be highly variable and unpredictable, dependent on engagement rates, algorithm changes, and market demand for sponsored content. This financial independence can appeal to students looking to pay off debts or support their families.

Advantage: Personal Fulfilment

The opportunity to share passions, knowledge, and become well-known are significant motivators. One participant expressed excitement about *"Sharing my knowledge about the thing I passionate about."* This sense

of personal fulfillment and the ability to influence others positively can be highly rewarding. It allows individuals to build a community around their interests and values, creating a sense of accomplishment and purpose. This sentiment is shared by others who find fulfillment in connecting with a larger audience. One respondent noted, *"You can share your interests and passions with a wide audience, which can be very fulfilling."* The ability to turn personal passions into a platform for influence and community-building makes this career path particularly appealing to those seeking meaning and impact in their work.

Disadvantages: Lack of Job Security

A recurring theme is the insecurity associated with a career in social media. The volatile nature of online platforms and the dependency on continuous audience engagement are major drawbacks. *"No job security"* was a concise yet telling response. The fear of losing relevance or having one's account suspended or hacked are real concerns that can abruptly end an influencer's career. This lack of stability makes it difficult to plan for the future or secure traditional benefits like health insurance and retirement savings. Influencing is not a stable career path, and popularity can wane quickly. The career lifespan of an influencer can be short, especially without continuous innovation and adaptation. Other respondents echoed these concerns, highlighting the risks involved. One mentioned, *"Time by time we don't get more views or if we don't post more, it's very insecure,"* reflecting the pressure to maintain constant engagement. Another noted, *"No job security, the fame from social media is not guaranteed to last,"* emphasizing the precarious nature of this career. The risks extend beyond losing followers; as one respondent pointed out, *"We are more exposed to controversy and our location can be tracked easily, leading to insecurity,"* underlining the personal safety concerns influencers might face. The need to constantly maintain fame was also a worry: *"The fame that you obtained from social media needs to be maintained constantly, which is very risky."* The challenges of online harassment and the lack of security were further highlighted: *"Online harassment, vulnerable to online harassment and no job security,"* and *"Being a social media influencer has no job security, and it is unstable."* These perspectives illustrate the significant risks and uncertainties of pursuing a career as a social media influencer. As another respondent succinctly put it, *"The job is unstable, and there is no guarantee of consistent income,"* reinforcing the notion that while the rewards can be high, the dangers and insecurities are equally substantial.

Disadvantages: Exposure to Negative Aspects

Respondents highlighted exposure to online harassment, controversy, and the psychological impact of fame. One respondent noted, *"We are more exposed to controversy and our location can be tracked easily,"* reflecting concerns over privacy and safety. The constant scrutiny and pressure to maintain a positive image can lead to stress and mental health issues. Additionally, the risk of online harassment and cyberbullying can

have severe emotional and psychological impacts. Other respondents shared similar concerns, emphasizing the instability and mental strain associated with influencing. One mentioned, *"It's very insecure as it depends on the audience engagement which is not consistent,"* pointing out the unpredictable nature of audience behavior. The mental toll of maintaining a certain persona was also noted: *"Mental pressure to maintain a certain image and constant online presence,"* illustrating the relentless demand to stay relevant. The impact of negative feedback and criticism is another significant challenge, as one respondent expressed, *"Being exposed to negative comments and criticism which can affect mental health."* This sentiment was echoed by another who highlighted the dual risks of harassment and job insecurity: *"Online harassment, vulnerable to online harassment and no job security."* These insights underscore the psychological challenges that come with a career in social media influencing, where the rewards are often tempered by the emotional and mental health risks involved.

Disadvantages: Pressure to Maintain Relevance

Continuously producing engaging content and staying relevant was also seen as a significant pressure. One respondent mentioned, *"Time by time we don't get more views or if we don't post more,"* indicating the constant need to remain in the public eye. This pressure can lead to burnout and a loss of creativity. The algorithm-driven nature of social media platforms means that even a short break can significantly drop engagement and income, adding to the stress of maintaining an influencer career. Other respondents shared similar concerns, highlighting the challenges of keeping an audience engaged over time. One stated, *"Not really, people tend to get bored when they see the same thing repeatedly,"* emphasizing the difficulty of consistently capturing attention. Another added, *"I think it is not because we can't expect the same level of engagement forever,"* reflecting the inevitable decline in engagement many influencers face. The importance of innovation in sustaining a career as an influencer was also noted: *"A career as a social media influencer can be sustainable only if one can continuously innovate."* This need for constant creativity adds to the mental strain, as another respondent pointed out, *"Being exposed to negative comments and criticism which can affect mental health,"* further underscoring the emotional challenges involved. Multiple respondents reiterated the mental pressure to maintain a certain image and stay relevant. One mentioned *"Mental pressure to maintain a certain image and constant online presence,"* while another highlighted *"Exposure to negative feedback and the pressure to always stay relevant."* These factors, combined with the insecurity of fluctuating audience engagement, as one respondent stated, *"It's very insecure as it depends on the audience engagement which is not consistent,"* contribute to the overall stress and instability of a career in social media influencing. This collection of perspectives highlights the significant pressures and challenges of sustaining a social media influencer career, where the need for continuous innovation, relevance, and audience engagement can lead to burnout and mental health struggles.

Societal Perceptions and Peer View

Mixed Opinions on Peer Participation

There are mixed views about peers becoming influencers. Some respondents admire their peers' talent and confidence, while others are skeptical about the guarantees of success in this field. One interviewee mentioned, *"It's good for them who have courage and confidence,"* whereas another said, *"Don't hope too much, because it's not guaranteed."* This dichotomy reflects the varied perceptions of success in the influencer industry. While some see it as a platform for self-expression and entrepreneurial success, others view it as an unstable and competitive field with no guaranteed outcomes. Other respondents elaborated on this perspective, noting that *"They must face the challengers to become social media influencers. It's not easy but some are doing well,"* and *"About people my age becoming an influencer, it can be good for those who have the talent and confidence, but not everyone will succeed."* The competitive nature of the industry was also highlighted, with one respondent advising, *"Don't hope too much because it's not something guaranteed. There are many challenges and it's very competitive."* This mix of admiration and caution is further illustrated by comments like, *"It's good for them who have the courage and confidence to stand out and influence others positively,"* and *"I think they are very talented because they already have their followers, but it's not a guaranteed career."* These differing perspectives highlight the importance of a realistic understanding of the opportunities and challenges in the influencer industry.

Motivating Elements for Becoming Influencers

Aspiration for Fame and Recognition

Many respondents are excited by the prospect of becoming famous and gaining recognition. The idea of being known and admired by a large audience is appealing. One respondent reflected this desire by stating, *"The fact that I become a famous person and many people recognize me."* The allure of fame and the associated social status are strong motivators, as many students are drawn to the validation and admiration that comes from having a large following. Other respondents expressed similar sentiments, noting, *"The recognition and admiration from followers excites me,"* and adding, *"Becoming popular and known to a large audience is very appealing."* The excitement of gaining popularity was also highlighted by respondents who said, *"The popularity that comes with being an influencer is something that excites me,"* and *"I look forward to the recognition and the large following that comes with it."* The desire to be admired and known was summed up by another respondent: *"Being admired and known by many people is a major draw for me."* These responses illustrate that the prospect of fame and recognition of being a social media influencer are powerful motivators for students, driving their interest in pursuing this career path.

Creative and Personal Expression

Many students find the ability to express creativity and share personal interests motivating. One respondent highlighted this by saying, *"Sharing my knowledge about the thing I am passionate about,"* indicating a strong desire for self-expression through social media. This platform allows individuals to showcase their talents, hobbies, and unique perspectives, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Other respondents echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the appeal of creative freedom. One noted, *"Influencers from other countries know you, and you get to express your creativity,"* while another shared, *"To become YouTubers or content creators, sharing my interests and ideas."* The chance to share passions and connect with like-minded individuals was further emphasized with comments like, *"The chance to express myself and share what I love with others"* and *"Creating content that reflects my passions and interests."* The ability to showcase creativity and build connections is a significant draw, as highlighted by another respondent who said, *"The ability to showcase my creativity and connect with others who share similar interests."* These responses illustrate that creative freedom and opportunity for self-expression are key motivators for those interested in pursuing a career as a social media influencer, offering an alternative to conventional career paths and allowing individuals to explore their artistic or intellectual passions.

Discussion

The results indicate a complex and nuanced perspective among Malaysian Gen Z students regarding a career as a social media influencer. A career as a social media influencer can be highly rewarding for those who are passionate, creative, and willing to navigate its challenges. Success in this field requires strategic planning, resilience, and a deep understanding of the audience. While it offers flexibility and the potential for high earnings, it also demands a proactive approach to managing income stability, mental health, and the ever-changing landscape of social media platforms. This finding aligns with the aspect of work-life balance identified in a systematic literature review conducted by Barhate and Dirani (2022). As addressed by the study Gen Z, regardless of gender, values work-life balance in their future careers. Ernst and Young (2020) reported similar expectations between men and women for flexible hours, time off for personal interests, and remote work options. Other studies (Arar & Öneren, 2018; Bohdziewicz, 2016; Hampton & Welsh, 2019; Puiu, 2017; Fodor et al., 2017) also confirmed Gen Z's strong preference for work-life balance, with the potential for them to pressure organisations to accommodate this need. Companies that offer work-life balance are more likely to attract and retain Gen Z employees.

While there is enthusiasm about the flexibility, potential income, and personal fulfilment that such a career can bring, there are also significant concerns about its sustainability and the pressures involved. The mixed feelings about societal acceptance and peer involvement in social media influence suggest that while

this career path is attractive to many, it is not without its perceived risks and challenges. The allure of fame, financial independence, and creative freedom are counterbalanced by the fears of job insecurity, mental health issues, and the relentless pressure to stay relevant. Overall, this study highlights the importance of addressing the concerns of job security, mental health, and market saturation while exploring the potential of social media influencing as a viable career option for future generations. This corresponds to a study conducted by An and Haryanto (2021) where the scholars identified that for those aspiring to become SMIs, it's important to realize that sustaining a long-term commitment, whether as a career or a side job for income, relies on staying intrinsically motivated and keeping that motivation throughout the journey. Thus, there is a need for better support systems, education on digital literacy, and strategies to manage the pressures associated with this career. By addressing these concerns comprehensively, creating a more supportive and sustainable environment for social media influencers is possible. This involves a combination of education, mental health support, diversification strategies, community building, and advocating for fair treatment and protection. Understanding and tackling these challenges will benefit individual influencers and contribute to the overall health and stability of the influencer industry. On the other hand, Gen Z students looking to become social media influencers face opportunities and challenges in the fast-changing digital and gig economies. The growing digital landscape boosts influencer demand, offering new career and financial opportunities (Andreani et al., 2021; Raza et al., 2022). However, this growth requires strategic career planning (Artemova, 2018). Schools and policymakers should incorporate digital skills and entrepreneurship into their teaching (Bellaaj, 2023). Emphasising mental health and providing support for online challenges is crucial. Partnerships between schools and industry can create mentorship and hands-on learning experiences, preparing students for dynamic careers and ensuring sustainable growth and economic stability for future generations.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of Malaysian Higher Education Institution (HEI) Gen Z students' perceptions of pursuing a career as a social media influencer within the gig economy. The research highlights this career path's duality, presenting its allure and inherent challenges. On the positive side, the flexibility, potential financial rewards, and personal fulfilment associated with being a social media influencer are significant motivators for students. The ability to set one's schedule, engage in creative expression, and achieve financial independence are compelling benefits that align with the entrepreneurial spirit and digital fluency of Gen Z. However, the study also underscores substantial concerns about the sustainability and security of this career. Students are acutely aware of the potential instability, the pressure to maintain relevance, and the risks of online harassment and mental health issues. These concerns reflect a broader apprehension about the transient nature of online popularity and the unpredictable dynamics

of social media platforms. The mixed societal perceptions and peer pressure further complicate these students' decision-making processes. While some admire the confidence and success of their peers in the influencer industry, others remain sceptical about the long-term viability of such a career. In conclusion, while the career of a social media influencer offers exciting opportunities, it is fraught with significant challenges that need to be carefully navigated. A balanced and strategic approach, coupled with robust support systems and education on digital literacy, is essential for aspiring influencers. Addressing job security, mental health, and market saturation is crucial for creating a sustainable environment for this career path. Future research and policies should focus on developing comprehensive support mechanisms to help young individuals make informed career decisions in the evolving digital economy.

Author contributions

All authors contributed equally to this work.

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