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Formative Evaluation of Arabic Language Modules Based on Blended Learning

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Abstract

The development of teaching and learning materials is an important process in ensuring the continuity of dynamic education. The materials developed must be in line with the passage of time and technological developments. To balance the speed of technology and the touch of humanity, teaching and learning based on blended learning is implemented. In the development of teaching and learning materials based on blended learning, various processes and procedures need to be verified to ensure the quality of production of a material. This study was aimed to examine the feedback of lecturers and students in the formative assessment of Arabic language modules developed in a blended learning environment. This study involved a total of 4 lecturers and 14 students of Sultan Zainal Abidin University who took basic Arabic language courses. Data were collected through checklists and brief interviews were conducted with study respondents in several evaluation sessions including individual evaluation, and small group evaluation. The findings of the study showed that in general, lecturers and students acknowledge that the developed module is suitable for use in a blended learning environment in addition to some suggestions for module improvement.

Keywords: Formative Assessment, Arabic Language Module, Blended Learning

Introduction

Arabic is a language that is very synonymous with Muslims around the world. Arabic is used for various purposes including; worship, education, tourism, economy and so on. Arabic is one of the international languages that first established itself in Malaysia more than 500 years ago (Jumingan, 2010).

In Malaysia, Arabic language has been applied in the field of education and is one of the subjects offered in various levels of study. This includes kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and university levels. This situation shows that the Arabic language has developed rapidly in Malaysia -- whose official religion is Islam. Arabic has been gazetted in the Education Act 1996 as a foreign language in the Malaysian Education curriculum.

Teaching and learning Arabic is more likely to study traditional means such as books or scriptures. The teacher will present the lesson in front of the class, and students must pay attentively while copying the notes. Since its inception, this approach has been used extensively and continues to be used today. However, given the rapid pace of modern

technology, teaching methods must be modified in order to keep up with the passage of time, particularly in today's technological boom. Teaching and learning Arabic requires all parties, including teachers and students, to accept change by incorporating technology into teaching and learning sessions.

The usage of technology in teaching and learning has become a requirement due to the numerous benefits that technology has offered in several industries. Nowadays, it is clear that technological dependence is ubiquitous throughout a wide range of disciplines, including education. Regardless, a touch of humanity cannot be ruled out, despite the immense ease and benefits provided by technology. To strike a balance between humanity's requirements and the application of technology in teaching and learning so that blended learning is recognised as a viable option.

Blended learning generally means learning that incorporates the use of technology as well as face-to-face (Bliuc, Goodyear & Ellis 2007; Graham 2006; Sharma & Barrett 2007). This situation provides space for students to experience different learning experiences when the teaching and learning process runs in two approaches, namely face-to-face and online. These two approaches have their own distinct advantages and when combined, they will give many advantages to students.

Through online learning with the optimal use of technology, students will learn in a more flexible environment while being able to celebrate the individual differences of students. While face-to-face learning, students have the opportunity to meet teachers and friends physically which to some extent can influence the psychological aspects of students.

Background of Research

Many attempts have been taken to ensure the continuity of Arabic teaching and learning in Malaysia, which involves different levels, including making the teaching and learning process of Arabic in line with the passage of time. The need to generate Arabic teaching and learning materials in electronic form and deliver them online has become one of the key objectives in this age of technological expansion. As a result, work on generating Arabic teaching and learning content in electronic and online formats is well underway. In any case, material development is a difficult process that necessitates thorough execution of all material development procedures.

Generally, in the module development process there are 4 main phases namely needs analysis phase, design and development phase, implementation phase and evaluation phase (Richey & Klein, 2007). The first phase aims to collect material development requirements data. The second phase is the design and material development phase. This phase is of paramount importance because the design and development phase of the material takes place during this phase. In the third phase which is the last phase is to evaluate the usability of the developed module.

The second step is critical to guaranteeing a module's effective development. During this phase, a process of formative review and refinement will be performed to verify that the material developed is of high quality and meets the development objectives. At the material development stage, the formative evaluation process assesses the strengths and flaws of instructions or information. Its goal is to improve the material's effectiveness and appeal. This assessment was carried out by gathering data on teaching from a range of sources and utilising a variety of data collection methods and instruments (Flagg, 2013; Tessmer, 1993).

The usage of technology in Arabic teaching and learning is not thought to be at its optimum. According to a study by Ab Majid & Ismail (2018), Arabic language educators' technological skills are still at a reasonable level. Educators are also more likely to employ traditional methods in the Arabic teaching and learning process, rather than relying on technology (Mustafa & Arifin, 2012; Abdullah, Abu Bakar & Baghdawan 2011; Yusri et. Al, 2012; Rahman, Ali & Wan Ahmad, 2008)

Previous research has revealed that one of the obstacles in Arabic teaching and learning is the lack of appropriate learning support resources, in addition to the fact that the present materials are uninteresting and need to be enhanced (Abdul Razak & Samah, 2006; Aladdin, 2013; Abdullah et.al., 2015). While in terms of software content, the teaching and learning Arabic method necessitates the creation of high-quality materials (Saad, Ismail & Abdullah, 2005).

Based on the discussion of learning materials in teaching and learning Arabic, it is obvious that there are flaws in the development of appropriate resources in the teaching and learning Arabic process. Furthermore, the use of technology is still considered as having little place in Arabic teaching and learning. As a result, this research was carried out in order to create a systematic electronic module that focuses on the procedures that must be followed in the development of high-quality Arabic teaching and learning materials. The goal of this research was to see how formative evaluation was carried out during module creation.

Research Objective

This study aims to examine the formative assessment procedures carried out in the process of development of Arabic language materials based on blended learning. This developed module is an electronic module that is an important component in blended learning. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To study students' views on the development of Arabic language modules based on blended learning.
- 2) To study the lecturers' views on the development of Arabic language modules based on blended learning.

Methodology

The second phase of the development of Arabic teaching and learning materials will be the focus of this research. The material development design is carried out in tandem with the formative assessment during this phase. A questionnaire (checklist) was used for formative evaluation, which was modified for this study based on previous research. Four lecturers and fourteen students were involved in this formative evaluation. Figure 1 depicts the formative assessment approach used in this study (Tessmer 1993; Flagg, 1990; Dick & Carey, 2005; Morrison et al., 2007).

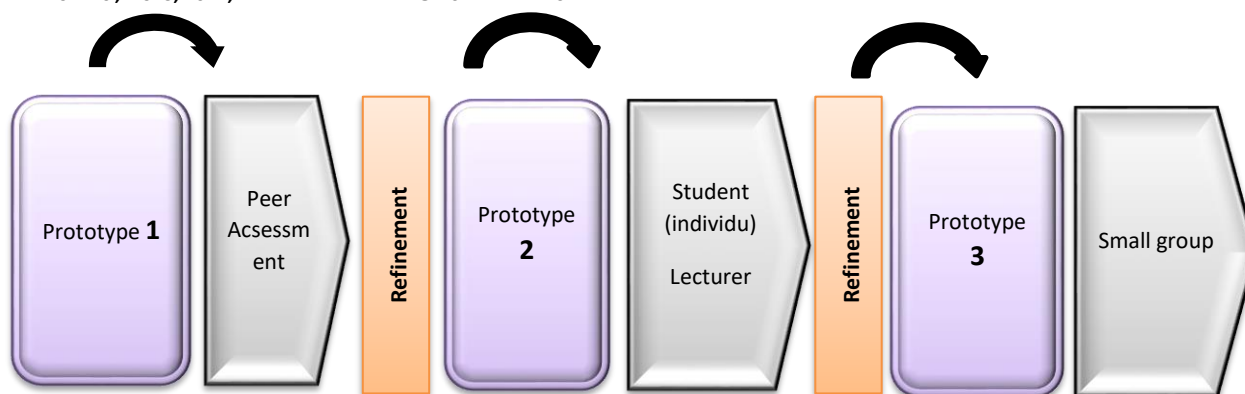


Figure 1 The formative assessment process of Arabic language modules

In the early stages of the development of this arabic teaching and learning module named as prototype 1, self -assessment and peer review in the field were conducted. All module weaknesses were identified and improved subsequently, which then prototype 2 was produced. At this stage, the evaluation has involved two parties, namely the evaluation from the lecturer and also from the students individually. Prototype 3 is the outcome of individual refinement based on feedback from lecturers and students. Prototype 3 is evaluated by putting it to the test in a small group of students. All of the feedback and ideas on prototype 3 were refined before the final version was created and evaluated in the study's last phase, which was the implementation and evaluation phase.

Findings and Discussion

In the process of refining the developed learning materials, formative assessment was conducted based on the procedure that has been outlined by Tessmer (1993). Tessmer has outlined several stages of formative assessment that begin with self or peer assessment. This is followed by individual assessment with students. Next comes an evaluation from the teachers or lecturers involved. Once refined, once again the developed material will be tested with a small group of students. Details of each assessment that has been conducted as per the next discussion.

Peer Assessment

Self-assessment and peer review are the initial steps after completing a prototype 1 module. After prototype 1 was completed, the researcher conducted a self-evaluation. While in the field, fellow lecturers have a role in providing initial feedback on the modules that have just been finished. There may be flaws in the research that the researcher is unaware of. After reviewing the prototype 1, the researcher's peer provided feedback. The general consensus was that each of the themes' designs needed to be refined so that the future uniform would be more intriguing and neater.

Individual Students Assessments

After executing the refining based on the lecturer's peer's recommendations, each student was evaluated individually. Prototype 2 was created based on self-evaluation and feedback from fellow lecturers. This student evaluation is done one-on-one, with two students and a researcher in each session. A total of four students, two males and two females, were asked to use the produced modules. Face-to-face meetings are held to guarantee that students'

thoughts and recommendations are solicited. All comments and suggestions from students are recorded for consideration in the refinement process at a later stage. Among the main suggestions from the students is to put a translation for each text as they are students of Arabic who have no foundation. The prototype 2 of this module has used Arabic completely without being accompanied by a translation into Malay. These student suggestions are considered for the module improvement process. There are also other comments and suggestions and they are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Individual Assessment Students' Comments

Student	Gender	Suggestion
Student 1	Male	i. Include a Malay translation of the content and instructions.
Student 2	Male	ii. Students still require guidance from lecturers in addition to using this material.
Student 3	Female	iii. Students face vocabulary problems. Therefore, translation is very necessary.
Student 4	Female	iv. Understands during a learning session but is confused when trying to apply it.
		v. Strongly agree that the material should be used in learning Arabic.

Comments from the Lecturer

The material was also evaluated with the instructors who teach the Arabic language course to gain their opinion on it. The lecturer has expertise teaching Arabic to students with no prior knowledge of the language. As a result, they are thought to be particularly qualified to make a judgement based on their experience. Their opinions were valued for assisting in the refinement of this newly produced module. This evaluation session included three lecturers in all. Table 2 shows the lecturer's details.

Table 2 Lecturers' Demographic Information

No	Identification	Position	Gender	Academic Qualifications	Teaching Experience
1	PSY 4	Lecturer	Male	Masters	7 years
2	PSY 5	Lecturer	Male	Masters	8 years
3	PSY 6	Lecturer	Male	Masters	7 years

After reviewing this developed module, in general the lecturers agreed that this developed module is suitable to be implemented in teaching and learning Arabic based on blended learning environment. The lecturers also left their comments and feedback as shown in Table 3.

Among the aspects touched upon by the lecturers who teach this course were the proposed modules using Arabic in the forum section, multiplying drill questions to help students to

better master the topic and add external links containing material produced by native Arabic speakers. Suggestions from the lecturers were considered and the next module was refined.

Table 3 Lecturer's Comments

Suggestions/ Comments	Lecturer 1	Lecturer 2	Lecturer 3
1. Forums should be relevant to learning topics and there should be at least some use of Arabic language	/		/
2. Use of materials before and after teaching and learning in the classroom	/		
3. This material's syllabus corresponds to students' comprehension levels.	/		
4. There needs to be many drills and exercises	/		
5. The animations are very interesting to the students		/	
6. The animation used is suitable for new/unfamiliar students		/	
7. Strongly agree that the content developed in the form of videos attracts attention to follow the learning of Arabic.		/	
8. This material is very helpful for students in revision		/	
9. This material is very good for pioneering and improving language learning through appropriate skills in increasing the motivation and inclination of students to learn Arabic.		/	
10. External links are added with material produced by native speakers. This is to give space to students to master the right style of language (uslub)			/

Small Group Students Assessment

After going through three refinement processes that started with peer assessment of lecturers, individual student assessment and assessment of lecturers who have taught, the module was finally tested in small groups of students. At this stage a prototype of 3 modules is produced. A total of 10 students were involved in this session. These students consisted of 3 male students and 7 female students. They were asked to go to a computer lab to use this module. Before the session began, students were given a briefing and instructions for the use of the module were given. Table 4 displays demographic information involving small group students.

Table 4 Composition of small group students

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	3	30
	Female	7	70
	Total	10	100
Arabic language background	No Basis at Primary School Level	6	60
	Primary School Level	3	30
	PMR Level	1	10
	Total	10	100

The module is offered to students with plenty of time to use it. The students became more enthusiastic about using the module as the session went, and they even begged for permission to use it after the testing session was completed. This student has taken a traditional Arabic language learning class that relied solely on books and did not include the use of technology support tools.

Following the module testing session with the small group, a quick group interview was held to obtain feedback from the students on the generated module. This module's student feedback was summarised in Table 5. All of the students agreed that the programme was both fascinating and easy to comprehend, with a variety of acceptable colours. These modules are also exhibited progressively, according to the students, and students learn step by step. The material of this module which is a continuation of the material learned in class has helped the students to more easily understand the topic and helped to recall what was learned. However, there are problems that occur out of control, namely the problem of internet access and a relatively slow server.

Table 5 Small Group Interview Comment

Comment	Group 1	Group 2
1 Interesting and colorful	/	/
2 Easy to understand	/	/
3 Interesting included with pictures and sounds	/	
4 Step by step learning		/
5 Summarised topics facilitate comprehension		/
6 Easy to understand because it is combined with learning in the classroom		/
7 Helps recall what have been learned		/
8 Internet access problem		/
9 Slow material from server		/

Based on the results of the formative assessment, it can be stated that this procedure necessitates strategy, thoroughness, and, most importantly, time to complete each stage of assessment. This module's formative evaluation included lecturers and students, two parties actively involved in the teaching and learning process, to guarantee that this module could be examined from a variety of perspectives. As a result, this formative assessment has successfully helped to produce the best modules, meeting the needs of the students and in line with the wishes of the teachers. All comments and suggestions are considered to produce a final version that will be tested in the final phase i.e. in the actual classroom.

Conclusion

This study reported that lecturers and students agree that the developed module is applicable for use in a blended learning setting in addition to some recommendation for module improvement. The development of modules in teaching and learning is one of the important aspects that need to be given attention to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning runs in line with the passage of time. The module development process involves various procedures so that the modules produced are of quality and meet the objectives. For studies that involve module development, formative research is one of the aspects that should be given priority. Formative assessment is one of the important procedures in module development before the final assessment can be carried out. Stakeholders need to be involved in the formative evaluation of the module. Therefore, the formative assessment process is one of the main pillars that need to be carried out carefully in the module development process.

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