# THE IMPACT OF STUDENT RESPONSE SYSTEM (SRS) ON STUDENTS' BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS OF ENGAGEMENT DURING TERTIARY LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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## SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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# THE IMPACT OF STUDENT RESPONSE SYSTEM (SRS) ON STUDENTS' BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS OF ENGAGEMENT DURING TERTIARY LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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# ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji corak tingkah laku fizikal pelajar di dalam kelas yang menggunakan Sistem Respon Pelajar (SRS) berbanding dengan tingkah laku mereka di dalam kelas tanpa penggunaan SRS dan 2) perspektif pelajar mengenai penggunaan SRS di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Sampel kajian ialah 35 orang pelajar yang mengambil kursus kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris di sebuah universiti tempatan. Pemerhatian bilik darjah, nota lapangan dan temu ramah telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data. Data telah dianalisa dan triangulasi secara kualitatif menggunakan kaedah analisis tematik. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan pelajar lebih aktif melibatkan diri secara fizikal dalam setiap aktiviti yang menggunakan SRS berbanding semasa aktiviti tanpa penggunaan SRS. Pelajar juga berpandangan bahawa penggunaan SRS membolehkan mereka melibatkan diri dengan lebih aktif dan mahu lebih banyak aktiviti di dalam kelas dijalankan menggunakan SRS. Berdasarkan dapatan kajian ini, boleh disimpulkan bahawa SRS ialah alat yang efektif untuk meningkatkan penglibatan pelajar secara fizikal. Implikasi kajian ini adalah SRS boleh dgunakan untuk memberi motivasi kepada pelajar supaya melibatkan diri dengan lebih aktif di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris.
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# THE IMPACT OF STUDENT RESPONSE SYSTEM (SRS) ON STUDENTS' BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS OF ENGAGEMENT DURING TERTIARY LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## ABSTRACT

The aims of this study were to 1) compare and contrast students' behavioural patterns of engagement during lessons activities with and without the utilisation of Student Response System (SRS) and 2) gauge students' perspectives on the use of SRS in English language classrooms. The participants of this study were 35 students undertaking an English proficiency course at a local university. This study employed classroom observations, field notes and interviews to gather the data. They were qualitatively analysed and triangulated using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that the participants displayed more engaged patterns of behaviours in the classrooms that utilised SRS compared to their behaviours in the ones without SRS. Students also viewed the utilisation of SRS as engaging and preferred to have more lessons with SRS. Based on the results of this study, it may be concluded that SRS was an effective tool to increase students' behavioural patterns of engagement. The implication of the study is that SRS could be utilised to encourage more engaging patterns of behaviour in English language classrooms.

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| | |
|---|---|
| BERI | Behavioural Engagement Related to Instruction |
| CEFR | Common European Framework of Reference for Languages |
| EP3 | English Proficiency 3 |
| EP4 | English Proficiency 4 |
| GE | General English |
| HEI | Higher Education Institutions |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IELTS | International English Language Testing System |
| MUET | Malaysian University English Test |
| Q&A | Question and Answer |
| RQ | Research Question |
| SCT | Sociocultural Theory |
| SPM | Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia |
| SRS | Student Response System |
| TOEFL | Test of English as a Foreign Language |
| UPSI | Sultan Idris Education University |

# LIST OF APPENDICES

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

## 1.1　Introduction

This chapter gives a brief introduction and summary of this research study. This chapter commences with a brief overview of the research, starting with a background study and a statement of problems. Research objectives were identified under the problem statements. Following that, few research questions were constructed. The significance and limitations of this study were included. The chapter ends with the definition of terms.

## 1.2　Background Study

The Malay language, or Bahasa Melayu, is the national language of Malaysia and is widely used in our education system as one of the leading media of instruction, especially in public schools and universities. Because of the aspiration and the need to

move into a new era of innovative and knowledge-based one, the government has allowed English to be used extensively as an alternative medium of instruction, especially in private-based Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The necessity of using the English language in Malaysia, especially in the education sector, has always been a priority as the language is considered the dominant lingua franca of the academic world (Faber, 2010).

As we look into the need for English language integration, researchers Selvaraj, Anbalangan and Azlin (2014) said that Malaysia has evolved from a production-based to a knowledge-based economy to stay relevant and compete in the global marketplace. That is why the change into an innovative era is essential for the education system as our standard of education has to respond to globalization and internationalization. Even our former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, also lauds the use of the English language in our education system. He had emphasised the need for the lingua franca by saying that "Mastering English in terms of teaching and learning is crucial as it is an international language needed for management and administration and it helps in employment opportunities" (Star Online, 2019).

The country also aspires to make Malaysia an education hub that is internationally recognised. Similarly, the nation's aspiration aligns perfectly with the vision and mission of the Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), which strives to be the number one university in the region with education as its niche (Utusan Online, 2018). Thus, the emphasis on English language usage among higher education institutions, including public universities like UPSI, is continuously growing and ever demanding.

That is why numerous English proficiency tests such as IELTS and TOEFL are used in academic institutions throughout the world for admission and placement purposes in HEIs. In Malaysia, the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) is used to measure proficiency, a prerequisite for admission, and also as placement in various academic programmes (Rethinasamy & Chuah, 2011). In most HEIs like UPSI, the tertiary level students also need to sit for English language papers to ensure that the students are well-versed and continuously exposed to the language.

All UPSI students must obtain at least a minimum MUET band, stipulated by their respective faculties before graduating. All students must attend and pass their compulsory English Proficiency papers as a prerequisite to graduate. English Proficiency papers referred to as BIU2032 (EP3) and BIU2042 (EP4) must be included as a part of all students' courses of study. Additional language enrichment course is known as General English - BIU3013 (GE) is also made compulsory for students who are unable to achieve the minimum MUET Band, usually Band 3 or higher (UPSI's Academic Circular, 2018).

This is just an overview of the emphasis taken by HEIs like UPSI on students' English language teaching and learning. Emphasis on the need to take and excel in English language proficiency classes and courses is continued even in their tertiary level of education. The influence of English language learning in HEIs; influenced by the aspiration of the country and the adaptation of our education system towards that aspiration; values the importance of the English language without undermining the status of our national language.

## 1.3    Problem Statements

Malaysia tertiary level students studying in higher educations are ideally competent English language users who can communicate and use the language without any major complications. It is a fact that these students had been exposed to at least a minimum of 11 years of formal English language education, spanning from the primary to the secondary school levels. There are even compulsory assessments or tests such as Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) that most students must go through to assess their English language skills, including their English proficiency level (Yvonne, J., Gurnam Kaur Sidhu & Beh, K. L., 2012).

According to the former Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh (Star Online, 2017), Malaysian undergraduates' English language competency should be at a minimum of 'B2' Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level before they enter their varsity. The B2 level describes that the students can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity and even be able to produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain viewpoints (North, 2015). As those descriptors imply, undergraduates in higher education institutions are expected to be functional, competent, independent users of the English language.

However, the fact remains where most tertiary level students are still struggling with their English language use even after years of learning English in schools. A vast majority of Malaysian students are still unable to gain a good mastery of the language (Yvonne Jain, Gurnam Kaur Sidhu & Beh Kian Lim, 2012). Even the former Higher Education Minister, Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh admitted that most of the current

undergraduates who are enrolled in undergraduate studies fall under the CEFR B1 level, which is, having the ability to use the language only with limited vocabularies and interact regarding familiar matters (Menon, 2017). The English competency of most tertiary level students is not up to par compared to what is expected of them when they enter universities or colleges.

More than half of the graduates produced annually by Malaysian public universities demonstrate a low level of English language competence required by potential employers (Mardziah Hayati, Ho & Wong, 2015). The National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 commissioned by the Ministry of Higher Education also found that more than half (54%) of undergraduate students from six Malaysian universities had only a limited command of English. These studies easily refute the assumptions of many about varsity students having achieved at least CEFR B2 level by the time they enter their undergraduate studies.

According to Pappamihiel's (2002), lack of English mastery among learners can be linked to the teachers. They often overlook students' lack of engagement in the classroom and limited cognitive skills in English as they emphasise more on students' language proficiency. Recent investigations showed that higher education institutions are facing more signs of disengagement or lack of commitment rather than engagement (Kazmi, 2010). Siti Maziha and Nik Suryani (2011) define the term "negatively passive participation" that reflect student behaviours as quiet, not concerned about class activities, not interested in the lessons and remain in their dream world. Zainal Abidin Sayadin (2007) also revealed that less than 20% of students asked questions to the lecturer during class.

As one of the language instructors in a public university, I can relate to myself and my classroom students to similar issues when teaching English courses. I have repeatedly seen my students being inattentive and rarely engaged throughout our English language lessons. Moreover, the students are consistently passive and always fearful of using the language. Being a language instructor at UPSI, I believe the responsibility to improve the situation comes from the educators. As educators, we are responsible for the students we teach, and our current teaching methods or tools have significant impacts on students' engagement in the classroom.

Being motivated by my own experience of using educational tech-based tools to engage students, I believe that the student response system (SRS) could be the tool educators need to bring back engagement in their classroom lessons. With that purpose in mind, this study intends to study the similarities and differences in students' patterns of behaviour for engagement. Patterns of engagement in this context are referring to a comparison between a classroom lesson without any Student Response System (SRS) and a classroom that integrates the use of SRS in its lesson.

SRS is an interactive remote answering system that offers instructors a way to gain some simple real-time feedback from the students (Egelandsdal & Krumsvik, 2017). It is a technological platform that is used by both educators and students with the aid of the internet and personal gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, laptops etc. Although there are many types of SRS available, most of them function in a similar manner in a classroom. A teacher poses a question or task to his or her students via an overhead or computer projector. Students, on the other hand, provide an appropriate response for the task given using a handheld transmitter or a 'clicker' (Thomas, Pinter, Carlisle, & Goran, 2015). Technology-backed learning environment like this will

trigger an interactive classroom, motivating students to participate and interact with others in the learning process (Fui-Theng & Mai, 2014).

Due to the integration of game elements (Gressick & Langston, 2017) like rankings, scores and awards, student engagement intertwines with the use of such a tool in any educational setting. SRSs are blooming as one of the most applied educational tools of the 21$^{st}$-century simply because of its' ability to facilitate teaching activities by 'gamifying' educational activities and interactions (Wang et al., 2016). This situation naturally promotes a more conducive environment for learning to occur among learners. The element of 'gamifying' mentioned above plays a crucial factor in the usage of SRSs as the physical tool in this study. It further helps to understand its influence on the other focus of the study, student engagement.

## 1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the problem statements, the research objectives are:

  i.   To observe the patterns of students' engagement during English language activities **without the utilisation** of student response systems (SRS).

  ii.  To observe the patterns of students' engagement during English language activities **with the utilisation** of student response systems (SRS).

  iii. To **compare and contrast** the patterns of students' engagement during different English language activities (**with vs without** SRS)

iv. To find out students' perspectives regarding the use of student response systems (SRS) in promoting classroom engagement.

## 1.5 Research Questions

Constructed from the research objectives stated above, the research questions are:

i. What are the patterns of students' engagement during English language activities **without the utilisation** of student response systems (SRS)?

ii. What are the patterns of students' engagement during English language activities **with the utilisation** of student response systems (SRS)?

iii. Are there any **similarities and differences** in the patterns of students' engagement during the language activities with and without SRS?

iv. How do **students perceive** the use of student response systems (SRS) in promoting classroom engagement?

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

This study may prove to be significant in the aspect of innovative teaching and learning for both teachers and learners. The findings of this research provide a purpose for educators in changing their conventional way of teaching and adopt the use of interactive educational tools in planning their lessons. This notion is further justified by Fui-Theng and Mai (2014) who mentioned that the advancement of technologies had stimulated the production of more exciting and practical approaches in teaching and learning, as we live in the 21st-century media-suffused environment.

Another significance that this study might provide to the educators is an alternative mean in assessing the presence of students' engagement in their classroom activities. By taking note of observable patterns that denote students' engagement in this study, teachers may observe the presence of such patterns in their classroom when they conduct their activities (with or without SRS) to get a quick but general overview of their students' behaviour and actions.

This study could help educators to identify their students' responses towards their choice of the educational tool since such observations will provide comfortable, convenient and real-time feedback. Such situations can trigger educators to reflect on their way of teaching and innovate their classroom activities with more engaging tools such as SRS. Educators could primarily detect and assume the presence of engagement students may have in their classroom environment by merely observing them casually during the teaching and learning process.

## 1.7    Limitation of the Study

One major limitation in carrying out this study would be the participants' ICT literacy while utilising the student response system in language lessons. ICT literacy is defined as the ability to use digital technology, communication tools, and networks for various purposes. (International ICT Literacy Panel, 2002). According to Katz & Macklin (2006), many college students still lack information and communication technology (ICT) literacy skills such as responding, locating, evaluating and communicating information using technology.

In this context of the study, the sample participants need to be able to handle and utilise their gadgets (smartphones/tablets/laptops) at a basic level. The application of student response systems is an interactive learning platform that requires the students to respond and answer using their gadgets. Inability to use the student response systems during language activities due to illiteracy of utilising such platforms will affect their responses during the study. The need for the participants' literacy in fully utilising student response systems without any difficulties and confusion is significant to hinder any invalidity in data collection during the study.

Another factor that could impact the flow of the study is the limitation of time. Sample participants are chosen entirely from undergraduate students who are currently taking English Proficiency classes at Sultan Idris Education University. The structure of the subjects or courses is limited to only 14 weeks, whereby the students are only exposed to a maximum of 2 hours of English lessons per week. This course structurisation confines the execution of the research and its procedure within the time limit of only 14 weeks, with 2 hours per lesson. It is crucial to take into account these limitations in future in order the better plan the research procedure.

To minimise the impact of the above-mentioned study limitations on the research study, specific precautionary steps will be taken by the researcher. For instance, the sample participants chosen for the study are given proper guidance on how to utilise SRS before the study. Students are made aware of the steps to utilise the SRSs required for the lesson properly. The researcher wanted to ensure that their illiteracy in using the platforms does not influence the findings.

The researcher will pre-plan with the corresponding instructor that will execute the lessons in the classroom. Language content and the activities (with and without SRS) are designed to cater to the time constraint, as mentioned earlier. The time constraint is within the 2-hour contact time with students. The emphasis of the lessons is on the language activities as that is when the researcher will acquire the core data collection for the study.

## 1.8    Definition of Terms

### 1.8.1    Student Response System (SRS)

A student response system is a set of hardware and software that facilitate teaching activities. An interactive remote answering device offers instructors a means to gain some simple, real-time feedback from the students. It is a technological platform that is used by both educators and students with the aid of the internet and personal gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops. This educational technology is also known as a personal response system, classroom response system, audience response system and clickers. In this research, the term SRS will be used extensively.

Most student response systems work similarly for a classroom setting. A teacher poses a multiple-choice question to his or her students via an overhead or computer projector. Each student submits an answer to the question using a handheld transmitter (clicker) that beams a signal to a receiver attached to the teacher's computer. The SRS software on the teacher's computer collects the students' answers and produces a

summary of each answer choice while promoting competitive rankings between students. The teacher then makes immediate instructional choices in response to the feedback, lead students in a discussion of the merits of each answer choice and ask students to discuss the question in small groups and so on.

Different types of SRS platforms are available for educators to utilize in their classrooms. Some of the common choices of SRSs that can be adapted for educational settings are Kahoot, Quizlet, Quizizz, Socratives, Mentimeter and many more. Apart from the minor differences in the application features, most of these SRS has the same modus operandi for educational use. For instance, the application of SRS 'Kahoot' is commonly started by connecting the teacher's computer to a large screen that shows questions and possible answers, and the students give their answers as fast and correct as possible on their own digital devices. A distribution chart of how all the students have answered will be given. Between each question, a scoreboard shows the nicknames and scores of the top five students, and at the end of the game, the high scores are announced.

### 1.8.2    English Language Classroom Activities

In the context of this study, the language activities mentioned is referring to the different types of activities that the instructor/teacher conduct during a classroom lesson. These activities are usually carried out by the instructor after a lesson's 'activity' stage. It is important to note that the language activities carried out in the language classroom will be based on the language component being taught or explained in that particular lesson.

The choice of language activities conducted also may vary according to the need of the lesson and language content. All activities will require some sort of response, action, or even feedback from the students based on the requirement and instruction given by the instructor.

The instructor may choose to conduct a quiz, discussion, group activity or even a question and answer (Q&A) session as a part of the lesson. The only manipulation factor in the study would be the tool used to carry out those activities. For a language activity without SRS, the activity can utilize any other teaching and learning material such as books, PowerPoint slides or even videos as part of their tool. As for the lesson with SRS, the instructor must utilize any suitable SRS as the main tool to carry out the language activities. It could be utilized whether to initiate discussion or group activity, have Q&A sessions with students or for different types of quizzing.

For this research, the researcher; with the help of the instructor; had devised two categories of lessons. The first category of lessons was classified as lessons 'without SRS' while the other category of lessons was classified as lessons 'with SRS'. A total of 6 consecutive lessons were planned by the researcher and the language instructor before carrying out this study.

Out of the six lessons, the first three lessons 'without SRS' will not use the SRS tool in conducting its language activities. That would refer to the usual use of materials like books and modules (written) and common Q&A sessions (spoken). The next three lessons 'with SRS' were the ones that will utilise the use of SRS as a mediated tool that helps students to participate in a similar kinds of language activities. Kahoot! or Quizlet are some of the types of SRS platforms that will be used to investigate the observable

difference between these lessons. The complete lesson plans and flow of the language activities are included in the Appendix section for reference.

### 1.8.3    Gamifying Language Activities using SRS

SRS tools are known for their engaging characteristics due to the integration of game elements (Gressick & Langston, 2017) like rankings, scores and awards. The element of student engagement is commonly influenced by the use of such a tool in any educational setting. SRSs are blooming as one of the most applied educational tools of the 21$^{st}$-century simply because of its' ability to facilitate teaching activities by 'gamifying' educational activities and interactions (Wang et al., 2016). This situation naturally promotes a more conducive environment for learning to occur among learners.

The element of 'gamifying' mentioned above plays a crucial factor in the usage of SRSs as the engagement tool in this study. It further helps to understand its influence on the other focus of the study, student engagement. In recent years, gamification or game-based learning; which comprises the use of tools like SRSs; has become a widely adopted pedagogical approach (Seaborn & Fels, 2015).  That is why the researcher opted to observe the behaviours of students when a lesson 'gamified' with SRS and compare it to the lesson without any SRS tool. The researcher wanted to observe the changes in student behaviours if there was any, and cross-reference those changes to previously-established attributes of student engagement such as Behavioural Engagement Related to Instruction (BERI) indicators.

### 1.8.4   Student Engagement

The term engagement, for this study, refers to the patterns of behaviours that students may portray during a language activity. To define, patterns of student behaviour in this context are referring to observable indicators that students might express when they are engaged in their classroom lesson. Some examples of such patterns are as follows:

- Number of times students asked questions or give comments about an activity/lesson

- Number of times students answered questions during the activity/lesson

- Number of times students seems excited or focused on the given task/activity

- Number of times students express non-verbal cues (laugh/sigh/clap etc.)

Concepts of student engagement had been widely adopted by many research studies. Most of them are commonly categorized under academic, cognitive, intellectual, institutional, affective, behavioural, social, and psychological (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). In this research, only one aspect of engagement relevant to student learning was emphasised, which is behavioural engagement. The justification for choosing only one dimension of engagement was based on the research needs and nature of this study, as listed below.

- Behavioural engagement in this study comprises the characteristics or observable patterns displayed by students in a classroom. It includes the verbal and non-verbal cues that can be observed easily and denoted to their engagement towards the lesson or the activity.

- Based on the research gap and the choice of data collection method chosen, only the behavioural side of the engagement can be observed based on a predetermined set of behaviours and attitudes that reflect engagement.

Based on the scope and need of this study, only the behavioural engagement of students is emphasised. Wang and Holcombe (2010) have described behavioural engagement as student participation in activities and their reactions in the classroom. As the study focuses on the observable patterns, only behavioural engagement can be interpreted into observable indicators of student engagement as compared to the other aspects.

Those indicators were adapted and from reliable instruments of Behavioural Engagement Related to Instruction (BERI), which is a classroom observation protocol developed for quantitatively measuring student engagement (Lane & Harris, 2015). The summarised descriptions of engaged and disengaged student in-class behaviours found in BERI had provided the base guideline for the researcher in developing a more detailed descriptor of engagement specific to the requirement of the study.

The adapted BERI instrument had been well established with an excellent inter-rater agreement for its items on observing student engagement for large numbers of students in a classroom. The BERI protocol was developed after Lane and Harris (2015) noticed differences in student behavioural patterns in the classroom that seemed to be related to different instructional methods, especially between didactic parts of a lesson versus more interactive parts.

The Behavioural Engagement Related to Instruction (BERI) protocol can be used to provide timely feedback to instructors, and it had been tested upon seven different courses with different instructors and pedagogy. BERI also had achieved excellent interrater agreement (>95%) with only a one-hour training session with new observers. It also showed consistent patterns of variation in engagement with instructor actions and classroom activity.

Although BERI can identify on-task behaviours, it is unable to differentiate the depth at which the student is cognitively interacting with the material. It is also important to note that observation of one of these behaviours does not entirely guarantee that the student is engaged or disengaged, but items in BERI have limited the set to pronounced behaviours for which there is widespread agreement from observers as to what it represents.

## 1.9    Summary

This chapter explains the general ideas of the research study. English language activities are chosen as the focus on student engagement. The language classroom problems and scenarios explained are within the context of the current educational situation of HEIs in Malaysia. This chapter commences with a brief overview of the entire research starting with a background study and the statement of the problem, followed by research objectives and research questions, and ended with a brief explanation on significance, limitations, definition of research terms relevant to this study.