

# **Pilot Study: Malaysian University Students' Attitudes towards Wiki Writing as An Alternative Assessment**

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Recently, alternative assessment has gained increasing attention especially in the context of Malaysian tertiary education. In line with this, the present study aimed at investigating Malaysian university students' attitudes towards the use of wiki writing as an alternative assessment in English learning. 29 university students participated in this study and data was collected via a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were employed in analysing the data. Results showed that the students' attitudes were negative towards the use of wiki writing as an alternative assessment for their English writing. They believed that alternative assessment is time-consuming and ignores students' writing skills. The students further expressed their preference for traditional written tests over alternative assessment. Limitations of the study as well as recommendations were further discussed.

Keywords: students' attitudes, alternative assessment, wiki writing, Malaysian university students

## **INTRODUCTION**

Despite the increasing attention given to English language in Malaysia in the recent years, the standard of English among Malaysian students particularly in the tertiary level remains a concern. The problems of mastering English does not only affect the students alone but also the English language instructors. This is because, the lack theoretical understanding of what constitutes good assessment practices among the language teachers is one of the contributing factors found by researchers in Malaysia (Khemlani-David, 1992; Chng & Rethinasamy, 2013). Some language teachers believe that assessment is subjective and hard to use. Others say it is time consuming, especially in large classrooms. This has called for actions to resort to alternative assessment as a means to modify their teaching and make learning more meaningful in the classroom. Instructors of English have begun to use web tools as a non-traditional form of assessment in gathering information from their students to examine achievement, effort, improvement and the process of self-assessment. While traditional exams are still popular, present day scholars have turned their attention to alternative type assessment to provide more valid and reliable information on student progress and achievement (Tunku Mohani Tunku Mohtar, 2010).

Therefore new methods of assessment have been developed to exhibit what students learn and their ability to use their existence knowledge to facilitate their own learning in the classroom. These new methods of assessment are known as 'alternative assessment' measures (Coombe, 2004). At present, wiki is viewed as one of the relatively new alternative assessment approach (Davies, Pantzopoulos, & Gray, 2011; Williams, 2014). Wiki demonstrates students' progress, achievement and self-reflection in one or more areas (Paulson & Paulson, 1999). Wiki assessment is an on-going process which involves a procedure which teachers use to plan, collect and analyse a collection of student's work. The main aims of wiki assessment are to encourage learners to be more autonomous, be independent learners by taking charge of their own learning, able to make decisions, participate in the self-assessment process of their own work, and become active learners (Davies, Pantzopoulos, & Gray, 2011; Williams, 2014). Besides student's active participation during the wiki assessment process, teacher's role as a facilitator is considered crucial as they are the key to successful use of such a strategy (Neiman, 1999). Thus, using wiki as an assessment tool instead of the traditional tests may help teachers to make better judgment and record student learning and at the same time teachers are able to improve their teaching practices.

### **Statement of problem**

The use of wiki as an alternative assessment makes learning more interesting, effective and engaging and it has transform the role of language educators and students in learning and teaching. Based on my personal anecdote as an English lecturer in Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, I introduced and used Wiki assessment in my students' English writing. Given that students today are constantly exposed and interacted using technology in almost every part of their lives, it is unlikely difficult for the students to learn their English writing using Wiki. However, I am quite uncertain whether my students are interested in the class. There were times where I can observe that my students' facial expressions signify frustration and a lack of interest in the subject matter when Wiki was integrated in the learning. Therefore, it is important to look at students' attitudes towards the use of Wiki writing as an alternative assessment because if the students feel that Wiki does not help them in their learning progress, they may feel burdened when given a task related to it and may not participate in the activities. Certainly, students are the major stakeholders in the learning, so knowing their attitudes towards the use of Wiki writing in the classroom will drive me to reflect on my teaching practice in order to cater for the students' needs (Shishavan&Sadeghi, 2009).

With regards to the literature on wiki, there are few existing studies on wiki related to teaching and learning of writing in English, and almost no studies to the knowledge of the researcher, have explored the attitudes of students towards the use of wiki in English writing. Given the limited literature, this paper argues that study on students' attitudes towards Wiki is crucial. This pilot study is intended to contribute toward filling a current gap in the literature through the development of understanding the attitudes of Malaysian university students towards

the use of Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in an English course. Thus, the following research questions were raised for this study:

- 1) What are the students' attitudes towards the use of wiki in English writing?
- 2) Do the students prefer alternative assessment over traditional assessment in their English writing?

## **Review of Literature**

### ***Alternatives in Assessment***

Huerta-Macías (1995) pointed out that alternative assessment are non-intrusive in the sense that they are merely tasks that students do in class every day and students are evaluated on these tasks. Furthermore, 'alternative assessment offers information not only on learners' weaknesses, but also on their strengths, as they are manifested in class over time' (Norris, Brown, Hudson & Yoshioka, 1998:2). There are several forms of alternative assessment; performance assessment, self-assessments, peer-assessment, diaries and student-teacher conferences. In addition to the performance of problem-solving tasks, wiki assessment has become another alternative measure in determining how well students understand and apply concepts in their learning (Davies, Pantzopoulos, & Gray, 2011; Williams, 2014). Williams (2014) suggested that wiki assessment has the potential to improve the complex task of student assessment, as well as to contribute to a more positive attitude toward the educational process.

### ***Wiki in English writing***

Wiki was developed in 1994 by Ward Cunningham. Cunningham used the term wiki, originally from a Hawaiian word for quick. Leuf and Conningham (2001, p.4) defined wiki as "freely expandable collection of interlinked web pages, a hypertext system for storing and modifying information – a database, where each page is easily edited by any user. The definition of Wiki is further elaborated as a kind of server software, which allows users to freely and easily construct and edit web page content using any web browser in which hyperlinks are accessible (Widodo & Novawan, 2012). Augar, Raitman and Zhou (2004) further highlighted that the main feature of wiki is it allows a user to "visit, read, re-organize, and update".

In the educational field, the use of Web 2.0 communication practices in assessment appeared to offer a new approach to assessment 'as' learning and have become important pedagogical tools that integrate technology with English writing (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2003; Fotos & Browne, 2004; Warschauer & Kern, 2000). Wiki, in particular, has emerged as an innovative Web 2.0 tool that has been widely used by English-language teachers to facilitate students' English writing (for example, Coniam & Lee, 2008; Lin & Yang, 2011; McPherson, 2006). On the Wiki platform, students can edit, update or remove information easily and quickly (Richardson, 2006).

### ***Attitudes***

Baker (1992) defined attitude as the mental of human that influences on emotions and behaviours for targets. Gardner and Lambert (1972) stated that there are two main roles of attitudes: (1) receiving in social status, (2) integrating in foreign language community. These roles related to the behaviour of students who interested towards learning a foreign or second language. They learn a foreign or second language for their future or for them to integrate into the community when they are learning English. Karahan (2007, p.84) argued positive attitudes help students to have good orientation when they learn English. This kind of positive attitude plays an important role in learning as appears on students' achievement. Padwick (2010) stated that learning any second language has social and psychological effects on the learners' aspects towards the target language.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) found out students' ability to learn a second language is affected by their attitudes, competence and skills. They also concluded that the process of language learning influenced on learners' beliefs and behaviour towards the target language. The culture in society imposed them to learn that language where they live. Gardner and Lambert stated that providing high motivation, increasing positive attitude should be done by teachers and student together as facilities in learning. Whereas a learner who does not have the tendency and desire in learning any target language will be considered to have negative attitude and cannot be enthusiastic or motivated in acquiring language. Therefore, attitudes of learners are important as they may influence their language learning.

### ***Attitudes towards wiki in English writing***

As mentioned previously, there are limited studies exploring the attitudes towards wiki in language learning and teaching. Specifically in attitudes towards wiki writing, there is a noted dearth in research that explored students' attitudes towards the use of Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in an English course. This paper thus will review studies that generally explore Wiki in language learning and teaching. In the studies relating to wiki in language teaching and learning, wiki has been considered as an effective tool for educators (Robinson, 2006). Ben-Zvi (2007) argued that collaborative writing assignments through wiki encouraged learners to revise each other's pieces and truly reflect on and evaluate what is being put together.

For instance, each time a wiki is edited, a separate tracking feature makes note of what changes were made and who made those changes. In other words, it archives the changes and the persons who made them in a single platform. Such situation can be found in Canole de Laat, Dillon, and Darby's study (2006) on undergraduate student responses towards using wiki. The researchers concluded that editing or revising someone else's work developed new forms of evaluation skills that enabled the students to analyse and make constructive decisions about new content. Through wiki, learners are able to further improve their writing skills such as identifying spelling errors, revising grammatical structures including punctuations and lexicons, and improving the essay content (Singh, Harun, Safinas & Fareed, 2013). Wiki also enabled learners to gain more content area knowledge because of student contributions in collaborative work (Lian, Hoon & Abdullah,

2011). Therefore, it can be seen that by incorporating wiki as an assessment in the students English writing in the context of ESL helps language learners to experience more positive learning. Hence, this study aims to add to the literature the understanding of students' attitudes when using Wiki writing as an alternative assessment.

## METHOD

The data was gathered quantitatively. An online survey was carried out using the questionnaire which investigated students' attitudes towards Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in their learning. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the experiences of the researcher in the study as well as ideas drawn from a variety of questionnaires in the field (e.g. Margaryan, Littlejohn & Vojt, 2011; Thinyane, 2010). The questionnaire made use of the Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree and 4 = Strongly Agree. Likert (1932) developed the principle of measuring attitudes by asking people to respond to a series of statements about a topic, in terms of the extent to which they agree with them, and so tapping into the cognitive and affective components of attitudes. Likert-type or frequency scales use fixed choice response formats and are designed to measure attitudes or opinions (Bowling, 1997; Burns & Grove, 1997). These ordinal scales measure levels of agreement/disagreement. The questionnaire did not distinguish females from males, and did not consider the gender factor because the current research did not count these variables.

The items of questionnaire can be seen at Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Items of questionnaire*

Items	Students' perception on the integration of technology in English learning
1	The use of wiki writing as an alternative assessment improves my English skills
2	Wiki writing as an alternative assessment is useful in my English learning
3	I'm not sure how to use wiki in my writing
4	I feel excited when the teacher uses wiki for writing assignment
5	I like wiki writing as an alternative assessment in my English class
6	Wiki writing is troublesome and time-consuming
7	Wiki writing ignores students' writing skills
8	I learn better when teacher use wiki for writing
9	I lose interest when the teacher uses wiki for writing
10	Using wiki writing as an alternative assessment is boring
11	I prefer traditional writing assignment rather than wiki writing assignment
12	Traditional writing is more effective in improving my writing than wiki writing

This study involved a total of 29 second year undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. These students were undertaking English for Business Communication course at the university. The author of this paper was the

instructor for these students in this course. In this study, Wiki was used as a collaborative writing tool in an English writing over the course of one semester. Additionally, the Wiki writing was the writing assignment that carried 15% marks. At the beginning of the semester, the students were briefed and introduced to Wiki, for instance, how to create their own pages and how to invite relevant users to be the members of their wikis. The weekly outline of the course schedule was strictly adhered to, in which both the wikis and face-to-face approaches were applied during the teaching and learning sessions, where appropriate. Administration of the questionnaire took place at the end of the semester. These students were requested to respond to the online questionnaire to ensure high participation rate and considerable focus on the survey. The method of descriptive statistics in terms of percentage has been employed for data processing and the method of deduction has been employed to analyse and interpret data.

### **FINDINGS**

The findings of the survey are presented in Table 2 below. It summarizes the frequency of percentages that were identified in the analysis.

*Table 1: Frequencies of students' perception on technology integrated teaching and learning*

Item	Students' perception on the integration of technology in English learning	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
1	The use of wiki writing as an alternative assessment improves my English skills	0	6.7	56.7	36.7
2	Wiki writing as an alternative assessment is useful in my English learning	0	6.7	76.7	16.7
3	I'm not sure how to use wiki in my writing	10	40	46.7	3.3
4	I feel excited when the teacher uses wiki for writing assignment	0	3.3	70	26.7
5	I like wiki writing as an alternative assessment in my English class	0	3.3	56.7	40
6	Wiki writing is troublesome and time-consuming	30	50	16.7	3.3
7	Wiki writing ignores students' writing skills	20	66.7	13.3	0
8	I learn better when teacher use wiki for writing	0	13.3	60	26.7
9	I lose interest when the teacher uses wiki for writing	40	50	10	0
10	Using wiki writing as an alternative assessment is boring	30	60	10	0

11	I prefer traditional writing assignment rather than wiki writing assignment	30	50	20	0
12	Traditional writing is more effective in improving my writing than wiki writing	36.7	53.3	10	0

In regards to the first research question raised previously about what are the students' attitudes towards the use of Wiki in English writing, a vast majority of students displayed negative attitudes towards the integration of wiki writing as an alternative assessment in their English learning. It can be seen from the table that more than 90% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that they "feel excited when the teacher uses wiki for writing assignment", and "like wiki writing as an alternative assessment in my English class". It can also be identified that 90% of the respondents agreed that they lose their interest in learning when wiki writing was used by the teachers. Additionally, 90% of the respondents claimed that the use of wiki writing as an alternative assessment in their English learning is boring. It can also be highlighted that nearly 80% of the respondents disagreed that using wiki writing as an alternative assessment help them to learn better. However, the students have equal responses when they were asked whether they know how to use wiki writing. Further, nearly 80% of the students agreed that it is troublesome and time consuming to use wiki writing while 20% of them agreed with the statement.

With regards to the second research question on the students preference of either alternative assessment or traditional assessment in their English writing, more than 80% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that "the use of wiki writing as an alternative assessment improves my English skills", and "Wiki writing as an alternative assessment is useful in my English learning". It can also be identified that 86% of the respondents agreed that the use of Wiki writing ignores students' writing skills. It can also be highlighted that 80% of the respondents agreed that they prefer traditional writing assignment rather than wiki writing assignment in their English course. Additionally, 90% of the respondents agreed that traditional writing is more effective in improving their writing than wiki writing.

To sum, a good number of students agreed and strongly agreed that traditional assessment is better than wiki writing as an alternative assessment, and the use of Wiki writing does not help them to improve their English skills. Integrating Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in their English learning does not attract the students' interest to learn. By and large, students' attitudes towards the use of Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in the learning of English were negative.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of the present study was to explore students' attitudes towards the use of Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in English learning at University Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia. With respect to students' attitudes, negative attitudes towards the integration of Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in English learning were pronounced. The findings suggested that a vast

majority of students claimed that the use of Wiki writing is not a source of excitement, motivation, and attraction in their English learning. In addition, the students' responses were divided equally when they were asked on whether they know how to use Wiki writing, indicating that some of the students are tech-savvy or digitally literate where they are able to use Wiki and are familiar with the features of Wiki. Whereas, it can be implied that there is another group of students that are not proficient in technology and may be having difficulties in using Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in their English course.

What was sticking about this research is that a majority of the students do not prefer alternative assessment in their learning. Most of them prefer traditional assessment as they think that it is more effective in improving their English skills. Given that the students of the current generation is considered as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001) where information technology is interwoven throughout their lives, thus it is interesting to see that a big number of students considered Wiki writing to be uninterested and ineffective in helping them improve their English skills. This finding probably reflects these students' experiences in the classroom when Wiki writing was integrated. It can be the case of students experiencing technical difficulties that hinder the smooth flow of learning.

Overall, the findings imply that the Malaysian university students have shown negative attitudes towards the use of Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in their English course. The students also show preference over traditional assessment compared to the alternative assessment. It is hoped that the findings of this pilot study can contribute to the literature on Wiki simultaneously becoming a stepping stone for further research in the area related to Wiki. To date, studies on this area has been rare and to ensure the integration of Wiki to be more efficient, testing and evaluation is one area of teaching and learning that needs to be explored, thus unleashing the "untapped potentials" of this digital tool.

### **Limitations**

There were two limitations of this research. First, it is important to note that this research has limitation in sample size. It should be noted that the sample was not large enough. If a larger scale quantitative study was to be developed, a large number of respondents can be surveyed. Second, it has limitation in its design. The current study is using basic descriptive analysis in analysing the data. It would be more reliable if the researcher used multiple data sources such as interviews, or observations as additional instruments in collecting the data.

While the sample size was too small to have the findings be generalizable and limited to descriptive data, the findings can provide valuable insights into the body of research on the integration of Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in English course.

### **Further Studies**

Future studies can employ other instruments, in-depth interviews and verbal reports to gain a better understanding of the students' attitudes towards the use of Wiki writing as an alternative assessment in the English course. The studies can expand on the range of the sample by including



a larger number of students, or include students from other universities in Malaysia. Future research can also focus on the English teachers' attitudes and perceptions about the integration of Wiki into their teaching.

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