

CHAPTER

6

ONLINE PRACTICES FOR MUET READING SUB-SKILLS

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) was introduced in 1999 to bridge the gap between secondary and tertiary English language needs, primarily in English language competency. The MUET examination consists of four language skills, namely reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The results for this examination are graded from Band 1 to Band 6, with Band 1 being the lowest and Band 6 being the highest. Apparently, it is compulsory for students to pass MUET examination with at least Band 3 before entering the tertiary education system. Although much research attention has been paid to speaking and listening skills for MUET over the years due to both skills being found to be generally the most problematic among Malaysian students, there is a pressing need to also look at other skills, such as reading, due to the advent of technology.

The overwhelming amount of information primarily presented on social media in the form of short videos, music, and pictures raises serious concerns about how the younger generation consumes textual information, which directly affects their reading strategy development as they transition into tertiary education. A study by Christen et al. (2020) highlights a significant shift in news consumption habits among Swiss

youth aged 20–25 years old. Their findings indicate that this demographic predominantly encounters news serendipitously through smartphone-based social media platforms, rather than actively seeking it out from traditional sources. Consequently, their engagement with current events is best understood not as a primary activity, but as ‘an incidental by-product of their social media use’.

Therefore, it is undeniable that the digital age has transformed the way we consume information, particularly in the realm of reading. With the advent of the internet and various online platforms, traditional reading practises have given way to a plethora of new and dynamic approaches. Research done on second language education over the past decade also highlighted that technology could enhance the language learning process (Gee & Hayes, 2011). Particularly, reading in a second language involves the use of meaning-making strategies, where the reader interacts with the text to elaborate, recall, and evaluate the information (Kymes, 2007) in another language.

In an era characterised by unprecedented information flow, the ability to read critically is no longer a mere academic skill but a fundamental component of engaged citizenship and professional success. It is within this high-stakes context that a disconcerting paradox emerges in Malaysian tertiary education. While today students are digital natives, adept at navigating vast online landscapes, their fluency in scrolling does not always translate into the deep comprehension required for academic rigor. This gap between superficial information consumption and profound textual analysis is a recurring concern in contemporary educational research (Rad et al., 2024). Our own observations were starkly aligned with this broader issue, echoing earlier findings by Shamida, et al. (2021) which highlighted a critical disconnect between students self-perceived reading proficiency and their actual ability to perform complex cognitive tasks like making inferences, synthesising disparate sources, and formulating evidence-based conclusions. This challenge is particularly acute for candidates preparing for the MUET, where such skills are explicitly tested and are crucial for success. It was this pressing educational need that served as

the primary impetus for the pilot project outlined within this chapter, an initiative undertaken by the UTM MyLinE Task Force to bridge this critical divide.

Our response had to be as modern as the problem itself. Recognising that effective pedagogical intervention must meet students in their own environment, we moved away from traditional models and embarked on the development of a bespoke online, self-access practice module. The decision to make it an online, self-paced resource was deliberate, designed to foster learner autonomy and provide the flexibility that contemporary students require. Furthermore, its content was meticulously tailored to the specific sub-skills of the MUET reading examination and rigorously benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to ensure international standards of pedagogical quality.

However, the purpose of this chapter is not simply to report on the module creation or its efficacy. Instead, we offer insight into the research journey itself—a reflective chronicle of the intricate processes, unforeseen challenges, and valuable insights that emerged along the way. In doing so, we aim to provide a more holistic and humanised account of project implementation, capturing the dual perspectives of our research team and the student participants. This narrative will trace that journey through its three pivotal stages: (1) The foundational phase of module preparation and design, (2) The dynamic period of student engagement and interaction, and (3) The crucial final stage of comprehensive project evaluation.

6.2 ONLINE SUPPORT READING INSTRUCTION

The cognitive demands of reading increase substantially when undertaken in a second language (*L2*), creating a multifaceted challenge that extends beyond simple translation. At the foundational level, *L2* readers must grapple with lexical and syntactic hurdles, dedicating significant mental resources to decoding vocabulary and sentence structures that a native speaker would process automatically. This