

## **Multimedia Resource for Self Access: How Students Benefit from It?**

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### *Abstract*

*Tell Me More (TMM) is a multimedia resource from Auralog. It is offered in many languages for instance English, German, Dutch, French and etc. It is used to cater the learning needs of young and adult learners. In Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), TMM is used for self access activity in which it contributes 10% of the overall course works in all the English courses offer in the university. Having used the resource for several years, the current study therefore is conducted to know the learning gain of 76 undergraduates in using the multimedia resource. Content analysis from the entries in one of the English subject's blog is used as the method in collecting the data for the study. The results from the study indicate that TMM is able to improve pronunciation, 'test' sense of patience, assist in presentation skills, teach independent learning, motivate by learning through mistakes and make learning more fun. The pedagogical implication from the study reveals that teacher's presence is still indispensable although students can 'self access' their learning by using the multimedia resource. It is as such since both entities possess unique characteristics and have different roles altogether.*

### INTRODUCTION

Tell Me More (TMM) is a multimedia resource that is used for teaching and learning by many English practitioners and language learners in higher educational institutions all over the world. At Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan (KTH) in Stockholm for example, TMM was used by immigrant engineers in a Technical English course to assist them in recognising their utterance (Hincks, 2003). In addition, Oba & Atwell (2003) assert that TMM is able to assist language learners in detecting and giving feedback for their mispronunciation. Although its technology still needs improvement in some ways according to them, it nevertheless able to show students their error phonemes with the help of 3D animation to visualize the 'model' articulation (in TMM). In light of this matter, this paper reveals that participants in the study not only able to refine their pronunciation, although some loathe using it, others feel that the use of the multimedia resource can enrich their vocabulary and correct their grammar, among others to a certain degree.

On the other hand, a study like this is conducted to know the effectiveness of using the multimedia resource since the English lecturers and teachers teaching the course have been using it for the past three years at the university. As a result, this study may assist practitioners in carefully evaluating the content of multimedia resources for teaching- learning in English courses. For students, the study is hoped to inform them on the kind of activities that can benefit them in learning English. Specifically, the study seeks to find the answer to the following research questions:

1. Have students used TMM before enrolling to the university?

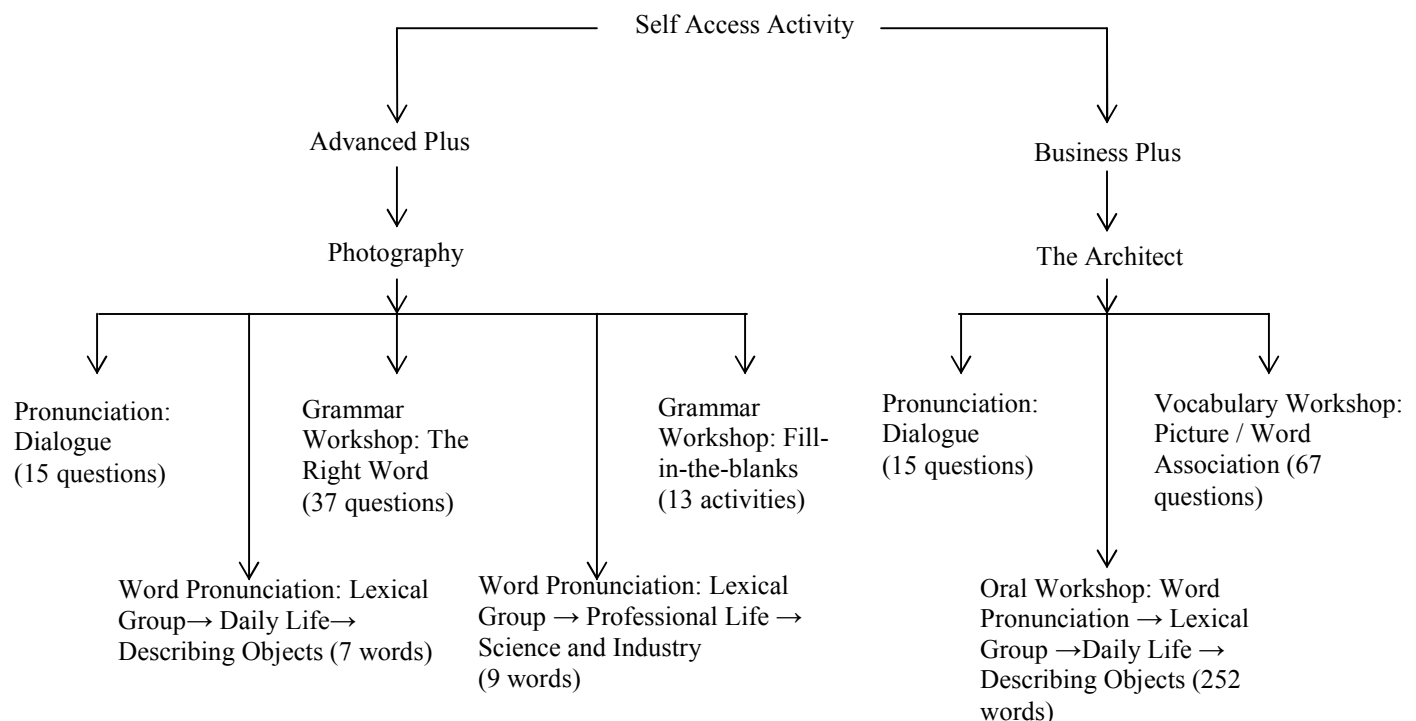
- a. Does TMM provide easy navigation?
2. What are the activities which help students to improve their English using TMM?
3. What do students learn as a result of using TMM?

### Self Access Activity using TMM

In UMP, all students who take English courses in the university are required to do self access activity by assessing TMM. As far as English courses are concerned in the university, it is noted that the content of the English courses is of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). On the contrary to the content of TMM, it does not cater for such specialisation but its content is of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). TMM, therefore is used as a whole, to assist students in using English language appropriately for their study (Gillet & Wray, 2006), regardless of the English courses they take in the university.

Diagram 1 shows the distribution of activities to be completed in doing the self access activities. Students are required to complete two levels of activities that are Advanced Plus and Business Plus. The coordinator of the subject together with the English teachers and lecturers teaching the course view that the language in these levels is 'useful' in their writing and speaking assessments. They further choose two topics which are 'Photography' and 'The Architect' due to its vocabulary and grammar content that they may apply in the course. On the other hand, students are required to only complete the number of activities as shown in the diagram. For instance, under the topic 'Photography', they are only required to complete 37 questions in the Grammar Workshop although there are more the numbers of the questions. Thus, those who exceed the questions are not given any marks. Instead, their effort is regarded as enriching their own skills and knowledge.

**1.0 Diagram 1: Distribution of activities for Self-Access**



## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Behaviourist theory in support of learning English using TMM

Behaviourist theory can be applied in discussing the use of TMM to learn English. According to the theory, students learn through reinforcement by associating a stimulus and response. The theory that draws from Skinner also explains that responses are obtained from learners when they use any learning material which provides them with appropriate feedback (Naismith, Lonsdale, Vavoula & Sharples, 2004).

In the context of using TMM, students learn English in such a way that the multimedia resource provides them feedback for any activity that they engage with. In completing Dialogue as one of self access activities, the multimedia resource provides students assistance when they can correct and ultimately improve their pronunciation. Deubel (2003) asserts that such learning according to the behaviourist theory makes “learners learn by doing, experiencing, and engaging in trial and error”. In so doing, they can increase their effort, yet some may also ‘give up’ in completing the activities. Those who correct their mispronunciation are “not passive individual who react to environmental stimuli” (Deubel, 2003). In fact, they can measure their improvement when TMM gives them higher frequency shown by the green bar in the activity that they engage with. More specifically when they do the Dialogue, their improvement is shown when the green bar indicates higher level of frequency than the previous attempt on this exercise. Likewise, Spuhler (2003) adds that applying behaviourist theory to learning through technology provides ‘control’ to those students who have the desire to correct their behaviour. In the perspective of using TMM, correction is reinforced when students are desired to see their improvement in doing this exercise by repeating the incorrect words. Thus, they are triumphed when the multimedia resource comprehends their utterance indicated by high wave of the green bar.

### Tell Me More in Learning English

Barr, Leakey & Ranchoux (2005), study the development of oral skills across two groups, comprises of 29 students using TMM in their pilot project namely TOLD (Technology and Oral Language Development) project at the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland. The treatment group uses technological resources such as TMM (Version 5), Digital Multimedia Lab and FLA. On the other hand, the comparison group is treated as a traditional conversation class wherein sample in the group form small groups’ discussions emphasising on human interaction in a meaningful context. Barr, Leakey & Ranchoux (2005) findings’ indicate that while progress is made by both groups, the progress made by those not using technology is significantly greater than by students using technology over a short-term study. Therefore, he suggests that there is a need for developing pedagogy to ensure that Computer Assisted Language Learning or CALL-based teaching goes beyond rehearsal activity to achieve message-orientated communication.

Hincks (2005) also uses TMM in her study entitled Computer Support for Learners of Spoken English. The rationale of using TMM in the study is due to her judgement that the language multimedia resource is able to “attractively apply pedagogical goals within the constraints of existing Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technology in the 2000’s” (p. 27) which can cater the learning needs of beginning, intermediate and advanced students of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Moreover, according to her, the compliance of the programme according to the engineering aspect is unlike many other products that are designed to teach pronunciation wherein computers are only used as tape recorders (Hincks, 2005). Though the two products,

namely Pronunciation Power and Better Accent Coach are already purchased and preliminarily evaluated as potential products to be used in her study, it is however rejected due to the fact that “the visual material in the programme (i.e. TMM) seems to have the potential in giving pleasant sensory stimulation and enrichment, in the sense that it features photographs of beautiful beaches, adorable children, delicious food, etc” (Hincks, 2005, p.27).

From the review of the literature, it can be seen that studies on Tell Me More in higher educational institutions mainly concern on the use of the software to improve pronunciation and oral skills. Though the current study also addresses the issue to certain extent, it however discusses few other things in its findings. Moreover, both Barr, Leakey & Ranchoux and Hincks studies use quantitative research methodologies in analysing their findings. This study however, uses content analysis by categorising and coding its data derived from students experience in using TMM.

## METHOD

### Participants

76 first semester students undertaking various engineering courses in the university participated in this four months study. Their participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. Their participation was counted when they responded to questions on TMM that was created by the coordinator of the subject, Technical English (UHL 2312) at <http://uhl2312jumani.blogspot.com/>. Specifically, the study used purposive sampling to collect data from students who responded to the postings on TMM. Besides that, they were required to write their names and matrix numbers below their comments for the purpose of awarding marks to their entries (that was done by their respective class English teachers and lecturers).

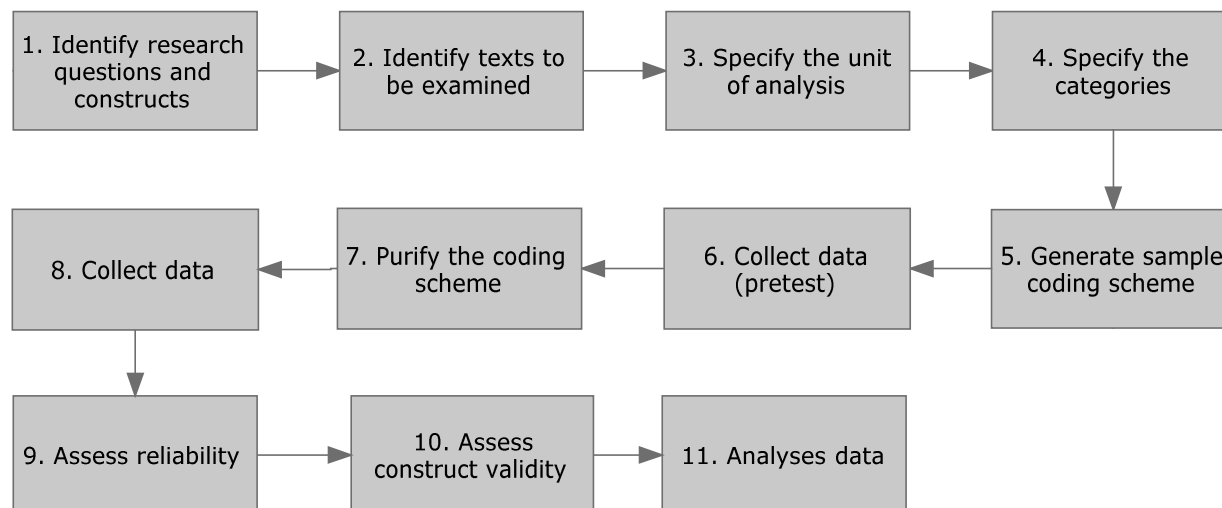
Students who enrolled in the subject were required to obtain a minimum of a D grade to enrol for other compulsory English courses offered by the Centre for Modern Language & Human Sciences (CMLHS). In the course, TMM was used for self access activities wherein they had to complete several exercises that were pre-determined in the course outline as to achieve a total of ten percent for their coursework. They were allowed to access the multimedia resource outside the class since the class hours are not sufficient to complete the activities.

### Design of the study

For the purpose of the study, content analysis was used as the method to analyse the responses or entries obtained from the postings in the blog. It was employed as the primary source in the study due to its technique which enabled one researcher to analyse the communication that was revealed through students’ feelings, beliefs and ideas in their entries (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Although the writers suggested that content analysis may be used in juxtaposition with other methods, this study however solely used the method as the design as it was more ‘appropriate’ in relation to the entries (i.e. data) that were already available in the blog. This was unlike descriptive method for instance survey method wherein a researcher was required to be involved either directly or indirectly in the process of collecting data via mail, telephone or face-to-face-interview (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Moreover, the limitation was due to the fact that many of the researchers involved in this research were not teaching the subject. Only practitioners who were teaching the course were entitled for the postings.

### *Procedure*

The procedure of content analysis was adapted from Insch, Moore & Murphy (1997) and Fraenkel & Wallen (2003). Figure 1 shows the process of content analysis that was carried out in the study by the former group of writers. The procedure of collecting data for the study will be discussed in turn below.



Three research questions were identified in the study. The first research question sought to know the students' opinion in using TMM in terms of their encounter with the multimedia resource and its navigation. The second research question was to find out the activities which helped them in improving their English. Besides that, research question two warrants them to give the results of learning English using the multimedia resource. From these research questions, four important constructs were identified and these were encountering, navigation, activities and results of learning (using TMM). Encountering was defined as whether or not students had the experience in using TMM in any English class before they enrol in the university. Meanwhile, activities referred to Word Pronunciation, Grammar Workshop, Vocabulary Workshop, Oral Workshop and Pronunciation activities.

On the other hand, navigation referred to students' ability in monitoring their own progress that was represented in a visual chart (Auralog, 2008) while they were doing all the activities required. Navigation also referred to students' ability in using the menus, buttons and icons in the multimedia resource. Finally the results of learning referred to students' feelings after they used the multimedia resource.

In identifying the texts to be examined, the researchers transcribed the entire entries in the postings. The decision was as such since all the entries were crucial to be analysed to answer the research questions. Thus, it required the researchers to read each sentence as the unit of analysis in the entries of all the participants (their participation was numbered) in the study. To specify the categories, single classification was used in the study to ensure only categories that 'best fit' the descriptions were considered when analyses of entries were done. According to Insch, Moore & Murphy (1997) single classification enabled a researcher to have a mutually exclusive category and it could only be assigned to that category. Moreover, inferred category was used in the study instead of assumed category as it allowed categories to emerge from the entries.

In the next phase, a sample coding was generated. Face validity was considered where the researchers made sense (Krippendorff, 2004) of the entries in accordance with the research questions. Moreover, face validity was crucial to reflect the category or concepts (Insch, Moore & Murphy, 1997) derived from the entries.

Subsequently, Insch, Moore & Murphy (1997) suggested that a researcher needed to select a sample of entries in testing the comprehensiveness and clarity of the coding scheme. In so doing, they maintained that the phase allowed researchers to purify the coding scheme by assessing semantic validity and stability reliability. Thus, semantic validity was assessed by the researchers' colleague who examined the list of words placed in the same category. The words would only be accepted should their colleague agreed that they had similar meanings or related to the category in a similar fashion (Insch, Moore & Murphy, 1997). Moreover according to the writers, assessing semantic validity is to ensure that constructs were defined clearly before they were assessed on stability reliability. On the other hand, stability reliability (also known as test-retest reliability) was assessed by the researchers who coded the same entries after leaving them for a few days. After these phases were done, the researchers were involved in the actual collection of data. All the entries posted by the participants were examined by following closely the coding schemes that were already defined. Later, they produced several themes from the entries. The process of reliability and validity were reiterated in the actual process of collecting the data. Once again, themes were checked by the researchers' colleagues to make sure that they (themes) confined to the 'scope' of the study. The final phase of the procedure was to analyse the data. This was recorded quantitatively in terms of frequency analysis and percentages. On the other hand, qualitative findings were also yielded specifically for research question three.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following research question one on whether or not students have used TMM before enrolling in the university, the results of the study indicates that majority of them have never used the multimedia resource. This is represented by 35 students as shown in Table 1. Although there are 41 students who do not answer the question; indicated as 'missing' in the table, it can be stated that they somehow have not had the experience of using TMM. Their first experience of using the multimedia resource is further asked in terms of its navigation. Five students state that the navigation is 'easy' which is contrary to only three students who assert that it is 'difficult'. However, there is only one response for each answer in favour of 'very difficult' and 'quite difficult'. Interestingly, two students are in the mid way of stating that they neither feel that the navigation is difficult nor easy. Nevertheless, Louisoder (2008 in Brynko 2008) believes that any learner can navigate TMM since "it is the best tool to learn a language with due to it is tailored for [any] language learners". Leakey (2006) conversely claims that the students' screens can be a little busy and difficult to navigate. As a result, the process of uploading the screens can take some time since the predominance of Flash programming tends to slow the navigation.

**1.1 Table 1: Summary of answers for Research Question 1**

Have you used Tell Me More before this?			
	Yes	No	
			Navigation
			Answers
			Very difficult
			Difficult
			Quite difficult
			Quite easy
			Easy
			Very easy
			Hard → easy
Total		35	Frequency
Missing		41	1
			3
			1
			2
			5
			1
			2
Actual number of students		76	15
			61
			76

In answering research question two, table 2 presents the list of activities that students benefit in improving their English proficiency level. Three important skills which are pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary are remarked from their entries in the blog. According to 62 students in the study, they agree that TMM has assisted them in terms of pronunciation. They learn that their pronunciation is correct when the multimedia resource shows a green bar upon pronouncing a word. Another possible explanation for such result is due to the numerous dialogues and interactive videos focusing on both oral comprehension and expression (Auralog, 2008) that they can practice. However, a study by Hincks (2003) indicates the reverse on this matter. A copy of Talk to Me from Auralog which is given as a supplement to a 200-hour course to immigrant professionals studying English in Sweden, do not noticeably improve the mean pronunciation abilities of the heterogeneous group in the study. Instead, her study found that TMM is appropriate for beginner level students with impertinent foreign accent.

On the other hand, 26 of the students believe that TMM has helped them in improving their grammar skills. 15 students however, affirm that the multimedia resource is useful in enriching their vocabulary. Students who learn a Second Language may undoubtedly acquire grammar and vocabulary skills since TMM provides 5,000 exercises which cover all the skills in learning English language despite speaking and listening, reading and writing and culture (Auralog, 2008). In commenting on the use of vocabulary via the multimedia resource, Lang (2008) believes that it enables one to understand the meaning of the text, both exercising reading comprehension and knowledge of vocabulary.

**1.2 Table 2: List of activities in improving students' English**

Activities	Pronunciation or Oral	Grammar	Vocabulary
Percentages (%)	62	26	15
Total of students	76	76	76

Research question three reveals the learning results after the students had used TMM. Five key issues or themes are produced within which they provide meanings to the study (Stake 2006). These themes will be discussed on its own merits as they serve the major findings in the study. Moreover, these emerging themes are the combination of students' feelings in favour as well as against the use of TMM.

### 1.3 Table 3: Learning results from TMM

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What have you learnt as a result of using Tell Me More?

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	Frequency of students' responses
1. Tested sense of patience	20
2. Assists in presentation skills	2
3. Teaches independent learning	1
4. Motivates by learning through mistakes	2
5. Uses of Information Communication Technology (ICT) makes learning more fun	4

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#### *TMM 'tested sense of patience'*

From table 3, it can be seen that majority of the students i.e. 20 of them state that TMM teaches them a sense of 'patience' when they have to repeat similar words several times as the computer does not understand what they pronounce. One of these students argues that she finds it difficult to pronounce the words in Oral Workshop because of the British accent which she has to imitate.

Actually it's quite difficult to speak [in] English in Oral Workshop because the language is like British sound..and I try more than 10 times to get the best level.  
It's so good for my pronunciation

Another student feels like the class is 'crazy', "... I felt like we are some crazy people that speak to ourselves". However, in the end he learns that the 'training' helps the class "to pronounce, understand and speak well in English" and consequently "... this activity really helps a lot [in improving pronunciation]". Such feeling is revealed due to the interactive speech recognition which provides a screen that displays a native speaker's voice frequency pattern in green (Louisoder, 2008). Therefore, he urges students to repeat pronouncing the words [in the same sentence] and matches up his or her own voice frequency pattern to that of the original one.

#### *TMM assists in presentation skills*

Two students believe that practising the activities assigned by their teachers assist them in their presentation skills as he claimed in his entries, "TMM can help me to prepare for my presentation for product exhibition project". His friend supports his claim by saying that,

In my experience by exploring TMM, I can learn more than I had expected. I learnt about how to pronounce the word with correct grammar and also new vocabulary. So that [therefore I] can perform better when I do my assignment or presentation after this

The language skills contained in Grammar, Vocabulary and Oral workshops which are used in students' self access activities can certainly assist them in their presentation skills. Louisoder (2008) claims that the Grammar and Vocabulary workshops can help them in fine tuning to these



two skills while Oral workshop helps them to speak the language (i.e. English). Moreover, the speech recognition aids them in Pronunciation: Dialogue.

*TMM promotes independent learning*

One student finds that TMM promotes independent learning as stated in the excerpt below:

... at the start page, it [there is] different type of lesson to choose by the different type of user and after that user can choose to explore the program by themselves or guide by the program [programme].

The three modes i.e. Guided- mode, Dynamic mode and Free-to-roam mode (Auralog, 2008) in TMM offer students to select their learning paths according to their learning abilities. Thus, those who want to know their learning progress in doing the activities may choose the first mode. For those who feel that they have certain objectives in using the multimedia resource, the second mode is the right choice for them. The final mode is suitable for those who want to determine their linguistic content.

*TMM motivates by learning through mistakes*

TMM motivates two students by learning through mistakes. One of the students confesses that she learns to correct her pronunciation by saying the words many times. She is determined to get her pronunciation corrected by the interactive speech recognition yet she does not renounce her effort, "I had to repeat several words too many times but I really don't mind about that because I can learn and correct my mistakes". In addition, the student's effort is regarded as worth of an attempt by another student, "It is funny when [I] heard my classmate repeat the word[s] many time..but it is a good try, right?".

The interactive speech recognition which enables students to improve their pronunciation and intonation skills (Auralog, 2008) provides them with the room to correct their pronunciation. For these students they may retry in pronouncing the words as many times as they like until their pronunciation is recognised by the multimedia resource.

*Uses of Information Communication Technology (ICT) make learning more appealing*

Four students believe that TMM is one of the ways to use ICT in improving students' English proficiency. A student writes that the use of video in the multimedia resource enables her to avoid herself doing a rather routine exercise in completing the required self access activities. On the contrary, Leakey (2006) views that the content of the videos, apart from phonetic phrases, images as well as dialogues in the multimedia resource are not suitable for higher level and adult learners. He therefore sees that these features need to be changed.

Another student considers ICT to assist those who are shy to speak in front of other students. 'Talking' with computer she believes, provides a ground where she can practise her pronunciation which she thinks indigent to herself.

One important thing I've learnt in TMM is it makes me didn't felt shy to speak up especially in that [the] oral activities...I admitted that I don't like to speak in English cause its [because it's] hard for me..That's why my pronunciation is very poor...

In support of the students' feeling, Leakey (2006) believes that the multimedia resource which can act as 'a coach' for any form of communicative purposes are able to assist those who are introvert to feel more at ease in practising to speak in English.

Though her other friend supports the above idea to a certain extent, her friend nevertheless feels that the role of a teacher is still needed especially when learning a language. Thus, her friend regards ICT as a media to make learning more interesting and it is not effective without the presence of a teacher to guide its process. Another student maintains the idea in which she writes, "... [a] teacher is so useful [helpful] in help[ing] student [to] learn English. TMM multimedia resource [is] just [a] minor element in [the aspect of] learning English". Nonetheless, Leakey (2006) feels that such multimedia resource is more suitable for self access activities especially for students in higher education. As a result, teacher's presence is seen to be more essential in lecturing rather than to be present when the students are doing do the activities. He further argues that the function of the multimedia resource with that of teacher's way of teaching might result in 'mismatch' since these entities have different pedagogical functions.

### CONCLUSION

The study concludes that majority of the students who use TMM for self access activity believe that the multimedia resource can help them to improve their pronunciation, 'test' their sense of patience, assist in presentation skills, teach independent learning, motivate by learning through mistakes and make learning more fun. They also believe that it cannot replace the significance of teachers' presence in the class. On this matter, D' Silva (2009) comments that teachers act as facilitators of the learning process especially in student-centred pedagogy where they are expected to become a 'guide by the side', making it smooth for the students to progress on the work the students' are required to do.

#### Limitations of the study

The study which was done on voluntary basis can possibly overlook other important data that may be revealed should the entries were made compulsory to all students. They may decline to write any entry since there were other postings to be commented. Besides that, they were only expected to respond to the activities in the workshops which were Grammar, Oral and Vocabulary workshops besides Pronunciation: Dialogue. Accordingly, the remaining workshops in TMM such as Culture, Lesson and Written workshops were not explored, in which could probably produce other results, were not discussed in this research. It was assumed that the various activities that were in the workshops can perhaps generate several other discussions in the study. It was predicted that better results would be generated from the study should these limitations were taken care of.

#### Suggestions and recommendations for further study

The study may be extended to a quantitative method by not only using frequencies and percentages in analysing the data. In fact, other studies may look into correlational research in terms of investigating the possibility of relationships between two or more variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). More specifically, further research can look at one of the purposes of correlational study that is to "explain an important phenomenon by determining relationships among variables" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 339). Taking the suggestion into consideration, such a study- namely correlational explanatory study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) may look at whether or not TMM can cause students to improve their competence in learning English. Thus, further studies may use more statistical tools such as anova and manova to explain the strong or weak relationship between multimedia resource and students' competency in English as their variables.

Note: *The writers would like to thank the teachers and students participated in the study. Special thanks to the coordinator of the subject who granted us the permission to use the data in the subject's blog.*

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