

A Perspective on the Spread of Digital Tools' Contribution on Low English Proficiency Among University Students in Malaysia and Its Impact on Academic Performance

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Abstract: *The fast-paced gallop that we achieve in information technology has galvanised all sectors of our daily life. It has completely reshaped the education landscape, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. The deluge of online learning and the associated digital tools caught us in complete surprise, often with inadequate preparedness. Undeniably, it has brought efficient ways to acquire knowledge, though it often exposes us to challenges and difficulties in using them to acquire digital literacy and English proficiency, particularly in Malaysia. This paper investigates the complicated relationship between the usage of technology and acquiring English competency in academic performance among Malaysian university students. Although the omnipresent Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools have facilitated most of the academic tasks, acquiring proficiency in English has further declined among the students, even though they are technically inclined. In a multilingual country where English is the second language, the ongoing struggle with proficiency has been a long-standing issue that affects graduates' employability, communication skills, and overall academic performance. With the global business and political landscape constantly evolving, mastering English is becoming increasingly important and will continue to be a key asset for anyone looking to join the international workforce. This study takes a closer look at how changing education policies, like the repeal of the Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) and the launch of initiatives such as MBMMBI and DLP, have impacted English teaching in Malaysia.*

Keywords: Digital technology, English proficiency, Academic performance, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Employability

1. Introduction

The advent of information technology has raised living standards across the countries around the globe, with sectors such as business, manufacturing, agriculture, and education being among the first to experience its impact. Furthermore, the pandemic altered the trajectory of progress, and everyone is now compelled to adhere to new norms. The education sector was significantly affected, as traditional methods were overthrown or partially retained to give way to online learning. Consequently, there is a higher usage of digital resources, many of which teachers and pupils are not completely aware of or are not making the most of. In the meantime, the introduction of AI (Artificial Intelligence) has made it possible to create essays, paragraphs, theses, and other types of writing with just a few keystrokes, which simplifies tasks and prevents students from learning English.

The growing use of digital technologies in the classroom has sparked worries about how they may affect Malaysian university students' academic performance and English language skills. The basis for Malaysia's strive in the midst of global competition to accomplish success is largely rested on the education sector in cultivating and reaping skilled, technology savvy students to support the country to emerge victorious in the ever-changing economic spectrum. (Iberahim et al., 2023). Even though digital literacy is crucial for academic achievement, it is impossible to ignore the difficulties that using these tools might provide, especially for students who struggle with English. It has been proven that technology improves the learning curve though it has got its own flaws (Pazilah et al., 2019).

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on the relationship between the spread of digital tools, English language competency, and academic achievement among Malaysian university students.

The 21st Century Dilemma

The political, economic, and business across the world, invariably in every country, has been significantly affected by the 21st century largely due to the advancement of digital transformation. The seamless inventions in information technology have provided the students with the skills necessary to evolve in an ever-advancing digital world (Karim et al., 2020). However, the same digital tools have been accused of its potential threat in accomplishing by producing high-end English write-up academically thus attributing to low-level English proficiency.

The Importance of English Proficiency in Malaysia

Low English proficiency among Malaysian university students has been a persistent concern, affecting their academic performance, employability, and overall communication skills. Malaysia, a former British colony and is a multilingual country where English plays a vital role in many aspects of our life. It has been a language for communication, education, business and international relations and other significant areas. The recent globalization and digitalization have attributed to the necessity of learning English as a second language. It facilitates the masses to access better career opportunities, better education and engage with global community to stay afloat.

The current world situation and ever-changing global competitiveness have made English proficiency as an important skill for economic growth and employment. The multi-national companies in Malaysia operate world-wide using English as the primary language of communication. Hence, people with strong ability in speaking, writing in English are much sought after by these MNCs (Multi-National Companies). Major industries such as tourism, finance, technology, healthcare, and international marketing require employees to be fluent in English to compete in global market which in-turn offer well-paying jobs.

English proficiency brings clear advantages, but widespread competence remains a challenge for all demographic groups. Rural regions frequently suffer from inadequate English education which creates uneven levels of language proficiency among learners. Educational institutions and government agencies need to maintain their focus on English language education by developing structured curriculums and conducting teacher training programs and language immersion methods.

The Academic Tribulations

The one aspect that affects Malaysian university students is their low-level English proficiency. The Government of Malaysia addresses this issue persistently with results that are far fetching and an impediment of the student' academic excellence, finding job and communication skills. There are several factors that contribute to this situation and is discussed in detail by many academicians and independent researchers.

As stated by Wendy Hiew (Wendy et al., 2021) who reiterated that “Among the myriads of factors, English language proficiency was suggested as a major contributing aspect to graduate employability in Malaysia”. This statement further confirms the necessity of the English proficiency for the graduate students while seeking employment both in and out of Malaysia. The study confirms the necessity for graduates from public universities.

However, the concern of low-level English proficiency is prevalent among all graduates whether they belong to public or private universities alike. While seeking jobs whether in public or private sectors, weighing students' ability to speak and write in English language becomes an imperative qualification.

Changing Education Policies

The continuous changes in educational policies for English and other subjects have resulted in inconsistent language teaching methods. Students' English exposure experienced lasting effects due to the repeal of the Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) policy. As a result of changing national priorities, political influences, and worries about global competitiveness, Malaysia's education policy has changed significantly over the years regarding the teaching of English.

During British colonial rule, English was the primary language of education, especially in urban schools. However, during 1956 (Razak Report (1956)) and in 1960 (Rahman Talib Report (1960)) changed the scenario and introduced Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) as the language of education. These two reports insist on using Malay as the language of education to foster national unity. It has been the upward trend and by 1970, the government phased out English as the medium of instruction, replacing with Malay in national schools, though English remained as a second language. Meanwhile, concerns grew over declining English proficiency among graduates seeking employment particularly in multinational companies (Asmah, 1996). Hence the policy makers started debating the need for English while not undermining the importance of Malay. Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) began during 2003 under the then Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (Hamid, 2016). This policy encountered resistance from Malay language activists and rural communities thus ending it in 2012.

However, the policy makers introduced Upholding Bahasa Malaysia, Strengthening English (MBMMBI) which emphasized Malay medium of instruction but aimed to enhance English teaching through additional language programs by implementing teacher training, English language labs and other international assessments.

In 2016, through the Dual Language Program (DLP), schools obtained the flexibility to deliver science and math lessons in English based on requests from parents and students. It allows those schools where teachers and students are willing to improve strong English language skills. This policy received criticism because it created a division between students from urban and rural areas even though it provided flexible options.

The Malaysian government, further, introduced programs to systematize the teaching in English by benchmarking the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The curriculum now incorporates robust digital learning methods alongside enhanced critical thinking exercises and improved English communication skills. The English Language Roadmap (2015–2025) aims to improve English language proficiency throughout all levels. The English Language Roadmap (2015–2025) aims to improve language proficiency throughout all levels.

2. Digital Resources and Malaysian University Students' English Language Challenge

The Digital Tool Factor in the Problem of Poor English Proficiency

The widespread adoption of digital tools in contemporary education has brought both advantages and disadvantages in the field of language acquisition. As these digital tools offer unparalleled access to unlimited resources, their impact on English proficiency among the university students requires scrutiny. The meagre English skills among the university students in Malaysia have been a factor attributed to their poor career opportunities and advancement, which raises obvious questions on the role of the “digital tool” factor either causing or solving problems of poor English skills.

The extensive availability of digital tools such as social media, AI (Artificial Intelligence) enabled translation tools, paraphrasing tools and other essay writing tools which have changed the landscape of learning forever. These tools as well as the spread of Internet, however, expose the student to English constantly making the language more comprehensible to learn it. Mark Warschauer (1999) insisted that though technology provides increased access to authentic input, it is the quality and context such input that render it effective.

Language efficiency should come through practice rather than relying on excessive digital tools to translate which subsequently affect the development of cognitive abilities to become self-sufficient in language competence and analytical skills. This act of depending on receiving translated text passively will not actively engage the intellectual effort needed to acquire a language.

Moreover, the more colloquial, abbreviated, slangy and often grammatically incorrect style of Internet communication is likely to diminish students' respect for formal English. Social networking sites, while they do enable contacts with English natives, also encourage relaxed and error-prone style of the code. Constant exposure to non-standard English will create a pattern in our minds where we think, feel and behave like we speak — far away from the grammatical regularities and order in the language, no matter what the context. Internet linguistics is a field (see Crystal 2008) But, according to Crystal (2008), while internet linguistics is a valid field, the internet's language also diverges extremely from a standard English language that caused confusion for students who start afresh.

The challenges posed by the “digital tool factor” in Malaysia varies as the diverse linguistic backgrounds of university students with different levels of exposure to English can aggravate the difficulties associated with it. It is obvious that students who heavily rely on digital tools for their English translation and paraphrasing activities may struggle to develop subtle skills needed for academic writing and communication on professional aspects. The government's implementation of language policies and practices play a major role in shaping educational outcomes along with the careful integration of digital tools into the curriculum, as reiterated by Gill (2005).

Emphasis on the Problem:

The Effect of Digital Distractions on Academic Performance and English Proficiency

The distractions or interruptions are caused by electronic devices such as smartphones, social media, video streaming as well as online games. All the time the students end up searching for the answers or to solve assignment questions on the Internet which further decreases their cognitive skills. The penetration rate of digital platforms in Malaysia, according to Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), (2022) stands at 96.8% in 2022.

The active participation of students mostly occupies social media platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram and thus diverting their attention from educational aspects (Hussin et al., 2021).

The areas that are highly affected due to digital distractions are:

1) Declining English Proficiency

Declining English proficiency is the concern nationwide as this proficiency is much sought after in business and other international level activities. A study by Ismail et al. (2021) found that Malaysian university students who frequently use digital devices for non-academic purposes have lower academic performance compared to those who manage their screen time effectively.

As this lack of English proficiency takes its toll on the students potential academic as well as career success, the need for governmental policies in increasing activities to develop a culture on English proficiency is much sought after.

2) Lost focus and Creativity

The diminishing spark or losing focus and creativity in Malaysian students' English learning is mostly attributed to the spread of social media platforms and AI infused applications which are freely available on the Net. The constant barrage of online distractions, together with the reliance on machine translation software, can lead to decreased attention spans for students and discourage independent language exploration. The allure of instant gratification, with information so readily available at the push of a button, can hinder the development of patience and persistence, both of which are fundamental to learning a language. As Warschauer (2004) further commented, while technology provides exposure to vast amounts of language input, the quality and context of that input are decisive factors for effective learning. Overuse of translation software can also be detrimental to critical thinking and independent construction of ideas.

3) Time Management

Students who spend excessive time on internet entertainment struggle with time management. Most of them do not allocate enough hours for English learning, leading to incomplete assignments, poor performance in exams, and lower language proficiency (Tan et al., 2021).

Are Digital Tools Contributing to Low English Proficiency in Malaysian Universities?

The integration of digital technology in university education in Malaysia, aimed at bridging the learning divide and enhancing accessibility, has ignited a critical debate: are the digital tools worsening the chronic problem of low English proficiency among students? The omnipresent digital tools like social media, online translation software which are mostly AI powered has drastically changed or altered the way the students' learn. By comparing to their counterpart

internationally, Malaysian university students are presented with digital presence in every aspect of their studies.

Meanwhile, the myth that if our students who are constantly in touch with digital media, where English is the prime language, will be fluent in due course of time is found to be false. As Warschauer (2004) argued that though the technology provides access to English language input, it is the quality and context of this input determines the effectiveness of the benefits. It has been proven that no guarantee is given the presence of English in digital media will boost the language skills of the user. This further attributed to over-dependence of machine translation tools which are quick in results, will further alienate the user from using their cognitive skills that is essential for language skills and comprehension, resulting in obtaining superficial understanding of English. The outcome of AI powered translation and essay writing tools, often, is not accurate and doubtful leading to potential misinterpretation and incorrect grammatical constructs.

As per Hutchins (1998), "Machine translation, though improving, still struggles with ambiguity and contextual subtlety, which are essential to correct language comprehension."

Overreliance on Digital Translators

One of the key disadvantages of technology tools is that students over-rely on internet translators. Such tools as Google Translate and AI language tools provide instant translations, leading to students not actively learning English vocabulary and grammar. Research has shown that over-dependent students of digital translators find it challenging to use language on their own and think critically about language usage (Rahman & Aziz, 2021).

Decline in Writing and Grammar Skills

Automated writing tools, such as Grammarly and spell-check features in word processors, correct grammatical errors automatically. While such tools enhance writing quality, they make students complacent about learning grammatical rules. Students may rely on the corrections without understanding fundamental language structures (Salleh et al., 2020). Consequently, their ability to construct logical academic essays and reports weakens over time.

Distraction and Reduced Language Practice

The use of electronic devices in learning environments introduces distractions that hinder language learning. Social media platforms, streaming video, and video games divert students' attention from reading and writing study activities. Hussin et al. (2021) research established that Malaysian university students who spend too much time on social media have poorer enrollment in English language courses, hence weaker communication and writing skills.

Limited Face-to-Face Communication

English proficiency is also directly linked to verbal communication skills, which are best developed in face-to-face communication. Virtual communication, such as texting and emailing, does not typically have the depth and complexity of face-to-face communication. University students who engage more in online messaging have difficulty developing formal speaking proficiency and pronunciation (Tan et al., 2021). The reduction of classroom discussions due to the expansion of virtual learning spaces also exacerbates this issue.

3. Impact on English Proficiency in Malaysian Universities

Reduced Critical Thinking in Language Use

Computer programs, particularly those with computer-aided correction facilities, have the potential to disrupt the practice by students critically analyzing their language use. Instead of working independently to refine their writing, students silently embrace computer-aided corrections. Research has shown that this lack of effort results in poor problem-solving ability in language applications (Yusof & Ibrahim, 2020).

Weakening of Reading Comprehension Skills

The nature of digital reading also affects students' ability to comprehend complex scholarly texts. The majority of university students prefer screen scanning over hard reading. The studies show that prolonged screen usage decreases reading memory, thereby rendering students unable to break down and explain complex English texts (Chong et al., 2021).

Difficulty in Academic Writing

Proficiency in argument formation, appropriate word choice, and consistency are essential for academic writing. Only when the pupils are proficient in the language can this be accomplished. Digital distractions and excessive dependence on automated applications like ChatGPT, Gemini, Deepseek, and others will make it harder for students to write well-developed articles and research papers. According to the majority of reports from instructors at Malaysian universities, students' lack of practical writing skills has led to a rise in badly written papers.

The limited proficiency in English by the university students is attributed to linguistic, educational and technological, socio-cultural factors that prevents from expressing ideas clearly and cohesively in a formal academic level. In primary school, children begin learning English, but the main aim is often just to pass exams. This focus can lead to problems because students spend most of their time on grammar rules and vocabulary lists. They do not get enough practice using English in real-life conversations or learning how to analyze and think critically in their writing (Musa, Lie, & Azman, 2012). Because of this, while students may know some basic grammar and vocabulary, they often find it hard to build strong arguments or write thoughtfully about a topic.

Another significant challenge is how students' first language (L1) affects their writing in a second language (L2). Often, students think in Malay or their native language and then translate this into English. This process commonly leads to grammar mistakes, unusual sentence patterns, and incorrect word choices (Maros, Tan & Salehuddin, 2007). Such influences make it hard for students to write in a clear and more academic style.

The technologies currently available are easy to use and provide quick feedback, but they might prevent students from improving their writing skills. When people rely too much on technology, they might only learn surface-level things. This can make it harder for them to review and enhance their writing on their own in a meaningful way (Mahmud & Tan, 2023). Many people are increasingly using digital tools like Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Google Translate for writing help. This convenience is useful, but there is a worry that relying too much on these tools might stop students from improving their own writing skills. When students depend a lot on technology, they may only learn at a surface level and find it difficult to carefully review and enhance their own work, as noted by Mahmud and Tan (2023).

To address these issues, universities in Malaysia need to provide specific support for academic writing. They can organize workshops that teach writing skills and set up centers that offer help with language learning. There should also be classes that combine both reading and writing exercises. Additionally, lecturers ought to give regular feedback. This feedback should not just focus on correcting grammar mistakes but should also assist students in improving their ideas and how they structure their work. By doing this, students can develop better writing skills and gain more confidence in their academic work.

4. Strategies to Balance Digital Tool Use and English Proficiency Development

Encouraging Conscious Language Learning

Conscious language learning should be encouraged by the educators in university level. This is to inculcate the point that the digital tools are to ensure the students engagement with these AI powered digital tools for language development. Instead of relying them on writing essays, checking grammar, students should be motivated to check and analyze their errors and grammar and learn from corrections. (Salleh et al., 2020)

Implementing Digital Literacy Programs

Programs for digital literacy that educate students how to utilize digital technologies efficiently without sacrificing language acquisition should be implemented by universities. These courses can help students learn how to balance using technology with more conventional teaching strategies like reading printed materials and having face-to-face conversations (Rahman & Aziz, 2021). Universities need to create a framework aligned with Malaysian Education Blueprint (Higher Education) and follow the global standards like UNESCO's Digital Literacy Framework by following standards such as:

- Information and Data Literacy
- Communication and Collaboration
- Digital content creation
- Safety and cybersecurity
- Problem-solving using digital tools
- Ethical and responsible digital behavior

Enriching In-Class Language Learning Activities

After the Covid-19 period, most of the universities in Malaysia has opted for blended (both face-to-face and online) classroom approach. In this time of blended learning, incorporating classroom based speaking activities, group discussions, debates, relay-story telling, oral presentation will help students to improve their English proficiency through active engagement and interaction. (Tan et al., 2021).

Integrate Digital Literacy into the Curriculum

Include Digital Literacy as one of the subjects in every curriculum. For an example, A Business Faculty can integrate Data Analytics or Digital Marketing Modules. Engineering programs can emphasize coding, simulation and AI tools while Humanities can digital research methods and online publishing such as journals, articles and research papers.

Establish Digital Literacy Courses and Workshops

The universities can consider offering compulsory Computer Literacy courses on introductory levels for all new students or 1st year students. It can offer multiple workshops for current students as well as staff to bring their knowledge on currently popular areas such as:

- Effective Online Research and Academic Referencing
- Using any Learning Management System such as Moodle, Blackboard etc.
- Workshops on hands-on exercises using Canva, Miro, MS Teams etc.
- Workshops on Safe and Ethical use of Artificial Intelligence and digital platforms.

Establishing Digital Learning Support Centers

Universities should establish Digital Learning Hubs or Tech Support Desks for Students in which students can:

- One-on-One Guidance
- Attend short sessions on new tools
- Access Digital Libraries for course materials and tutorials.

However, digital literacy is not just for students along and it can provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for all academic, administrative and support staff to ensure they can model best practices, use digital tools effectively and provide support and give guidance to the students.

Collaborating with Industry and Government

Universities need to partner with governmental and non-governmental organizations such as:

- **MDEC** – which collaborates with various NGOs to advance the digital economy in Malaysia.
- **National ICT Association of Malaysia (PIKOM)**: which plays a significant role in driving digital transformation initiatives and representing Malaysia's information and communications technology (ICT) industry.
- **Malaysian Digital Association (MDA)**: this organization promotes best practices and innovation in the digital space by focusing on the digital advertising and marketing industries of Malaysia.
- **Open-Source Developers Club Malaysia (OSDC.my)**: This organization drives for Open-Source technologies and fostering programming communities to support digital transformation.
- **Internet Society Malaysia Chapter (ISOC Malaysia)**: It is part of the Global Internet Society. It concentrates on Internet Access, Development and related policies in Malaysia, thus contributing to the nation's digital transformation efforts.

Apart from the local firms, we do have international companies like Google, Microsoft, or AWS etc., may come forward to help in digital literacy among university students to get access to free tools, online certifications, global platforms, align university digital skills with industry needs and can host guest lectures and bootcamps.

Encouraging Deep Reading Practices

Encouraging students to engage in deep reading practices is another activity that can be incorporated into their study routine such as reading traditional books and academic articles. The lecturers can print reading materials along with digital content to ensure that students develop strong comprehension skills (Chong et al., 2021).

Regulating Screen Time and Digital Distractions

Setting up rules for using digital tools during study hours can really help students keep their screen time in check. By doing this, universities can make guidelines that encourage students to limit their use of social media while they are supposed to be studying. Instead, students can focus their energy on activities that help them learn languages (Hussin et al., 2021).

5. Summary

The widespread use of digital tools empowered by AI (Artificial Intelligence) has completely transformed the learning process, not only in Malaysia but also all over the world in higher education presenting both advantages and challenges. Though these digital tools have enhanced cooperation, broadened access to information, and offered flexibility in the learning environment, it nevertheless, offer unanticipated effects on students' ability to learn English as a second language. These unforeseen implications have pushed the education institution to devise more strategic, pedagogically sound, and context-sensitive integration of digital technologies into language education by amalgamating the effects of digital tools' usage on language proficiency and academic performance among Malaysian university students.

The addition of digital tools in education in Malaysia has augmented in the past decade using platform such as, Google Classroom, Zoom, Moodle, Blackboard Learn, and mobile apps persistently embedded into academic routines. However, on the users' side, though these tools expose gateway to resources available on the Internet, students end up using passively without actively engaging in language production (Yunus et al., 2021). The exposure comes in many ways such as using auto-correct or using Grammarly or watching YouTube videos which may expose the students to English constantly but do not necessitate the critical thinking or active usage necessary for language acquirement. As a result, students may appear digitally literate and their academic skills in English in writing and speaking remain largely underdeveloped (Ismail, 2018).

The excessive use of virtual digital tools for translation, grammar check or content generators may seem to be useful, it can effectively undermine the learning process when used as substitutes. This process alleviates the necessary mental processes such as memorizing grammar conventions or expanding vocabulary, are bypassed in favor of quick fixes in order to meet the educational requirements (Hamzah et al., 2020). As a result, the students are unable to develop rational arguments or engage in scholarly discourse or defend complicated ideas which subsequently impacts on academic achievement.

The informal communication fosters by the digital communication through social media, instant messaging and online forums promotes casual, abbreviated and grammatically incorrect forms of English which leads to deteriorating or already diminishing English proficiency. This further aggravates the non-standard language patterns for Malaysian students who already operate in a multilingual environment (Thang et al., 2016). The absence of exposure to practice using formal academic English also deprives them of their linguistic competence which leads to low grades in courses with coursework that requires formal writing, critical analysis, and oral presentation.

Yet another issue is the pedagogical quality of materials available online or produced by digital tools. Though e-learning is largely practiced in all the higher education institutions in Malaysia, the instructors are not necessarily all instructed on using these platforms in language learning. Most of them are primarily limited to sharing reading exercises and lectures accompanied by

slides but not with utilizing simulation tasks as aids to the use of the language (Kabilan et al., 2019). The lack of controlled interaction, feedback and guided language practice hinders the potential of the digital tools for supporting language ability. Therefore, technology cannot make progress without the proper guidance and instructional design of the teachers concerned. Next, it is impossible to ignore the problem of digital equity. A significant number of students lack access to advanced technology, quiet study spaces, and high-speed internet especially, among the low-income students and those from the rural population (Yunus & Suraya, 2010). These obstacles widen the gap in the chances of learning language while also restricting them to access online resources. By limiting the access to internet services, it isolates students who already struggle with English from peer interactions, linguistic input, support services which reflect on their academic underperformances.

Regarding the wider consequences of low English proficiency on academic achievement, it is highly imperative in linking low English proficiency to subpar academic achievement. It impacts students' capacity to follow lectures in English, finishing assignments in English, and participate in group discussion in English, resulting in low grades. According to Ismail et al. (2018), language difficulties are the most commonly cited academic challenges faced by Malaysian undergraduates. This effect is particularly great in English medium programs where students are expected to read academic journals, author research papers and present ideas in fluent English.

The effect on digital tools on language skills rests on how we use them. Well-integrated tools, such as language apps, online discussions, podcasts, and digital narratives, can significantly enhance learning by fostering active reading, writing, communication, and listening (Yunus et al., 2021). To maximize these benefits, students must learn critical and effective tools use, and teachers need to embed digital tools in language learning and prioritize digital literacy to empower students to select and apply tools for language development.

A diversification approach is necessary in the future, to mitigate the negative impact of digital tools overuse which capitalize on their potential benefits. A balance between curriculum designers and educators should be enforced to work together to create English language modules that embed technology meaningfully – bringing digital interaction with tasks that require language engagement. Next, professional development for educators needed to be included in training in digital pedagogy, ensuring the educators can facilitate language-induced online environments. To close the gap in access and ensure inclusive education, higher education institutions should invest in digital infrastructure and offer supportive interventions to disadvantaged students.

Additionally, creating student awareness is critical. Workshops on digital responsibility, language learning strategies, and critical tool usage can empower students to become independent and self-reflective learners. In addition to their digital involvement, universities should also fortify support services such as writing laboratories, peer-mentoring programs, language centres and writing workshops.

In summary, the proliferation of digital tools in Malaysian universities has brought both peril and promise in English language proficiency. While these tools provide access to all, provide flexibility and innovation, their misuse or over-reliance has contributed to a decline in formal language skills. This highly reflects students' academic performance, particularly in tasks that require structured communication and critical thinking. Every scientific invention comes with its own advantages and disadvantages; it's we humans who need to choose and use wisely. By

adopting a strategic, learner-centred, and pedagogically grounded approach, educators, individuals, institutions, and students can harness the umpteenth number of digital tools as allies rather than adversaries in language development. This, in turn, shape Malaysia a global competitor in terms of competent, confident English users.

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