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Content Selection Strategies in Vlogging: Analysing ESL Students' Decision-Making at Universiti Malaysia Sabah

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the content selection process for vlogging projects among ESL students in an English classroom. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 51 students using an open-ended questionnaire. Thematic analysis was used to interpret qualitative responses, while descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and chi-square tests were conducted to examine relationships between variables. The findings reveal that students consider multiple factors when selecting vlog content, with entertainment value (20.0%), creativity (18.2%), viewers' benefits (16.4%), and personal experiences (16.4%) identified as the most influential. Other factors include educational value (10.9%), content quality (9.1%), and personal preferences (9.0%). Students produced vlogs across a range of themes, including traditional culture, food reviews, personal challenges, health-related activities, and product reviews. Social media exposure, particularly through platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, significantly influenced their content decisions. These findings offer valuable insights into the decision-making process underlying students' vlogging projects, emphasizing the importance of creativity, audience engagement, and digital media influence. The study contributes to the pedagogical understanding of vlogging as a tool in English language instruction and offers practical implications for educators seeking to integrate vlogging into the ESL classroom.

KEYWORDS: Vlog, Social Media, Oral Communication, Content Creation

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media platforms have become an integral part of daily life, with vlogging emerging as a prominent medium for communication, self-expression, and content creation. The rise of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube has introduced new modes of digital engagement, fostering a new generation of content creators – vloggers (Burns, 2021). This shift has not only transformed online communication but has also created opportunities to integrate vlogging into educational practices. As the popularity of vlogs continues to expand, it has become increasingly important for individuals, particularly the younger generation, to develop essential digital literacy and content creation skills to navigate and contribute effectively to this evolving media landscape (Loreto, 2022). Beyond serving as a creative outlet, vlogging offers significant prospects for personal branding (Rahayu & Marka, 2024), entrepreneurship (Cockrell, 2022), and career advancement (Ngoc, Dung, & Pejić Bach, 2022). Given these potential benefits, it is crucial to examine how tertiary-level English language learners engage with vlog content selection through social media exposure. Understanding their content preferences and decision-making processes can help educators provide targeted guidance, equipping students with the necessary skills to expand their reach to a wider audience and enhance future opportunities.

Recent studies further underscore the interest in vlogging among younger demographics. A 2019 survey of 3,000 children in the United States (aged 8-12) and a 2023 report (Yeoh, 2023) indicate that 40% of Gen Z aspire to become content creators, reflecting the significant role of vlogging in modern digital engagement. However, despite its widespread appeal, individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who are new to vlogging often encounter significant challenges due to a lack of structured guidance, limited resources, and unfamiliarity with the medium.

This study aims to explore the content selection process for vlog project production and identify the key factors influencing students' selection of vlog content. A deeper understanding of these aspects will enable educators to equip students with essential competencies required in today's digital economy (Burger, Fisher, Hudson, & Rader, 2021), including digital literacy, communication skills, creativity, and adaptability - skills that are crucial for success in an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven landscape (Loreto, 2022). Furthermore, the findings of this research can contribute to curriculum development and inform pedagogical strategies to enhance English language classroom instruction (Anugerah, Sutapa, Yuliana & Riyanti, 2019), ultimately preparing students to meet the demands and opportunities of the digital age (Dia, 2024).

The study also seeks to investigate the relationship between vlog content selection and the factors influencing students' decision-making within an English-language classroom setting. By exploring how students navigate content options, the research aims to uncover the motivations, preferences, and considerations that shape their choices.

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do students select content for their vlog projects?
2. What factors influence students' selection of vlog content?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vlogging involves the creation and dissemination of video content on social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. In the context of language learning, vlogging has been recognised as an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing communication skills (Burns, 2021), providing opportunities to practise speaking and listening skills in authentic ways (Rakhmanina & Kusumaningrum, 2017; Stanley & Zhang, 2018). Prior research has demonstrated the positive impact of vlogging on learner motivation, fluency, creativity, and cultural awareness in language acquisition (Lestari, 2019; Maulidah, 2018; Santhanasamy & Yunus, 2022). With the increasing prominence of social media as a platform for content creation and consumption, vlogging has gained widespread popularity, particularly among Generation Z (Zuraidah & Mardziah, 2019). Given this shift, understanding the factors that influence content selection in vlogging projects is crucial for educators seeking to adapt instructional methods to align with the needs of digital-native learners (Shahrani et al., 2020).

In response to this evolving educational demand, the English syllabus has recently been aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), emphasizing the importance of communicative skills in listening and speaking (Zuraidah & Mardziah, 2019). As proficiency in spoken communication plays a critical role in employability, insufficient speaking skills may pose challenges for learners in professional settings (Ramamurthy et al., 2021).

Incorporating student-produced videos into the learning process has shown promising results. When students actively participate in the video-making process - from scriptwriting to shooting and editing - their engagement with learning materials is enhanced, leading to a meaningful learning experience (Rakhmanina & Kusumaningrum, 2017; Santhanasamy & Yunus, 2022; Stanley & Zhang, 2018). The active involvement of learners in video production fosters greater motivation and improves speaking proficiency (Afifah et al., 2019; Lestari, 2019; Maulidah, 2018; Wahyuningsih, 2018). Moreover, learners acquire technical competencies related to video production and editing, such as camera operation, lighting, and audio management, which contribute to their overall learning outcomes.

Beyond instructional design, individual characteristics and demographic factors also play a role in students' learning experiences in online environments. Research indicates that student attributes such as computer self-efficacy, prior exposure to online learning, and attitudes towards digital course delivery have varying effects on student motivation, preferences, and overall satisfaction (Puzziferro, 2008; Jan 2015; Bolliger et al., 2010). Socioeconomic status has also been identified as a significant determinant of students' engagement with digital learning tools, with those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds more likely to utilize such technologies effectively (Lee & Lee, 2021). In Malaysia, household income groups are classified into B40 (the bottom 40% of earners), M40 (the middle 40%), and T20 (the top 20%) based on the Department of Statistics Malaysia's Household Income and Basic Amenities Survey (2024). This classification is intended to ensure that assistance, especially in terms of necessities and financial aid, reaches those within the designated income threshold. These findings highlight the need for inclusive and equitable educational strategies that accommodate diverse learner backgrounds and leverage technology to enhance learning outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the content creation practices of content creators and students. Data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire administered to both groups to gather insights into their content-creation practices and preferences. The responses were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify key themes and patterns. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic data, providing a contextual understanding of the participants. The combination of qualitative analysis and descriptive statistics offered a comprehensive view of the content creation practices among both groups.

Participants

The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique among ESL learners at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, based on factors such as their experience with content creation, their status as digital natives (Dingli & Seychell, 2015), and their willingness to participate. The students had lower English proficiency levels, ranging from MUET Band 1 to 3.5, which is equivalent to IELTS scores of 3.0–5.5 and TOEFL scores of 32–78 (Abu Bakar et al., 2021). MUET serves as a primary tool for assessing English language proficiency in Malaysian higher education.

To enhance the generalisability and validity of the study, a diverse student population was included, as reflected in the demographic data (refer to Table 2). The study sample consisted of 51 students enrolled in an oral communication English course, where vlog production was a mandatory component of the course assessment.

FINDINGS

This section presents the demographic profile of the respondents, the relationship between content choices influenced by social media, and the factors affecting learners' vlog content selection. The data were analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics, while qualitative patterns were examined to provide deeper insights into content selection choices. A total of 51 participants took part in the study.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic distribution of the respondents is summarised in this section, covering gender, age, ethnicity, state of origin, socioeconomic background, and education level. The majority of respondents were female (66.7%), while males accounted for 33.3%, indicating a higher participation rate among female students. The age distribution reveals that most respondents were 21 years old (78.4%), identifying them as digital natives. A smaller proportion of participants fell into other age groups (refer to Table 1).

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	17	33.3%
Female	34	66.7%
Age	Frequency	Percentage
19 - 20	3	5.9%
21	40	78.4%
22-24	8	15.7%

Table 1: Gender and Age Distribution of Respondents.

Geographically, the highest proportion of respondents originated from Sabah (80.39%), followed by Sarawak (11.76%). This high representation aligns with the university's policy of prioritising students from Sabah and Borneo before considering applicants from other Malaysian states (Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 2025). In contrast, respondents from Kelantan (3.92%), Pahang (1.96%), and Penang (1.96%) were minimally represented. The ethnic composition was diverse, with Bajau (31.37%) and Malay (15.69%) being the predominant groups, followed by Kadazan Dusun (13.73%), Bugis (13.73%), and other minority groups (refer to Table 2).

Country/State of Origin	Frequency	Percentage
Sabah	41	80.4%
Sarawak	6	11.8%
Kelantan	2	3.9%
Pahang	1	2%
Penang	1	2%

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Kadazan Dusun	7	13.7%
Bajau	16	31.4%
Bugis	7	13.7%
Malay	8	15.7%
Brunei	4	7.8%
Other Borneo ethnicities	9	17.6%

Table 2: Ethnic Composition.

The socioeconomic background data indicate that the majority of respondents (78.43%) belong to the B40 socioeconomic group, while 21.57% are from the M40 category. In terms of educational background, most respondents (76.47%) completed their studies with an STPM qualification. Smaller percentages obtained a Matriculation certificate (5.88%), Foundation certificate (5.88%), Diploma (7.84%), and Degree (3.92%). Regarding English proficiency, most respondents (94.12%) achieved a MUET Band score of 3 to 3.5, while a smaller percentage (5.9%) fell within Band 2 to 2.5.

Previous Education	Frequency	Percentage
STPM	39	76.5%
Matriculation	3	5.9%
Foundation	3	5.9%
Diploma	4	7.8%
Degree	2	3.9%

MUET Band	Frequency	Percentage
Band 3-3.5	48	94.1%
Band 2-2.5	3	5.9%

Family Socioeconomic Background	Frequency	Percentage
M40	11	21.6%
B40	40	78.4%

Table 3: Socioeconomic and educational background

RQ 1: How do students select content for the vlog project?

Relationship between Content Created by Content Creators and Students

A cross-tabulation analysis was conducted to examine the correspondence between the emerging themes and content categories in students' responses for RQ1. These findings offer valuable insights into content selection patterns and the relationship between the two datasets. Further analysis using a chi-square test was conducted to determine the significance of this relationship.

Case Processing Summary

	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Content by Content Creator * Content by Student2	61	100.0%	0	0.0%	61	100.0%

Content by Content Creator * Content by Student Crosstabulation

		Content by Student		Total
			yes	
Content by Content Creator	Count	0	26	26
	Expected Count	4.3	21.7	26.0
	yes Count	10	25	35
	yes Expected Count	5.7	29.3	35.0
Total	Count	10	51	61
	Expected Count	10.0	51.0	61.0

Table 4: A cross-tabulation report between Content selection by students for the vlog project vs Content created by social media influencers

The crosstabulation in Table 4 shows the relationship between content created by content creators and content created by students. Out of the 61 total cases identified, when content creators produce content, 26 cases (42.6%) indicate that students do not create similar content, while 35 cases (57.4%) indicate that students do create similar content. The expected count for students not creating similar content when content creators produce content is 21.7, while the expected count for students creating similar content is 29.3. A larger proportion of students appear to create content similar to that of established content creators. This may indicate that students rely on content creators for inspiration, reflecting a preference for trending, audience-tested, or popular content themes (Puzziferro, 2008; Jan 2015; Bolliger et al., 2010). While expected counts suggest a roughly balanced pattern, the higher actual count of students creating similar content (35 cases) implies an observable influence of content creators on students' choices.

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.885 ^a	1	.003		
Continuity Correction ^b	6.923	1	.009		
Likelihood Ratio	12.550	1	<.001		
Fisher's Exact Test				.003	.002
N of Valid Cases	61				

a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.26.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 5: Chi-square report between Content selection by students for vlog project vs Content created by social media influencers

The chi-square test results in Table 5 indicate a significant relationship between content created by content creators and content created by students. The Pearson chi-square value is 8.885 with 1 degree of freedom, and the associated p-value is .003. This suggests that the observed frequencies in the crosstabulation are unlikely to have occurred by chance, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The continuity correction chi-square value is 6.923 with 1 degree of freedom, and the associated p-value is .009, further supporting the presence of a significant relationship. The likelihood ratio chi-square value is 12.550 with 1 degree of freedom, and the associated p-value is less than .001, providing strong evidence of a relationship between the variables. Additionally, Fisher's exact test yields a p-value of .003 for a two-sided test and .002 for a one-sided test, further supporting the significance of the relationship.

Based on these results, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant relationship between content created by content creators and content created by students.

RQ2: What factors influence students' selection of vlog content?

Factors Influencing Content Selection for Vlogs

The analysis highlights key factors influencing vlog content creation (see Figure 1) in response to RQ2.

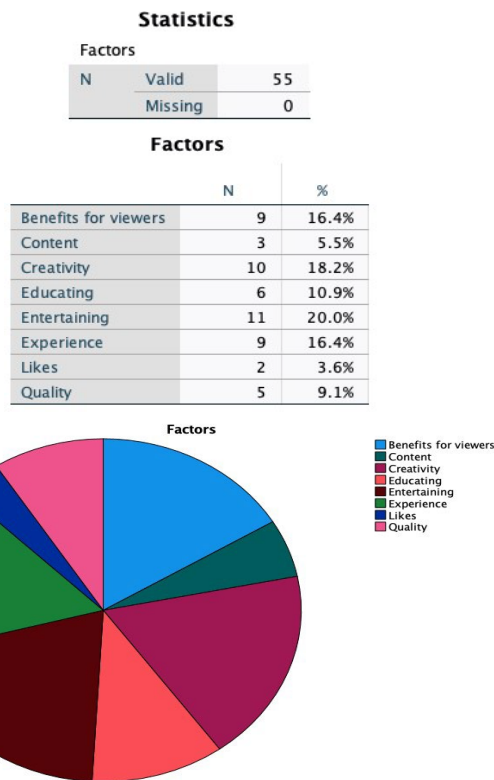


Figure 1: Content selection factors

The analysis highlights key factors influencing vlog content creation. Among the 55 valid responses, the most frequently cited factor is "Entertaining" (20.0%), emphasising the priority respondents place on producing engaging and captivating content to retain audience interest. "Creativity" emerges as the second most significant factor (18.2%), indicating the importance of innovative and unique approaches in vlog production. Factors such as "Benefits for viewers" and "Experience" are equally significant (16.4%), reflecting a dual focus on creating rewarding viewer experiences and leveraging personal expertise. "Educating" accounts for 10.9%, suggesting a recognition of the educational potential of vlogs in disseminating knowledge or providing informative content. "Quality" (9.1%) highlights the emphasis on production standards and the aesthetic appeal of content, while "Content" (5.5%) and "Likes" (3.6%) reflect a lower prioritization of direct content substance and social validation metrics such as audience reactions. The findings suggest a multifaceted approach to content selection, balancing creativity, audience engagement, and educational value with professional presentation.

DISCUSSION

Insights from Gender, Age and Ethnicity

The samples comprise a majority of female respondents (66.7%), which may influence content selection toward themes traditionally associated with female preferences, such as education, creativity, or storytelling. Research suggests that female creators often prioritise social connection and emotional appeal in content, which may explain the emphasis on factors like "educating" and "entertaining" (Wei,

Kian, & Mey, 2025). Conversely, male respondents (33.3%) may focus more on technical aspects such as production quality or engagement through humour or action, potentially influencing the balance between creativity and content quality. The predominance of 21-year-old respondents (78.4%), within the 19 to 24 age range, positions them as digital natives who are highly familiar with social media and emerging trends. Their age suggests a tendency to prioritise entertainment and creativity, as these are dominant themes among Gen Z content consumers and creators (Zuraidah & Mardziah, 2019). The multicultural composition of respondents, particularly the dominance of Bajau (31.4%), Kadazan Dusun (13.7%), and Malay (15.7%) communities, reflects a diverse range of cultural narratives. This diversity may lead to a preference for culturally resonant content, highlighting heritage, traditions, or regional identity. Additionally, minority groups such as the Rungus, Bidayuh, and Iban, though small in representation, may bring unique perspectives to content creation, emphasising inclusivity and diversity (Thathiah, 2024).

Influence of Socioeconomic Status

Respondents from the B40 socioeconomic group dominated the sample (78.43%). This background often comes with resource constraints, influencing content selection to focus on cost-effective themes and tools. For instance, these students may prioritise creativity over production quality, as creativity does not require expensive equipment. This aligns with existing literature on digital content creation in low-resource settings, where students rely on innovation and adaptability to compensate for technological limitations (Ndibalema, 2022).

Conversely, respondents from the M40 Group (21.57%) may have greater access to resources, allowing them to emphasise higher production quality or explore diverse content themes. This disparity might lead to varied approaches in content creation, with the B40 group using affordable tools such as mobile-based filming to bridge resource gaps. Thus, socioeconomic context shapes students' decision-making in content selection, leading them to prioritise practical and accessible themes such as educational content, skill-based tutorials, or community-focused topics. These themes reflect their lived experiences and aspirations.

Consideration for Teaching and Learning Practices

There are a few considerations for both learners and teachers based on these findings, as outlined below:

a. Learning Strategies with Inclusivity.

The tendency to imitate or reference existing content may be linked to students' learning processes (Derex, Feron, Godelle, & Raymond, 2025). Observing and replicating content creators' strategies enables students to experiment with established content styles before developing their unique approaches. However, despite the influence, 42.6% of students do not replicate similar content. This suggests that a subset of students actively seek originality or prefer to diverge from mainstream trends. When contextualised within demographic data, limited access to internet connectivity and technological facilities (Lee, & Lee, 2022) may also contribute to students' reduced reliance on social

media influencers as references. Students from geographically remote areas often face challenges in accessing these resources (Yahuarcani et al, 2021), which may hinder their ability to engage in autonomous learning. Gaudart (2023) highlights instances of miscommunication between Malaysians and Americans caused by a lack of cultural elements in language content. Understanding these demographic influences allows educators to strategies their pedagogical approaches to better accommodate the diverse backgrounds of students.

b. Instructional design with Inclusivity.

For educators, fostering originality in students' vlogging projects is essential. Students should be encouraged to explore unique themes rather than merely replicating existing trends. This can be facilitated through structured guidance at each stage of the vlogging process, from initial planning and brainstorming to content production.

Vlogging stages	Activities
Conceptualizing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning what to say and how to say it 2. Coming up with an appropriate voice-blog topic 3. Listening to others' vlogs for ideas 4. Consulting a dictionary or searching the Internet 5. Note-taking
Brainstorming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outlining main and supporting ideas 2. Translating from L1 to L2 3. Writing down a script before recording
Articulation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rehearsing before recording 2. Recording voice blog and uploading it after checking
Monitoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listening to the recorded file before uploading it 2. Monitoring vlog entries in terms of content, organization, and language usage
Evaluating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluating vlog content, organization, and language-usage 2. Redoing the vlogs

Table 6: Stages of Vlogging (Maulidah, 2018)

By training students to balance inspiration from popular content with personal innovation, educators can enhance learners' communication skills while expanding their ability to express ideas in diverse and dynamic ways. This approach aligns with 21st-century learning goals by equipping students with critical and digital literacy skills essential for effective content creation and meaningful engagement in online discourse (Schrum & Levin, 2009). Integrating digital literacy training and providing flexible learning methods that accommodate varying levels of access to technology can empower students to develop their potential, even with limited resources.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the factors influencing content selection for vlogging projects among students in an oral communication English language classroom at Universiti Malaysia Sabah. Through an analysis of data collected from 51 students, several key determinants of content selection emerged. The findings highlight the significance of entertainment value, creativity, audience benefits, personal experience, and social media exposure in content selection. Notably, students recognised the need to create engaging and entertaining content that captures their audience's attention. They emphasised the importance of showcasing their creativity and uniqueness in their vlogs, striving to stand out. Additionally, students acknowledged their role in producing valuable and informative content that educates and inspires viewers.

Personal experience played a pivotal role in content selection, as students drew on their interests and backgrounds to create authentic and relatable vlogs. This finding highlights the value of personal connection and authenticity in content creation, with students more inclined to produce vlogs on topics they were passionate about and had first-hand experiences with. In addition, social media exposure emerged as a significant influence. Students indicated that the content they consumed on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram shaped their own content choices, highlighting the role of social media as both a source of inspiration and a reference point for their creative process.

These findings have important implications for educators and practitioners in the English language classroom. By understanding the factors that influence topic selection, educators can design learning activities and assignments that integrate vlogging as a creative and engaging tool. Encouraging students to explore their creativity, draw from personal experiences, and provide valuable content can enhance their learning experience and foster meaningful connections with their audience. However, this study has certain limitations. The sample size was relatively small (51 students), which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the study was conducted within a specific context - an English classroom - and further research is needed to examine content selection in different settings and populations. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of content selection in student-led vlogging projects. The identified factors provide valuable insights into the motivations and considerations that shape students' content choices. By considering these factors, educators can more effectively support students in their vlogging endeavours and foster a learning environment that promotes creativity, authenticity, and engagement.

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