Empowering Academia Through Self-Narratives for Professional Development in Synthetic and Human-Generated Podcasts

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Abstract

Social and emotional learning are defining characteristics for mapping identities not only in personal schemata but also professionally speaking. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are driving principles for students as well as teachers. A person who is heard, understood, and included will bring forth the best possible outcomes for one's community. In this paper, advancing inclusive leadership and leveraging self-narratives through AI will be tackled through the means of podcasting both in real-life narratives with global contributions and a sample synthetic podcast series of interviews. The presenter will juxtapose and demonstrate the difference between a human-conducted and an AI-generated podcast. On the same scale, in this session, the presenter will showcase the importance of articulating the voices of English Language teachers (ELT) and global leadership not only in Tunisia as a case study but also in a global stance. Light will be shed on the "Ikigai", which is a borrowing from a Japanese concept that means the purpose of life, for each guest in the podcast series. During these interviews, interviewees imparted their personal and professional narratives by relating their "Kaizen", which is a theory of continuous improvement, to teaching and leadership development in the education field. All these transformations have been endorsed and enhanced through AI-powered content from generating AI music, videos, and generic voice creation through open AI and AI Labs. Proportionally, podcasting has been adapted as an active learning experience and a growth mindset opportunity to leverage the competencies of Engineering students to fit into the CDIO standards.

Keywords: Self-Narratives, Empowering, AI-Generated, Podcasts, Humanist, Ikigai, Kaizen, Life Purpose, Improvement, CDIO Standards: 2,7,8

Introduction

Language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it.
Bakhtin (1984, p. 183)

The notion of the self has been approached differently over the ages whether in literature, artistic creation, or research studies. The post-covid era is characterized by a paradigm shift in perceiving and expressing individual and collective identities. This paper will focus on the interconnectedness between the human psyche, the dialogic self, and various metacognition aspects responsible for shaping the self, identity, and life purpose, ikigai, and kaizen, continuous improvement through self-narratives in podcasting which is presented as a new journalistic and educational tool.

As a research study, this paper will tackle the cross-cultural and cognitive dialectics of ikigai and kaizen, language implicature, and adaptation of the concepts in global contexts with TESOL professionals and undergraduate students in Tunisia as a case study. Digital storytelling offers a new human approach to identities and the self through podcasting for educational purposes. One of the colleagues interviewed conveyed that the Ikigai International Podcast served as a possible tool for critically examining the social and emotional dimension of life in English Language Teaching (ELT) (Lin, 2023).

The focus of this qualitative narrative inquiry is to collect stories and perceptions, aspirations, life purpose, challenges encountered, and motives from Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESOL) and to investigate to what extent the intersection between their mission, passion, vocation and professional can lead to a purposeful life. As defined by the Japanese government, ikigai is defined as "the zest of life [...] it refers to that which brings value and joy to life: from people, such as one's children or friends, to activities including work and hobbies" (Ikigai, 2022). Other perspectives on ikigai were approached by theorists like Marc Winn such as in the famous Venn Diagram of the crossing of passion, mission, vocation, and profession.

The Ikigai and Kaizen podcasts explored the concept which is rooted in the Japanese culture and its adaptation to the Western and Eastern worlds. Research also includes undergraduate software engineering university students studying English as a second language and enrolled at MUST University which is aligned with the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc. (ABET) accreditation criteria. The podcasting experience tackled their personal interests, hobbies, life purpose, and goals. A qualitative narrative inquiry design involves collecting experiences and personal explanations, which can lead to strategic and purposeful collective actions (O'Tool, 2018; Cline, 2021).

This paper is divided into four sections. First, the theoretical background related to narratology and podcasting, narrative podcasting, will be explored to theorize the impact of the latter on this experience participants. The next section will scrutinize the different case studies elaborated on this project at the organizational and institutional levels. Afterward, the correlation between ikigai, Kaizen, podcasting, and professional development will be analyzed through two interrelated surveys, one for teachers and the other for students.

Methods

Design

This article is framed on the mixed method approach narrative inquiry qualitative and quantitative and the discourse was analyzed through a constructivist method as the blend between the two approaches. A mixed-methods approach is a research methodology in its own right. As stated by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), a mixed-methods research design is a research design that has its own philosophical assumptions and methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it includes philosophical assumptions to provide directions for the collection and analysis of data from multiple sources in a single study (Dawadi et al., 2021).

Among the modalities conducted in this research is podcasting for educational purposes whereby it employed as a tool for self-expressionism, indeed, during the ikigai and kaizen talk shows guest speakers told their stories about their life purpose as constructed from their life experience at professional and personal stances. This preoccupation with the self is not just with our own selves. We also want to witness others finding out who they are, what they are made of, and if they can change (Coward, 2013, p. 88).

Among the ELT available podcast talk shows that deal with either teaching practice or theme-based dialogues, the ikigai & kaizen podcasts provide a distinctive narrative of professional development blended with coaching. Narrative podcasting serves as a powerful tool to harness professional development through storytelling techniques and personal narratives. In the Ikigai & KaiZen podcasts, a qualitative and narrative inquiry was established in interviewing teachers at a global stance articulating leadership voices, and at another scale integrating podcasting in educational programs for mapping future careers and empowering leadership skills in undergraduate learners studying English as a second language.

The narrative inquiry method was used as a steppingstone to cover personal stories of TESOLers and EFL students.

> Narrative inquiry is relatively new among the qualitative research designs compared to qualitative case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory. What distinguishes narrative inquiry is it beings with the biographical aspect of C. Wright Mills' trilogy of 'biography, history, and society'(O'Tolle, 2018). The primary purpose for a narrative inquiry study is participants provide the researcher with their life experiences through thick rich stories. Narrative inquiry was first used by Connelly and Calandinin as a research design to explore the perceptions and personal stories of teachers. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990)

The ikigai and kaizen podcasts participants offered varied layers of their lives as impactful stories. Each narrative mirrors the delicacy and the art of being an English language teacher from their very first taught lesson to the most prominent conference they organized or attended.

Participants: Case Studies of Tesol Professionals and Undergraduate Students (MUST)

Data Collection

Ikigai & Kaizen in Tesol

Data was collected through two different means: audio-visual via interviews and textual retrieved from two surveys, one for professionals and another one for teachers. Participants in these podcasts were identified according to their professional profiles such as achievements, professional development they provide to others like volunteering in ELT communities in teachers associations, personal development blueprint, prowess and interests, and quality service. Volunteer interviewees in the TESOL field include 18 teachers for the IKIGAI International Podcast and 14 for the KaiZen Experience. The podcasting experience was segmented into three interconnected phases: pre-interview, the storytelling exeperience, and post-narrative.

In the pre-interview phase, an onboarding process is established whereby the guests receive a serious of reflection questions framed from the Ikigai's Venn Diagram, a link to an ikigai personality test and a surprise question kept secret until the day of the interview. Usually, the unrevealed questions are personalized to the speaker's ikigai test result asked either by the host or an AI avatar speaking assistant. The ikigai and kaizen podcasts rely on co-creating meaning of every guest's life purpose through narrative podcasting. During the podcast episode, every participant was asked about 1) Why did you choose your actual profession? If it was not a choice, what has paved the way for you to work in this field?; 2) What do you think are the utmost skills your (ELT) community needs from you?; 3) What are the top three skills you think you can be paid for? (not necessarily linked to teaching); 4) When was the last moment you felt extremely happy about a professional/personal milestone?; 5) Can you list out as many skills as you think you have mastered apart from teaching and training?; 6) A surprise question (to be revealed on the day of the interview). Following the interview, a follow-up survey was communicated to participants to share their insights and feedback.

As for the KaiZen podcast, the approach was slightly different yet interconnected with ikigai. The focus was continuous improvement not only at the individual level but also collectively. A case study reminiscent to the kaizen experience is with Blue Ocean Language Center which is a language and business school in Syria with an innovative strategy.

The specificity of Kaizen in this case study is the leagership strategy which is a porte-manteau of leardership and management whereby the manager of the business demonstrates the criteria not only of successful management but also transformational leadership in the sense Mr. Safwan A. Kadoura deals with his work partners as his collaborators not his employees. As defined Masaaki Imai, Founder of Kaizen Institute, "KAIZEN™ means improvement. Moreover, it means continuing improvement in personal life, home life, social life, and working life. When applied to the workplace KAIZEN™ means continuing improvement involving everyone – managers and workers alike". The second episode of the KaiZen podcast illustrates the synergy of such zenitude in leadership with Blue Ocean.

Ikigai and Kaizen at the Magrebian University of Science and Technology (MUST) University

Among other case studies explored within the Tesol field, in this article, podcasting for educational purposes is applied in curriculum design at MUST University which is a private establishment providing the North American system benchmarks blended with national higher education criteria in Tunisia. The syllabus of the English Composition course endorses the integration of the podcasting experience to enhance engineering competencies and maintain sustainability as guiding principles. MUST University. This section of the research paper will shed light on the best practices of CDIO[1] standards correlated to podcasting and identified through the ILOs[2] matrix for each course.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and CDIO Standards for Students: 2,7,8

This paper covers part of the course syllabus ENG121 entitled English Composition and the convergence of the ILOs, ABET student outcomes, with the revisited Bloom's Digital Taxonomy with more focus on AI capabilities, and human distinctive skills. This approach follows the UNESCO's Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research, the 17 SDGS, the ABET ILOs for software engineering, and Bloom's revisited Taxonomy, creating a comprehensive quality course. The course is planned to fine-tune the course learning objectives (CLOs) with podcasting to the CDIO standards for students: 2,7,8 which are: learning outcomes, integrated learning experiences and active learning.

Results

Ikigai & Kaizen With Teachers

The survey shows that the importance of the podcasts' episodes results differs from teachers to students. As shown in the bar chart below, the podcast articulated aspects of social emotional learning (SEL), inclusive leadership and self-improvement for professionals.
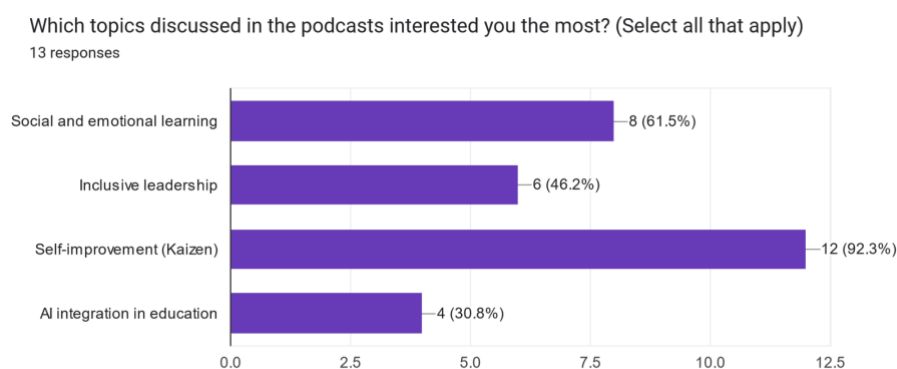

Figure 1: Topics Discussed in the Ikigai & KaiZen Podcasts

The ikigai podcasts mirrors in itself the inclusive aspect as it has hosted global professionals from countries including the USA, Honduras, Senegal, the UK, Brazil, Egypt, Tunisia, Japan, Canada and many more. Global leaders discussed addressed their best teaching practices,

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[1] CDIO: Conceive, Design, Implement, Operate
[2] ILOs: Intended Learning outcomes (ABET)

lessons learned from their community service and provided insights for novice teachers on how to be agents of change in the field of ELT.

Following the survey investigation, speakers have conveyed that 69.2% think that the DEI was articulated in the podcasts as demonstrated in the pie chart below.

Did you find the discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion relevant to your experiences?
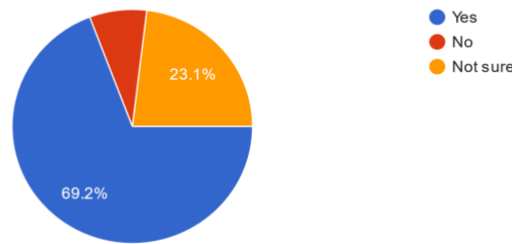13 responses

Figure 2: Topics D.E.I in the Ikigai & KaiZen Podcasts

Innovation was incorporated in the ikigai and KaiZen podcasts at the level of experimentation with artificial intelligence. Indeed, in the last part of the interview, the guest is asked a question by an AI chatbot and is invited to converse with the tool. The AI-powered experience was assessed as followed:

Do you feel that the integration of AI technology enhances the experience in Ikigai and Kaizen podcasts?
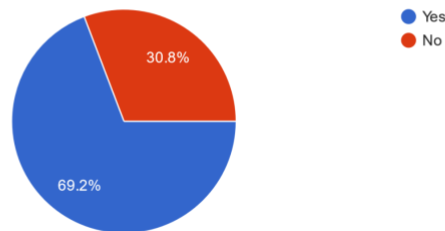13 responses

Figure 3: Integration of AI in the Ikigai & KaiZen Podcasts

With a percentage of 69.2%, participants expressed that the AI assistant and co-host experience enhance the Ikigai and KaiZen podcasts while 30.8 did not related to the new tool in podcasting.

At a larger stance, the podcast serves as an inspiration to the interviewees to further pursue a purposeful life. On a scale from 1 to 3, 53.8% expressed their interest in adopted this philosophy to their lives.

How likely are you to apply insights from the podcasts in your personal or professional life?
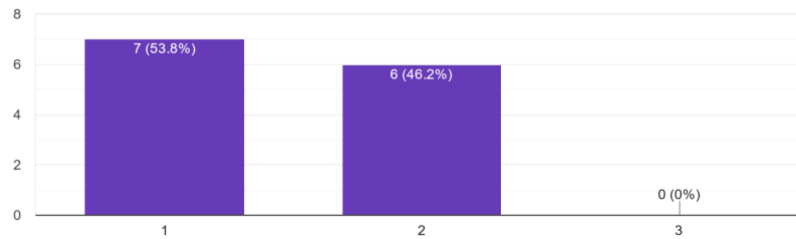13 responses

Figure 4: Likelihood to Apply Ikigai and Kaizen to Participants' Lives

The Ikigai Venn's diagram intersects with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in all its aspects of psychological needs, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. Someone's vocation can be what "the world needs from you", doing what "you love" is what keeps your passion for life ongoing, one's self-esteem can be cultivated from achieving one's passion, mission, profession and vocation to sparkle one's self-actualization for the "zest of life", ikigai (Ikigai,2022).
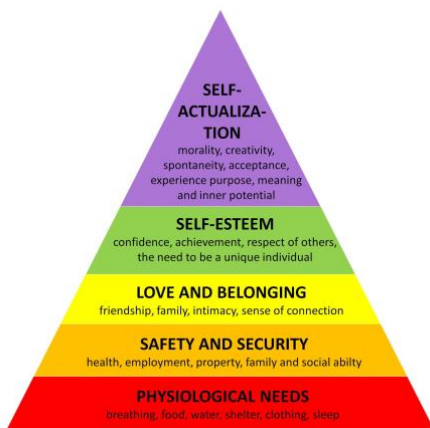

Figure 5: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Figure 6: Ikigai Venn Diagram

As for to what extent the concepts of ikigai and Kaizen were articulated, 76.9% positively embrace transformational habits.

Do you think the podcasts effectively articulated the concepts of Ikigai & Kaizen (finding purpose in life and transformational habits once at a time)?
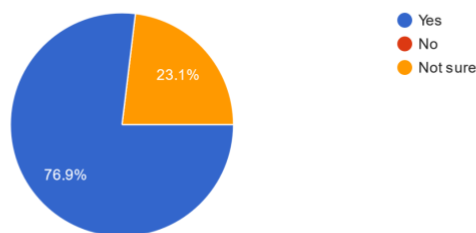13 responses

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Figure 7: Topics Discussed in the Ikigai & KaiZen Podcasts

Ikigai & Kaizen With Undergraduate Students

Podcasting was used as a means to leverage the competencies of Engineering students to fit into the CDIO standards. Kaizen is the major topic favored according to the post-course survey as 50% of the students preferred topics of self-improvement according to the bar chart below.
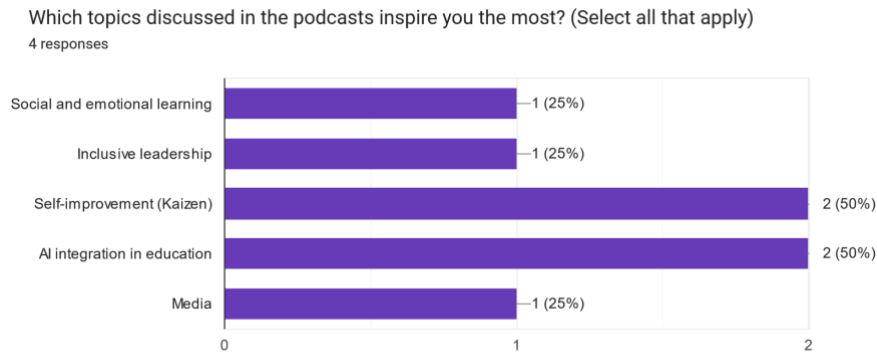

Figure 8: Topics discussed in the Ikigai & KaiZen podcasts for students

As for the DEI aspect, 100% of students consider that the podcast was diverse enough, equitable and inclusive to all.
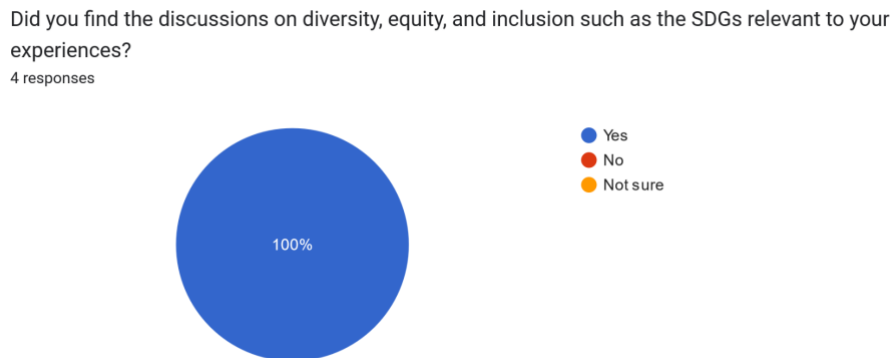

Figure 9: DEI in the Ikigai & KaiZen Podcasts for Students

Concerning the AI avatar section, participants perceive that the experience was "very intriguing to see how AI analyze questions and respond to them" and also consider the AI avatar as unbiased and guided introspection."

According to the graph below, the majority of participants think that the integration of AI technology has enhanced the podcasting experience. Proportionally, podcasting has been adapted as an active learning experience and a growth mindset opportunity to leverage the competencies of Engineering students to fit into the CDIO standards.

Do you feel that the integration of AI technology enhances the experience your podcast?
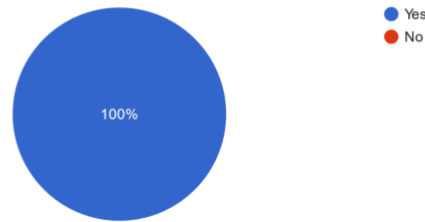4 responses

Figure 10: AI Technology in the Ikigai & KaiZen Podcasts for Students

In the syllabus devoted to the advanced technical communication course, the curriculum is designed with instructional methodology relying on the revisited Bloom's Digital Taxonomy in which the learning experience is scaffolded from low-order to high-order thinking skills blended with active learning andragogy[3].
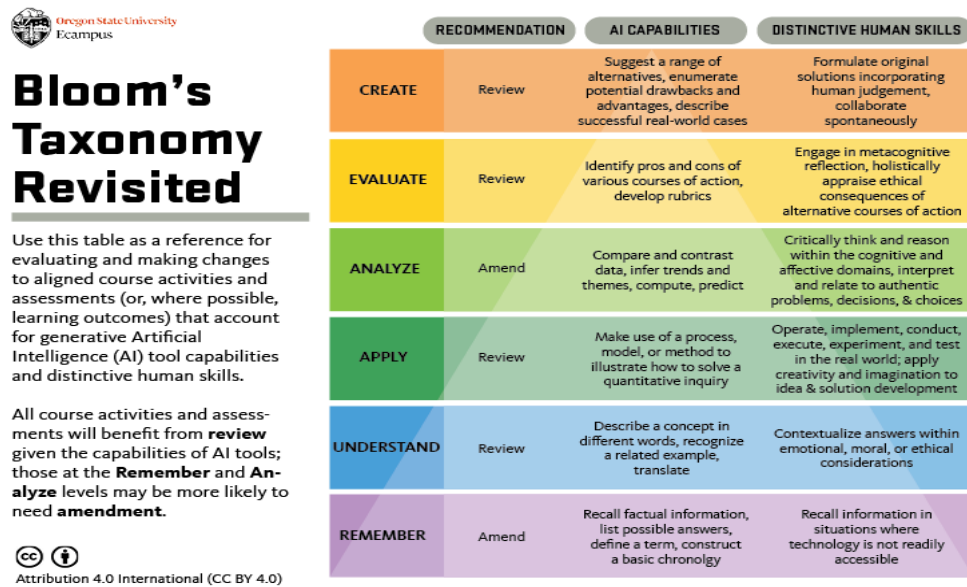

Figure 11: Bloom's Taxonomy Revisited

Instructional design relies mainly on building up on distinguished human skills and engaging students in metacognitive learning experiences. The active learning approach, essentially a student-centered approach, contextualizes meta-learning on research and project-based tasks powered by artificial intelligence such as creating discussion boards, blogs, videos, presentations and most significantly in the case of this case study, podcasting for educational purposes.

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[3] Andragogy: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-40274-7_54

How likely are you to apply insights from the podcasts in your personal or academic life?
4 responses

Figure 12: Likelihood of Applying ikigai and kaizen for students

As indicated above in the chart, 75% of undergraduates are more likely to apply ikigai and kaizen to their personal and academic lives.

Do you think the podcasts effectively articulated the concepts of finding purpose in life and transformational habits?
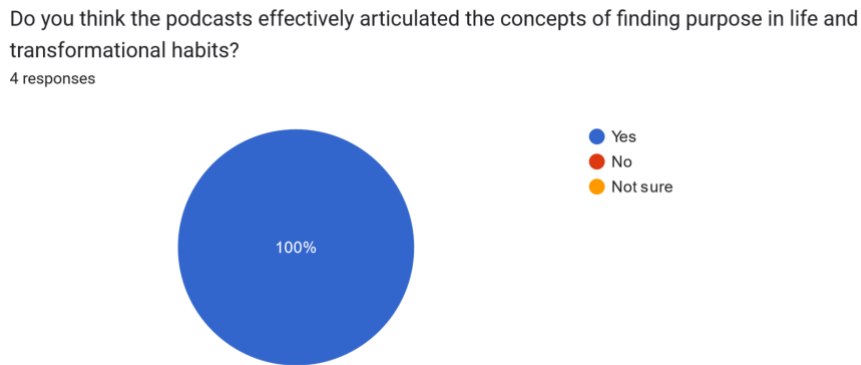4 responses

Figure 13: Relevance of the Ikigai & KaiZen Podcasts for students

The majority of participants consider applying ikigai and kaizen in their lives as indicated above in the graph.

Discussion

Results have shown that both concepts, ikigai and kaizen are relevant to academia including teachers and students and express their interest in applicating them to live a purposeful life. Most importantly all stakeholders perceive the importance of articulating one's voice and podcasting is one possible effective tool.

As for the juxtaposition of the human and the AI-Synthetic podcasts, results have shown that the majority appreciate innovation in the narrative experience through AI, yet there are exceptions that prefer the human interaction and see no purpose in implementing AI.

Conclusion

This paper is an initiative to bring academia together including professors, students, and global citizens to ponder upon one's purpose for life. This is not an attempt to define or frame ikigai or kaizen but rather has a holistic vision to the multiplicity of perceptions to one or more terms embraced in life. Participants considered that podcast "natural the way it is" and not having a journalistic style. Other colleagues believe that "these podcasts are great and will definitely be

of benefit to teachers looking to improve both their teaching practices in a holistic way and it's a wonderful growth mindset tool as well". As plus Delta, some improvements suggest "interviewing some rising voices in different parts of the World. They embody leadership in their field." From students' standpoints, they would appreciate keeping the same podcast but working on the project as a group work. As Ibn Khaldoun states, the inherent social nature of human being, one cannot live in dissociation with one's community regardless of one's age group.

Acknowledgments

Appendix

The Matrix of Assessment of the ILOs from the syllabus of the ENG121 English Composition Course at MUST University.

ILOs	Assignment: AI-Powered Digital Stories	Assignment: Conversational Skills with Open AI	Assignment: Episode 1: MUST Education Podcast	Assignment: Writing An Article: E-magazine Project (STEP 1)	Assignment: E-Magazine Project (STEP 2): Writing a Haiku Poem	Assignment: MUST UNiversity Podcast: Episode 2
1						
2						
3	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	X	X	X			X
5	X		X		X	X
6	X		X	X	X	X
7	X	X	X			X

Student Outcomes (SOs) from the syllabus of the ENG121 English Composition Course at MUST University.

1. An ability to identify, formulate, and solve complex engineering problems by applying principles of engineering, science, and mathematics
2. An ability to apply engineering design to produce solutions that meet specified needs with consideration of public health, safety, and welfare, as well as global, cultural, social, environmental, and economic factors.
3. An ability to communicate effectively with a range of audiences
4. An ability to recognize ethical and professional responsibilities in engineering situations and make informed judgments, which must consider the impact of engineering solutions in global, economic, environmental, and societal contexts
5. An ability to function effectively on a team whose members together provide leadership, create a collaborative and inclusive environment, establish goals, plan tasks, and meet objectives.

6. An ability to develop and conduct appropriate experimentation, analyze and interpret data, and use engineering judgment to draw conclusions.
7. An ability to acquire and apply new knowledge as needed, using appropriate learning strategies.

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