

THE IMPORTANCE AND EFFORTS IN USING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING AND THE TEACHER'S READINESS FOR INTEGRATING ICT IN THE CLASSROOM IN MALAYSIAN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Information and communication technology (ICT) plays an important role in language teaching and learning. With the rapid development of technology in the field of education, it is vital to apply ICT in the classroom as this can assist both teachers and students. As a result of the application of ICT, both teaching and learning are facilitated. The purpose of this study is to review the importance of the application of ICT in Malaysian Education and the efforts in using technology to improve language teaching and learning. The government made few efforts to make sure that teachers use ICT as one of the tools in teaching. Thus, this review also put forward the teacher's readiness for integrating ICT in the classroom. This review also discusses various types of technologies being used in the teaching and learning process such as blogs, voice chat, audio conferencing, emails and many more. The result of this review are hoped to provide insights that to make the best use of current learning trends and tools, teachers need to be computer literate and confident in using the tools in the classrooms.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Malaysian Education, Teaching and Learning

1.0 Introduction

The integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) has been developed by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia and with such efforts; the growth can be seen in the application of ICT in the classroom or even outside of the classroom. Ybarra and Green (2003) noted that students need further language support in learning languages. In order to develop all the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), a lot of practices are needed and for doing such tasks, students are in need of using various tools which can help them learn the language easily and effectively. Based on a study by Nomass (2013), there are numerous numbers of ICT that can be used in the teaching and learning process and it is divided by all the four skills. For instances ICT such as using computers, broadcasting, CD players, tape recorder, computer reading based-programs, multimedia software, browsing the Internet, electronic dictionaries, internet voice chatting, speech synthesis programs, emails, internet text-chatting and many more can be used to assist learners. This is where the integration of ICT will be useful in teaching and learning process.

As cited in Salehi and Salehi (2012), Garret (1991) mentioned that the integration of ICT in teaching and learning served as a medium in which a variety of methods, approaches and pedagogical philosophies may be implemented. In addition, as cited by Shaymlee and Phil (2012) by Graddol (2000) noted that the application of ICT in the classroom also sets a new teaching model. He also stated that the numbers of English learners doubled from a billion for the year 2000 in just a decade. Shaymlee and Phil (2012) added that the significance of teaching continue to grow, fuelled, partially by the use of ICT. Hence, with the rapid development of ICT's usage in teaching and learning, teachers need to be knowledgeable to cater the needs of the students nowadays.

The motivation of this study is to highlight the importance of integrating ICT in language teaching and learning. Teachers often skeptical about using technology in the classroom as it is believed that technology should not drive pedagogy. However, technology are popular, innovative and have the potential to fundamentally change the way teachers think about ways on enhancing teaching and learning. Technology is continually developing and teachers need to adapt new teaching method accordingly. ICT is hoped to reduce the workload of teachers in the planning and delivering of their teaching and learning activities. Thus, it is worth reviewing the importance and efforts in using technology to improve language teaching and learning and the teacher's readiness for integrating ICT in the classroom in Malaysian education.

2.0 Methodology

ICT in education has gone a long way of implementation. Various studies have been conducted to explore on the impact of using ICT in education. However, this review paper is limited to research done and articles within the outskirts of Malaysian education system to further look into ICT and language learning in Malaysia. Works included in this paper were identified from language and teaching journals to further help review the issue of the uses and effectiveness of ICT in language education.

3.0 Discussions

3.1 The importance of ICT in Malaysian Education

The emergence of evolving technologies leaves a significant impact on educational development. Thus, many researchers reported their studies on the integration of ICT in the process of teaching and learning as efforts to amplify students'

performance, teaching effectiveness and teachers' productivity (Wang et al., 2008; Jamil and Shah, 2011). ICT is being implemented in our education system because according to a case study by IPPMM (2007), traditional methods are inadequate to prepare students to face the future that is moving toward knowledge-based economy. For students to be more knowledge-based, many educators focus on teaching and learning using the constructivist approach where it is more student-centred and students are coached to become "active thinkers" to construct their own knowledge. As cited by Melor Md Yunus (2013) by Mullamoa (2010), ICT is being implemented because it is not viewed as a conventional method but as an inventive method of teaching which could activate learning among students.

Furthermore, numerous studies have shown that the quality of learning can improve notably when teaching is integrated with ICT [Davis, et al. (1997); Ab. Rahim Bakar et al. (2008)] which is why when the Malaysian government launched Vision 2020 in 1991, ICT was going to be an integral part of the Malaysian education.

Another reason why ICT is being implemented is due to the numerous tools in technologies that teachers can use in and out of schools or university to enhance students' learning. This point can also be a disadvantage as some projects do not have a clear learning design and Alexander & McKenzie (2001) noted that without a clear objective, learning outcomes cannot be improved. This does not stop technology to be implemented in tertiary education where Marlia Puteh (2008) mentioned the importance of e-learning to promote the use of IT in university teaching and to prepare students for the new technologies that they will face in the job market.

3.2 The efforts in using technology to improve language teaching and learning

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has emerged, and plays a significant role in language learning, (Amelia, A. Rahman Sidek., and Melor Md Yunus, 2012) where the technology has innovated the students' learning styles (Melor Md Yunus., Maimun Aqsha Lubis, Lin, C. P. and Ismail Suardi Wekke, 2009).

It is undeniable that ICT does provide extensive approaches to learning (Melor Md Yunus, 2007) where it helps provide an array of choices such as online practices, blogs, social media and also online discussion boards to facilitate language learning. As efforts are made in improving technology supported education, it does demonstrate positive indication that ICT learning can be as effective as traditional classroom learning (Yong Zhao, 2003). As cited by Adnan Abd Rashid (2011), the government, through the Ministry of Education, has introduced various initiatives to facilitate the adoption and diffusion of ICT. In line with the Vision 2020, government has draft ways so as to integrate ICT into the education system.

Malaysia has allocated substantial funds for the usage of ICT in education. These include the building of computer labs, supplying of PCs, and related peripherals, training of teachers and development of instructional materials. Some of the investment was channeled directly through ICT initiatives such as Smart Schools, MySchoolNet Project, School Access Centre, EduWeb and 1BestariNet. One of the aims of ICT use in education is to prepare students with the appropriate ICT skills which are very much needed in this 21st century education. Based on the Preliminary Report on Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the gap in school infrastructure for computer labs have been bridged by 2% in 2011. Malaysian schools are expected to be equipped with at least the basic infrastructure by the end of 2015 to enable the students to have the benefits of ICT in education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). By ensuring sufficient connectivity in rural school, it will help to trim down the disadvantages of rural learners (Bismillah Khatoun, 2007). Efforts made by the government in employing ICT in Malaysian education are, irrefutably, to enhance their learning and improve on the efficiency of delivering quality education especially to students in rural areas.

3.2.1 Teacher's readiness for ICT education

Teachers' acceptance and readiness have been globally recognized as some important factors in the success of incorporating technology in education. Despite the apparent initiative by Malaysian government, studies on teacher readiness for ICT generally are not keen towards fully utilizing ICT in classroom as they are cautious in integrating technology in traditional classroom (Azizah Ya'acob, Nor Fariza Mohd Nor & Hazita Azman, 2005) possibly due to lack of technical support available as well as time constraint in classroom (Bee Theng Lau and Chia Hua Sim 2008; Derntl & Motschnig-Pitrik 2005).

Nevertheless, despite the negative inclination of fully utilizing ICT in teaching and learning, a study conducted by Bee Theng Lau and Chia Hua Sim (2008) in determining teachers' perception of using ICT in classroom, has shown that teachers does make frequent use of ICT for teaching and instructional support as well as to manage classroom activities. The study also shows that the most ICT applications used by teachers are teaching courseware, internet browsing and presentation tools such as power point slides. But, it seems from the data, teacher does not make use of multimedia tools such as online demos and simulation, even though they do possess great capability in providing assistance to enhance teaching. (McFarlane, A. and Sakellariou, S. 2002).

From the data presented in the study, it appears that teacher does attempt in making the most of ICT, however they are in need of training to be able to fully utilized ICT in education. While efforts made by the government are extensive, teacher's readiness in teaching using technology is also an important factor to influence the styles of teaching and learning of students.

3.3 Types of Technologies Being Used in Teaching and Learning

The use of technology has expanded rapidly during the last two decades and educators have many types of technologies to choose from to suit each skill in language teaching and learning. The reason to choosing a particular technology varies but there are a lot of self-developed and commercial courseware that can be used in an ESL classroom.

To be more specific, Melor Md Yunus et al. (2013) mentioned that one of the popular tools which is commonly adapted in the teaching of reading and writing is the use of blogs. The research done by Melor Md Yunus et al. (2013) showed positive findings in terms of the students' interested in presenting ideas and responding to their classmates' ideas by commenting on the blog. This type of feedback can be more effective than self-editing as more than one person is able to give a response.

As for writing skills, students can do online activities or email exchanging with a native-speaker. Voice chat or audio conferencing could be used to enhance speaking skills as well as online presentation. Technologies like electronic dictionary and online activities can also help to increase their vocabulary.

To complement teaching, visual aids can help to stimulate discussion, or allow out-of-class teaching. Tools designed for this purpose, such as PowerPoint, can be used well or used badly depending on the user (Reynolds, 2005). Websites and social medias can be used to share different types of resources and to communicate in a group setting. Teachers can now also opt to have the iPad, tablet or laptops with them to ensure information and resources are accessible to students. Most tertiary level institution are using the web 2.0 in their blended learning to access lectures, have group discussions, doing online presentations and other educated related activities.

Compared to radios and television, ICT tools like laptops, LED projector, internet and social networks is still considered to be in its infancy level (Salehi & Salehi, 2011). There are many types of technologies which could be used but regardless the amount of technology, it will not be used if educators do not have the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to infuse technology into the curriculum (Baylor & Ritchie, 2002). Melor Md Yunus et al. (2013) also said that the presence of ICT tools could cause students' involvement to be negative and this will make the class control difficult.

However, Melor Md Yunus et al. (2013) did mention that ICT plays a major role in creating new and improved model for teaching and learning. As McFarlane, A. and Sakellariou, S. (2002) mentioned, teachers do attempt in making the most of ICT, as long as training is given to be able to fully utilize it.

4.0 Future Research Directions and Conclusion

Teachers' readiness in adopting and making full use in utilizing the ICT in schools has commonly demonstrated positive perceptions (Bee Theng Lau and Chia Hua Sim 2008), however, to make the best use of current learning trends and tools, teacher need to be computer literate and confident in using the tools in the classrooms. Even though Melor Md Yunus et al. (2013) mentioned that the use of ICT could cause the lackadaisical attitude among students, various kinds of planning and different types of activities involving ICT in teaching and learning could be planned to ensure students are continuously motivated and interested to learn. Teachers throughout the country should be actively involved and take full advantage of the ICT initiatives introduced by the ministry to ensure those initiatives achieved the stated goals. In conclusion, technology integration in language teaching and learning takes time: time for institution to be well-equipped and time for teachers to be skillful.

However, the present study has some limitations that need to be taken into consideration. Due to the limited study on integrating ICT in language teaching and learning and the teacher's readiness in integrating ICT in Malaysian Education, a broader generalization from the data is difficult to make. This paper in turn may lead to in depth studies on teacher's readiness in integrating ICT in Malaysian schools and their ICT capability as well as their readiness to face the 21st century education in the future.

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