

The Relevance Use of Technology in Teaching English in Malaysian Schools: Are We Ready Mentally for the Shift?

(Kesesuaian Penggunaan Teknologi dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris di Sekolah-Sekolah Malaysia: Adakah Kita Bersedia secara Mental untuk Peralihan?)

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Abstract

Students around the world need advanced skills to succeed in the globalized, knowledge-based world of today or this 21st century. Traditional approaches are no longer practiced as they have always been but improvised using technology to cater to the needs of the education sector. Language teachers are challenged to incorporate the use of educational technology in teaching languages to their students. However, some results from previous literature indicate a few factors have to be taken into consideration when integrating technology in the language teaching and learning processes, such as parental support, students' diverse demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as their accessibility to technology, students' knowledge in using technology, and teachers' readiness to incorporate technology in teaching English to their students. By considering the factors as mentioned, it is suggested that more technological professional development should be organized to equip teachers with the latest technological knowledge as well as boosting their motivation and confidence in integrating technology in their lessons.

Keywords: Computer-assisted language learning, language education

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INTRODUCTION

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 has been the central focus in planning and executing English lessons in schools nationwide. The eleven paradigm shifts to transform the existing education system have been deliberated under a wide range of variables from the characteristics of students and schools to the expectations of the technologically driven world. The seventh shift of the blueprint, which leverages ICT to scale up quality learning across Malaysia and the second, ensures that every child is proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English language' are interrelated in determining the issue chosen.

In Malaysia, the common issues that are always associated with computers in education are 'unequal computer access', 'one computer classroom', 'health risks using computers', 'computer crimes' and 'copyright laws in Malaysia' (Chan, Kaur Sidhu, Baba, & Parman, 2007). However, less emphasis is put on the readiness of Malaysians cognitively in incorporating computers in classroom teaching, especially in English lessons. In general, the community expects the Malaysian millennial generation to be able to use the language better with the immense exposure of computers and technology from first-class mentality countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan. However, Malaysia is fortunate if it is always the case, but it is not. Computers and technology do not work alone in nurturing critical thinking in both teachers' and students' minds. Teachers and students play crucial roles in achieving the goals and objectives of the national education system.

Henceforth, the paper will look into the concepts of both computers in education and teachers' and students' acceptance of computer-aided language learning. However, a rigid generalization will not be initiated throughout the analysis of the issue to ensure the reliability or validity of the paper across culture, time, or different perceptions. In the main, a different view and understanding is expected from arise from the community's senses in finding the most effective method to encounter alike issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section comprises an overview of computer-aided language learning that is taken from a few studies to figure out the perspectives and perceptions of teachers and students, theories related to the pertaining issue that will be the benefits of having computers in education as well as arguments on the issue of computer-assisted language learning in English classrooms, especially in Malaysia.

The Effect of Computer-Assisted Whole-Language Instruction

A research that was done in Taiwan entitled 'The Effect of Computer-Assisted Whole Language Instruction on Taiwanese University Students' by Wang (2011), maps out a general understanding of a class scenario of computer-aided language learning. The implication of the study to the world is evident from many angles and comparisons to the Malaysian English classroom setting can be determined and analyzed.

The research is remarkable and contemporary in many ways. However, there are a few aspects that can be improved to the betterment of future research. First, the researcher should have done thorough experiments on materials that were chosen beforehand to suit the students' language competency. This is mainly because materials (textbooks, websites, videos, etc.) are manipulative variables and they unquestionably influence the results of certain research. Hence, more in-depth reading, comparing, and even pilot testing should be undergone before the actual experiment takes place. This is to ensure clearer and more accurate results that would contribute to educational development that indirectly benefits human beings' advancement in any other possible way.

Second, the researcher should also consider how the students were selected that would next determine their inclination to be involved in the research and the setting of the experiment. As mentioned before, the subjects were university students, and an English course was compulsory to be taken by that particular student. This condition would point toward the students feeling enforced to be part of the research and also the lecturer felt restricted to certain circumstances. For instance, the researcher and the students were tight to the university's requirements of certain grades and achievements. This mind-setting has embedded into both the researcher's and the students' heads, and it would interrupt the expected patterns of the results. However, the area of research is truly captivating in the sense that the researcher has not only used a critical approach, which is the whole language approach to teach but also combines the method with the modern concept of teaching, CALL. Hence, despite the minor imperfections that must have been beyond the researcher's control, the research should be looked into as a reference study for those who are interested in conducting more advanced similar research.

The results showed that the students liked the computer-assisted four-skill instruction and felt motivated to enhance their interest in acquiring the language (Wang, 2011). In addition to that, the researcher also discovered that many of them preferred to work in groups only with the teacher's accessibility rather than on the internet. This suggests that peer discussion is more successful if it is carried out in a real classroom with teacher's guidance. Percentages also showed that a large number of the students liked the materials used in the classroom, such as video-assisted English teaching, whether the content of the selected video was relevant to the content of the textbook or not (Wang, 2011). This proves that technology manages to attract students' attention to learning. While the majority of students agreed that the course was helpful and computers or access to network resources were not barriers to online learning. The statistics also prove that the application of computer-assisted integrated four-skill instruction is more effective for improving lower ability learners. This is because they did not value peer cooperation due to their high self-esteem of working alone as much as the lower-level students did or simply because the textbooks were not suitable for certain students. The results also show that the interactive materials helped to enhance not only students' learning interests but also students' English performance (Wang, 2011).

The results acquired from the study depict that in a general statement, any creative and productive means that are offered in schools in the effort of gain existing and new knowledge is fairly accepted by students and teachers because the school constitution is believed to be the primary source of knowledge-gaining by students, especially. This is supported by Papalia and Feldman (2012), one of the domains or the central organizing experience in most children or youths' lives is at school. School is a community that offers opportunities to learn new information, sharpen existing skills, and even master new strategies or skills, and participate in different areas of knowledge. Hence, it is always claimed that by having computers and technology in schools, intellectual and social horizons would be widened. It is also believed that the quality of schooling greatly affects students' performance in many aspects such as in soft skills, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills as well as in sports, and for sure in academic performance. A good school should provide not only an orderly or safe environment but also adequate and modern material resources, a group of stable and knowledgeable teaching staff (Papalia & Feldman, 2012). The theories and assumptions on papers or books usually disclose expectations and hope by the community of how should the school be and overlook the importance of looking at variables involved in certain school types that would determine the achievement of the schools overall.

Computer-Assisted Writing Program among College Learners

A research was done by Fang (2010) entitled 'Perceptions of the computer-assisted writing program among college learners' unveils that even though the 'adoption of computer-aided writing instruction is worth taking into consideration in the EFL composition

classroom', the results of the survey questionnaire also revealed that a large number of the learners held less positive attitudes toward the reliability of the computer-assisted writing program as an essay grader. However, there are people who 'promised educational moon shots through technology were an assorted lot' (Tyack & Cuban, 2000). According to Tyack and Cuban (2000), these people who mainly consist of scholars, academic entrepreneurs, and psychologists thought that technologically-programmed teaching and learning sessions would restructure pedagogy and give new hope to the education system globally. Is teaching by machine alone enough to achieve the new benchmark or do we depend on the machine in changing the world?

If students were to learn mainly by machine only, they would, in the end, find that their expectations' were not accomplished. This is related to their motivation and the belief system of the school community as a whole. Students' expectations are defined by Eccles (1987, 1993) as 'beliefs about how well they will do on upcoming tasks, either in the immediate or long-term future, assisted by the materials, resources, and guidance that they get from their surroundings' (as stated in Santrock, 2009). Hence, depending solely on computers and technology would not bring students' and teachers' development forward, and if this continues, the objective goals of certain countries would not be achieved primarily. Students, despite the exposure they have been getting, believe that teachers are knowledgeable and if they do not comprehend certain matters, they prefer to ask teachers and not straight go to computers asking for guidance. A static and rigid opinion over related issues could be a disaster to a country's whole plan, followed by reckless implementation and would affect the countries' development in many aspects.

Implementing Computer-Assisted Language Learning in the EFL Classroom

A study goes by the title 'Implementing computer-assisted language learning in the EFL classroom: Teachers' perceptions and perceptive' that were done by Chan and Son (2009) reveals that teachers in general, are in favor of the use of computers and technology in their schools. However, this sample or subject studied in the research is from a quite well-developed country which is Korea. Thus, they considered new learning contexts created by the use of computers as essential and desirable environments for the ICT-based global society. Chan and Son (2009) believed that the use of computers simply added value to their teaching instead of replacing them, as claimed by many other teachers.

Secondary schools in Malaysia apply 'immersion' or 'sheltered English' models in teaching English. These variations create some difficulties in planning educational policies, as there are too many variables to be taken into account, unlike the research by Chan and Son (2009), which only focused on one particular country in which the people speak the same native language. Malaysia has to apply different models because it is a multi-racial country. This consideration makes the educational authorities in the dire of the need to generalize or optimize some educational policies to get optimum benefits, including policies in regards to computers and technology. 'Immersion' is when all students in a class speak the same native language and are at similar levels of proficiency in English while 'sheltered English' differs from immersion in that students come from varying native language backgrounds (Brown, 2001). The different realities sometimes limit the ability in maximize the use of computers and technology in English classrooms, especially in countries that have apparent considerations to be well, such as the number of students, their socioeconomic status, their proficiency, and many others. Malaysia, for instance, can be divided into two regions that are Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak. Each place has different types of students, which makes the objectives and expectations are different at many levels.

Most of the research in the same area, whether recent or traditional, are in supports of implementing the use of computers and technology in teaching English, and none of them are completely off beam. Many studies can be referred to even though they were conducted in different places with different samples or subjects. However, research or

theories can be questioned as to look for a better and centered focus on the issue. For example, can Malaysia achieve the seventh shift of the blueprint, which leverages ICT to scale up quality learning across Malaysia' with the mentality of Malaysians in general? Are there any similar cases that explain the overview of the case? Are Malaysians up to the requirement to have such determined policies?

According to Towndrow and Vallance (2004), educational policymakers around the world and in Asia consider that medium-term gains can be achieved in human capital growth through investments in technology and technical training because most jobs now require computer skills to be hired and be excellent workers. Hence, it is supposedly relevant and encouraging to teach a language using technology as it brings out more progressive outcomes whether in finance or the issue of the effectiveness of the teaching. It is almost odd that language teaching is isolated from the incorporation of technology, as it comes in different ways, such as televisions, computers, smartphones, and other gadgets. Moreover, the need to revamp educational policies in recent decades is primarily due to the intervention of technology. This generalization works for many cases on Earth. The relevance of the use of technology in teaching English in Malaysian schools seems to be unproblematic or unquestionable at some points, especially by digesting input or information provided by vast research around the world.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The relationship between the use of ICT in classrooms with English language learning is particularly relevant as there are about 17.5 million Internet users (Malaysia: 17.5 million Internet users, 5 million on broadband, 10 million on 3G, 2011), and the data comprise 60.64% of Malaysia's population. The statistics indicate how people of Malaysia nowadays are literate as most websites on the internet are operated using the English language. However, is the data adequate to assume that Malaysians are up to the use of technology in classrooms that would boost their academic achievement? What is the reality of our English classrooms when the claim that is always heard is that our classrooms are equipped not only by computers but also by the mind-boosting mentality in facing different adversities? Policies are introduced and always seen as the benchmark of the level of our education system. The policies surely do not cover all the real stories happening in isolated areas such as suburban and rural areas, as a result of the lack of accessibility. Teachers' and students' perceptions differ according to their demographic backgrounds, socioeconomic backgrounds, and also their academic backgrounds.

Then (2012) reported in *The Star* that 'The Sarawak Teachers' Union (STU) is deeply concerned about the "tidak-apa" attitude shown by parents towards their children's education.' An interview has been done and Gani, the STU president said that this could not care-less attitude was spreading in urban and rural schools, adding that this negative behavior might have contributed to the decline in the academic performance of their children (Then, 2012). A basic understanding can be drawn from the newspaper report that there is such a mentality happening in society, whether in urban or rural areas. The mentality that formal education is the only means needed to be a doctor, to be an engineer or simply to be a successful person in the future. Parents do not find that they should be responsible for their children's education, and this isolation of responsibilities has been a problem ever since.

Hence, even though Malaysia is a fast-developing country, some people do not immerse themselves in the importance of education as a whole. These people are not only those from rural areas who do not work or have education at any rate but working people too. If the community from the beginning shows their irresponsibility with regard to schools, how would the integration of computer and technology into the classroom be extended to be students' regular basis in learning? At the core of a healthy family, functioning is the idea of commitment (Gladding, 2002). Thomas (1992) said that in strong families, members are devoted not only to the welfare of the family but also to the growth of each

member (as stated by Gladding, 2002). The school constitution needs the family's commitment to be able to function according to the plan, and the computer-assisted language learning needs more than school hours to be fully utilized. For instance, some homework given by the teachers requires further use of computers and if parents at home do not tolerate the needs or simply cannot afford to buy a computer or simply the parents do not see the importance of having a computer at home, the objectives of teaching would not be achieved.

In a heterogeneous society like Malaysia, a critical matter is that people or students are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds be able to coexist and cooperate in positive ways (Tiene & Ingram, 2001). This issue, however, can be solved by choosing computerized resources that have an interactive capability that allows students to more actively engage in aspects of other cultures. The point of weakness has just now been turned into a solution by taking the best out of the worst. Teachers can manipulate computers and technology to reduce the knowledge gap between students' understanding of each other's cultural beliefs. Even though the students might take some time to get used to the approach, but eventually, the students should be able to leave behind the conventional mentality that computers and technology used in the classroom are only for learning something robotic or modern but also they can learn the subject matter that is from the past. Plus, they strengthen their relationship by knowing each other's values to enhance their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Apart from addition, students who are from rural areas are mostly the central argument of their ability to grasp the subject matter of teaching with hi-tech devices involved. Within the allocated time of about 70 to 80 minutes for two periods and 35 to 40 minutes for one period, some students who are not familiar with computers and technology, especially those who are from rural areas who find it difficult to finish a lesson because instead of learning only English, they now have to learn how to use it. For example, for teachers to use an easy website in the classroom, students need to know how to use access providers (a business that provides access to the Internet free or for a fee) to connect to the Internet; second, to be able to key in the web address in the address bar, and finally to be efficient in fully utilizing or exploring exercises and other interactive activities by mastering basic computer skills, such as using a mouse to point, click, and double click as well as understanding keyboard and typing skills. In addition, there are a few of quite a far-reaching computer skills required to be able to enjoy the learning effectively such as the ability to review the exercises or activities, how to copy, paste, or download texts and files and how to identify specific buttons like 'home', 'back' and 'minimize' buttons. Essentially, in this modernized era, people would not find so overwhelming and critical to operate a website courseware, but students from rural areas generally would need guidance in handling this website.

Gender differences in access, use, attitudes, and achievement with computers can also be a factor in having a mentality in Malaysia. In comparison with male students, female students do not take as many computer courses at school, or they do not spend as many hours on computers at home, or computer camps, and later on in the university, they do not select undergraduate or graduate computer majors as often (Kirkpatrick & Cuban, 2000). This case happens in our schools where boys are more attracted to the lesson if it involves computers and technology, but for girls, they would participate just as not actively as boys. Hence, should we ban computer-assisted language learning in girls' schools? This traditional mentality needs to be reconsidered by teachers who teach because there are ways to tackle the girls' attention. For instance, Kirkpatrick and Cuban (2000) mentioned that teachers can choose any new songs by artists at their age to capture their attention because research shows that girls are more easily attracted to edutainment more than boys. Hence, choosing materials or resources needs to be done carefully and critically by teachers to deny gender differences as one of the factors limiting the use of computers and technology in schools, which would further affirm the fact that boys are better than

girls when it comes to technology. This acclamation would demotivate girls to study in such an environment.

The difficulties in really incorporating computers and technology in teaching English are not only faced by students, but there are also issues related to teachers. First, teachers are too occupied by not only workloads as a teacher but also minor clerical workloads. Gani (2012) said "Teachers are facing tremendous increase in workloads, both in rural and urban schools, but more so in urban schools. The teacher will not be able to monitor the academic and personal development of every student under his charge under such pressing circumstances" (as reported by Then, 2012). The mutual understanding is that when teachers have too many work, they do not have time to search for resources on the internet and using computers waste their time in executing the learning because it is not always the case that computers function accordingly. This perception is incorrect because computers and technology are to assist teachers in conducting lessons, help in maximising teaching periods, and help in achieving the objectives of a particular lesson. This point is supported by Morrison and Lowther (2004), who mentioned that the greatest strength of the Internet is the amount and types of information available at the touch of a mouse button. The information can actually trigger a teacher's mind in choosing the topic and preparing handouts for the lesson. The possibilities of using the Internet are limitless, and teachers should be aware of the fact that computers and technology are not at all burdens in their teaching career. By having computers in education, workloads have been reduced, which promotes healthy working experience. The key question is actually how to find the information in an efficient and effective manner that would reduce not only costs but also time of teaching. Generally, computers are teachers' good assistants in handling workloads that might result in the teachers' health condition.

Teachers also need to know that computers can be a motivational factor for students. Educational psychologists have made up the concept of 'interest', a type of motivation that has been proposed as more specific than extrinsic motivation, and even intrinsic motivation. A distinction has been made between 'individual interest', which is thought to be relatively stable, and 'situational interest', which is believed to be generated by specific aspects of a task activity (Santrock, 2009). Research on this type of motivation has stressed mainly on how it is related to learning. Interest is linked to measures of deep learning than surface learning. With the assistance of computers and technology, teachers should be able to promote deep learning environments such as students able to give responses to more difficult comprehension questions and to recall the main ideas of subject matters. Besides, integrating technology into the classroom has been found to increase students' motivation to learn and engage in learning, especially when it is used to foster authentic learning (Santrock, 2009). Hence, to prepare students of the real-world situation and for Malaysia's education system to be well-implemented, teachers need to get rid of the idea of having computers in classrooms is a mess and problematic but to benefit something from its presence. Having young students of this era to lead the nation in the future should have made teachers think of the importance of implanting critical thinking in students' minds nowadays, and critical thinking is possible when the students are connected to other people's experiences or other places' stories through the use of the Internet. Interest is always the critical matter when it comes to having students' concentrations stay on learning as well as the expected outcomes to be achieved and so to reduce the pressure, computers' contributions should not be underestimated.

Also, teachers should be aware that in the current era, students prefer to be given autonomy in determining their ways or strategies of learning and later on when they make decisions for their future undertakings. More or less, students should be given practices on knowing what is the best in their education and life generally from the first step of planning the lesson. Hence, the lessons planned should be more learner-centered, and fewer teachers' involvement is anticipated nowadays. Computer-assisted language learning is very suitable for encouraging learner-centered instruction because student-centered comprises techniques that focus on learners' individual needs, styles, and goals,

techniques that give some control to the students such as group work or strategy training, techniques that allow some spaces for students' creativity and innovation as well as techniques that could enhance students' self-competence and self-worth (Brown, 2001). For example, teachers can ask students to simply use the internet to look for ideas in writing a letter to their respective friends on the topic of interesting places in Malaysia. This activity would give opportunities for students to show their capability in integrate their opinions or interests with the learning activity. Discoveries can be found by having students feel challenged by different activities. Hence, teachers should not be afraid to try something new in the effort to promote self-learning.

In addition to that, the implications of having computers and technology in classrooms in the Malaysian context can be seen by relating them to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. From the eleven areas, there are two areas significant to the implication of the study that are: language proficiency and maximum use of ICT. The new blueprint aims to equip English teachers with more exposure to the language in order to be more flexible and experienced despite their age and backgrounds as teachers with adequate skills and intelligence are highly needed to support the aim of replacing Peperiksaan Menengah Rendah (PMR) with school-based assessment (SBA). Teachers should at least know how to apply modern approaches like the whole language approach, learner-centered instruction, and task-based instruction to suit their teachings to students' different intelligence.

Moreover, the implementation of computer-assisted language learning in Malaysia has yet to be a reality, as Internet access and virtual learning can be reached via 1BestariNet for all schools by 2013 (The Star, 2012). Hence, the study of the whole language approach that English should be acquired in an integrative manner and technology as assistance to boost critical thinking is certainly a good beginning to prove the effectiveness of the blueprint. The policy has been made to assist teachers and society in general in determining the goals and drives in achieving the goals. Expectations have been mapped out in order for Malaysia to be one of the developed nations in the end.

CONCLUSION

In education, especially language teaching, the relationship between available technology and the prevailing methodology has always been two ways (Towndrow & Vallance, 2004). It is very essential that regardless of the amount of exposure and experience of the language teachers, they need to know the importance of having flexibility and creativity to add up their teaching practice qualities. Teaching practice should be decorated with many different skills and abilities so as to surprise and give different opportunities of learn to the students.

These positive requirements of being a teacher are a must because the world is spinning very fast and human beings create many new inventions and more critical overviews about the world. Hence, the need for the next generation to be even better and more capable of enduring the pressure of dealing with modernized issues is very much emphasized. Teachers are one of the primary hopes of the world to see future generations with wise and appropriate mind settings, especially when the school has become children's second home. The importance of having a decent yet challenging environment for learning in schools should be emphasized and thoroughly well-thought.

In language teaching, there are too many differences and variations of not only the students but also the materials, the general issues, and the demands of newly improved ways of teaching coming in the way. Therefore, teachers must be tough enough and ready to accept the fact that technology and computers are the new assistance of teachers. The demands and workloads of being some professional educator force teachers to be adjustable and flexible to the fact that teachers must include ICT in their teaching process to reduce their workloads and maximize their use of time.

In addition, teachers need to consider the demands of their clients, which are the students who need technological involvement in their teaching and learning process as they are now extremely familiar and have been exposed to computers since they were young, and the fact that they have vast interests in computers is the primary factor in why teachers cannot escape the influence of computers. Moreover, students' different bits of intelligence should not be neglected as it would be unfair to the students that have no linguistic skills as much as their other friends do. Teachers need to instil positive and encouraging learning values in students; thus, ICT can be the best way to achieve the ultimate goals of teaching.

Decisively, teachers, educational practitioners as well as and students of the twenty-first century more or less cannot avoid the importance of ICT in teaching and learning English. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education has just mapped out the importance of ICT in not only acquiring English but also encouraging professional development in teachers. This new policy is believed to change the old scenario of teaching and learning English as a second language in Malaysian secondary schools, whether in Peninsular Malaysia or Sabah and Sarawak.

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