

The Application of Information and Communication Technology in Malay Language Teaching: Teachers' Perspectives

ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in language teaching and learning is among considered suitable with the current education needs. However, the issue is regarding how far do teachers master the concept of computer-aided language learning, their skills in performing teaching by using ICT, mastery level as well as the constructions faced by the teachers. Therefore, this research is intended to examine the issues stated above. The research sample consisted of 87 Malay language teachers who were randomly selected around the Hulu Langat District in Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia. In this survey research, questionnaires were used to collect the relevant data. The research findings show that the computer-aided language teaching concept is being understood in various dimensions. In terms of training, most of the respondents have already attended basic computer courses. However, the courses related to teaching material preparation using multimedia, the usage of internet and website design are given less attention. The use of computer in Malay language teaching is able to increase students' ability to master Malay language better. Therefore, aspects such as in-service training, preparation of interactive learning materials, encouraging the use of internet in teaching as well as preparing suitable technology with current situation are required to be given attention.

Key words: *Information and Communication Technology (ICT), language teaching and learning, teachers' perspectives, and students' ability.*

INTRODUCTION

Language teaching is basically inseparable from the development of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). As stated in the Malay language syllabus, students acquire and process information critically from various sources that could be accessed using the ICT facilities. Students could also utilize information that is easily gained and with recent features.

The application of ICT in teaching is in accordance with the objectives highlighted in the Education Development Master Plan (2006). The plan

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emphasises on the application of ICT in teaching and learning. Besides that, the development of human capital as proposed in the plan needs students who are capable of using ICT.

K. Grove, N. Strudler and S. Odell (2004) stated that the importance of ICT used in classroom has raised issues and arguments among education technologists. As a group who supports the effectiveness of information technology, they proved that it could increase productivity and decrease motivation which indirectly supports the process of learning and the ability to teach uniquely (Roblyer & Schwier, 2003). Besides that, there are justifications based on the criticism towards a high investment value in technology in which its effectiveness has been doubtful (Cuban, 2001).

This protestation occurs as there are uncertainties in terms of the outcomes gained through education programs that used enormous funds. In Malaysian context, researches conducted towards the effectiveness of computer usage in teaching show tendency towards the increase of computer literacy in students especially those in rural radius. In this matter, P.A. Ertmer (1999) as well as B. Hokanson and S. Hooper (2004) have examined the effective use of technology needs that increase day by day and intended to look at the ways teachers use technology as well as the reasons for its usage. Studies conducted locally also show that teachers have good perceptions towards Computer-Aided Language Learning or CALL (Finkbeiner, 2001:339-361). Besides, teachers are also found to portray a high level of enthusiasm in attending any form of training related to ICT for teaching language in order to ensure its smoothness and successfulness.

Researchers are also concentrated on the major role of pedagogical method used in classroom teaching. There are various issues often related to ICT in teaching language. C. Stallard (1998), in his research, stated that a lesson becomes ineffective due to the lack of preparation by teachers to develop computer-aided teaching. Apart from that, there are also problems such as hardware for course software, teachers' attitude, administrator, training, family's encouragement and community's influence that influence the effectiveness of its implementation in classroom (Moersch, 1995).

Basically, the Malay language teaching is not exempted from ICT. Although Malay language lesson only involves mastery of linguistic performance which looks as if it is fairly easy to control, however there are still various issues that are regarded to distract learning effectiveness. The problem includes basic Malay language skills such as oral, reading, and writing. At the higher stage, there are students who still could not understand a text that has been read entirely. Besides that, in secondary schools, writing mastery is still needed to be given attention to ensure that the objective of the Malay language lesson is achieved.

Therefore, the application of ICT in Malay language teaching is seen as an appropriate attempt to give impact towards the problems faced. As a teaching tool with the latest features, the use of computer is seen as an effort that could change students' perceptions towards Malay language learning. Therefore, Malay language teachers should have knowledge and skill in conducting computer-aided language teaching and learning. Even though there are difficulties in implementing it, teachers need to be equipped with skills and knowledge along with the present education needs that entail students centered teaching.

Hence, this research is intended to analyze Malay language teachers' understanding of the ICT language teaching concept, the level of computer mastery, the attended courses, the problems faced and the solutions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The research objectives are as follows: (1) to examine Malay language teachers' understanding towards using ICT in language teaching; (2) to examine the level of ICT mastery among Malay language teachers; (3) to examine teachers' perception towards the application of ICT in Malay language teaching; and (4) to examine the problems faced by Malay language teachers in applying ICT in lessons.

This research used descriptive survey method. The sample consisted of 87 Malay language teachers from a few schools in Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia. The research sample was randomly selected. Questionnaires were used to collect data related to the application and mastery of ICT in Malay language teaching. The items of the questionnaires included perceptions towards ICT in language teaching, training and level of mastery, implementation and its relationship with students' language mastery, constraints in implementation and ways to overcome them. The obtained data were analyzed using SPSS and presented in percentage and mean form.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

First, Teachers Perspective on ICT in Language Teaching. This first question discusses the mastery of ICT in the language teaching concept among the teachers. As a teacher, he or she should understand the concept of using ICT in classroom through the attended courses. Based on the research findings, it is found that the research sample demonstrated various understanding towards the concept.

Table 1:
Using ICT in the Language Teaching

Teachers perceptions	%
Students learn language by using computer with the presence of teachers.	51.7
Students learn language with the use of learning software in CD.	44.8
Students use search engine such as Google to find facts when writing essays.	40.2
Language teaching when teachers use LCD projector as a teaching aid as a part of their teaching.	39.1
Students learn language aspects (for instance, vocabulary) by using computer.	32.2
Students learn ways to write essays or letters with the use of Microsoft Words.	28.7
Students learn language by using computers without the presence of teachers.	18.4
Students learn language through distance learning by using computer.	17.2

Based on the findings, there is a diversity of understandings of the research sample towards ICT in Malay language teaching and learning. This diversity is mostly influenced by factors such as exposure, opportunity and commitment shown in the implementation of teaching. Most of the selected Malay language teachers stated that the ICT in language teaching and learning perception is when students learn language by using computer with the presence of teachers (51.7%).

Basically, ICT in language teaching is implemented with students interacting with readily available materials in the computer. Students will use those materials with assistance from teachers. For the second highest concept in terms of percentage (44.8%), it is stated that students learn language with the use of learning software in the CD. The choice of this concept is found to be significant when teachers use learning CD which is available in the market to assist them in teaching. Students could learn language by following the lesson materials contained in the CD while teachers could conduct lesson observation at the same time. The third concept that became the teachers' choice is students use search engine such as Google to find facts when writing essays. This means that teachers believe that using ICT in Malay language teaching and learning needs to be related with internet usage that gives a lot of information to students, especially when mastering language skills such as writing essays. For the fourth choice, the sample chose the perception as in language teaching using LCD projector as teaching aid (39.1%).

Electronic teaching aids are related to ICT because of their needs in the teaching field. Besides the use of LCD projector, the use of electronic aids are also able to increase students' interest and understanding. The less agreed concept for ICT's interpretation is that students learn language through distance learning by using computer (17.2%). This is based on the interpretation that the research sample does not take into account the aspect of distance learning to suit the ICT in Malay language teaching and learning perspective as there are no teachers who could assist students when there are learning problems.

Second, the Use of ICT in Malay Language Teaching. The research sample of selected Malay language teachers also stated their opinions in the use of computers in Malay language teaching. The research findings are as stated in table 2 below:

Table 2:
The Use of ICT in Malay Language Teaching

Teachers Statements on Using ICT in Malay Language Teaching	Mean	SD
I am interested to use ICT in Malay language teaching and learning in Malay language teaching.	3.26	.689
I am interested to learn the skills of producing learning materials using simple software for Malay language.	3.18	.739
I am interested to teach Malay language using computer but I do not have much time to prepare the teaching materials.	3.14	.770
I will use internet tools in Malay language teaching and learning.	2.81	.785
I am capable of using internet in teaching and learning.	2.80	.818
I have used computer in Malay language teaching before.	2.67	.944
I will feel comfortable if I am required to teach Malay language by using computer.	2.66	.787
I am only capable of using PowerPoint in teaching Malay language with the use of computer.	2.52	.829

SD = Standard Deviation

Based on the research findings, the level of computer usage in teaching of the research respondents is low (mean = 2.67). Research respondents also stated that they are uncomfortable (mean = 2.66) if they are required to teach language by using computer. Whereas, in terms of teaching software, they do not agree (mean = 2.52) if they are mentioned to merely master the use of PowerPoint in teaching. This is because when it comes to software mastery, the research sample of selected Malay language teachers master it with 36% at the good level while 54% at the moderate level.

Meanwhile, with regard to internet usage, research respondents admitted that they are lack of capability (mean = 2.80) in using it which leads to the lack of internet usage in teaching (mean = 2.81). There are possibilities of other factors that caused the lack of internet usage among them such as exposure and facilities available in schools.

Other than that, interest also influences a teacher's teaching. The findings reveal that most respondents have moderate level of interest (mean = 3.14) to teach Malay language using computer although they have plenty of time to prepare. They also have moderate level of interest to be given exposure related to computer software production (mean 3.18).

Third, the Suitability of Application of ICT in Malay Language Teaching. Most of the research respondents agreed that (mean 4.10) the use of computer in Malay language teaching is limited to reading skills only. Whereas, they felt that the use of computer in essay teaching is not really suitable (mean 3.18).

In this matter, in order to obtain a good effect, teachers need to be creative in computer-aided teaching (mean 3.48).

Fourth, the Level of ICT Mastery. All the research respondents have attended ICT related courses. Based on the findings (table 3), all the research respondents have received computer training, especially in courses related to their services organized by the Education Department or District Education Office.

Table 3:
The Mastery Level of ICT in Malay Language Teaching Usage

Type	Mean	SD	Level of Mastery		
			Good	Moderate	Poor
Microsoft Word	2.72	.449	72.4	27.6	0
Microsoft Excel	2.31	.556	35.6	59.8	4.6
Microsoft Power Point	2.26	.637	36.8	52.9	10.3
Internet	2.18	2.19	27.6	64.4	8.0
Microsoft Access	2.05	.513	16.1	73.6	10.3
Multimedia	1.94	.490	9.2	75.9	14.9
Website Development	1.32	.560	4.6	23.0	72.4

The computer application mastered by most of the research respondents is Microsoft Word (mean 2.72; good level: 72.4%). Other skills mastered are Microsoft Excel (mean 2.31; good level: 35.6%), Microsoft Power Point (mean 2.26; good level: 36.8%), Internet (mean 2.18; good level: 27.6%), and Microsoft Access (mean 2.05; good level: 2.05%). Besides that, multimedia skills (mean 1.94; poor level: 49%) and website development (mean 1.32; poor level: 56%) are regarded as low mastery. This shows that research respondents do not master important aspects, especially the ones related to learning materials that require the usage of multimedia elements. Website development that is regarded as to give less benefits in teaching and learning needs to be given attention, especially in ensuring students to think more creatively.

Fifth, the Effect of Using ICT towards Students. The findings reveal that the application of ICT in teaching could enhance students' interest towards Malay language (mean 3.06). However, they felt that smart students are more keen in learning when teachers use the ICT in their lessons (mean 3.14). Weak students on the other hand are found to show less interest in learning even though teachers use the ICT (mean 2.74). The findings also show that the mastery of essay writing is less effective if ICT is used (mean 2.79). In this matter, the development and application of learning material should lay more emphasis on multimedia and interactive aspects to give a deeper impact to students (mean 3.00). Students will also get interested if internet tools are utilized during their lessons (mean 3.19).

Sixth, Constrains in the Implementation of ICT in Language Learning. The findings state that there are a few constrains faced by teachers in using ICT in teaching Malay language. There are still teachers who are lack of expertise in conducting computer-aided lessons due to lack of training (mean 3.62). Teachers also face problems using ICT in language learning and teaching as more time is needed to prepare materials (mean 3.98). Apart from that, students are lack of interest (mean 3.26) in using ICT when it comes to Malay language teaching. The computers used in schools are often spoilt and left out in terms of capacity and technology (mean 2.82).

Besides that, there are constraints with regard to uneffective computer system organization in schools (mean 2.72). Problem regarding computer rooms also often impede the smoothness of the application of computer in teaching. There are Malay language teachers who do not get to use the computer rooms as often as the rooms are used by a group of other students (mean 2.86). Colleagues influence does not affect research sample in the implementation of computer-aided teaching. The interest to practice computer-aided teaching does not decrease when there are not many teachers who not do so (mean 2.51). School administrator is not the constrain towards the implementation as the administrator encourages teachers to apply computer in teaching (mean 2.90).

Seventh, Suggestions to Overcome the Problems. There are a few suggestions given by the research sample to overcome problems to increase the use of ICT in Malay language teaching (table 4). Most of them agreed with the suggestions to overcome the problems such as by creating network (mean 3.51), preparing allocation (mean 3.47), providing enough infrastructure (mean 3.46), a material development group (3.45), encouragement (mean 3.42), and exposure (3.41).

Table 4:
Suggestions to Overcome the Problems

Suggestions	Mean
Create a network of cooperation between the committees or schools in the District Education Office.	3.51
Prepare suitable allocation to provide up-to-date computer technology.	3.47
Create an appropriate ICT infrastructure for learning.	3.46
Need to have a material development group that is being encouraged by the administrator.	3.45
All Malay language teachers need to be given computer application exposure.	3.42

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The issues discussed above mostly focus on the importance of computer-aided teaching to be implemented in teaching and learning of Malay language. The summary of the research findings is as described below:

Teachers have to master the concept of computer-aided language teaching so that a fine understanding towards the concept could give impact towards teachers' teaching quality. This is because there are various understandings towards the concept given by the Malay teachers. The three main components that computer-aided language teaching should have are computer, language, and learning (Finkbeiner, 2001). At the earlier stage, teachers need to understand the implementation of teaching concept and the procedure of using computer in order to give optimum effects to students.

The use of computer in language teaching has been practiced by Malay language teachers. However, the limitation of usage in terms of fulfilling the needs should be given attention. For instance, the use of computer in writing skills needs to be given attention as the application of computer could help students to arrange text organization as well as facilitate the editing process. In order to ensure the efficiency of teaching, the materials used should be able to assist teachers to convey lessons more efficiently.

Most Malay language teachers have already attended computer courses. Along with that, for the purpose of ensuring the effectiveness of computer application in teaching, the attended courses need to relate with the development of learning materials. A suitable software could be used for that purpose. This is appropriate with the findings of Son Jeong-Bae (2006) who revealed that the application of computer in teaching, especially the ones that involve online courses, are capable of drawing students' attention.

The effect of application of computer in teaching and learning Malay language is found to be positive with the research respondents who stated so. One of it is that the application of computer could nurture a deep interest towards mastery of Malay language. The research carried out by Saad Al-Kahtani (1999) illustrated that the use of computer in essay writing lesson may possibly give impact towards students' achievement.

The constrains faced by the Malay language teachers in carrying out computer-aided lesson include the aspect of development course, students with different level of intelligence, computer technology which would often transform, the time required to carry out lesson preparation and others that have the possibilities to give impact towards teaching. C. Stallard (1998), on the other hand, stated teachers' ability factor in operating computer, teaching materials preparation and suitable strategy to be used as among the constrains faced. In this matter, the planning and preparation of school administrator to prepare teachers in order to really master the skills need to be done professionally.

The problems in using computers need to be resolved by laying extra emphasis on ICT application in teaching as highlighted by the Ministry of Education. Malay language syllabus needs to be referred in order to examine closer the requirements of using computer in teaching. Furthermore, emphasis with regard to integrated teaching in other subjects is also able to assist students to be proficient in certain topics (Hokanson & Hooper, 2004).

As a conclusion, Malay language is now facing a challenging era, especially in terms of public's awareness towards its importance in teaching. Nevertheless, teaching aspect has to be given attention by underlining the mastery of language skills that are taught. The use of computer in Malay language teaching is able to increase students' ability to master Malay language better. Therefore, aspects such as in-service training, preparation of interactive learning materials, encouraging the use of internet in teaching as well as preparing suitable technology with current situation are required to be given attention.

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