Using Internet in English Language Teaching

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***Abstract*:** *The Internet is gradually gaining its popularity in Malaysian higher institutions. However, there is not much evidence on the application of the Internet in Malaysian higher institutions as well as the teachers' view on their Internet application in language teaching. Therefore, the aim of this research is to look for the perception of Malaysian English language teachers of higher institutions on the use of Internet in language teaching and learning, particularly in English as a Second or Foreign Language. Respondents who are teaching in UM university were the subjects of our research. Their computing interest, frequency of Internet navigation, and their opinions on their purposes of Web application were obtained. Results show that most of the teachers used the Internet in their language classes, allowed their students to communicate with them via E-mail, received the students' assignments via the technology and they also believed that the Internet is a valuable teaching tool in their language teaching.*

1. Introduction

Rapid industrialisation and globalisation pose a direct impact on the nature of teaching and educating the students. Language teachers have to accept the fact that teaching is no longer limited to the four walls of their classrooms or even the resource centres such as the library and media rooms. They have to realize that they are preparing students who are going to spend their adult lives in the new millennium which demands high level of computer literacy and self-learning. This is especially true for the purpose of locating and retrieving information from various unlimited sources across the globe. As Malaysia progresses towards becoming a developed nation, Malaysian teachers can no longer rely on traditional teaching and training methods to survive in the stage of an information- and knowledge - based society. Instead, new learning and teaching systems need to be developed to meet the country's needs in creating such a society.

According to Gunter and Murphy (2001), technology, which is a rapidly developing and changing phenomenon, has brought remarkable challenges and changes for both, the educators and education. This results in the reforming of the school system brought by computers as a leading technological mechanism. Teaching, too, is no longer limited to using the class textbook and audiotapes in language laboratories, videos and slides but it can be more interactive via other mediums. "network-based language teaching" is refer to language teaching that involves the use of computers connected to one another in local or global networks. Others may use simply "on-line" or "cyber" or "virtual" language learning. Through the World Wide Web (www), can gain on-line access to various applications such as lecture notes, on line quizzes, announcements, reference materials, and interactive computerized lessons.

In the recent years, local universities in Malaysia have allocated a large part of their ICT (information and communication technology) funds towards the setting up of campus-wide network transportations. This would enable them to accommodate distance-learning program, which will guide to the establishment of borderless classrooms. Having the technology alone will not be enough if language teachers do not know how to control this remarkable power and direct it to create a meaningful teaching and learning environment.

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The Internet has entered into the typical popularity after its existence for nearly twenty-five years (Frizler 1995) and it is gaining its popularity in the universities and colleges worldwide (Trokeloshvil & Jost 1997) when World Wide Web (www) was introduced in 1995. Internet facilities offer "information booths" such as websites that offer several types of information including news, documentary materials, product sales, databases, online library or general information and teaching and learning materials; e-mail; meeting discussions; chat rooms; and services including file transfer protocols (ftp), telnet, and net meeting which are able to transfer video and audio signals.

Language teachers can always use these facilities in their language classrooms.Muehleisen (1997) claims that the Internet can be used in foreign and second language classrooms for the following reasons: (a) Learning to use computers provides a strong basic motivation for learning English. (b) The Internet places English in an international context whereby learning English means learning about the language and communicating with people around the world. (c) Internet projects are interactive.

In addition, Graus (1999) identifies a few general reasons for using Internet in the foreign and second language classrooms. Among the reasons include: providing new skills and a basic understanding of the underlying technology; preparing the students for the information society in the 21st century; providing better education for the next millennium; linking the idea of the teaching material with the real life in the outside world. He also argues against teachers' act of abandoning their traditional teaching methods and replacing those with the Internet. It is quite impossible to predict the effects of the Internet in the future.

Therefore, he believes that teachers should not abandon their traditional teaching method but see the Internet as a useful complement to usual teaching. Indeed, the Internet can truly become a valuable skill to the foreign language classroom provided that teachers are convinced that it can offer many benefits to the language learning process. Although many educators and dedicated Internet users feel that the Internet is useful in the educational context, there is still not much practical evidence that supports these claims.

This paper discusses a study that investigates the perception of Malaysian English teachers of higher institutions on the use of the Internet in modern language teaching and learning, particularly in the English Second Language and English Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) instruction. Specifically, it looks into the computing skills that the language teachers have acquired, the type of computer application programs that they normally use in their daily activities and the type of computing tasks that they employ in their teaching.

2. Literature Review

Several studies on the use of Internet facilities in language classrooms have been carried out. Kornum (1993), using e-mail in her English language class, manages to improve her students' motivation during the project. It also enables her to evaluate the teaching and learning strategies involve in the projects and later apply those strategies to her other students. Davis and Chang (1994) report that students' writings have improved in fluency and organization in their distance English Second Language (ESL) learning program when students were asked to use e-mail in their assignments. Furthermore, students have better understanding of the English usage. Kroonenberg (1995) states that as a result of the e-mail activities employed in his language classes, his students in Hong Kong were more eager to read and listen to their friends' ideas and hat the quality of their arguments was improved and their thinking became more creative. more writing skills had been accomplished using the e-mail; the writing process namely brainstorming and editing among the students became less inhibited since the students' attention was focused on the content of the message than the form.

Liao (1999) reports there was an improvement in reading and writing skills among sophomore EFL students at the National Chung Hsing University in Taiwan with key-pals of varying age from Australia, Republic of Czech, Germany, Ireland, Romania and the United States. Such learning approach promotes more meaningful acquisition and language learning especially when the students are able to communicate with other speakers of English language and learn about new cultural values and norms from them. As learners learned to transfer what they have learnt (from the information gathered) to the new settings (the information presented in the website),

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they learned to practice their logic skills and make evaluative judgmentsStudies on the use of Internet facilities in language teaching and learning are still very few. Kang's (1995) study on secondary school students in Malaysia found that students enjoy learning through Internet activities because they can search for information in a direct, active and interactive manner. They also take more pains at writing correctly because of their global audience.

The Web is undoubtedly an interesting and valuable source for ESL/EFL teachers and learners. In the future, the Web is likely to become more important for ESL/EFL education. With the various kinds of authentic materials available and the probable increase in good ESL/EFL sites, the Web is becoming very useful to those in the field of education. However, the teachers and learners should not be deceived by the huge popularity of the Web as the fastest growing

Internet facility at the moment. Teachers and students, in this case, have to be selective and careful of their choices of websites for not all websites are good and can offer what they need.

Kitao and Kitao (1996) believe that the Web is a useful tool for teachers to present in class. Teachers who want to make use of the Web should ensure that the sources are colorful, realistic and attractive. Graus (1999) identifies a few new features of the Website, which will improve its popularity,He also adds that flexibility, power and ease of use are other advantages featured by the Web.

3. Methodology

The sample population identified from one institution, namely UM (university Malaya). Eight lecturers were our respondents. They are UM language teachers in two faculties, faculty of linguistic and faculty of literature. Their experience of English language teaching not very different. All of them have between 5 to 8 years' experience in this field. The study took only two weeks. The instrument used in this research was only the face to face interview.

The following are the research questions that will be answered in this study:

- How do language teachers perceive language teaching via the internet?
- How do language teachers add internet in their language teaching?
- What are the potential benefits of language learning via the internet?

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Background Information

Two respondents were male whereas the others were female. The data reveals that seven of the respondents had home computers. Five of the respondents used the computers at home every day. Three of them operated their home computers a few times per week. This indicated that although after working hours the respondents still engaged themselves with their computers. On the opposing, the rate of use differed when the respondents were in their workplace. All respondents had computer in their rooms at their workplace. In addition, their field of work requires them to engage in computing activities such as researching for information for their teaching materials whereas at home they might have other important duties to perform. In fact, accessing the Internet from home can be very costly.

From the respondents' point of view in interview, two of them agreed that they were excellent users of computers. They agreed that they were able to use Access, Excell, PowerPoint, the Internet as well as maintaining the hardware and software of computers among others. A significant number of them, four rated themselves as good users and believed that they were able to use Excell, PowerPoint, Internet, e-mail and the statistical packages to name a few. The remaining respondents, two of all fell under the category of fair users who likely that they could only operate Word, Internet and e-mail for their academic and personal purposes.

All respondents (100 percent) stated they looked around on the Internet. This indicates that the Internet has placed itself well in the Malaysian higher institutions as verified by the teachers from this university.

Furthermore, it shows that Malaysian educators (represented by the eight respondents) have begun to see the importance of the Internet technology in their daily activities. However, only 70 percent of the respondents indicated that they surfed the Internet every day, and another substantial number (30 percent), operated the technology only a few times per week. When they were asked in the interview to rate themselves as the Internet users, 50 percent of the respondents rated themselves as good users. Another 50 percent of them felt that they are in fair user category. It was a good indication that no respondents felt that they were poor users. Perhaps this was because the members of the faculty had undergone computer-training program. Nevertheless, it shows that those teachers have had some knowledge on the computer skills necessary for internet navigation. Most of the respondents (seven of them) searched the Web for general information. This was carried out when they needed to have some explanation on something in particular or when they were curious about an idea, book or anything for that matter. 20 percent of the respondents searched the Web for academic purpose, which was very much related to their job undertakings. A large number of the respondents (80 percent) used the Internet for e-mail writing to their colleagues, students, and friends or vice versa. The finding also shows that the respondents did not just use the Internet for academic purposes or e-mail writing but also for news discovery and worldly knowledge.

4.2. Research Question 1: How do language teachers perceive language teaching via the Internet?

The purpose of Internet application in language teaching also diverse among the respondents. 70 percent of the respondents allowed their students to seek for articles and materials from the Websites. In addition, 60 percent of them encouraged their students to arrange appointments with them via e-mail. Another 40 percent of the respondents provided their students with web addresses related to the courses they taught and expected the students to access the web addresses provided by them. In short, the respondents' applications of Internet in their language teaching were not limited to searching for articles in the websites but the tasks they gave to their students varied accordingly. The respondents were indirectly teaching their students to use the Internet.

The information obtained indicates that six of the respondents applied the Internet in their personal English classrooms whereas only two respondents did not apply the Internet in their language teaching. For instance; Lecturer 2: via internet, we can find so many opportunities to escape from canned knowledge and discover thousands of information sources. Or L3: English teaches can use internet to prepare some teaching materials and sometimes they use resources from the internet. (see more in Appendix)

They said that they encourage their students to access the websites during classes or during the students' own free time. For instance, one of the respondents teaching Literary Studies indicated, "some websites can give students assistance with critical literary views and information on writers and texts." In other words, certain teachers encouraged their students to explore the field of study via the internet to gain more knowledge and information in the classrooms. The two respondents who did not apply the Internet in their language teaching, on the contrary, taught Applied Linguistics and Critical Thinking courses, the nature of the courses does not necessitate the need for the teachers to encourage Internet navigation to their students. This might also relate to their recommendations of other resources, which may consist of more information than they could get from the Internet. For example, one of the lecturers said: "Internet is not well-integrated in teaching English as a foreign language". However, it was safe if the lecturers were to recommend extra readings or materials obtained via the Internet to their students.

The survey also reveals that five of the respondents encouraged their students to search the Internet for article. This indicated that the teachers were fully utilizing the various activities offered by the Internet to the advantage of their students. For example, references to the courses taught were no longer confined to books, which were sometimes outdated; instead, updated articles and notes available in the Net became the trend. In short, the respondents had begun to fully apply the Internet in their language teaching and had placed the Internet as a useful and necessary tool in linking the technology with the students' real life with the outside world.

4.3. Research Question 2: How do language teachers add Internet in their language teaching?

Six of the respondents planned to add the Internet in their own courses. In addition, five of them believed that the World Wide Web is a valuable teaching tool for their courses. 80 percent of the respondents felt that the Web provides up-to-date information and 60 percent of them felt that their colleagues should integrate Internet in their language teaching. A website can contain texts for language learners to read through, with tasks that they are encouraged to perform in order to enhance their reading skills.L1 indicates that "before using the internet in language teaching, teachers need to be competent enough to use Internet-based materials in the classroom". This high percentage of positive response towards Internet use indicates that the respondents are certain of the benefits the Internet presents for language teaching. Students are encouraged to send assignments via e-mail. As L8 said: "I can also set a group of student a task which requires them to communicate with each other by e-mail, thereby encouraging productive writing skills".

4.4. Research Question 3: What are the potential benefits of language learning via the Internet?

50 percent of the respondents allow their students to send completed assignments via e-mail. This indicated that teachers who allowed their students to send assignments or messages via e-mail were practicing the independence of time and space offered by the Web. L2 indicates that she can e-mail one or more students a task of some short to complete, which is then return to her for marking or doing correction. This was because the Web is available 24 hours a day.

Another 50 percent of the respondents permitted their students to access the Web addresses provided by them for additional information on the courses. When we asked about their other comments on the Internet use in language teaching, only one respondent stated that students could recover up-to-date information from the Internet. It seems that students need to be taught how to search and retrieve information from the Net.

Also, one of the respondents compares face-to-face and electronic discussion she said that there is more participation in the electronic discussion than face-to-face discourse, it is also clear that, students who think that they are not fluent in the English language tend to do better in electronic discussion. The language use in the electronic discussion is both formal and more complex. This explains why most students fear to be engaged in face-to-face discussion. She also suggests "electronic communication is a good environment for development use of more formal and complex language".

One of the main objectives of this research was to answer the question on the opinion of teachers regarding Internet use in the language classrooms. The respondents are obviously very keen in using the Internet in their teaching. Their Internet application is only related to a few advantages offered by the Internet. So, they only allow their students to seek information through articles and journals in the Internet, arrange for appointments, access web addresses, or send writing Assignments by e-mail. Those limited activities are still lacking in practice for the Internet offers a vast area of knowledge to the teachers and students alike.

5. Implications of the Study

There are four major implications that can be observed here. First, the possibilities of the Internet as the new medium in Malaysian education are huge. Therefore, teachers should use the Internet in their lessons. They will of course no longer be in the attention of the classroom for the classroom becomes more student-centered but they will be involved in "coaching" the students than "teaching" (Graus 1999). By involving themselves and their students in the Internet tasks and activities, teachers will be able to discover new ideas in language teaching. For example, they can suggest extra information and language input to their students as well as assist the learning process. In fact, they will help to develop a new pattern in education (Frizler 1995).

Secondly, the Internet has a positive impact on the students' learning experience. The language inputs they gain from the classroom will be varied and will help increase their motivation in language learning as argued by Muehleisen (1997), Newfields (1997), Osuna and Meskill (1998), Warschauer (1996b), Kornum (1993), Liao (1999) and Davis and Chang (1994) in their studies. Obviously, students' language proficiency can gradually be

improved with the Internet application. In this case, students should realize that world communication will become increasingly important and knowledge of English, as the world language will be paramount. so, students need to acquire both computer skills and language skills to be successful in the Information Age.

Thirdly, policy makers in education will find this study useful for they can observe the potential benefits the Internet offers for Malaysian based language teaching. In addition, they can also evaluate on the teachers' present perceptions via this study if the Internet were to be integrated in the curriculum. Fourthly, teachers have applied many strategies and approaches for the teaching of English. Finally, Having laid down the use of the Internet in the classroom, it is safe to say that the impact of the Internet in society in general will be profound for the years to come. Evaluating the importance of integrating the Internet in the educational contexts, Web designers should consider a few aspects when designing their web pages.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has discussed the potential use of the Internet in language teaching. It has also managed to come up with a few recommendations for people who are directly involved in the educational context and those who are interested in using Internet in their undertakings. Relating to the benefits of using the Internet in language classrooms, teachers must make use of the Internet in their English classes.

Use of Internet technology in language classrooms is obviously something new and unknown to many students. It is hoped that it will improve the students' motivation to stand out in the course and indirectly stimulate their interest to make English a part of their lives. Teachers must also be aware of their function in the digital age i.e., to communicate to the students the ideas and skills necessary to function well in the English language learning. They will need to get more involved with the Internet in order to continue improving their teaching skills. Not just that, the Internet improves the students' learning abilities as well.

Therefore, teachers need to prepare themselves well for the digital age without any more doubts. This study shows the use of Internet for English teachers in UM. The results of our research findings indicate that teachers are able to be creative and resourceful in the language classroom via the Internet. The creative Internet resources are project work, interactive writing, news scanning, stories and fables, idioms and creative writing.

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