Technological Innovation in English Teaching in Stand-Alone Private Language Institutions in Malaysia: Is It Adequate and Effective?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to highlight the significance of the technology in English language teaching in Malaysia. This article overviews the innovative technological teaching aids and its impact on English teaching process. The study aims to investigate the technological implementation in English teaching classroom, identify its importance and focus on adequacy of implementation of technology in the English teaching in Malaysian context.

Key words: Technological innovations; Effectiveness; Technology tools; English teaching

INTRODUCTION

With the current wave of technological innovation, educators, schools and academies have implemented variety of technological tools to complement daily routine. Technological tools are ubiquitous among teachers as it engages students' attention; make classes more lively, informative and educational. With the love to everything new and interesting, students look forward to such classes. This study will disclose the effectiveness of such technology on English learning process.

There are plenty of opportunities and motivation to bring something new and exciting into the classroom that involve students into interactive learning. This can positively influence students to improve English without forcing them to study, as they will look forward with great expectation to the next English class and most probably prepared with some extra materials for interactive engagement.

Teaching aids has become an integral component in any classroom these days. Such benefits include helping learners improve reading, comprehension skills, illustrating or reinforcing a skill or concept, differentiating instruction and relieving anxiety by presenting information in a new exciting way.

In Malaysia there is an emphasis on studying English Language, and as a result many English language schools have been established, teaching involves the use of a variety of technological innovations.

This study aimed to investigate the technological implementation in English teaching in the classroom, identify its importance, and effectiveness among students. The focus falls on the types of technological tools for English language classroom.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Technology, gives the teachers, students and facilitators ways to collaborate and create value by giving unlimited options. In education, it helps to improve teaching and learning. The introduction of the modern library and the pencil in the mid-1600s is often equated with the beginning of the use of technology in education. But the technology as we understand now, started in latter part of the 1970s, when computer was integrated into schools. When IBM created the first PC in early 1980s, nearly twenty percent of schools in the UK and the US had computers in use and by 2005, more than 50% of public schools had laptops for students in their technology budget with more than 90% of schools having access to the Internet. By 2011, many schools were including tablet

PCs for students and teachers in their technology budget (OurICT, 2017). And now, smart phones and related Apps have changed the educational dynamics again. Now the catchword is **Technology integration,** use of **technology** tools in general content areas in education in order to allow students to apply computer and **technology** skills to learning and problem-solving skills. Generally speaking, the curriculum should drive the use of **technology** and not vice versa (Dockstader, 2008).

1.1 Technology and Learning

Does technology enhance learning? Not much evidence to support such a claim, especially among researchers on Higher Education sector (e.g. Davis & Graf, 2005; Kanuka & Keland, 2008; Passey and Higgins, 2011). It is certainly beneficial to well-motivated and experienced learners, however, without such motivation, skills and experience e-learning is unsuccessful and a source of distraction for students. In the current environment, there is a need to design technology around teaching to enhances learning and how to measure that enhancement (Kirkwood, Adrian & Price, Linda, 2014; Dockstader, 2008) and not vice versa.

Studies have shown operational enhancement like increased flexibility (Taylor & Clark, 2010) and improved retention (Connolly et al, 2007) if technology is centred around teaching. Positive quantitative changes that have been identified in such an environment include improved engagement or time spent on learning task (Coller & Scott, 2009; Tormey & Henchy, 2008), favourable perceptions or attitudes (Coller & Scott, 2009; Connolly et al 2007; Stephenson et al 2008; Swan & O'Donnell, 2009)) and improvement in test or assessment scores (Coller & Scott, 2009; Connolly et al, 2007). At the qualitative level, this approach has shown marked improvement in deeper learning or understanding/higher order thinking processes and skills (Coller & Scott, 2009; Connolly et al, 2007; Cooner, 2010; de Leng et al, 2009), more reflection / critical awareness among students (Connolly et al, 2007; Cooner, 2010; Herman & Kirkup, 2008) and improved student interactions in online discussion and/or collaborative activity Connolly et al, 2007; Cooner, 2010).

1.2 Technology and English Teaching

The teaching of Languages, including English, has seen various levels of integration in the use of Technology, with the ultimate goal being seamless integration. Technology is very much part of language learning throughout the world with different levels of usage.

Digital technologies are ideally placed to help teachers working with learners, and learners working independently, to do the necessary 'languaging' that makes learning development possible (Motteram, 2013). Recent report predicts that the demand for learning English is likely to fuel the growth of the software market for English language learning and development (Zazulak,

2016). And is supported by teachers, parents and policymakers who acknowledge and support the growing influence of technology (Patricia & Lauren, 2017) in education. Given this trend, teachers, students, parents and policymakers might assume that students' familiarity and preference for technology translates into better learning outcomes, but this assumption is not necessarily true (Patricia & Lauren (2017).

A global survey on on-line by Chong had identify 10 way technology enhances language teaching in and out of class environment (Chong, 2016)[1]. Some of the class room based innovation are:

1.3 Digital Platforms

With the invention of Internet there is a freedom and access to plenty resources apps and media programs that can improve teaching and learning routine. For instance, the app Edmodo, nowadays has become one of the popular online environment for teachers, students and parents. This app helps teachers to exchange useful information and prepare for the lesson.

Cloud based tools like Google Docs have also become indispensable. According to Tyson Seburn (2016) it is a reliable platform to save and keep necessary teaching resources, students course works etc.

A multimedia like Digital Video by Nik Peachey (nominated for an ELTons award for innovations in teacher resources) it helps to create activities, lessons and coursers for an interesting interactive class.

1.4 Online Corpora

The use of corpora according to Johns (2016) is important as it is a large collections used for studying linguistic structure and definitions of words. The corpora are now available online. That means teacher no longer has to refer to the paper dictionary in order to explain the difference of such words as "trouble" and "problem" with the online access it becomes easier to reach out to the correct definition. It saves time and implements effectiveness in learning English.

1.5 Online CPD (continuous professional development) and the Global Staffroom

With the growth of social media and inventions of new apps, English teachers from all over the world can form online communities that act like a huge "global staffroom". As well for students there are Instagram accounts and websites where they can learn English from home. Sandy Millin[2] (a psychologist and linguist) has stated that such apps like Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat can offer support and share ideas with teachers and students.

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[1] Chia Suan Chong December 2016 article for www.britishcouncil. org
[2] Sandy Millin "Social media for the positive learning environment" article 2016.

1.6 Mobile Learning and BYOD (bring your own device)

The development of mobile technology and the proliferation of smart phones have enabled many of us to access the Internet and a huge variety of apps on the go. Learners benefit too, from apps like podcasts like Luke's English Podcast – Learn British English with Luke Thomson – nominated for an ELTons award[3] in the category of digital innovation.

Teachers are also able to build on their teaching knowledge and skills by listening to podcasts like The TEFL Commute. About 50,000 teachers from more than 200 countries watch webinars or archived videos of talks by TEFL teachers. Both are nominated for an ELTons for innovation in teacher resources.

And if teachers and students are gaining so much from their mobile devices, why ban them from classrooms?[4] It seems that getting students to bring their own devices to class is fast becoming a game-changer in ELT practice.

1.7 Online Authentic Materials

One of the benefits of using Internet for language learners is the ability to gather any useful information. However, choosing the right source or online material can be crucial for effective English learning.

National Geographic Learning makes use of TED talks to develop the pedagogical approach to teach and for learners Cambridge for Life Digital videos can be helpful boost to use English perfectly. Both resources are nominated for ELTons awards 2016.

1.8 The IWB (interactive white board)

The IWB started appearing in the classrooms in the 20th century and now has become a normal equipment of many classrooms around the world. It allows to save and print some activities written on board it also allows to control classroom computer, play listening activities, videos and so on. It is a perfect tool for presentations. The possibilities seem endless.

However, some teachers say that it could more less as a distraction in learning/teaching routine and it doesn't give much of an impact in understanding of English language.

There are people who state this equipment can be a positive compliment to a skilful teaching and it can benefit a good teacher, the teacher, who without the IWB can handle the class perfectly.

1.9 Teaching Soft Skills and Critical Thinking Skills

Many of students all over the globe are now learning English to oil the wheels of communication in the worlds of business, trade, education, and tourism. To enable students to become better communicators, teachers should perhaps go beyond grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, and look at helping them *communicate effectively in English.*

Learner resources nominated for an ELTons award this year include Richmond Business Theories (Richmond ELT)[5], which features online resources that help teachers and students with soft skills like problem-solving, presentation skills, time management and decision-making. Academic Presenting and Presentations (Levrai and Bolster 2016) looks specifically at the communication skills needed when making a presentation at college or university. Another ELTons nominee is The Thinking Train (Helbling Languages 2016)[6], which believes in starting young. It helps children develop critical thinking skills that could support them not just in their English learning but in the learning of other subjects and life skills.

And perhaps it is this ability to think and reflect that will enable us as teachers and learners to take any innovation out there and make it work in the context of motivating students to learn English. After all, as a wise teacher of mine used to say, *'It's never the tool, but the user that makes the difference.'*

2. METHODOLOGY

The participants in this study involved English learners around Klang Valley, the hub of academic and employment activities in Malaysia. The participants were initially identified by current students of Stand-Alone Private Educational Institutions in Kuala Lumpur, who volunteered to undertake enumeration aspects. Snowballing technique was used to identify other participants and the final tally was 212 for this exploratory study.

2.1 The Sample Size

Degree of Variability; measures the distribution of attributes in a population of interest. The more heterogeneous a population, the larger the sample size, and for a more homogeneous population, the smaller the sample size must be for a given level of precision. As a proportion of 0.5 (50%) indicates the maximum variability in a population, it is often used in determining a more conservative sample size, which is used in this case. The standard confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 5% is used for generalization purpose.

2.2 These Values are Appropriate for Research of This Kind

Yamane (1967:886), provides a simplified formula to calculate sample sizes.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

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[3] The ELTons are the only international awards that recognize innovation in English language teaching (ELT)
[4] Steve Robinson - English teacher and the author of the article "Teaching as life goal" 2015

[5] http://business-theories.richmondelt.com/
[6] http://www.helblinglanguages.com/thethinkingtrain/

Where N–population size, n – sample size, e – error
Based on these assumption, sample size n is 220.

3. Survey Results

Table 1
Frequency on Importance of Devices

Technological tools implemented in the classroom	1-not at all important	2 -not quite important	3-somewhat important	4-quite important
Power Point	0	7	45	160
BYOD (Bring Your Own Device)	19	25	30	138
Tablets	15	7	68	122
Overhead Projector	0	0	78	134
Podcasts	5	90	114	3
Online materials	8	10	65	129
Smart Board	0	15	50	147
VR Box	18	22	126	46
Mobile Apps	3	16	77	116
Screen Readers and Braille Displays	18	92	78	75

Based on the survey, Power Point usage is still popular among students, followed by Smart Board although student favor bringing their own device and Mobile Apps usage is appealing to students. Bring Your Own device method of teaching, whereby students could learn English by using their own device they are comfortable with has become trendy among students, however, the use of Podcast has not got on well.

3.1 Correlation Analysis

The English language performance measurement has been designed through the Gardner and Lambert (AMTB-Attitude Motivation Test Battery), which measures the performance of the learner based on the 4 skills: listening, reading, writing, speaking. The Correlation analysis uses Spearmen correlation coefficient.

The results are demonstrated in the table 2. The table 2 demonstrates the coefficient of the correlation between Effectiveness of English Learning among students and devices implemented in the classroom. Test result indicate insignificantly influence of devices on effectiveness except for Tablet, Overhead Projector and Smart board, albeit, with low level of correlation among them with Smart Board showing negative correlation. Therefore, these devices do not show greater influence on learner's performance in English Language class and in fact Smart Board usage is detrimental.

Table 2
Correlation Among Devices and Effectiveness

		Correlation Coefficient	1
Spear-man's rho		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	Power Point	Correlation Coefficient	0.019
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.778
	BYOD	Correlation Coefficient	-0.029
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.678
	Tablet	Correlation Coefficient	.173[*]
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.012
	Overhead Projector	Correlation Coefficient	.146[*]
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.034
	Podcasts	Correlation Coefficient	-0.023
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.742
	Online material	Correlation Coefficient	-0.08
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.249
	Smart Board	Correlation Coefficient	-.150[*]
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.029
	VR Box	Correlation Coefficient	0.027
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.695
	Mobile Apps	Correlation Coefficient	-0.06
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.388
	Screen Reader and Braille Displays	Correlation Coefficient	0.095
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.169

DISCUSSION

The research aimed at investigation Technological Innovation in English Teaching in Stand-Alone Private Language Institutions in Malaysia and its effectiveness on Students' learning. A quantitative survey instrument was used based on a sample of students using the snowballing technique.

> Based on the survey, researchers identified the 'traditional' technological tools are popular among students but the usage of some of 'newer' devices are promising. However, they are not effective as teaching tools in the current form.

Surprisingly among adult learners of English, the traditional classroom devices as Power Point, Overhead projector and Smart Board are still popular. It is as well

convenient for learners to use their own device in the classroom, as they are familiar with using their own devices. The effectiveness of technological devices based on the correlation analysis, however, implies none of them are effective tools among English learners. In the current environment locally, it appears that teaching is centered around technology, these is seen in the support for some form of technology usage but no reflection on effectiveness. It is recommended that local institution design and incorporated digital technology around teaching to enhances learning and device new ways to measure that enhancement (Kirkwood, Adrian & Price, Linda, 2014; Dockstader, 2008). Such a move can bring about operational enhancement (Taylor & Clark, 2010; Connolly et al, 2007), positive quantitative changes (Coller & Scott, 2009; Tormey & Henchy, 2008; Connolly et al 2007; Stephenson et al 2008; Swan & O'Donnell, 2009) and qualitative changes (Coller & Scott, 2009; Connolly et al, 2007; Cooner, 2010; de Leng et al, 2009; Herman & Kirkup, 2008) which is not clear in the current approach. The role of technology in learning should be clearly identified across different stages of English learning. The curriculum need to indicate where/how/types of digital tools suitable at each and every stage and that technology used to collaborate an effective interaction for learning. Teachers and learners should be technically supported and undated in developing their skills in using digital and computer technologies to ensure it improves learning.

However, the cost of additional devices may become a burden to the private educational institution. The provision of necessary technological support in the modern classroom should be incorporated into the overall design of program to help balance efficiency with cost. This study as well supports the idea of sparkling the classroom with additional technological tools in an integrated manner based on the preference but with a consideration on the cost implication.

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