

INTERNET AND 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 seek 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 two universities were the subjects of the research. Their computing involvement, 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.

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 confined 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 the country progresses towards becoming a developed nation, Malaysian teachers can no longer rely on traditional teaching and training methods to survive in the era 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 restructuring 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, overhead projectors, videos and slides but it can be more interactive via other mediums. Warschauer and Kern (2000) introduced the term "network-based language teaching" (NBLT) to refer to "language teaching that involves the use of computers connected to one another in either local or global networks." Others may use simply "on-line" or "cyber" or "virtual" language learning. Through the World Wide Web (www), interested parties 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 have allocated a large portion of their ICT (information and communication technology) budget towards the setting up of campus-wide network infrastructure. This would enable them to accommodate distance-learning program, which will lead to the establishment of borderless classrooms. Having the technology and the infrastructure alone will not suffice if language teachers do not know how to harness this remarkable power and channel it to create a meaningful teaching and learning environment.

The Internet has entered into the mainstream 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; forum 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 exploit 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 intrinsic 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 abstraction 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 conventional teaching. Indeed, the Internet can truly become a valuable asset to the foreign language classroom provided that teachers are enthusiastic and convinced that it can offer many benefits to the language learning process.

Although many educators and keen Internet users feel that the Internet is useful in the educational context, there is still not much empirical 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. The following are the research questions that will be answered in this study: (1): *How do language teachers perceive language teaching via the Internet?* (2): *How do language teachers integrate Internet in their language teaching?* (3): *What are the potential benefits of language learning via the Internet?* (4): *What are the teachers' perceived criteria of good websites for language teaching?* (5): *What are the disadvantages of language learning via the Internet?*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Teachers are mostly aware of what is involved in the process of language learning. However, it is quite difficult to determine how exactly a person learns a second language in the Internet environment. In this case, in order to make the process of teaching and learning a success, sound theories of learning are needed to explain the underlying reasons for the use of computers in this Information Age.

Between 1950s and 1960s, language teachers had been adopting the behaviorist theory via the Audio-lingual Method, which was the “State of the Art”. Then, there was a shift to the cognitive theory, from which communicative method is derived. Many teachers prefer to concentrate more on Krashen’s theory of comprehensible input i.e., providing learners with the input, which enables them to proceed to the next stage of learning (Chapelle, 1997; Yong Zhao 1997). In this context, the Internet is one of the resources, which can fulfill this requirement (Bowers, 1995:A-3).

However, the Internet does not totally disregard the behaviorist model of language acquisition. Krashen’s idea of providing students with enabling input is definitely acceptable but when discussing the possibilities of using the Internet in the classrooms, mere comprehensible language input is inadequate. Theoretically, it sounds acceptable but operationally, what is comprehensible and what is not are difficult to be determined. It is only the language learners themselves who know what is comprehensible for them. If this is true, then the Internet definitely offers plentiful English language information that can be a source of reference for the students. In fact, some websites do offer good English language instructional materials, which the students can attempt at their own pace.

Some of these instructional materials are interactive in nature. If language learning is seen as more meaningful and more productive when there is active interaction between teachers and learners or among learners, then bi-directional learning materials in the Internet should, for some degree, be able to provide that the necessary interaction (Supyan Hussin & Roziana Rosli, 2001). Examples of this interactive element are the repetition and drills, immediate correction and immediate reward and reinforcement. Ariew and Frommer (1987:119) discuss their account of drill and practice programs: “Drill and practice programs consists of mechanical manipulations of words or sentences, using the same types of exercises as one uses in class, such as transformation and substitution drills; or in textbooks, such as multiple-choice and fill-in-the -blank questions.”

Although some people view that the behaviorist model is inadequate to cover the wider perspectives made possible by the newly improved technology, Alessi and Trolip's (1991) drill-and-practice is needed as it forms a complete instructional process in computer-based learning. The instructional process has four sequences: (1) presentation of concepts and ideas on the subject matter via classroom teachings, (2) guide on how students can master and/or comprehend the concepts or ideas taught via tutorials or simulations, (3) reinforcement of what has been learned via drill-and-practice, and (4) test or assessment on students' mastery learning via examination. In other words, the behaviorist's input on drill-and-practice is seen as complementing the cognitive view of learning. Therefore, teachers will have to provide learners with enough drills, practice, skills, support, and motivation to boost the learners' linguistic and computer competence, thus, helping them to achieve their target and present needs.

PAST STUDIES

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 boost 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 that the quality of their arguments was enhanced and their thinking became more creative. Next, Friedman et al. (1995) reports that using an electronic discussion group for an undergraduate composition course provides a forum where students are able to "model, rehearse, test the limits of, exchange, and reshape academic arguments" (p. 192). The students reacted positively to the integration of electronic discussion groups into their composition course and the quality of their term papers' "researched substance and persuasive effect" improved. In addition, Belisle (1996) states that her Japanese students studying English at Mukugawsa Daikuin in Nishinoya in Japan showed improvements in their ability to organize the tasks of communicating and collaborating with peers and teachers; more writing skills had been accomplished using the e-mail; the writing process namely brainstorming, revising, and editing among the students became less inhibited since the students' attention was focused on the content of the message than the form. Also, Warschauer (1996b) compares face-to-face and electronic discussion where 5 Filipinos, 5 Japanese, 4 Chinese and 2 Vietnamese students enrolled in an advanced ESL composition class at a community college in Hawaii. Results indicate that there is more participation in the electronic discussion than face-to-face discourse. Apart from that, it is also evident that students who think that they are not fluent in the English language tend to do better in electronic discussion. Warschauer finally concludes that 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 fostering use of more formal and complex language” (Warschauer 1996b).

Furthermore, Osuna and Meskill (1998) carry out a study, which focuses on the learners’ experience with regards to the language and cultural knowledge they acquired via the Web. The overall result of the study indicates that students believe that the Web is an excellent tool for learning the foreign language culture. The reasons being its promotion of learner autonomy, easy access and provision of up-to-date information to the students who are very keen to learn the Spanish language and culture. In other words, it is easy for the students to relate to the theories and language input they learn in their classroom to that of the real world communication. This study is a good example of a successful integration of the Internet into the ordinary classrooms activities, which enables the students to perceive “the Internet as an integral part of the class instead of as an add-on” (Osuna & Meskill 1998). 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 Czechoslovakia, 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. In a collaborative writing project between Robin Hood Primary School in Birmingham and XinMin Primary School in Singapore, the students were found to be more positive towards developing their writing skill due to the nature of the activity, which requires autonomous learning exercises (Ho, 2000). As learners learned to transfer what they have learnt (from the information gathered) to the new settings (the information presented in the website), they learned to practice their logic skills and make evaluative judgments. Last but not least, Mehlenbacher et. al (2000) examined how students enrolled in two web-based sections of a technical writing class performed compared to students enrolled in a conventional version of the class. Although no significant difference in the students’ performance was found between the two learning conditions, the data reveal intriguing relationships between students’ prior knowledge, attitudes, and learning styles and the web-based writing environment. One important finding is that reflective, global learners performed significantly better online than active, sequential learners.

Studies 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. Tunku Mohani and Zoraini (1998) studied a few examples of the use of resources on the Internet in the University of Malaya. The results of the 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. Norlida Alias and Supyan Hussin et al. (2002) analyzed perceived helpfulness of the Internet facilities among students in a writing course. The study reports that 85 percent of the 21 websites studied were perceived helpful by students in helping them to compose their papers; 95 percent indicated that

e-mail activity helped them to generate ideas; 90 percent stated that peer editing and revising activity via discussion group helped them to gather more ideas, and 93 percent claimed that forum discussions allowed the students to contribute ideas in the group, and 87 percent indicated that this activity stimulates their thinking process. The results also showed that those students' attitude and motivational levels improved after they used the Internet facilities in their writing course.

As mentioned earlier, one of the Internet facilities is the websites that offer online instructional materials. The questions that we are interested in investigating are: What constitutes "good" instructional websites? What are the criteria for "good" English language learning sites in the Internet?

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 immense popularity of the Web as the fastest growing Internet facility at the moment. Teachers and students, in this case, have to be selective and extra 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. Osuna and Meskill (1998) mention a few aspects of the Web, which enable it to become a valuable learning gadget; the Websites offer current, interesting, varied and useful information to the students. They also suggest other criteria judged by the students in determining whether a website is good or the other by looking at the visual elements: photographs, graphics and maps. Graus (1999) identifies a few new features of the Website, which will enhance its popularity. Those features include interactivity, multimedia and hypermedia. He also adds that flexibility, power, authenticity and ease of use are among other advantages featured by the Web.

METHODOLOGY

The sample population was first identified from two institutions, namely UKM and UNITEN. Twenty questionnaires were randomly distributed to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) language teachers, and 10 to Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN) language teachers. However, only 15 respondents who used the Internet in their language teaching (based on their answers in Section 3 of the questionnaire) answered the questionnaire completely. The study took four weeks and the data were analyzed using frequency distribution procedure.

The instrument used in this research was merely the questionnaire which contains four sections. The first section of the questionnaire is meant to gauge the respondents' backgrounds and educational qualifications as well as their teaching experience. The second section, on the contrary, seeks the answers regarding respondents' computing involvement. The third section of the questionnaire is

formulated to elicit the respondents' frequency of Internet navigation as well as their perception of good and uninteresting websites. The final part of the questionnaire consists of miscellaneous questions intended to survey the respondents' opinions on their objectives of using the Web.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background Information

Six respondents (40 percent) were male whereas the others were female (60 percent). Nine respondents (60 percent) were at the range of 35-39 years of age. Significantly, five of those respondents (55.6 percent) had served the teaching institution for more than ten years. All the fifteen respondents, in addition, were the experts in various fields namely TESL, TESOL, Linguistics, Applied Linguistics and Literature. The researcher had also managed to obtain the views of three doctorate holders, nine masters' holders and three-degree holders. Overall, the respondents varied in terms of age, experience, gender, field of study and qualification.

The data reveals that 93.3 percent of the respondents possessed home computers. This was counter-checked with the frequency of home computer use and as expected most of the respondents (60 percent) used the computers at home every day. Only 26.6 percent of the respondents operated their home computers a few times per week. This indicated that although after working hours the respondents still engaged themselves with their computers. An interesting finding reveals that only one respondent had never used the home computer despite possessing one. Another respondent only used home computer once in a month. On the contrary, the frequency of use differed when the respondents were in their workplace. Of thirteen respondents who possessed a computer in their rooms at their workplace, 86.7 percent of them used the computer every day. This significant difference between frequency of use at home and workplace perhaps existed because respondents spent more time on computing activities at 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 commitments and duties to perform. In fact, accessing the Internet from home can be very costly.

From the respondents' point of view, in addition, 20 percent 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 substantial number of them (46.7 percent) 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 (33.3 percent) fell under the category of fair users who anticipated that they could only operate Word, Internet and e-mail for their academic and personal purposes.

All respondents (100 percent) stated they surfed the Internet. This indicates that the Internet has placed itself well in the Malaysian higher institutions as proven by the teachers from the two universities. Furthermore, it shows that Malaysian educators

(represented by the 15 respondents) have begun to see the importance of the Internet technology in their daily activities. However, only 40 percent of the respondents indicated that they surfed the Internet every day, and another substantial number (33.3 percent), operated the technology only a few times per week. When they were asked to rate themselves as the Internet users, 53.4 percent of the respondents rated themselves as good users. Another 26.6 percent of them felt that they fell under the 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. Nonetheless, it shows that those teachers have had some knowledge on the computer skills necessary for Internet navigation.

In terms of the purpose of the respondents' Internet navigation, generally, most of the respondents (93.3 percent) searched the Web for general information. This was carried out when they needed to have some elaboration on something in particular or when they were curious about an idea, book or anything for that matter. 86.7 percent of the respondents searched the Web for academic purpose, which was very much related to their job undertakings. A substantial 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 navigate the Internet for academic purposes or e-mail writing but also for news discovery and worldly knowledge.

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

The purpose of Internet application in language teaching also varied among the respondents. 73 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 confined 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 and perhaps such teaching pedagogy will leave some impacts to the betterment of both the students and teachers in the Knowledge Age.

The information obtained indicates that 86.7 percent of the respondents applied the Internet in their respective English classrooms whereas only two respondents did not apply the Internet in their language teaching. When counter-checked with the courses they were teaching, it was discovered that the former taught the TESL, Linguistics and Literature courses among others. They encouraged 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 apart from the ones imparted 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. However, it was harmless if the lecturers were to recommend extra readings or materials obtained via the Internet to their students. Perhaps it was the teachers themselves who were unsure of the resources available on the Internet pertinent to their courses.

The survey also reveals that 73.3 percent of the respondents encouraged their students to search the Internet for articles and authentic materials. 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. 60 percent of the teachers who also had improved in their teaching style allowed their students to arrange for appointments by just sending messages via e-mail or discuss their problems regarding certain areas of the subject on-line. Significantly, 6.7 percent of the respondents even compelled the students to retrieve course information and supplementary tutorial materials via the Internet. 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.

Research Question 2: How do language teachers integrate Internet in their language teaching?

86.7 percent of the respondents planned to integrate the Internet in their respective courses. In addition, 73.4 percent 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 66.7 percent of them felt that their colleagues should integrate Internet in their language teaching. This high percentage of positive response towards Internet use indicates that the respondents are certain of the benefits the Internet presents for language teaching. It is most likely that they will apply the Internet or continue to integrate the Internet in their language teaching. Apart from their intentions of applying the Internet in the educational context, the respondents' moves towards Internet use were also evident.

All respondents possess e-mail accounts and 93.4 percent of them contacted their colleagues by e-mail. This explains that the respondents found it useful to use e-mail as one of the Internet applications in their academic and personal pursuits. It shows that the respondents are beginning to regard the Internet as a new way of communication. Perhaps, apart from communicating for personal news with their colleagues, the communication also circles around academic purposes: exchanging

notes, articles, or information. In addition, the respondents' Internet use has also expanded to their students. Students are encouraged to send assignments via e-mail. Perhaps, for the benefits of their students, some lecturers also allow the use of the technology for other purposes namely students' comments and responses regarding the course. Generally, it shows that the respondents realized the importance of the Internet in the educational setting particularly in their respective institutions.

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

46.7 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. This was because the Web is available 24 hours a day. Another 40 percent of the respondents permitted their students to access the Web addresses provided by them for additional information on the courses. Apart from learning how to access the Web addresses, students also learnt how to receive and send e-mail as well as various other skills needed to access the Web. The majority of the respondents (73.3 percent), in addition, allowed their students to explore the Web for articles and materials discovery. The utmost use of the Internet exhibited by the teachers indicated that the Internet offered a range of activities, which gave a lot of benefits to both teachers and students. Apart from exhorting the students to learn new skills imposed by the technology via the given tasks, the teachers were indirectly developing the students' academic skills i.e., their skimming and scanning techniques through the vast amount of information found in the Web. This shows that language learning is no longer confined to the information retrieved within the four walls of the classroom. Instead, it is advancing beyond to the outside world and it is the Internet that makes this possible.

When asked about their other comments on the Internet use in language teaching, only one respondent (6.7 percent) stated that students could retrieve up-to-date information from the Internet. It seems that students need to be taught how to search and retrieve information from the Net. Having navigational skills alone may be good enough if students do not know how to look for required materials precisely.

One of the main objectives of this research was to answer the question on the perception of teachers regarding Internet use in the language classrooms. The respondents are obviously very keen in integrating the Internet in their teaching. For example, all respondents are Internet users and 86.7 percent of them applied the Internet in their respective courses. However, most of them are applying the technology but in a very superficial way. Their Internet application is only pertinent to a few advantages offered by the Internet. Hence, 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 restricted activities are still lacking in practice for the Internet offers a vast realm of knowledge to the teachers and students alike.

Research Question 4: What are the teachers' perceived criteria of good websites for language teaching?

With regards to the perception of the respondents on the criteria for good websites for language teaching, 73.3 percent of the respondents felt that a good website offers links to other relevant websites. This is particularly true when one might want to seek other websites when he is not satisfied with the contents of the particular website.

The information obtained also indicated that 26.7 percent of the respondents perceived that a good website offers interactive language exercises to the students. Interactive here merely means there are some form of two-way communication between the computer program and the user. A good example is the feedback given to correct and incorrect answers provided by the students: “nice try”, “congratulations!”, “You miss the target” are among the interactive and motivational device used to stimulate students' interests and boost their confidence. The findings also indicated that 40 percent of the respondents perceived a user-friendly main page as an indication of a good website. This was perhaps because the main page of a website is the overall indication of the whole lesson or tutorial. As the first item that is seen before the lesson or tutorial, the main page must be attractive and motivating for the users to engage in the program more often.

Research Question 5: What are the disadvantages of language learning via the Internet?

13.3 percent of the respondents commented that the Internet encouraged plagiarism. This is undeniably true because as the Internet is a rich source of information on various topics, it may ‘inspire’ those students who are desperate enough to steal the writings of others. Another 13.3 percent of the respondents argued that not all materials available in the Net are applicable in the Malaysian context of language learning. Nevertheless, the respondents stated that if the suitable materials were identified they would be good resources for language teaching. The survey also reveals that 6.7 percent of the respondents believed that one of the disadvantages of the Internet is its inability to provide activities for listening and speaking skills as well as writing skills (to a certain extent). This is perhaps due to some physical limitations such bandwidth, speech recognition technology, and specific number of characters that can be processed by computers. This explains why most of the exercises available in the Internet focused more on grammar enrichment, vocabulary building, reading comprehension, and thinking skills.

Having discussed the above research questions, we can conclude that generally, there is lack of teachers' focus on Internet application in language teaching. How then can they best benefit from the Web as a supplementary resource? How can the teachers apply the Internet in the classrooms when they themselves “do not know where to begin looking for on-line resources and information?” (Frizler 1995). Obviously, many teachers are relatively computer literate, and have surfed the Internet before either on their own or with assistance from friends. However, most of them are unclear about how to use the technology as a tool to foster language learning. In addition, they simply do not have time or money to spend on training. Although

educators are convinced of the benefits of using the Internet, there are still a few practical matters to be dealt with before their students can benefit from using the Net in language learning.

Nevertheless, at some point, teachers need to start looking for suitable websites that are useful for their lessons. There are a number of times when teachers spend a considerable amount of time searching for particular information but the surf is fruitless. Instead, they ended up with something completely different and irrelevant. Though the respondents indicated no indication of such problem, it is foreseen that they do have problems evaluating the Web. This was because they failed to indicate how a website is not helpful to their students when the question was posed to them.

Graus (1999) had earlier identified such a problem and later, he came up with a model for material selection. His model is worth discussing because he presented the model in a very systematic way. Following Graus' (1999) criteria, this section will provide a model for teachers who want to select materials on the World Wide Web. He stated that there are a few steps that are encompassed in the model. Firstly, teachers must narrow down the topic. They will need to evaluate their objectives of surfing. They must answer the following question; which types of data are they searching for -- stories, articles, facts or statistics? Once teachers are clear about their objectives, they will continue to the next stage. In the second stage, they have to determine why they need to look for such information. By evaluating such criteria, teachers will be able to scan through the resources quickly before even reading the whole content of the information. Once the websites are determined, the final step is to test the sites. Graus divided the criteria used for this stage into two categories: criteria pertaining to the content of the web pages and those related to design and user-friendliness. He discussed that teachers can test the sites by using the SCAD checklist (Source Evaluation, Contents, Access, Design), which incorporates both mentioned categories. The SCAD checklist is summarized below:

- Source Evaluation: trustworthy source, author's credentials, e-mail, organizational support, rated by known authority, meta information, bad grammar
- Contents: accurate information, up-to-date, comprehensive, rounded story, audience and purpose, objectivity, fairness, reasonableness, moderateness, external consistency
- Access: standard multimedia formats, does it require extra software or plug-ins, free, easy to reach or overloaded, download time
- Design: well structured, easy to navigate, interaction, distracting visual elements, does everything function, functional design, working hyperlinks

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 enormous. Therefore, teachers should integrate the Internet in their lessons. They will of course no longer

be in the limelight 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 explore new ideas in language teaching. For example, they can offer extra information and language input to their students as well as facilitate the learning process. In fact, they will help to develop a new paradigm in education (Frizler 1995). Secondly, the Internet has a positive impact on the students’ learning experience. The language inputs they obtain from the classroom will be varied and will help boost 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. Hence, 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. This is in line with the current trends in most academic institutions in the world whereby the integration of the Internet technology in the curriculum is the state of the art. Fourthly, teachers have applied many strategies and approaches for the teaching of English. A few years back, they struggled to introduce the new approach in language teaching i.e., communicative language teaching by fostering communication via communicative activities to the students. The integration of the Internet is a better teaching methodology for it encompasses more than one approach: communication, learner autonomy, student-centered classroom, and project-based working. The frameworks proposed by Wills (1997) and Graus (1999) will be very useful for such purposes. 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. Kimball (1998) suggested several points for fruitful web authoring: (a) organize texts and other data so that students can get involved and stay engaged. (b) create opportunities for students to become authors on-line; (c) seize opportunities for oneself to make connections with other teachers and researchers with similar interest.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study only presents the use of the Internet in ESL/EFL classroom in general. No specific area of interest was focused. It is hoped that future studies will look into a specific field of study namely the Literary Studies or the TESL course. This will enable the researchers to gain insight into the specific area and thus observe how teachers manipulate the Internet technologies in real classroom environment. It would definitely be an interesting exposure because it can explore the use of Internet in subjects which one might think that the application of the Internet is not applicable. Another possible area is to look into the effectiveness of the Internet application in

language learning process. Perhaps, future researchers should focus on the extent to which Internet can help improve students' language proficiency. Last but not least, study on certain aspects of language pedagogy in the delivery system can be a very interesting one.

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 integrating Internet in their undertakings. Relating to the benefits of integrating the Internet in language classrooms, teachers must make use of the Internet in their English classes. Integration of Internet technology in language classrooms is obviously something new and unknown to many students. It is hoped that it will boost the students' motivation to excel 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.

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