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## **EFFECTIVE USE OF THE INTERNET IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: WHAT AND HOW?**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has developed gradually over the last 30 to 40 years. This development can be categorised into 3 distinct phases, namely, *Behaviouristic CALL*, *Communicative CALL* and *Integrative CALL*. The introduction of a new phase does not necessarily entail rejecting the programs and methods of a previous phase; rather the old is subsumed within the new. The new phases introduced do not gain prominence immediately, but gain acceptance rather slowly and unevenly. It is within the third phase of CALL that the Internet came into the picture. Like the other two phases, the Internet was accepted rather cautiously at first. However, compared to the other two phases, the use of the Internet for language teaching and learning has now reached a fairly mature stage. It has been there for a while and it looks like it is going to stay because the Internet provides many opportunities for language practice, use and development for both teachers and learners and it opens up many avenues for language learning.

### **WHAT IS THE INTERNET**

The Internet or more commonly referred to as the Net – is also



known as cyberspace, the information superhighway, the online community, the electronic library and the digital revolution. The use of this terminology is inter-changeable depending on what the focus of one's description and attention. Basically, it is a large connection of computers in networks that are tied together so that many users can share their vast resources. One of the significant characteristics of the Internet is that there are millions of computers connected to the superhighway. Through access to the Internet, one can easily obtain the wealth of information from the various millions of websites currently available and the number is multiplying at a very fast rate everyday. Thus the Internet offers a wealth of information that you and your students could obtain useful information from. Most websites are open to the public and are even free or a minimal fee is charged for obtaining information from them. Thus, access to the Internet poses no problem and requires very minimal charge, if any.

Over the past ten years, using the Internet as an EFL/ ESL tool has received much attention at least in many Western countries and in more technologically advanced countries like Japan. In other parts of the world and even in Malaysia however, the integration of the Internet in a language classroom is still at its infancy stage. Thus a lot of work is required from a variety of sectors and decision-making bodies to help in the process of integrating the Internet in a Malaysian classroom. There are many ways that the Internet can be used in the classroom in Malaysia, and that is the focus of this article.

## **WHAT IS AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS**

As mentioned earlier, the Internet is an information superhighway where millions of remote computers are connected together and within this superhighway, many websites from all over the world can easily be accessed as long as one has an Internet connection. Some of the types of materials that can be accessed include:

*Materials that can be adapted and/or adopted for classroom use*

For one thing, the Internet is an Aladdin's cave of information. There are simply so many texts and materials available for both teachers and learners alike, waiting to be utilised. These are not restricted only to websites specifically built for language teaching and learning but teachers and learners may even access texts or materials on specific topics such as 'Conservation of the Environment' for example. This text can either be adopted or adapted depending on the complexity of the original text and also the level of proficiency of the users.

*Web sites specifically for language learning*

Language learning need not be a laborious endeavour where learners need to do boring drill and practice activities or listen to endless explanations and one-way communication from the teacher alone. All of these are things of the past because the Internet allows learner-centred activities, gives the learners the freedom to choose what to learn, when to learn, how much to learn, how fast to learn, and many more. In short, it allows learners the freedom to learn at his/ her pace, which, psychologically will boost one's motivation and this, leads to more learning.

When we speak of language learning web sites, learners are spoilt for choice. There are web sites specifically on grammar items, language games, vocabulary games, vocabulary building, writing centres, speaking activities, language exercises, online teaching and learning resources, emails, chat rooms, discussion lists, mailing lists and many more. The list can go on and on. Aren't we all spoilt for choice? So it is all up to the teacher and the learner whether or not they want to utilise this technology in their language teaching and learning.

*Lesson plans for teachers to adopt and/ or adapt*

Lesson plans are easily available for teachers to access from the Internet. There are so many to choose from. These lesson plans can either be adopted for cases where the content of the lessons are relevant to the Malaysian context and school syllabus, acceptable according

to the Eastern values that we practice and challenging enough to suit the level of proficiency of our learners. If not, information within the websites can be adapted and modified perhaps to suit the learner's language proficiency level. Alternatively, ideas that work as reported in the lesson plans, such as approach, methodology and activities for language learning may be adopted. In contrast, the content of the lesson may be replaced by more relevant materials that suit the level of language proficiency of the learners and the environment of the Malaysian educational context and syllabus.

#### *Teacher tips to be adopted/adapted*

The Internet allows teachers and even learners to share their experience on any language teaching and learning task. Through the Internet, anyone can publish and publicise things. This includes successful and less successful stories and tips about a particular lesson, topic, approach, method and even activity. Since the Internet is easily accessible, it is just a matter of a click of a button that one can share one's experience about a lesson or get tips about a particular lesson.

#### *Ready-to-use materials*

Because there are so many web sites available, and the number is multiplying every minute of the day, therefore, there are bound to be some that hits the jackpot for our learners. In other words, these texts, materials or even language learning websites can be adopted the way they appear without having to do any adaptation to them at all. This is especially true because more and more of us here in Malaysia are becoming computer literate and are aware of the facilities offered by the Internet. Being aware of the local contexts and cultural values we practice, many more of us are now able to produce and publish more relevant information, tips, text, materials, activities that suit the Malaysian context, all published on the Internet to be shared by the general public.

#### *Printable resources*

Last but not least, the Internet has available for us, infinite printable

resources that can be used for our language teaching and learning lessons.

## **WHAT IS REQUIRED TO USE THE INTERNET IN THE CLASSROOM**

To be able to use information or text and material from the Internet for your language lesson, several things need to be used. They are the following:

### *A computer connected to the Internet*

The above sub-heading may put many of you off from integrating the Internet in your classroom because we are all aware that as far as Internet connection is concerned, only a limited number of schools have been blessed by it! However, having an Internet connection to your classroom or even to your school is not a necessity, although having it is an added advantage and a dream comes true to many of us! All you need is to have access to the Internet, regardless of where you access it from, be it from a cyber café, or from the comfort of your own home. This is so because, as maintained above, there are many ways that the resources from the Internet can be utilised. If no connection is available to your classroom, then you may want to download materials and adapt them for your classroom use and distribute them in the form of handouts to your students. With this, you still allow variety in the content of your lesson and you still save yourself from the laborious effort and endless time of developing your own materials and texts in the name of adding variety to your lesson.

### *A browser program*

To access information from the Internet, you will need a browser program such as Mozilla Firefox, Netscape Communicator or Internet Explorer installed on the computer. However, any computer purchased today comes with it a browser program.

*Knowledge of using search engines*

Search Engines are used to ease your search for information on the Internet. Some established and more commonly used search engines today include Yahoo, AltaVista, GoTo, HotBot, Lycos, InfoSeek, Excite, and WebCrawler. Each one of them has its strong points and its specialisation. The next time you have access to the Internet, try visiting these search engines and feel and experience it for yourself the advantages and speed of using one search engine over another.

*Printer to print out materials*

Access to the Internet alone is not sufficient for you to be able to utilise the enormous information available on the Internet for your language learning lesson, especially if you have no Internet connection in your language classroom. To still be able to give your learners the opportunity to take advantage of the bountiful resources offered on the Internet, you will have to be able to printout some relevant information which you can later use in your classroom. As proposed earlier, these printed materials can either be used the way they are or you may want to adapt them to suit the learner's level of language proficiency.

*Your creativity*

In addition to the above, a teacher's creativity will come in handy to make the resources from the Internet interesting and challenging for the learner. These materials may need to be adapted to suit the Malaysian school syllabus for example, or the graphics used in the original text may not be suitable to the Malaysian culture, the language level of the original text may be too difficult for the student, or even the content of the worksheet you download looks rather plain and boring – in this case, a teacher's creativity may bring about more interest and can even boost a learner's motivation to learn. The fact that you bring in something different from the content of your textbook is good enough to inculcate interest for the lesson among the learners.

*Your time*

Very often, materials taken from the Internet need to be adapted to suit the needs of the learners. Therefore, this demands sacrifice on the part of the teachers, as far as precious time is concerned. However, as shown in several studies in the past, the time invested by teachers in bringing in and adopting the technology in the classroom has brought about enormous interest among the learners to learn more. The result of the outcome of the teachers' sacrifice may well be worth the effort!

*Your innovative ideas*

In addition to creativity, you innovative ideas will come in handy because through this, you can bring in something out of the ordinary into your classroom. This, as maintained earlier may create interest in the lesson among your students. Given several of these boosts, imagine the result of your hard labour – a classroom of enthusiastic, ready and motivated bunch of learners.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTERNET

Some characteristics of the Internet which can bring about enormous impact in a language classroom include:

*Massive amount of information*

There are massive amounts of information available on the Internet. It is up to the teacher to mix and match relevant materials to suit the needs of the learners. In addition, the information on the Internet is constantly changing because for one thing, the webmasters, will keep updating their sites to invite more readers. In addition, the number of websites created each day is multiplying due to the ease of publishing materials on the Net.

*Interactive*

Web sites are interactive – in the sense that users can interact with the

web pages. One can for example send emails, answer questionnaires, and fill out forms, just to name a few of the interactive activity one can perform whilst on the Internet.

### *Hyperlinks*

Another feature of the Internet is that it contains hyperlinks. What this means is that, because there is massive information available on the Internet, you choose your own route through the information. The web pages too are linked to other web pages, thus it is easy to jump to other related web pages. In many web pages, information that are linked are underlined, or put in different colours. This will signal to users that there are hyperlinks related to that particular word or phrases. With the hyperlink facility, you can visit sites all over the world, and visit sites through them.

## CONCLUSION

The Internet has so much to offer. Now it is up to the language practitioners whether or not they want to take the necessary steps to utilise the resources available on the Net. Bringing the actual Internet connection into the classroom may be too much to ask for for now, but utilising the potential and resources available is still affordable and achievable.

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