PRIMARY ESL TEACHERS IN USING ICT TO TEACH ENGLISH
DURING COVID-19:
CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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DEDICATION

This project report is dedicated to my father, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my mother, who taught me that even the largest task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

The emergence of the COVID-19 virus has caused substantial changes in the teaching profession in Malaysia. ICT-based teaching contributes to virtual education as online learning has become increasingly important and it is on the rise among educators. The language educators work under pressure to integrate ICT skills in their teaching and learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the virtual teaching environment has become more challenging for educators to adapt to the new norm implemented to curb coronavirus spread. Nonetheless, research that highlights primary school teachers' challenges and strategies to overcome the issue of teaching English using ICT is still inadequate. Hence, the current study aims to investigate the challenges encountered by English as A Second Language (ESL) teachers in implementing online lessons. It also outlines some possible ways to deal with ESL teachers' problems in conducting online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research objectives of the present study are to examine the significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception with their age, gender, and confidence to use ICT in teaching English during COVID-19, to explore the challenges encountered by Primary ESL teachers in using ICT to teach English during COVID-19 and to identify the possible strategies to overcome the challenges faced by the Primary ESL teachers in using ICT to teach English during the COVID-19 pandemic. A mixed method was exploited in this research to gather data in two phases. Hence, for the first phase of data collection, a total of 166 primary ESL instructors from West Johor participated in the questionnaire. In the second phase, 12 ESL respondents took part in the semi-structured interview. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship in the ESL teachers' perception based on their age and confidence to use ICT. However, there is no significant difference in the ESL teachers' perception among gender in utilizing ICT during COVID-19. This study discerns ICT-inculcation teaching strategies to overcome the challenges experienced by teachers in teaching English during COVID-19.

ABSTRAK

Kemunculan virus COVID-19 telah menyebabkan perubahan dalam profesion perguruan di Malaysia. Pengajaran berasaskan ICT menyumbang kepada pendidikan maya kerana pembelajaran dalam talian menjadi semakin penting dan berleluasa di kalangan pendidik. Pendidik bahasa Inggeris bekerja di bawah tekanan untuk mengintegrasikan kemahiran ICT dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran semasa wabak COVID-19. Maka, persekitaran pengajaran maya menjadi lebih mencabar bagi warga pendidik untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan norma baru yang dilaksanakan untuk membendung penyebaran coronavirus. Namun, penyelidikan yang menyoroti cabaran dan strategi untuk mengatasi masalah pengajaran dalam kalangan guru bahasa Inggeris dari segi penggunaan ICT masih tidak mencukupi. Oleh itu, kajian semasa bertujuan untuk mengkaji cabaran yang dihadapi oleh guru Bahasa Inggeris sekolah rendah dalam melaksanakan pengajaran dalam talian. Ini juga menggariskan beberapa cara untuk menangani masalah dalam menjalankan pengajaran dalam talian semasa penularan coronavirus. Objektif penyelidikan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji perbezaan yang signifikan dalam persepsi guru bahasa Inggeris dari segi usia, jantina, dan keyakinan untuk menggunakan ICT, untuk meneroka cabaran yang dihadapi serta mengenal pasti strategi untuk mengatasi cabaran pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris semasa pandemik COVID-19. Kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif digunakan untuk mengumpul data dalam dua fasa. Bagi fasa pertama sejumlah 166 orang guru dari Johor telah mengambil bahagian dalam soal-selidik. Seramai 12 orang guru telah menyumbang bagi fasa kedua dalam temu bual separa berstruktur. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan dalam persepsi guru ESL berdasarkan usia dan keyakinan mereka untuk menggunakan ICT. Walau bagaimanapun, tidak ada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam persepsi guru ESL antara jantina dalam menggunakan ICT semasa COVID-19. Kajian ini mengemukakan beberapa strategi pengajaran berasaskan ICT bagi mengatasi cabaran yang dialami oleh guru bahasa Inggeris semasa COVID-19.

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ICT	-	Information and Communication Technology
MOE	-	Ministry of Education
4Cs	-	Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Creativity
ESL	-	English As A Second Language
MCO	-	Movement Control Order
WHO	-	World Health Organisation
Wi-Fi	-	Wireless Fidelity
WFH	-	Work-From-Home
ELT	-	English Language Teaching
WWW	-	World Wide Web
ITE	-	Initial Teacher Education
EFL	-	English As A Foreign Language
PLC	-	Professional Learning Community
LMS	-	Learning Management System

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

The new millennium era vitalizes the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) convention in all sectors, including the education system. As stated in the Malaysian Education Development Plan, 2015-2025 (MOE, 2015), Malaysia currently stands at the seventh-highest internet penetration rate across Asia, with 67%. In this modern era, the learning process can surpass any time as the information is accessible and available beyond school boundaries in a virtual world. Moreover, ICT has been denoted as the utmost innovation that largely contributes to every aspect, and it can facilitate the development of second language abilities to teach English efficiently.

ICT has a noticeable impact on our education and drastically changes the teaching paradigm. AlDajani (2020) regarded this as a unique innovation that allows learning to occur in ways that have never happened. As globalized citizens, one has to leverage online education to seek information at the fingertips. It is supported by Jan (2017) who mentioned the accessibility of vast resources enables the pupils to be independent learners instead of merely depending on the teachers. Research from Caldwell (2018) revealed how teachers could lend a hand to the students to become better independent language learners in the Japanese classroom, specifically for listening tasks, by playing recorded audio during the lesson. His research emphasises the benefits of ICT implementation in the language classroom, and he mentioned that ICT enables the teachers to access the listening activities that can be accessed without a fee.

In line with Malaysia's drive to fulfill the country's Vision 2020, ICT usage is highly promoted among the teachers and students in the classroom. The Ministry of

Education (MOE) of Malaysia has introduced the DELIMa project, which was initially known as Google Classroom. This initiative was embarked on to provide a computer-generated learning platform to enrich ICT practice among the teachers and pupils. This shows that the government desires ICT to be inculcated in the Malaysian education system's learning process. Teachers play a crucial factor in influencing teaching and learning in the classroom by cultivating ICT usage. Therefore, it is significant to make sure the educators have sufficient ICT literacy skills and high confidence levels in exploiting ICT.

In this digital era, ICT has been widely used in the classroom, and it plays a significant role by giving pupils opportunities to learn and apply the required 21st-century skills, likely the 4Cs, which stands for communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity as cited by Zulkarnaen, Setiawan, Rusdiana & Muslim (2019). As an effort to uphold the development of ICT content in primary education, initiatives must be taken to identify the key issues. The English as Second Language (ESL) teachers' training is the centre of attention in the education system to enhance ICT-based knowledge among the instructors in enlightening the eminence of teaching and learning.

The constant development of ICT in education places more demands on teachers who have to be well-versed and ready to adapt to modern ICT tools in delivering the lesson. Various ICT tools as standard technology-based items used in schools include laptops, computers, LCD projectors, digital whiteboards, photocopy machines, audio-video devices, cameras, and scanners to inculcate ICT-based learning. When the teachers receive these tools as new ICT modifications, they tend to create suitable educational materials according to the learner's needs to make sure the learning process takes place efficiently. The influence of technology in ESL classrooms has shown that teachers can expand practical activities for the pupils by employing technology in the lessons. However, teachers encounter several difficulties while incorporating ICT in their teaching because inculcating digital-based learning is a multifaceted process at a hard time during the virus spread in Malaysia. Thus, Chalkiadaki (2018) proclaimed the difficulties of acquiring 2st-century skills.

Records have shown that using ICT tools can increase pupils' motivation to learn by giving them more control over the learning experience, as Lin & Chen (2017) claimed. ICT tools can help students observe, explore, engage, solve problems, and make stimulating discoveries for themselves if they are given the opportunity to use them in their teachers' learning process. Akarowhe (2017) stated that using ICT resources increases students' classroom teaching and learning participation. He also further explained that using the ICT audio-visual resources is likely to improve pupils' performance by drawing their attention span in the classroom or the ICT lab.

Despite the demonstrated advantages of ICT in English subjects' teaching and learning in Malaysia, the usage has been weighed down with several challenges. ESL teachers face countless obstacles in teaching English to deliver the lessons to the pupils using ICT tools. In the same direction as this problem, some studies reveal the challenges ESL teachers face in teaching English using ICT during the COVID-19 pandemic. The stakeholders have engaged in heated discussions over how teachers can efficiently deliver the lesson during the home-based learning period. Consequently, the current study aims to provide insight into Primary ESL teachers' ICT usage in conducting English lessons during the COVID-19 virus spread in Malaysia and the challenges they face in the virtual classroom, and the possible strategies that can be undertaken to overcome the issues in the future.

1.2   Background of the Research

The English language plays a crucial role among the young learners. With the integration of technology in education, online language teaching and learning could become a conventional mode of delivery within the school organization. Despite that, it can be argued that this mode is still in its initial stage as online language pedagogy remains mostly unexplored during the outbreak of COVID-19 in Malaysia. In their studies, Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison (2020) explained that online teaching falls short in providing the much-needed details for informing online practices, especially regarding developing and promoting integrating ICT. This is an issue of concern, notably in ESL classroom settings, by encouraging learning that does not

produce positive results due to affective factors and limited revelation of the virtual second language teaching with ICT integration.

Despite its critical importance, the education system's situation is not at ease during the Coronavirus spread in Malaysia. The education sector was primarily affected during this crisis, which eventually led all the universities, colleges, and schools to shut down. COVID-19 virus disrupts various sectors of the state, including the country's education sector. Due to the pandemic, Malaysia collectively joins several other countries to follow a lockdown policy and strict social distancing measures as prevention. Thus, the Malaysian government made a quick decision to declare the Movement Control Order (MCO) as recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) on March 18th 2020, to restrain the spread of the virus among the nation.

While dealing with school closures, the teaching instruction has been maintained remotely. At the same time, education authorities ordered online learning for education organisations around the world. The same conditions and rules were applied in Malaysia. Daniel (2020) explained that in reassuring the pupils to receive education continuously, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from the United States even recommended online learning to be implemented to ensure the pupils continuously engage in the learning process from their homes. Thus, the teachers ramp up to give their full attention to the new pedagogy with something familiar with the new curriculum. Thus, the e-learning platform plays an executable and germane role in guaranteeing the young learners obtain an education without missing the classes during the pandemic.

Online learning emphasizes internet-based learning, which offers a synchronous and asynchronous mode of learning. Synchronous learning is a form of education while simultaneously interacting with teachers using online platforms such as Google Meet, DELIMa video conferences, and online chat. Meanwhile, Ko & Rossen (2017) further claimed that in asynchronous learning, the pupils tend to learn indirectly using an independent learning approach by replying to emails, blogs, online discussions, videos, articles. Accordingly, Amiti (2020) explained that the pupils are

required to utilize learning synchronously and asynchronously to attain achievable learning outcomes by the end of the lesson.

Undoubtedly, this pandemic has had a tremendous impact on schools, students, and teachers. The children are not allowed to attend one-to-one classes to ensure their well-being (Daniel, 2020). The outbreak even made the teaching and learning process more challenging for educators to adapt to the new norm implemented during an unavoidable hard time due to the increasing number of new COVID-19 cases. Nonetheless, the educators work under pressure to integrate ICT skills in their teaching and learning process during the global pandemic. One can never deny that teachers face various challenges in implementing ICT in teaching English to ESL learners.

The online teaching placement made the teachers ascertain and study unfamiliar platforms such as Webex and BigBlueButton. Webex and BigBlueButton is a platform and an outlandish technology for most primary ESL teachers. Teachers struggle to experiment with the new technology for the sake of being up-to-date and deliver the lesson for the pupils if one of the available online platforms fails to operate on time. Few teachers even stated thatthey need to spend more time searching for the felicitous and most manageable platform to conduct online lessons to make the lesson delivery more appealing and captivating. The teachers had to look for new ideas to keep the young learners engaged with tasks actively, which underlies the teachers' shoulders to respond to the requirements to deliver virtual lessons. This issue occurs due to the deficiency of ICT training for teachers during home-based learning, which is typically not practiced among Malaysian teachers. In a similar study, Esfijani & Zaman (2020) affirmed that teachers' lack of ICT training is one of the top three common challenges teachers face in conducting digital lessons.

The most predominant downside of this new uncertain experience is the lack of direct interaction between the teachers and the learners. Some scholars argued that the lack of communication affects pupils' interest and motivation, which slowly plummet. Teachers even find it unenviable to prepare the teaching materials with different proficiency levels based on their preferred learning styles. It is practical for the teachers to vary the worksheets and teaching approach based on the pupils' learning

in the classroom needs. On the contrary, educators cannot choose the well-chosen method that suits all learners regardless of their proficiency levels when integrating ICT in education. Virtual learning has weakened the learning process, and the new teaching setting is difficult and tiring for the teachers as they need to spend lots of time learning the new pedagogy (Kaisar & Chowdhury, 2020). It has been proven that the home setting is not as convenient as the classroom-based environment since the teachers need extra time to set up their laptop, speaker and to adjust their internet connection. The scholar argued that the most suitable place to conduct online teaching is school because schools provide Wi-Fi facilities in the classrooms or ICT rooms.

It is reasonable to say that Work-From-Home (WFH) is not an easy task for most teachers as it causes problems because the educators do not have the necessary ICT equipment to conduct online classes. The researchers, Guven & Gulbahar (2020) claimed that teachers are the core dynamics in implementing the ICT-based elements in the education field. In the modern digital teaching culture, the teachers need to develop and evolve with the digital learning community to become the mentors, facilitators, designers, and evaluators who successfully incorporate technology into the educational context. In addition, the culture of digital learning has also contributed to a change in the roles of teachers as digital classroom administrators and computer-thinking designers. However, high-speed internet connection, laptop with a working camera, microphone, or not having to befit technological devices seem to be predominant factors that hinder the teachers' involvement in online teaching, as Fauzi & Khusuma (2020) mentioned.

If the laptop or computer devices do not have an up-to-date processor to support the software, such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, one can never proceed with online teaching. It is proven that clear and regular communication between teachers and pupils is one of the most imperative parts of a pupil's education. Thus, teachers cannot depend on the poor internet connection to carry out the teaching, which eventually leads to miscommunication and the inability to convey the lesson's key content. Gybas, Klubal & Kostolányová (2020) investigated their research on the effectiveness of utilizing technology-based lessons in home, and the findings indicated that the use of technological tools in the home could be distracting to the low

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proficiency learners. Students may find it tedious to pay attention to the teacher's teaching to quickly disconnect from the lesson if the screening time exceeds the average time limit. Therefore, teachers must consider the pupils regardless of their age and proficiency level to provide the best virtual teaching environment that suits them in their learning.

Educators need to consider the language learners' attention span by realising the importance of online teaching progress. Policymakers and stakeholders need to identify the issues and strategies to tackle ICT facilities and develop ICT integration in education without any obstacles. On the whole, there is a requirement to address the problems in the combination of ICT into the curriculum. In complying with that, the country's education has to play a fundamental role in offering high-quality and skilled professionals capable of handling both present and future digital teaching needs amid the COVID-19 virus outbreak.

1.3 Problem Statement

Dishon (2020) observed that technology's enactment in education had reshaped the classrooms' teaching approach. Bozkurt (2020) asserted that most countries around the world confront issues in terms of inadequate technologically skilled instructors that are competent for 21st century development. The educators often portray a low level of technology usage in education, with low confidence in attempting the ICT to inculcate them into teaching and learning practice. Thus, these clearly show that educators' ICT training is vital to making them comfortable with newly-introduced technology despite their age difference and enabling them to handle it independently.

The findings from an international journal by Dwiono, Rochsantiningsih & Suparno (2018) showed that Malaysian teachers perceive ICT inculcation in teaching. The result of the study revealed that Malaysian teachers acquired average competency to use ICT such as handling PowerPoint and Microsoft word. The study highlights the teachers minimum and basic ICT competency in handling ICT to teach. The findings indicated that ESL teachers are inadequate in ICT skills, knowledge and not well-

versed with lots of modern technologies due to limited infrastructures and facilities, although they show a positive perspective about the ICT in teaching and learning purposes.

Van der Spoel, Noroozi, Schuurink & Van Ginkel (2020) administered another research to investigate the teachers' online teaching expectations and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic to compare their perception of their online teaching expectations in the Netherlands. A similar study by Aliyyah, Rachmadtullah, Samsudin, Syaodih, Nurtanto, & Tambunan (2020) explores the teachers' perceptions of online learning in Indonesia's primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, an investigation by Wan Hassan, Ariffin, Ahmad, Sharberi, Azizi & Zulkiflee (2020) identified the challenges Langkawi Vocational College Students encountered using Google Classroom as a teaching and learning platform during the MCO. Similarly, Almanthari, Maulina & Bruce (2020) focused on the viewpoints of Mathematics teachers in secondary schools about the operation of e-learning and the hurdles that occur in carrying out the virtual lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although several studies on the challenges and strategies in using ICT have been conducted worldwide during the pandemic, such reviews are not prevalent in Malaysia, particularly in primary ESL classrooms. Conversely, more research needs to be undertaken to study ESL teachers' challenges and strategies in teaching English using ICT. Patently, it will become an issue to generalise the results as some analysis is performed on a small scale. For instance, the focus is solely on the obstacles experienced by Mathematics teachers from primary school and vocational school students from the secondary school. In Malaysia, not only few research has been conducted on Malaysian teachers, but also none of the studies consider age, gender and confidence to use ICT in a single research.

Therefore, it is important for primary ESL teachers to address and overcome all the problems emerging during online teaching responsively so that the learning continues to achieve the target. As a result, the above-mentioned studies cannot be generalised due to limited studies focusing on Malaysian ESL teachers and few studies conducted outside of Malaysian context on a small scale. Hence, there is a need to

conduct the current research as it focuses on the primary ESL teacher's perception based on their age, gender and confidence in employing ICT to deliver the virtual teaching during COVID-19 in Malaysia. The present study intends to discover some of the possible strategies to overcome the issues that encounter by English language teachers encounter during Work-From-Period.

1.4 Research Objectives

The researcher has considered the following objectives to fulfill this study's aim, as mentioned earlier. The highlighted research objectives are as below:

1. To examine the significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception with their age, gender, and confidence to use ICT in teaching English during COVID- 19.

2. To explore the challenges encountered by Primary ESL teachers in using ICT to teach English during COVID-19.

3. To identify the possible strategies to overcome the challenges faced by the Primary ESL teachers in using ICT to teach English during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5 Research Questions

To attain the purpose of this study, the researcher aspires to answer the following research questions:

4. Is there any significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception based on their age, gender, and confidence to use ICT in teaching English during COVID- 19?

5.   What are the challenges encountered by Primary ESL teachers in using ICT to teach English during COVID-19?

6.   What are the possible strategies to overcome the challenges faced by the Primary ESL teachers in using ICT to teach English during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.6   Research Hypotheses

RQ 1 : Is there any significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception based on their age, gender, and confidence to use ICT in teaching during COVID-19.

Ho1 :   There is no significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception between age to use ICT in teaching English during COVID-19.

Ha1 :   There is a significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception between age to use ICT in teaching English during COVID-19.

Ho1 :   There is no significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception among gender to use ICT in teaching English during COVID-19.

Ha1 :   There is a significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception among gender to use ICT in teaching English during COVID-19.

Ho1:   There is no significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception between confidence to use ICT in teaching English during COVID-19.

Ha1 :   There is a significant difference in Primary ESL teachers' perception betweenconfidence to use ICT in teaching English during COVID-19.

1.7   Theoretical Framework
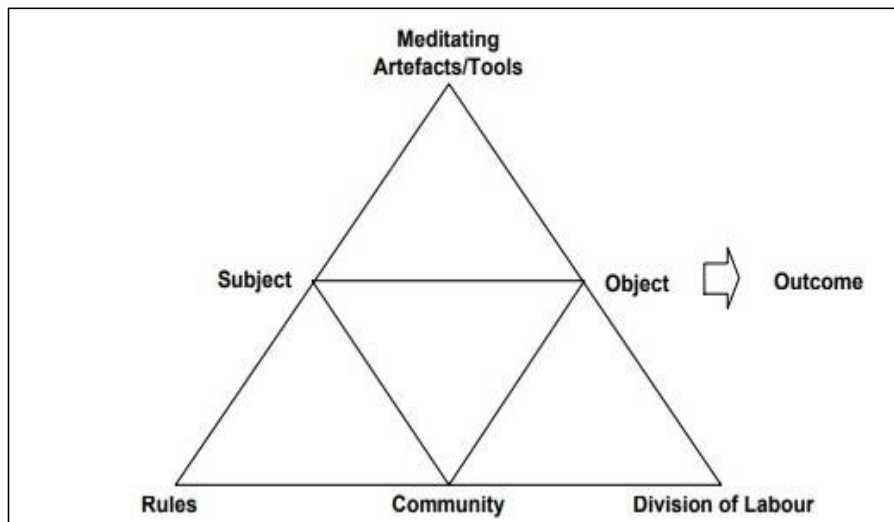
Figure 1.1   Activity Theory Adapted from Ling & Hang (2003)

Activity Theory is an adapted framework from Ling & Hang (2003) for conceptualizing what works and what does not work and the ICT teaching hindrance. In order to effectively incorporate e-learning into educational practices, innovative practices, creativity, and experimentation are necessary since traditional pedagogical practices cannot be implemented during the coronavirus pandemic. An appropriate theoretical framework is crucial to enable a systematic research study take place. As a consequence of the implementation of virtual teaching, the theory provides suitable methods to research and analyse the reconfiguration of ICT-based teaching practice in real-life scenarios. Moreover, the insight gained from the framework can be further applied to improve the implementation of virtual-teaching in the education system.

Table 1.1   Table Representation of Activity Theory

No	Elements	Representation of Activity Theory
1	Subject	The primary ESL teachers
2	Object	The ESL teachers' ICT usage
3	Tool	ICT-based teaching materials and resources
4	Rule	Work-From-Home during COVID-19 pandemic
5	Community	The ESL learners
6	Division of Labour	ESL teachers' preparation in terms of providing appropriate ICT-based materials and conductingthem well in the aspects of task distribution.

As shown in Table 1.1 , the Activity Theory comprises six crucial elements in delivering a lesson that incorporates ICT. The six elements are subject, object, tool, community, rules, and division of labour. As the primary element, the subject refers to the ESL teachers in the primary schools who are the English lesson facilitators. As the second element, the object closely links to the ESL teachers' ICT usage to engage with the learnersin the teaching and learning activities. Whereby, the tool is the ICT-based teaching resources or online materials and tools, as the third element also acts as the mediator between the subject, which refers to ESL teachers and object that can describe as the ICT implementation (Mwanza & Engeström, 2003)

Community as the fourth element plays an essential role because the community refers to the ESL young learners who receive the teachers' knowledge. The rule as the fifth element provides a condition for the teaching pedagogy. Here, the teachers have to conduct the lesson by following the Work-From-Home policy by virtual teaching during the MCO period to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The division of labour as the sixth element explains the primary ESL teachers' preparation in providing appropriate online teaching materials. In these elements, conducting the learning activities using ICT is also a significant aspect of distributing tasks to the pupils. When the teachers take into consideration all these elements, they could achieve positive learning outcomes at the end of the lesson.

The teachers must acquire the ability to operate technology-based tools, specifically laptops, computers, adjusting speakers, and the ability to handle the tools while using them for teaching and learning purposes in or outside of school are essential to conducting the lesson flawlessly. The primary examples of the required ICT capabilities are the basic knowledge to operate the laptop's software and hardware and to utilise the software tools such as word processors, presentation slides, and communication utilities. Thus, accordingto Malla (2018) teachers must equip themselves with technological skills and effectively apply them to teaching and learning progressions.

If teachers acquire this and are well-versed in the technologies and competencies, they could turn the teaching and learning activities into productive

lessons while promoting digital-based learning to young learners to achieve a successful lesson outcome. It is fundamental to acquire a vast knowledge of the electronic or ICT tools available, and it will enable them to alter the teaching subject to deliver to the pupils effectively without any obstacles. The teachers must understand employing digital tools to achieve the desired learning outcomes in their teaching practice. This demonstrates that a teacher is competent in shaping teaching and learning activities based on technology items by applying operative techniques and methods.

Hence, it is the call of the hour for ESL teachers to change their mundane teaching and learning methods and adapt to evolving technology-centered teaching. The sudden shift to online teaching without prior planning has created the risk of most of the teachers' difficulties in inculcating ICT-based education efficiently due to the failure to generate new interests into teaching every day. The incorporation of ICT in English language teaching classrooms depends on a host of lessons. Other than the teachers' knowledge and skills in handling the ICT in the pre-planned strategies to overcome technical barriers, the mandatory factors can be useful during the unavoidable period, namely Work-From-Home seasons. The Activity theory did not outline an element that explains teachers' perception about ICT usage to teach or the appropriate strategy to be undertaken if the lesson did not achieve the desired outcome properly. Therefore, there is a need to introduce a new framework to achieve this research study's main purpose by focusing on the steps to be taken in conducting virtual teaching from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia.

1.8   Conceptual Framework

The present study is intended to examine the challenges and strategies faced by primary ESL teachers in using ICT during the COVID-19 virus spread. The conceptual framework includes the research participants' age, gender, and confidence in using ICT to teach English among primary ESL teachers to explore their perceptions in executing online teaching during the pandemic. With this rapid change of face-to-face teaching to distant learning in many parts of the world, some still wonder if post-

pandemic acceptance of online teaching would continue to exist and how the new teaching paradigm will affect the demanding worldwide education. Thus, it is vital to explore the ESL teachers' perception of their ICT inculcation to teach English during the pandemic.

Other than examining the teachers' perception, it is also equally important to identify the challenges encountered by the English teachers in delivering an effective ICT-enhanced lesson virtually. When the research issues are identified, the appropriate steps-to-taken are taken to overcome the educators' barriers to producing smooth virtual teaching. The current research also focuses on the teachers' expectations for future ESL online teaching during outbreaks, which eventually will lend a hand for the educators to mentally and physically prepare for the battle and continue to contribute positively to education, as shown in Figure 1.2 below.
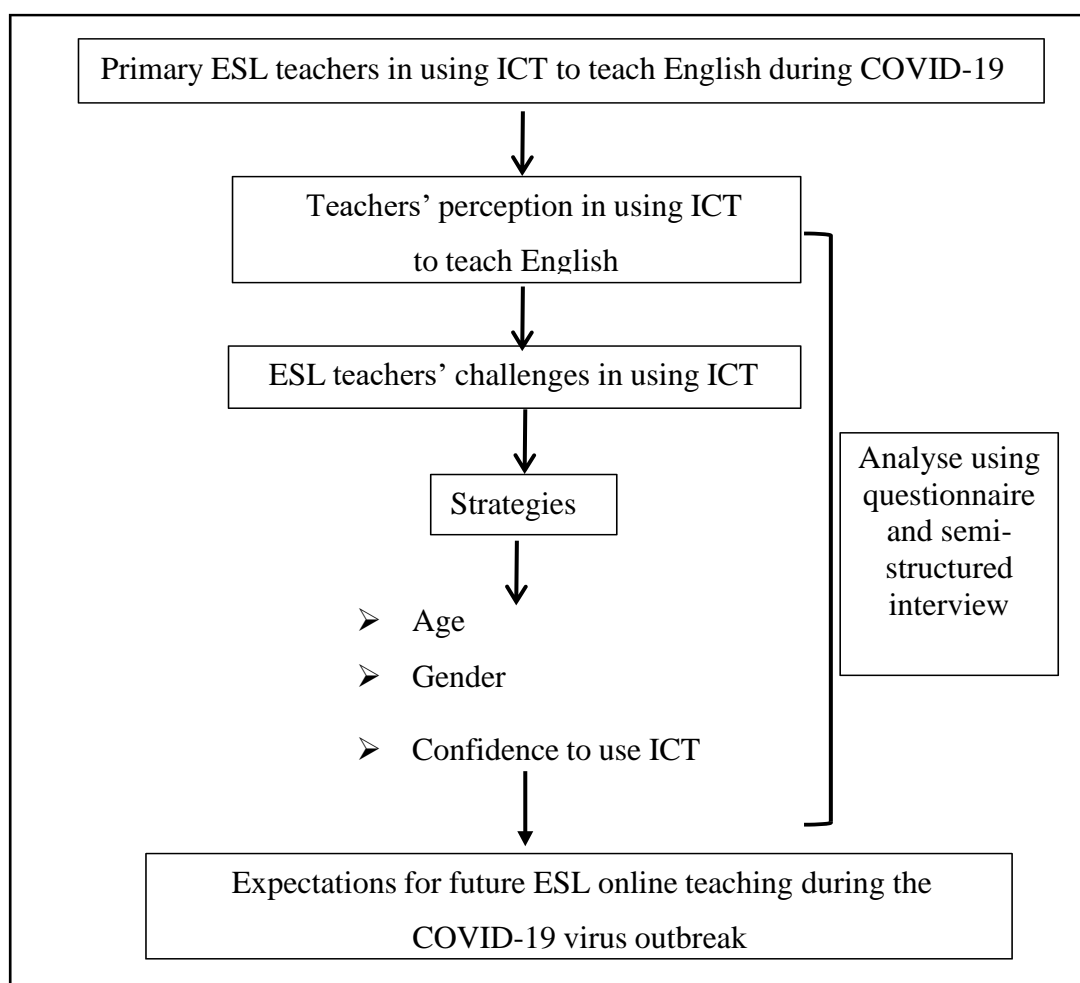
Figure 1.2   Conceptual Framework

In a nutshell, the reformed framework focuses on the primary school teachers' perception about handling ICT to teach English during the pandemic. The current study also highlights the challenges educators encounter in conducting digital teaching, which is necessary and aims to provide applicable ideas for ESL teachers' pedagogy instruction to handle during home-based teaching. Teachers expressed their hopes regarding the current demanding situations in teaching practices for the future of education. Based on the present-day constraints in executing virtual learning, teachers face various challenges in conducting English lessons by relying on ICT. Therefore, a questionnaire is a compatible instrument that will enable the researcher to collect the data to examine the English teachers' perception of ICT during COVID-19 and its significant difference between the educators' age, gender, and confidence to use ICT. As a result, the researcher aims to administer a semi-structured interview among Primary ESL teachers to gather in-detailed information regarding the barriers and strategies to overcome future issues. Furthermore, beneath these factors, nations' teachers expect future ESL online teaching that is worth highlighting for policymakers to execute reform towards education equity and for practitioners to improve their pedagogy during this kind of outbreak during pandemics.

1.9   Significance of the Research

A large number of studies have been conducted about English language teaching and the use of ICT in the last decade in achieving a laudable outcome. Recent literature studies have shown that using ICT in the language classroom or the virtual environment is beneficial for both learners and teachers. Among the benefits are that young learners can enhance their vocabulary and improve their reading and speaking skills. Conversely, the shutting of schools and other learning institutions has impacted 94 percent of the pupils' population worldwide, which is 99 percent in few countries like Africa and India, as mentioned by the WHO (2020).

Conducting virtual English Language Teaching (ELT) lessons is extremely challenging for educators, especially since they need to prepare various tools like laptops, speakers, a good internet connection, and adapt the online teaching materials,

which happened in the blink of an eye. The main reason for this is, the teachers, as the instructors, possess little ICT knowledge or skills to prepare their online classroom environment to interact with the young language learners. When the ESL teachers do not acquire the basic knowledge to handle the technology, it is difficult to efficiently implement the lesson. Moreover, the ESL learners also encounter obstacles to understanding the online materials or resources provided by the teachers as they are learning from home. For instance, the low proficiency pupils face difficulties in terms of completing the given task as they fail to understand the gist of online reading text without the teachers' guidance in completing the work.

In addition to that, both school organisations and teachers should consider teaching English during this coronavirus pandemic as a dual responsibility to utilise and explore other technology options to cope with education and career path concerns. The teachers embrace the double roles like the teachers' role as an educator and as an implementer while dealing with complex situations that include lack of training or lack of equipment during the COVID-19 eruption in Malaysia. This research will, directly and indirectly, contribute to the stakeholders if the nation had to undergo the second lockdown due to the epidemic in the future. In consequence, the study's significance denotes ESL teachers, ESL learners, and ESL policymakers in Malaysia to confidently tackle the virtual teaching and learning activities during pandemic seasons.

1.10   Scope of the Research

The present study addresses the challenges encountered by primary school English teachers in delivering English lessons for young learners from primary schools through ICT in online teaching. Furthermore, the possible strategies in teaching English using ICT also discuss this research to enable the teachers to understand the COVID-19 or virtual teaching approaches. Primary school English teachers from Johor Bahru will contribute to this research and allow the researcher to collect the necessary data required for this significant study. Some of the factors that might influence teachers' capability, such as computer literacy and geographical setting, are

an exception in the current study. Simultaneously, the participants' age is encompassed in this research study's demographic information in the questionnaire distributed.

1.11   Definition of Terms

1.11.1 Primary ESL Teachers

ESL can be described as English as a Second Language. Thus, primary ESL teachers refer to the Malaysian educators who specialise in educating non-native young learners in primary school levels to listen, speak, read, and write English. ESL teachers often educate pupils who do not speak English as their mother tongue.

1.11.2 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The abbreviation "ICT," outlooks for Information and Communication Technology, provides the facility to save, process, convey, translate, replicate, or obtain automated data. Digital flip-books, digital textbooks, email, chat, and distance learning programs, namely Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Webinar, are some of the aptitudes of ICT. The execution of ICT is increasingly used to give young learners access to information, promote interaction, communication, and enhance digital literacy skills.

1.11.3 English Language Teaching (ELT)

English Language Teaching (ELT) refers to the ESL instructors' teaching based on the various terminology, concepts, approaches, and tools used to practice English language teaching as professional development. In ELT, ESL teachers come up with numerous spellbinding teaching methods by utilising different education approaches

that are apt to the diverse proficiency of the language learners in the classroom or outside of the school, specifically during distance learning.

1.11.4 COVID-19

The newly identified coronavirus has affected a global contagion of respiratory infection termed COVID-19 virus spread among the citizens. COVID-19 indicators comprise cough, fever, shortness of breath, body pain, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, headache, or running nose. COVID-19 can be fatal, where some have caused death.

1.11.5 Pandemic

A pandemic symbolises an epidemic that affects the anticipated number of a particular disease in a community during a specified period. The pandemic is well-known among worldwide citizens due to the rapid outbreak of the new infection, which typically affects a significant proportion of the world's population.

1.11.6 Challenges

Challenges represent the teachers' constraints and issues regarding the digital technology resources and capabilities of employing it during the virtual teaching implemented during coronavirus spread.

1.11.7 Strategies

Strategies are the overall plan that design to achieve the long-term or overall goals under conditions of uncertainty in solving the existing issues to produce a balanced approachin teaching English based on ICT.

1.12 Summary

Chapter 1 probes the background of the problem, problem statement, research questions, theoretical and conceptual framework, and the research's significance and scope. To sum up this chapter, the definition of terms was also deliberated in the study. Explicitly, this research aims to examine English teaching using ICT during the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges experienced by primary ESL teachers and possible strategies to avoid this prominent issue.

5.10   Recommendations for Future Research

The shortcomings discussed in this study could be improved by following the suggestions below. First and foremost, the existing research investigation primarily focussed on the challenges faced by the teachers and selected them as the research participants. However, the students' perspectives are also equally important and necessary for this topic. As a manner of being proactive with student education, these tactics might involve giving students a gradual focus and appropriate instruction in ICT usage prior to a crisis such as a pandemic. Especially in the context of the online world, students will almost certainly need to study anything through e-learning at some time in their adult lives, and providing them with the resources to do so is essential. Likewise, future researchers are recommended to focus the students from different perspectives to get more ideas on the students' perception of online learning and the challenges they face. As a result, more research is needed to study to what extent students' hurdles to adopting ICT-based teaching and learning activities prevent them from attaining their learning goals and exploring their perspectives on overcoming the problems they confront. Finally, future scholars can carry out research that compares the government and private schools' online learning. This allows the schools to learn from one another and improve ICT-based knowledge, which benefits the teachers, students, society, and national development in the long run.

5.11   Conclusion

Teachers' perspectives of using ICT are unaffected by demographic criteria such as gender. Teachers of all ages have diverse views on ICT usage in terms of confronting difficulties and hurdles when implementing it virtually. Challenges and the lessons learned from this experience can guide the instructors to properly use ICT in teaching and learning more deliberately and purposefully. Overall, this analysis shows that primary English language teachers in the Kulai district had difficulty producing instructional resources using ICT as a method of instruction during the COVID-19 epidemic. Teachers' performance and educational quality have been impacted by the sudden changes in the teaching and learning process. Therefore,

teachers must be properly trained and equipped with the necessary ICT competencies and resources in order to optimize their online education approaches. Due to the socio-economic situation, the students' experience of smartphone capabilities, internet quotas, and stable internet connections raise the teachers' concerns about online learning efficacy. Thus, the instructional strategy needed to change, and the stakeholders, including teachers, parents, schools, and the Ministry of Education must collaborate to redefine and redesign intended online learning goals that are aligned with a national curriculum. According to the conclusions of this study, policymakers must cooperate with schools and other stakeholders to develop comprehensive programs to prepare the educators and young children to face the ICT-inculcated teaching and learning activities outside of the school environment.

5.12   Summary

This study endeavors to grant insights and perceptions on English teaching in Kulai primary schools through ICT-based instruction amid COVID-19. This chapter also delves into how ESL teachers feel about teaching online during the pandemic via an online questionnaire. The difficulties that language teachers encountered were then examined in detail through a semi-structured interview. In addition, the present research study discovers some possible teaching strategies or recommendations to solve the teaching challenges experienced by the ESL teachers in Malaysia.

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