21st Century Education in Teaching English as Second Language (ESL) in Tertiary Institutions in Sabah, Malaysia

Pendidikan Abad Ke 21 Dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL) Di Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Di Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract: The surge in global competition necessitates the education system in Malaysia to go through transformation at all aspects, including in the use of technology in Education. The transformation in education towards the 21st Century is not only needed in primary and secondary schools but also in tertiary institutions. The transformation in education leaves a big impact on the field of education, including the teaching of English as Second Language (ESL) which is currently experiencing teaching and learning transformation process as well. This literature review canvasses the advantages of using technology in ESL classroom, the current challenges ESL educators face when teaching ESL in Sabah's tertiary institutions and the role of ESL educators in using technology in their approach to teaching ESL. This review was carried out through an analysis of secondary data in the form of related and relevant previous studies conducted by researchers in the teaching of English as a second language. The findings indicate that there are some advantages in employing technologies in ESL classrooms. However, there are also few challenges that ESL educators need to embrace or face during teaching ESL in Sabah's tertiary institutions. ESL educators will serve as a facilitator and guide to assist students in the process of embracing 21st Century learning in Industrial Revolution 4.0 era.

Keywords: 21st Century Skills, English as Second Language, Industrial Revolution 4.0, Technology

Abstrak: *Peningkatan persaingan persekitaran global memerlukan sistem pendidikan di seluruh Malaysia melalui transformasi dari semua aspek, termasuk penggunaan teknologi dalam pendidikan. Transformasi dalam pendidikan ke arah abad ke-21 diperlukan bukan sahaja di peringkat sekolah rendah dan sekolah menengah, tetapi transformasi ini juga diperlukan di dalam peringkat institusi pengajian tinggi awam mahupun swasta. Tambahan pula, transformasi dalam pendidikan meninggalkan kesan besar pada kebanyakan bidang pendidikan; termasuk dalam bidang pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL) yang sedang mengalami proses transformasi juga. Kajian literatur ini merangkumi kelebihan kepada tenaga pengajar dan pelajar dalam menggunakan teknologi di bilik darjah ESL, cabaran semasa yang dihadapi Pendidik ESL ketika mengajar ESL di institusi pengajian tinggi Sabah. Kajian literatur ini juga merangkumi peranan Pendidik Bahasa Inggeris dalam menggunakan pendekatan teknologi dalam pengajaran. Kajian literatur ini dilakukan dengan cara menganalisis data sekunder iaitu mengkaji kajian – kajian literatur yang telah dibuat oleh pengkaji lalu. Dapatan kajian literatur ini mendapati bahawa terdapat kesan baik dalam menggunakan teknologi di bilik darjah. Namun demikian, terdapat juga beberapa cabaran yang pendidik bahasa Inggeris hadapi ketika mengajar Bahasa Inggeris di institusi pengajian tinggi Sabah. Para pendidik tersebut berfungsi bukan sahaja sebagai fasilitator dan juga sebagai pemberi panduan kepada pelajar dalam menghadapi pembelajaran abad ke–21 dalam era Revolusi Industri 4.0.*

Kata kunci: Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua, Revolusi Industri 4.0, Skill Abad Ke-21, Teknologi

Introduction

Of late tremendous changes have occurred in the cultural, social, economic and political systems of the global communities. It has been stated that globalization is one of the key driving factors that contributes to these changes (Tvaronaviciene, Grybaitė, & Živile, 2013). In this so-called global village, technological advances together with climate change have also disrupted the way countries and peoples communicate, trade, provide goods and services as well as exchange information (Zakaria, Di & Yunus, 2017). Malaysia has reported changes in one of its main sectors of the society and it is the education sector. It continues to play a significant role in the developmental process of Malaysia as a country. The changes taking place in this sector has driven the country's leadership to adopt a more strategic stance in offsetting the impact of these changes on the society. The country's education policies have been reviewed and further improved in an attempt to keep abreast with as well as meet the demand of 21st Century education (MOHE blueprint 2015-2025). Relatively new technologies such as the Internet and other education related software offer potentially transformational opportunities for teaching and learning, which in turn also ties with the learning of new skills that are relevant to the emerging needs of the technologically driven 21st Century (Mishra & Mehta, 2017).

Methodology of teaching English as a Second Language.

According to Pandian (2002), the methodology of teaching English in Malaysia has undergone radical shifts so much so that it has been altered from structural-situational orientation to communicative learning approach. Even though these changes are good, the shifts come with a number of challenges. There has also been a shift from one that was knowledge-based dominated by learners having to memorize given materials to one that promotes self-access and independent learning with life-long learning outcomes. This methodology seeks to produce 21st Century learners who are better oriented in soft skills and who can think creatively and critically. This is an addition to being able to work collaboratively, demonstrate leadership quality as well as personal responsibility. These skills, promoted in 21st Century education, would enable learners to achieve beyond the classroom domain in that they would be better prepared to compete in the local and international job markets. Hence in this sense, educators in the 21st Century would not be merely providers of knowledge but also facilitators of creative and critical thinking skills.

Advantages of Incorporating Technology in ESL Classrooms

As a consequence of frequent technological advancement, educators are faced with a challenge to keep up with it and hence the need for educational initiatives that would help meet these demands. The Malaysian Ministry of Education have pointed out that tertiary institutions are tasked with helping students to get accustomed and cope with changes in technology that are brought about by Industrial Revolution 4.0. This type of education is referred to as Education 4.0. It involves language educators using technology to disseminate information to learners as well as develop their language skills.

Benefits of Employing Technology for ESL Educators

Education 4.0 is said to be the one of the most practical approaches to be implemented because it aimed at supplying future graduates with the capabilities and competencies needed in the digital–driven industry (Lawrence, Ching and Abdullah, 2019). Shahroom and Hussin (2018) state that Industrial Revolution 4.0 offers a better chance for society to move from one that utilizes workforce to machine efficiency. Since technology helps quicken revolution, transforming teaching methods in ESL classrooms into a technology-based classroom allows students to respond to innovations and in turn acquire new knowledge. The introduction of the Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs) by the Malaysian government has eased online learning, yielding opportunities for Malaysians to pursue their studies online. Due to the fact that English is widely spoken in Malaysia including Sabah, new technologies would be considered a welcome aid in facilitating the process of learning the language. According to Lawrence et al. (2019), Education 4.0 has created an opportunity for educators to employ new technology tools. This has indirectly enriched the knowledge and honed the linguistic skills of the ESL educators more significantly.

Benefits for ESL Learners

Technology integration in ESL classrooms does not only benefit educators but also learners as well. According to Ahmad, Adnan, Azamri, Idris, Norafand and Ishak (2019), technology integration in ESL classrooms helps improve learners' academic performance. Technology, which in this case is e-Learning, has introduced electronic media to help students develop their language proficiency. Unlike technologies like Microsoft's PowerPoint presentation tool, the massive online open courses and blending learning tools are enriching learning and

teaching in that learners would be able to share their writings with others through technologies like Google Docs. Lawrence et al. (2019) state that Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) scheme introduced by the Malaysian government provide those with work experience but no paper credentials the opportunity to upgrade their academic qualifications. The 2u2i academic program is another program that allows learners to acquaint themselves with academic as well as industrial knowledge. The advantage of this is that graduates are potentially well prepared for the future. The use of technology creates an opportunity for students in the ESL classroom to experience a more practical-based learning rather than a theoretical one. The project-based learning improvises student's career related skills, getting them ready for the industrial operations outside schools.

Challenges Faced by ESL Educators when Employing Technology in ESL Classroom at Tertiary Institutions in Sabah, Malaysia.

The use of technology in school in developing countries is being embraced by most educators. This is because employing technology such as e-Learning tools plays a huge role as it offers great opportunities for self–paced and interactive learning while at the same time improving the understanding of learners as it makes learning more engaging and interesting (Anealka, 2018). However, this integration does not come without obstacles. Similarly, educators at Sabah's tertiary institutions face challenges when employing technology in ESL classrooms as limited knowledge and skills in technology and resistance to change are said to be the main challenges faced by ESL educators.

ESL Educators' Technology Mindset

Anealka (2018) states that educators including ESL ones need to familiarize and equip themselves with the digital tools so as to meet the learning preference of 21st Century students. However, according to Johnson, Jacovina, Russell and Soto (2016), many current but senior educators grew up without access to technologies such as personal laptops and even computers. Contemporary learners dubbed as 'digital natives', on the other hand, have been brought forth in an environment saturated with computers and technologies. Johnson et al. (2016) further add that these digital native users would intimidate educators, especially those with little experience in technology be it in terms of knowledge and skills in using technology in teaching and learning environment. Therefore, building ESL educators' knowledge and skills related to technology incorporation in classroom through training and support from educational administrators is

necessary. In addition, Lawrence et al. (2019) state that most educators strongly believe that traditional method still remains as the effective teaching method and this mindset inevitably would adversely affect the effort to meet the demands and aspirations of 21st Century education. Hence, in order to warrant technology to be used as an interactive learning tool, educators' beliefs and mindsets about method of teaching are to be accordingly changed and appropriately attuned to educational technology environment as well.

The Role of ESL Educators in Using Technology in their Teaching

ESL educators have a major role in teaching and guiding their students to use technology in their language classes. As technology becomes an essential part of the learning process in and out of the class, it also grows in importance as a tool to assist educators facilitates learning for their learners (Amin, 2019). Educators, therefore, play a vital role of instructing learners on how to make good use of technology in learning. They can be ICT practitioners who may help learners to get know how to access materials relevant for their study from the Internet through available devices. Educators can also help learners know how to use their devices to save and share information with others for the purposes of studying and revision. Students are likely to understand and perform better if their teachers satisfactorily play the roles of guide and instructor. Another role played by ESL educators in using technology in teaching language is to ensure that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative is successful (Fenner, 2013). The initiative is about ensuring that students are equipped with knowledge and skills to help them throughout their college, career and lives. Most people tend to undermine the role of ESL educators in ensuring the success of the CCSS initiative. Fenner (2013) further discuss about how other teachers question the role of ESL educators in ensuring the success of CCSS. It should however be noted that by incorporating the use of technology in the teaching of English as a second language, ESL educators are swayed to ensure the initiative succeeds.

Role as ICT Practitioners

When playing their role of guiding and instructing learners, ESL educators have a role to play in ensuring they have a wide range of skills to assist learners. According to Amin (2019), technological skills in ESL learning should not only be based on the prevailing technological trends but also the future anticipations of improvement in technology. This is because the skills given to learners are meant to help them not only in the present but also in the future. Bearing this in mind,

educators should know how to prepare learners for future trends in technology.

Role as a knowledge and skills enforcer

Incorporating the use of technology in teaching ESL is a vital role of every ESL educator. This is given the fact that the knowledge acquired by using technology is not only relevant in class but also in a student's life in general. Using technology in learning may help students learn and understand better and thus in turn linguistically perform better in their target language. This is because the use of technology in learning tends to be more engaging to the students and hence improving their ability to grasp what is being taught. The advantages do not end there as the skills acquired in class can be used outside the classroom. For instance, the use of a computer is not only limited to class but may also be used later in one's career. Similarly, using the internet to do a thorough research on a given topic is a transferrable skill that can be employed in class as well as in future outside class activities. In view of this, ESL educators indeed play an important role in equipping learners with skills and knowledge that they can fall back to in their current and future uses of technology.

Conclusion

Technology has indeed proved its significance in all aspects, including Education. In line with the Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0, there is a need for Malaysia to transform, improve and enhance its education system so as to be at par with other competitive countries in the world arena. Its importance in the education is increasing rapidly because it is now relatively mandatory for students' survival in their post-secondary education and in their professional life. It is equally beneficial for teachers and learners because students are engaged with technology outside of the classroom and they love to learn through technology. New teachers are also demanding it as a necessity in learning. For students, technologies do offer transformational opportunities for both educators and learners as now they obtain new information and knowledge from sources other than of books. Although technology is beneficial in terms of academic performance and language proficiency improvement among learners, it comes with challenges. Malaysian educators including those in Sabah's tertiary institutions, may need to change their beliefs and mindsets in the methods of teaching. For educators, apart from being ICT practitioners as well as knowledge and skills enforcers, a change in their mindsets to employ new technologies in the classroom and obtain new and necessary information related to technology is indeed crucial for them as it enables them to keep up with the current demands of 21st Century education. Technology is not something to fear

about rather it is a means to transform the world into a better place. A new change always needs cooperation, support, involvement, and commitment of relevant authorities. If we truly want to work for the betterment of students through 21st Century education, we should celebrate and embrace technology, and consider it as an amazing tool for teaching and learning. The existing models of teaching and learning should be transformed not immediately but gradually and positively. The transformation should be implemented through teachers because if we can convey a change positively with proper teaching, learners will adopt it with open arms.

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