

## **The internet as an essential classroom language teaching and learning tool in today's high tech generation: A case study on students at Kolej Universiti Islam Sultan Azlan Shah**

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**ABSTRACT :** *Technology in language learning has been seen as just one of the many methods of language teaching. However, in today's multimedia era when many people, particularly the younger generation are preoccupied with modern gadgets and social networking, the use of advanced technology in the classroom has become a necessity rather than a luxury for language teachers. This study investigates the role of modern technology in language learning with special emphasis on the internet. In this study the researcher used the internet as a basic educational tool in classroom learning. With the help of the internet in the language lab, the researcher used online resources, online exercises and the Sanako interactive language learning tool. The present researcher experimented with regular English lab sessions, surveyed, observed and recorded the learning process of 170 students from 5 different classes at Kolej Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah. In a survey to get the students' feedback on the lab sessions, the majority of the students found that the lab sessions eased and enlightened their learning process, stimulated their interest and provided a relaxed, non-stressful learning atmosphere. In the teacher's experiment and observation, several benefits have been noted. Firstly, the chat rooms available in the Sanako learning tool enabled students to conduct group discussion under the teacher's supervision. Secondly, the quick access to an array of sources of information and materials from the internet aided faster learning and stimulated higher order thinking skills. Thirdly, it fostered independent learning among the students. Fourthly, unlimited learning resources and materials could be sent to the students in paperless form. Besides that, the internet as a communication tool enabled teachers to provide feedback on students' written work quickly and efficiently.*

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**KEYWORDS** - *Internet, Language Teaching and Learning*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

Technology in language learning has been seen as just one of the many methods of language teaching. However, in today's multimedia era when many people, particularly the younger generation are preoccupied with modern gadgets and social networking, the use of advanced technology in the classroom has become a necessity rather than a luxury for language teachers. Therefore, there is a demand for teachers today to keep updating themselves with the latest technology in language teaching and enhance their skills in modern instructional technology as well, besides enhancing their skills in teaching methodology. This approach is necessary to fulfil the demand of technologically savvy students of today's young generation. Some examples of modern technology used in language lessons are the usual audio and video materials, language learning softwares, internet, games, animations, etc.

This study investigates the role of modern technology in language learning with special emphasis on the internet. In the last few years the number of teachers using Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has increased notably and numerous articles have been written about the role of technology in education in the 21st century. Although the potential of the internet for educational use has not been fully explored yet and the average school still makes limited use of computers, it is obvious that we have entered a new information age in which the links between technology and TESL/TEFL have already been established. The development of the internet brought about a revolution in the teachers' perspective, as the teaching tools offered

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through the net were gradually becoming more reliable. Learning a new language is a challenging task. It demands hundreds of hours of study and dedicated, regular practice. Fortunately, the internet has made the task a bit more manageable. Nowadays, the internet is gaining immense popularity in second and foreign language teaching and more and more educators and learners are embracing it (Lee, 2014).

The internet is usually used as out of class information gathering tool to help students. In this study the researcher used the internet as a basic educational tool in classroom instruction. According to Sayers (1993) (as cited in Lee 2014) the internet has tremendous potential as a tool for teaching English. He mentioned that network-based technology can contribute significantly to motivation, independence from a single source of information, authentic materials for study and global understanding.

In a world where the use of the internet becomes more and more widespread, an English language teacher's duty is to facilitate students' access to the web and make them feel like citizens of a global classroom, practicing communication on a global level.

With the help of the internet in the language lab, the presenter used online resources, online exercises and the Sanako interactive language learning tool to cater to the learning styles and preference of the target learners. Sanako is a technology that develops language teaching and classroom management solutions through virtual learning, providing tutors live interaction with students and making multimedia, internet resources and classroom management tools available. It can be used with any computer that has internet connection (Wikipedia, 2015).

## 1.2 RESEASRCH QUESTIONS

The study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the differences between the traditional classroom and the virtual classroom?
2. What are the educational benefits of the internet as a main classroom tool?
3. What are the linguistic benefits of the internet as a main classroom tool?
4. How is the response of the students and teachers towards online lessons?

## 1.3 OBJECTIVES

Following were the objectives of the study:

1. To distinguish the virtual classroom from the traditional classroom in terms of teaching and learning experience of students and teachers.
2. To determine the educational benefits of the internet as a main classroom tool.
3. To determine the linguistic benefits of the internet as a main classroom tool.
4. To obtain feedback from students and teachers towards online lab sessions.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

This study is mainly a qualitative study involving systematic participant observation and survey methods. In this study at Kolej Universiti Islam Sultan Azlan Shah, Kuala Kangsar, the present researcher experimented with regular English lab sessions instead of the traditional classroom in almost every class for 2 semesters with 5 separate groups of students pursuing their diploma programme at KUISAS. The number of students per group were between 25-35. There were approximately a total of 170 participants of whom the learning process have been observed, recorded and surveyed. In the lab lessons, the researcher used modern technology to deliver instruction as well as providing practice to students. In her lessons, the researcher usually used powerpoint slides, videos and audios in addition to the common traditional methods. The researcher also exploited the Sanako interactive language learning system in the language lab with various interactive online activities for reading comprehension, writing, listening and speaking skill. The internet was used as a classroom reference tool for vocabulary comprehension, translation, brainstorming in group discussions and information gathering as part of pre-writing task and preparation for oral presentation. The internet was also used as a practice tool with many access to online exercises, quizzes, self-tests. Besides that, the internet was used as a communication tool between the teacher and students as well as among peers where students can share their written work and get instant feedback.

After a few lessons, a survey has been conducted to find out students' learning style preference. In the survey, they were to rate their degree of preference for different learning methods such as language games, group discussion (as well as other learning methods usually done in the traditional classroom) and online lab sessions, etc from very low (no. 1) to very high (no. 5). The responses of the survey were analysed quantitatively. In addition to that, a feedback session was conducted where students gave open-ended responses towards their learning experience with the regular online lab sessions and activities. The written feedback given by the students were analysed qualitatively. Some of the teachers who used lab lessons were also interviewed about their experience and the responses by their students.

## **III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

From the researcher's experiment and observation, together with report from other teachers, several benefits have been noted. These benefits are related to online communication which facilitates faster and more efficient feedback, almost unlimited resources available at the fingertips which speeds and enhances cognitive process needed during lessons, independent learning and the better learning atmosphere.

### **3.1 Online communication for faster feedback on language**

The discussion tool and chat rooms available in the Sanako learning tool enabled students to conduct group discussion under the teacher's supervision. The teacher could monitor the discussion in the chat rooms by attending to language problems and rephrasing the students' statements when necessary. Some students had problems expressing themselves smoothly in English with the proper sentence structure, vocabulary and grammar. Their discussion needed the teacher's intervention from time to time to draw their attention to their language errors, which they can correct. Beneficial practice was made possible with the teacher's guidance as the more language errors and correction they were aware of, the more they could improve (if they had reasonable aptitude for language leaning). The different windows for different chatrooms for different groups could be viewed at the same time and this made it easier for the teacher to monitor the discussion of different

groups almost simultaneously; something that could not have been done in a group discussion of a traditional classroom. In a

traditional classroom, it is only humanly possible to handle one group at a time. With the Sanako system, not only can the teacher give special attention to each group but also each individual. Students can ask questions without feeling shy when they click the relevant button to draw the teacher's attention and the student can pose their questions in a private chat with the teacher. With the Sanako system, the teacher can record students' discussion and pay careful attention to them later. The teacher can collect the discussion and keep them in their files. In a traditional classroom, students' discussion cannot be examined in a concrete way as can be done with the Sanako system.

The internet as a communication tool enabled teachers to provide feedback on students' written work quickly and efficiently. Multiple drafts sent by students could be checked and commented on. Selected drafts could also be displayed to other students in class to facilitate peer review and editing process.

### 3.2 Unlimited resources at the fingertips to enhance cognitive process during classroom learning

One of the most important tools for learning a second or foreign language is regularly reading and listening to interesting and useful information in the language that students want to learn, in other words, exposing oneself more to the target language (Meyers, 2015). The internet provides such information with resources such as online English newspapers, articles, news, video and movie clips, songs etc. A wide range of authentic reading resources and audio materials are available just at the students' fingertips. More resources than what can be found from the traditional classroom. Although some may argue that a standard written material is often the best place to start, printed materials like books can only cover certain aspects of a language, not all. One usually needs to synthesize several materials for complete information as no single material is adequate. Getting printed materials can be costly to some students. One may argue that students can visit the library to get good references. How many students today would bother to spend time searching for suitable books in the library when it is much easier and faster to just google. In today's age, information and resources need to be in paperless form because there is just too much of them in this age of rapid development in information technology.

Access and exposure to engaging, authentic, and comprehensible materials in the target language is essential for language learning to be successful especially when these materials expose students to the native speakers' speech and writing. However for many language learners, whether in classes or self-study settings, such access is often limited. Thus, language educators have long turned to information and communication technologies for access to suitable materials (Egbert, Chao, & Hanson-Smith, 1999; Hanson-Smith, 1999; Salaberry, 2001). As far as language class is concerned, the researcher in her study observed that the quick access to an array of sources of information and materials from the internet aided faster learning and stimulated students' higher order thinking skills during the lessons. Therefore, it facilitated fruitful and meaningful intellectual group discussion that was backed up by information from reliable sources on the topic of discussion in addition to the students' own knowledge and critical thinking. Besides that, it enabled students to accomplish complex tasks. As far as language tasks is concerned, with the help of internet as instant reference tool, students were able to give more quality ideas and current information in their speech and writing and were able to perform better in challenging group discussion tasks than they could have in the traditional classroom where they would usually have to think from scratch and do not know where to start. According to Zhao (2015), the internet enables the learner to access authentic news and literature in the target language, which can reflect current changes more effectively than printed sources. Constantly referring to online sources also gave them more exposure to high level vocabulary, so they get more language input. After all, the internet provides an international and globalized learning setting. This is not to suggest that students need to always be dependent on internet sources without using their own critical thinking and original ideas. The internet sources can provide cues that can trigger their bright buried ideas waiting to surface.

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One may argue that not all information that students are exposed to are reliable. True. Again this challenge can develop students' critical thinking in evaluating sources; distinguishing the reliable from unreliable sources, distinguishing facts from opinions and generalizations.

### 3.3 Independent learning

The approach fostered independent learning among the students as they could quickly refer to relevant websites from the internet to help with their language problems such as online dictionaries, online translation sites, websites with online learning materials such as PowerPoint slides, notes, exercises, self- test quizzes, grammar and spelling check tools,etc. If students do not understand the meaning of certain words teachers use or words from the references, those who are vocal need not keep asking their teachers meanings of the words and those who are passive need not be lost like what usually happens in the traditional classroom. The internet is just in front of them for them to search the meaning or translation. Unlimited learning resources and materials could also be sent by the teacher to the students in paperless form. With access to self-tests, students as well as teachers could monitor their progress and performance quickly and take the necessary action. Among some of the most popular and useful websites for learning English are One-stop English, BBC, British Council and esl.com.

### 3.4 Changing role of teachers and students

The changing role of the students could be observed. They were in an active role rather than the passive role. Besides just being a passive recipient of information transmitted by a teacher, textbook, or broadcast, the students were actively making choices about how to generate, manipulate, or display information they obtain. According to Meyers (2015), technology use allows many more students to be actively thinking about making choices, and executing skills based on the information they receive than what is typical in teacher-led lessons. Students are also involved in the process of learning as knowledge creation (Bransford & Cocking, 2000.)

As the students' role changes, so does the teachers'. The teacher is no longer the centre of attention as the dispenser of information, but rather plays the role of facilitator, setting project goals and providing guidelines and resources, suggestions and support for student activity (Meyers, 2015).

### 3.5 Students' response

Table 1: Students' responses towards survey on their level of preference towards different types of English language learning method

Learning Method	LEVEL OF PREFERENCE				
	Very Low 1	Low 2	Average 3	High 4	Very High 5
Online lab sessions			27 (17%)	46 (29%)	87 (54%)
Classroom language games		18 (11.25%)	32 (20%)	55 (34.38%)	55 (34.38%)
Group discussion or activities in the classroom			64 (40%)	55 (34%)	41 (26%)
Additional exercises outside the classroom		14 (8.75%)	54 (33.75%)	78 (48.75%)	14 (8.75%)

Figure 1: Comparison of the number of favourable responses given on the level of preference for each different type of language learning method

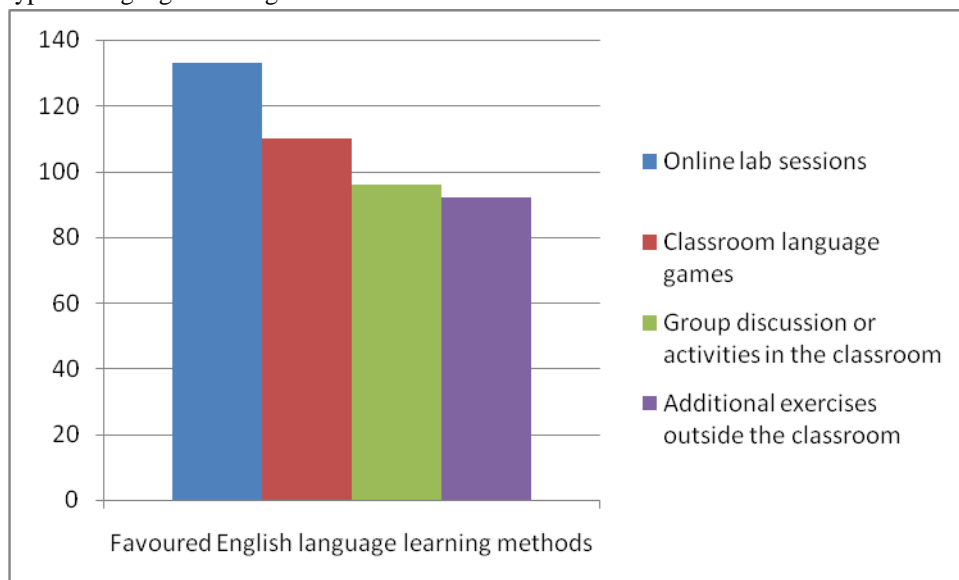


Figure 2

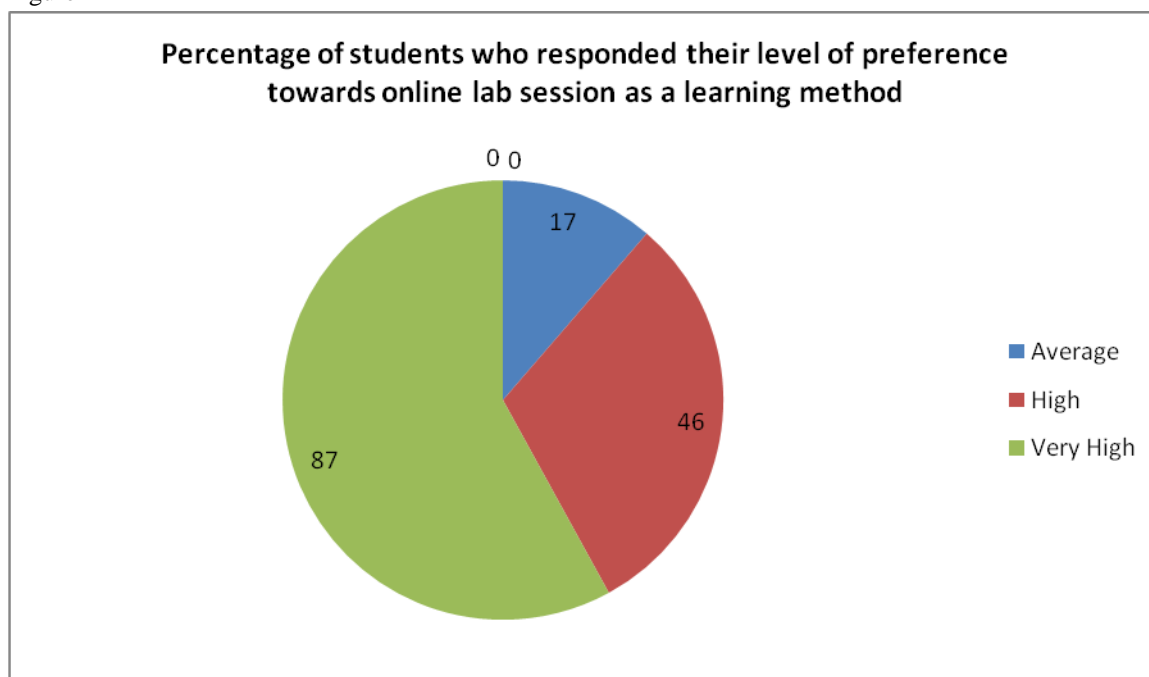


Table 1 summarizes the responses of the approximately 160 students whom the researcher was able to survey. Figures 1 and 2 provide visual description of the data summarized in Table 1. From the bar chart presented in Figure 1, it can be seen that from the various language teaching and learning styles, the students rated their level of preference most favourably for the online lab sessions. Altogether a total of 133(83%) of the students gave a favourable rating (a score from 4 to 5 is considered favourable while 3 and below is considered unfavourable.) Although various interesting activities can be conducted in the classroom such as group discussion/activities and language games, which is the second most favourable learning style with 110 (69%) of respondents giving a favourable rating, students in this age are somehow more attracted to the most modernized,

contemporary and novel method of learning rather than the usual styles. The pie chart in Figure 2 details the responses of the students towards the most preferred learning method with 54% indicating their strong level of preference by circling the number 5 for Very High, 29% circled number 4 for High and only 17% circled 3 for average.

From an analysis of their open-ended response towards the online lab sessions, it can be summarized that the lab sessions eased and enlightened their learning process, stimulated their interest and provided a relaxed, non-stressful learning atmosphere.

Following are some exact excerpts of students' open-ended feedback towards online lab sessions:

'Let us have all our classes in the language lab.'

'With lessons in the lab easy to find information from the internet.'

'Changing the class to language lab is interesting since there is a clear slide to watch.'

'Saya suka kelas di makmal bahasa yang santai.'

It can be seen that computers are most popular among students as they are often associated with fun and games. Student motivation is therefore increased, especially when a variety of activities are offered. To attract their attention, students today demand more current methods of teaching and learning in today's age of rapid advancement in technology with ipads, smartphone and we do not know what more will come.

### 3.6 Discussion

With all the advantages highlighted about the benefits of modern technology, one question which arises is will teachers become obsolete? In no way does this study suggest that technology can replace teachers as nothing can replace the knowledge and experience that teachers bring with them to the classroom and the guidance and coaching they can provide their students. Only teachers can teach students how to critically evaluate the authenticity of the abundance of information students receive from the internet. The role of teachers as the main educators is eternal despite the increasing advances in technology that will come. Modern technology has to be recognized as an invaluable supporting tool (Cafarella, 2015).

## IV. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

We cannot always depend on technology because sometimes there are technical problems. This is when the teacher has to adapt. The lab session, however, has its limitations, which is why lab session has not been the sole practice in the researcher's English lessons. Because of the limitations of lab sessions, the researcher has also conducted traditional classroom sessions to make up for its weaknesses. As with many other forms of modern technology, the limitation of lab lessons is that it reduces the personal touch of teacher and student interaction as well as interaction among peers in the classroom. The physical arrangement of a language lab itself does not enable students to have much physical movement around the classroom. Therefore, certain language activities that involve a lot of physical movement cannot be conducted in the language lab. Even when the teacher did not use the language lab and conducted lessons in the traditional classroom, in this high-tech age, the internet has still found its way to the traditional classroom. Many students are still gaining access to the internet through their handphones and ipads to search for relevant information.

The focus of the study is on the students' learning process with technology rather than the end result as the end result such as their proficiency and performance in exam is influenced by many other variables such as the learners' attitude, effort, their environment, the assessment tools and others however good the technology may be as mentioned by Zhao (2015). It cannot be safely concluded that a single method has a major influence on student proficiency as many factors play important role. The researcher observed the development of the students in the classroom tasks and assignments given. This study did not aim to measure progress based on

paper and pencil tests but rather, communicative tasks. Further research may be needed in future to measure the end result of students' performance.

## **V. RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study did not explore further the use of internet for authentic distance communication tasks with speakers from other locations and participation in online forums and discussions. Further research can also be done to explore the use of the internet in providing an international communication environment for learners in the era of globalization.

It has often been said that the best way to learn a foreign language is to become immersed in it. For most, however, the notion of spending months in a foreign country is unrealistic. Nevertheless, it has often been said that the world is shrinking. With the internet, connecting with people in foreign nations has never been easier. Through social media websites, people are connecting with others and using online communication tools to practice their foreign language skills. The internet is the principal medium by which students can communicate with others at a distance, (e.g. by e-mail or by participating in discussion forums). Some teachers have set up joint projects with a school in another location and others encourage students to take part in discussion groups. There is no doubt that such activities are motivating for students and allow them to participate in many authentic language tasks. By taking advantage of the communication tools provided by the Internet, one can learn a foreign language in a more efficient manner than was possible (Meyers, 2015).

## **VI. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

It can be concluded that the internet with its rich source of information and communication has become an essential classroom learning tool that can speed up and enhance the learning process in the classroom. A lot of time can be saved by teachers and students in the teaching and learning process. It may not be practically possible for every English teacher in an institution to conduct regular lessons in the language lab if there is a limited number of labs and neither is it practical to have many labs due to limitations in finance and space. This is not a major obstacle because the internet service is no longer limited to computers. Modern technology has made the internet service portable to cater to our internet dependent society. It can be accessed by users everywhere, anytime through their mobile phones, ipads, etc.

The effectiveness of technology on language learning is dependent on how it is used. Certain technologies are more suitable than others for certain learning tasks for certain learners. Technology, when used properly, can have a positive effect on language learning. The availability and capacities of information technologies need to be fully taken advantage of by language students or educators. Students and teachers also need to truly capitalize on modern information and communication technologies to significantly improve language learning (Salaberry, 2001).



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