

## THE MULTISENSORY APPROACH FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING: EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT TEACHERS OF A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN SABAH, MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Teaching English Language in primary school using ICT technology is a great challenge for language teachers. The study investigates how 40 voluntary student teachers of a public university in Sabah use ICT and multisensory approach to teach English. The study employs The Learner Centric Ecology of Resources Framework (Luckin, 2008) as a guide to observe knowledge scaffolding of students learning. Focus group interviews to elicit qualitative data were done with some selected student teachers who participated in the voluntary teaching job at selected primary school in Kota Belud, Sabah. The results showed that the majority of the student teachers were motivated to teach English using multisensory approach because it helped them to connect English with outside world via visual aids (multimedia). The student teachers' reflective journals also indicated that they were able to align the ICT materials with the proficiency level of the students, create interactive teaching and learning materials, using ICT to improve class control because the graphics and sounds attracted students' attention. All the actions by the student teachers proved that they were frequently updating each other in teaching like how the Luckin's framework suggested. If this method of learning is practiced by more schools, it would make language learning interesting.*

**Keywords:** Language learning, Learner Centric Ecology of Resources, Jolly Phonics, multisensory approach, ICT

### INTRODUCTION

The use of ICT in Malaysian schools dated back to 1970s. Since then, both government and non-government agencies have implemented numerous ICT-related initiatives. However, at 33% penetration rate, Sabah remains as one of the lowest rates in Malaysia (Borneo Post, 2014). The *Teaching For Change Using ICT* project was initiated by a group of researchers from Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia. The project aimed to improve language learning through the ICT-based multisensory approach. Beside English Language, the project involved other subjects such as Science and Mathematics. This paper focuses on the experiences gained from student teachers teaching English Language via the multisensory method.

The specific objectives for English component of the project are:

- to extend the pupils' phonic knowledge
- to introduce the rudiments of grammar
- to teach spelling systematically
- to improve vocabulary and comprehension

Lessons planned and conducted in this project were aligned with the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) in Malaysia. Six modules and six compilations of lesson plans were prepared and handed to the school. Each of the primary school students also received a

module and a stationery kit. The modules contained notes, exercise and games for English learning. The funder, Yayasan Sejahtera Malaysia (a government NGO) sponsored two LCDs, four laptops and four audio equipment for the school.

The project was participated by 40 student teachers who were pursuing a Bachelor of Education (TESL). Prior to this project, the students did not have any experience teaching in a public school. A series of training involving the ICT-based multisensory approach was conducted with the student teachers. The training involved these areas: introduction to the Jolly Phonics (JP) method, letter sounds, blends, songs and actions, using different teaching aids, games, grammar, readers, lesson-planning and microteaching. The ICT method was taught during the second year as undergraduate student in the university. The English student teachers visited the school every three weeks for a year. Every class was assigned with two student teachers.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *The Learner Centric Ecology of Resources Framework*

This study employed the learner centric ecology of resources (Luckin, 2008). The learner centric ecology of resources consists of four major elements; skills and knowledge, curriculum, resources and administration. Luckin (*ibid*) defines skills and knowledge as the substance learned, while resources refer to tools or people to learn the skills and knowledge. This paper only focuses on skills and knowledge, and resources. In the present study, skills and knowledge are defined as the ICT skills and knowledge of the student teachers. This study sought to explore beyond the student teachers' ability to ICT tools. Skills and knowledge also refer to the student teachers' ability to digitize the language learning process. Resources refer to the ICT hardware and software needed to develop learning materials and to implement the teaching and learning process. ICT resources used by the students teachers included video-sharing sites, photo-sharing sites, audio-sharing sites and presentation tools.

### *The Multisensory Learning Approach*

Studies show that using ICT the right way of learning and teaching is also a crucial factor for successful ICT integration in language learning (Hadi Salehi & Zeinab Salehi, 2012; Saadiyah Darus & Ho, 2008). Teachers' ICT literacy and competency skills can be important when integrating them with the learning content for students (Narasuman, Md. Rizal & Azlan, 2011; Lau & Sim, 2008; Samuel & Zaitun, 2007). Although little is known about how teachers use ICT to transform the English language learning activities, Samuel and Zaitun (2007) reported that English teachers lacked the ability to use ICT for language learning. In addressing this issue, this project attempted to integrate ICT into multisensory approach to improve language learning.

Multisensory approach in language learning involves the use of senses to learn English. Multisensory learning suggests that students learn through visual learning, audio learning, tactile learning and kinesthetic learning. Some of the learning activities included in this project were singing songs, playing games, playing salt dough, air writing, learning through flash card, hopscotch and watching videos (Ni Putu et al., 2018).

In this study, the primary students and preschoolers were taught synthetic phonics using the Jolly Phonics (JP) technique which is a method commonly used by European countries in particularly United Kingdom. JP provides the teaching of 42 letter sounds through multisensory method that involves all of the body parts to remember the letter sounds that makes the participant to enjoy the teaching and learning process (Lloyd, 1998). They learned to

recognise all the letter sounds of English, and how to use the letter sounds to read and spell, as well as developing visual, listening and memory skills, and becoming familiar with some sight-words. It involved multi-sensory learning skills such as singing, dancing, letter writing using fingers, hopscotching, drawing and games to learn the fourty two letter sounds.

## THE SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

The project was conducted at a primary school named Suang Punggor National Primary School (SK Suang Punggor) in Kota Belud, located about 70 kilometres from the state capital, Kota Kinabalu. The school was located in a rural village named Kampung Suang Punggor. This school had a population of 207 students, and over 30 teaching staff. The majority the population in the school belonged to the Bajau ethnic group. The main occupations in this village were fishermen and farmers. The enrolment of the school is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of students in SK Suang Punggor

Class	Enrolment
Year 1	35
Year 2	39
Year 3	35
Year 4	32
Year 5	32
Year 6	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>207</b>

This paper focuses on the qualitative data collected from the student teachers and the students. Qualitative data provides rich data on the subjects' experiences on the use of multisensory approach (Creswell, 2007). The study employed reflective journal writing and observation as the main methods of enquiry. Of the total of 40 student teachers involved, only seven student teachers submitted their reflective journals for data analysis. Observations from time to time were also conducted to collect evidence in the forms of photos and videos. Documents such as students' work were also collected. The data sought to answer two research questions:

- a) What are the ICT skills and knowledge demonstrated by the student teachers?
- b) How was the ICT-based multisensory approach used in language learning?

The data obtained were analysed through coding and grouping to find emerging themes. Findings obtained through reflective journal were triangulated with observation and document analysis.

## FINDINGS

### *ICT Skills and Knowledge Learned*

Firstly, student teachers demonstrated the ability to align the ICT materials with the proficiency level of the students. The materials also needed to be relevant to the rural content of the school. ICT materials for language learning available in the Internet are not contextualised for the local context. As Student Teacher 7 recalled “we search for teaching ideas using ICT online and modify them in order to fit them into our lesson plans”. Therefore, student teachers had to ensure that the materials used are appropriate for the local context.

*When we planned for the lesson, we take into account about the students background, the syllabus for the lesson... We tried not to dwell too much into what we thought would be best or bad for the students in the rural area because we don't want to end up creating materials that are completely foreign to them and thus hindering their learning process.*

Student Teacher 2

Secondly, student teachers learned the skills and knowledge to create interactive teaching and learning materials. Interactive activities avoid dull and monotonous lessons. Interactivity helped the student teachers to manage the flow and pace of the lessons as they could “easily pause, play or rewind the videos or slide show” (Student Teacher 3). By creating interactive materials, students became actively engaged. As Student Teacher 1 recalled, “the use of songs also encouraged them to participate actively during the lesson as they can sing along to the song.”

*We search for the materials that would suit the students' interest and needs. When we taught the topic of Sound Around Us, we used popular nursery rhyme to make the students more engaged in the classroom. We also inserted some pictures to help them understand the topic more.*

Student Teacher 2

Thirdly, student teachers learned about class management in ICT-based language lessons. Class management was challenging especially for classes with a large number of students. Student Teacher 2, 3 and 6 expressed that using ICT helped them to control the students easier as the graphics and sounds attracted their attention. However, student Teacher 1 faced problem controlling her class as the students became disorganized when participating in the ICT-based activities.

*The number of students is quite big and the students at the back were not able to see the video clearly. We asked them to come forward. The students then started to push each other as every one of them wanted to near to the computer and speaker. It took times to control them because they became too 'active' when they saw the computers and LCD. The problem is not because of the technology used but more to the students.*

Student Teacher 1

### ***ICT-Based Multisensory Language Learning Approach***

Findings showed the use of ICT in multisensory approach helped to improve the delivery of abstract knowledge, especially to young learners. ICT helped especially in the explanation stage of the new knowledge. Due to the setting of the school in rural area, Student Teacher 1 expressed that it was challenging for the students to “imagine things they have not seen or things that they are not exposed to.” ICT enabled student teachers to provide concrete examples to teach them knowledge which they had not known before.

*I feel better in using ICT in the classroom because with all the colours and clearer wordings, it compliments my teachings as well as delivering a clearer message to the students, especially animations, which helps in giving them exercises and they will be able to remember it better.*

Student Teacher 7

The use of ICT in multisensory approach also allowed the student teachers to bring the outside world to the school. ICT allowed students to experience new things which could not be “obtained through reading a book” (Student Teacher 1). As Student Teacher 4 recalled, ICT could “give them some insight of how the outside world can be” (Student Teacher 4).

The use of ICT in multisensory approach helps to establish language practice opportunities. In introducing new vocabulary and explaining new knowledge, student teachers did not have resort to translation. Instead, student teachers could rely on the ICT tools to present the meaning of the new vocabulary and knowledge through pictures and videos.

*For Primary 1, we use ICT to teach them vocabulary related to animals by showing them video and pictures of animals instead of just using translation in the classroom. This help in controlling the use of mother-tongue in the classroom.*

Student Teacher 4

Students were able to relate the new knowledge learned through ICT and sensory-based activities. Students made connection between the new English vocabularies and the ICT-based audio-visual aids. For example, in studying “Animal Sounds” students listened to the student teacher’s explanation, saw the picture and listened to the actual sounds. The students were able to remember and recall the new knowledge when doing the activity.

*The pictures, videos and sound produce from the ICT materials making the students attracted and enhance their understanding. This is because, they are not only hearing the teacher’s explanation but they can also refer to the pictures provided. They can easily visualise the idea. The sounds also enhance their understanding and making them more alert during the lessons. For example, when we are teaching them the ‘Sound Around Us’, we need to introduce to them the sounds of animals. Using the ICT makes it easier to us to explain the sound as they can see the pictures and hear the animal sounds.*

Student Teacher 3

Making connection through visualization helped the students to retain their memory and apply the knowledge in their activity. As Student Teacher 7 recalled,

*They tend to remember better when they see and listen. What I do to make sure if they are still able to recall and apply what they have learned from the previous lesson is to give them some questions or ask them to be the teacher and recap what I have taught them earlier.*

Student Teacher 7

## RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The JP method was effective to teach the correspondences of grapheme and phoneme through multisensory method that helps the participant to remember the letter sounds with ease (Ni Putu et al., 2018). Besides, JP also emphasizes to train blending ability for wider vocabularies grasp by students. On the hand, the student teachers were also able to demonstrate and use their ICT-related skills and knowledge previously unknown to them for parting knowledge to

the primary students. The use of ICT and multisensory skills improved language learning in a more practical, hand-on approach (Hadi Salehi & Zeinab Salehi, 2012). This augurs well with the teacher education programmes in the university where student teachers are taught to devise ICT-based learning materials. However, they have limited opportunities to experience teaching using ICT-based materials in real classrooms. Therefore, by participating in community projects such as this one enables student teachers to develop pedagogical, technological and content knowledge using the resources available in the community. The study recommends that the multisensory approach that utilises also the JP and ICT skills can be employed to improve English Language especially reading and writing for primary schools.

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