Chapter 7

ICT in Malay Language Learning: Lessons Learned from Two Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

With digital communications and technological media becoming an integral part of the new professional workplace and everyday lives of the younger generation (especially in post-industrial societies), comes the clarion call for educators to develop a more complex understanding of language and literacy and how to go about designing pedagogies that equip students with 21st Century skills. This chapter presents two case studies that examine the complex interaction of teachers, students, writing pedagogies, language curriculum and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The study explored students’ experiences of using ICT in second language writing and the impact of ICT on writing pedagogy and the curriculum, producing in-depth descriptions and interpretations to answer a set of focused research questions.

INTRODUCTION

The use of ICT for education is not just about technologies. It is important to think of ICT as practice – as ways of doing things – albeit by adopting a particular and sophisticated sense of practice that involves communities of learners. What schools teach and how they should respond to change and changing circumstances can be represented as a gap that exists between what key agents in the larger cultural context (e.g., the ministry and policymakers) and key agents concerned with classroom curriculum (e.g., teachers and students) see as important in social, cultural and historical terms (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). This gap can largely be defined by reference to practices in, approaches to and understandings of technologies and literacy.
The setting for this study is Singapore. Singapore has a unique linguistic background because of its multi-racial society. While all classes are taught in English, it is compulsory for all students to learn a second language in Singaporean schools. Knowing a second language enables Singaporeans to preserve their values and also gives them an identity as an Asian society (Shepherd, 2005). This second language for most students may be the language spoken at home (e.g., students of Malay cultural heritage choosing to study Malay as a second language at school); while for others it may be a foreign language (e.g., students of Chinese or Tamil descent choosing to learn Malay at school). Students are required to learn a second language from Primary 1 (Year 2). The time allocated in the curriculum is 3.45 hours per week or six to seven periods of 30 to 45 minutes duration. During these language classes students learn the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (MOE, 2004).

In the latest Malay Language Curriculum Review conducted in 2005, it was noted that there was a shift in home language use. In the Malay community, the proportion of Primary One students (aged 6 to 7) who use English as their main language at home increased from 17% in 1996 to 28% in 2005. This means that Malay language teachers now face the challenge of further developing innovative and creative teaching methods to stimulate learners, given that more parents and students appear to perceive that learning English is vital whereas the Malay language is considered less important. Thus, the use of ICT in Malay language classrooms is seen as a necessary method in order to empower learners through customised technology-enhanced teaching and learning (MOE, 2005).

BACKGROUND

Planning for ICT in education in Singapore provides a blueprint for the use of ICT in schools and access to an ICT-enriched school environment for teaching and learning for every student. The first ICT Masterplan (1997-2002) or MP1 laid the foundation for integrating ICT into education. The mission of MP1 was to harness ICT for instructional purposes and to provide directions to schools for integrating up-to-date technologies into the educational process. The following actions were carried out to achieve the MP1 objectives:

- Training school teachers in the use of technology for classroom teaching that could enhance learning;
- Providing hardware and software to schools;
- Supporting schools in the ICT implementation;
- Initiating special projects to engage teachers and students in the continual and active exploitation of ICT use; and
- Collaborating with the ICT industry.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the second Masterplan (MP2) for ICT in Education in 2002. This was to ensure that schools continued to integrate ICT into their curriculum so as to develop a culture of thinking, lifelong learning and social responsibility (MOE, 2002). To meet these goals, four key dimensions of the ICT Masterplan were identified: curriculum and assessment; learning resources; teacher development; and physical and technological infrastructure. The Masterplans clearly spelt out how ICT was to be used and integrated into the curriculum as a strategy to meet the challenges of the future and envisaged that by 2002 students would spend 30% of curriculum time using ICT (MOE, 2002).

By 2004 there were changes in the teaching and learning approaches adopted by schools. Evidence of these changes was reflected on school websites where teachers uploaded and shared their teaching resources using ICT with other teachers in the same zonal areas (MOE, 2004). Additionally, an increasing number of students
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