

HISTORY AND THE NEW MEDIA: TEACHING FORM FIVE HISTORY IN MALAYSIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Digital history, is “an approach to examining and representing the past that takes advantage of new communication technologies such as computers and the Web. It draws on essential features of the digital realm, such as databases, hypertextualization, and networks, to create and share historical knowledge.” This definition comes from the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, one of the earliest proponents of digital history, whose web site showcases several digital history projects. In Europe and the US, such an approach or methodology is very popular and provides an effective teaching mechanism. However, in Malaysia, “digital history” is quite unknown and rarely explored by academicians or teachers of history at the undergraduate or even secondary-school levels. Even at the university level, there is not yet a course offered on digital humanities.

Thus, this study seeks to instil awareness among teachers on the use of new media in teaching history. An educational history web site was created or developed to provide history modules that integrate the new media and innovative approaches in teaching Form Five History. A blog was also set up as another means of channeling information to history teachers in a more interactive, quicker, and easier manner.

In summary, this approach has the capability to significantly impact the delivery of Form Five history and at the same time inculcate deep interest based on innovative, interactive, and attractive teaching and learning methods. If such an approach is given the best opportunity to be employed as a teaching and learning tool, history as a boring subject will only be a myth believed by those who are technologically illiterate.

This study evaluates the receptivity of teachers towards incorporating the new media in teaching history. It seeks to identify barriers and challenges by offering some reflections on a number of issues limiting history teachers' potential to use the new media. This study goes on to offer solutions to overcome these challenges.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study draws upon literature related to the current debates on teaching and learning history in Malaysia. First, an overview of the current learning environment is presented, followed by discussion of the reforms instituted by the Malaysian government. Then the potential of the new media is discussed in reference to the school-based assessment system and the application of high-order thinking skills at the secondary school levels. The critical role that the new media play in history education is appraised. Also addressed are the reasons behind the lack of motivation and skills among history teachers in Malaysia, and some suggestions are made for how these issues could be addressed.

1.1 Current debates on teaching history in Malaysia

The teaching and learning of Malaysian history at secondary schools is often the subject of criticisms on a national level for its lack of inclusivity, creativity, and relevance. Many lament the sole reliance on history textbooks and the failure to introduce new and relevant reading materials that charts the trials and tribulations of the nation's history (Gomez 2014). The common complaint from the public (including students) has been the content of the history syllabus, which many argue was not reflecting the multicultural history of the country. Another vital complaint from the public has been the dispiriting method of teaching—mainly by requiring students to memorize facts and dates (Malaysian Insider 2013)—what is known as factualism (Capps and Vocke 1991). This conventional method of teaching history was further emphasized when science teachers were roped in to teach history because of the surplus of science teachers (Samsudin and Shaharuddin 2012). While teachers are criticized for