Trends in Malaysian ELT Research Presented at the Melta Conferences 2005-2009

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Abstract

Research activities in the English language as taught at the various levels in Malaysia have been dynamic over the last two decades. The number of conferences held over the years in the country on English language alone is a good indication of this. This shows that awareness of a dominant second language is strong not only in the government policies over the years but also amongst the general population. The current paper reports on the types and topics of research that have been carried out on the English language and linguistics from 2005 to 2009 in Malaysia at the MELTA conference to see how our perceptions and reception of the English language have grown or changed over the years. Abstracts from the MELTA conference of the said years formed the data of the study and were analysed for general distribution of common topics. A discussion is provided to link past research to potential future research in the relevant areas of English language teaching in Malaysia.

KEYWORDS: Trends, Malaysian, English language teaching, ELT, MELTA Conference

Introduction

The development of English in Malaysia has created a fertile environment for research in ELT due to British colonialisation which brought about public education and English as the medium of education, particularly in urban schools. Education, along with other factors, caused the English language to become prestigious mainly due to the recognition it received in the economic and job sectors, international communication and education. When the Malay language was reinstated as the national, official and only language in public education, English took a backseat, and since then there have been many complaints, as evidenced by the spate of letters and reports in the daily press. In general, many complained that Malaysians have a low proficiency in English. This naturally has repercussions on ELT in Malaysia. English teachers and schools all found themselves entrusted to restore the English proficiency among students. This is not an easy feat, as education is not the sole responsibility of the schools, as propagated by Clinton in her book *It Takes a Village* to educate even one child. Nevertheless, English language educators in Malaysia have kept on working to keep abreast of latest developments in ELT and to seek ways to teach English effectively in Malaysian schools and institutions.

The Malaysian English Language Teachers Association (MELTA) plays the role of a resource house, among others, via the annual conference where English language practitioners from all over the country gather to share and learn new things about the teaching and learning of the English language. The MELTA conference, which is the

association's annual international event, is as of 2010 in its nineteenth year, with the number of conference participants steadily increasing, mirroring the increased awareness of the importance of English language education, and the need for keeping abreast with new teaching and learning innovations and current research in the area. At the MELTA conferences, the topics presented tend to focus on teachers and students, teaching and learning, language learning and teaching strategies and approaches, language skills, technology, literature, learning anxieties and apprehension, and so forth, framed within various contexts. This offers a kaleidoscope of experience that is attractive to Malaysian English language practitioners from public and private schools and institutions, thus encouraging them to participate in the MELTA conference every year.

A study of trends, such as this small scaled one, allows us to analyse past research and project what is useful or relevant for the future. There is abundant research on research trends over the years in various disciplines. Kirk (2010), for example, reviewed future trends within European-authored research published in four English-language journals in the period of 2000-2009 to discuss issues for the future of research in his field of physical education. To him research matters as the results linked the past to the future. A study of trends would provide results that may direct future research in the respective fields. Wright and Wright (2009) conducted a trend analysis to provide a holistic view of English education in Australia in the era of sustainability which views curriculum design as organic, progressing and developing with the changing world. The development of the field of education requires from time to time a re-look at the elements that have contributed to its growth. Davies (2008) studied the trends that emerged in his research

on language testing textbooks in English since the 1960s. His results pointed to language learners being trained within the resource material rather than actual encounters and to the many changes that have occurred in the area of materials.

This research was undertaken to study the trends in research in English language teaching (ELT) and other related areas based on the variety of topics that were presented by the Malaysian English teachers and researchers at the MELTA Conferences over the past few years, specifically in 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2009. The topics presented may directly reflect the perceptions of what is important and otherwise in ELT in Malaysia and allows us to provide suggestions for the overall improvement of the teaching and learning of English in the country. The results of this research will be of significance to various parties interested in ELT. Teachers may share this insight on the distribution and frequency of topics presented at the conferences, and use the information to focus on the relevant language skills or topics related to English in their teaching. Policymakers, on the other hand, may formulate strategies in ELT-related areas possibly perceived to be important, as presented at the MELTA conferences. Special interest groups, publishers, and other groups may contribute by providing the necessary support around the perceived areas of interest in English and ELT.

Methodology

MELTA conferences held within the last five years were selected mainly due to the time constraints in reporting, although a more longitudinal time frame would have allowed

depth to the results. Briefly, in 2006 and 2008, the MELTA conferences were held in three venues within two weeks and therefore had many more paper presentations, while the 2005 and 2009 conferences were held in one venue but for a longer period of three days each. There was no MELTA conference organized in 2007 due to the Asia TEFL conference which MELTA hosted in Kuala Lumpur. The number of presentations for the four years of conference was 700. The number appears to be small given that in 2006 and 2008, the conference was held in three places. However, as many of the papers were re-presented in each of the three venues, the actual number of papers presented was as such, taking the duplication into consideration. Out of the 700, approximately 600 topics were included in the final analysis. Among those excluded were presentations by non-Malaysians, as their topics mainly dwelled on the generalities of English Language Teaching and were outside the context of the Malaysia classroom, and topics which did not fit the predetermined labels.

Since data was collected from readily available sources, the study employed the unobtrusive research method, that was introduced by Webb, Campbell , Schwartz , Sechrest and Grove **(**1981). According to Lee (2007), unobtrusive measurements presumably reduce the biases that result from the intrusion of the researcher or measurement instrument in other types of research. The disadvantage of the unobtrusive measure is that it reduces the degree of researcher's control over the type of data collected. The type of unobtrusive measure used particularly for the current research is Content Analysis. Content Analysis refers to the analysis of text documents, and the analysis can be quantitative, qualitative or both. Typically, the major purpose of content

analysis is to identify patterns in text for major themes or ideas. Since Content Analysis involves text, the study is limited to the types of information available in text, according to Lee (2007).

The programme books of the conferences in the stated years were useful in providing information that served as data for this paper. The books were sourced from the MELTA office which maintains a collection of ELT-related materials including copies of all conference programmes. The next step was sorting and categorizing the titles of presentations of each conference; these titles were then "lifted" and retyped in another list. The titles of papers presented during the conferences were then scrutinized and grouped according to their respective subthemes or focus for each year. The labels for the different themes were adopted from the Internet TESL journal at (http://iteslj.org/Articles/) and then adapted, as listed below.

1. The Teacher/Teacher Training

2. Thinking

3. Approach/Methodology

4. CALL

5. Internet/New technology

6. Listening/Speaking/Oral

7. Communication

8. Children/Young adults

9. Culture

10. Language acquisition

11. Learner Strategies

12. Material Development

13. Reading

14. Testing

15. Writing

16. Vocabulary

17. Grammar

18. Motivation

19. Literature

20. ESP

Other themes that were not included in the research analysis include those on multiple intelligence, language planning, language policy, and curriculum. Since each conference had its own sub-themes, it was expected that certain topics would occur in greater numbers than others.

In sorting and categorizing the titles of presentations, a few things were taken into consideration. For example, there were instances of titles that combined more than one theme, such as those found in the following titles:

1. *Speaking English across the Board: Using Multimedia Techniques in Pre-school Education*

   (a combination of Speaking skill, Children and New Technology)

2. *Teachers' Reflections on the Use of CALL Tools in ESL*

   (a combination of The Teacher and CALL)

3. *Constructing E-Learning Courseware and Online Quizzes Using Toolbook Assistant*

   (a combination of CALL and Testing)

4. *Reading an Academic Expository Text – the Strategies Employed by Students*

   (a combination of Reading skill and Learner Strategies)

With such titles, all themes that were perceived within a title were counted accordingly, for example, in (1) the themes perceived are Speaking and CALL, in (2) they were

Teacher and CALL, in (3) they were CALL and Testing, and in (4) they were Reading and Learner Strategies.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the results of the study according to the following sub-headings:

A. Analysis According to Each Conference Year

B. Comparisons of the Themes Across the Conference Years

C. Aggregated Data According to Descending Order of Number of Presentation

D. Specific Areas of Research Within the Common Themes

Analysis according to conference year

2005: ESL education: Confronting changing realities

Table 1 shows the results for 2005. The theme of the conference for this year was *ESL education: Confronting changing realities.* The most frequent topic of presentation was Methodology, numbering at 20, followed by papers that focused on Teacher/Teacher Training at 11. Research on the Internet in the ELT was a popular topic with 10 presentations. CALL has not been grouped with this theme, as the former dwells on

language teaching with specialised courseware on ELT, whereas research on the internet looked at how teachers and learners may improve their English proficiency by utilizing what is offered in the web, on their own or as part of learning. Topics on the skills of Reading and Writing were also repeatedly presented, at frequencies of 8 and 7, respectively. Topics on Literature were presented 8 times. There was only one presentation on the other two skills of English, i.e. Listening and Speaking. Grammar was dealt in 3 presentations.

Table 1. Common themes in the 2005 MELTA conference

	Types of Paper Presented	Total		Type of Paper Presented	Total
1.	The Teacher/Teacher Training	11	11.	Learner Strategies	5
2.	Thinking	3	12.	Material Development	2
3.	Approach/Methodology	20	13.	Reading	8
4.	CALL	3	14.	Testing	6
5.	Internet/New Technology	10	15.	Writing	7
6.	Listening/Speaking/Oral	1	16.	Vocabulary	4
7.	Communication	1	17.	Grammar	3
8.	Children/Young adults	1	18.	Motivation	3
9.	Culture	4	19.	Literature	8
10.	Language Acquisition	0	20.	ESP	3

2006: Reading and writing: Preparing ESL learners for the real world

Table 2 shows the number of presentations for the various topics in 2006. The theme for the 2006 MELTA conference was *Reading and writing: Preparing ESL learners for the real world.* The overall number of papers presented in this year surpassed 2005 because it was held in three venues. Following the theme, naturally research dwelled on Reading and Writing, at 25 a piece, indicating that the Conference had achieved its targets to focus on reading and writing. Teaching Approach/Methodology was a popular topic this year with 23 presentations. Research on children was high with 21 presentations, literature was consistent with 12 presentations. Topics on Grammar, Listening and Speaking, Vocabulary, Thinking and Culture were not favoured for presentation.

Table 2. Common themes in the 2006 MELTA Conference

	Types of Paper Presented	Total		Types of Paper Presented	Total
1.	The Teacher/Teacher Training	4	11.	Learner Strategies	7
2.	Thinking	1	12.	Material Development	6
3.	Approach/Methodology	23	13.	Reading	25
4.	CALL	2	14.	Testing	9

5.	Internet/New Technology	7	15.	Writing	25
6.	Listening/Speaking/Oral	2	16.	Vocabulary	2
7.	Communication	0	17.	Grammar	1
8.	Children/Young adults	21	18.	Motivation	1
9.	Culture	0	19.	Literature	12
10.	Language Acquisition	0	20.	ESP	6

2008: English and multiple literacies

Table 3 shows the number of presentations for the various topics in 2008. The theme for the 2008 MELTA conference was *English and multiple literacies.* In line with the conference theme, the numbers of presentations on Reading and Writing were high, at 20 and 16, respectively. The number of presentations on the topic of Internet/New Technology was also high at 20. Topics related to Approach/Methodology and Literature were common, with 12 and 10 presentations, respectively. Topics on Thinking, Material Development, Communication, Language Acquisition, Motivation and ESP were not presented at all. Topics on Children, Culture and Grammar received little attention.

Table 3. Common themes in the 2008 MELTA Conference

	Types of Paper Presented	Total		Types of Paper Presented	Total
1.	The Teacher/Teacher Training	5	11.	Learner Strategies	2
2.	Thinking	0	12.	Material Development	0

3.	Approach/Methodology	12	13.	Reading	20
4.	CALL	2	14.	Testing	5
5.	Internet/New Technology	20	15.	Writing	16
6.	Listening/Speaking/Oral	7	16.	Vocabulary	9
7.	Communication	0	17.	Grammar	4
8.	Children/Young adults	5	18.	Motivation	0
9.	Culture	3	19.	Literature	10
10.	Language Acquisition	0	20.	ESP	0

2009: Congruity between theory and practice: Effective methodologies in English language teaching

Table 4 shows the total number of presentations in 2009. The theme for the 2009 MELTA conference was *Congruity between theory and practice: Effective methodologies in English language teaching.* There were 12 topics related to Approach/Methodology, 9 on Reading, 14 on Writing, and 11 each on Internet/New Technology, Literature, ESP. Topics on Thinking, Testing, Material Development, CALL, Communication, Motivation and Language Acquisition were not favoured at all. Overall, there were no themes that stood out as the most preferred topic of presentation in 2009.

Table 4. Common themes in the 2009 MELTA conference

	Types of Paper Presented	Total		Types of Paper Presented	Total
1.	The Teacher/Teacher Training	6	11.	Learner Strategies	5
2.	Thinking	0	12.	Material Development	0
3.	Approach/Methodology	12	13.	Reading	9
4.	CALL	0	14.	Testing	9
5.	Internet/New Technology	11	15.	Writing	14
6.	Listening/Speaking/Oral	9	16.	Vocabulary	3
7.	Communication	0	17.	Grammar	4
8.	Children/Young adults	4	18.	Motivation	0
9.	Culture	1	19.	Literature	11
10.	Language Acquisition	0	20.	ESP	11

Comparisons of the themes across the conference years

The information in Tables 1 to 4 is shown together in Table 5. The most common themes presented for each year are highlighted. We can see that in 2005, the most popular theme was related to Approach and Methodology. Whether or not this was due to the Conference Theme could not be decided at this point in research. Themes on the Internet/New Technology were also common in 2005. In 2006, themes related to Approach/Methodology were again popular. Reading and Writing were also popular due to the Conference Theme that focused on Reading and Writing. There was a surge in themes related to Children/Young Adults, which indicates a growing interest in this area.

The number of presentations on the theme of Children/Young Adults in 2006 was encouraging at 26; however, this dropped to 5 in 2008. In this year, themes related to Internet/New Technology were popular, and Reading and Writing reigned, again. In 2009, the number of presentations of all topics popular in the previous conference in 2008 decreased, that is, there was no theme that had a surge of research during the year, as indicated in the number of presentations during the said conference. This may be due to the variety of research in other themes not mentioned in the list. Themes that are marked with an asterisk are perceived as the more consistent themes, and if the trend is consistent, there should still a high number of presentations related to the indicated themes. However, this was not the case across the years for the specific themes. The trend is that the preferred themes remained as the more frequently presented themes for each subsequent year.

The least popular topics for presentation at the MELTA conferences are Thinking, CALL, Communication, Culture, Language Acquisition, Material Development, Grammar and Motivation.

Table 5. Common themes in the 2005-2009 MELTA conference

No	Types of Paper Presented	2005	2006	2008	2009	Total
1.	The Teacher/Teacher Training	11	4	5	6	26
2.	Thinking	3	1	0	0	4
*3.	Approach/Methodology	**20**	**23**	12	12	67

4.	CALL	3	2	2	0	7
*5.	Internet/New Technology	**10**	7	**20**	11	48
6.	Listening/Speaking/Oral	1	2	7	9	19
7.	Communication	1	0	0	0	1
8.	Children/Young adults	1	**21**	5	4	31
9.	Culture	4	0	3	1	8
10.	Language Acquisition	0	0	0	0	0
11.	Learner Strategies	5	7	2	5	19
12.	Material Development	2	6	0	0	8
*13.	Reading	8	**25**	**20**	9	62
14.	Testing	6	9	5	9	29
*15.	Writing	7	**25**	**16**	**14**	62
16.	Vocabulary	4	2	9	3	18
17.	Grammar	3	1	4	4	12
18.	Motivation	3	1	0	0	4
*19.	Literature	8	12	10	11	41
20.	ESP	3	6	0	11	20

Aggregated data listed according to descending order of number of presentations

Aggregated frequency of themes

Table 6 presents the aggregated data for the topics that were presented for 2005 to 2009 at the MELTA conferences, in descending order. The highest number of themes presented was Approach/Methodology at 67. Reading and Writing related themes were also very popular at 62 times each. Internet-related topics were also popularly researched and presented throughout these years, at 47 times, and Literature at 41 times.

Table 6. Aggregated number of themes presented at the MELTA Conference 2005-2009

No	Themes	Total	No	Themes	Total
1.	Approach/Methodology	67	11.	Listening/Speaking/Oral	19
2.	Reading	62	12.	Vocabulary	18
3.	Writing	62	13.	Grammar	12
4.	Internet/New Technology	48	14.	Material Development	8
5.	Literature	41	15.	Culture	8
6.	Children/Young adults	31	16.	CALL	7
7.	Testing	29	17.	Thinking	4
8.	The Teacher/Teacher Training	26	18.	Motivation	4
9.	ESP	20	19.	Communication	1
10.	Learner Strategies	19	20.	Language Acquisition	0

The high number of research in the skills of reading and writing compared to the other skills, as presented at the MELTA conference 2005-2008 results might indicate the following:

1. Reading and writing are the two areas Malaysian English teachers and researchers find most important in the English classroom in terms of proficiency development;

2. Reading and writing are perceived as areas still lacking in research particularly in the Malaysian context;

3. Reading and writing are perceived as more relevant as they tend to be the products of English language learning that students must produce immediately in school, in the English course as well as other courses;

In general, **r**eading allows for a myriad of activities to take place and the teaching of other skills in the ESL classroom. In teaching reading, for example**,** a teacher often starts with the reading text itself, which is usually preceded by a pre-reading task. This may be silent reading, which involves schemata building, or discussion on topics related to the topic of the reading text. During the reading process, often out loud, listening is involved. This is followed by further discussion, and then the answering of comprehension questions which often include some form of critical thinking and discussion. A study by Ganakumaran (2004), for instance, shows that teachers may request student to write an essay in respond to the discussion of a reading material.

 The Internet shows an encouraging increase in number of research over the years and ranked fourth among the most preferred theme of research. This shows the increasing

awareness of the computer, internet and new technology, in general, in education. This is probably due to the availability and accessibility of computers and the internet in education. Not only that, the increase in the awareness of the internet is also probably caused by government's support and encouragement in the use of technology in schools. In Malaysia, schools have been given all sorts of support in increasing their students' literacy in computer and the internet, and to encourage teachers to be computer and tech-savvy. The support is manifested in the forms of computers for schools, software for the students, internet connections, training for teachers, and tax incentives for computer buyers. Hence, it is not surprising that research in Internet and new technology-related areas has increased in number. The trend in research indicates that the number of research in this area may increase exponentially with the greater accessibility of the internet to the general population.

Research in literature in Malaysian ELT is also consistent and ranked fifth in the overall list of themes. This shows that Malaysian English language teachers and researchers find literature relevant in improving students' proficiency, enough to warrant a high number of research in the area. The popularity of research in literature may also be due to the perceived relevance of Reading, as mentioned earlier. English literature provides an immediate resource for reading in the English class, and comes in various genres, such as novel and short story. In general, the reading of literature in the English language classroom has been seen as a viable approach to teaching Reading and an effective way to improve the students' proficiency in the English language (Carter & Long, 1991; Cliff Hodges, 2010; Edwin, 1993; Nicholson, 2006)

Focus on the young learners in ELT appeared to have intensified with the high number of presentations on this topic. This suggests that teachers and researchers are more aware of age as a factor that affects language acquisition as found in a lot of research (Ellis and Morrison, 1998; Goodman, Dale, and Li, 2008). The younger the child is exposed to the language, the more intuitive he or she will be in the use of the language. The implementation of the policy of Teaching of Mathematics and Science in English for all students that started in 2001 in the public schools could have likely ignited the research in English language among young learners, since children as young as Primary 1 were exposed to English in these critical subjects. Many pre-schools (kindergartens) also took up the endeavour of converting to English as their medium of instruction, as a result of this, to prepare the young students for primary school. The effects of these would be the fertile environment which would make plenty of resources available for research in the areas of language in young learners as well as the controversial policy of teaching the two critical subjects in English.

Research on the other skills of language which are mainly listening and speaking shows a combined total of fourteen presentations for the four years of conference. Coupled with this is Communication which showed only one presentation for the said years. This result is somewhat surprising especially in light of the Communicative English language syllabus which aimed at improving English communication skills among speakers. The dismal number of research in the area indicates that English teachers and researchers may not find this area significant enough in language development to warrant more research. It may also be that, communication, speaking and listening are areas that are harder to

gauge compared to Reading and Writing, causing research in this area to be rather lacking. To determine the actual reason(s) for the lack of research in this area would require separate research in the area of communication alone. It is indeed a puzzle why researchers of the English language and ELT have not focused more on this theme due to these reasons.

The low focus on grammar in the ELT research in Malaysia is evident in the number of presentations at the MELTA conferences, that is, only twelve. This indicates that there is less focus among English language teachers and researchers on grammar in the English classroom, compared to reading and writing. Many English language teachers believe that grammar in inherent in all the other English sub skills, such as reading and writing, and is acquired incidentally, even though grammar is given focus in the syllabus. However, in recent years, there have been debates about the merits of explicit instruction of grammar in the classtoom as this appears unnatural in language development (Celce-Murcia & Oshtain, 2000; Liu & Jiang, 2009). In spite of the dissenting voices, there are also many who advocate the teaching of explicit grammar (Halliday & Hasan, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

ESP is also not a favoured topic of research with the 20 presentations over the four conferences. The number is rather low in light of the fact that the teaching of ELT has now branched out into its various recognized genres, such as business English, English for the Sciences and English in the Workplace. However, in Malaysia, ESP does not precede or equal the importance of teaching English for general purposes and definitely has no place in the schools. To date, there has been little effort to introduce ESP at the

school level, with the exception of English for Science and Technology, mainly due to time and syllabus constraint. This factor may reflect the lack of research in ESP at MELTA conferences. ESP is more prevalent in institutions of higher education but the research done on ESP at this level is more likely to be presented at conferences focused on ESP.

Material Development, Culture and CALL have not received much attention from ELT researchers, judging by the number of presentations for each of these topics. For CALL, the internet has almost completely taken over in terms of being a resource centre and incorporating technology in the classroom. Thus, research on the internet is favoured much more than for CALL. Material Development is probably not favoured due to the syllabus provided by the Ministry of Education, which must be adhered to, as well as time constraints in producing supporting materials. The small numbers of presentations for research in Material Development and Culture in ELT nevertheless, can be positively viewed as attempts to tackle the problems of language development among the students via strategies other than the popular areas of Reading, Writing and New Technology. In recent years, there has been a spurt of research in producing reading materials that are related to the students' culture, a strategy which is believed to facilitate language acquisition.

Two other areas that hardly received any attention are Thinking and Motivation. Thinking has been discussed in many forms such as creative thinking and critical thinking. Teachers have been requested to create activities that allow students to "think out of the box" so that they would be able to face the challenges of the real world.

Perhaps, thinking and English are not seen as compatibles, the former is cognitive and the latter a skill. For motivation, researchers did not venture into this area, although we read endless complains from the general public regarding **students' lack of motivation** in the English subject or that the English teachers do not do enough to motivate the students to like learning English, which causes problems in language learning and acquisition. However, both thinking and motivation are often incorporated in teaching approach and methodology, and this may have caused research in the latter to be higher in number than in the former themes.

Specific areas of research within the common themes

This section highlights the details of the most commonly presented themes at the **M**ELTA conferences during the period of 2005-2009. They were Approach/Methodology, Reading, Writing, Internet/New Technology, and Literature. This is summarized in Tables 6a-e.

Table 6a. Specific areas of research within the theme of Approach/Methodology

Common Theme	Common Areas Researched
Approach/Methodology	1. Outcome-based approach 2. Process-collaborative approach 3. Using learning contracts 4. Communicative-approach methodology

	5. Using poetry
	6. Pictologics
	7. Using films/movies
	8. Context-based language teaching
	9. Using drama
	10. Task-based learning
	11. Problem-based learning
	12. Teaching through stories
	13. Teaching Grammar with Colours
	14. Tree Methodology
	15. Journal Meaning-Focused Interaction
	16. Genre/Process Approach
	17. Using Magazines
	18. Using Music
	19. Using Authentic Material
	20. Using Art
	21. Using Email
	22. post-colonial reading Approach

Table 6b. Specific areas of research within the theme of Reading

Common Theme	Common Reading-related researched areas
Reading	1. Testing and Reading 2. Books as a best friend 3. post-colonial reading Approach 4. anxiety concerns 5. group size 6. young learners 7. rural pupils 8. pre-reading 9. reading for pleasure 10. connection to writing 11. using film 12. extensive reading 13. use of visuals 14. ICT 15. Reading at the tertiary level 16. Creative readers 17. Concept mapping 18. Multiple intelligence

	19. How to motivate

Table 6c. Specific areas of research within the theme of Writing

Common Theme	Common Writing-related researched areas
Writing	1. blogs
	2. portfolios
	3. young learners
	4. multiple intelligence
	5. resume and ICT
	6. connection to reading
	7. LEP
	8. Mind mapping
	9. Process collaborative approach
	10. Experience
	11. Enjoyable writing
	12. Letters
	13. Effects of reading and speaking
	14. Debates
	15. Chat language

	16. Narrative writing
	17. Reluctant writers
	18. Tertiary level writing
	19. Apprehension
	20. L1 Influence
	21. Motivation
	22. Writing in a fun way

Table 6d. Specific areas of research within the theme of Internet/New Technology

Common Theme	Common Internet-related researched areas
Internet/New Technology	1. Perceptions
	2. Speed bumps
	3. My Access
	4. Multimedia
	5. Speaking Test
	6. Material Development
	7. Written Recall Protocol (Test)
	8. E-distance Education
	9. ICT in Curriculum

	10. E-forum
	11. Blogging
	12. Software Accelerated
	13. Literacy
	14. Electronic journal
	15. Interactive website

Table 6e. Specific areas of research within the theme of Literature

Common Theme	Common Literature-related researched areas
Literature	a. Reader response
	b. Literacy response
	c. Real world experience
	d. Interactive website
	e. Malay literature (translation)
	f. Young adults
	g. Literature as a developmental tool
	h. Popular literature
	i. Metaphors
	j. E-forum

From the details given for each of the common themes, one could argue that they incorporate many of the other themes that had received little attention in research such as culture, thinking and motivation. This is likely true, as the teaching and learning of language involves many factors and covers the various skills all at once in varying degrees. However, the current analysis have only covered the titles of the topics and therefore tended to report the themes in rather an isolated manner. A further analysis of the content of each presentation might have shown the interconnectedness of the themes.

Conclusion

The study was undertaken to examine the trends of research in the English language and ELT in Malaysia, using the topics of papers presented at the MELTA conference in selected years from 2005 to 2009 as the data of the analysis. The findings of the study show that themes related to Approach/Methodology were high in the list, i.e., in their number of occurrences during the conferences. This is followed by themes in Reading, Writing and Internet/New Technology. Although literature showed much lower numbers compared to these themes, it was consistently presented throughout the years.

In terms of perceptions, the high frequencies of occurrence of these themes indicate that in general English teachers and researchers in Malaysia placed high significance on these mentioned areas. Reading and Writing are considered the more important skills that students must have in order to be attain proficiency, and thus the results show that the

English teachers may be consistently finding ways to improve the teaching of Reading and Writing. The high numbers shown for the presentation of themes related to Reading and Writing might also indicate that the present scenario for the teaching of reading and writing to Malaysian ESL students is still inadequate, given of course that, foremost, Reading and Writing are seen as important. In terms of the Internet, I can safely say that many would agree that the future will be defined by New Technology. No one wants to be left behind, and Malaysia, like all developing countries, would also not want her citizens to be left behind and therefore must ensure that the population possesses literacy in the computer and internet. If this trend of perception continues, we would expect to see many more research presentations on themes related to the internet and new technology in various aspects of language teaching and learning.

Finally, on the issue of the other language skills that are often said to be important, that is, Listening, Speaking, and Grammar in the teaching and learning of English, specifically as a second language, the MELTA conferences provide evidence for the lack of research in these areas. This might be an indication of the general perception that they are not as important as the skills of Reading and Writing. It may be that Malaysian English language teachers find research in these areas difficult and too tedious to handle, but this point would be subject to future research. This and a host of other issues form the limitation of this study which may at times cause the conclusions to be too general or too narrow, all of which is admissibly the fault of the author alone.

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