

Conference Report

3rd International Language Conference (ILC) 2014 on language teaching, learning and research: Inspiring teachers, engaging learners

The 3rd International Language Conference (ILC 2014), a triennial event, was held at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) from 4th to 6th June, 2014. The conference was organized by the Centre for Languages and Pre-University Academic Development (CELPAD). Assistant Professor Datin Dr. Engku Haliza Engku Ibrahim, Dean of CELPAD, delivered the opening remarks, while Tan Sri Dato' Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim, President of IIUM, officiated the opening ceremony.

The main objective of the conference was to provide a platform for language educators and practitioners to share best practices and the latest developments in language teaching, learning and research in English, Arabic and Bahasa Melayu. The keynote speakers were Prof. Dr. Jonathan Newton, Victoria University, New Zealand; Prof. Dr. Abdul Aziz Ibrahim Al-Osaili, Al-imam Mohamad Ibn Saud University, Saudi Arabia; Prof. Datuk Dr. Awang Sariyan, Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka, Malaysia; and Prof. Dato' Dr. Ibrahim Ahmad Bajunid, INTI-UC Laureate International Universities, Malaysia.

Tan Sri Dato' Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim, President of the International Islamic University Malaysia, addressed the audience in the opening ceremony. The President congratulated CELPAD for organizing a language conference at a critical juncture of national development and reiterated that the future expectations of the generations to come and career requirements of the approaching century necessitated language experts to address the language needs of learners who would not merely observe and adapt to the rapidly-changing reality, but were capable of

charting new modes of thought and directions that would respond to circumstances which may be radically different from past experiences. He also advocated the teaching and learning of “Jawi” at the tertiary level and recommended IIUM to take the leading role in developing the syllabus.

The Dean of CELPAD, Datin Dr. Engku Haliza Engku Ibrahim, in her opening remarks encouraged language educators to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and learning approaches by constantly conducting research. She remarked that the ultimate aim of research in language learning and teaching was to enable language educators, practitioners and institutions to make sound decisions about language educational activities and experiences that would best serve language learners.

Prof. Newton, who delivered the English keynote address, deliberated on the issue of achieving fluency in language learning without sacrificing language accuracy. He explored different ways that language educators and practitioners could transform their classrooms into fluency-friendly learning environments. Prof. Dato. Dr. Awang Sariyan, in delivering his Bahasa Melayu keynote address, emphasised the importance of embracing Bahasa Melayu as a language for academic and workplace purposes in the new millennium. Likewise, Prof. Dr. Abdul Aziz, in his Arabic keynote address, forewarned the trap of language fossilisation in developing ill-defined fluency in Arabic language learning. Prof. Dato’ Dr. Ibrahim Bajunid underscored the importance of exploring language-teaching methods that emphasize learner engagement, which in turn would inspire teachers towards effective knowledge-based teaching. As an invited forum panellist, Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Bajunid called attention to the need to promote multilingualism in nation building as opposed to monolingualism. The issues espoused by the guest speakers were well received by the audience.

The ILC 2014 brought together paper presenters and conference participants from 28 countries. During the three-day conference, a total of 205 papers in English, Arabic and Bahasa Melayu were presented in 10 parallel sessions on a daily basis. Some of the language areas covered were language for academic and occupational purposes (EAP/EOP), language learning styles and strategies, language testing and measurement, curriculum design and programme evaluation,

E-learning, Islamisation of language learning and teaching, literature, and intercultural communication.

The ILC 2014 was officially closed by the Chairperson, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Isarji Hj. Sarudin. In the closing remark, he underscored the value of language as an indispensable social capital, and the efforts of teachers in language education in educating not merely for excellence in the academic sense, but also for the development of balanced integrated personalities to face the challenges of the 21st Century. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Isarji opined that aside from providing a forum for presenting new developments in language learning, teaching and research, the ILC 2014 offered a meeting place where researchers and practitioners, typically drawn into the limiting focus of specialization, could allow themselves to be opened up to other perspectives which would lead to different ties, support networks, and justifications and thus, ultimately, a deeper meaning for their limited endeavours.

The conference achieved its target in deliberating and debating the important role of empirical research in all areas of language teaching and learning. Similarly, the conference attendees showed heightened the interest in exploring different methods and approaches towards a common goal of inspiring teachers and engaging learners. The 4th International Language Conference will be held in 2017.

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