

UTILIZATION OF INTERNET AS AN ALTERNATIVE MEDIA TO LEARN ENGLISH INDEPENDENTLY OUTSIDE CLASSROOM

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Abstract.

Nowadays, Internet has brought essential influence to human life. People may consider it as one of their primary needs. Internet has been easily accessed because many public places provide WI-FI facility so everyone can stay connected with internet. In order to accommodate this necessity, State Polytechnic of Padang also provides free access of internet in the campus. Actually, this internet facility should give beneficial aspects to students especially in improving their ability and understanding in English. There are many websites or blogs that offer great opportunity for students to improve their competence in mastering English skills. However, students sometimes cannot use this opportunity maximally. There are two reasonable factors why students cannot gain optimal benefit of internet utilization. Firstly, they do not know certain links of websites that provide English learning materials which are useful for them. Secondly, they do not have sufficient knowledge to utilize the content from essential websites or blogs for improving their English competence. The article then focuses on introducing useful links available in internet based on category which are demanded by students such as listening, speaking, writing, reading, grammar and English tests. Furthermore, this article also explores required knowledge and skills that must be acquired by students to gain benefit in utilizing contents from websites or blog as media of English learning outside of their classroom. By gaining these knowledge and skills students will be able to develop their independent language learning.

Keywords: internet, English materials, independent language learning

Introduction

Utilization of Internet nowadays increases rapidly. Since we are living in the age of digital technology, Internet plays an important role in the lives of our lives. Children and youngsters engage in online activities both inside and outside the classroom (Sefton-Green, 2004). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become one breakthrough in educational process. It is being used to assist students to learn more effectively and help teachers to do administrative tasks more efficiently (Selwyn, 2003). Belawati (2003) describes there are about 2,500 educational institutions were internet users and 20% of them were higher educational institution. This great demand on the utilization of ICT occurs because it offers great advantageous aspects in the process of language learning. Firstly, the process of language learning becomes more attractive because it involves different forms of presented media such as texts, pictures, tables, video and multimedia. Secondly, it offers various topics and tasks which can be selected based on learners' need. Thirdly, the application of ICT has developed a new field of independent learning because it may offer efficient and high quality achievement in personal or collective learning (Islam, 2011).

However, the utilization of this new technology does not bring expected result. It faces some challenges such as students' inappropriate acceptance, cultural gap, lack of institutional support, low motivation of users, slow access of internet, affordability of computer and connectivity, computer literacy, expertise and others.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to optimizing utilization of the Internet in the process of independent English learning.

Brief Review of Related Theories

B.1 Definition of Essential Terms

The term internet that is used in this paper refers to the clear definition mentioned in a resolution of Federal Networking Council on October 24, 1995. "Internet" refers to the global information system that— is logically linked together by a global unique address space based on the Internet Protocol (IP) or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons;

is able to support communications using the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) suite or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons, and/or other IP-compatible protocols; and

provides, uses or makes accessible, either publicly or privately, high level services layered on the communications and related infrastructure described herein.

The term of Internet utilization which is used in this paper refers to utilization of modern type of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the process of English learning. Although there are many definitions of ICTs, this paper focuses on the definition proposed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): 'ICTs are basically information-handling tools- a varied set of goods, applications and services that are used to produce, store, process, and distribute and exchange information. They include the 'old' ICTs of radio, telephone and television, and the 'new' ICTs of computers, satellite and wireless technology and the internet.' The second essential term in this paper is independent learning. This term in some studies can also be interchangeably with some other terms such as autonomous learning, self directed learning and learning how to learn (Meyer et al, 2008). Philip Candy, in the now classic text 'Self-direction for lifelong learning' (1991), quotes Forster (1972) to define independent learning/ study: 1 'Independent study is a process, a method and a philosophy of education: in which a student acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for inquiry and critical evaluation; 2 it includes freedom of choice in determining those objectives, within the limits of a given project or program and with the aid of a faculty adviser; 3 it requires freedom of process to carry out the objectives; 4 it places increased educational responsibility on the student for the achieving of objectives and for the value of the goals'. In the independent learning, individual can choose what they want to learn, set their own goal, apply their preferred method and others. "Independent study is a process, a method and a philosophy of education whereby a learner acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for enquiry and critical evaluation" (Candy, 1991).

B.2 Benefits of using modern ICTs (Internet)

The development of ICTs has brought great improvement in the process of language learning. It may transform the learning process from in-class teaching to outside classroom learning (Liu, Shih and Tsai, 2011). Abdallah (2007) argues that the Internet is used in education because it facilitates learning, teaching and communication. It is possible to find a great deal of information online. Furthermore, students can study any topic in English independently online and they can also find many activities in internet to use based on their own preferences. ICT provides a variety of learning opportunities for students to learn language (Yunus, 2007). Harmer (2007) explains that students may be able to find practically any kind of information they need via internet. They can access many sources such as newspapers, encyclopedias, history, film, lyrics and broadcasting association and online streaming. Moreover, internet also offers attractive online activities such as interactive games with chat room which can be used by many players around the world simultaneously such as Point Blank, Call of Duty and others. Internet also provides social networks and chat room such as facebook, line, MySpace and others which can be use as potential media to do collective chat or discussion online. Kilime (2010) explains that the Internet can be used as '...the main aid in teaching a language and as a basic source of communication in distance education', not only as a complement to other teaching resources. The World Wide Web provides teachers and students with the possibility to listen to radio programs, television programs, the news and etc., thus listen to native speakers online. Moreover the internet gives students access to library and a great deal of reading materials, and also the opportunity to familiarize themselves with many different cultures and peoples (2009). Gitsaki and Taylor (2001) further stated that the advantages of the Internet learning can let students practice English and computer skills at the same time, expose them to rich input of English used in real life situation, enhances students autonomy by allowing students to direct their learning to areas that they are interested in, assist student to communicate with native speakers at any time, and stimulate their learning motivation through various online activities. Internet may increase students' motivation to use English outside classroom.

B.3 Problematic Dilemma in using Internet in English Learning

In some cases, the ideal purpose of internet application cannot be achieved successfully because of several factors. The first factor is due to the lack of students' skill in using the internet. Students seem to have limited knowledge and information about some useful links in internet that can be used as resources and media to learn English. Searching on Internet is a skills in itself which students need to acquire (Harmer, 2007). It may be caused by there is no information and explanation from the lecturers or teachers about those useful links. The second factor can be identified as the lack of students' understanding in utilizing the learning materials which are displayed on the link or website. Students seem confused to make optimal use of learning materials that they find in the internet. Thirdly, some students are easily distracted from their learning process in using certain links because there are many interesting and attractive links, software, programs and application in internet. Suryani (2005) explains that there are four dilemmatic factors of Internet utilization in Indonesia, they are cultural background of Indonesian society, lack support from

educational institutions, low motivation of students, and insufficient skill of academic staffs. Some researchers focus their study on discovering barriers or challenges in using internet in language learning, some of those factors can be seen as low confidence in using ICT (Hara, 1998), self efficacy and prior educational background (Mungania, 2003), administrative issue, limitation of social interactions, limited academic skills, limited technical skills, learner motivation, time and support for studies, high cost, limited access to the Internet, and some technical problems (Muilenburg, 2001). Internet also contains misleading and incorrect information as well as questionable contents. Dudeney (2010) observes that there is indeed information on the Internet that is not appropriate for students such as bullying, harmful adults, unsuitable contents, cheating and others. Those problems need to be solved in order to gain expected results of internet utilization in language learning.

B.4 The Useful strategies for using internet in English Learning

Some studies have been conducted to overcome those problems. Islam (2011) proposed three requirements for efficiency of independent English learning through the Internet. The first strategy is by promoting self monitoring ability. The learners should establish a good learning goal, formulate feasible study plan and optimize their self-evaluation for learning process, confidence and effects. Secondly, he mentions strengthening cooperation. There should be solid cooperation between students, teachers and supervisor to ensure that the students get necessary knowledge, help, guidance, supervision in the process of achieving their learning goal through internet utilization. The third aspect is optimizing of network configuration. In this case, he would like to invite awareness of site builders in constructing a sense of useful innovation which offers clear instructions of learning purpose, distinctive features, abundant resources, rational design and high interactive. Excellent English language learning websites should reflect the advanced teaching philosophy.

Students must also be equipped with certain literacy of internet utilization. For instance, to use a search engine effectively, learners need to know exactly the word or phrase on which to base their search. Mansfield 2002, in his study describes students' anxiety in using internet. They wanted to write a report on (Australian animals), had students search for 'animals', only to find that the search resulted in a long list of pornographic sites. He then suggested they use actual species names (for example, koala, kangaroo), only to find a list of (mostly) companies that had named themselves after Australian animals. He finally found that a search for 'Australian animals' produced a list of appropriate sites. It is therefore wise for teachers to preview the search results of any search engine and search words they plan to use to avoid accidentally displaying inappropriate material.

B.5 Useful Links

Before discussing the useful links or websites that may be used as the media for learning English, it is necessary to discuss types of sites for learning English through internet. As Jones (2000) in Moote (2002) examines the characteristics of some online learning materials for students and describes three models of online learning sites for students: distributive, tutorial and cooperative. In the distributive model, materials or lesson sheets are available for learners to study independently. Students respond to reading or listening passages by completing multiple-choice, gap-filling or other exercises. The software allows students to get immediate feedback on their answers. The tutorial model is often found on fee-for-service websites that offer two-way communication between the teacher and the learner using email, chat, telephone or video conferencing. The cooperative model allows students in the course to communicate with each other as well as with the teacher. This paper actually classifies the links or websites for supporting English learning process into five major groups, they can be identified as general information, English five skill supports, English Tests, vocabulary and dictionary

General information

www.youtube.com
www.wikipedia.com
www.google.com
www.yahoo.com

Five skills supports

www.npr.org (listening)
www.cnn.com/studentnews (listening)
www.esl-lab.com (listening)
www.learningenglish.voanews.com (listening)
www.efl.org (listening)

www.esl-bits.net (listening)
www.talkenglish.com/Listening/LessonListening.aspx?ALID=200 (listening)
www.audiobook.fm (speaking)
www.uioa.edu/~acatech/phonetics/english/frameset.html (speaking)
www.esifast.com/robot/ (speaking)
www.eslgold.com/speaking/ss_simple_shopping.html (speaking)
www.usatoday.com (reading)
www.cnn.com (reading)
www.thevisitorpanama.com (reading)
www.npr.org (reading)
www.esl-bits.net (reading)
www.nytimes.com (reading)
www.breakingnewsenglish.com (reading)
www.nelliemuller.com/Reading_Comprehension_Practice.html#Online_Distance_Learning (reading)
www.softschools.com/quizzes/language_arts/reading_comprehension/quiz1290.html (reading)
www.owl.english.purdue.edu/ (writing)
www.eslgold.com/grammar (grammar)
www.a4esl.org/q/1/grammar.html (grammar)
www.learnenglishfeelgood.com (grammar)
www.englishpage.com/modals/modalintro.html (grammar)
www.lessons.englishgrammar101.com/EnglishGrammar101/Module/Lesson1-6.aspx (grammar)

English Tests

English tests which are commonly used to measure Learners' standard English may be classified into IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC. Actually, each of these tests has its own characteristics and purposes.

<http://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/prepare-test/free-practice-tests> (IELTS)
http://www.ielts-exam.net/practice_tests/35/ (IELTS)
<http://www.testden.com/challenge/free-ielts.asp> (IELTS)
<http://www.testden.com/challenge/free-toeic.asp> (TOEIC)
<http://www.toeic-online-test.com/> (TOEIC)
<http://www.testden.com/challenge/free-toefl.asp> (TOEFL)
<http://www.toeflnetwork.com/toefl-practice-test> (TOEFL)
<http://www.4tests.com/toefl> (TOEFL)
http://www.testmagic.com/Knowledge_Base/TOEFL/Structure/ (TOEFL)

Dictionary

<http://www.sederet.com>
<https://translate.google.com/>
http://www.reverso.net/test_translation.aspx?lang=EN
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>
<http://www.wordreference.com>

Vocabulary

<http://www.freerice.com>
<http://www.corpus.byu.edu/coca>
<http://www.learningchocolate.com>
<http://www.vocabahead.com/StudyRoom/tabid/61/Default.aspx>

Conclusion and Suggestion

Internet – its contents and application – may become an alternative resources of English learning process. Unlike conventional learning process in the classroom, the Internet provides various type of authentic materials that includes theory, practice, evaluation and feedback suited with learners' preference and need. Basically, there are two major advantages that can be derived from utilization of Internet in language learning. The first advantage is the learners may have an opportunity to have a direct contact with native speakers. The second advantage is that they will gain various English materials such as general information, English five skill supports, English Tests, vocabulary and dictionary.

In order to achieve optimal purposes in the utilization of Internet, students must be familiar with certain strategies in using the internet. Besides, they must be able to know the appropriate links or website that can be used to improve their English independently. Collaboration among teachers/lecturers, supervisors,

students and web-designers may improve the quality of learning materials posted on the website which may lead to the improvement of students' English learning through internet utilization.

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