

Digital Teaching Tools in 21st Century EFL Classroom: Are Our Teachers Ready?

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Abstract

Over the past decade, along with the rapid growing information of communication technology, information processing has become an indispensable part of application in variety of fields. In relation to language teaching and learning, digital media has invaded the classroom. Unfortunately, during professional training the writer's gave, those English teachers who belonged to 'well prepared' for this sort of media was very few. These teachers used a laptop with certain learning materials which were prepared prior to teaching and an LCD projector and/or speakers on the desk. In general, their teaching and learning seemed to be more interesting due to technology touch. They created an image of being creative, and above all, innovative. This paper discusses how technology, in this case digital teaching media, supports teaching and learning; then, outlines the problems facing EFL teachers; and, finally, suggests possible solutions to the problems. Obviously, this paper is meant to promote professional teaching and contribute to future researches on similar topic.

Keywords: teaching media, digital era, teaching English.

In the traditional mode of teaching, including the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia, teachers used to be a source of everything in the classroom, while students were only the recipients. Teachers were the centre, while students were the silent, passive objects. This concept has changed today: students are the centre of teaching and learning process. Teachers with all their efforts and main roles as the classroom director, manager, counsellor, and a model in the use of the language they teach, facilitate learning inside the classroom and, possibly extended to, outside formal learning context.

Today, every teacher of English in Indonesia is demanded to teach English with

the 'student-cantered' concept. Every teacher is given responsibilities to achieve teaching and learning goals by involving students in the process of learning the language. The changing of the teaching and learning process concept is partly influenced by the development of human life, especially the development of technology in the modern life.

The development of technology has invaded the classroom. The presence of technology in the classroom is represented by the teaching media, from simple to the sophisticated forms as commonly available in language laboratories and computer-assisted language learning centres. The media are there to support the teaching and learning. This

paper aims to discuss how teaching media help teachers and students in teaching and learning process, outlines problems encountered by teachers, and, finally, suggests possible solutions to the problems.

Advantages of Using Digital Teaching Media

According to Kemp and Dayton (1985) the use of media in teaching is beneficial in the following ways

1. Uniformity of presenting learning materials. Teachers may vary in understanding a concept. With media, their various interpretations are reduced, and therefore, the messages are conveyed uniformly.

2. More interesting learning process. Media helps convey audible information (audio) and visible (visual), in such away that they are able to describe principles, concepts, process and procedures abstract and incomplete to more concrete and complete.

3. More interactive learning process. If accurately selected and well-prepared, media can help teachers and students communicate in two ways actively. Without media, teachers may tend to speak 'one way' to the students.

4. Reduced teaching and learning time allotment. Quite often, teachers need much time explaining the learning materials. When done correctly, the use of media can save time. This means students may spend more time doing exercises and varied learning tasks.

5. Improved student learning quality. The use of media does not only make learning process more efficient, but also help students absorb or master learning material more comprehensively.

6. Student's less dependence on teacher. It is another way to say media "talk". When planned carefully, media enable learning process to occur anywhere and any time the students

want, with little or no help from and even in the absence of teacher.

7. Optimized positive attitude towards learning process. The use of media that is interesting to students will in turn enhance student's favor/love of and appreciation for knowledge and skill given and its inquiry.

8. Teacher's wider roles. Through media, teachers do not have to repeat explanation again and again. They can save their time giving oral explanation. Consequently, they have time paying more attention to students, encouraging, giving them help, etc.

Media as teaching aids should be utilized by teachers in their teaching and learning process, but in fact this aspect is often neglected for some reasons, such as limited time for teaching preparation, difficulty finding suitable media, no funding, etc. These are all not necessary, since actually many sorts of media will do in accordance with certain conditions and needs, such as time, financial support, and material to be taught. A certain kind of media has certain characteristics and capacity in conveying messages and information (Kemp and Dayton, 1985). Teachers should know the characteristics and capacity of each type of media in order that they can select which one best suits the condition and need. Audio CDs, for example, are good to let students have adequate experience of verbal learning materials (sounds and pronunciation). Some audio CDs are available on the market. When the available audio materials are not suitable, teachers can prepare one by themselves with a simple way and relatively low cost. Audio media making for a classroom use just needs a recorder and a better speaker of English; that might be the teacher him/herself. The key word is creativity.

Talking about creativity in teaching and learning, the writer had most difficult moments trying to persuade his audiences that media would make their practice much better and

easier. In his professional experience of giving trainings to EFL teachers of Junior and Senior High Schools in some areas, the writer found that the vast majority of the teachers have not seemed to show interest in utilizing any kind of media. They preferred talking in most of the time, leaving an impression of monotonous teaching and learning process. In other words, today's English language classrooms are filled with activities referring to deductive teaching.

Creativity in the use of technology in the language classroom has resulted in teaching innovations. Digital (video/photo) camera, laptop, computer, and LCD projector are often seen available in the classrooms. A good teacher of English might download songs, games, texts, images, or other materials from the internet, integrate them to those media/tools above, and use them to support his/her teaching and learning. The internet is an unlimited source of downloadable materials. From You-Tube, for example, video files can be downloaded and use for speaking class. From inside a laptop, Power-Point perhaps remains the most popular among those few teachers skilled in dealing with the media.

The use of media in ESL/EFL language classrooms is "the wind of change" – as a form of teaching innovation. According to Hassel and Hassel (2012), digital media have potential to transform teaching process in three ways.

1. Enabling excellent teachers to reach more students. Great teachers will increasingly be able to teach more students in person as digital learning replaces portions of instruction in an individualized fashion and provides time-saving student data; reach students remotely via technology; and capture and share their performances and methods widely through video and smart software that individualizes learning. Even among excellent teachers, various people will thrive in different roles.

2. Attracting and retaining more of these excellent teachers. As excellent teachers reach more students, they will be able to earn more

out of regular per-pupil funds. The combination of higher pay and career opportunities made possible by digital learning will, in turn, help teaching attract and keep the best performers.

3. Boosting effectiveness and job options for average teachers. Average teachers will benefit as digital technology and the extended reach of their excellent peers take complex tasks off their to-do lists, enabling them to focus on the parts of teaching at which they can excel. Through technology, they can also obtain real-time data and advice about how to help each of their students succeed, saving time and improving performance. Digital learning makes it easier to personalize instruction, which a lot of average teachers find it difficult or impossible to achieve with whole classrooms of students with a wide array of needs. Some new roles will pay less, but many will also require hours far shorter than today's typical fifty-hour teacher workweek.

The development of digital teaching media needs English teachers to always adapt themselves to be technologically literate and work with media to support their teaching and learning process, of course if they are committed to professionalism.

EFL Teachers in Digital Era

Maxim Teachers as an important element in teaching and learning process cannot avoid the influence of digital era which has already created technologies. Digital age has opened up the new dimensions to the learning which are not visible in our existing traditional school system. Twenty first century learning is more complex than ever before as it includes various skills that must be acquired by the learner.

Besides creating a more complex teaching and learning process, digital era influences the teachers' role. Teachers are demanded to play their roles as facilitator, manager, and advisor by keeping up with

the development of technology in digital era. Based on the article untitled *Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age* (Essays, 2018) the main roles of teachers are building linkages between their students' individual interests and understandings and the common skills and knowledge society expects them to acquire. It is the task of teachers to tackle with the technology and to grow their learners to acquire "skills of the 21st century". On the other hand, many English teachers seem unaware of "conventional" teaching media, and let alone digital media. In the classroom, during peer-teaching training of the teacher professional certification program, in which the training participants had been provided feedback on teaching performance, did not seem to care about the comment given, highlighting the absence of teaching media. Though digital technological devices were already made available in the room, namely laptop and LCD projector, they remained relatively the same as in the second day peer-teaching.

Surprisingly, when asked if the presence of technologies in the classroom would be beneficial to students, almost all teachers' response fell into the favorable side of the scale (Suwartono, 2009). This means there is no consistency between the teachers' perception and their behavior. This could mean they only pretended; they were not honest in giving response to the survey. It could also mean they had inadequate computer skill (or not at all), and consequently, they were not confident.

In his career development, the writer has some experience in using technology in the classroom. Once, he was so keen on utilizing video to stimulate student learning interest in a listening class. It turned out that video was an extraordinary medium to help language learners listen and speak. Later, he conducted a classroom action research involving the use of internet materials to develop the students' scientific writing performance (Suwartono, 2008). Last year, he conducted another classroom action research on the use of video as a reflective tool in the English suprasegmental

features teaching and learning. The study has also led to some promising pedagogical implications for the teaching of pronunciation in specific and general English learning.

We cannot deny that students who live in digital era are more knowledgeable about technology than their teachers who just know about it recently. As pointed out in *Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age* (Essays, 2018), students are ahead of their teachers in using the technology and accessing information in various fields. They are less dependent on teachers and prescribed text books. They build upon their existing knowledge and derive their own meanings. It has provided them freedom and flexibility which was not available earlier. Learners have active, reflective role in this digital age. Today's children are "growing up digitally." Their view of the world is very different from that of adults, thanks to exceptional access to information, people, and ideas across highly interactive media. Today's children are the latest model of human being. Looking at the world of children is not looking backward at our own past – it is looking ahead. They are our evolutionary future.

Meanwhile, the technology that develops in digital era helps teachers do their job better. For instance, in the old time, teachers used to use blackboard and chalk to explain the material. Those teaching aids can be replaced by Power-Point, which is more effective and efficient for delivering the material. Even though there are positive influences of the technology advancement, problems may also arise. The biggest one, according to an article untitled *Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age* (Essays, 2018), is that a classroom filled with digitally literate students is being taught by linear-thinking, technologically obstructed teachers. Students have been exposed to these technologies or similar ones early during their formative years, while their teachers have just been exposed to it only recently. As a result, the students are sometimes more capable with the technology than the teachers.

Some schools today were equipped with digital media. However, it seems only few teachers use them in the classroom. The germane question is: are they rarely given the chance to learn how to use this technology, or do they not have interest in the technology? Answer to either questions means that the teachers are left behind in term of digital media, at least the ones applicable to classroom use. If it is true, then, these English teachers do not optimally benefit students.

Suggested Solutions

Here are alternative solutions to the problems faced by the EFL teachers in keeping pace with technological advancements in the classroom. The solutions are proposed considering the aspect of empowerment rather than the assistance from authorities, which means dependence and uncertainty.

Being Actively Involved in Teaching Professional Association

The local association of English teachers is strategic to improve the EFL teachers' teaching competency and quality. Within the organization, English teachers can create environment for their own professional development. They are not only sharing ideas, knowledge, skills, and experience among themselves, but also initiate preferred sources of up-dated information, eg. journals, and experts or trainers with their own funding.

From the observation done during the training, it shows that most teachers are unfamiliar with scientific journal. Few teachers have adequate insights into the methodology of teaching since they have got the chance to attend and participate in quite a lot of top-down or centralized trainings held by the government. Hence, it is adviseavble for the associations to take part and participate in such trainings.

The associations can actively participate in trainings held by the local government board or within university-based services.

For example, in regard to teacher professional development, in China, Yang (2008) mentions the merit of a digital training system developed by the project for the teaching of writing in English in an area. The result is that it opens a fruitful way to professional teaching, efficient learning, and innovative writing. So far, trainings on teaching media for English teachers have been very rarely held, at least in our local area and the vicinity. The association can then initiate close cooperation with teacher training and professional development institutions nearby.

Doing a Classroom Action Research

A study aimed to improve the professional skills of teachers through a change of mindset (Sukarni, et. al, 2009) concluded that the EFL teachers involved in the classroom action research program were encouraged to enhance their competency level, believe in their own capacity in the English language competence, and were willing to cooperate with issues such as the importance of IT facilities for the improvement of education, were eager to attend international seminars, publish the paper in seminar proceedings, and in an international journal. It means that EFL teachers are ready to improve their own practice, including the use of technology in the classroom by learning and working together with colleagues. Teachers who are more capable in digital teaching media can share knowledge and experience with their peers in collaborative action research projects.

Conclusion

Technological advancements in varying fields of life have entered the language classroom. EFL teachers should warmly welcome the technology progress and optimally make use of it as medium to support their teaching and learning, of course if they are committed to professionalism. Therefore, they should continually sharpen their creativity by exploiting the technology for teaching

innovations. Teaching Professional Association activities and collaborative classroom action research are strategic to empower EFL teachers in keeping pace with the development of today's digital technology applicable to the English language classroom. With the activities EFL teachers do not have to wait until they are too late.

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