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**Challenging University Students to Be Independent and Critical
Reader by Enhancing Their Reading Skill Through Some Reading
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**English Department
Faculty of Languages and Literature
State University of Makassar**

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COMPUTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

Rapid advancement in computer technology has strongly been influencing education in a larger extent. In the teaching of English as a second/foreign language, the use of multimedia computers has increasingly been popping up. This article highlights some issues of computer use in language education. The main points of discussion will concern about computer assisted language learning (CALL) and online learning programs via internet. The use of ICT in education needs high commitment from all related parties. In relation to the Internet use, it is no doubt that it has significant implications for both teaching and learning. The Internet and its use in EFL classes show immense potential. Therefore, teachers are strongly encouraged to make use of the Internet in their English classes.

Key Words: Computer, ELT, CALL

INTRODUCTION

Rapid advancement in computer technology has strongly been influencing education in a larger extent. The more sophisticated technology of computers has brought a new nuance and perspective in education sector. Apart from administrative purposes, multimedia computers have been used to equip teaching processes. Many claim that the multimedia devices of computers promise potential interactivities for learners and instructors. They do not only have the power to be able to reasonably deliver text, but also to deliver and record pictures, sound, graphics, photographs, animation, and moving video.

In the teaching of English as a second/foreign language, the use of multimedia computers has increasingly been popping up. Some modes of teaching through multimedia have introduced the use of interactive CD-ROMs and online programs. The so-called CALL (computer aided language learning) has become popular since the use of multimedia computer has been integrated with language teaching. In developed countries, the use of computer to aid the teaching of English as a second language has been widely used to support the learners' language acquisition. However, in Indonesia the computer takes minimal role as a teaching aid to support EFL learning.

This section highlights some issues of computer use in language education. The main points of discussion will concern about computer assisted language learning (CALL) and online learning programs via internet.

CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) Programs

CALL is a term associated with the computer use in language teaching. However, it should be distinguished between CALL and non-CALL programs. CALL programs are designed especially to teach language. On the other hand, programs not designed for language teaching purposes, are non-CALL programs. Word processing (e.g. Ms. Word) and presentation software (e.g. Ms. Power Point) are two common examples of non-CALL programs. To some extent, the non-CALL programs can also be manipulated and used to assist the teacher to deliver his/her instructions. If the teacher decides to use the non-CALL programs, s/he must be computer literate and able to author computer-based learning materials integrated into his/her course. These materials should enhance students' motivation and interest to learn. Otherwise, the learning becomes inefficient and ineffective.

We now focus our attention to CALL programs. Brown (1999) identifies three common types of CALL programs, text reconstruction, text manipulation, and drill and

practice. Text reconstruction is a program where all letters of a text are replaced with blanks and the learner reconstructs the text from contextual clues (for example *Storyboard*). Text manipulation is a program where learners must perform various types of manipulation such as reordering a jumble discourse or retyping a text which has had punctuation deleted (for example *Textplay*). Drill and practice is a program where the learners do intensive practice on a grammar, vocabulary or other point (for example *Choicemaster*). These programs are either authoring programs (e.g. *Storyboard*) where the teacher may enter his/her own exercise or dedicated programs where the context is fixed.

The current computer specification which is more sophisticated enables the computer itself to perform various multimedia tasks, either delivered with CD-ROM, authoring packages, or Internet (discussed in separate section). This multimedia capacity enables the computer to store pictures and to deliver and record sound and moving video. According to Brett (1999), multimedia can be defined as the computer-delivered combination of a large range of communication elements, text, sound, graphics, pictures, photographs, animation, and moving video. Ready-use CD-ROMs for language learning are produced in bulk and can be easily bought in the market. Some examples are listed below:

- Longman Interactive English Dictionary (Longman) ISBN 0 5 822 3694 0
- My First Incredible Amazing Dictionary (Dorling Kindersley) ISBN 0 751 31502 8
- Multimedia Flashcard (Heinemann) ISBN 0 435 29646 9
- English Works 1 (Longman) ISBN 0 582 23756 4
- Encyclopedia Britannica
- Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia
- Learn to Speak English
- Follow me to San Fransisco by BBC English
- Reading Made Easy
- Play and Learn by Dorling Kindersley
- I Love phonic by Dorling Kindersley
- StudyCom's English for Internet (<http://www.study.com/index.html>)
- English Practice (<http://www.englishpractice.com>)

The followings are examples of authoring packages:

- WIDA Software (email: 100014.2317@compuserve.com)
- Storyboard
- Hot Potatoes (<http://hotpot.uvic.ca>)

The followings are examples of Internet resources:

- Classroom Connect (<http://www.classroom.com>)
- Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections (<http://www.stolaf.edu/network/iecc>)
- The Online Writing Lab (<http://universitycollege.wsu.edu/units/writingprogram/index.html>)

Lee (2000) identifies some reasons for using CALL, namely (i) experiential learning, (ii) motivation, (iii) enhance student achievement, (iv) authentic materials for study, (v) greater interaction, (vi) individualization, (vii) independence from a single source of information, and (viii) global understanding.

Brown (1999) suggests some pedagogical implications of computer-assisted learning, namely: (1) There is value in instantaneous and specific feedback provided by some computer-assisted language learning programs; (2) learners can take as long as they like with the activities; (3) there is a much greater range of commercially produced language learning software than there has been in the past; (4) learners have an opportunity to develop familiarity with the basic computing skills in our classrooms that they will increasingly need outside them; and (5) computer use constitute a new literacy demand and we should be assisting students with it.

Internet as an Online EFL Learning Aid

a. Introduction to the Internet

The Internet is a connection of computer networks from most areas,

such as education, government, business, culture, and technology. It is a worldwide network of computers that enables individuals or groups to interact and communicate with other people or institutions through computers all over the world. According to Teeler and Gray (2000), Internet is a network of people and information, linked together by telephone lines which are connected to computers. In fact, more than 100,000 independent networks – public and private – are currently connected to form this vast global communications system. This is the road of the information superhighway. Right now, the internet connection is enabled by various means which is provided by operators.

Through the widespread network, each individual system brings something different to the whole (databases, library services, graphs, maps, electronic journals, etc), and the end result is a vast accumulation of information. It is a worldwide network of computers that interact on a standardized set of protocols which act independently of particular computer operating systems, allowing for a variety of access methods to the Internet (Singhal, 1997). Hence, it allows users to exchange information, views, correspondence, experiences, and entertainment with each other. The Personal & Finance Confidential Research Team state that the Internet is a place (often referred to as Cyberspace) where people can gather and speak openly about literally

anything; it is a 'global village' where people are free to be themselves without fearing that 'Big Brother' is watching; there are no borders between countries. Therefore, a student from UNM Makassar may communicate and share information, experiences, and language with another student in USA at the fingertip push of buttons.

In order to become a citizen of Cyberspace and enjoy the pleasures of the Internet, there are some prerequisites that we need to get on the Internet. The basic tools and devices we must have are a *Personal Computer* or laptop, *Modem* (usually the computer/laptop is already equipped with internal modem); *Internet connection from a Service Provider*. These tools and devices are connected in such a way to enable us to get on-line in the Internet.

b. Reasons of Employing the Internet in the EFL Setting

The use of modern technology in foreign language education began with the use of language laboratory comprising a series of student booths and central control panel for students. Due to the advancement of technology, computer has emerged to contribute in language learning which is called *CALL (Computer-Aided Language Learning)*. This has been shown to increase learner motivation since the interactive and multimedia capabilities of the computer make it

an attractive teaching/learning tool. CALL continues to develop with its interactive software, which provides encouraging and promising results.

Recently, due to the advancement of computer use, Internet is gradually being introduced, including in the second/foreign language classroom. In Indonesia, the use of the Internet is still very exclusive. Only favorite schools provide Internet facility with restricted use. Moreover, not many teachers are familiar with it. Many also do not realize the potential the Internet can have in second and foreign language classroom. As a result, the students are rarely/never exposed to it.

Regardless of whether one uses the Internet or not, one must be clear about the fact that we have entered a new information age and the Internet is here to stay. Because the use of the Internet is widespread in numerous fields and domains, without a doubt, it also carries great potential for educational use, specifically second and foreign language education (Singhal, 1997).

There are several reasons for using the Internet in English classes. Muehleisen (1997) claimed that she had two main motivations for starting to use the Internet in her ESL/EFL classes. First, she wanted students to be *exposed to a wider range of English* than they usually encounter in their daily lives; she hoped to find native speaking e-

mail penpals for them. Second, she wanted to encourage students to *use English for pleasure outside of class*. This is absolutely potential for students to experience since most information on the Internet is in English. In other words, the Internet places English in an international context. Hence, they will realize that English skills need to be acquired.

Since motivation is always a key issue in the field of education, Fox (1998) propounds that the use of the Internet in language education seems to fill, at least with many students, the criterion of promoting strong intrinsic motivation. It appears to motivate students to develop their interests in the subjects they are learning that they will pursue on their own, rather than because of outside pressures such as homework, tests and the like. In relation to this, Muehleisen (1997) outlines clearly that students are interested in joining the Internet revolution for three reasons. On a very basic level, students see the Internet as trendy and want to be a part of it, others are also drawn by the practical aspects of job skills acquisition and on learning skills that will be useful in life.

From a teacher's standpoint, involving students in Internet usage promotes a variety of activities and learning outcomes which are desirable. The Internet provides quite various interactive tasks for teachers to assign, e.g. reading, writing, vocabulary, structure, and

language games. However, teachers' creativity in designing and planning the tasks is badly needed. Here, the teachers should set up the goals, design the modes of interaction, determine the target materials, and show the practical way to browse the materials on the Internet.

Another strong reason to employ the Internet in EFL classes is the material perspective. Every Internet user knows that the Internet provides a huge amount of information, either in the form of text, graph, picture, or sound. These, of course, contain authentic teaching materials for teachers to assign. Teachers may find articles, lesson plan, language games, on-line newspaper, and others that are subject to modify to suit their classes.

c. Some Facets of Internet Use in the EFL Classroom Interaction

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in recent years has seen many changes along with the technology development. Since the Internet has been gaining in popularity it is natural for teachers to incorporate the technology into their instructional paradigm. However, Singhal (1997) states that although the Internet has been available to most people, only recently have educators been realizing the potential the Internet

can have in second and foreign language classrooms. In Indonesia as a developing country, the Internet is gaining immense popularity in business sectors. However, on the standpoint of many teachers, it is still viewed as a device to obtain up-to-date news and novel information. As a result, students lose opportunity to get exciting learning experiences.

Before the teacher assigns students to perform web-based tasks on the Internet, there are some basic pedagogical requirements that should be considered in order to make effective use of the Internet, namely teacher goals, student needs, the integration with the lesson, necessary support (for example: detailed handouts, practical manual to get into the Internet, assistance on the Internet use), and student involvement in decision). These are intended to facilitate the learning interaction. As an illustration, we can look at the following display of the student needs and the teacher goals in a one-year composition course utilizing the Internet:

Student's Needs:

- need for writing practice,
- need for writing with a real purpose in mind,
- need for authentic audience,
- need for feedback,
- need for motivation,
- need for new challenge,
- need for peer evaluation,
- need for something new,
- need for new skills,
- need for skills for future employment,
- need for creativity, and
- need for authenticity in writing;
(Trokeloshvili and Jost, 1997)

In the following are some facets of Internet use in English language learning interaction that can help teachers implement computer network-based activities into their second/foreign language classroom.

E-mail

Email is one of the Internet facilities that enables users to send and receive e-mail. There can be little doubt today that e-mail forms an integral part of our daily communication via the Internet which by the end of year 1998 already had over 100 million users and the growth reached up to 250 million users by the end of the year 2000. Fresh data posted online by the UN's telecommunications agency showed that the estimated number of Internet users had reached 2.08 billion by the end of 2010, compared to 1.86 billion a year earlier. Royal Pingdom

Teacher's Goals:

- improved writing in all areas,
- higher awareness/consciousness,
- writing with a purpose,
- general understanding of the technology,
- active communication,
- student enthusiasm,
- understanding of the internet,
- students working cooperatively,
- general understanding of web research,
- general computer/typing skills etc.,
- self-expression in student work.

reported that by the year of 2010 there were **107 trillion** emails sent on the Internet, **294 billion** – average number of email messages per day, **1.88 billion** email users worldwide, **2.9 billion** email accounts worldwide. The technologies spawned by the Internet have had far-reaching effects on the way in which we think, conduct business and teach. The British Council report on the Internet and English Language Teaching (1996) reports that schools worldwide have used e-mail for international communication activities since the late eighties (Nagel, 1999).

In pedagogical context, email can be utilized to promote exciting and real learning interactions. The modes of interactions that email can provide are (classroom and/or outside) teacher-students interaction, interactions between classmates, interaction with other students from different school, and

interaction with other people from different places or countries. The communication atmosphere in these various interactions is lively and real, so that the students feel that they really use the target language in real situation. They start to realize that the language they are learning is really important in their life; hence it increases their motivation to learn the target language and enhance their language skills. Reading and writing are two language skills that are potential to develop through email project, since reading and writing email in English is more interactive and challenging.

Jack Pillemer (in Nagel, 1999) in his article e-mail as a teaching tool makes the following observations with regard to e-mail as a teaching tool: (1) E-mail definitely excites, motivates and encourages writing; (2) The technical organization should not fall on the teacher's shoulders alone; and (3) The nature of the project must be clear and a personal element in the communication is essential if it is going to endure

There are some ways to use e-mail in the EFL classroom. Teachers can make a *class e-mail directory* and encourage students to practice by sending English e-mail to each other. Thus, it promotes mutual classmate interaction and teacher students interaction. The teacher may assign the student to send and

reply email with a certain purpose that has been decided before. The students in sending and replying their email may send cc to the teacher for the purpose of either correction, materials for classroom discussion or evaluation.

The other way the teacher can do is to find *keypals* (e-mail penpals) for his/her students, or help them find their own. Thus, it encourages interaction between the class and the students from other schools or countries. Here, the teacher can link the class with other class from different school via email. The teacher may make a deal with the different school teacher. If the link is of foreign email exchange, not only the students improve their language skills, but also get intercultural connection. For this purpose, some institutions, such as St. Olaf's University, offer teacher assistance in e-mail activities through their IECC (Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections) mailing lists as a free service to help teachers and classes link with partners in other countries and cultures for e-mail classroom penpal and project exchanges. Since its creation in 1992, IECC has distributed over 19,000 requests for e-mail partnerships. At last count, there were more than 7300 teachers in approximately 73 countries participating in at least one of the IECC lists.

Of course the teacher may bring the students to get connected with various *mailing lists*. He/she may ask the students just to browse the web listing mailing lists and let them choose one(s) according to their interest. By joining in the one based-interest forum, students will find a great place to share ideas with full of fun, since they have the chance to respond to the email forwarded to them and, on the other hand, give questions to the other internet users of the same mailing list. In return, they will likely receive responses. Thus, students will enhance their reading comprehension and writing ability.

Email can also be used for *task supply* by a teacher and *task submission* by students. A teacher may supply tasks to students via their email address; and the students can submit their task through their email attachment. The teacher, then, may give correction and suggestions on the students' task by replying each of the students' emails. By this practice, the students can find and keep their task confidential.

Many email projects have been carried out successfully. Kroonenberg (1995), for example, employed e-mail in her ESL classes at Hong Kong International School. She relates her initial experiences of working with two classes of ESL multinational students in grades 9-12, and a homogeneous group of summer school students involving Cantonese-speaking 14 and 15 year

olds. Mello (1997) found out that a pen pal project is beneficial to the students because they can practice reading and writing, and use English not to communicate with the teacher in contrived environment, but as an authentic medium for expressing their ideas, thoughts and beliefs to a real audience. Such kinds of interactions that result from the above situations can lead to cooperative projects and increased communication between students from all over the world, in turn leading to the development of social skills.

Web Browsing

The Internet can also be used to retrieve and access information. Through the World Wide Web, an Internet user may hunt for numerous kinds of information and data. It is remarkably a virtual library at one's fingertips; it is a readily available world of information and valuable resource for both language teachers and learners.

In relation to this, Singhal (1997) states that since so much of the material on the Internet is in English, even non-directed activity such as "surfing" the World Wide Web can involve a great deal of reading in English, and it can be a pleasurable, yet effective, way of introducing students to the basic functions of the browser such as the Forward and Back buttons, the Jump function and bookmarks. He then claims that the Internet

facilitates the use of the specific language in an authentic setting. The Internet can also be used to acquire information from language resources for a variety of purposes. For example, students can access current information from countries around the world. They can obtain geographical, historical, social/cultural, economic, and political information from the countries in which the target language is spoken. Students can read online web site of daily newspapers and same-day news reports.

The Internet also serves as a medium for experiencing and presenting creative works. The teacher can assign students to do creative web-based tasks. The teacher, first of all, has to set the objectives and clarify the procedure of accomplishing the job. Of course, the teacher should make sure that the students have the basic skill of operating a computer. If not, he/she might find a problem with the flow of the class activity. Some programs, utilizing the Internet that the teacher can assign to students potentially promise successful EFL learning outcomes, as in the following:

- a. A very easy way for a teacher to assign students a web-based task is to instruct them to *search for specific information*. This activity may promote higher order thinking skills since students need to review the result of their browsing that requires scanning, discarding, and evaluative judgment. This, of course, encourages students to practice reading skills and strategies.
- b. The teacher may also assign students to *practice certain areas of EFL learning*. The activities may include online-proficiency test (such as GMAT, and TOEFL preparation test practice), reading comprehension, grammar exercises, vocabulary exercises, listening comprehension test, word-puzzle, etc. The Internet provides such activities. Thus, the teacher may recommend specific sites on the Web. Students will get fun doing them since they are more interactive. Soon after submitting the complete test or exercise, the students will get their score, either through a direct reply or through a specified email address.
- c. Another fascinating web-based activity a teacher can assign is *WWW Treasure Hunt contest*. The teacher provides questions. To help students browse the page instantly, he/she may furnish the Web-page address. The students, then, compete to find the answers. This activity encourages students to practice their search and English skills. The following are three samples of the questions the teacher can use in a Treasure Hunt.
 - What courses in undergraduate program does the University of Sydney offer? List at least five

- of them Can you find its logo?
The answer can be found at:
<http://sydney.edu.au/>
- What is the official mascot of FIFA World Cup 2010? Can you find a picture of it? The answer can be found by typing key words in the web search bar of in one of the search engines.
 - Write down the political career of former President Bill Clinton in a paragraph. The information about that can be found at:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Clinton
- d. The teacher can also *set up a web page* for his/her class. The teacher and their students use it as an "electronic bulletin board". The teacher can post schedules, announcements and copies of information he/she hands out in class. If, for example, the students miss a class or lose a handout, they can browse the page; even they can find the assignment supplied to them. This, of course, gets the students used to the use of the Internet for information.
- e. If the students are still new to the Internet, the teacher should put together a list of *starting links*. This is intended that they connect directly to interesting sites without having to search first. Thus, they don't need to choose from a long list of options, which can make them frustrated. The suggested links that reflect EFL students' interests are among other things:
- The Internet TESL Journal:
<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/>
 - English Class Link:
<http://www.waseda.ac.jp/faculty/96050/englinks.html>
 - Purely fun sites:
<http://www.nando.net/toys/cyrano/version2/compose-cyrano.html/>
 - Newspapers:
 - The Japan Times:
<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/>;
 - The Washington Post:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/>;
 - The Guardian:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>
 - Sites for English study:
 - Dave's ESL Café ():
<http://www.eslcafe.com/>;
 - Self-Study Quizzes for English Students:
<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/quizzes/>
 - Basic search engines:
 - Excite:
<http://www.excite.com/>
 - Yahoo:
<http://www.yahoo.com/>
 - Hotbot: www.hotbot.com/
 - Lycos:
<http://www.lycos.com/>
 - Web Crawler:
www.webcrawler.com/
- Some practical facets of the Internet use in foreign language illustrated above ensure encouragement and motivation for students to use English outside the classroom and to make English a part of their daily lives.

CONCLUSION

The use of ICT in education needs high commitment from all related parties. In the level of management, there should be a thorough plan of all aspects of ICT use, such as hardware, software, human resource, maintenance, and management. Since the use of ICT, especially computers, has become a trend and need, the management of educational institutions should allocate enough budget in order to maximize and facilitate the learning activities.

In relation to the Internet use, it is no doubt that it has significant implications for both teaching and learning. The Internet and its use in EFL classes show immense potential. Therefore, teachers are strongly encouraged to make use of the Internet in their English classes. This implies that the EFL teachers and learners must become familiar with using the Internet and its various functions such as e-mail and web browsing. They must learn how to utilize email for learning purposes and use specific search tools in order to access information, search for lesson plans, or material and ideas to supplement their lessons.

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