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Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Applications in English Language Teaching (ELT): Prospects and Challenges

Nurdin Noni
Universitas Negeri Makassar

Abstract

The onset of information and communication technology (ICT) has influenced education sector, especially English language teaching and learning. Many researches have proved that the use of information and communication technology (ICT) have positively impacted on language teaching and learning in many aspects, such as motivation, interest, attitude, confidence, and competence. The emergence of various and easy-use ICT facilities and applications promises and brings about potentiality on the innovation of teaching and learning of English as a second/foreign language. Therefore, the integration of ICT in language learning has become indispensable in today's teaching learning environment. This paper highlights some prospects of ICT applications in improving the quality of EFL teaching and learning. Some of the challenges facing the use of ICT in language learning, such as computer and internet facilities, teachers' skills and commitment, and government support, are also discussed.

Keywords: English language teaching (ELT), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Internet.

Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign language has immensely changed from period to period. Noni (2004) asserts that foreign/second language teaching approach has undergone changes from time to time due to the dissatisfaction upon and reaction to the former ones. These changes have also brought different perspectives and strategies in EFL teaching. The views on foreign language teaching have shifted to communicative approach, which gives emphasis on language use rather than language form, fluency rather than accuracy, and student centered rather than teacher centered. The advancement of technology has been claimed to be one of the causes of the changes. In terms of the computer use, it is broadly known that the teaching of English has been incorporated with the development of the technology. CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) is a term which indicates the use of computer to facilitate the language teaching and learning. Another term is INTALL (Internet Assisted Language Learning) to show how the integration of internet use and the language teaching. This article will highlight the prospects and challenges of ICT use in English language teaching.

The Development of EFL Teaching

The way of how to teach English as a foreign language is the main concern in any period of civilization and social changes. The teaching of English as a foreign language has tremendously changed over the years, which shifted from very teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered ones. The changes were due to the changes on demand of learners who were colored by the development of human civilization

and social interactions. The changes have been designated by the various language teaching methods which have come and gone in their period, namely grammar-translation method, direct method, structural method, reading method, audiolingual method, situational method, and communicative approach. These methods have been affected by the development of technology. In this sub-section, I will briefly discuss the process and principles of second/foreign language learning and acquisition in relation to the roles of ICT.

The process meant above is in line with the product view proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2006). In the product view, *intake* is a subset of input *before* the input is processed by learners. In other words, *intake* is unprocessed language input. This view can be illustrated in the following diagram.



Input, output: the product view

According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), “*Input* may be operationally defined as oral and/or written corpus of the target language (TL) to which L2 learners are exposed through various sources, and recognized by them as language input. This definition posits two conditions: availability and accessibility”. It is obvious that the various sources and target language exposure can be well provided with the help of ICT facilities, such as internet, e-book, you tube, CD-Rom, etc. In terms of availability and accessibility, ICT with various facilities, as discussed in the next sub-section, can satisfy both the teachers/lecturers and learners of target the language, especially English. In the process stage, The various ICT facilities enable learners to interact and practice the target language they are learning. Since learners can easily access the English language learning materials, it is potential that the learners have enough intensity and quality to acquire the language input, and will in turn get the expected output.

Studies on ICT Use in English Language Teaching

The ICT tools have been commonly used to facilitate teaching and learning process. In the teaching of English as a foreign language, many researches have been conducted which show favorable trends to support improving the learners’ achievement of target language skills and increasing their affective domains toward the use of ICT in English language teaching (Graus, 1999; Stepp-Greany, 2000; Noni, 2004; Choi and Nesi, 1999; Dang, Pham, Ngo, and Ngo, 2012; Nair et al, 2012). These indicate that the use of ICT has impacted on the improvement of English language teaching. Viatonu and Kayode (2010) concluded in their study that “the use of information and communication technology (ICT) cannot be underestimated in language teaching and learning process because emerging technologies make it pertinent and practical to approach learning in ways that have been advocated by scientists, theorists and educational psychologists. It is imperative that teachers and learners keep abreast of the modern trend at improving teaching and learning of English language through the use of Information and Communication

Technology. Suffice it to say that information and communication technology has revolutionized society globally, including how language instruction is taught and delivered. They further recommended that in order to facilitate the integration of ICT into language learning, the following should be put in place: (i) Constant/regular supply of electricity, (ii) Provision of computers in schools for learners and laptops for teachers of English language, (iii) Recruitment of and adequate remuneration of competent instructors, (iv) Regular computer training and re-training for English language teachers, and (v) Provision of internet facilities in schools". However, apart of the potentiality of ICT has in language teaching reported above, there are some constraints in applying ICT in English language teaching as concluded by Salehi and Salehi (2012). They mentioned that insufficient technical supports at schools and little access to Internet and ICT prevent teachers touse ICT in the classroom. Shortage of class time and time needed to learn using ICT were reported as twoother discouraging factors for teachers to integrate ICT into the curriculum.

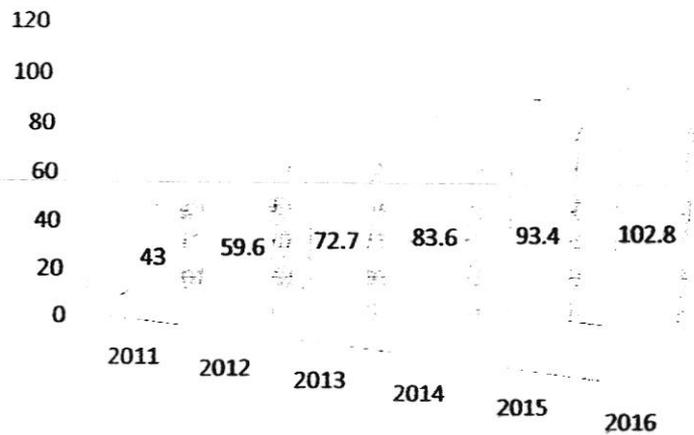
Prospects

Information and communication technology (ICT) has brought great effect on all areas of teaching and learning. In the field of language teaching, ICT has generated immense impact on the development of English language teaching methodology and the availability of massive learning resources. According to Viatonu and Kayode (2012), the prospects of ICT in language learning are to expand access to language programs, improve the quality of teaching and learning, provide access to up-to-date materials and offer teachers and learners an avalanche of materials in different modes. They also further quote the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa who stated that: (i) English lessons that incorporate multimedia applications can exert powerful motivation and provide bored students with exciting new ways to learn; (ii) the use of ICTs enhances English language competence as well as the quality of learners' experience; (iii) the effective use of ICTs removes the time and space limitations found in traditional teaching, as classroom dialogue can now extend beyond the time and space constraints; (iv) it allows students to learn more autonomously and thereby raises self-esteem and confidence; and (v) It enhances learners' interaction, verbalization and involvement in group collaborative learning. The prospects mentioned above are made possible due to numerous reasons in terms of trends in ICT and advancement in ICT facilities, especially internet. The following are some of the reasons described briefly.

- The Increasing Number of Internet users in Asia and Indonesia as the Potential to Support English Learning

The number of internet users have been increasing tremendously. In Asia, there have been 1,076,681,059 internet users or 44.8% of the total users in the world as of June 2012 (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2012). Indonesia was ranked fourth after China, India, and Japan, as 55 million Indonesian people accessed the internet. Statista (the Statistics Portal) released statistic (as indicated in the figure below) which showed the number of internet users in Indonesia in 2011 and 2012 with projections from 2013 to 2016. In 2012, 59.6 million people were accessing the internet in Indonesia. This figure is projected to grow to 102.8 million in 2016. Another survey showed that up to 80 percent of

Internet users in Indonesia are people aged between 15 and 30-years old (The Jakarta Post, October 28, 2011).



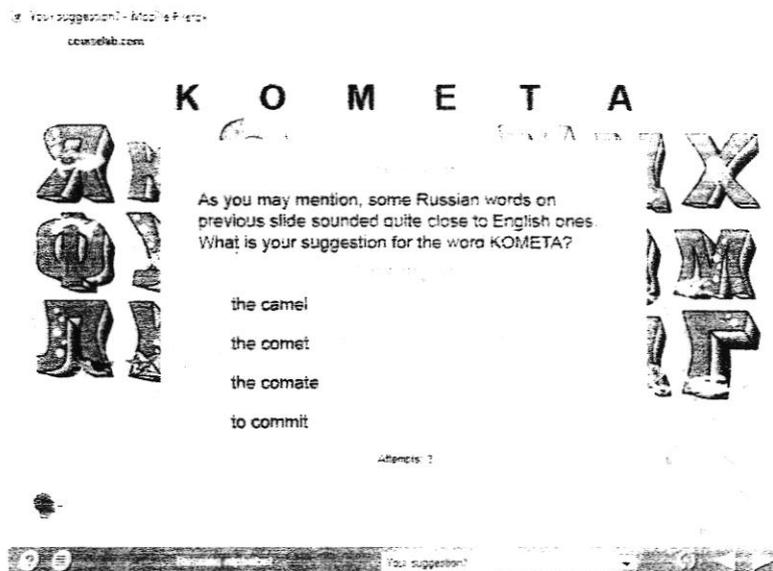
Number of internet users in Indonesia from 2011 to 2016 (in millions)

In the context of education, the data indicate that many if not most of the internet users are secondary school and university students. In other words, they already have internet literacy such as web browsing, emailing, facebooking, and searching you tube. This implies that there is a potential and prospect for internet use in learning and teaching activities. Therefore, the teachers/lecturers should take advantage of such circumstances. In the context of English as a foreign/second language teaching, it is apparent that the internet offers numerous opportunities to enhance skill and provide more input in the English language as the target language that the students are learning. What's more, English is mostly used in the internet. According to *Wikipedia*, most web pages on the Internet are in English. The data as of 12 March 2014 showed that 55.7% of the most visited websites used English as their content language. This also becomes a valuable opportunity for teachers to provide students English language exposures.

In terms of the most frequent sites visited, the data released by Alexa Rank Analysis showed that the top 10 most visited websites are successively ranked as follows: Google, Facebook, You Tube, Yahoo, Blogger, Baidu, Wikipedia, Windows Live, Twitter, and QQ. However, in the Jakarta Post (July 24 2012), the top ten sites visited by Indonesia's internet users is different, in which Facebook was ranked first (70%), followed successively by Google (62%), Yahoo (37%), You Tube (30%), Twitter 16%, 4shared (15%), Detik (7%), Wikipedia (7%), Google+ (5%), and Kaskus (5%). The trends above should be taken for granted by teachers/lecturers in planning, delivering an evaluating their lesson. Saykili (2010), for example, claimed that Facebook has the pedagogical, social and administrative potentials to support English language teaching. He also found out that if planned appropriately as part of an educational project, the same technologies and features of facebook would be able to facilitate and produce effectual and meaningful learning of English within an online community of English language learners. The other sites

The Multimedia Learning Object Authoring Tool enables content experts to easily combine video, audio, images and texts into one synchronized learning object. All assets are configured to be played back in a pre-configured order. Users do not need to perform any programming tasks, but rather going through a graphical user interface to generate the learning object. (www.learningtools.arts.ubc.ca/mloat.htm)

CourseLab is a powerful, yet easy-to-use, e-Learning authoring tool that offers a programming-free WYSIWYG environment for creating high-quality interactive e-Learning content that can be published on the Internet, Learning Management Systems (LMS), CD-ROMs and other devices. CourseLab is available as a commercial product (version 2.7) and as freeware (version 2.4). (<http://www.courselab.com>). The following is one of the samples of CourseLab output, namely audio-free version quiz feedback.



Course Management System (CMS)

CMS is a web-based application in the form of learning portal. With the internet connection, this portal can be accessed anywhere by both teachers/lecturers and students. CMS is mainly used organize learning content, material development, curriculum management, material presentation, assignment, evaluation, and grades. CMS usually provide facilities for teachers/lecturers to upload learning materials and tasks, and for students to download learning materials and submit their assignment. There are, of course some other facilities which are worthwhile to complement face-to-face teaching. One of the CMSs which is commonly used in higher education level is MOODLE. It is an open source which enable users to download and install with free of charge. In my experinces using this type of CMS, I found it very effective to carry out my hybrid teaching of ICT assisted and face-to-face teaching delivery. I could also enrich my teaching materials for students to learn and keep the records of all students assignments. I also found it very interesting and interactive for students to have a discussion forum for certain assigned topics.

The students commented not only on the given case but also their friend's respond. In terms of English language teaching, the teacher can provide any kinds of resources or learning materials related to the four language skills and language elements in any types of delivery modes, such as text, voice, video, picture, animation, you tube, and presentation file.

We also have Edmodo of online which is a free and private social platform for classrooms. Platform applications include a messaging service, a class calendar, a place to store and share content and educational applications, assignment and grading capabilities, mobile access, class discussions and notifications and many other features for collaboration. (www.edmodo.com). This is much simpler compared to Moodle. The advantage of Edmodo is that we do not need to install it in the server since it is internet-based CMS. So, what the users need to do is just to sign up either as a teacher or a student if they are new users. Through this Edmodo, millions of teachers and students are connected in online classrooms, collaborate on assignments, discover new resources, and some other forms of activities.

Electronic Books

An e-book is the electronic version of a book that can be read by using a personal computer, laptop, PDA, smartphone, tablet, or other devices by using a e-book reader application or mostly as PDF files. As in the printed books, e-books cover full contents which may include text, tables, diagrams, illustrations, pictures, etc. According to Sasson (Success Consciousness), there are some advantages of e-book compared to traditional printed one, they are:

- (i) Ebooks are delivered almost instantaneously. We can purchase, download and start reading them within minutes. We don't have to go to a bookstore to buy them or order them from publisher and wait for days or even weeks;
- (ii) Many ebooks are sold nowadays with bonuses, which we usually do not get with a printed book. This adds value to the purchase.
- (iii) Ebooks take up less space. We do not need large space or bookshelf to store them. We can store hundreds and thousands of ebooks in our computer, CD-Rom, or other devices.
- (iv) Ebooks are portable. We can carry a whole library of hundreds of books in CD, laptop, notebook or any other devices, without worrying about their weight.
- (v) Ebooks can be interactive and contain audio, video and animations, which can enhance the message that the author is trying to convey.
- (vi) Ebooks are printable, so that if we want to read an ebook in the traditional way, we can print it out.

Of course, there are some other advantages of e-book. In the field of English language teaching, e-books are already available. We can find references, encyclopedia, textbook, and other kinds of learning materials. These potentials make ease of teachers and learners to enrich themselves with more resources in order to grasp more knowledge and skills in English language.

Government Regulation to Support ICT Use in Learning

The government of Indonesia has the wish to implement e-education which is indicated by some regulation products, such as Strategic Plan (Renstra)

2010-2014, Decree of Ministry of National Education Number 38 year 2008 on the Management of Information and Communication Technology in the Ministry of National Education, and some other related ministerial regulations. In the Strategic Plan, it is stated that the information system and technology should be able to support providing educational services, including e-learning, e-knowledge, and e-learning resources. In the Decree of Ministry of National Education number 13 year 2007, it is stated that one of the school principal competencies is the ability to use the information technology for the improvement of learning and school management. In the Decree of Ministry of National Education number 16 year 2007, it is stated that one of the teacher competencies is to be able to use information and communication technology in learning process. This implies that the use of information technology to enhance learning and teaching process, including English language teaching has already become the concern of the government in Indonesia. It is an evidence that the government has proved the implication of the regulations in the forms of, for example, equipping schools with IT facilities such as computers and their peripherals, internet connection, and school application program (Program Aplikasi Sekolah/PAS), and providing ICT training for teachers.

Challenges

Apart from the prospects that ICT has in foreign language teaching, there are some challenges that teachers/lecturers should anticipate in order to optimally integrate the ICT into their teaching programs. The challenges are as follows:

- The internet contains big amount of junk and obscene sites. These kinds of sites should be controlled by teachers in order that the students do not access them. They could also block them so that the students cannot open them.
- Teachers are not yet competent and skillful enough to use ICT tools. In this circumstances, the teachers must upgrade or familiarize themselves with ICT and its application in the classroom settings. They have to make sure that they know how to run them. The other challenges from the teachers' perspective are their low commitment and desirability to want to learn, especially those who have low ICT literacy. There are also teachers/lecturers who have good ICT literacy, but do not have commitment to use it or do not care about it.
- Electricity, internet connection facilities and other factors could be unreliable or expensive. The teachers should anticipate these factors since they are determinant in the success of ICT integration. In many areas in Indonesia, electricity is not yet stable; internet connection is difficult due to low bandwidth; and computer facilities do not sometimes work properly due to low memory or out of date.
- The maintenance of the existing ICT tools is very poor. Ideally, there should be a technician assigned for the ICT regular maintenance. If not, there should be someone (teacher or administration staff) with a basic skill of ICT maintenance assigned for the task.
- The number of the ICT facilities is not in good ratio to the number of users. If this is the case, there should be a plan from the institutional leaders to put more budget on the ICT tool purchase. Or, the scheduling should be well managed in order that the users will get their turn.

Conclusion

The use of ICT tools has been proved to support the teaching of English as a foreign language. Studies have shown that ICT tools have brought favorable impact on the students' English learning and affective domains, such as attitude, interest, and motivation. Experts also assert theories on the use of ICT in foreign language teaching. They acknowledge that ICT tools and facilities has brought new ideas and prospects to teachers and learners. These facilities could present dynamic, interactive, enjoyable, and meaningful activities that will in turn promote better target language learning and acquisition. These prospects and potentials should be taken for granted by teachers/lecturers in conducting their English classes. They should ensure that they are able to integrate ICT in their lesson plan, delivery of teaching, evaluation, and follow-up. Otherwise, they will miss the great chances for their students to learn and practice their target language. In other words, there is no reason for teachers to avoid using ICT to support their English teaching. However, it should also be noted that there are some challenges that should be anticipated.

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