

DOES TECHNOLOGY ALWAYS PROMOTE LEARNER AUTONOMY? INVESTIGATING UNIVERSITY TEACHER'S ATTITUDE

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Abstract: One of the most highly anticipated benefits of the use of technology for language teaching is its role in enhancing learning autonomy. Some scholars believe that autonomy contributes to effective and lifelong learning, making it one of the goals in learning. By using technology, both teacher and student can have access to various learning resources and materials which may promote autonomy. The Internet is one of the most widely used sources, for it could help teachers access authentic materials for their students, while students could also learn the language at their own paces. However, reports have shown that technology also discourages students to be more autonomous. It has been reported that unrestricted use of technology, without proper guidance and control from teachers, would not make students more responsible for their own learning, making it not favored by some teachers. To sum up, there are both benefits and constraints in the use of technology in achieving learning autonomy. Reacting to such a dilemma, it is necessary to learn the beliefs of English teachers regarding the use of technology in their classes and to which direction it leads to. The present study attempts to search for the answer from the English lecturers in Muhammadiyah University of Jember.

Keywords: *University, Case Study, Affordances, Constraints*

INTRODUCTION

Integrating technology in classroom setting has been done for decades in language classes and has been a popular area of interest as many scholars now try to respond to the demands of the 21st century learning. Technology is believed to provide comprehensive access to education (Yagcioglu, 2015). It can be used as a medium to approach all elements in education, from the curriculum to learners. Learner autonomy is one which technology can afford. There is such abundant evidence showing how technology is powerful to improve learner autonomy by enhancing their language skills and competence. Çelik, Arkın, and Sabriker (2012) did an investigation on how ICT in ELT impacts student's self-regulated learning and found that technology is mostly used by language learners to improve listening skills. They use English audios and videos from YouTube and their own inventories in their PCs. Additionally, learning from the findings in Young (2003), the Internet is considered interactive, thus useful for learning English. This interactive nature of technology facilitates different learning styles, which later can help promote effective learning and support the achievement of learner autonomy. In Indonesian context, Prihatin (2012) found the possibility the computers offer to engage language learners to learn not only in the classroom, but also beyond. Pinkman (2005) found that blogs have also shown the possibility to offer autonomy in learning. Blogs make English more meaningful to them as they feel the fun to use it in their blogs outside the classroom. These exemplify technologies as affordances as they are used to induce certain expected actions (Ryder & Wilson, 1996), which in this context is learning.

The idea of learner autonomy as an important aspect in learning has been discussed for decades. One popular definition of learner autonomy, written by Holec for the Council of Europe, is the "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Çakıcı, 2015). According to studies conducted in this area of interest, learner autonomy is crucial in learning activities at least due to several reasons. First and foremost, learner autonomy can strengthen learning motivation, as said by Little (2006) that an autonomous learner knows what to do to improve his learning motivation. A different direction in the relationship between learner autonomy and motivation has also been found. Spratt, et al., (2002) in their findings suggest that motivation can be a powerful force to induce learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is also thought to be a significant characteristic of a learner because it can make learning "more focused and more purposeful, and thus more effective both immediately and in the longer term" (Little, 1991). An immediately effective learning is possible to achieve with learner autonomy because during classroom

activities an autonomous learner will have the confidence to choose the strategy which suits him best. The longer-term effect of learner autonomy is often related to lifelong learning, in which chances for autonomous to be lifelong learners are wider (Pinkman, 2005). Additionally, Healey (2002) stated in his study that technology has the potential to enhance learner's motivation for learning English in such a way that it offers more chances to being autonomous learner. Briefly, the significance of learner autonomy will go with the saying: you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. In an educational context, a teacher can provide as many opportunities as possible to his students, but he cannot make the students learn if they do not want to. Teachers need to promote learner autonomy to make their students learn, not physically attend the classes and do activities as instructed.

Even though technologies have shown such capability to approach learner autonomy, investigations also reveal that technologies can become constraints, as opposed to affordances (Ryder & Wilson, 1996). Therefore, this paper aims to investigate how teachers see this dilemmatic position of using technology and whether they are aware of the direction technologies lead the students to.

METHOD

This is a case study which is approached qualitatively. This design is considered the most suitable to observe teacher's beliefs and attitude towards the use of technology in the class and its relation to promoting learner autonomy. As mentioned in Dornyei (2007), case study is used mainly to collect detailed information of a case. Moreover, qualitative approach offers a more in-depth explanation towards a phenomenon under study. Therefore, it is expected that the researcher can bring a comprehensive explanation as a result of thorough observation in the field of study.

Participants in this investigation are three university teachers in the Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember, Jember, Indonesia. Historically, the Department of ELT in Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember was the first in Jember, which was initiated in the Academic Year of 1981-1982. Each of the three is responsible for different classes. The first teacher, Teacher A, is teaching English for Young Learners (EYL), IT in ELT, and Pre-Writing. Secondly, Teacher B is a teacher of Pre-Intermediate English Grammar, Guided Writing, and Prose. The third teacher, Teacher C, is responsible for Inferential Listening, Interpretive Listening, and Guided Speaking. These teachers have over five years of experience, thus they are good informants for the case study.

Information was collected mainly by interviewing every teacher separately and observing their teaching practices. A semi-guided interview was used for this study, which comprises questions that are related to the research problems; beliefs and attitudes in using technology for teaching and learning purposes and their perception in regard to using technology to promote learner autonomy. Furthermore, the observation was mostly used as a confirming tool after the interview was undertaken. All information would later be analyzed and compared to the existing, relevant literature. This stage helps make and formulate the comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon, therefore further conclusion, suggestion and implication can be arranged. Although generalizability is still an issue in case studies, the knowledge obtained is expected to be able to fill a slot in the area of technology use to promote language autonomy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The observation to three university teachers in Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember for the present study yielded some important information related to the research problems; teacher's beliefs to technology use and whether it provides affordance or constraint to the teaching. To the first research problem, which is the teacher's beliefs towards the use of technology for learning purposes, all the three teachers have a similar idea. They believe that technology is very good for their students as a one-stop reference for all knowledge, including for the courses they are teaching.

Teacher A sees her students facilitated with the help of technology especially the Internet, which is also affordable to provide them with varieties of self-learning sources. They can seek as much information as they want and learn anything they want. For example, for classroom presentations, some of her students could initiatively find other relevant sources to be presented in front of their classmates. They could use the information from the Internet for deepening their content knowledge in EYL. An observation was done to confirm, and it was found consistent with Teacher A's information. The students as presenters showed kinds of puppets as media to teach English to young learners, some of which are not stated in the course book provided by the teacher. Teacher A also sometimes recommended some learning sites for her students in the Writing Class for them to learn on their own. Teacher B, on the other

hand, who is responsible for teaching grammar, writing and prose class emphasized the advantage of using technology in her grammar class. She described that her students made use of exercises in the Internet as self-learning activity, even though she did not recommend them to do it. The Internet offers more interesting and interactive exercises than those in the course book, and with more various types of exercise. In addition to the Internet, Teacher B also sees the benefit of e-dictionaries in her student's spelling skill. She always suggests her students to look up the dictionary anytime they doubt the correct spelling of a word. Furthermore, Teacher C who teaches language skills, listening and speaking, expresses a similar idea. With the technology, especially again the Internet, her students can find so many examples of conversation in the real context. They can see differences of certain utterances and confirm to the teacher in the class. She also added that by their technology literacy, the students can better pronounce words using e-dictionaries. In her class, she usually delivers the learning material using videos, like dialogs or clips from a movie, to present the real use of the language.

From the interview, aside from the benefits of technology, Teacher A and B show their awareness of some drawbacks they experience while teaching using technology. In their writing classes, Teacher A with her Pre-Writing and Teacher B with her Guided Writing, believe that to some extent, the technology has affected the student's attitude towards writing. In the Guided-Writing class, for example, the teacher gives an exercise to write about a certain topic. Some students would simply browse the Internet to find a sample for this exercise and copy such work. This 'taking for granted' or 'copy-pasting' attitude has powerfully inhibited their learning of the skills. It also happened in the Pre-Writing class. Although the course's objective is to make some good sentences to construct a paragraph, many of the students tend to copy other people's work from the Internet. Such work can be identified by comparing the student's in-class work and homework. Teacher B also tends to find the 'copy-pasting' habit in her Prose class. It especially happens when the students are given the exercise to write an appreciation of a literary work. The students would find the appreciation from the Internet and submit it to the teacher. To identify that the work is not an original work of theirs, the teacher would check their students' understanding towards the prose; their failure to understand will obviously show their dishonesty. Teacher B's attempt to avoid such dishonesty is by giving the exercise in the class and not allowing them to use their smartphones. Moreover, the limited amount of time in the class becomes another issue inhibiting her to allow the students use smartphones in the class. On the other hand, Teacher C does not see any drawback of technology use for teaching and learning purposes. Further, she argues that this could be influenced by the nature of the course she is teaching, which is oral communication skills. In assessing her students' performance in both listening and speaking skills, she will require them to directly speak, thus very little chances are open for such 'copy-pasting' habit to occur. In her speaking class, mostly the students will be required to speak in pairs and in groups, while in her listening class, she will check her student's skill by directly asking. So, Teacher C believes that technology does not inhibit her student's skill.

The teachers have shown such positive attitudes towards technology use for learning activities that they are aware of its benefits and open chances for the technology to be in their classes. However, they also discover an unexpected yet unwanted habit of using the technology for learning, the copy-pasting habit, or what Ma, et al. (2008) term 'digital cheating' and 'plagiarism'. It is a serious issue in academic context which belongs to the form of academic dishonesty (Hosny and Fatima, 2014) and has been getting even more serious in the past decades, as literature has proved increase in student's cheating and their considering it as an 'okay' behavior even worse. The Internet, in this issue, may be considered the culprit for it bridges the student and the sources for plagiarism. With regard to learning autonomy, cheating and plagiarism inhibit learner autonomy. These behaviors show lack of responsibility of one's own learning, which opposes the definition of learner autonomy.

The second research problem, which is whether the technology use in the class is leaning towards the affordances or constraints. The former is very close to learner autonomy, while the latter has the potential to inhibit student to be more autonomous. In this study, only Teacher C thinks that the technology use in her teaching leans more to the affordance, while the other teachers believe that technology does not really promote learner autonomy. Teacher C believes that in her classes, listening and speaking, the most important is her student's involvement. This involvement is further defined as the student's ability to understand English questions and expressions by showing appropriate responses. Teacher C, therefore, has a positive view that the technology does not become a constraint. She admits that even though she cannot see significant effects of technology to the student's achievement in the class, as long as it does not disturb learning, she believes that technology will facilitate learners to be more autonomous.

However, Teacher A and B agree that technology has not yet helped students to be more autonomous. It is related to the previously mentioned identification about the dishonest behavior in their students. They are a little pessimistic that technology can help the students to be more autonomous with such behavior. This behavior shows the students' irresponsibility for their own learning; they fail to see, at least in the short term, how such dishonesty impacts their competence in a course. To these teachers, the student's real competence will be difficult to reveal when such dishonesty takes place. This concern urged the teachers to make the students learn their work by restricting the use of technology in the class. They can browse the Internet outside the class to prepare themselves for the class.

Thus, is restricting technology use in the class a solution to this problem? This attitude may not be true as it will inhibit learners to be more autonomous. Teachers cannot think that they can hamper the massive use of technology by their learners. It would be wiser that the teachers change their mindset thus way of teaching. Peggy A & Anne (2010) emphasized that to meet the demands in the 21st century learning, it will be no longer appropriate to use technologies minimally; using slides presentation, office application, the Internet for browsing material. Technologies should be used to increase effective teaching and learning activities thus creativity of the teachers is urgent. For the case investigated here, a serious changing movement in teaching is urgently required. Teachers need to renew their ways of teaching by giving tasks that require more than the low order thinking (knowledge and comprehension) but rather the higher ones (analysis, synthesis, evaluation), thus can minimize any academic dishonest behaviors to occur.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

University teachers have shown having positive attitudes towards technology use for learning. However, it was also found that cheating and plagiarism become more common among students and these inhibit learner autonomy. This also leads to the view that technologies in the class do not enhance learner autonomy, even they become constraints in learning. Teachers as agents of change need to change the way they teach to be more adaptive to the trend.

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