

IT TOOLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: In this article, we discuss the idea about how Information and Communication Technologies – particularly the internet- can be developed as a tool to support independent learning. From my point of view, both new media and education are closely connected. Moreover, the internet has several functions that might be explored for academic purposes.

Key words: internet, education, English language learning, academic activities.

In this globalization era, English is considered a powerful language in the world to transfer information and technology. Wallraff (2000) in What Global Language claims that English has become an official language in many non English speaking countries even the number of people speak English is lower than Chinese, Hindi and Urdu. Therefore, people concern more with the importance of learning English. This idea is supported by Jordan (2002), who describes that in non-English speaking countries English is taught in various courses such as English as a Foreign Language (EFL); English as a Second Language (ESL); English for Academic Purposes (EAP); and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

On one hand, some people argue that the global status of English can not be separated from its other popular role as the language of science and technology (Jazadi, 2004). Similarly, Slack and Wise (2006) in Cultural Studies and Communication

Technology emphasise that technology and language are strongly connected in the society. On the other hand, new media -particularly internet- may play important role in popularizing English as a global language. Walter Ong (1982 as cited in Swenson et.al., 2006) notes that ‘technologies aren’t just changing our lived conditions, they are changing the way that we think’ . Several experts also mention that ‘an examination of literacy practices involving technologies deserves special attention, not because they are separate, but because they are central to effective English education in a rapidly changing world’ (Swenson et. al. 2006). Furthermore, Leu (2005) states that the Internet and other newer technologies have linked to literacy issues including English education.

Since sixty years ago, mass media tend to be parts of people’s daily activities. Newspapers, magazines, tabloids, televisions and radio programs have been popular as sources of information, education and entertainment. Nowadays the concept of mass media is transformed into new media. Most of new media definitions are directly linked to Information Communication and Technologies (ICT) and focus on their technological features (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). Kress (2003) describes new media as the transformation from traditional print-based media to the new information and communication technologies. Furthermore, he develops two characteristics of new media. First, new media tend to use multiplicity modes, such as moving pictures, music, and sound effects.

Second, new media are interactive and broadly interpersonal. For instance, Mackay (1997) classifies some types of new media, including personal computers, mobile phones, fax machines, Internet, and other interactive media. In responding to this issue, Rice and associates (1984 as cited in Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006:21) argue: “...those communication technologies, typically involving computer capabilities (microprocessor or mainframe), that allow or facilitate interactivity among users or between users and information.”

In research about the relationship between Internet and academic activities, Roy Morgan Survey (1998 as cited in Burton, 1999) found that young audiences were

identified as heavy internet users. This result is supported by Curtis (1998) who claims that the youth are interested in online chat and sites which consist of reviews of CDs and videos. Additionally, the majority of youth uses internet for playing games, doing research for school or university, browsing and creating own web pages online. In relation to youth and social activity, Burton (1998) and Sternberg (1997) both agree that young people want more opportunities to create their own media and to express their views as important members of a civil society. Similar finding also stated by Tapscott (1997) that young users usually access the Internet to play, find out their world, engage with various identities, communicate themselves through own web pages, extend relationship with friends and family, and get socialized. In 'Internet and teens' identity formation', Frangoulidou (2003) identifies that Internet provides different functions such as communication, information, education and entertainment. He also claims that the Internet users have choices either to present their real identities or create new ones. Additionally, a user might present different identities at the same time. Other researchers, Maddel and Muncer (2005) investigated the internet and mobile phone communication activities among young people. They argue that the Internet users' social networks are larger and more active than those of non-users. Furthermore, several Internet search engines have already focused more on social connectivity rather than content by providing email; chat rooms; e-groups; instant messaging; and personal spaces. In relation to the concept of academic activities, American Online (AOL) survey in United States -as reported in 'The Internet at Home and in School' - found that most students took advantages of the internet to improve language skills, get help with homework and get access to the library and other sources (American Online reports 2000 as cited in Rice & Haythornthwaite, 2006). This study also states that the youth as participants feel being a better student by doing online activities. Hamman (1999) adds that Internet communication complements realworld relations. Furthermore, in Perspective on Internet Use: Access, Involvement and Interaction, Rice and Haythornthwaite (2006) describe that students can use Internet for various purposes such as doing research; communicating with friends and family;

getting information about products to buy; getting news; getting health information; sending/receiving pictures to and from family/friends; getting re-connected with the people.

In his research, Jazadi (2004) argues that students may be successful in learning English by practicing this language out-of classroom. At least two studies (Pickard, 1996 and Lamb, 2002 as cited in Jazadi, 2004) show that students might develop English language skills through reading novels, newspapers, magazines, books; listening to a variety of English radio and television programs; creating an English club and using Internet. While exploring the functions of the Internet in general, they may offer opportunities for educators to increase knowledge; communicate with colleagues; get access to teaching materials and share resources. To sum up, Internet provides unlimited sources of information that can be explored to learn English. For instance, lecturers have opportunities to increase their knowledge; communicate with colleagues; get access to teaching materials and share resources. Students may also take benefits such as developing research skills, having interactive learning, communicating with other students and getting better understanding of global issues. Furthermore, there are two advantages of using Internet for English language learners: (1) have a direct contact with native speakers; and (2) obtain various English teaching/learning materials. On one hand, webpages and websites offer many advantages in combining texts, images, animations, videos, voices, music and sound effects; on the other hand, the Internet may have significant social and cultural effects. It is a fact that the English language skills and the computer literacy are the two most common criteria required to enter the multinational work place. Therefore, university students should be prepared to face these new challenges.

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