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EFL INSTRUCTION IN ICT-CULTURED ENVIRONMENT: 
TEACHERS’ CHALLENGES AND ROLES

Hamamah *

Abstract
The advances in technology surrounding EFL instructions have served to expand learning experiences beyond the traditional classroom. It is stimulating to help the students achieving the goal of acquiring the target language. However, some teachers have anxiety in dealing with this due to their unfamiliarity to the technology. This article discusses EFL teachers’ challenges in facing ICT-cultured environment and the ways of redefining teachers’ role in order to make the students learn efficiently, autonomously, and responsibly in process of language learning, in Indonesian context. With the enormous chance to access information in the presence of ICT, it is expected that students can be nurtured to build up independence in the EFL learning.

Keywords: EFL instructions, ICT-cultured, and EFL learning

In Indonesia, in responding the need to improve the people’s ability to take part in the global discourses, the government has implemented the national standard of education in which Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is included in the minimum requirements for formal education (PP no 15 2005). Likewise, there is an emergent trend in the society to be able to bring the ICT into play. Being technology-literate is not only providing people with more opportunities to be more professional and successful, but also increasing their self-prestige as technology-literacy symbolizes modernity.

For the abovementioned reasons, people, especially students, are constantly searching various ways to be technology-literate. It is shown by the rapid growth of the Internet users in Indonesia. The Internet makes it possible for people to get the information necessary for them. The growth of the Internet users is shown on the official statistic data published by Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association (APJII) on their website: http://www.apjii.or.id/do-kumentasi/statistik.php?lang=ind. By the end of 2007 APJII estimated that the number of the Internet users in Indonesia has reached 2.000.000 subscribers with 25.000.000 active users.

With regards to the massive and increasing use of ICT, EFL teachers in Indonesia face the challenge of keeping pace with students regarding the ICT literacy. Nowadays, by using the internet, students have vast opportunity to get the information necessary for their study beyond the classroom walls. Prior to the ICT era, EFL teachers in Indonesia struggled for students’ attention, effective teaching methodology to be able to handle a large number of students, and limited facilities. Recently, as an addition, they have to deal with the challenges of developing their teaching practices using ICT in order to be able to meet the demand of the era and to cater the need of students who grow up in technosophisticated environment.

This article discusses EFL teachers’ challenges in facing ICT-cultured environment and the ways of redefining teachers’
role in order to make the students learn efficiently, autonomously, and responsibly in process of language learning, in Indonesian context.

EFL Teachers’ Role and Responsibilities

In the past, the role of the EFL teachers was the keeper of knowledge who was considered all-knowing, who would deign to deposit some of this knowledge into the minds of his/her students (Kaback, 2007). The communicative approach has directed the focus of language teaching towards the development of learners’ communicative competence in the target foreign language (Clouston, 1997). In accordance to the latter, the role of EFL teachers is to help their students to develop communicative competence in language learning.

Patil (2008) mentions that the biggest responsibility of EFL teachers is to help students overcome shyness, inhibitions and nervousness, as an addition to developing students’ self-confidence. Concerning that, Dornyey (2001) lists five strategies for the teachers in order to be able to fulfill their responsibilities in helping the students to install, sustain, and increase self-confidence.

1. Teachers need to foster the view that competence is not a static condition but an ongoing process. Thus learners come to think that growth is gradual but sure.
2. They need to provide regular experiences of success in the classroom.
3. They need to give opportunities to the learners to contribute meaningfully. When students feel that they can contribute, they will feel more interested.
4. They need to praise the learners for their contribution and their progress. An occasional word of encouragement will elevate their spirits and level of motivation.
5. They need to make the classroom climate less stressful. Learning gains momentum when the classroom situation is relaxed, friendly and homely.

Additionally, Ciekanski (2007) states that in order that language learners to be efficient communicators in the target language, they need to be autonomous in terms of possessing sufficient independence and confidence to fulfill the variety of social, psychological, and discourse roles which they may encounter. In accordance to that, EFL teachers’ role is to design classroom instruction that can provide less emphasis on teachers and teaching and greater stress on learners and learning. In this case, EFL teachers are responsible to foster the learners’ "natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills" (Reid, 1995).

Benefits in ICT-based Learning Environment

ICT opens up great opportunities in EFL learning environment. Concerning this, Smith & Hardaker (2000) state that with the involvement of technology, students get vast opportunity to access the learning sources far beyond the reach of traditional classroom. Technology provides meaningful learning environment to the EFL pedagogical practices (Nunan, 1991).

Additionally, ICT, especially the Internet, offers numerous benefits to the language learners. Lee (2000) mentions that proper integration of ICT to EFL instruction can provide eight benefits. The first is experiential learning. It is a kind of learning in which students can be exposed to vast amount of other people’s experience. This way, students develop thinking skills and choose what to explore. The second is motivation boost. It is the condition in which students’ drive for learning is increased significantly whenever a variety of activities are offered by technology-based learning. If motivation is heightened, eventually students can be more independent in their learning.

The third of the eight is enhanced student achievement. Network-based instruction can help pupils strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their learning attitude and by helping them build self-instruction strategies and promote their self confidence. The fourth is the availability of the authentic materials for study. The fifth is greater interaction. By accessing the
Internet students can interact with many different people and practice the language with less anxiety of the effect on making mistakes. Additionally, students can get positive and negative feedback by automatically correcting their on-line exercises.

The sixth is individualization. Shy or inhibited students can be greatly benefited by individualized, student-centered collaborative learning. High fliers can also realize their full potential without preventing their peers from working at their own pace. The seventh is independence from a single source of information. Although students can still use their books, they are given the chance to escape from canned knowledge and discover thousands of information sources. As a result, their education fulfills the need for interdisciplinary learning in a multicultural world. The last is global understanding. Understanding the culture of the target language enhances understanding of the language. To this end, the Internet is a valuable resource for both language teachers and learners.

Additionally, Lee (2000) mentions that by accessing the web, students can practice communication on a global level. The Internet facilitates the use of the specific language in an authentic setting. Such experiences can allow learners to participate in the culture of the target language, which in turn enables them to further learn how cultural background influences one's view of the world.

Challenges for Teachers in ICT-Cultured Learning Environment

The availability of ICT in the surrounding of EFL instruction brings about challenges to the teachers. Roblyer (1993) as cited in Ertmer et al. (2001) mentions that most teachers today often lack a clear vision of how technology can be used to support educational best practices. This phenomenon also happens in Indonesian context. There is an indication that many EFL teachers in Indonesia still have the reticent attitude towards ICT. Even though there are teachers who are excited with the advancement of technology and the students' autonomy of accessing the internet resources, many others are still anxious. This is in line with what is stated by Akbaba and Kurubacak (1998) that teachers share a number of concerns and anxiety about ICT because they have their own limitations, such as time or lack of knowledge.

In a study in North America, Indonesia, Chile, and Peru, Ely (1990) concluded that the barriers to teachers' use of educational technology were lack of time and lack of teachers' ICT experience and skills. Ely further argued that as the people who would have to deal with education in ICT-riched environment, teachers have to possess relevant knowledge and skills.

The common rising issue observed in the abovementioned review is the teacher' technology anxiety which may result from several factors such as lack of encouragement, technical and theoretical knowledge and experience in making use of ICT. In Indonesian context, this problem may root from the fact that the teachers have difficulties in finding time to spare especially for those teachers who are already exceeded with large classes, overloaded syllabi, and little assistance. These problems result in teachers’ resistance towards change. This is in line with Herschbach's (1994) opinion as quoted by Lee (2000) who mentions that instructors would likely be unwilling to use technologies that require substantially more preparation time.

Redefining EFL Teachers’ Roles in ICT-Cultured Learning Environment

In the abovementioned circumstances, it can be seen that there is an observable gap between the advancement of technology surrounding the EFL instruction, the students’ fast pace of following the advancement of technology on one hand, and the anxiety of some EFL teachers on the advancement of technology surrounding the EFL instruction on the other. In the attempt to deal with those circumstances in Indonesian context, the redefinition of teachers' role can be the alternative solution. Lee
(2000) mentions that what needs to be understood by EFL teachers is that technology can/will never substitute teachers but they offer new opportunities for better language practice and so what really matters is how we use the technology.

The redefinition of EFL teachers’ role may essentially make the process of language learning in technology-riched environment significantly more fruitful. In this case teachers do not need to be anxious even though they need uphill efforts in keeping up with the advancement of technology and students’ ICT-literacy. Teachers do not have to be the model of making use of technology to learn a language, but they can be a guide on how to make use of technology in increasing language proficiency.

Therefore, the pedagogical process needs to be geared towards the situation in which the students understand that they have the responsibility to acquire and utilize knowledge in enhancing their language proficiency beyond classroom walls. The EFL teachers needs to encourage students self-reliance and self-determination in the EFL learning by making use of their ICT-literacy. In accordance to that, ICT-literacy in conjunction with teacher’s guidance can do much in promoting independent learning. ICT-literacy will not be effective if the teacher does not guide the students in making the most of it in their effort of learning autonomously.

We should not see learner autonomy as a situation that excludes the teachers’ responsibility from the learning process. Learners have to be taught the skill of ‘how to learn’. Besides, the teacher’s knowledge of the subject area remains of critical importance to the learning outcome. This is in line with Dam (2000) who defines autonomous learning as learning situation in which the learner is given the possibility to be consciously and actively involved in his or her own learning in a technology-sophisticated environment.

In addition, teachers need to guide learners to be efficient in their learning, especially in the use of ICT. In most cases, language learners do not know how to learn efficiently and properly on their own, so teachers need to guide them. Where learners are working on their own, they will need suggested technique to deal with certain materials. In this case teachers act as facilitators who serve an important role by helping learners organize their learning, choose suitable sources of learning, and be motivated to continue.

Finally, since a foreign language is ideally studied in a cultural context, in a world where the use of the Internet becomes more and more widespread, an EFL teachers’ role is to facilitate students' access to the web and make them feel citizens of a global classroom.

CONCLUSION

The development of ICT has globally geared the society into a fast-paced technological way of life. In accordance to that, EFL teachers, especially those in the Indonesian context, need to come around soon and be open to the technological advancement. This is due to the fact that technology can help accommodating students’ diverse abilities and interests and keeping them actively engaged. Teachers’ role is vital in putting the pathway for the students to access the information that can support their learning. Teachers’ guidance in choosing and evaluating the Internet sources will aid students to be more responsible and comfortable in using the Internet and encourage them to look for better ways to express themselves.

REFERENCES


