

The Utilization of Mobile Technologies in ELT: Voices from English Course Teachers

Pahmi

*Department of English Education
Faculty of Teacher Training and
Education
Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau
Pekanbaru, Indonesia
pahmi@umri.ac.id*

Siti Niah

*Department of English Education
Faculty of Teacher Training and
Education
Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau
Pekanbaru, Indonesia
sitiniah@umri.ac.id*

Novfelaningrum Edjuista
*Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau
Pekanbaru, Indonesia
novfelajuista@gmail.com*

Abstract—The utilization of mobile technologies such as smart phone to support English language teaching (ELT) has attracted many teachers, including those teaching in English Courses. This research aims at exploring practices and voices of English Course teachers in utilizing mobile technologies in their teaching practice. This study employs qualitative approach where three English course teachers are involved as research participants. In collecting data, semi-structured interviews are employed. The research findings show that all three participants are in line if mobile technologies are advantageous in a way such technologies can help students in learning English. From the data analysis, there are two emerging themes voiced by the participants, namely advantages and barriers regarding the utilization of mobile technologies in ELT. They are all in agreement that mobile devices allow students to experience more learning opportunities where they can quickly obtain information, experience many ways of learning, and capable of studying anytime and anywhere. On the other hand, some barriers are also revealed. The teachers are concerned with the issue of device as distraction.

Keywords—*Mobile Technologies, ELT, Voices, English Course Teacher*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the so-called globalization era, English plays a vital role in people's life. It is undeniable thing that everyone learns English in that English is used in "research, publication, business and commerce" [1]. Indonesian Education System actually has provided an opportunity for the students to learn English in school. However, many students are still unable to use English in daily communication. In order to improve their English, many students have to go to English courses.

There are several English courses in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. All of the courses provide various classes, one of which is conversation. Many students take conversation class since they do not have many opportunities to use English in schools. In order to give the best service for the students, each of the teacher in the courses should find a variety of ways to help improve students' English.

One of the ways is by utilizing technology such as mobile devices to support teaching and learning process. Many teachers try to incorporate these devices into their classroom aiming at enriching learning process as these devices have many benefits, one of which is to serve as extension for

learning in new environment. Compared to computer, these devices also have low cost [2]. The next benefit which attracts teachers to use mobile phone is the capability to allow students to experience learning whenever and wherever they are.

A. Mobile Assisted Language Learning

The use of mobile devices in ELT becomes popular in recent days. Begum [3] characterizes Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) as a method for upgrading language learning by utilizing cell phones. It is learning by making use of smart phones, PDAs, MP3/MP4 players, and PCs [4]. Cell phones can be utilized in ELT effectively since these gadgets are small, brilliant, portable and above all comfortable to utilize [5].

Numerous features in most cell phones right now enable students to do a few exercises, for example, taking notes, making voice recordings or short videos, taking pictures, using dictionaries or learn language through apps such as duolingo and quizlet, and so forth. Allowing students to use mobile phones and do such activities certainly enrich language learning. The activities with mobile phones can be done both inside and outside the classroom.

B. Previous studies about mobile learning

Several studies have been carried out regarding the utilization of mobile technologies in ELT. The results of most research, such as by Fazeena & Hewagamage [6], Kim et al. [7] and Gikas & Grant [8] reveal that the research participants view mobile phones as beneficial device to help students learn English. Another study by Deriquito & Domingo [9] demonstrate that many teachers utilize mobile technologies since these devices are affordable by both teachers and students, simple to utilize, accessible, and portable. In addition to the benefits of mobile devices to support English teaching and learning, those who decide to incorporate such technologies should take into account a few barriers. The barriers normally found are teachers who tend to dislike technology, students who often get distracted, and many more [8].

The findings of previous research are in agreement that the utilization of mobile devices brings many advantages to support language teaching and learning. However, most research still focuses on figuring out benefits of mobile devices from students' perspective. Moreover, most research was carried out in schools or universities.

This research, on the other hand, tries to find out the voices of teachers teaching in some English Courses regarding the utilization of mobile technologies to support their teaching practice. In more details, the research questions are as follows:

1. What do English course teachers say regarding the utilization of mobile technologies in ELT?
2. What are the teachers' voices of benefits and barriers of utilizing mobile technologies in a teaching context?

II. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Participants

This qualitative study was carried out in November 2018 involving three teachers teaching in English Courses in Riau province, Indonesia as the research participants. Convenience sampling was used in selecting the participants. In collecting the data of this study, the researchers used semi-structured interview in that it is appropriate for interpretive research. Furthermore, McDonough & McDonough [10] argue that the researchers can obtain broader follow-up responses through this type of interview. Furthermore, semi-structured interview can be used as one of the forms of data in qualitative research [11].

The participants in this research are anonymous and pseudonyms are used to identify the participants. The first participant is Dodi. He holds an undergraduate degree and has been teaching in an English Course for more than five years. The second participant is Oges, who also holds an undergraduate degree. He has been teaching English for four years in an English Course. The last participant is Andi who holds an undergraduate degree and has been teaching in an English course for more than three years. All of the participants have used smartphone in their class for many times.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

In collecting data, the researchers employed face-to-face interviews. The interview lasted for forty five minutes for every respondent. The interview was divided into two parts. In the initial part, it aimed at investigating respondents' views in relation to the utilization of mobile devices in ELT. In doing so, the researchers asked the teachers to voice their ideas as well as experiences to integrate mobile devices in their respective teaching context. After that, the researchers tried to find out the respondents' opinion regarding the drawbacks of using smart phones in ELT.

After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed the data using an approach by Creswell [11] which are data exploration and data coding. The data from recorded interview were first transcribed, and then the transcripts were coded to "form descriptions and broad themes in the data" [11].

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The interview results reveal that there are two themes discussed by the respondents, namely advantages and barriers in utilizing mobile devices in ELT.

A. Advantages

1. Obtaining instant information

Obtaining information instantly is the first advantage discussed by the respondents. Utilizing cell phones with great network enables both teacher and students to complete a few exercises in a simple manner since they have the gadget in their grasp. Dodi and Andi depict how they utilize the gadget to support their teaching. Making an online group is an activity they do to facilitate online communication. This allows teachers to share information and can be informed to the students directly.

Dodi : In most classes I teach, I create WhatsApp Group where I can share learning materials to my students. The group is also used for online discussion as extended activities.

Dodi's strategy by utilizing smart phone to create WhatsApp group demonstrates how he provides a forum where both teacher and students are capable of having online interaction. Dodi's students can get instant information through the group.

Another teacher, Andi, makes use of LINE app for his students:

Andi : I use LINE to help me in teaching process. For me, I use it to find out the development of my students' learning.

Different from Dodi, Andi is concerned with the development of his students' language ability. He focuses on identifying his students' errors when conveying ideas on the group. After finding out the most common mistakes made by the students, he then can correct those mistakes in the class.

In addition to facilitate learning for students, teachers can also utilize the devices to enlarge their knowledge. Oges states:

Oges : Before coming to the class, I have to prepare myself. Reading on the Internet through my gadget helps me get some ideas to find the best strategies to be used in the class.

2. Various learning opportunities

One of the most outstanding benefits of smartphone integration to support students' learning is the possibility of using various features of the devices. Some skills can be improved such as vocabulary. Moreover, students can interact after class as a way to practice English and facilitate self-learning.

Vocabulary

There are so many applications students can install on their mobile phone in order to enlarge their vocabulary. An application called Quizlet is one example. Many teachers encourage students to download and install the app. By doing this, students can review the vocabularies they learn in the class, or even learn new words using the app.

Dodi : I always encourage my students to download Quizlet, so they can review the vocabularies at home. I think this app is really helpful.

Oges : I often ask my students to do self-evaluation. Students can do some test on the app to check whether they can memorize and understand the words they have studied.

Practicing English

Many students complain that they have little exposure to English. They find it hard to use English in daily communication. Now with the availability of smartphone, students can practice their English anywhere anytime. Seeing this potential makes many teachers utilize the device to create a group where students can practice their English through online discussion.

Dodi : In order to help my students practice their English, I create an online group. Every day I provide different topics to allow the students to share ideas. I of course need to ensure that the topics are interesting.

From the extract above, it can be seen how Dodi provides a space where his students can be involved in discussion. As a result, his students are capable of using English every day even though on the group. Andi does similar thing:

Andi : I find an app like LINE really beneficial. I invite my students to join online discussion about the topics I provide. They can convey ideas through written form or use audio feature. They can choose whatever they like.

Self-learning

Students are encouraged not only to learn in the class, but also learn independently outside the class. In providing such opportunity, Oges asks his students to visit some websites such as british council, eslgold, and many more. Learning through an app is also a possibility.

Oges : In order to enrich their learning, I always ask my students to browse on the Internet using their smartphone. I recommend them to visit british council, eslgold, and download some apps like Quizlet and Duolingo. Today's students can learn through their mobile phone on their own at home.

3. Flexibility in time and place

One of the reasons why many teachers find smartphone beneficial to support language teaching and learning is the ability of students to learn wherever and whenever.

Dodi : Everybody seems to go anywhere with their mobile phone, not to mention my students. That's why I use this opportunity to ask my students to use their devices in the learning process. A sample activity they often do is recording their voice or video recording when interviewing their classmates.

Andi : As far as I am concerned, mobile device is really awesome. This device might be small, but has many functions and can be maximized by both teacher and students. The students can access learning materials and practice English anywhere anytime.

B. Barriers

Apart from many advantages offered by mobile devices to support teaching and learning, there are also a few barriers faced especially by the three respondents. The barriers deal with the device itself, the view of people towards the device, and students' low level of English.

The common barrier faced by the respondents, as in Dodi's class, is the fact that not every student can afford smartphone. As a result, some students cannot join the group created by him. It means that these students do not have the chance to express their ideas in the online discussion.

The next barrier when integrating mobile technologies in language classroom is the fact that many people see these devices as distraction. Many people are afraid that students will not be able to focus on the lesson if they are allowed to bring and use mobile phones in the class.

Dodi : What concerns me regarding the use of mobile phone in the class is the students will tend to use the device for other purposes such as opening their social media and reading unrelated materials.

Oges : A lot of time students keep playing their phone, and not pay attention to the lesson. Of course this is wrong. Even they sometimes cheat on the test by asking and sharing the answer to classmates using their mobile phone. But overall I believe that mobile devices are just tools which should be used wisely. Teachers also need to make a deal with the students that the devices will be used if they are told to do so.

C. Discussion

Advantages

1. Obtaining instant information

Utilizing technology enables learners to obtain instant information [12] which was not possible in the past. Furthermore, technology can provide more learning opportunities [13]. As one of technological advancement products, smartphone has the potential to support teaching and learning process provided that the device is easy to be used [5]. The interview results reveal that all of the respondents are in favor of utilizing mobile technologies in their respective classroom. In their teaching practice, they often utilize the device for several purposes, one of which is to enable the students to gain instant information.

Begum [3] argues that students' active participation can be facilitated by using smartphone. Some activities can be done such as suggested by Ally et al [14] where students can share interesting information to their classmates. This activity was done by all of the respondents where their students are given a chance to join the group created by the teachers and use the group to discuss and share important information and even new learning materials they get from some sources.

2. Various learning opportunities

Experiencing new ways of learning is one benefit offered by the utilization of mobile devices. Students are able to do a lot of activities using their devices such as learning vocabulary using quizlet, doing some reading on the Internet, improving their speaking by using recording voice or calling their friends, and many more [3]. Two respondents explain how they encourage their students to download an app named quizlet as a way of learning vocabulary.

Today's teachers are encouraged to provide extended learning activities for the students. Using mobile

technologies enable the teachers to do so. Students can learn not only in the classroom, but also out of the class. For outside learning activities, teachers can act as facilitator [14] such as during the online discussion. Chatting on the phone can be a space for students to learn a language [15]. This realization made Dodi and Andi create a group using Whatsapp and LINE. In the group, they facilitate online sharing and discussion to help students improve their language competence.

Dodi and Oges ask his students to download language apps such as quizlet and duolingo. This is in line with what is recommended by McDonough & McDonough [10] in order to allow the student to learn independently. Pinkman [16] states that teachers need to motivate students to experience self-learning.

3. Flexibility in time and place

Having the ability to learn anywhere anytime is the most intriguing advantage of utilizing smartphone in learning process [17]. Accessing materials and interacting with friends are possible no matter where the students are (Cavus, Bicen, & Akcil, 2008; Shuler, 2009, cited in [8]). This has attracted the three respondents to utilize the devices to support their teaching process.

Barriers

Even though the utilization of mobile devices has been done by many educators, there are some barriers that need to be taken into account. A lot of research has shown that students might lose their focus during the study if they are allowed to bring and use their phones (Roschelle, 2003, cited in Markett & Sa [18]). Another issue was found by Deriquito & Domingo [9] where the majority of people see mobile phone as a device to communicate, not to be used in the classroom. Two respondents, Dodi and Oges, agree with the research finding of Deriquito & Domingo. In their class, they often find students to use their mobile phone to check their social media, chat with friends, watch on YouTube, etc. As a consequence, they do not really pay attention to the lesson.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the voices of English course teachers regarding their practices in utilizing mobile devices in ELT. Three of the participants are in line that there are numerous advantages of such devices if teachers can make use of them effectively and maximally. The devices allow students to obtain information quickly, experience several kinds of learning activities, and able to learn anywhere anytime. Apart from the benefits, teachers need to take into account some barriers when incorporating the devices in ELT. Teachers often complain that students tend to be distracted from the lesson. Students' low level of English and self-esteem also affect their performance especially during online discussion.

When deciding to incorporate these technologies in schools, universities, and English courses, teachers need to be advised to overcome the barriers mentioned above. Furthermore, the research results contribute in a way to enrich existing literature regarding the utilization of smart phones in ELT, especially in English course context.

This study has some limitations, though. The primary restriction is the number of participants, only three respondents. A bigger number of respondents may prompt various outcomes. Second, the research was carried out in Riau, Indonesia. The outcome may shift if including more teachers from a few areas in Indonesia. Hence, further research might include more respondents from different areas. Research to explore reasons of those who are not using mobile phones in classes is also recommended in order to look at the issues on the utilization of mobile technologies in EFL classes in a more rounded way.

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