



The Role of Digital Media in Language Learning for Blind Students at Junior High School

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the application of digital media to help blind students adjusting their learning. Using a case study that involved students and language teachers at a special school for the blind students in Yogyakarta, the study specifically examines the role of digital media in learning Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) from the perspectives of the students and teachers. The findings showed that digital media plays a significant role in many ways, such as providing activities, like role playing in learning Indonesian using websites, android applications and electronic books. The digital media in learning Indonesian is also explored to help students in reading and listening. The use of digital media by teachers is applied before learning, during learning, and during assessment or evaluation of learning.

Keywords: *Blind student, Junior high school students, Digital media, Language learning,*

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital media is a learning medium that can be transmitted (Feldmann, 1996). This media can be a channel between the creator and the recipient more effectively and selectively. Media are identified as a tool, channel provider and strategy that can be used to acquire, produce and share knowledge through communication and interaction (Lindgren, 2017). Digital media, for example television, radio, and internet, can be used as learning media, particularly in language learning.

The basic concept of language learning media is a physical instrument that functions as an intermediary for messages or language learning materials with the role of the teacher in designing strategies for interacting with learners in the learning process so that the expected goals are achieved (Dewi & Budiana, 2018). Learning media makes learning activities not boring. For example, in learning fiction, different characters can be explained through the characteristics of different characters that can be seen from their voices.

Each learning media has its own strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses and strength are related to the users as well as the recipients. In this case, the way the media works towards teachers as users and students as recipients is also different.

Various studies related to language learning media have been previously carried out. A study conducted by

Aji (2018) used TikTok application makes Indonesian language learning can be carried out interactively which can be adapted to the environmental situation and conditions of the students. Pelangi (2020) applied the Canva application to support teachers in utilizing knowledge, creativity, and skills to be used in learning. YouTube media to improve students' vocabulary and understanding Handayani (2020). In learning Arabic, the medium of learning Arabic vocabulary with the game my happy route resulted in an increase of 88% in student scores (Isnaini, 2020). On the other hand, Javanese language learning can be facilitated by digitizing Javanese script, which is further proven to improve teacher skills (Aribowo, 2018).

From these various studies, it is known that learning media is quite influential in language learning. Both digital media and non-digital media have been used to increase the success of language learning. However, the learning media for visually impaired students are not as varied as the learning media for students in general.

Some learning media have been previously applied to students with visual impairment, such as the use of Geoboards to introduce flat shapes (Nisa, 2020), digital talking book media for learning English (Cahyani, 2015), and audio for sport learning (Priyono, 2020). The findings of those studies found that the media have been successful to help visually impaired students learning.

In general, blind students have limited ability to see (total blind) or can only see light (low vision). Blind students usually tend to have obstacles in growing interest in reading braille (Arif et al., 2021). In addition, blind students tend to experience fluctuating motivation and have a low IQ. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the competence of blind teachers and be supported by learning media that are in accordance with the needs of students, as well as facilities such as Braille textbooks.

Learning media in general have a role to support learning and support learning activities. For learners with special needs, the role of the media is important to strengthen students' memory compared to not using the media at all. The problem is that not all learning media can be accessed easily. This study reveals the use of these media, especially at the junior high school level, particularly the digital media.

2. METHOD

This qualitative descriptive study used interview and observation techniques to collect the data. The participants were language teachers at one junior high school, including two Indonesian language teachers, one English teacher, and one Javanese teacher. Observations were made with a focus on learning in the classroom and the use of media during learning. The data collection process is carried out within one month. The interview process was conducted face-to-face at the school.

From the perspective of the four teachers, this study observes the use of digital media in every lesson carried out by the teachers, including the digital media chosen by the teacher, its use, and the difficulties experienced by the teachers. The entire answer from the teacher is then reduced to be further presented into a data.

The instrument in this research is a list of questions which is divided into three parts. The first part is a question about digital media used in language learning. The second part that was asked was about the role of digital media in learning. The third part that was asked was about the application of digital media in each learning session.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Digital Media Used in Language Learning

The digital media used in language learning for blind students are quite diverse. These media are accessed through smartphones and personal computers, among others. Through smartphones, the applications that are often used are WhatsApp, Google classroom, and YouTube. Through personal computers, students can access educational websites, content written in blogs, and electronic books in pdf format. This study digs deeper into applications that are often used by teachers and

students with visual impairments, such as websites, android applications, eBooks, and WhatsApp.

The findings from the study demonstrated that teachers used websites to support language learning. Some websites present a discussion of a text, in the form of an example text, the meaning and types of text, the structure of the text, and the language of the text. For learning Indonesian, sources other than trusted websites can also be used as references. Some blogs also provide information that can be used as learning media. Learning Indonesian requires references in the form of text types. Learning fiction texts can use the facilities of blogs that provide fiction articles. These blogs include grid.id and bobo.com. For non-fiction texts, websites are also used to find examples of persuasion and argumentation texts. For the procedure texts, a cooking recipe website was used, such as CookPad. These kinds of websites are quite often used by teachers, especially when they need learning materials, depending on the forms of texts that are in accordance with the material being studied. This method was chosen because of the ease of accessing the website. Teachers do not need to feel complicated because they must first install an application to be able to access the website.

Apart from websites, android applications are used to support language learning, such as Instagram and TikTok. The applications are used to display tasks, and there are special requirements for blind students in accessing Android applications.

Electronic books that can be used to support learning are fiction-based and non-fiction-based books. Students and teachers can access e-books through personal computers and smartphones. Personal computers were used because they can provide more files to access compared to smartphone. By using a personal computer, the files accessed can be in the formats.

Learning using the WhatsApp application can also be performed by all language teachers at the school. WhatsApp application is commonly known by the Indonesian people, especially for academics. Various media, whether video, audio, visual, or short or long text, can be accessed using the WhatsApp application. One of the advantages of using media through the WhatsApp application is its easy-to-access audio feature. Through the voice note feature, students can feel as if the teacher is speaking directly. In addition, the audio can be saved to make it easier for blind students to understand the learning materials or assignments given. It is also easier for students to submit assignments through this voice note feature. A study by Praptaningrum (2020) found that WhatsApp can motivate students more as students can learn and imagine the sound they hear with audio so that they have more time to understand the material presented.

3.2. The Role of Digital Media in Language Learning

Language learning emphasizes four aspects of language skills, namely speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Reading and writing skills for blind students are quite different from students in general. This is because blind students use braille codes. In writing, they use manual tools in the form of a Reglet and a stylus to compose braille letters.

The role of digital media to facilitate activities related to writing skills is the conversion of writing facilities that can be voiced using google voice or the talkback feature on smartphones. On a laptop, writing-related learning is supported by the JAWS application. On smartphones, learning related to writing is supported by TalkBack and Google text to speech facilities to translate voice into writing directly.

From the use of devices that have special applications, each student or teacher should have one device each, so that they can memorize the patterns or habits of using their respective electronic devices. Each personal computer has its own settings. Likewise with smartphones, the different types of Android operating system may be the differentiator for the different ways of accessing each smartphone.

Reading skills are not much different from writing skills related to the use of media towards them. The role of the media in this case tends to be the main tool so that students can read the text easily. This convenience has quite an impact when learning online, but after face-to-face learning, reading activities do not require the help of smartphones or laptops because the teacher has dictated the material to be delivered, while students write using Braille.

In speaking and listening skills, the role of digital learning media in language learning tends to be more varied. This is because many sites or online information providers provide audio or video-based content. In listening skills, students do not need to have difficulties because audio media such as podcasts can be accessed easily.

3.3. Application of Digital Media in Every Learning Session

Learning is divided into several sessions, namely before learning, during learning, and after learning in the form of evaluation or assessment activities. In every learning session, digital media is not always used by all language teachers. However, students tend to often use media to facilitate access to learning.

Each class at the school site in this current study consists of a few students. For example, Class VII consists of three students, class VIII has five students,

and class IX consists of ten students which is further divided into two classes. With this small class condition, learning with audio or video media does not require additional speakers. Only with the device used, the built-in speakers are sufficient for the needs of loudspeakers.

Before carrying out learning, the teacher looks for references in the form of text combined with audio and video media that are appropriate to be given to students. Before the learning activity begins, the teacher provides an inducement in the form of shows that show the latest information such as regional, national, or international news. This show is also applied in the context of implementing literacy for students.

During learning, most language teachers carry electronic devices as a provider of information to be taught to students. This is because many teaching resources are in the form of electronic books. Teachers use electronic devices to open digital books or give assignments to students.

Learning evaluation can be in the form of project assessments, as well as assessments to measure students' cognitive understanding. Learning in the form of projects is supported by social media to display the results of language skills learning. In general, texts for these skills can be categorized into fiction texts and nonfiction texts.

4. CONCLUSION

From the research that has been done, three main conclusions were obtained related to the types of learning media, the application of learning media, and their role in each learning session. Digital media play a role in learning Indonesian, including websites, android applications and electronic books. The digital media in learning Indonesian are used in helping students reading and listening. Teachers used digital media before learning, during learning, and during assessment or evaluation of learning them if possible.

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