

Integrating Technology in Indonesian EFL Classrooms: Why Not?

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The Minister of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia, through its substantial policies, has gradually encouraged teachers in Indonesia to integrate the use of technology into their teaching practices. Responding to the policies, this paper aims to introduce *Hot Potatoes*, *Blog*, and *Edmodo*, as some alternative educational technology that the teachers can utilize to support their teaching practices, particularly in their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The paper addresses technological potentials of the technology for teaching and learning, such as for accessing information about the language, providing exposure to English, publishing learner work, interacting with other learners, managing, and organizing learning. The paper also explains possible challenges in utilizing the technology specifically in EFL teaching contexts. The discussions are supported with my reflective experience in utilizing the technology, related research findings, and literature. This paper provides insights into alternative educational technology that the teachers can use. Additionally, the paper can encourage the teachers to begin utilizing the technology to support their teaching practices and help students achieve learning objectives in their EFL classrooms.

Keywords: technology, hot potatoes, blog, edmodo, technological potentials, EFL teachers

Introduction

The integration of computer and technology in language teaching and learning has been acknowledged pervasively. For instance, there is a rapid growth in using educational technology with various applications of distance education, Internet access and educational games (Ross, Morrison, & Lowther, 2010) and in integrating various technological applications into teaching and learning (Mogbel & Rao, 2013). Even, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), concerning the use of computers, software, and online learning materials for teaching and learning a second language (Chapelle & Jamieson, 2008), has become a standard and an expected part of a curriculum (Kessler, 2006).

In Indonesia, Minister of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia, through its

substantial policy stipulated in Indonesian Qualification Framework (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2012), appears to issue integrating technology into teachers' teaching practices. In brief, the Framework technically consists of nine qualification levels, in which each level has specific descriptions to perform. With regard to the framework, Indonesian teachers who possess their Bachelor or Master Degree are in the level six to eight, whose specific descriptions would seem to encourage them to utilize technology in their teaching. Another national policy, *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia Nomor 65 Tahun 2013 Tentang Standard Proses Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah*, Chapter1, article 13 (Nuh, 2013), also encourages the teachers to utilize

technology to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of students' learning.

In a sense, the national policies (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2012; Nuh, 2013) endorse that teachers in Indonesia cannot always depend on the use of a whiteboard in their classroom to support their teaching and learning process (Mali, 2015a). I positively translate the policies as an active encouragement for the teachers to begin utilizing educational technology to support their teaching practices. It is because the technology can be a highly engaging tool that can provide a source of real language, enhance students' learning motivation (Stanley, 2013), make a classroom more appealing to students (Park & Son, 2009), and improve students' language learning (Cahyani & Cahyono, 2012).

With these theoretical points in minds, I aim to introduce [1] *Hot Potatoes*, [2] *Blog*, and [3] *Edmodo* as alternative educational

technology specifically for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia and support the discussions with my reflective experience (Gebhard, 1999) in utilizing the technology, related research findings, and literature. I outline their technological potential for teaching and learning, such as for accessing information about the language, providing exposure to English, publishing learner work, interacting with teachers and other learners, managing, and organizing learning (Stanley, 2013). Then, I explain possible challenges in utilizing the technology particularly in EFL teaching contexts. The practical discussion in this paper will be an interest of EFL teachers in Indonesia who teach university students, look for alternative educational technology to support their teaching practices, and wish to explore ideas about how their students can benefit from the technology.

Hot Potatoes, Blog and Edmodo

Hot Potatoes.

I discuss the 6th version of Hot Potatoes (see Figure 1). It is free downloaded software designed by Half-Baked Software, Inc and is available at <http://hotpot.uvic.ca>. The software is equipped with five basic programs namely *JQuiz*, *JCloze*, *JCross*, *JMix*, and *JMatch* (Arneil, Holmes, Street, 2004) that enable the teachers to create interactive Web-based exercises (Winke & MacGregor, 2001) including multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ ordering and gap-fill exercises. As an example, I have utilized *JQuiz* program in the software to create a multiple-choice listening exercise of

After creating the listening exercise, I can mention some benefits of using the software. First, Hot Potatoes is an offline and free downloaded software. The teachers

describing places. The exercise provides my students with a slow-speed recording entitled visiting a museum, free downloaded from www.eslpod.com. In the exercise, students should choose a right answer to every question according to the recording they hear. Figure 2 illustrates the listening exercise. To create similar exercises, the teachers can also free-download other recordings from some websites that I specifically suggest:

- www.eslfast.com;
- learningenglish.voanews.com/;
- www.breakingnewsenglish.com;
- www.famouspeoplelessons.com/.

do not need to pay for a subscription and have an internet connection if they want to use it. Second, in the case of creating listening exercises, the software enables the

teachers to upload any Mp3-format-recordings. Third, the software can be integrated with some web applications, such as the World Wide Web, “a system for accessing and viewing information on the Internet” (Li & Hart, 2002, p.374). This integration will enable a listening exercise

Blog.

A blog, abbreviation of weblog (Crystal, 2006) and Internet innovation (Tseng, 2008), refers to “a web application that allows its user to enter, display, and edit posts at any time” (Crystal, p.240), and looks like a personal website and a public diary that everybody can read (Harmer, 2007). To create a blog site, the teachers should initially have a Gmail account and register to one of free-access and commonly known blog sites, www.blogger.com, in which they can set a name for their blog-site address, for example, *cheerEnglishlearning.blogspot.com*. After finishing the registration process and successfully creating their site, the teachers can start to access their blog and to post any information outside their classroom. Everyone who knows the blog address and has the Internet connection can read and leave comments on the post.

Campbell (2003) details three types of blogs for use in classrooms: tutor blog, learner blog, and classroom blog. In particular, I have been utilizing the tutor blog and maximizing its technological components, such as blog entry, reader comment, and link sharing to support my teaching in some classes at English Language Education Program, Masyarakat University Indonesia (ED-DU). I affirm the benefits of tutor blog (Campbell) because I can provide my students with links (using link sharing) for their self-study (see Calvin, 2014a), remind them (using blog entry) about assignments they have to complete (see Calvin, 2016a), encourage their online

that the teachers have created to be accessed publicly. Last, the software can help the teachers to check answers given by their students fast, so they no longer need to read their students’ work one by one, check whether their answers are correct, and put any signs for their correct or wrong answers.

verbal exchange by asking them to give comments (using reader comment) to their friends’ postings (see Calvin, 2016b).

Besides, I can use the tutor blog as an online gallery space for a review of my students’ works (Duffy & Bruns, 2006) as, in my creative writing class at ED-DU; people can see their poster (see Calvin, 2014b) and leave some comments to them. Significantly, “because other people can see their blog, students are more careful about looking up words they need and checking grammar and spelling” (Abu Bakar & Ismail, 2009, p.49, as cited in Walker & White, 2013, p.76). Publishing students’ work online can also promote a positive effect on the quality of written work that learners have made (Stanley, 2013) and provide an opportunity for the students to obtain more diverse feedback on their work (Purcell, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013).

Literature also notes other advantages of using blog in teaching and learning, such as enabling teachers to encourage reactions and ideas to their students by leaving some comments to their blogs (Duffy & Bruns, 2006), and facilitating communication among its users “without inhibitions and preconceptions that accompany most face-to-face interactions” (Ward, 2004, p.4). The blog also provides students with “real learning opportunities to improve their written English as they can be asked to read their classmates’ blogs and respond to them” (Fellner & Apple, 2006, p.17). It also provides them with a space to write things

they wish to express so that they can determine their personal texts and, in an interesting way, combine them with conversations (Yang, 2009). Some also believe that blogging provides a semblance

Edmodo

Edmodo is a virtual learning environment (Light & Polin, 2010) and “a pedagogical and collaborative communication system” (Wallace, 2014, p.294), in which “students can learn outside their classroom (Harmer, 2007). Edmodo is also a social media service specifically designed for education that allows teachers to create social media activities for their students in a private and protected learning environment (Walker & White, 2013). To create an Edmodo account, the teachers should initially visit www.edmodo.com (see Figure 3) and register themselves as teachers.

Besides the tutor blog, I also have utilized Edmodo to facilitate my teaching in some classes at ED-DU. One of the classes is Academic Writing class (see Figure 4). In 2015, I conducted a study to explore perspectives of twenty-one students at ED-DU about advantages of using Edmodo and about how it facilitates the students to achieve learning objectives in their classroom (Mali, 2015a).

In essence, my study continues the positive trend of using Edmodo in teaching and learning. It reveals that Edmodo facilitates the students to communicate with their teacher and classmates discussing any problems dealing with their writing class. This finding confirms that Edmodo provides teachers and students a simple way to connect one another (Balasubramanian, Jaykurman, & Fukey, 2014). The study also

of authenticity and interactivity regarded by students and teachers who need to communicate one another either inside or outside the classrooms” (Ubaidullah, Mahadi, & Ching, 2013, p.20).

indicates that Edmodo promotes learning efficiency to the students, for they can easily access their classroom learning materials, information, teacher’s, and classmates’ feedback easily wherever they are. This particular finding endorses the fact that Edmodo helps students to review lessons, submit their work, obtain feedback from their teacher easily (Kongchan, 2012), and access any learning sources as well as to receive the feedback from the teacher (Balasubramanian, et al.). The students also benefit a learning efficiency in a way that Edmodo saves their time and reduces their learning costs because they can download their learning materials and upload their assignments electronically.

Furthermore, my study notes that Edmodo can help the teachers to monitor submissions of their students’ assignments. More specifically, they can set a deadline for their students to submit an assignment. If a student submits it late, Edmodo will automatically notify the teachers (see Figure 5), which seems likely that they can always expect their students to make a serious effort by submitting all assignments on time (Mali, 2015a). By joining Edmodo, the teachers can also join subject communities (see Figure 6) in which they can discuss academic related issues and obtain significant information about learning resources from members of the communities.

Possible Challenges in Utilizing the Technology

I concern with the fact that teachers and students need to have access to a computer and good internet connection to run the technology. This fact can be an obvious challenge, for lacking an access to a good internet connection and computer facilities remains a well-noted issue at many schools in some parts of Indonesia (Mali, 2015a,b; Tempo, 2015a,b; Redaksi1, 2015; Kaltim Post Group, 2015). To deal with this situation, requesting a related Network Administration Team of a school or university to provide a free high-speed internet Wi-Fi within its area (Thien, Phan, Loi, Tho, Suhonen, & Sutinen, 2013) can be a possible solution. Importantly, “if sufficient computer facilities assisted by technical support are available at schools, teachers would be inspired to use CALL actively in their classrooms” (Park & Son, 2009, p.23). Furthermore, Indonesian Government must be committed to ensuring the availability and easy access to the internet connection, supporting hardware, and software in all schools in Indonesia, so teachers in the country can start to utilize technology as a response to the national policies and to the advancement of techno-

technology in teaching and learning.

Another challenge is also related to how EFL teachers view the use of technology in their teaching practices. Some of them still have doubts if they possess technological skills to integrate technology in their future EFL classrooms (Javad & Leila, 2015) and if they should “use online teaching such as e-mail, chat, or blog, in their teaching activities” (Cahyani & Cahyono, 2012, p.141). In that case, I agree that the teachers need technological training to utilize technology into their EFL teaching practices (Cahyani & Cahyono; Javad & Leila) and introduce them with “types of computer technology that can support their immediate needs” (Gilakjani, 2012, p.73). Then, the teachers should feel sure whether to use online or offline technology because I believe that they can always utilize both to support their teaching. Chaney, Chaney, Eddy (2010) make an important note that it is not a matter of on infusing a course of study with the latest and the most sophisticated educational technology but is more on utilizing technology that suits unique needs and interests of teachers and students.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed *Hot Potatoes*, *Blog*, and *Edmodo* as alternative educational technology that shows some technological potential that the teachers can maximize to support their teaching practices in their EFL classrooms. I would like to state that the technology discussed in this paper is a friendly-user in which the teachers can operate it easily. The discussions in the paper should not be translated in isolation as the teachers can always do further explorations to the technology. Then, I

suggest the teachers to monitor online interactions done by their students, particularly in their Blog and Edmodo, and ensure that they interact positively to facilitate their learning. It is also necessary that the teachers still have a classroom meeting because their students perhaps need to clarify particular things they have accessed electronically. Even though the use of computers in a classroom cannot ensure a better quality of education (Park & Son, 2009) and technology cannot replace traditional

teaching approaches in a classroom, I endorse that today's educational system cannot develop without access to computers and the Internet (Javad & Leila, 2015). Therefore, this paper eventually hopes to be a starting point to encourage the teachers in

Indonesia and enhance their confidence to begin utilizing educational technology to support their teaching practices and help students achieve learning objectives in their EFL classrooms.

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Figures



Figure 1 The 6th version of Hot Potatoes



Figure 2 A sample of listening exercise using *JQUIZ* program



Figure 3 Edmodo home page



Figure 4 My virtual class in Edmodo

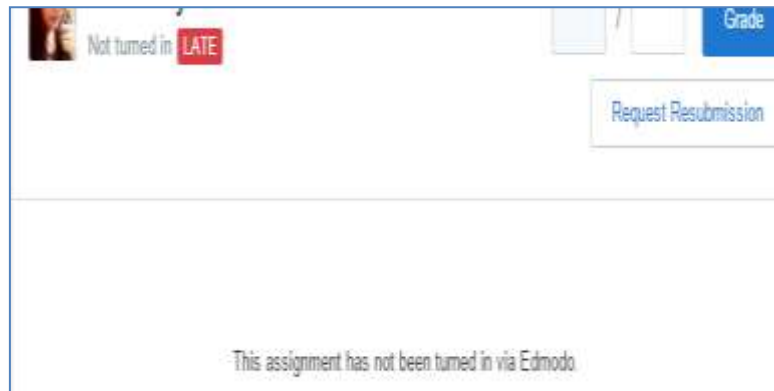


Figure 5 The Edmodo's late submission notification

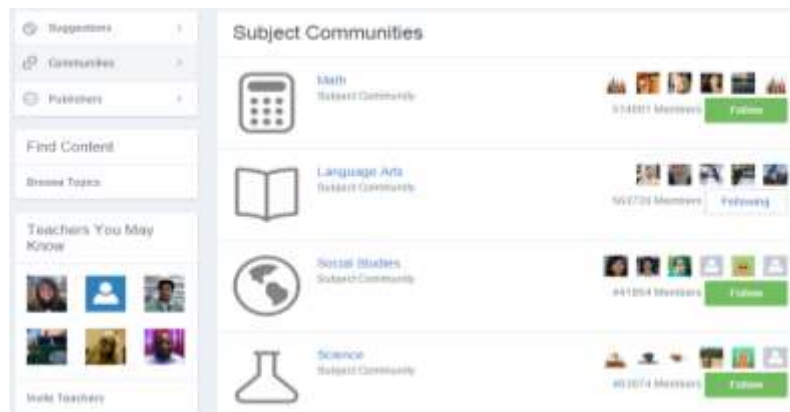


Figure 6 The subject communities in Edmodo