

Enhancing Students' Speaking Skill Using Web Applications: an Autonomous Language Learning Concept

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Abstract

The 140 million internet users in Indonesia results in a high rate of internet activity marking the rising of a new digital era. Hence, this country's education can be developed further with the help of digital technology as it becomes an important asset to introduce the autonomous learning concept in Indonesia. Autonomous learning is coined as "the ability to take charge of one's lesson" (Holec, 1981). Students are now able to carry out their learning without depending on the teachers. Once they finished their study, they can still learn by themselves making the process of learning becomes a continuous process. However, the concept of autonomous learning is still unpopular in Indonesia despite the enactment of Competence Based Curriculum which puts more emphasis on the independent aspect of learning.

This paper aims to introduce some web applications which can be used by the teachers to encourage autonomous language learning, particularly the speaking skills, to their students. Speaking skill is commonly developed through practice which heavily relies on the class activities. However, the insufficient time or class meetings becomes a hindrance for the students to practice their speaking appropriately.

The applications will be discussed on the aspect of its usefulness as a teaching model sample or a lesson plan for a speaking class which emphasizes on autonomous learning concept. The paper expects to bring out new approaches and ideas to help students learning English language in an easier, faster, and in a fun way with prolonged sustainability.

Keywords: *autonomous language learning, web applications, digital literacy*

INTRODUCTION

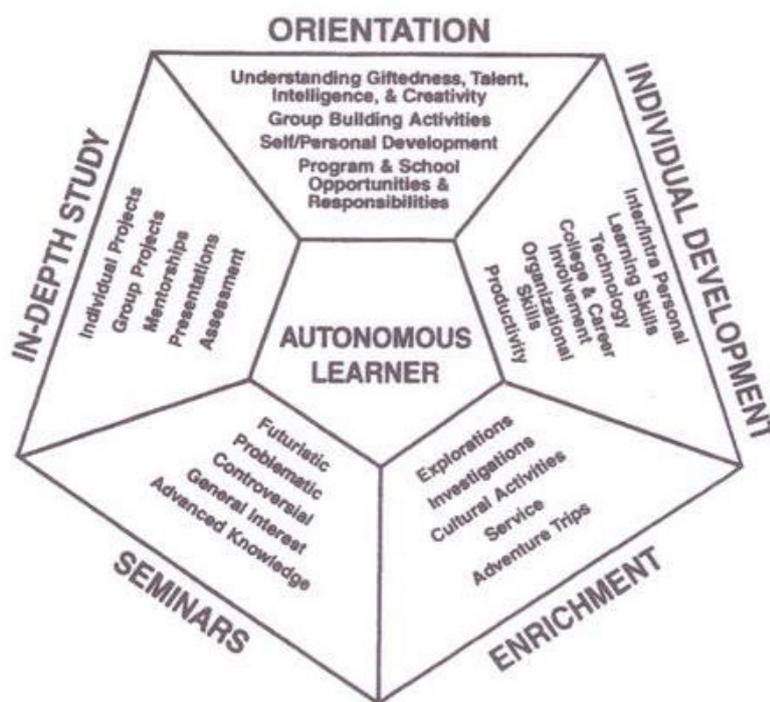
According to *wearesocial.com*, with the total of 262.0 million of population, Indonesians have one of the highest internet users in South East Asia with the number of 132,7 million of them (51 %) are active internet users (2017). It marks a new digital era in which all is connected and information is circulating rapidly. Indonesia has around 142% or 371,4 million mobile subscriptions with 92 million active mobile social users or 35% of penetration. With the blooming digitalization in Indonesia, it becomes a capital for every educators in Indonesia to develop their teaching materials to be more autonomous in nature. The support of the digitalized world will help in learning independently without depending on the educators. As a result, students are able to continue their learning even after the official class is over. Learning thus becomes a never ending process and can be passed down to generations. All can be achieved by introducing the autonomous learning to the students.

The term autonomy according to Dickinson as cited in Benson (2006) refers to the ability of the learner to be "totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions". This implies that the ones who are taking the full control of their study including the objectives, means, and outcome of their learning is the students themselves. According to Holec (1982), autonomous learning "represents a situation in which learner chooses aims and purposes and sets goals, chooses materials, methods and tasks; exercises choice and purpose in organising and carrying out the chosen tasks, and chooses criteria for evaluation". In this term, the process of learning itself is purely done by the students from the start to finish. This implies that the students will acquire skills to be both teacher and learner in which they can manage their own class and assess their own learning material and outcome. In the long run, they will be able to learn by themselves in an on going process through the course of their lives, it makes learning become a life-long process. It is different with independent learning which focuses more on the acquisition of knowledge rather than controlling the learning process. Autonomous learning is much more complex in its process and involves different skills to be used.

Further description on autonomous learning concept comes from Benson and Voller as cited in Thannasoulas (2000) which focuses on the following as the term autonomy description:

- a. For situation in which learners study on their own;
- b. For a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
- c. For an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
- d. For the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning;
- e. For the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

The application of autonomous learning concept in a class setting is proven to be a tricky one considering the different style of learning the students have. In order to accommodate that, Bretts and Kercher (1999) developed the following autonomous learning model which can be applied by teachers in order for their autonomous class to be successful. It is important to be noted that it does not need to be done in order. Teachers can address one or two of the five stages proposed in this model since it is difficult to make sure that everyone has the same digital facilities and students' level of language learning.



Betts and Kercher's Autonomous Learning Model starts with Orientation. This is the stage in which the students are given basic knowledge on learning, the purpose of it, and how they can guide their learning on their own in the future. The basic concept of autonomous learning is taught in this stage. In the Individual Development stage, the students understand the basic skills to do autonomous learning, which includes how to use the tools, understanding their specific goals of learning, and how to achieve it through appropriate learning strategies. In this stage, it is important that the teacher already provide the students with the required digital equipment and essential digital literacy skills to conduct the autonomous class. The next is enrichment stage in which the students relate to the world they live in. They are required to explore new ideas, investigating phenomenon, taking part in cultural activity and other real life experience to connect them with the environment they live in. Seminars is a stage in which the students are able to share their knowledge to the others through a discussion or presentation. It is better to be done in group since they can learn how to cooperate one another. The last is In-Depth Study in which the students are required to synthesize information, skills, and strategies they have learned and create something new which reflect their own knowledge gained from the autonomous learning activity they have learned. All of the stages are not necessarily done in order. Teachers may focus more on one or two stages of the model depending on the circumstances of their class, students and facilities provided.

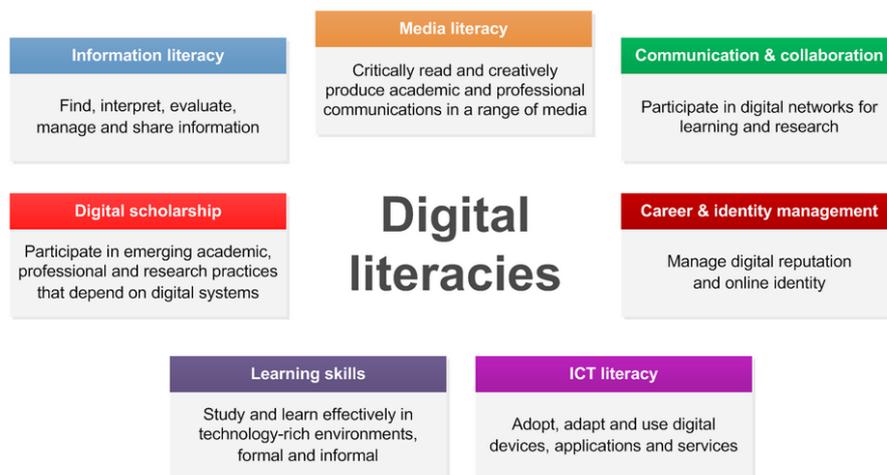
Once the autonomous learning is conducted, it is expected that each student can now be an autonomous learner. According to Thanasoulas (2000), there are seven main attributes of autonomous learners that should be acquired. They are:

- a. Autonomous learners have insights into their learning styles and strategies;
- b. take an active approach to the learning task at hand;
- c. are willing to take risks, i.e., to communicate in the target language at all costs;

- d. are good guessers;
- e. attend to form as well as to content, that is, place importance on accuracy as well as appropriacy;
- f. develop the target language into a separate reference system and are willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply; and
- g. have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language.

Achieving those aforementioned skills is the ultimate goal of an autonomous learning concept. In order to do that, it is important for the teacher to merge this concept with digital literacy concept. This is related to the use of digital technology in conducting the class.

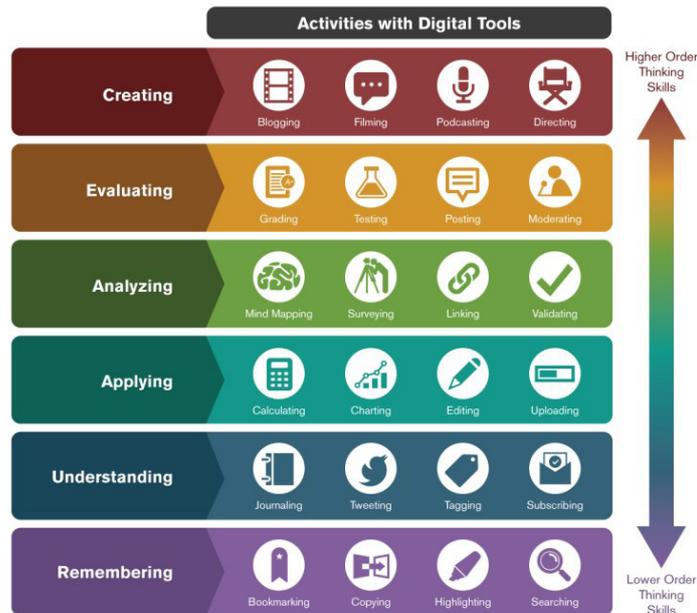
In relation to the rapid advancement of digital technology in Indonesia, it is even more possible to do an autonomous learning concept. There are some things to consider when dealing with the limitless sources of information available on the web, one of which is being a digitally literate individual. According to the working definition as cited in Karpati (2011), agreed at the UNESCO June 2003 Expert Meeting in Paris, “literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.” (UNESCO, 2004) When translated into the digital context, digital literacy refers to individual’s ability to discern which digital information is appropriate, understanding the content of the information, interpret it and share the knowledge by creating content and communicating it digitally. Digital literacy is considered as an important life skill according to UNESCO. Some skills associated with digital literacy includes *ICT skills, civic skills, learning to learn skills, participation of adults in lifelong learning*. This comes back to the main objective of autonomous learning which is a lifelong learning. Below is a simple diagram depicting the nature of digital literacy.



From: <https://blogs.salford.ac.uk>

In creating a lesson plan for an autonomous language learning class, it is important to refer to Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy. There are various kinds of activities which can be included in the class activity according to Bloom’s order of thinking. Below is a sample scheme which can be included in the lesson plan for teachers.

Bloom's Digital Taxonomy



From: <https://teachonline.asu.edu>

Theoretically, the application of autonomous learning in Indonesia can be achieved with the rapid growth of digital technology in Indonesia. Based on the digital profile gained from We Are Social, Indonesia has a relatively high speed connectivity and most of the population are already familiar with the internet through their phones or PC. The current generation is coined as a digital native in which they have already been introduced to the digital technology and information since their early childhood. Elementary school students are now have their own cellular phone with working internet connection which enables them to access information from limitless sources. They know how to navigate them to meet their purpose either it is educational or entertainment in nature. Whereas our generation can be considered as a digital migrant in which we know digital technology relatively late. We used to get information from our teachers or printed sources which requires us to work more on getting the information with limited resource. Some educators still need to learn how to properly search information through google or downloading apps to support their teaching. In order to bridge the gap between the digital native and digital migrant, we need to put more efforts to be able to catch up with the digital natives. One of the ways is by becoming a digitally literate educators. This paper will further discuss on what it takes to be a digitally literate teacher and how to apply autonomous learning method to a language learning class.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Webster New World Dictionary, speaking is to say words orally, to communicate as by talking, to make a request, and to make a speech (Nunan, 1995). Speaking becomes essential since this is the basic means of communication. Learning a language requires the speaker to be able to communicate orally to relay their intentions to the others. It also requires comprehension in which language aspects are used to understand what other people say in a two way communication. Hence, speaking skill requires the students to be able to excell in both fluency and accuracy. Whereas fluency relates to the ability to speak in an understandable way both contextually in the term of idea and orally in the terms of pronunciation, stress and intonation so the listener understand what the speakers is talking about. On the other hand, accuracy which emphasizes on the language form such as structures, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Mazouzi, 2013). In order to achieve both accuracy and fluency, teachers must be able to design a lesson plan which addresses those aspects of speaking.

Some factors affecting speaking skills are highlighted by Tuan and Mai (2015) in Leong and Ahmadi (2017) which include performance conditions, affective factors, listening skills and feedback during speaking class. Performance condition relates to the carrying out of the speaking class process which relates to the duration, quality of the speaking and the support. Affective factor relates to the ability of the teachers to make a lesson plan and activity which motivates the students which can boost their confidence and reduce their anxiety in making mistakes. Listening becomes important which relates to comprehension. It is important for the students to be able to discern information, request or question given to them so they can communicate effectively. Topical knowledge relates to the familiarity of the topic within the context of the language they speak. Familiar topic is easier to understand since most of the vocabs and expressions are commonly used in the students' surrounding. Teacher's role is also important since feedback turns out to be a significant factor in a speaking class. Students need to know whether they speak the right way or not and the feedback should be

given in a manner that it still motivates them to speak despite the mistakes they might have made. Judging from the factors mentioned by Tuan and Mai above, applying an autonomous class still requires the teacher to be involved in the language learning process either as the conceptor, actor and evaluator. Later on, the students are expected to be all three of them when they already apply the autonomous learning method assisted by digital technology which manages to provide them with limitless learning materials in various forms starting from articles, videos, to communicate with the native speakers.

With the growing number of internet users, it is not possible to enact an autonomous language learning concept. Each school now has a free internet connection which is significant for the students to learn autonomously. At home, they are also able to use mobile data to access the internet. With all of the facilities provided, now it is the time to plan the learning concept in an autonomous language learning class which emphasizes on students' speaking skills. Once you are ready to conduct an autonomous learning concept, you need to make sure that all the facilities are available. The facilities include the internet connection in the class, the availability of browsing tools such as a pad or computer. Once all of the facilities are met and provided, the teachers must be able to plan activities and materials required for the running of an autonomous class. It includes the five stages of autonomous learning model as mentioned by Bretts and Kercher in the introduction above. Starting with orientation, individual development, enrichment, seminars and ending with in-depth study stage. Initially, it is important to emphasize the ability to use digital sources responsibly as a basic skill that the students must have. The knowledge of digital literacy becomes significant in this concept. A digitally literate student must have cognitive and technical skills to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create and communicate information. Some of the things that the teachers need to do are:

1. Making sure that the students get the lesson plans and facilities to equip them with technical and cognitive skills to find, understand, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information in different formats. You need to adjust your lesson plans with your students' skill, condition and available facilities such as internet connections, computers, handphones and others.
2. Ensure that your students will be able to retrieve relevant information, interpret the results and evaluate the quality of that information. Thus, teachers need to teach them the Web Quest skill and introduce them to reliable sources and information cues.
3. Your students must know the relationship between technology, life-long learning, personal privacy and stewardship of information. Teach them how to be autonomous learners, avoid plagiarism and be responsible to the information they share. Introduce them to different apps, blogs, and plagiarism checker tools.
4. Your students must use the skills to communicate and collaborate with peers, colleagues, family and the general public. Ask them to cooperate in a group seminar or presentation dealing with issues around them.
5. Your students must be someone who can actively participate in civic society and contribute to a vibrant, informed, and engaged community. Give your students a project which implements their skills to contribute to the society, such as social project, blogging, and others.

In order to fulfill those requirements, teachers need to be a digitally literate students first. It is important for us to explore the many skills required to be a digitally literate teachers. Resourcefulness is the key factor in here. It is important for the teachers to practice autonomous learning first in order for them to teach it to their students.

To start an autonomous learning class, the students must understand the concept as well. It is important for the teacher to give the knowledge about the concept to the students and explain how the class will be conducted. Teachers can introduce them to autonomous learning concept and how it is applied in teaching and learning settings. Using videos can be a good option since the students can compare how teaching and learning session run when conducted with autonomous learning concept and the conventional one. Inspire them to be autonomous learners by showing them what benefits they can get if they can be an autonomous learners. This way, students can evaluate their goal and set their aim for the class as well as being more prepared in trying the new concept. Teachers can also ask the students to search for information about it online and ask them to make a summary out of the sources they get for a more diverse source of information as well as practicing their web quest skill.

Once the concept is understood by the students, the teachers can start to use the many applications available in the web or mobile phones. The type of applications to be used depends on the facilities that the students acquire in the class. If computers are provided for each students, it is easier for the teachers to conduct the class fully online using the web applications. However, if computer is not available, there are plenty of applications for language learning which can be downloaded through AppsStore or PlayStore. Here are some applications that can be useful for language teachers.

1. Quizlet

Quizlet is a basically quiz applications which is perfect for learning vocabularies in a fun and interactive way. Teachers can access the app by visiting the link Quizlet.com or downloading the application through PlayStore and Appstore. The features which students can use in this app is flash cards for study card, quizzes and fun games. This app is good for learning vocabularies. Teachers can create study set which includes all vocabularies required for a specific lesson and share the set to the students by sharing the link of the set. Once the students get the link, they can use the study set as they like and test their skill by doing the quizzes or doing the skill test provided at the app. Teachers can also get their students' result in doing the quiz and test by creating a class. This way, they can observe their students' understanding on the material they give and evaluate their teaching. Students can also access the set anytime they want so they can learn independently at home.

2. English central

Englishcentral is a website which specifically provides teaching materials in the form of videos. Unlike youtube, the videos in this app are made for language teaching purposes. There are different skills to be addressed in each of the video such as vocabularies, expressions, slangs, and grammar. If you visit the page englishcentral.com, there are categories for the learners such as beginner, intermediate and advance level. There is also a test which helps the visitors to evaluate their skill. Once they click one of the videos, they can watch a video with a certain topic which also includes quizzes for listening, repeating and speaking with the instructor feature. This app is perfect for independent learning especially for speaking skill improvement since it has the complete feature for listening, speaking, and interacting.

3. Rubistar

Rubistar is an app which helps teachers to create rubrics for assessment. This app might not give much assistance for students doing their tasks. Hence, it helps teachers to make rubrics for assessment for each task they make to the students. An autonomous learning concept requires the students to be actively involved in a project such as presentation, seminars, video projects or writing projects. Such projects require a clear rubric for assessing their performance. Rubric will help students understand the requirements for the task and set their goal for achieving the best result. Once they know the requirements to get a certain bar of score, they will be able to assess their own project and make adjustment whenever it does not fulfill some requirements.

4. Slido

Slido is an app which is perfect for a presentation. This app helps presenters to be more interactive with the audience. It features functions which enable the audience to join in an event created by the speakers such as asking questions and doing a survey. The presenter is able to give equal chance to each audience to ask questions and enable them to rate best questions to be answered. The presenter can also create a live poll or survey which addresses certain topics of the presentations. Teachers can use the app to evaluate students' performance in a presentation by using the poll feature. This app is also perfect for learning WH questions in a class.

5. Answer the public

Answer the public is an app which is more suitable for advanced language students. This app is useful for brainstorming activity for a paper, presentation, or seminar project. It is almost similar with goole but it addresses specific issues according to the key words the users type on the search icon. It is much better than goole since it provides users with the mind mapping of an issue which includes all 5W+1H elements. Once the users click the question, it directly links to articles and news about the certain topic to be searched. It will train the students to be able to navigate information in the internet and use them for the specific purpose of their learning. Teachers must be able to train their students on the nature of reliable sources of information and plagiarism to use this app properly in an autonomous learning concept.

There are still many other application which can be used by teachers to assist them conducting an autonomous learning concept. Google helps a lot in searching for the ones fit to your class and students' requirement.

CONCLUSION

There are plenty of apps which can be used by teachers to assist their teaching and learning activities. One thing that needs to be remembered is assessing the condition of each classes and the available facilities. Adjusting the lesson plans with the class condition is always required to make a fruitful outcome for the lesson. A digitally literate language teacher should be able to improve the material by keep inovating new ways of teaching using the apps which now become more varied and freely accessible. Open mindedness is significant in here.

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