

DILEMMA IN EXPLOITING MEDIA TECHNOLOGY IN ELT: BETWEEN OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGE

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***Abstract:** Since the turn of the twentieth century, sophisticated technologies have marked the revolutionary era of human beings. The rate of the progress is so incredible that no one is able to predict what other changes may be happening. Despite being late, ELT world has slowly begun to change by adopting media technologies in teaching. During the course of the change, however, the practitioners of the technologies pose a dilemma in the level of implementation. On the one hand, they offer grand opportunities to create a brighter future, but on the other hand, they bring with them challenges that may prevent the teacher practitioners from adopting them in language teaching practices. Thus, it is within this perspective that this paper is trying to discuss by viewing them from what the opportunities and the challenges it poses by offer inga way out from it. This paper will mainly be a reflective discussion in nature, as it tries to open up those two opposing sides and underlines the potentially remaining problems that may intact if they are not coped with in a proper manner.*

***Key words :** media technology, dilemma, polarization*

WHAT IS MEDIA?

The word “media” has increasingly gained popularity in the midst of this free-market and globalization era. The word is originated from Latin word medium, which then becomes more familiar in English vocabulary as medium (singular) and media (plural) and is then used in a large number of

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languages in the world. Not to mention, such coinage is frequently used in Bahasa Indonesia as *media komunikasi, multi media, mediasi, medium*, etc. In the most recent development, the word media develops into much broader terms. It is so broad that there are so many kinds of words collocate with it, such as: communication media, electronic media, conventional media, multi media, teaching media, mass media, media technology, etc.

Media itself, in its most generic sense, is defined as “ means of communication with a large number of people especially television, radio and newspaper”(Hornby, 1995:727). Within this perspective, some terms like news media, mass media, communication media, broadcasting media, etc. are invented and used to refer to a greater range of fields. In further development, with the advent of computer and digital technology, media have much broader meanings as it is also used to refer to such areas as electronic media, digital media, multi media, and media technology.

Within a smaller field of teaching, in particular, that of language teaching, the word media has long been introduced to refer to anything used from outside of main teaching materials brought into the classroom to provide aids in teaching. It is what is so-called “language teaching media” or “language teaching aids”; two terms which are used interchangeably to mean the same thing. “Realia” is the term that predates those two above.

The concern of our current discussion, however, is more on the presence of media technology in ELT, which since the turn of the 20th century, has marked the beginning of a new era in language teaching. It is an era of an incredibly rapid development of technology during which various electronic and digital devices began to be invented and which culminates in the advent of Informational Technology of computers. This is because all the brand new inventions of human beings have inevitably brought about change in the field of language teaching. Despite being late in responding to the technological development, as most of the technological tools were not initially invented for teaching purposes, the world of language teaching has slowly and gradually introduced technology as language teaching media or language teaching aids. The progress started from simply radio, tape recorder and player, OHP, video, and television which were among the earlier tools to be introduced and exploited in teaching up until digital video camera and player, multimedia computer which carries with it among the most sophisticated application programs in the recent days such as e-mail, the Internet, and Video conference, virtual multimedia, etc. The only

technological device originally designed and intended for language teaching purposes is probably the language laboratory, which boomed in the audio-lingual time.

Nobody knows exactly or is able to predict what other newer invention will be brought into our future world societies as the rate of technological progress seems to be beyond everyone's imagination. What matters to date is rather on how much we can take advantage of the human creation and benefit from it for the betterment of the people, despite the consequences that every single finding will always bring into existence, not to mention into the world of ELT. It is similar to the questions that Bosserts put forward as cited by Castells in Warschauer (1998) with the key question that needs to be answered that is not "What is the role of the technologies in schools?" but rather "What is the role of schools in the age of information technology?"

Castells, a professor at the University of California who wrote a book entitled *The Information Age* as cited by Warschauer (1998) stated that our current societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the Self. He also posits that it is within the framework of timeless, placeless, virtual symbolic systems that we construct categories shaping our behavior. What he wanted to say is that we are currently put in circumstances where we have to make choices between two opposing options of interest. Within such a rapid progress of development where everything spins in a revolutionary rather than evolutionary rate, we are confronted by two opposing options i.e. we keep behaving the way we were or conversely going along with the wind of change. Such a trend is in line with the characteristics of postmodernism as posited by Daniel Bell (cited in Sugiharto, 1996) that this current era is the era where the tendency of opposition is developing. There is a strong force to change but at the same time appear to have a counter-force, which prevents the change from taking place.

The current world of ELT is not exempted from the reality illustrated above. In response to the technological revolution, the ELT world is also torn into various kinds of bipolarity and ambivalence. We are in the opposition between urban and remote areas, the have and the have-no institutions, the old and the new thoughts, the means and the ends orientations, the quality and the quantity, etc. To be more specific, in responding to the advent of the media technology, we are also under dilemmatic circumstances as we are still confronted with various opposing

opinions and argumentations. It is within this framework that the section to follow will mainly be focusing on.

BELIEVED TO BE OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES

Plenty of linguists and educators have given their recommendations that media have great potentialities in improving the quality of teaching and learning. From the most generic points of view, Richard (1996:200) argues that media have potentials to help:

1. supplement the input provided by commercial and teacher-produced materials
2. stimulate motivation and interest
3. show learners how language is used in genuine contexts of use
4. bring the language classroom to life

Specifically, from the perspective of media technology, Warschauer & Healey (in Egbert, et al. (2002) pointed out that computer technologies can do much good to the ELT practices, by means that there is support of experiential learning and practice in a variety of modes, which can provide effective feedback to learners, enable pair and group work, promote exploratory and global learning, enhance student achievement, provide access to authentic materials, facilitate greater interaction, individualize instruction, allow independence from a single source of information, and motivate learners.

Within the current communicative language teaching era, which places communicational activities in its most up-to-date trend, demands for more meaningful, personalized and meaningful and interactive learning activities are increasing. From the perspective of cognitive approach, according to Warschauer & Meskil (2000), technologies allow learners a maximum opportunity to be exposed to language in meaningful context and to construct their own individual knowledge. While from the perspective of sociocognitive approach, they further state that the Internet (one of the most sophisticated media technologies) is a powerful tool for assisting a sociocognitive approach to language teaching, and it is in fact this fit of the Internet with sociocognitive approach which largely accounts for the new-found enthusiasm for using computers in the language classroom. The internet is a vast interactive medium which can be used in a myriad of ways.

This is another proof of advantage that the media technology may be offering. A research on interactive video conducted by Verano's (1989), Felix et al. (1990), which was then confirmed by Liu (1992), on his multimedia research (cited in Healey, 1998) indicated that the interactive video increased students' retention in vocabulary study.

In addition, this era is also marked by some changes in the way ELT perceives about the teaching of language. Such a change is best described by Gardner & Miller (1997) who comment that there has been a shift in classroom language teaching from predominantly teacher-centered to more student-centered. As a result of this shift in approaches to teaching there has also been a shift in approaches to learning – students are now encouraged to actively develop language learning strategies and use them when and where they feel appropriate.

In this sense, this is a high time to make the language teaching more personalized and self-started. It is, then without doubt, the greater range of offers of technological hardware and software in our current world of teaching provides wider opportunities to move ahead to a potentially better teaching and more personalized learning.

WHY MEDIA?

Talking about media and practice of teaching, we are unlikely to abandon the means in the pursuit of the ends. What is meant is that every end of instruction will be justified from the means by which the objectives are built-up and achieved. Though media is only one of many aspects of teaching, it should have played determining factor in the success of teaching and learning processes. Thus, it has to be taken into consideration in the process of assessment or evaluation. In doing so, everyone involved in the running of the instruction processes is supposed to view those two aspects (means and ends) in holistic spheres. Media constitute the elements of instruction that help mold the learning, or to put it into another way, the availability and the use of the media play an unchallenged role in determining whether the learning processes are intense or simply superficial ones. It should be justifiable to put it that way due to the reason that media have a lot to do with language processing and production.

There are some rationales behind the arguments why the use of media is suggested. The section that follows will view them from both psychological and pedagogical perspectives. From the psychological points

of view, the success of learning is primarily determined by the depth of the input processing. The deeper the input is processed in the brains prior to the storage stage in memory, the greater the possibility of the input to be stored properly. It means that whenever the brains are in need of retrieving the stored data, the quicker and easier they are to come up and ready for use. This opinion gains its ground in the deep processing theory, which holds that the depth and the meaningfulness of rehearsal improve the memory (Craik and Lockhart, in Anderson, 1995). Carter (1987) also holds a similar position by arguing that a proper storage of information in the brain will result in better memorization. Their opinions, certainly, go very well with the previously mentioned benefits of the media, as has been put forwarded by Richards in the previous section. The use of media in teaching-learning activities may intensify the input processing in learners' brains. Research on virtual realia as reported by Singhal & Zyda in 1999 (cited in Hee Jung Jung, 2002) indicates that the ability to communicate through the technology, either by means of a text or audio chat system, allows users to engage in meaningful language exchanges. Such a finding may gain its ground on the deep processing theory, since as what Ellis posited, the deep processing strategies like semantic elaboration and imagery mediation results in better acquisition (Ellis, 1990). Research has also confirmed that the mental activities, which happen during the learning process have a strong effect on memory so that the depth of the processing helps improve retention like that stated by Craik & Lockhart in 1972 (cited in Anderson, 1988).

While, from the pedagogical perspective, it is argued by Cunningsworth in 1984 that learning activities will not be of much help to the learner of English unless they present and practise English in a systematic and comprehensive way so that new language items can be assimilated by the learner (cited in Wright (1987). The materials, as set in most text books, have generally been systematic since they have followed the order of acquisitions as has been advocated by psycholinguists like Krashen (cited in Ellis, 1988:11). However, making the material comprehensible by the learners is not the book writers' concern but rather the task of the teachers to make the products made by the third person's hands understandable and comprehensible. It is called the third person because, as we all know, every single course book is always written by someone who is he, she or they. It is here where the role of media of teaching lies in the most strategic position in helping to make the materials more meaningful and memorable.

Candlin and Edelhoff in 1982 (cited in Wright 1987) proposed that materials should have a role in promoting learning in general and language learning in particular. They fulfill this role in the way they offer activities and tasks and exercises, which challenge the competence of the learners. Again, through their proposal they want to point out that materials *per se* would not do much good unless the activities and tasks which are made available are not treated in appropriate ways when they come to learning-teaching activities. Creating a challenge that would most likely optimize students' competence would depend to a larger extent on the teachers' capacity to put the materials into a good blend of activities involving every possible potential including that of media or aids exploitation in teaching.

Pedagogical consideration also posits the importance of processing from the perspective of teaching strategy. This is in line with the idea advocated by Nunan (1991:4) who says that "very recently, in terms of language processing, it is generally advisable that the learners need access to both top-down as well as bottom-up processing strategies in learning." Most traditional teachers rely heavily on the former rather than the latter. It is mainly because most of the old texts books prescribed them to do so. Grammar-translation-based materials are cases in points. Meanwhile, in nature, the help provided by media in teaching is a bottom-up process, which can make the learning more meaningful. Lots of language educators like Nunan have seen the loophole of merely adopting one single strategy and therefore advocated the adoption of both as a perfect combination. Again, here the media of teaching gain its ground.

CHALLENGES THAT THE MEDIA TECHNOLOGY BRING

In contrast to all the bright sides of the use of the media technology, we will see that there are so many barriers that may potentially prevent the language teachers and educators from using them in the teaching practices. Talking about the use of media technology inside or outside classroom activities will never be immune from problems that the current teachers of English have to cope with, as there are always various hindrances or handicaps confronting them. They mostly stem from the bipolarity or ambivalence, i.e. the dispute between local and national interests, old and current beliefs about teaching, the poor and the rich institutions and few others coming from the intervening factors once the technologies are to be

brought into use. No matter which one they are, those hindrances and handicaps can, in general, be put into two major groups:

a. Challenges rooted from teaching environment:

In the countries where policies of education are determined by every local authorities rather than by the central government, education in the level of implementation would not be as much greater case as those in otherwise. Adversely, in the countries whose governments still take a great portion of interference and control over the school affairs, as the case in Indonesia and other developing countries, for instance, the ELT practices have not yet gained their real independence, even when what is so-called local autonomy has, quite sometimes, been introduced and the rulings about it have come into effect. In such circumstances, various aspects of school processes still have to comply with the rules and regulations imposed by the central government. Even worse, they are prone to making them prescriptive rather than innovative. As a result, teaching is still rule-governed, meaning that teachers are compelled to primarily direct their teaching activities to the set procedures, bureaucracies, as well as to achieve goals prescribed by national curricula through which the pre-determined targets of materials have been elaborately made. For sure, it provides the teachers with a very little chance to express themselves as they have to meet whatever set in the national syllabi in order to be considered as being qualified teachers who manage to make their students pass the national exam.

The disparities in quality frequently resulted from differences in school environments. Distribution in wealth is so diverse that between city and town, town and country, private and state-owned schools are immensely divergent. The implication of such discrepancies is the difficulty to set the same standard of school facilities due to the difference in the ability of each institution located in different locations to equip itself with standard resources. The differences of the chance for the teachers to access resources make those working in more privilege outweigh those in the under-privilege institutions. Access to media technology is also more wide open to the former while none is available for the latter. This is due to the fact that according to Lee (2001), financial barrier is the most frequently mentioned barrier in using technology in ELT. Thus, in

response to the ever-changing world, in particular in adopting the technology for teaching purposes, the diversity of wealth above poses the second biggest handicap.

b. Other barriers:

Other factors that prevent the teacher practitioners and educators from using technology as mentioned in Egbert, et al., (2002) are, among other things:

1. Time pressure both outside and inside classes
2. Insufficient and inflexible guidelines, standards, and curricula
3. Lack of support or recognition for integrating technologies
4. Inadequate training and technical support
5. Age, gender, attitude toward technology and teaching experiences

In addition, one more factor, which poses the most eminent problem is the traditional or the old beliefs about teaching. The belief that teaching is simply passing on the knowledge to the successive generations; is the handing down of knowledge and values from the old to the younger individuals. The belief is represented by groups of teacher practitioners, who hold the conviction about the past glorious time and see the change and the future with indifference. They may be called conservatives by the futurists in a sense that they are, in the one hand, over-confident about their old beliefs and, on the other, skeptical about the current change in the ELT. Even when they are presented with a newer perspective about new methods of teaching they do not feel like to know or to learn. This group might not constitute the majority, but the influence in discouraging others is not usually ignorable.

Thus, the dilemma lies on the fact that those who are in favor of the technology adoption in the ELT will only be able to materialize their dreams when the needed preconditioning to their wishes that are made available too. They have to have a conducive environment in which their dreams are accommodated. In other words, it is assumed that there should be a balance between the dreams and the supportive environments. They have to have resources to be accessed, willingness to change, opportunities to adopt, freedom to express new innovative ideas of teaching, support from the colleagues, adaptive and high-motivated students, etc. It then requires both much bigger funding and substantial change of policies in education, particularly in the area where ELT is concerned.

In response to those who disfavor the technologies, there should be proof ascertaining them that technological presence does bring about better teaching and learning result. This may pose a bigger challenge in the part of the pro-technology teachers, as there is not much proof yet that the technology adoption automatically results in better learning in spite of the truth that technologies offer greater opportunities for ELT. That the Internet use, for instance, gives many potentials for learning activities, does not mean it will instantly make the learning outcomes better. It still depends on the extent to which the optimalization of the whole intertwined aspects of teaching such as the target of teaching, the appropriateness of the technology with the materials to be brought in, the accuracy of activity choices, the clarity of procedures taken, the properness of preparation made, the sufficiency of time spent and the students' readiness, etc. is made.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, there is no best formula to get out from such dilemmatic issues above as they all pose complex bipolarity and ambivalence. The fact that technology has shed light in a better and prospective future of ELT seems to impose on every courageous teacher or educator who wishes to venture into incessantly developing, changing and progressing world to adjust themselves and go along with the wind of change. The reality, however, is not always as rosy as the idealism as there are always challenges that prevent them from moving forward and making changes. There are some requirements to be met in order to make sure that technologies will do make a change in the teaching and learning. The bipolarity and ambivalence may prevail and will always remain in two opposing sides. However, among the wisest ways to cope with them to the greatest possible extent, is the ability of every teacher and educator to weigh the advantages from the disadvantages in consideration to exploit the technologies into the teaching practices. Once the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, the language teachers and educators will find a justification to adopt them and vice versa.

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