

STUDENT PERCEPTION OF TECHNOLOGY AND OPTIMIZATION OF ITS USE TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract

The pandemic has been a time when technology has emerged as a solution to support education. Various applications that can be installed on the gadget, one by one, appear to offer alternative learning solutions in various fields. However, the using of technology still has not been maximized by most students. By using a survey model "likert", this study aims to investigate students' perceptions of using technology, to assist learning activities, and to improve their English skills. The survey was conducted on high school students in West Bandung Regency, where as many as 75 students gave responses; to find out how superior technology is in their point of view, and whether they are optimizing its use as high as their awareness of technological prowess.

Keywords: *educational technology, English Language skill, student perception*

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INTRODUCTION

The discussion about technology in the world of education, perhaps is not something new. However, during the pandemic era, technology seems to have replaced the role of teachers, textbooks, and even schools themselves. Since the government issued Decree Number 15 of 2020 concerning Guidelines for Organizing Learning from Home in an Emergency for the Spread of Covid-19, which regulates the technical "Learning from Home", practically all activities that are usually done at school, now must be moved at home. This then makes gadgets used as a solution to study in the midst of a pandemic.

In another phenomenon, lack of reading interest among EFL students is also associated with technology (in this case smartphone), which makes them prefer to play social media and access online news instead of reading textbooks (Desfourina as cited in Wahyuni, 2019). On the one hand, this condition is considered as a change in habits from reading textbooks to e-books. However, at the same time, this condition is also accommodated to become a new study, by changing the learning system to become online system oriented. (Cho, 2012).

This is a contradictory condition that appears first, where the appearance of gadgets that are expected to bring ease in reading books, apparently also does not produce results. The change from physical form to digital form does not necessarily increase reading interest by accessing e-books, due to the fact that access to social media is preferable to accessing e-books.

The paradox of utilizing technology for entertainment versus education in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has indeed become a global concern. Many students hold positive perceptions that technology facilitates communication, yet they face obstacles in self-regulated learning when utilizing it for autonomous study (Kurniawan & Daud, 2020).

Previous researchers have found that although students are categorized as digital natives, their digital literacy is often limited to social media consumption rather than academic production or the utilization of structured language learning applications (Ahmadi, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to map out whether students' positive perceptions of gadgets are directly proportional to instructional

optimization actions, particularly in enhancing independent English language proficiency at the secondary school level (Anwas et al., 2020).

Seeing directly the current phenomenon of high school students, we will see that this generation is very close to technology. Nearly 100% of high school students have gadgets (smartphones, tablets, or laptops), social media accounts, and even many of them are exploring their talents by becoming a blogger or YouTuber. From the language aspect, they seem to understand well the use of an application and its gadgets, which may use English language settings, and also start using technology terms in English into their daily conversations, for example the word download, install, low-batt, loading, followers, and so on. Returning to the issue of education, do children also use gadgets in educational functions, just as often when they use them for social functions?

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions on the importance of using technology to support learning activities, especially English. In this view, the researchers will try to find out whether they used the tools optimally to support their learning activities, and further to improve their ability in English.

In this study, we will also analyze another contradictory condition related to the use of gadgets that is not directly proportional to e-book access, in which case the researcher will see whether this also occurs in online learning activities.

RESEARCH QUESTION

By paying attention to the general description above, this research will be examined in the following research questions:

- a. What are students' perceptions about the importance of technology to help their study?
- b. To what extent can gadgets help the students to improve their English language skills?

To analyze this phenomenon, a theoretical framework regarding perception is absolutely essential. Perception can be said as a person's point of view of an object that raises personal definitions, opinions, or arguments. According to Slameto (2010) as quoted by Wahyuni (2019), perception is also influenced by information or messages that enter the human brain. This means that perceptions have a subjective meaning, because the opinions formed may vary from person to person, even though the information and messages that come in are the same.

There are many factors that influence the emergence of perceptions, as stated by Walgito (2004) as stated in Wahyuni's research (2019):

- a. Perceived object
An object will trigger the emergence of a stimulus that is responded to by nerves and sense organs.
- b. Sense organs, nerves, and nervous system centers
Nerves are the intermediaries that forward the stimulus that arises due to an object, thus transmitting commands to be carried out by the sense organs.
- c. Attention
To bring up a perception of an object, it requires focus or attention to that object, so that information is recorded on the nervous system about the object to be perceived.

Related to this, the conclusion that will emerge at the end of this study is based on the subjective impression of the students who are becoming the respondents to the survey given.

RESEARCH METHOD

The information obtained in this mini research is set as primary data, because all the data come directly from source, those are 75 students who answered the pooling spread using “Google Form”. Researchers distributed the survey to senior high school students from several classes.

The question of the survey is classified into three big theme, in which by the question we hopefully can read (a) the perception of the students about the importance of using technology for helping their study; (b) the perception of the students that technology as a device that can also help them to improve their English skill; (c) the using of the technology by the students, weather they have already optimized the gadget they have or not.

In addition, researchers also take some related journals as references regarding how technology takes the importance in learning English. Researchers combine those data to conclude some hypothesis and recommendation that can probably be used by the students, in order to improve their English skill.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Perception of The Students about The Importance of Using Technology for Helping Their Study

To find out the extent of students' perceptions of technology issues in relation to supporting education, the researchers asked whether they think digital technology is very helpful in learning, even though it is not during a pandemic.

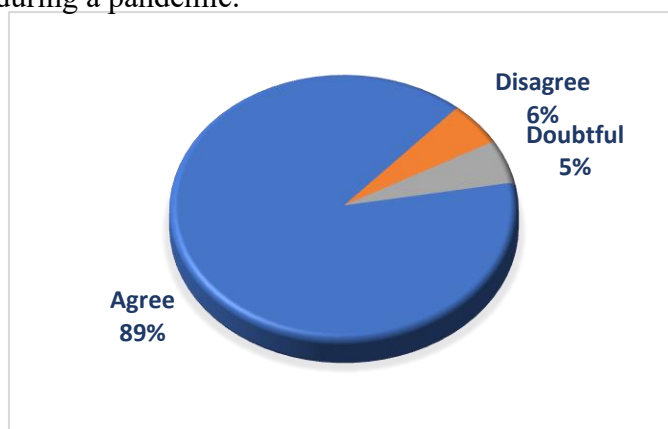


Chart 1. The Students Perceptions About the Importance Of Using Technology

In this assessment, 67 out of 75 students answered “agree”, 4 students answered “disagree”, and 4 others answered “doubtful”. The conclusion that can be drawn at a glance is that most students agree and place technology as one of the ways they can use to help learning activities, not only limited to during a pandemic but whenever they need help.

Researchers say "Mostly" as well as "one way", in context, there are some other answers that apparently did not provide technology to help their learning tasks. In fact, 4 students answered "doubtful". This gives the impression that there are some students who prefer conventional ways of learning, such as reading textbooks, group discussions, or asking teachers, friends, and parents.

The answers from the respondents show an interesting point. Many previous studies have always underlined technology as the most effective and efficient method used to accelerate learning. Among them is the research of Ruggiero & Mong (2015) as quoted in Sahraini & Syamsudarni (2018)

(2018), which states that Technology is considered a golden key to enhance an educational innovation. Although this research specifically leads to the use of computers, in general, technology is considered a tool that should help teachers and students find any information.

Related to this research, students (respondents) should also be expected to place technology as a tool that really helps them when learning. The respondents should give a very positive perspective that technology is very important in supporting education.

However, the fact is that not all respondents gave positive responses about the importance of technology for learning activities. There are still some of them who even doubt the importance of technology for students to help learn. The findings regarding the presence of doubtful students, or those who do not view technology as a primary solution, align with critiques concerning infrastructural readiness and digital cognitive overload.

According to Lie et al. (2020), the forced transition to digital spaces during the pandemic frequently induced digital fatigue (such as Zoom fatigue or digital burnout), causing some students to miss conventional face-to-face interactions. This doubt is also triggered by a lack of guidance or technology anxiety, wherein students feel that without the physical presence of a teacher, gadgets instead become major distractions that diminish their learning focus (Sari & Wahyuni, 2022). This student uncertainty underscores that technology acceptance is subjective and heavily influenced by the home learning environment as well as the students' own digital self-efficacy.

This research does not deepen with other questions, such as the way they prefer other than technology, or the reason that makes them not even sure that technology is the right solution to help their learning activities.

The second question given is whether they use their gadgets to complete school assignments. From these questions, the researchers got 31 “Often” responses, 12 “Rarely” responses, and 32 “occasionally” responses. By analyzing these answers, it can be seen at a glance that even in completing school assignments, not necessarily in English lessons, students are not always intense with their gadgets.

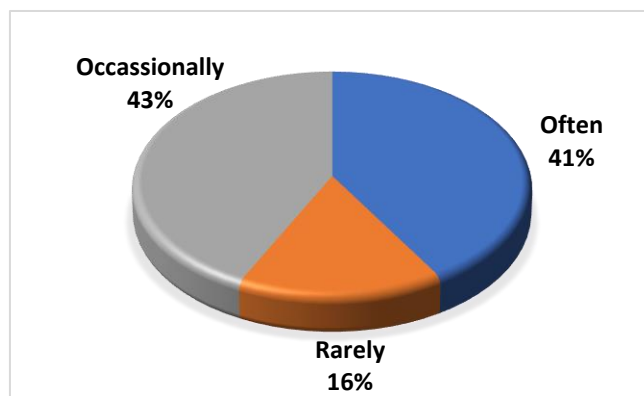


Chart 2. The Use of Gadget to Complete Students' School Assignments

At this stage, the researchers immediately conclude that, on the one hand, students feel helped by technology, but on the other side, they also do not rely on technology as the only way to help them learn. It seems that students still need verbal communication or direct communication with humans, instead of relying on digital technology to help with their work.

The Perception of the students about Technology to Improve Their English Skill

The research deepened by asking follow-up questions, after reading their perceptions about the use of technology in general, the researchers want to know whether they also realize that gadgets can help them to improve their English skills.

Several questions were asked to explore students' perceptions about this:

- a. Are you agree that digital technology is very useful, one of which is if we want to improve our English' speaking skills?
- b. Are you agree that gadgets are the easiest way to practice and improve English language skills?
- c. Are you agree that gadgets are the best way to practice and improve English skills?
- d. Do you have an English learning application on your gadget?

The answers obtained are as follows:

Question	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
a	61	14	0
b	36	33	6
c	36	34	5

Table 1. Questionnaires related to students' perceptions of technology to improve English language skills

Meanwhile, for the “d” question, only 31 students or about 41% of the respondents have certain applications on their gadgets to learn English. The rest, as much as 59% of the respondents gave the answer "no".

Entering this section, there is something interesting from the answers given by the respondents. In the previous question, students gave positive perceptions of the use of technology to support their learning activities. However, when the question was deepened specifically for learning English, the students who doubted were almost equal to those who agreed with it.

This means, technology in their view, may help in learning activities, but students have not or even done not find its easiness when use it in English lessons. This can be read by looking at question (d), most students do not have any application related to English lessons. Although there are also some of them who install or have applications (whatever it is) on their gadgets, which can help them in learning English.

The absence of follow-up questions to students, of course, did not make this research in-depth. For example, in this case the researchers do not ask whether the technology they use is only optimized for subjects that require calculation such as mathematics or physics, or maybe they only know a very few features on their gadget, or not so familiar with some of the features in the gadget that can be used to learn English.

More in-depth research is also needed to determine students' preferences for English learning methods to improve their skills. If students really think that technology will help the learning process, is learning English also included? Furthermore, further research can be used to develop suitable applications to improve English language skills.

The exploration of this question is actually still related to the previous question, but here we read that, even though they consider technology as a device that they can use, digital technology is not the easiest or the best way they can use. Analysing the numbers above, it can be taken the possibility that in learning English, students are more comfortable or prefer to use the dictionary or

English module used in school, according to the curriculum used, even though they still install applications (whatever it is) to support learning English.

The Optimizing of technology using by the students

Entering the final part of deepening the questions about the role of this technology, the students again answered more specific survey questions, whether in the gadgets they have there are some applications installed that will support them in learning English. Or at least, do they use their gadgets to practice their English skills. These questions are:

- a. I use gadgets to access and read English news
- b. I use digital dictionary to improve English vocabulary
- c. I practiced listening by accessing English videos
- d. I write blogs or social media captions in English
- e. I use a gadget to practice proper pronunciation of English words

The questions were deliberately selected and developed to see whether the students knew that the gadgets they had could be used to improve their English language skills, even if only in simple ways (without special applications).

Generally, we know, high school students use social media such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, and also access YouTube channels very often. Not even a few of them have a youtube account to upload their own videos. By asking the 6 questions above, the researchers wanted to see whether the media they usually access, they also use for educational purposes.

But apparently, the answers obtained are as follows:

Question	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
a	11	18	40	6
b	25	14	31	5
c	12	23	35	5
d	14	23	27	11
e	24	14	33	4

Table 2. Questionnaires related to students' perceptions of technology to improve English language skills

In deepening this question, according to the researchers, the answers were not satisfactory, in context, because the students (respondents) had not maximized the tools closest to them yet to maximize learning and improve their English language skills.

Students only occasionally or even rarely touch their gadgets and use them for educational purposes, especially in helping to learn English. In fact, they don't really need any special applications, if they want to, to improve their English skills. It is enough with the existing simple media, as long as their use is optimized.

This is actually a blunder for the teachers. On the one hand, we are in a pandemic period, where the use of gadgets is a tool that should be maximized to support learning activities. But in reality, students have not been able to take advantage of the convenience of this technology to optimize skills, especially in English.

Researchers say this is a blunder for the teacher, because a good teacher, one of which must have criteria, namely understand the needs of students and solving learning difficulties, and also being able to explore other skills needed (Biggs and Moore, 1993 as cited in Mullock, 2003).

This result is also in line with Wahyuni's research (2019), where many high school students still do not use technology tools to support their learning activities, in this case to improve English

language skills. In fact, it is said in the study, that the gadgets that are owned are more often used for entertainment purposes rather than education.

So, returning to the role of the teachers, this is where the importance of teacher creativity, which will also contribute to optimizing the use of gadgets by students for educational matters, especially in terms of improving English language skills.

The low optimization of gadgets by students for productive activities—as indicated by the data in Table 2, where the activities of reading the news (question a) and writing social media captions in English (question d) are dominated by the 'rarely' option—demands a shift in the teacher's role in the digital era. Teachers are no longer merely sources of information, but rather creative facilitators. In this industrial era, academics and practitioners are required to utilize the internet as a medium to obtain authentic materials (Pinter, 2017). This utilization of the internet provides easy access to reach various real teaching materials that enable students to interact directly with real English content and environments.

The integration of authentic materials from the internet into classroom learning has been proven to stimulate student motivation and interest, for instance, through the visualization of global culture via digital recordings. The teacher's ability to optimize this internet technology will ultimately foster learning autonomy, both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, technology offers high flexibility in material delivery through an emphasis on audio-visual aspects (Rivers, 2018). Through appropriate visual materials and digital teaching techniques, teachers can assist students in achieving good proficiency while maintaining their learning motivation during the process of collecting materials they are interested in.

The rigid and test-oriented learning conditions (washback effect) in Indonesia are recognized as one of the primary factors limiting students' learning autonomy outside the school corridors. Research by Sukmawati & Munir (2021) demonstrates that when the curriculum and national assessment systems focus on text-based written tests (such as grammar and reading), students tend to ignore their gadgets for practicing productive skills like speaking or listening. Consequently, technology is only used as an instant digital dictionary rather than an immersive medium for authentic language interaction (Muallim et al., 2023). This explains why the percentage of ownership of specific English learning applications in this study is very low (41%); students do not perceive any structural urgency from the school to install such applications.

Data in Table 2 prove that productive activities with high academic value, such as writing blogs or social media captions in English (question d) and reading the news (question a), fall into the 'rarely' category. This phenomenon demands a shift in the teacher's role from merely an instructor to a creative digital technology facilitator. Pinter (2017) emphasizes that internet utilization must be directed toward providing authentic materials so that students can interact with a real language environment. In this industrial era, students' out-of-class autonomous learning will not emerge organically without pedagogical intervention in the form of digital project-based assignments from the teacher (Rivers, 2018; Muallim et al., 2023). Teachers must be capable of bridging students' fondness for social media into meaningful language activities.

Conclusion

From the discussion about the use of technology by students in improving their English language skills, the researchers describe a simple conclusion, because it still has to be deepened with detailed research, that students' perceptions of technological progress are actually very high. They already know and even actively use existing gadgets to explore themselves through social media. Some of those who became respondents have also started to utilize existing technology to support learning activities, not only in English. Even so, the researchers still hope that the use of this technology can continue to be optimized, so that students can be more skilled in every subject, especially English, only by utilizing simple features that are certainly very familiar to students. This of course, must be supported by the role of teachers who understand the needs of students, so that

they can direct them to use technology, not only for social media and seeking entertainment, but also in creative and educational matters.

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