

Web-Based Language Learning: Benefits for Enhancing EFL Learners' Speaking Skill

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Abstract. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) achieves the outstanding position in the field of pedagogy of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Its promising existence has encouraged foreign language learners to interact authentically in the computer-based English learning. Web-based language learning (WBLL) as the successor of CALL has emerged and is gaining its popularity as an online learning platform in the field of language education today. WBLL is able to improve the competence of learners and become a convincing interactive learning medium in confirming better quality of language input and output through the internet technology. Although not a few studies have discussed Web 2.0 technology, the majority of their findings may only review the students' and teachers' perceptions in using the technology; instead, not too many findings focus on how WBLL impacts learners' language skills, more specifically EFL learners' oral performance. This paper purports to review empirical studies using WBLL for enhancing EFL learners' speaking skill in addition to its benefits for enhancing learners' motivation and providing stimulus to alleviate their anxiety while speaking with highly interactive learning environment outside the classroom.

Key words: WBLL; CALL; speaking skill; technology-based instruction

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INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology (ICT) has penetrated into most aspects of human life so that people can do anything through ICT such as recording what is happening around them where this is due to the support of advances in digital technology. It is undeniable that technology is developing rapidly and educational institutions have begun to adopt and implement computer devices as instructional tools to facilitate students for learning. There was a name for integrating technology into English language teaching (ELT) which was termed as CALL (computer-assisted language learning). CALL is the earliest approach in computer technology-based learning and provides many opportunities for students to learn independently.

Over the past twenty years, the Internet has facilitated its users in the implementation of technology-based education to be more flexible and more efficient. According to Pacheco (2005), world wide web (www or web)-based education has become a leading feature of CALL. In addition to advanced computer technology, websites are also considered the easiest and most popular approach to education at the levels of secondary and higher education. This new trend is called Web-based Learning (WBL) or specifically in language learning known as web-based language learning (WBLL).

Since the term WBLL became popular in the

field of language education, there has been an increase in the number of studies focusing their investigations on the web-based language learning in classrooms. According to Lai & Gu (2011), language instructors can extend their teaching practice model beyond the physical constraints of language classes because web-based technology has now allowed teachers to take advantage of it. For example, in blended learning, in addition to attending face-to-face traditional language classes, students also can carry out online activities outside of school. In terms of facilitating learning English using technology, websites can be useful for foreign language learning (Son, 2008; Blake, 2011), and learners have a positive perception for web-based learners (Tan, 2013; Ngampornchai & Adams, 2016). One of the positive perceptions is that learning and teaching a foreign language on a web platform can help learners reduce language anxiety (Dewaele, 2017; Fauzi, 2021a). Furthermore, according to McIntosh et al. (2003) that communication mediated by text-based computer in web platform has lowered learners' anxiety level due to less pressure in responding task without a time limit. Therefore, this paper would like to review how far WBLL contributes benefits for language teaching especially to enhance learners' speaking skill of English.

METHODS

This paper uses qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach (Zed, 2008). Library research, according to Zed, is the research limits its activities only to the study of literature references to answer problems. The problems analysed in this study are (1) the nature of WBL for language learning; (2) WBL for enhancing EFL learners' speaking skill; and (3) WBL benefits for alleviating language learners' anxiety while speaking the target language. Benefits of this study can contribute to web-based language learning technologies in improving proficiency of learners' spoken English. In addition, WBL offers English teachers' insight into how students can achieve their communicative speech without worrying their interlocutors while speaking using the target language. Moreover, by trying to implement web-based language learning, learners may have a virtual partner through artificial intelligence in the web to replace native speakers who are inaccessible to them, and learners can familiarize themselves to speak up without triggering their anxiety.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion in this part conveys problems discussed through a literature review where web-based language learning (by its nature) is a technology facility that can help teachers or instructors to provide learning materials to their students with a variety of learning strategies. The following specifically reviews the related matters in terms of: (1) the nature of WBL for language learning; (2) how WBL enhance speaking skill of EFL learners; and (3) the benefit of WBL to alleviate language learners' anxiety in speaking.

1. The nature of WBL for language learning

The WWW (World Wide Web) is the Internet's most popular new technology tool used as a communication facilitator. The web also serves as a medium for the instructional distribution. Many websites provide digital educational activities and internet-based courses for a large number of subjects at all levels of the language classroom. Web-based learning or WBL for short is an internet medium that can be used by teachers or instructors to design and deliver instruction through various learning strategies (Khan and Vega, 1997). In general, individual learners can be responsible for their learning processes and outcomes on web platforms (Reeves and Reeves, in Cavus and Sarica, 2008). This can also give them the freedom to move at

any time and to any part of the world virtually if they want to.

Through WBL, learning can facilitate and help students perform certain tasks through teacher-designed information. As noted, communication technologies in WBL are generally categorized as asynchronous or synchronous activities (Darhower, 2008); (Wang, et al, 2004); (Pacheco, 2005). *Asynchronous* activity is that participants can engage in the exchange of ideas or information without relying on the involvement of other participants at the same time using web technologies such as blogs, Google classroom, or email. In contrast, *synchronous* activities are participants engaged in the exchange of ideas and information with one or more other participants such as chats, video conferences, and discussion boards in the same period of time.

In terms of language skills, reading and writing skills are more convenient to be taught through asynchronous because teachers or instructors can facilitate their learners by providing instructional materials via blog or Google classroom (Fauzi, 2021b). In writing skill, for instance, teachers merely provide learners exercise pages such as filling the gaps by using the words given, or analyzing written texts to find out the error in terms of grammar or sentence structures. Similarly, to reading skill, teachers also have no difficulty to provide reading sources. They just link the texts that they want to share then prepare the document sheet in Google classroom to examine comprehension from what learners have read. All learning activities from both language skills keep requiring active learners when learning to use web-based technology though they do not have to be involved at the same time with other learners and their teachers or learning facilitators.

In contrast to two other language skills named listening and speaking, teachers or instructors have to be intensively controlled and involve with their students. Therefore, both skills are more applicable with the synchronous nature (Fauzi, 2021b). In speaking skill, video conference application such as Zoom is very beneficial to give students a chance to perform their speaking. The advantage of video conference is that the student can interact at a distance with other students and the teacher or instructor rather than studying alone. Regarding with listening skill, in addition to this skill can also be done via asynchronous such as pronunciation practice with computer-peer talk (using AI technology) but this skill is also often integrated with speaking skill so

that its learning activity is more convenient in the synchronous activity.

Those all learning conditions above are to conform Downing & Rath (1997) that WBL facilitates communication, enhances interactions, provides student-centered, self-paced, collaborative learning, disseminates shared information, and reaches out to global communities. Therefore, more educators have utilized web-based for learning in order to make their teaching more attractive to and more interactive with students.

2. WBLL for enhancing EFL learners' speaking skill

WBLL facilitates its users to communicate and interact with challenging and complex content, so that learners are free to have control on the use of the platform. In this case, teachers must always be there with their learners to direct the learning process. This is in line with what Wild and Quinn (1997) affirm that learning activities in a technology-based environment still have a role for teachers as a controller in determining learning outcomes.

In addition, to improve the oral competence of L2 learners in the language classroom, web-based technology is increasingly being applied as a learning platform (Fauzi, et al. 2022). This is due to the fact that WBLL provides a convenient platform to increase the chance of interaction for language learners. Through meaningful interaction, learners can put into practice the linguistic knowledge they have learned in class and can learn from each other. One of web-based technology applications which is helpful to enhance learners' speaking skill is video conference, e.g., *Zoom*. This application can provide opportunities for students and instructors to interact remotely, rather than having to learn on their own. Computer-based class discussions can be conducted independently without depending on space and time. In addition, students and other peers can speak interactively through video conferencing with native speakers of the language being learned. This is the time for learners' opportunity to compare their pronunciation with native speakers. This is in line with what was stated by Cotlar and Shimabukuro (1995) that through WBLL, guest teachers or instructors can be invited to join class discussions or even conferences, so that students can interact directly with experts in their fields. In addition, video conference is also providing a face-to-face interaction to students where this kind of virtual

platform can build a virtual community by providing support and promoting sharing among the participants which can help overcome the isolation of remote areas (Singletary and Anderson, 1995).

In terms of enhancing EFL learners' speaking skill, Dugartsyrenova and Sardegna (2017) utilized *VoiceThread*—an online website allowing its users to share a text, audio or video; in their language classroom. This web-based platform was provided to eight undergraduate students studying Russian as a foreign language in which the platform can enhance learners' oral proficiency in regard to vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency. Furthermore, Hwang, et al (2016) experiment a web-based platform to Taiwanese sixth-graders who were provided with pictures to create digital story videos. The platform was equipped with various useful functions to create or add text, picture, and animation with their own voice to narrate the story. From the study, it was proved that web-based platform significantly improved the speaking skill of EFL learners in addition to the use of animation to create videos significantly associated with participants' learning achievements. Related to several WBLL applications utilized abovementioned, it is not exaggerated to say that web-based language learning has a positive impact on learners' L2 speaking proficiency as well as on their active participation in the virtual interaction.

3. WBLL benefits for alleviating language learners' anxiety

Some have claimed that web-based language learning applications benefit the learning outcomes, output, interaction, affect, and motivation of learners. El Sazly (2020), for instance, examines the effect of the use of artificial intelligence (AI) on learners' anxiety in speaking English and proficiency during speech. He explores the role of AI applications in speaking practices to manage foreign language anxiety levels. He uses AI chatbot in interactive activities to facilitate the interaction improvement and oral communication in improving learners' English-speaking skill. His finding supports the integration of AI technology in web-based learning as an effective tool in English education because it provides flexible, interactive, and learner-centered learnings, as well as minimizing anxiety in speaking. This is also to confirm Tafazoli and Gómez-Parra (2017) who assert that using AI applications in web-based learning can

improve student-centered learning approaches, in addition to showing that anxiety can be minimized when AI offers enough autonomous learners to interact.

Meanwhile, Ataiefar and Sadighi (2017) assert that web-based language learning in enhancing speaking skill under the name of *Voice Thread* application can overcome foreign language anxiety. This application is an audio-conferencing medium with an asynchronous model. The level of learners' anxiety using the *Voice Thread* can be reduced where it is likely due to the relaxed atmosphere created by this tool. In addition, the use of this application can make learning relaxed and enjoyable. The fact from the study implicitly informs that web-based language learning applications can allow teachers to provide a learning atmosphere that is relatively stress-free and calmer when interacting with students. This is also similar to McIntosh's, et al., (2003) that communication mediated by text-based computer in web platform has lowered learners' anxiety level due to less pressure in responding task without a time limit. In addition, according to Mak (2011), foreign language classes often become a triggering spot for the rise of learners' anxiety especially when they are asked to produce spoken language in front of their own teachers and friends. Therefore, the choice of WBLL is able to alleviate students' apprehension and fear while speaking the target language.

Furthermore, the most recent study related to web-based English learning being able to reduce learner anxiety levels is the findings from Bashori, et al., (2020) which states that web-based language learning can alleviate learners' anxiety when speaking. In addition, the study conducted on Indonesian vocational school students in speaking English revealed that learners feel less anxious when speaking in front of websites based on automatic speech recognition (ASR) than talking to peers or other interlocutors. The result of this study contributes to what Crookall and Oxford (1991) stated that technological tools can help teachers provide a learning environment that can reduce the anxiety level which is considered to hinder learners' speaking skill. Based on aforementioned studies related to English learning using web-based technology, there is no doubt that it can provide benefits to lessen the learners' anxiety in speaking English since there is no pressure from the surrounding environment.

CONCLUSION

This literature research has provided a brief overview about the importance of web-based English learning for EFL learners. By this literature review, it is concluded that WBLL can provide a convenient platform to increase language learners' interaction opportunities especially in enhancing speaking skill. In addition, the WBLL can also overcome language learning anxiety since it makes language learning to be more relaxed and more enjoyable. By this result, it implies that English teachers might be recommended to familiarize their students with learning through web-based applications especially in speaking practice because the high level of apprehension when speaking such as fear of being wrong, nervousness, lack of confidence can be alleviated through web-based learning. Nonetheless, this study is admittedly still far from comprehensive to uncover the shortcomings of web-based English learning especially in terms of supporting learners' speaking proficiency. There is still a need for in-depth theoretical studies or even more specific research related to the benefits and influences of English learning through web platforms to improve learners' speaking skill of English.

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