

THE USE OF DIGITAL CHOICE BOARD TO ENGAGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LEARNING NARRATIVE TEXT

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ABSTRACT

Students are having diverse learning styles, personalities, needs, interests, and intelligences, which affect students' engagement to the teaching and learning processes including English Language Teaching and Learning. And therefore teacher should accommodate those diversities by differentiating the instructions that provide varieties of activities students can choose based on their own interests. Using Digital Choice Board under the framework of differentiated instructions philosophy, teacher's effort to engage the students by giving them "*Merdeka Belajar*" and freedom to choose can be implemented. This paper discuss the implementation of Digital Choice Board to engage students in EFL teaching and learning and provide evidence how Digital Choice Board can improve students' engagement in learning narrative text.

INTRODUCTION

In 2019, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology established *Merdeka Belajar* philosophy for primary and secondary education through a regulation. Reflecting the entire contents of the regulation, it can be seen that the course grid or the lesson plan is more simplified. Teachers are given flexibility in the learning process to choose, create, use, and develop the RPP format. With the consideration that it is the teacher who knows the needs of his students, teachers are given opportunity to accommodate the diverse needs of the students.

English teachers hopefully, respond to the regulation by providing the students in the area of EFL teaching and learning with varieties language inputs. Understanding the students' needs, interests, proficiency, intelligence and learning style in learning English should be put as the important part in designing learning strategies that can accommodate those different backgrounds (Tomlinson, 1999).

However many teachers have found it tiresome and time consuming to create lesson that can provide students having different backgrounds. Moreover, during the blended learning, many teachers thought that they should focus on two things, synchronous and asynchronous mode of meetings. Designing lesson plan with the instructions that more efficient and effective, simple and concise in one page only but covers all the standard is challenging. So that teachers are being confused with the standard settled by the government. This problem needs to be solved. So that through the freedom to arrange lesson plan (RPP) for teachers, the students will also learn with more actively, dynamically, and being engaged with learning activities which are based on students' choices.

This study proposed EFL teaching and learning strategies that can be used as the alternative in solving the problem dealing with students' different backgrounds. By using Digital Choice Board (DCB) as part of Tomlinson's (1999) ideas on differentiated instructions, this study presents how DCB can help teachers designing instructions for all students. It also describes the way to use DCB in English class.

Differentiated Instructions: a pedagogical strategy

Tomlinson, et al., (2003) present a developed definition of Differentiated Instructions (DI) that encompassed consistently the various ideas on how teachers apply differentiated instruction. In other words, DI is a teaching approach in which "teachers proactively modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products to address the diverse needs of individual students and small groups of students to maximize the learning opportunity for each student in a classroom" (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p.121).

Tomlinson's (1999) framework for differentiating based on content (what the teacher provides as learning input), process (how the teacher has structured the activity), or product (what the students are expected to produce) has been widely used by educators to organize the many different ways an activity can be modified for different learners.

Erben et al (2009) state that differentiated instructions is allowing students to choose the route to their learning. They suggested the use of technology that allows students to engage in the types of activities and strategies that employed project-based learning. Project-based learning promotes student-centred lessons in which exploring, experimenting, and discovering knowledge happened in student-centred learning environments (Nunan in Erben et al, 2009). It leads to

teacher's recognition of providing a variety of assignments within units of instruction, realizing that students do not all learn in the same way.

Won and MacDonald (2014) state that differentiating instructional content involves varying the topic and type of content (texts, audio, or video). It means that teacher adjust the learning materials based on the students interests, learning preferences, or knowledge of the topic. While in adapting the process, teachers adjust activities to allow learners to use different cognitive skills ranging from memorization to creation, often based on Bloom's taxonomy. In adapting product, teachers offer learners an alternative means to demonstrate their learning.

Erben, et al (2009) suggest principles on using technology in educational setting that gives teachers perspectives on how to facilitate students especially language learners with effective instructions as well as pointing out the importance of knowing the students' background. Those principles are: 1) knowing the students' familiarity with technology; 2) choosing materials that fit to the students; 3) fostering learner autonomy to collaborate and enhance their own learning; 4) promoting language use that foster both types of interaction: communicatively accurate and communicatively effective interactions; 5) anticipating the challenge of technology use in the class. These five principles need to be considered by teacher when implementing the instructions.

Students' Backgrounds: Essential Elements

Identifying the students' backgrounds: readiness and needs, interests, learning styles, personalities, and intelligences prior to lesson planning are important (Blaz, 2016). By thinking about these factors, teachers provide learning that involves students to be in engaging learning environment.

Readiness is the proximity to the specified learning goals. The students' background knowledge comprehended to achieve the learning goals. Dray et al (2011) conducted a research on students' readiness and needs in relation to online learning. They developed instruments to assess students' readiness toward online learning by combined students' learning characteristics and technology capabilities. The readiness instruments on learning characteristics including their beliefs about responsibility in problem solving, self direction, self efficacy in writing and expression, academic self-concept, and behavioural regulation for goal attainment (Dray, et al., 2011). While in assessing students' readiness in technology capabilities, Dray et al. (2011) includes basic technological skills and material access to technology.

Other insights on assessing students' readiness for DI are coming from Erben, et al (2009). They give alternative ways to find out students' readiness through the use of technology that is by using exit cards, quizzes, and survey. This action research will use quizzes and survey with the contents adapted from Dray (2011). The result of the students' readiness assessment is used in differentiation as well as in grouping the students.

The same is true with the students' need assessment. Tzotzou (2014) conducted a study to know her students' needs in EFL learning. The need analysis including learner's attitude toward EFL learning that imply Dörnyei's (1998) intrinsic and extrinsic motivation concept. At this point,

she suggested that teachers must generate EFL class activities in which students can apply their language skills and knowledge as tools to meet the factual needs in eloquent condition.

Interests relate to passions and kinship that motivate learning. Asgari et al., (2019) insist that paying attention on student's interest by providing Interest Based Language Teaching can improve the student's achievement. But it can be more than that, student who receives attention on their individual interest will likely to be more confident and motivated to learn. The interests that they perform are connected with their attention focus, goal setting and learning strategies (Hidi and Rininger, 2006).

Digital Choice Board: Students' choices

The strategies embark the elaboration of students' background accommodation (Tomlinson, 1999) with the varieties of learning inputs and modalities, flexible grouping, interactive media, engaging activities, learners' autonomy, and a choice for project based learning. Those strategies are packed as a set of learning station namely Digital Choice Board (DCB). In DCB, the learning materials are delivered through varied inputs, activities, and medias based on the students' backgrounds.

The implementation of the strategies supported by the utilization of technology-assisted language learning. The students' individual uniqueness and diverse backgrounds are accommodated by the adjustment of the instructions. Besides, those approaches are effective in making the students engage with the learning, on task, and improve their learning achievement. Other than that, identifying students' background will make teachers design the lesson that improve students' learning autonomy. The Digital Choice Board can be seen below.

Narrative Text Choice Board

<p>Watch the video</p> 	<p>Watch the video</p> <p>NARRATIVE TEXT FAIRY TALES</p> 	<p>Listen to the audio below</p> <p>Radio Redukasi cerdas, santun, dan menghibur</p>			
<p>Watch the video</p> 	<p>EXIT TICKET OF NARRATIVE TEXT</p> 	<p>Practice your grammar</p> <p>PAST SIMPLE TENSE</p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td> <p>REGULAR VERBS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + V ed / d + s / es / V ? Did + s / V? </td> <td> <p>ADVERBS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + just / then + last week / at that time + in 2011 + when / before / after </td> <td> <p>IRREGULAR VERBS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + + ll / am - + did / + I / was ? Did + s + I / was? </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<p>REGULAR VERBS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + V ed / d + s / es / V ? Did + s / V? 	<p>ADVERBS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + just / then + last week / at that time + in 2011 + when / before / after 	<p>IRREGULAR VERBS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + + ll / am - + did / + I / was ? Did + s + I / was?
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<p>Play the game</p> 	<p>Play the game</p> 	<p>Play the game</p> 			

The Digital Choice Board is a kind of graphic organizers that give students opportunities to choose activity presented in grid with nine squares. The students do the activities by selecting three activities that form *Tic Tac Toe* either horizontally, vertically or diagonally. The square in the middle is obligatory because it is students' reflection/exit ticket after learning independently the selected activity. The middle square is an activity that all the students do. It is a worksheet to assess their understanding on narrative text.

The Digital Choice Board is created for the students to select three activities delivered through some media. Those media were Google Classroom, YouTube, Live Worksheet, English Short Story Apps, and *Radio Edukasi*. The overall learning activities in DCB is wrapped in fun atmosphere and accommodating the students learning preferences. The students are free to choose three activities with one obligatory activity used as the reflection of the students' learning. The duration of learning by using the digital choice board are negotiable, which means the students set a contract on when they will accomplish the activities they have preferred. During the agreed days they must do the activities in the DCB and submit the screenshots as proofs of their learning in Google classroom, and by the end they took the exit ticket.

After explaining about what the students should do with the digital choice board, teacher can ask the students to tell their selection by fulfilling the Google Form. The form is used to know their enthusiast. The teacher can give students opportunity to explore the input text with media and theme variations. The variation on the input text as well as the content of the learning helps students to actualize their personal belongingness to the learning process (Borja, Soto, and Sanchez, 2015; Ortega, Cabrera, and Benalcázar, 2018). The students' explorations to the media that fit to their interest and learning preferences increase their self-confidence and autonomy (Lefa, 2014; Asgari et al. 2019).

It is important for teachers to note that there are various learning styles model: visual, aural, reading/writing and kinaesthetic (VARK). The other model of learning style was visual, auditory, verbal, kinaesthetic, logical, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Brown's (2007) three learning style model is visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. Among these models, each student is benefitted by not only one model of learning style. So providing students chance to develop learning through variety of modalities in the Digital Choice Board motivate students' language learning.

In differentiated instruction, teacher should not identify one single learning style or method of learning and focusing on it alone and ignore the other learning modalities, and this could ultimately hamper learning (Blaz, 2016; Bondie and Zusho, 2018). It is much more useful to think of it like this: the teacher recognizes the students' certain learning strength, then uses that strength by adding more of it to learning strategies. But the teacher must not stop using the other modalities but rather extends it for others.

The exit ticket test the students should take after learning about narrative text is part of students' reflection. It measures their depth of knowledge on narrative text. The exit ticket test is to be placed in the center of the digital choice board. To access the exit ticket, students click on the link located in the square. After clicking the link, they will be directed to a site that they should do the worksheet online.

After accomplishing the tasks in the worksheets, the students click on the submit button. Automatically the worksheet would be scored, so they would know on what part they had made incorrect answers. Knowing what part they had made mistakes will manage the students to go back to the prior activity they had done such as watching video that explained about narrative text or listening to *Radio Edukasi* depending on the their interest. Using exit ticket test in the lesson is to guide the students recalling information that they had got on asynchronous learning experience. It is to measure their depth of knowledge on narrative text. According to Webb in Blaz (2016), depth of knowledge is referring students' reflection on what they had understood, basically involves just repeating learned material. The exit ticket, therefore, contains with tasks and worksheets that integrate Bloom's taxonomy especially on remembering and understanding domain.

CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration the factors that promote a "Merdeka Belajar" environment previously stated, EFL teachers may differentiate their classroom environment by encouraging students to create an environment of free preferences learning. Teachers should encourage the students to reveal their true passion in learning and knowing what they are selecting.

Another point EFL teachers should consider is the elaboration or search of materials that will allow them to provide them with content materials that go according to their readiness level or interests. Also, they should monitor their students while they are working so that they can provide them individual or group support when needed as well as more time to develop their tasks if necessary. Similarly, they should give their students the opportunity to become responsible for their own learning as they will be able to decide the types of materials they will use for their own learning as well as the tasks they will perform to demonstrate their progress. Finally, teachers should manage to elaborate or get visual (pictures, posters, videos, etc.) and audio (audiotapes, music, etc.) representations of the content being studied in order to support the student learning and provide an interactive environment.

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