

DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES OF EFL SPECIAL SCHOOL TEACHER: ENGLISH FOR MENTALLY RETARDED STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Mentally retarded students learn English with difficulties. The limitation is related to the mental problems as the main obstacle to learn English. The use of digital tools can be very beneficial in teaching and learning English for mentally retarded students. There were several types of research related to mentally retarded students but there was no research about the digital literacy practices of special school teachers in teaching English. This paper investigates the digital literacy practices of teachers in teaching English for mentally retarded students. The participants of this research were 15 special school teachers from three special schools around Jakarta, Tangerang and Kediri. The data of this research was gained through an open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and online observation. The result showed that teachers in special schools were able to use some applications and digital tools in their teaching such as Ms Office, Video, Whatsapp, Google Form and Cap Cut. Their functional skills have been well-developed. Moreover, they could operate and use these digital tools for teaching and it was affected by teachers' ages and work-period. In line with digital literacy practices, the findings showed that teachers have already used some digital tools in some ways based on Hague and Payton framework: teachers could create digital contents such as power point, video, voice recording and images (creativity), 86.7% of teachers have selected useful material by watching the downloaded video before giving them to the students (critical thinking and evaluation), 73.3% of teachers used digital tools to introduce their students to foreign cultures to raise their tolerance among citizens (cultural and social understanding), teachers used video to promote collaborative learning (collaboration), 53% of teachers found no difficulties to find and select information (finding and selecting information ability), 86.7% of teachers liked to review the information then shared them with others (effective communication) and 66.7% of teachers used trusted websites to download teaching materials (e-safety). On the other hand, the findings showed that special school teachers faced some challenges in using digital tools for teaching mentally retarded students such as difficulties in downloading teaching materials, lack of internet access, less-focused students, number of students in class, short teaching period and in availability of teacher's guide. With these conditions, teachers were expected to upgrade themselves by being long-life learners and being open-minded for any updates. Moreover, this paper contributed to English language teaching literature especially for mentally retarded students.

Keywords: Digital Literacy; Special School; ELT

INTRODUCTION

English is a compulsory subject at all senior high school levels in Indonesia. Special school is no exception [1], [2]. Teaching and learning English have various challenges in different kinds of schools [3], [4]. The challenges of teaching and learning English in the state, private, and special schools are different according to the target of the schools.

In special schools, the classes were established according to the kinds of students. Different condition of the students leads them to different kind of classes [5], [6]. For example, a mentally retarded student should study in the same class as other mentally retarded students. A mentally retarded student should not be in the same class as a speech disorder student. So, the students in the special schools are classified in the classes based on their special conditions.

In the modern era, digital literacy becomes very important [7], [8]. In the educational context, a teacher is required to be digitally literate. Teaching and learning that is integrated with the digital atmosphere can provide a better process and result [9]. The use of digital tools can engage the students more and the teaching and learning become more enjoyable and meaningful [10], [11].

Related to the special school with mentally retarded students, a teacher may find several challenges in teaching English in Indonesia since the conditions of the students that the mental development is slower than they should develop [12]. A mentally retarded student at the age of senior high level can be the same as an elementary student with non-mentally retarded conditions [13]. This condition creates several challenges in teaching English to the students.

This research led to answering three research questions. The first research question was What kinds of digital tools are used by teachers in teaching English to mentally retarded students? The second one was how do teachers deal with digital tools in teaching English to mentally retarded students? The third research question was what are the challenges faced by teachers in using digital tools in teaching English to mentally retarded students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

ELT and Mentally Retarded Students

Mental retardation is a condition where someone cannot perform an activity. Mental retardation is one of the disability conditions [14], [15]. Someone with mental retardation experiences the mind developing incompletely. The person that is categorized as mentally retarded has an IQ of seventy or lower in psychological tests [16]. Therefore, a mentally retarded person develops some slow or incomplete skills.

Related to the indicators used to identify the condition of mental retardation are learning difficulty, attention distraction easily, motor skills lack, poor language development, and problems with adaptive behavior. A mentally retarded person is also can be identified and classified based on the range of the IQ [17]. There are four categories of mental retardation conditions. The first is mild mental retardation. This condition is for a person with a score of

fifty to seventy on an IQ test. The second was moderate and the IQ ranges from thirty-five to forty-nine. The third is severe. This condition is for someone whose IQ score ranges between thirty-four to twenty and the last is profound that the IQ score is under twenty [18].

Bearing with the teaching of English, mentally retarded students find it more difficult to learn [19]. The teacher has to teach focus on the students' needs and adjust to the student's conditions. The use of interesting teaching media, colored pictures, videos, and storytelling are helpful to attract the students' attention. Moreover, the instructions given by the teacher should be clear, loud, and easy to understand [20], [21]. The teaching method should be considered an important thing in teaching mentally retarded students. Creating interesting teaching and learning will be very beneficial.

Digital Literacy Practices

The use of digital technology is considered a helpful thing in teaching mentally retarded students. A teacher is suggested to have digital literacy skills. Digital literacy is not the only skill to use digital tools. Digital literacy is skills to find, analyze, evaluate, and use the information for specific purposes [22], [23].

A teacher for mentally retarded students should be able to find, evaluate, modify, and create suitable teaching materials for the students based on their special needs [24]. The teacher should be able to use and collaborate digital tools with the information to teach mentally retarded students in a better way since mentally retarded students need special treatment for learning materials [25].

There are eight dimensions of digital literacy. The dimensions are as follows:

Table 1. Eight dimensions of digital literacy [26]

Dimensions of digital literacy	Descriptions
Functional Skills	Skills in operating various digital tools
Creativity	Ability to process digital content creatively
Critical thinking and evaluation	Thinking and evaluating information from digital tools critically
Cultural and social understanding	Using digital tools to understand cultural and social aspects of digital media
Collaboration	Using digital media and information collaboratively
Finding and selecting information ability	The ability to find, select and evaluate information through digital media.
Effective communication	Ability to use information from digital media to share ideas and build effective

	communication
E-safety	Ability to use digital tools and information safely

The table shows that digital literacy is not only about reading and writing using digital tools. It covers functional skills, creativity, critical thinking and evaluation, cultural and social understanding, collaboration, ability to find and select information, effective communication, and electronic safety.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

There were several previous research related to the mentally retarded students in Indonesia. The first research is entitled towards a better way to teach and promote mentally retarded EFL learners' vocabulary learning and retention [14]. The result of the research showed that there was a significant difference between the effectiveness of the two vocabulary learning strategies. The group that learned vocabulary through pictures performed better than the other group. However, the research did not explore the digital literacy practices of the teachers in teaching English for mentally retarded students.

The second research was entitled the use of the TPR method for disabled students with different learning styles in English vocabulary development [15]. The result showed that there were three kinds of learning styles. The learning styles were visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic. After using TPR, the result increased one hundred percent for both visual and auditory learning styles while the kinaesthetic increased fifty percent. The research also revealed that many factors influenced the result of the students' tests. The research focused on the use of TPR.

The third research was entitled the practices and obstacles of English language teaching in intellectual disability classroom: a case study at special school (SLB) in Palembang [16]. The result showed that teaching English for mentally retarded students was the same as the regular students but the difference is from the students' needs. The research also revealed the obstacles of teaching English for intellectual disability students were coming from the limitations in writing, reading, speaking, listening, and heterogeneous ability.

The fourth research was entitled developing English vocabulary application for the mentally-retarded students at SLB Arya Satya Hati [17]. The research developed an application for teaching vocabulary for mentally retarded students. The result of the study showed that the application can be used in teaching and learning vocabulary for mentally retarded students. However, all researches above did not explore the teacher of mentally retarded students related to the digital literacy practices.

Based on the previous research, there is a research gap. The previous research did not explore the digital literacy practices of the ELT teacher for mentally retarded students. Therefore, this research would like to fill the gap by researching the English teacher of mentally retarded students related to digital literacy.

METHODOLOGY

This research applied a qualitative case study design. It was considered to be chosen since this research would like to describe an issue [27], [28]. In this case the issue about digital literacy practices of EFL teachers for mentally retarded students. The participants of this research were fifteen special school teachers from three different special schools. The data of this research was gained through an open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and online observation. An open-ended questionnaire was chosen because it is an effective way to obtain data [29]. A semi-structured interview was used in this research to gain data deeper while observation is used to support the primary data [30], [31].

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

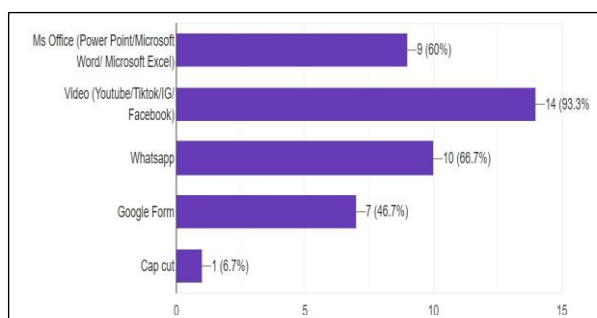
This section will explain the result of the study based on the research questions with the framework used adopted from Hague and Payton. The findings would be broken into some sections to give detailed information. It was supported by data results and interviews which would be described separately. Then, the names of participants mentioned in the excerpts are pseudonyms, this aimed to uphold research ethics and confidentiality.

Digital Tools Used by Teacher for Teaching Mentally Retarded Students

Researchers agree that the use of digital tools may raise students' motivation in learning English. This was also beneficial for mentally retarded students. As the result shown in table 1, there were five digital tools or applications mostly used by special school teachers.

This result also resembles the functional skill as mentioned in Hague and Payton's framework of eight dimensions of digital literacy. Additionally, the offline class was the setting of this study, and 15 special school teachers from three different schools were becoming the respondents. From the table, it can be concluded that most respondents agreed to use video for teaching their students (93.3 %). By connecting to the projector and display to the class, they argued that video was the most effective one to attract students' attention. Then the second most app or digital tool used by teachers was WhatsApp (66.7%). From the interview, teachers revealed that WhatsApp was effective be used to deliver instruction. Furthermore, teachers used Ms. Office (60%) such as PowerPoint to deliver the materials. The rest apps used were google Forms (46.7%) and Cap Cut (6.7%).

Table 1. Digital Tools Used by Teachers for Mentally Retarded Students



Dealing with the digital tools

Teachers of mentally retarded students used digital tools in their teaching processes such as Ms. Office, Video, WhatsApp, Google form, and Cap Cut. Mainly, they used this to attract students' attention. This showed how the digital practices of special school teachers were applied. Based on the Hague and Payton framework, there were eight dimensions of digital literacy. Furthermore, digital literacy practices of teachers for mentally retarded students were broken down into several dimensions:

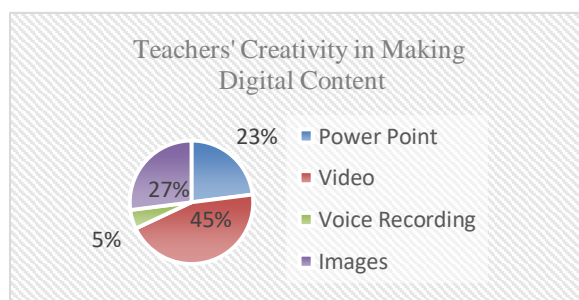
Functional Skills

Based on the findings, it showed that teachers in special schools were able to use some applications and digital tools in their teaching. They could operate and use these digital tools for teaching. It was affected by some aspects such as teachers' ages and work-period. From the data, it was gained that there were 46.2% of teachers have been working for more than 10 years while others were about 5-10 years (30.8%) and 1-5 years (23.1%).

Creativity

Creativity means teachers can modify and explore their knowledge then apply them in their teaching process. Based on the findings, it revealed that special school teachers were creative to create some content for teaching in class. Table 2 shows how teachers explored their creativity and in line with the second dimension of Hague and Hayton's framework.

Table 2. Teacher's creativity



Teaching mentally retarded students don't limit teachers' creativity. Realizing the importance of digital tools in teaching activity, special school teachers were still able to make their digital content for teaching materials. The video was the most frequently created by special school teachers. Based on the interview, teachers spent their time creating the learning video and posted it on their YouTube channel (45%). This was used to teach their students in class and also as a reference for other teachers. Then the images were the most frequently made by teachers (27%).

Teachers captured the targeted pictures and adjusted them based on their needs and it was used in their teaching to grab students' attention, particularly in pre-activity as they warmed up. Mentally retarded students were extremely excited to watch the video and see the images shown by their teachers. Then other digital contents created were PowerPoint (23%) and voice recording (5%). All digital content was expected to help the mentally retarded students learn better in class.

Critical Thinking and Evaluation

In digital literacy practices, teachers were expected to have critical thinking. How good teachers were in selecting suitable teaching materials and adjusting them to students' needs? Regarding the result, 86.7% of teachers performed their critical thinking. It deals with their abilities to select useful material based on the school syllabus. For instance, the teacher watched the downloaded video before giving them to the students. But surprisingly, 13.3% of teachers rarely evaluate their materials which were gained from the internet especially the video. They just downloaded some without any evaluation, such as the length of the video, suitable content, and so on.

Cultural and Social Understanding

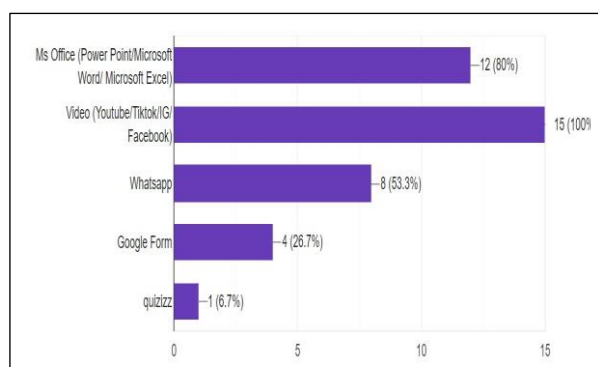
The next dimension of digital literacy was cultural and social understanding. This means that teachers also used digital tools to teach students tolerance to make them understand global citizenship. Mentally retarded students had the right to learn English better and teachers might integrate the cultural social understanding into their teaching process. Based on the findings, 73.3% of teachers used digital tools to introduced their students to foreign cultures to raise their tolerance among citizens.

Based on the data gained from the interview, it revealed that teachers integrated some topics with foreign cultures such as tourism objects, food around the world, and traditional costumes. Though mentally retarded students had difficulties maintaining their concentration during the learning process, the observation result showed that they were enthusiastic to watch the video about traditional food from other countries. They tried to relate to the current condition in Indonesia. On the other hand, 20% of teachers introduced the students to foreign cultures and 6.7% of teachers do not. It could be understood why some teachers did it so since the teaching period was limited and students' retention was too short. Then teachers just maximized the whilst-activity by directly discussing the topic with the students in class.

Collaboration

Collaboration is very essential for learning in the 21st century. Students need to work together and solve the problem. Mentally retarded students also might implement this in a classroom situation but with some considerations. To help them achieve this goal, teachers in special schools used some digital tools for instance Ms. Office (PowerPoint/Ms. Word/Ms. Excel), Video (YouTube/Tiktok/ IG/ Facebook), WhatsApp, Google Form, and Quizizz, as it was shown in table 3.

Table 3 Using digital tools for collaborative learning

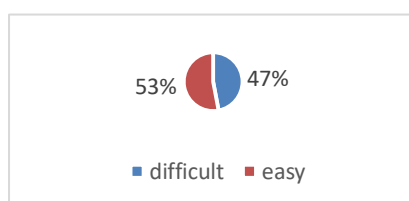


Based on the findings, it showed that all special school teachers mostly used video to promote collaborative learning. Mentally retarded students watched the video together in pre-activity then they raised discussion about the topics. Yet, the duration of the video was less than 10 minutes since mentally retarded students have very low retention during the study. Besides, teachers also used PowerPoint/ PPT to deliver the materials in class (80%). They made colorful slides with an interesting design. By having this, students were expected to focus on the lesson. Then, teachers used three other digital tools as WhatsApp (53.3%), Google Forms (26.7%), and Quizizz (6.7%).

Ability to find and select the information

Due to the characteristics of mentally retarded students which differ from others, teachers might consider choosing suitable teaching materials. Regarding the observation result, some findings need to be discussed further as was described in the following table.

Table 4 Teachers' ability to find and select the information

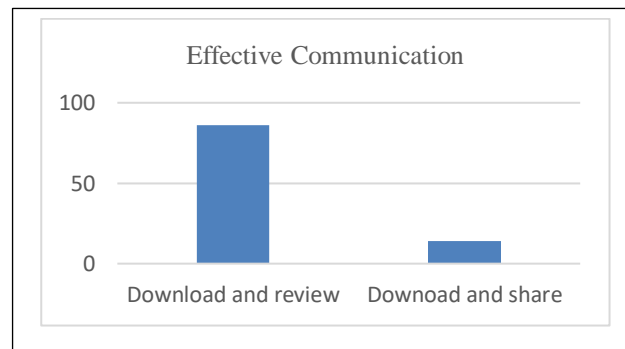


Surprisingly, the chart showed that 47% of teachers got difficulties in finding and selecting the information, that was, teaching materials. From the interview, they claimed that the most factors affecting these conditions were poor internet connection and the inappropriateness of teaching materials. Then it forced teachers to create their own with some adjustments based on students' needs. Meanwhile, 53% of teachers found no difficulties to find select information. It was because most respondents live in urban areas where internet access was available. Internet was also at their fingers tips then teachers were too easy to find all materials needed and select the appropriate ones.

Effective Communication

From the theory of Hague and Payton, the seventh dimension of digital literacy was effective communication. It was about the capability of teachers to filter the information. This skill was very essential for nowadays teaching.

Table 5. Effective Communication

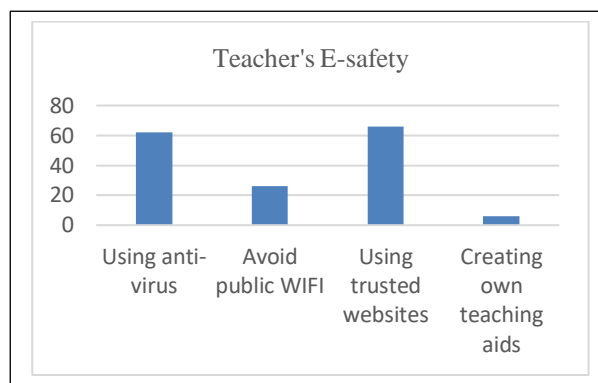


The data showed that 86.7% of teachers liked to review the information then share them with others. So, if they found improper information, others would not get it. On the other hand, 13.3% of teachers stated that they rarely filter the information. Once they got the information, they just directly shared it with others. The result was, others would find improper content or materials and it would impact their students' understanding. From the interview, teachers mentioned that they had less time to review the information due to teaching load and preparation.

E-safety

Getting information was too easy for teachers nowadays. Supported with a good connection would enable teachers to download the teaching materials. Yet, teachers needed to be aware during downloading sessions to avoid them getting unwanted things like viruses and unsafe websites. As it was described in table 6, there were several things that teachers might do to have e-safety.

Table 6. E-safety



From the table, 66.7% of teachers used trusted websites to download teaching materials. Special school teachers used a search engine like google to get the printable worksheet and downloaded the PowerPoint from esl.collective.com. Then others used anti-virus to protect their devices so they could get the safe ones (60%), avoid using public Wi-Fi (26.7%) and create their teaching aids (6.7%). From all findings, teachers implemented the use of digital tools to promote better learning for mentally retarded students.

Challenges in Using Digital Tools in Class

From the results above, it can be seen that teachers used some digital tools already in class. Moreover, from the interview, teachers informed that they had difficulties in using digital tools due to some reasons. And here are the reasons for using the digital tools in class as shown in table 2.

Table 7. Difficulties in Using Digital Tools in Class

Difficulties	Total Respondents
"I found difficulties in downloading the teaching materials"	3
"I got lack of internet access"	3
"My students are less-focused"	12
"My students don't understand the instruction"	11
"I got too many students in class"	1
"The teaching period is too short so I can't use the digital"	4

tools effectively”

“I don’t have any teaching
guide to use the digital tools
for teaching my students”

From the table above, there were some reasons why special school teachers have difficulties using digital tools in class. No data shows that teachers did not know how to use various digital tools. But the problems were occurring due to some reasons. Most teachers found it difficult to teach the mentally retarded students as they have low intellectual which differ from other students and made them less focused (92.3 %). This condition leads to other problems which made students did not understand the instruction given by their teachers (84.6%). As the result, teachers spent much time in pre-activity to re-explain the instruction very carefully and had less time for the whilst activity since the students’ focus decreased already.

The main problems were also less availability of teacher’s guide including books or handouts (46.2%). From the interview, teachers informed that they tried to upgrade their teaching skills by learning to use digital tools. They joined some seminars or in-house training conducted by schools or other institutions. Other reasons for teachers’ difficulties were about short teaching period (30.8 %) and unable to download teaching materials due to internet access (23.1%). As mentioned earlier that the use of digital tools was very beneficial to enhance students’ motivation, thus the following challenges must be overcome. Teachers must be able to upgrade themselves by being long-life learners and being open-minded for any updates.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

From the research findings, it has been shown that special school teachers have applied digital literacy on their teaching practices. Their functional skills have been well-developed by being able to use some applications and digital tools such as Ms Office, Video, Whatsapp, Google Form and Cap Cut. Furthermore, they could operate and use these digital tools for teaching and it was affected by teachers’ ages and work-period. In line with digital literacy practices, the findings showed that teachers have already used some digital tools in some ways based on Hague and Payton framework: create digital contents (creativity), select useful material by watching the downloaded video before giving them to the students (critical thinking and evaluation), use digital tools to introduce their students to foreign cultures and raise their tolerance among citizens (cultural and social understanding), use video to promote collaborative learning (collaboration), able to find and select information (finding and selecting information ability), review the information then shared them with others (effective communication) and use trusted websites to download teaching materials (e-safety). Yet, based on the findings, it showed that special school teachers still faced some challenges in using digital tools for teaching mentally retarded students such as difficulties in downloading teaching materials, lack of internet access, less-focused students, number of students in class,

short teaching period and in availability of teacher's guide. With these conditions, teachers were expected to upgrade themselves by being long-life learners and being open-minded for any updates. Thus, schools and all stakeholders need to concern to improve teachers' digital literacy by providing in house training and others beneficial activities which promote better special school teacher's digital literacy practices.

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