Digital natives problems and challenges in learning English

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the problems and challenges encountered by Digital Natives and to find out how they overcome them in English learning. The Digital Natives were students of the English Department, IAIN Salatiga, in Academic Year 2017/2018. The methodology of this research was descriptive qualitative. This research used questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was used to find out the problem, challenge, and solution of Digital Natives in learning English. The interview section was to collect the information from participants about their experience, the problems and challenges, and how to solve them. This research, it was conducted data analysis by data reduction by simplifying, classifying, and removing unnecessary or irrelevant data to achieve the best finding of the research. The results showed that bad internet signal and connection, the negative effect of the technology and language learning problem. The challenge they frequently have is coping with the problem of lack of English vocabulary and they are being unsociable to the environment. The research showed that technology can be used as an effective digital tool to learn English. It can be seen by the participants' learning experience. The digital tool assists English learner by overcoming their problems and challenges, what are the participants get more in using the digital tool is how fun the digital tool make easier for English learners... To overcome those problems, they should be wise with their dependence on the gadget and the internet. Then after a long time getting difficult vocabulary, they looked up some online dictionaries and asked to their friends.

Keywords: *Digital Natives; Problem and Challenge; English Learners*

Introduction

Technology makes our lives more manageable these days compared to the time when people work manually (Surowiecki, 2005). There is no doubt that many things are conducted only with little effort. However, the use of technology brought us to confusion when we had to learn about fifty-button remote controls and digital cameras with many features. Thus, discussing about the use of technology, there will be two sides' effects: problems and challenges.

People who were born in 1980s found that it is not easy to apply technology in their daily lives during that period, there were still limited kinds of staff working with technology.

However, those problems and challenges are also faced by those who were born and grew up during the development of internet technology. These generations are so-called *Digital Natives* and *Digital Immigrant* (Prensky, 2001) *Digital Native* or *Generation X* or younger or *digital DNA* (Livingstone, Zur, et al., 2008) (Zur, 2011), *the Google generation,* or *the millennials* (Gibbons, 2007).

Today's generations represent digital Natives because they were born, lived, and grown as native users of digital devices. Another type of so-called *Digital Immigrants* is those who learn about technology later. Undeniably, the internet has been massively or tremendously used by this generation in lots of cases and functions. Generally, most digital

natives are tech-savvy, which means knowing a lot about modern technology, especially computers, because they are born around technology. Nevertheless, some others do not have skills for technology and computers, moreover, they have the anxiety or tendency to learn more.

The actual term "Digital Natives" was introduced by Prensky in 2001 and has been used by many others as well (Bennett, S, 2008), (Schmid, R.F., Bernard, R.M., Borokhovski, E., Tamim, R., Abrami, P.C., Wade, C.A., Surkes, M.A. & Lowerison, 2009) (Tamim, 2011), (Lin, 2010), (Li, Y & Ranieri, 2010), (Kennedy, 2008).

Prensky (2001) states that today's students of Kindergarten until up to college students – represent the first generations that grow up with this new technology. Many research already discussed digital natives, especially in defining their characteristics (Bakar, 2016), (Jukes, 2010), (Livingstone, Redlich-Amirav, et al., 2008), (Gasser, 2012), (Franco, 2013), (Helsper, E.J & Eynon, 2010), (Vincent & Miller, 2011), (Tang, J & Yuan, 2018).

Today it is not hard to discover those Digital Natives. The criteria included for this generation are available in IAIN Salatiga. English learners in English Education Department are mostly Digital Natives because they were born in the 20s. It is somewhat rare if a student does not have a gadget or smartphone. For instance, to keep up with much information about academics, their batch, or even contact their lecturers requires them to connect to the internet. As Rallis as quoted in (Dalyono, T & Mudayen, 2017) argues, they need the information to be provided in a timely,

efficient way within 24 hours and 7 days a week.

Even so, those English learners come from different backgrounds and origins. Some graduated from high school in the city where they have become accustomed to technology and a good internet connection, while the others were from remote areas in the *kampong* or village. Sometimes, they cannot access the web for learning quickly or get back manually. Consequently, dealing with technology for those English learners also has problems and challenges. To elaborate on the issues and challenges faced by the digital natives of English learners in higher education, especially in Islamic universities, and to find out how those digital natives solve the problems become the gap of the research that the writers would like to discuss in this paper.

Even though many of the students were using a wide range of technologies in their daily lives, Kennedy (2008) states "there are areas where the use of and familiarity with technology-based tools is far from universal.". Some of this research has identified potential differences related to socio-economic status, cultural or ethnic background, gender, and discipline specialization, but these had not been comprehensively investigated. In addition, according to Zur (2011), the group of Digital Natives falls into the following three major groups: Avoiders, *Minimalists,* and *Enthusiastic*. Those groups' classification helps us to understand the challenges for Digital Natives to interact and cope with their English learning problem and needs in their daily activity

Research Method

This research is qualitative (Redlich-amirav, D & Higginbottom, 2014) in nature, which implemented interviews (Hancock, 2006) and questionnaires to collect the data (Ajayi, 2017). The researcher used a form of an open questionnaire that consisted of nine questions. The questionnaires used by the researchers were adopted from Franco (2013) that includes characteristics of Digital Natives. However, the researcher would analyze only nine questions; Those are Q1-Q9 as the ability of technology background from participants only as additional information to determine the highest level (those who have been getting in touch

with technology a lot) of English Learners for Digital Natives. Questionnaires were used to complete questions that had not been answered by means of conducting interviews as part of the data triangulation or data reduction process.

The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview to collect more data or information from participants. It is a qualitative data instrument. In the form of a semi-structured interview, it consists of five main questions. The interview section is primary data collection, while the questionnaire is secondary. This research was conducted at State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN Salatiga), which is located

at campus 3 on Jalan Lingkar Selatan Salatiga, Pulutan, Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia. The subjects are undergraduate students aged 18-21 from English Departments, especially for the 5th semester, from different schools, backgrounds, and origins. The researcher practices convenience sampling.

To gain appropriate participants, the researcher arranged some requirements that were needed. The first requirement was the Fifth-semester students from different schools, backgrounds, and origins. Secondly, the researcher distributed the questionnaire for 2017 English Department students. It consisted of 53 respondents from batch 2017 English Education students. The last, the researcher limited the scope of research participants. The researcher selected the participants who have the highest level of Digital Natives. Finally, a number 13 students were involved in this research. The researcher selected the English Department students of batch of 2017 because they tend to grow surrounded by technology in the digital era.

To make it easier, the researcher gave the code to the participants. P1-P13 means the number of participants, followed by the initial of each participant's name. The researcher would later use the code P1-P13 to identify and mark each participant. In this research, data

analysis was conducted into two phases based on the second phase of data collection. In the first phase, the researcher analyzed the questionnaire data from participants to determine the highest level of English Learners for Digital Natives. In the first phase, the researcher analyzed the data of the questionnaire from participants.

The answer to questionnaire information can determine the highest level of English Learners for Digital Natives. The next step is the researcher analyzing the data from the second phase. The researcher analyzed the participant's answers from the interview section. The interview section was conducted to obtain in-depth information about English learners' problems and challenges for Digital Natives.

(Miles & Huberman (1984) suggested that activities in qualitative data analysis were carried out interactively and continued continuously until they were completed so that the data was saturated. The measure of data saturation is indicated by no longer obtaining new data or information. Activities in the analysis include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. In this research, it was conducted data reduction by simplifying, classifying, and removing unnecessary or irrelevant data to achieve the best finding of the research

Results and Discussion
The questionnaire used by the researchers was adopted from Franco (2013); it consists of characteristics of Digital Natives. However, the researcher would analyze only nine questions those are Q1-Q9—first and second questions or Q1-Q2 as knowledge of technology background from participants only as additional information. The researcher has analyzed and then presented the distribution of questionnaire analysis to determine the highest level of

Interview Results

In the second phase of data analysis, interview data were collected to obtain the primary data that is used in this research. The researcher selected five participants who already started learning with low motivation but showed the high regulation to apply in the interview section of his research. However, in this research, the researcher did not eliminate the participants; the researcher used all of the

English Learners for Digital Natives. The result would be used to know the highest level of Digital Natives data from all participants, even though the researcher found participants and classified them into three following significant groups: *Avoiders*, *Minimalists,* and *Enthusiastic* (Zur, 2011).

There are some questions; it is in multiple choices. For the most part, each question has yes-no and frequency choices of answer. At this point, the researcher found the highest level of Digital Natives from participants.

participants to be actively involved in the interview section. The researcher contacted and met the participants directly to obtain the information or chat on WhatsApp to do an online interview. There are six main questions in the interview section. In this research, the researcher coded the interview questions of Q1-Q4 deals with the problems of Digital Natives in English learning whereas the question of Q5 deals with the challenge of Digital Natives and

question of Q6 deals with the solution of Digital Natives. The researcher presented the

The Problem of Digital Natives

Q1: When did you get your first gadget, computer, laptop, smartphone? What is your first email account? What is your first social networking sites?

The researcher summarizes the participants' experience time with technology such as first gadget, computer, laptop, smartphone, first email account, and first social networking sites. The first group almost presents the same time for experience with technology; it is about when they were in elementary school. P5 and P6 dealt with email and social networking earlier than the others did, while P11 was in junior high school. In the meantime, majorly the second group present the time in the junior high school either for having their first gadget or social networking site account. Formerly, the third group gives the time later, which is in senior high school. However, P1 and P8 have already had their social networking site account since junior high school. Typically, their social networking was *Facebook*.

Q2: What other experiences with technology did you have before learning English?

The researcher obtained the information that all participants' experience is learning English with technology. Moreover, the participants also told the variety they used to learn English. The most familiar features from the participants are looking up the difficult words on the digital dictionary and information on the internet or social media. Besides, P3 and P10 learn English with English songs from the internet, and P9 and P10 learn English through games. In addition, only P4 who was experienced digital native joining the online course to learn about TOEFL.

Q3: How often do you talk with colleagues about the technology use?

The first, second, and third present almost the same answer, even though not all talk about technology use. P5, P2, and P13 say that they often discuss technology use with their peers. For instance, P5 explained that she often discusses technology use because she has an online business. She even attracts more customers through social media because it supports her much to run her business. Unlike

participants' answers in English that were used in the interview section.

P5, P2, and P13 debate technology use with some peers.

Q4: What is your biggest problem dealing with technology in this era?

During the interview, the researcher still identifies some of the same problems. For instance, P5, P2, and P7 state that the internet signal and connection was the biggest problem. Based on the interview of the problem, it was clearly answered by P5. "*My biggest problem dealing with technology in this era is the signal; it is so difficult to get a fast signal in some places.*" Another participant, P2, said, "*I got a slow internet connection.*" In Indonesia, especially on Java Island, though many facilities had already been provided, some people still have internet connections.

Another problem of English Learners for Digital Natives is the negative side that we can get from the internet. As P.6 states, some people misuse technology for cybercrime, and P.4 always tries to avoid any negative things that appear on the internet, such as hoaxes, because many people will not filter or be willing to check it out more before believing the truthiness of the news. P11 also says that the internet is open for everyone so there will be the possibility of people misusing the information for bad intentions.

In addition, for P8, P9, and P10, the technology that is supposed to help people can be troublesome. P8 likes to learn things on the internet, such as e-learning, but it also can be tiring for him because he has to look at the screen all the time, which is not suitable for our health. P9 and P10 agree that people rely on smartphones too often. P9 assumes that sometimes it disturbs her from doing her job because she often gets distracted from her smartphone, and P10 believes that smartphone often makes people forget the surrounding environment.

Furthermore, P9 explained, "*My biggest problem in dealing with technology in this era is the dependence on a smartphone. When using a smartphone, I will not forget and cannot be separated from a Smartphone for a while. If you do not have a smartphone, then my mind will be focused on smartphones, and it will lead to my dependency.*"

Then, P10 also stated, "*My biggest problem in dealing with technology is many people who like to play with gadgets and forget about our environment, which is not good.*" It is lined with the learning styles of digital natives are limited to the learning style related to the use of technology information and communication in their learning process.

These findings fit with the explanation that the use of technology among young people is often far more passive, solitary, sporadic, and unspectacular. Primarily restricted to particular

Challenge of Digital Natives in English Learning

Q5: What challenges that you encounter in learning English with technology?

For the most part, those English Learners' challenges are lack of vocabulary that they need to enrich. Regarding students' engagement with technology, based on the questionnaire's answers, mainly English learners answer yes, and the rest is maybe. None of them says no. In the interview, thirteen participants were divided into three groups. The first group is the earliest ones who have gotten in touch with technology since elementary school. The second one starts from junior high school, and the last is senior high school. Overall, the majority of them began to have their gadget, computer, and social networking account since they were in junior high school.

These findings fit the definition of Digital Natives as proposed by Prensky (2001) Dealing with the frequency of using digital tools and connecting to the online world, in the form of questionnaires and interviews, the participants answer that they use digital tools and connect to the online world more often instead of discussing the use of technology itself.

In addition, English in Indonesia is more likely to be taught and learned only as a foreign language, unlike neighboring countries like Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia, because English is widely spoken as a second language. It also means that learning English in Indonesia occurs mainly in classrooms rather than during daily communication. So obviously, they vary in English language proficiency as well.

passive uses for most people (e.g., game playing, messaging, social media, retrieval of online content). Undoubtedly, if the use of technology is only passive and not as it is expected, it can be dangerous.

One more problem for P11 and P12 is the language learning problem. Although they are from English Department, most technology uses English, and it is difficult for them to comprehend. Some solve this problem by simply looking up the meaning of the words on the internet.

About the challenges of Digital natives as English learners, the researcher carries out the answer into several points. How problems and challenges of English Learners can be seen from the participants' results of the questionnaire and interview, and how the participants solve their problems during their learning English with technology.

Based on the research that the researcher has done from interviewing the participants, generally, those English Learners' challenges are lack of vocabulary that they need to enrich.

P4 said, "*Some challenge learning English with technology: I get new vocab, less self-confidence to express in front of other people, and limited time for studying English.*" While P12 explained, "*For this time, I just feel sometimes I cannot understand some vocabularies at all, so I have to open the dictionary to understand it well.*"

P8 learns more about digital literacy; he stated, "*The challenges are, it would be so curious to learn more about English. It is not enough if I have one source; I am curious to learn from other sources, looking for many sources, many e-teachers, e-exercise, etc. Another challenge is when my friends have something in English e-learning, it makes me challenged to have many things in e-learning then I don't want to lose by my friend.*"

Bennett, S, (2008) argues that students' everyday technology practices may not be directly applicable to academic tasks. Therefore, education has a vitally important role in fostering information literacies that will support learning. However, Selwyn (2009) claims that the digital native is often portrayed as autonomous and highly sociable.

The Solution of Digital Natives problems

Q6: How do you cope with or solve the problem of learning English with technology?

Concerning the problem of bad internet connection and signal, the participants said that nowadays, it is so easy to get free Wi-Fi, as they say, to cope with that problem. Nevertheless, in some particular places, the internet is not that good.

Related to the negative effect of the technology, the solution is to try to find the positive use of technology like what P3 and P10

Conclusion

The researcher concludes that poor internet signal and connectivity, the detrimental impact of technology, and language learning issues were among the challenges faced by digital natives when learning English. They typically face difficulties in dealing with a lack of English vocabulary, and they are unsociable in their surroundings. Technology can be employed as an effective digital tool to learn English, according to the findings. The digital tool assists English learner by overcoming their problems and challenges, the participants get more enthusiasm in using the digital tool which

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replied that they learned English with English songs from the internet, and P9 and P10 learned English through games. In addition, there was the only participant of P4 who has experienced joining online courses for learning TOEFL.

Dealing with the problem of P11 and P12 is the language learning problem. Based on the interview result, the participants likewise express the variation they use to learn English. The most familiar features from the participants are lookup English difficult words in the digital dictionary and asked their friends.

makes it easier for Digital Natives in English learning. To overcome those problems, they should be wise with their dependence on the gadget and the internet. Then after a long time getting difficult to understand the language, they may lookup English difficult words in the digital dictionary and asked to their friends. One of the most exciting challenges and opportunities in teaching Digital Natives is to figure out and invent ways to include reflection and critical thinking in the learning but still do it in the Digital Native context and perspective. We should be able and must explore more in this domain for further research in the future.

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