ESAC and 21st Century Generation Learners: Dynamic Challenges

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Abstract

English Self-Access Center (ESAC) is one of facilities in Universitas Negeri Malang (UM). It has abundant materials, updated hardware, and cozy and comfortable rooms to support teaching and learning process. These updated materials and technology, however, do not ensure ESAC to support 21st century learners to learn and develop their English skills fully. It becomes confronted when facing the characteristic of 21st generation which totally different with previous generation or even old education system. So that, some challenges are emerged and this paper will discuss those challenges as well as potential solutions for improvement and development of ESAC. This paper will also discuss how to manage and fulfill the needs of nowadays generation especially for English Department students

Keywords: ESAC, 21st century generation, language laboratory

1. INTRODUCTION

As one of facilities in UniversitasNegeri Malang (UM), English Self-Access Center (ESAC) is frequently visited by students. Almost every open day there are students visiting the facility, either for self-studying, doing their assignments, browsing the Internet, or just spending some time between classes. Most of them come to ESAC on their own will, although first semester students are required to come to ESAC frequently as part of a course they take.

For several later years, students who come to ESAC become more and more adept in technology. This technology adept is one of characteristics of 21st century learners (Durham Public School, 2012). This generation of learners, besides having good knowledge in using technology, are also independent, diverse and personalized, learner-centered, and adaptable (Heick, 2012). As the presence of this generation becomes more and more in ESAC, a question whether ESAC is appropriate in assisting this generation emerges. Thus, this study is conducted.

In a way, this reflection is a retrospective process for the authors, since one of the authors is the site assistant of ESAC, while the other is a student of Department of English who happens to be in ESAC often. By doing this reflection, the authors see what they have done for ESAC, how they involve in the management and development of ESAC for several years back, and the conditions of ESAC under their involvement. In advance, the authors also evaluate themselves in their role in ESAC, as well as the role of ESAC towards learners' development.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

For this study, the authors try to reflect what happens in ESAC for several past years, including its management and the condition of its materials and facilities. To reflect what happens in ESAC, the authors try to see some aspects of ESAC and correlate these aspects with related theories. From this reflection the authors can get the answer of this study, whether ESAC is appropriate for assisting 21st century learners. From this reflection, the authors also try to propose some suggestions to improve ESAC in assisting students, for 21st century learners as well as other generations of learners.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 History of ESAC

To begin the reflection, a short history of ESAC is presented. As a facility, ESAC is developed through SEMI-QUE grants scheme in 2003-2004, and developed again further in 2008-2010 through PHK-I grant (Department of English, 2015). Both grants has been won by Department of English. This facility is developed in order to "instilling reflective independent learning habits in students without being dependent on the presence of course facilitators and classroom routine activities" (Department of English, 2015). ESAC is expected to develop autonomous learning characteristics in students of the Department. In order to do so, ESAC is equipped with various learning resources and facilities, such as books, audio and video materials, computers, and comfortable rooms.

3.2 The Management of ESAC

ESAC is run and managed by a site-assistant. This site-assistant is appointed by the Department and officially contracted by Faculty of Letters. In the past, a lecturer is also appointed by the Department to be the head of ESAC. It means that there are two main managers in ESAC, the head as the leader manager and the site-assistant as the staff. At that time, ESAC has more than one site-assistant as well. However, it's only one site-assistant who get contract from the faculty. In the middle of 2016, the last non-contract site-assistant has resigned. Since then, there is only one site-assistant to manage ESAC.

In 2014, a change of regulation has been made by the faculty, and the position of head of ESAC is erased. This change makes the site-assistants the main manager in ESAC. This means that the site assistant is the one who communicate with higher management, the department and the faculty, since there is no higher position in ESAC. This chain of command and communication is a bit unclear, though, since there is no clear regulation on which management ESAC is directly under, the department or the faculty. This unclear situation results in confusion of management, especially by the site assistant.

3.3 The Condition and Access of ESAC's Resources and Facilities

ESAC has abundant and various learning resources. Of all of these resources, materials for reading dominate in many of ESAC's rooms. These materials have a dedicated room, Reading Room, and occupy quite a space in Culture Gallery in forms of magazines and newspapers. Reading materials are also available in Teacher Resource Unit (TRU), albeit its restricted access. In Computer Room, some materials for reading skill practice are also available. Besides reading materials, ESAC also possesses some electronic materials such as audio materials and videos (movies and documentary videos), practice cards (skills and components), display materials, and board games. All of these resources have gone minor update since ESAC's major development through SEMI-QUE and PHK-I grants. Continuous update only happens for newspaper and some magazines, while for novels and books get non-consistent update. The other resources have not got any update yet.

Along with vast amount of resources, ESAC is equipped with large space, which is then separated into several rooms, and other good facilities, such as computers, Wi-Fi, and recording tools. The rooms available have various functions based on its name, for example Reading Room focuses on reading activity, since it has library like design, Recording Room is used for recording audio and video, and Speaking Corner is optimized for speaking practice. All rooms are designed to be comfortable for students, so they can enjoy their independent learning more. Several years back, some rooms have got function changes, although these changes are not official. These changes happen because the rooms have not been used as it is designated for, while the lecturers of the department need some space for various activities.

The computers are designated for listening practice and browsing the Internet, while Wi-Fi is provided to support students' modern gadgets, especially for learning purposes. These computers and Wi-Fi hardware have gone minor update since the PHK-I development, and some have gone down for good. It happens as well for some other electronic devices, such as some televisions for playing movies and cable channel, and some laptops that ESAC got from the same grant back in 2008. For some other hardware and facilities, such as recording tools and computers for major editing, have worked properly, but these tools are rarely used.

4.   DISCUSSION

Seen from the concept of ESAC, it has significant purpose to support and develop the students' autonomous learning. It also related with the characteristic of 21st century learners: they want autonomy in their education, as well as the freedom to express their creative prowess (Koh, 3: 2015). It means that from its concept and initial purpose, ESAC has great potential as a major support in 21st century learners' learning process.

Seen from the materials and facilities, ESAC abundant various materials and adequate facilities which support learners' diverse and personalized characteristics (Heick, 2012). However, it should be noted that since technology has developed very fast lately, there should be constant update in ESAC's facilities.

Heick(2012) also stated that however ESAC is abundant and has variety of resources, it is not enough to support 21st century learners as they posses project/problem/inquiry-based characteristic. The resources and materials should be accompanied by some kind of project or problem that sparks their interest to access the resources and solve the project and/or the problem. Some of these resources have already had this, such as practice cards and booklet, however some others don't have.

Another real challenging problem for ESAC to support 21st century learners is the ESAC management. Although the concept and initial purpose show a great potential in supporting 21st century learners, the implementation of it in the management is the key factor whether its potential can really be realized. So for these challenges, site-assistant felt as the main challenges for ESAC to implement its potential.

We found that there is a missing link of chain command in the management. As for illustration, when the position of the head of ESAC is erased, the link between the staff and the higher management disappear as well. This link is important, since the head acted as the middle manager that keep the information flows in both directions (Gardner&Miller, 71:1999). This information includes policy and views from both higher management and staff as basic to set direction for ESAC, with this link missing, the site-assistant cannot got clear understanding on how the site-assistant should manage ESAC. This current condition leads ESAC to management model commonly named "ambiguity".

(Gardner&Miller,70:1999) explained that where decision-making is unplanned and organizational goals are unclear and ambiguous. If it is linking with the 21st century learners, this ambiguity condition makes it difficult to operate ESAC in fulfilling the needs of 21st century learners.

Since the recruitment of site-assistant, he/she did not receive any training related to the management of Self-Access Center. If any, the training is just at the beginning of the recruitment, where the new site-assistant is trained by the previous site assistant before he/she leaves ESAC. There is no official introduction such as the purpose or concept of ESAC. It is probably because the recruited site-assistant is considered already know ESAC quite well, since the recruit is the alumni of the department and has helped in ESAC for several time.

The site-assistant should figure out some management stuffs in the process of managing ESAC. Automatically, with no proper and regular training for ESAC's site-assistant, it is not easy to give assistance for 21st century learners, since they posses unique characteristics. The site-assistant

might learn himself/herself, but it might take some time as well, since there is no clear direction and policy from higher management. The site-assistant can also try to manage ESAC in general way. But, with the diverse and personalized nature of 21st century learners it might not be managed optimally, or in other words under-used by learners(Gardner&Miller, 72:1999).

5.   CONCLUSION

These are could be as the solutions that might be useful to improve ESAC so that it can assist 21st century learners better.
a.   Regular training for the site-assistant.
b.   Regular evaluation
c.   Collaboration between ESAC and courses
d.   Providing activities or events
e.   Giving students more chance to participate in managing ESAC

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