

# STUDENTS' PERCEPTUAL BELIEFS ABOUT THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Antonius Suratno, Cecilia T. Murniati, Emilia Ninik Aydawati

**Abstract:** Research indicates that human perception about technologies determines the attitudes towards them (Aviram & Tami, 2004). Thus, prior to attempting to make use of the technology for teaching, understanding of users' perceptions or beliefs about ICTs is crucial to be established. The purpose of this study is to understand how technologies are used and perceived by the students and how much the technological gadgets have been used for English-skill-related activities. The study employs descriptive quantitative method by which data were collected through questionnaire surveys. This paper will discuss the preliminary findings of an on-going study on the above issues. Implication that this study informs EFL in Indonesia in that technologies indeed have a significant role in school environment and may be optimized for learning purposes will be discussed.

**Keywords:** *ICT, technological gadgets, perception, English-skill-related activities*

## Background

Many scholars have attempted to study the effect of the Information Technology (IT) on students' learning. However, the current literature on the use of technology in learning yields inconclusive results. No research has established the precise effect of the IT use on the success of learning. Why and how multi-media enhanced help options are presented and what effect it has on learning remains undecided (Rüschhoff, 1993). However, technology must now be regarded as an accepted and proven addition to the existing set of learning media. A large number of tools for a wide variety of applications (viz. Internet, computer, mobile phone and audio-video) have been developed over the past decade, and both standard hardware and software have unprecedentedly become available not only to the privileged few but also to the common members of society for various purposes of learning. All that has been a general consent is that the use of technology to facilitate learning is accepted to be of value across educational institutions, not to mention, university or college levels.

Research indicates that human perceptions about technologies determine their attitudes towards them (Aviram & Tami, 2004). Thus, prior to attempting to make use of it, understanding of users' perceptions or beliefs about ICTs is crucial to be established. The use of technological tools to boost learning is influenced by several factors. Research has identified the perceptual beliefs of human beings as the major determinants of their practical attitude towards anything. Positive beliefs inspire individuals to take interest while negative feelings motivate them to stay away (Aviram & Tami, 2004). Based on this understanding, it is necessary that research on the users' beliefs or perceptions about the IT available at hands be conducted in order for directing the trajectory of future IT-based learning or IT assisted learning.

The objectives of this study are to know the extent to which learners in the Faculty of Letters Soegijapranata perceive the use of the technology for the assistance of learning. In other words, the purpose of this study is to understand how technology is used and perceived by the students of the Faculty of Letters of SCU (Soegijapranata Catholic University). Data were collected through questionnaire surveys. Though our focus is on perceptual beliefs of the IT, questions also cover practices of the use of the IT in order to find out how much the IT has been used for English-skill-related activities.

The end result of this research is that tuning and adjustments at the perceptual level brings changes in the users' attitude which, in turn, may bring about the change of learning styles through the way in which technological gadgets can be optimally used. By then we may gain assurance if technology indeed have a significant role in school environment as well as to gain confidence that the use of educational technology results in learning. This study intends to find out how the Faculty of Letters students, SCU perceive the IT in day-to-day life, the activities that they do with the gadgets they own, and the activities that they have ever done to take advantage of the IT gadgets for English learning-related activities.

## Information Technology And Learning

The use of media technology in foreign language teaching or learning has constantly evolved. Teachers have tried to make use of the technology such as audio, video, and computers. As technology has developed very fast, more gadgets are used by more and more people. Almost all students have technological gadgets and use them all the time. With these technological gadgets, they can use social media tools such as Facebook, Wiki, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter. According to Liu (2010) the advancement of modern technologies tries its best to accommodate the needs of people especially the younger generation that have been labeled as Digital Natives by Marc Prensky (2001) He defined today's students as "they spent their entire lives surrounded by and using

computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age” as cited by Liu (2010). They always update their social media technology. When new kind of gadgets such as Ipad or Iphone are made available in new version, they will likely be attracted to buy them. Although these gadgets are not particularly designed for learning purposes, they contain authentic materials usable for learning, such as learning language. Even when gadgets are used for games or for communication they, as a matter of fact, can potentially be useable for learning.

As cited by Chen (2011) research done by Chapelle, 2001; Egbert, Chao, & Hanson-Smith, 2007; Salaberry, 2001; Zhao, 2003) has shown that the use of technology can broaden the horizons for learning an L2, and also have an impact on the nature of both the acquisition process and the object of study. The use of technology helps learners to expose themselves to English.

To know the use of social media tools as a learning resource, Liu (2010) has investigated student’s use of different social media tools, their perceptions and attitudes towards these tools and their preference of social networking groups. The result shows that the students use Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube. They use these social media for social engagement, direction communication, speed of feedback and relationship building. Based on the findings of the study, Liu (2010) suggests that teachers integrate social media tools into current educational system as a teaching and learning resource to assist the process of curriculum delivery and to use social media as a parallel learning channel to compliment current curriculum delivery and to extend the learning environment to the real world and to enrich students learning experiences with real life practices.

English has been learned and used by more and more speakers. According to David Graddol (in Shyamlee, 2012), digital technologies provides avenues to improve certain skills such as writing. However, they also pose challenges such as plagiarism and fair use. This suggests that the potentials of the digital technologies are abundant. Unluckily, however, their wealth remains limitedly explored.

## **Methods Of Data Collection And Analysis**

### ***Population and Sample***

The population of this study is all active students in the Faculty of Letters SCU. Due to the limited funding and resources, the study recruited only those volunteering to take part in this study.

### ***Data collection***

To obtain the data, we administered a survey to the students in the Faculty of Letters. The instrument for this study, thus, is a close-ended questionnaire. The questionnaires consist of two sections. They are:

#### 1. Respondents’ background

This section asked students’ sex, students’ gadgets, and the gadgets used and the frequency of use.

#### 2. Questions related to students’ perceived use of IT for their learning

The questionnaire in this section asked how students view the use of technology in general and in language learning, how students view the use of technology in improving English skills courses, how often they use technology for completing their assignments, and how they use online applications for their learning. For each of these questions, participants are required to choose answers based on Likert scale such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Very Often, Often, and so on.

### ***Data analysis***

Once the survey was administered, we analyzed the data using descriptive statistics. We used SPSS to calculate the means and the standard deviations of the responses.

### ***Establishing validity and reliability***

To establish the validity and the reliability, the questionnaire was tested by conducting a pilot study to a small number of students. This pilot study was essential to improve the wording, the scales, and the format of the questionnaire and to establish content validity (Creswell, 2003).

## **Data Analysis and Discussion**

### ***Students’ perception of IT***

Questions 1 – 13 were intended to find out the students’ perception of IT. The means of those question items ranged from 3.36 (Question 1) to 2.4 (Question 12). This indicates that students perceived IT as beneficial for learning activities. Students reported that they enjoyed using technological gadgets. They thought that gadgets should not be used only for fun.

Table 1. Statement “I enjoy using the technological gadgets”

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2	1.8
Disagree	67	59.8
Agree	43	38.4
Strongly agree	0	0
Total	112	100

Table 2. Statement “I don’t think it is a good idea to use the gadgets just for the trivial fun (non-learning purposes)”

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	17	15.2
Disagree	42	37.5
Agree	42	37.3
Strongly agree	11	9.8
Total	112	100

#### Activities students used with their gadgets

Students used gadgets for various activities. Questions 4.7 – 4.19 were intended to investigate types of activities students used with their gadgets. The highest mean of those questions was 3.3 (Q 4.19) and the lowest mean was 1.9 (Q 4.14). The survey shows that among the most frequent activities done by the respondents (top 5 activities) using IT gadgets are to do the following (subsequently from the most frequent to the less): entertainment-related activities, chatting on-line, texting, updating social media status, and searching information via search engines. The following table shows the most preferred activities and the least preferred activities.

Table 3. Activities students used with gadgets

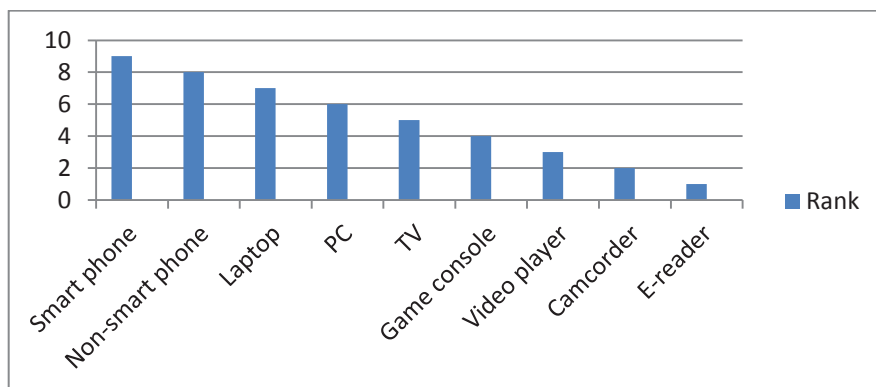
Responses	Never %	Rarely %	Often %	Very Often %
Emailing	8	35.7	41.1	15.2
Chatting in English	0.9	36.6	44.6	17.9
Chatting in Indonesian	1.8	19.6	44.6	33.9
Using google translator	6.3	44.6	31.3	17.9
Using dictionary	3.6	17.9	58	20.5
Updating social media status	3.6	19.6	44.6	32.1
Texting		23.2	46.4	30.4
Bloggng in English	30.4	50	15.2	4.5
Searching educative YouTube videos	11.6	37.5	40.2	10.7
Discussion board	17.9	50	28.6	3.6
Reading news	6.3	33.9	48.2	11.6
Searching for information	5.4	19.6	49.1	25.9
For entertainment	0.9	12.5	33	53.6

#### English learning related activities

In this study, students perceived that there were benefits in using gadgets for English learning related activities. They admitted that their vocabulary expanded as a result of using technological gadgets. In addition, learning through the facilities offered by the Internet was both interesting and engaging and their listening skills improved as a result of using the technological gadgets. Table 4 shows how their gadgets affect their English skills.

Table 5. Student’s perception of the effect of gadgets on their English-language skills

Responses	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
Improving my writing skill	1.8	28.6	61.6	8
Improving my reading skill	1.8	12.5	72.3	13.4
Improving my listening skill	0	6.3	70.5	23.2
Expanding my vocabulary	0	9.8	65.2	25
Total	100	100	100	53.6



The data in this study also suggest that smart phones were the most popular gadgets, while E-reader, one of the current gadget designed for reading electronic books lied in the least popular one. This suggests that the more favourable gadgets were the ones with the Internet connection feature. In other words, students preferred the gadgets that have features related to the Internet. The implication of such a finding may suggest where the future trajectory of technological gadgets will eventually progress. In addition, should the future decision makers consider integrating the IT gadgets into the educational realm, the Internet has to be the primary consideration.

Interestingly, as the respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of the IT gadgets used, the majority (75 %) answered that the frequency of use is everyday.

Table 1. Frequency of use

	Frequency	Percentage
Every day	84	75
4 -5 times a week	13	11.6
2 – 3 times a week	9	8
Every 2 or 3 weeks	4	3.6
Once a month	1	0.9
Almost never	1	0.9
Never	0	0
Total	112	100

## Conclusion

From the analysis of statistics, this pilot study suggests that all the students of the faculty of Letters, SCU have made IT gadgets part of their day-to-day life activities. As indicated by the responses of the questionnaire, smart phones have been the most frequently and laptops as their second most frequently-used gadgets.

They all enjoy using the technological gadgets and they admit that their vocabulary expands as a result of using gadgets. In addition, learning through the facilities offered by the Internet, as they admit, is both interesting and engaging and their listening skills improve as a result of using the technological gadgets.

In addition, it is found that among the most frequent activities done by the respondents (top 5 activities) using IT gadgets are to do the following (subsequently from the most frequent to the less): entertainment-related activities, chatting on-line, texting, updating social media status, and searching information via search engines.

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