How is e-learning useful
to teachers & student teachers: using Be-smart for Reading and Listening class.

by

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Abstract

The powerful information resources of the Internet hold tremendous promise for students and teachers. Teachers can find lots of useful resources on the Internet, which they can use in their instructions. E-learning than can be found on the internet is a hi-tech way, which is widely used in teaching learning process. Yogyakarta State University provides students with e-learning, which is known as Be-smart, in order to meet the upper standard of transferring knowledge and facilitating students to open the global world. It can be the train for UNY to get what people of say World Class University. Thus, this article will describe the use of Be-smart in teaching listening and reading in English Education Department of Faculty Languages and Arts.

Key words: E-learning, Be-smart, Reading, Listening

Introduction

E-learning is commonly referred to the intentional use of networked information and communications technology in teaching and learning (Naidu, 2006: 1). It seems like e-learning offer tremendous opportunities for communicating, displaying, and sharing information in teaching learning process. Recently, more and more schools have computer rooms and connected to the Net for teaching purposes (Dudeney, 2007: 32). Two questions come up then, can e-learning influence teaching and learning? If the answer is positive, then how is e-learning useful to class participants?

First year student teachers of English Education Department get a packed of subject that they need to master. I teach Listening and Reading for freshmen. There are two kind of meetings that they have in these classes: classroom meeting and be-smart. There will be 16 meetings in one semester that they need to attend for both listening and reading.

Listening is a compulsory subject and one of receptive skills that is not easy to be mastered by the student teachers (Nation, 2009). According to the English Education curriculum (2009: 29) listening subject provides students with basic skills in com-

prehending simple oral discourses through recorded voice of native speakers. Materials are presented in a variety of short functional texts with exercises on pre-listening warm-up activities, listening for specific information/literal comprehension, listening for gist/reorganization, making inferences, listening and making evaluation, and appreciation. Students' classroom activities include individual work, pair work, and group work. Evaluation on students' achievement is based on classroom participation, home assignments, the mid and the final test.

According to English Education curriculum (2009: 32-33) the other receptive skill, reading, describes as follows while developing the basic competencies of reading initiated at secondary schools (such as getting general and specific information from the text, getting the main ideas and detailed information from the text, deducing the meaning of words, phrases and sentences based on the context, and explaining relations between parts of the text through grammatical cohesive devices), with a mastery of vocabulary within 4500 words and relevant grammatical structures, the course also aims at the development of the skills of inferencing, analyzing, synthesizing, and speed reading. In order to aid the language development, both simplified and authentic texts of general topics may be used. Text types may include Spoof, Recount, Report, Description, Narration, News item, Procedure, and Explanation. While individual performances are noted, pair and group work should be encouraged. Assessment of success is based on portfolios and mid-term as well as final examinations.

Receptive skills, listening and reading, play as input for student teachers. Meanwhile, speaking and writing, the productive ones, play as output. Normally, students acquires input first, then they can produce spoken or written expression. The logic is the more student teachers get input the better performances they produce. In order to be able to demonstrate comprehensible meaning, students need to get relevant and meaningful input either from listening or reading so that they acquire not only full understanding of the messages being spoken but also the model to communicate them in the appropriate speaking context. The more students get input from listening, the richer the knowledge they acquire then the more fluent they become. One investigation from Dupuy (1999) in Nation (2009) about "narrow listening" – an approach based on Krashen's idea, reported improvements in students listening comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary as well as increased confidence in French. The improvements were resulted from listening as many times as they wish to a range of 1 – 2 minute aural texts on a range of familiar and interesting topics.

Student teachers need to get more input not only from the printed book but also from other media such as audio-visual material that can be utilized to scaffold their knowledge so that students have good model how to speak naturally and read comprehensively. Be-smart gives extra help to teacher in meeting the need of soft media, such as audio material, video, text with pictures. In addition, be-smart provides student teachers with sources, forum, link to other useful and supportive sites, chat, quiz, and offline activities.

Discussion

The major aims of using be-smart are to support student teachers in learning and comprehending the content and getting opportunities to practice reading, listening and writing simultaneously. Integrating technology into classroom instruction requires a careful selection of instructional material and thoughtful preparation so that student teachers get the intended content and eager to come back for more (Wong and Chee 2003: 17) cites Williams (2003). Thus, preparation is an important phase before integrating technology in the classroom instruction so that teacher and student teachers can get advantages from the useful digital media in be-smart, besides the printed material, textbook and other classroom media, which are presented in the class.

Reading class

I normally act as presenter while explaining material in front of the class, observer when monitoring small group discussion, designer and facilitator in be-smart activities as well. Activities that I prepared and designed for student teachers in be-smart reading class were: first, forum in which they shared their opinion about one particular topic and commented other opinions comprehensively. It can be seen from picture 1 below.
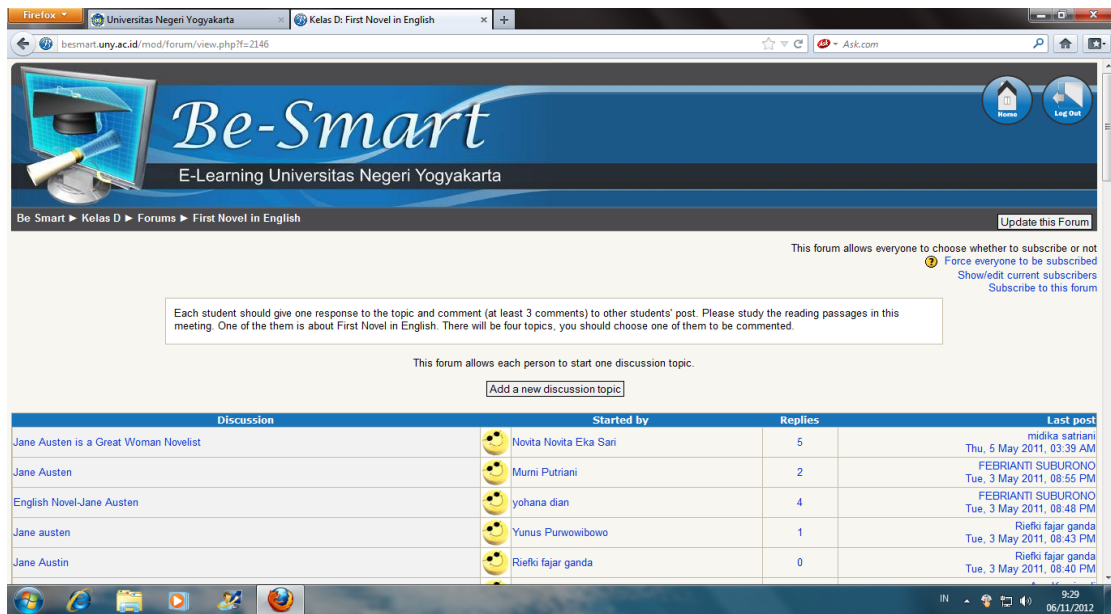
Picture 1. Forum activity for reading for fun

In that forum activity, there were four topics and one of them was Jane Austen that was described in the uploaded text. It was reading for pleasure activity so the content was light and popular. This activity was an independent study for student teachers so that they got extra opportunities to practice not only reading for fun but also expressing opinion in written expression. Independent study is any school-related assignment that students need to do more or less alone (Metcalf, Jenkins, Cruickshank, 2006: 202). It was expected that they obtained the messages the way Jane Austen starts her career and got to know famous novelist. The idea behind this was that students needed extra reading for fun that could not be done in the classroom due to the time allocation. At the end of the lesson, student teachers got extra knowledge about novelist, vocabulary, and ability in writing. Meanwhile, teacher got opportunity to practice how to design and facilitate such activity as forum in which students could practice reading, writing and communicating comprehensively.

Second, two sites were linked and posted in the second meeting as a supporting substances for classroom material which focused on spoof text (Anderson & Anderson, 1998). There was a problem in comprehending spoof text, such as it was little bit hard for them to understand a humor imitation story since they could not catch the funny things. If they did, it was still hard to get the messages as they never get the real version of the story. I had found a way to describe the spoof through displaying something very familiar with them, for instance spoof VS original of twilight link. Student teachers found it useful and it gave them keys in understanding spoof. Then, they compared two stories, tried to summarize them, and then shared their writing to the rest of the class in warming up

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reading activities. It was a possible way out to overcome problems that occurred in the class and limited time allocation in one meeting. In addition, it was much easier for them as they could open the links and downloaded them anytime. Thus, student teachers had control when and how many times they learnt them. It can be seen in picture 2 below that giving link is a possible way out to describe spoof stories in real life.
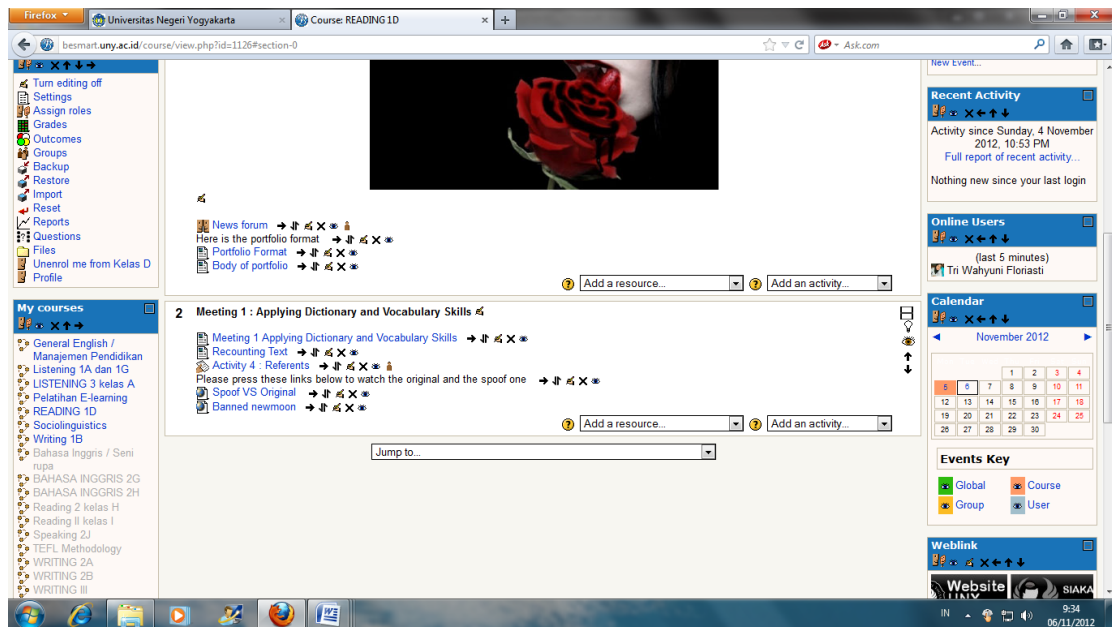

Picture 2: Useful links

Third, it is an extra assignment that student teachers use to increase their capability in locating main idea, which is found in picture 3 below. It was in the third meeting that they were introduced to main idea, supporting details and new vocabulary. In order to get familiar with other text types, student teachers were given longer recount passage. It was not easy, as the topic was getting unfamiliar. It was expected that they gained new vocabulary then memorize them and located the main idea correctly.
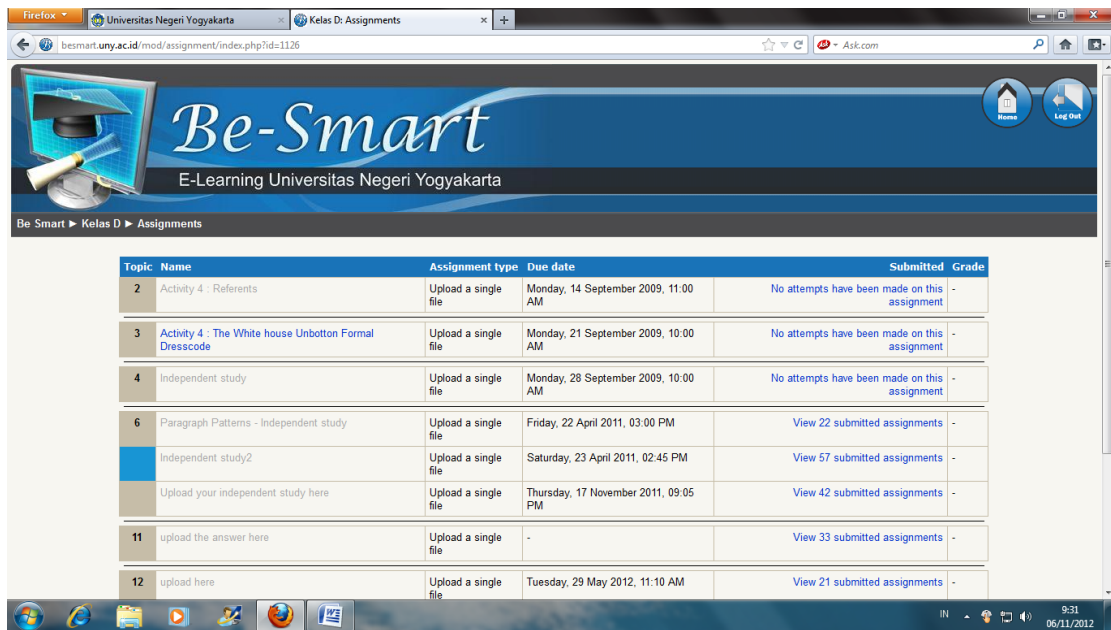
Picture 3: Extra assignment

Listening class

Due to the lack of using other media but English book or printed materials, student teachers did not get more chance to develop what they got. They needed to get more input not only from the printed book but also from other media such as audio-visual material that can be played to scaffold their knowledge so that students had good model how to speak naturally. A pack of audio and audiovisual material was uploaded in the sites so that student could download them easily. Thus, they got big opportunities to practice and increase their listening ability as it can be found in picture 4 below.
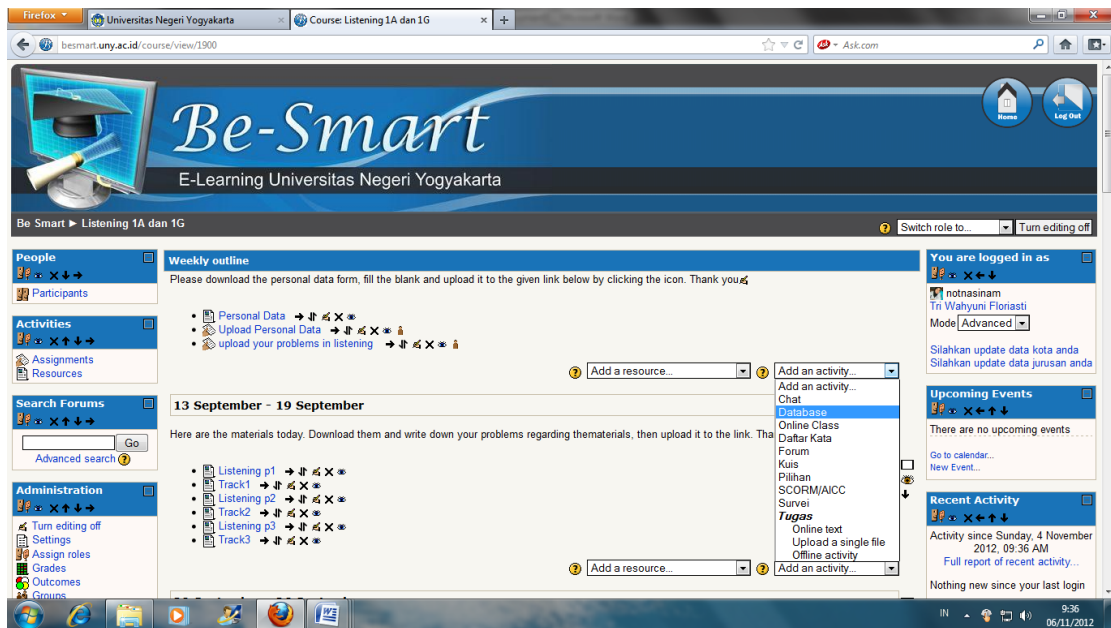
Picture 4: Listening audio material

The power of Information Technology has tremendous impacted in human life. "You are what you use" can be employed to describe the "gadget" situation. People put their life in the Internet. Today, we find that Internet is about us. Life is more practical, for example people use a gadget to manage three or four businesses in one time and anywhere. This potential advantage is a challenge for teachers who need to put English closer to students in their daily life (Floriasti, 2012). It can be used as a media in teaching listening skills. Once students downloaded digital material from the be-smart and installed it to their hand phones, they started learning the material anytime and anywhere. It means that they have the control how and when to learn the material. It can be matched with their learning style and habit.

In contrast, this advantage cannot be found in pictures, which are displayed in the limited time allocation in the class. When the class is over, so does the media (Floriasti, 2012). Students have the control how and when to study the digital material. Therefore, the students are getting closer to listening skills. The more they listen to the material, the more they acquire vocabularies, and the more they can produce sentences fluently.

Based on the explanation above, it can be stated that student teachers need more independent activities, which provide more practice in listening which contain good model of accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, grammar and standard rate of delivery so that students have standard Speaking skills. Thus, students need audio-visual

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media that gives them extra help in acquiring spoken micro skills and improving their listening abilities as well.

In the future, their abilities will be a potential factor that can be used as good model in listening and reading skills for their students and excellent material designer. Basically student teachers are designed to be junior or senior high school teachers that meet the competencies. Their capability in teaching and designing material meets with characteristics of good language teachers are (Allen, 1980 in Brown, 2001:429)

Technical Knowledge
1. Understands the linguistic systems of English phonology, grammar, and discourse
2. Comprehensively grasps basic principles of language learning and teaching
3. Has fluent competence in speaking, writing, listening to, and reading English
4. Knows through experience what it is like to learn a foreign language
5. Understands the close connection between language and culture
6. Keeps up with the field through regular reading and conference/workshop attendance

Pedagogical Skills

1. Has a well-thought-out, informed approach to language teaching
2. Understands and uses a wide variety of techniques
3. Efficiently designs and executes lesson plans
4. Monitor lessons as they unfold and makes effective mid-lesson alterations
5. Effectively perceives students' linguistic needs
6. Gives optimal feedback to students
7. Stimulates interaction, cooperation, and teamwork in the classroom
8. Uses appropriate principles of classroom management
9. Uses effective, clear presentation skills
10. Creatively adapts textbook material and other audio, visual, and mechanical aids
11. Innovatively creates brand-new materials when needed
12. Uses interactive, intrinsically motivating techniques to create effective tests and lessons

It is expected that what student teachers get in their study can give them some inspiration and motivation how to design material, use appropriate approaches and give suitable media in teaching learning process. Therefore, it can be used as a pattern to develop English material in the future for different purposes and emphases, and assess students' performance. In addition, the audio-visual media will give them an alternative way to give input for their future students in enriching listening skills.
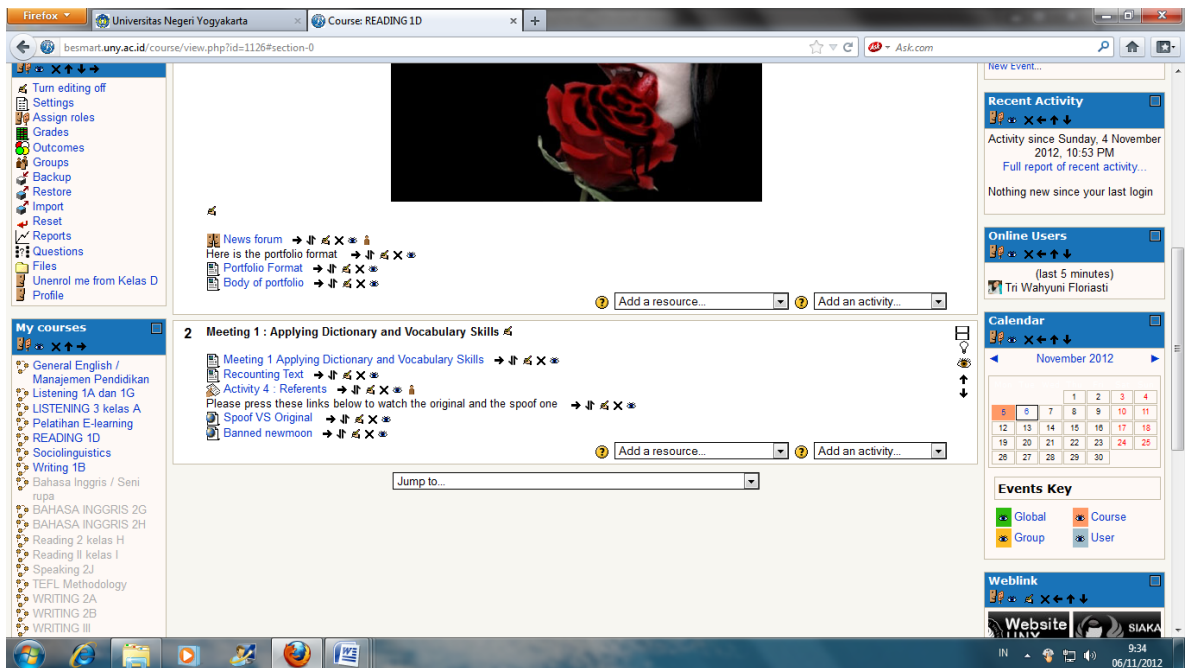
Picture 5: portfolio

Moreover, student teachers need to know how to assess their future students. They might follow the way I did in reading class. I used portfolio in assessing student teachers' achievements as displayed in picture 5 above. Portfolio is very useful in assessing students' achievements either in reading or listening class. According to De valenzuela (2002) a student portfolio is a systematic collection of student work and related material that depicts a student's activities, accomplishment, and achievements in one or more subject.

Conclusion

I expect that the result of using be-smart as supporting media will provide students with adequate knowledge in mastering reading and listening and giving student teachers with individual opportunities to practice and improve listening skills. Furthermore, as a result of acquiring good model from listening student teachers have confident to speak and not worried about making mistake and error, then give them good model how to speak naturally in daily context and formal situation as well. In the future, their abilities will be potential factors that can be used in the upper level of study, and in their class. It can be said that using be-smart influences the way student study and the time they spent as well.

Moreover, it is a good opportunity for me to prepare and design innovative activities through the use of be-smart. It is a useful practice in integrating technology into

classroom instruction, as it should support the classroom interaction and the student teachers needs in improving listening and gaining more skills in reading.

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