# COPING WITH LIMITED TECHNOLOGY CONTEXT IN EFL CLASSROOM

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**Abstract**: The integration of technology into the EFL teaching and learning has become very important since technology can present real life English communication with its complexities into the classroom. This integration has challenged EFL educators to be digitally literate in using technology to support English teaching and learning context. However, problems dealing with technology context in EFL classroom setting such as inaccessible high technology tool, unstable electricity source and unreliable data connection sometimes occur and therefore limit the teaching and learning experience. This paper aims to explore the way of coping with limited technology contexts by carefully selecting and then integrating three most familiar technical tools to the EFL classroom activity namely Facebook, mobile phone and computer, and by manipulating its features to construct the students' learning experiences in both actual and virtual learning environment.

**Keywords**: Facebook, mobile phone, computer, EFL, technology

In this ICT (information and communications technologies) era, EFL education nowadays cannot be separated from the integration of technological tools. Basically, technological tools such as computer and internet are invented to make human's works are easier, faster, and better than before. Computer and internet have offered unlimited possibilities to access, to edit and to share any kinds of files such as movies, songs, pictures, photos, electronic books, or html page for educational purposes.

Nowadays, our students are more accustomed to using technological devices in their learning activity. They record teacher's explanation, take pictures of the written explanation in their textbooks instead of writing it, they download articles and books instead of buying it, they listen to the music in their iPod, mp3 player or mobile devices while reading and typing their essays, and they prefer to directly type their essay rather than write it down first (Prensky, 2001). Hence, it is a challenge for us to be digitally literate in integrating computer and internet in our EFL classroom setting as an inseparable part of instructional activity, to better serve and better teach students who are more and more experienced with computers and internet. This technology integration demands us, EFL educators, to manage all information that we read, to digest it,

then to represent and display that information in all possible forms (Brindley, 2008; Cantoni &Tardini, 2008).

The integration of technologies as technical media is very important in classroom activity since it can present the outside world in all its complexities into the classroom (Brinton, 2001). Hence, we have to master the utilityof technical media to enhance the process of teaching and learning English, to stimulate learners' interest in learning English, and to familiarize learners with technology. However, although technical media is important in the process of teaching and learning English, we cannot deny that some technical media are costlier and less user-friendly than nontechnical media. Additionally, we are still dealing with limited technology contexts in the classrooms as follows:

- Not all EFL classrooms setting are equipped with high technological tools such as built-in-class LCD projector or interactive whiteboard. Consequently, EFL educators lack of knowledge in using and operating LCD projector to display their PowerPoint presentation in classroom, and merely focusing on using nontechnical media such as whiteboard/blackboard, still pictures, and textbooks.
- EFL educators heavily rely on school equipment with unreliable internet connections during the learning time, so the possibility of having online communication or face-to-face communication in an actual classroom is very limited.
- EFL educators largely depend on electricity power in the classroom. So often the electricity is off and hence it has forced the educators to stop using technical media, or even worse, to stop the teaching process.

Those conditions listed above can become obstacles to hold back EFL educators from being digitally literate. To cope with these problems, EFL educators should not only be trained to use technical media in teaching, but also to be aware with the case of limited technology in the classroom. It is our task as EFL educators to help our students gain well-developed English skills to communicate, along with technological capability, to excel in today's ICT era. One of the ways of coping with these limited technology contexts is by developing a right attitude to technology: carefully select technical media which are easier to utilize and to integrate in classroom activity. In doing so, we make our classroom activity more efficient, effective, interesting, and meaningful to promote digital literacy and to present virtually continuous learning atmosphere for students.

This paper discusses the ways of coping with limited technology contexts which have been listed previously by maximizing the use of Facebook account, mobile phone and computer in classroom activity. These three technical media have been prioritized among other technical media because these media are very familiar, very accessible, and thus very comfortable to utilize. The discussion in this paper has been focused on exploring the features of Facebook, mobile phone and computer to be manipulated in classroom activities for addressing limited technology problems in teaching and learning English, based on the principles of constructing and experiencing language learning.

The nature of language learning is to enable the learners to use target language in real life communication context. Therefore, the activities of all language skills in classroom setting should be continuously interrelated as a simulation to the real life language activities, and it should be viewed as the process whereby knowledge of using English is situated and resulted through experiences (Slavin, 2012; Hampel & Lamy, 2007; Moon, 1994; Kolb, 1984). In this ICT era, the aim of language learning is to produce all-rounded communicators; therefore, all EFL educators have to be able to handle both face-to-face communication and mediated communication (Kenning, 2007). EFL educators should construct an environment for the students to use English through a set of experiences on specific language tasks mediated by Facebook, mobile phone and computer. The use of these technical media in classroom can help us to create virtual classroom for our students to experience English as if they were in a real life communication context, to freely use English without being afraid of making mistakes, and to support them in developing their digital literacy (Hampell & Lamy, 2007; Andresen, Boud & Cohen, 1999).

The integration of Facebook in EFL teaching and learning process has been examined by Yunus et al (2012) in their research project. Carried out in Malaysia, they explored Facebook as one of the potential social network websites to find out its effectiveness in improving the university students' writing. The result showed that integrating Facebook group can help the students to write by maximizing 'spell check' feature of Facebook and by treating peer feedback on Facebook groups as inputs to get better writing idea. The process of this digitally-constructed brainstorming activity has positively contributed to better idea development in completing students' essay. In Iran, Rouhi and Mohebbi (2012) have explored the assistance of computer in facilitating English reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. Their research result showed that providing computer to assist language learning activity was very effective for the students in experiencing the pleasure of learning and increasing their learning possibilities (Rouhi & Mohebbi, 2012).

In 2011, Wang et al conducted a research to investigate the integration of cellphone into traditional EFL classroom in China. Having carefully examining the students' perceptions and attitudes towards the integration of mobile phone into EFL classroom activity, they found that this integration activity was highly welcomed by the students since their learning experience became more interesting and effective, and they were more ready to develop their technological readiness in integrating mobile phone into their learning activity (Wang et al, 2011). In Indonesian EFL context, the integration of mobile phone in project-based video task was also conducted as research focus by Modjanggo and Tungka (2010), and the result proved that through mobile phone-mediated video task, the students were able to construct their own learning environment, to decrease their anxiety in speaking English and to motivate them in learning English.

The brief discussion of maximizing the features of Facebook, mobile phone and computers begins this paper, and then followed by displaying suggestedactual and virtual classroom activity. Finally, ways of integrating

Facebook, mobile phone and computers in actual and virtual classroom activity ends this paper.

## MAXIMIZING TECHNICAL MEDIA IN CLASSROOM
### Facebook

Facebook is one of the social networking websites which enable its users to communicate with others around the world and to share information as many as possible. It is very easy to access anytime, anywhere, and by any kind of mobile devices. If we do not have mobile devices with internet browser feature, we can still communicate via Facebook through short message service (SMS) application. Facebook not only offers easily accessible advantage but also provides very rich features to allow its users to communicate through text, voice also video chat (partnering with Skype), and to allow the users to share information in form of text, image, audio and video documents as well. Because of all of its features Facebook has become one of the most popular social networking websites, supported by the fact that Facebook users in Indonesia had already reached 43,06 millions 43,523,740 on March 31, 2012 based on internetworldstats.com.

EFL educators can build virtual classroom as an environment for students in experiencing English by maximizing all features of Facebook. This virtual classroom is created by using Facebook group account for a specific course, in order to continue the students' learning experience outside the actual classroom. If the discussion in actual classroom is to provide face-to-face communication environment, then the purpose of creating virtual classroom through Facebook is to respond the needs of having mediated communication in English. In this virtual classroom, 'Update status' as Facebook's main feature is fully maximized as virtual whiteboard, in which EFL educators can share various forms of information: text, photos, videos, weblink to educational online games, or HTML page about the latest information related with the learning topic. Students' active participation can be seen through their comments and responses on the status updates. All information shared in status updates can also be downloaded and used in actual classroom discussion.

Besides using 'Update status' as virtual whiteboard, educators can also maximize the use of text 'Facebook chat/video chat' to begin online discussion and interaction. All information shared via Facebook is traceable and stored in the Facebook history; so that students are able see their own progress in using English in the mediated interaction and communication session. By maximizing the use of Facebook as innovative technical media, EFL educators can be accustomed to sharing multiform information for educational purpose. What is needed by educators then is to establish some rules or ethics in using Facebook as virtual classroom to control the information sharing and the Facebook-mediated interaction among all students.

### Mobile Phone

Among all the technological tools, mobile phones are probably the most popular and widely used in all over the world. People are getting used to using mobile phones to communicate easier and faster than before, therefore it is very

hard now to image life without mobile phone (Cui and Wang, 2008). Blackberry, Android-supported, Symbian-supported, Windows-supported, Java-enabled and iPhone mobile devices cannot be separated anymore from today's lifestyle. What makes mobile phone very popular is that mobile phone is very easy to bring, very advanced and very smart since it shares almost the same functions and features as personal computers have, such as listed in the Table 1.

Table 1.        Features of mobile phone

| Usage | OS-supported mobile phone | Non OS-supported, java-enabled mobile phone | Non internet-enabled mobile device |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sending text, image, audio and video documents | BlackBerry Messenger, email service, MMS service, SMS service, , Bluetooth sharing, third-party applications | Email service, MMS service, SMS service, Bluetooth sharing, third-party applications | SMS service, Bluetooth sharing |
| Opening and editing Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint files | Word to go, Sheet to go, Slideshow to go (free edition, paid edition for creating documents), Open Office Document, Think Free Office | Third-party applications | No |
| Recording events Capturing moments | Video recorder Camera | Video recorder Camera | Video recorder Camera |
| Recording voice | Voice notes recorder | Voice notes recorder | Voice notes recorder |
| Snapshotting image | Screen muncher (third party application) | Third-party applications | No |
| Playing audio documents | Voice notes, music player | Voice notes, music player | Voice notes, music player |
| Playing video documents | Video player | Video player | Video player |
| Accessing Facebook | Facebook for Blackberry/Android/Symbian/IPhone, internet browser | Mobile Facebook, internet browser | Yes, through SMS Facebook application |
| Accessing web page | Internet browser | Internet browser | No |
| Text/voice/video chatting | Facebook chat, Yahoo Messenger for Blackberry/Android/Symbian, Blackberry Messenger | | No |

| Electronic book reader | PDF reader (free or paid application) | e-book reader application | Yes |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |

This Table 1 above lists several features of mobile phone to be maximized in mediating students' classroom activity and homework. It can function as a personal digital assistant, portable media player, internet browser, video camera, USB device, personal modem, digital reader, and gaming console. In the case of limited modern technologies, educators can manipulate these mobile phone features to enhance the classroom activity by expanding time and space for learning. The maximum use of these features can make the construction of virtual learning atmosphere possible for our EFL teaching and learning process.

**Computers**

Computer is the most important technological tool of ICT era since it has two primary roles: to enable us to do the task faster and easier than before, and to engage ourselves in the digital creativity and digital literacy (Heinich et al, 2002). Computer enables us to produce textual communications, but it is also a tool for people to access various ways of communication and to share information. Today, inexpensive computers are now available to support the teaching and learning process (Sokolik, 2001) and have come in various forms such as PDA (personal digital assistant), PC tablet, laptop, and netbook. The term computer used in this paper is referred to portable personal computer such as laptop or netbook. Both laptop and netbook are computers which have been designed to be made portable, to answer the needs of people who are mobile. The differences of laptop and netbook are on the size, weight, and power needed for graphically intensive games and programs.

However, not all EFL classrooms are equipped by LCD projector and ready-use computers, and this condition limits the technology-mediated classroom activity. Unstable electricity has also become the limitation as well. To address with these limitations, create the handout of today's material decorated with interesting pictures from clipart feature in MS Word for our learners. Computers allow us to blend both nontechnical media (e.g. pictures, real objects, typed and printed handouts, newspapers) and technical media to support teaching and learning process. Here are some suggestions to use computers in classroom activity:

- In an actual classroom setting, present the material by integrating computers or mobile phone to make the material presentation session more alive and interesting, and to make our students model the way we present our material.
- Show the students how to manage their files in mobile phones by using computers. Highlight the function of mobile phone as USB device, to trigger the students' background knowledge on how to export their video file or image file from their mobile device to computers to organize the files into PowerPoint Presentation.
- Encourage the students to maximize computer applications to create their work in multi media forms, such as integrating image, graphic, animated pictures, sounds, even videos. For example, by using webcam to record a video presentation, by using Picasa application to create collage and send it right

away to educator's email or to Google + website, by using communication feature already provided in their computer such as Microsoft Office Outlook, or by using Windows Media Maker to create video presentation.
- For virtual classroom activity, instruct the students to compress their video file or image file to a smaller size. Compressing digital files to a web-document size will make the uploading process faster and easier.

Two figures in the following pages are the suggested ways of integrating and maximizing technical media in EFL teaching and learning process. The first figure represents the use of technical media in an actual, regular learning environment, while the second figure represents technology-mediated virtual learning environment with its activity.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Presenting the today's material in a PowerPoint presentation,│
│  but still providing the printed version in case of unstable  │
│  electricity power                                            │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                            ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Share information in form of digital file, and allow the     │
│  students to copy it to their laptop/netbook                  │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                            ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  To support the teaching and learning process, use personal  │
│  model to find information, or maximize internet browser      │
│  feature in mobile device in case of limited LAN connectivity │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                            ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Give computer/mobile devices-mediated assignment to promote  │
│  the students' digital literacy as well as to encourage their │
│  learning experience.                                         │
│  (e.g. always encourage the students to have PPT for their    │
│  presentation task, to record their spoken performance by     │
│  using video recorder in their mobile devices, or to record   │
│  their classroom activity)                                    │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                            ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Instruct the students to send their assignment via email or  │
│  post in on Facebook group account, so that their learning    │
│  experience is not only limited to the actual classroom, but  │
│  can also be continued outside the classroom                  │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                            ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Give face-to-face/email feedback to the students'            │
│  performance and assignment. Make sure that their progress is │
│  appraised, and their mistakes in producing language are      │
│  highlighted and corrected.                                   │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                            ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Ask the students to reflect their learning process and share │
│  their reflection to Facebook group to be discussed, or share │
│  it to educator's email                                       │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                            ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Give comments to the activity to end the whole session by    │
│  sending it the students' email address or by sharing it via  │
│  Facebook group account.                                      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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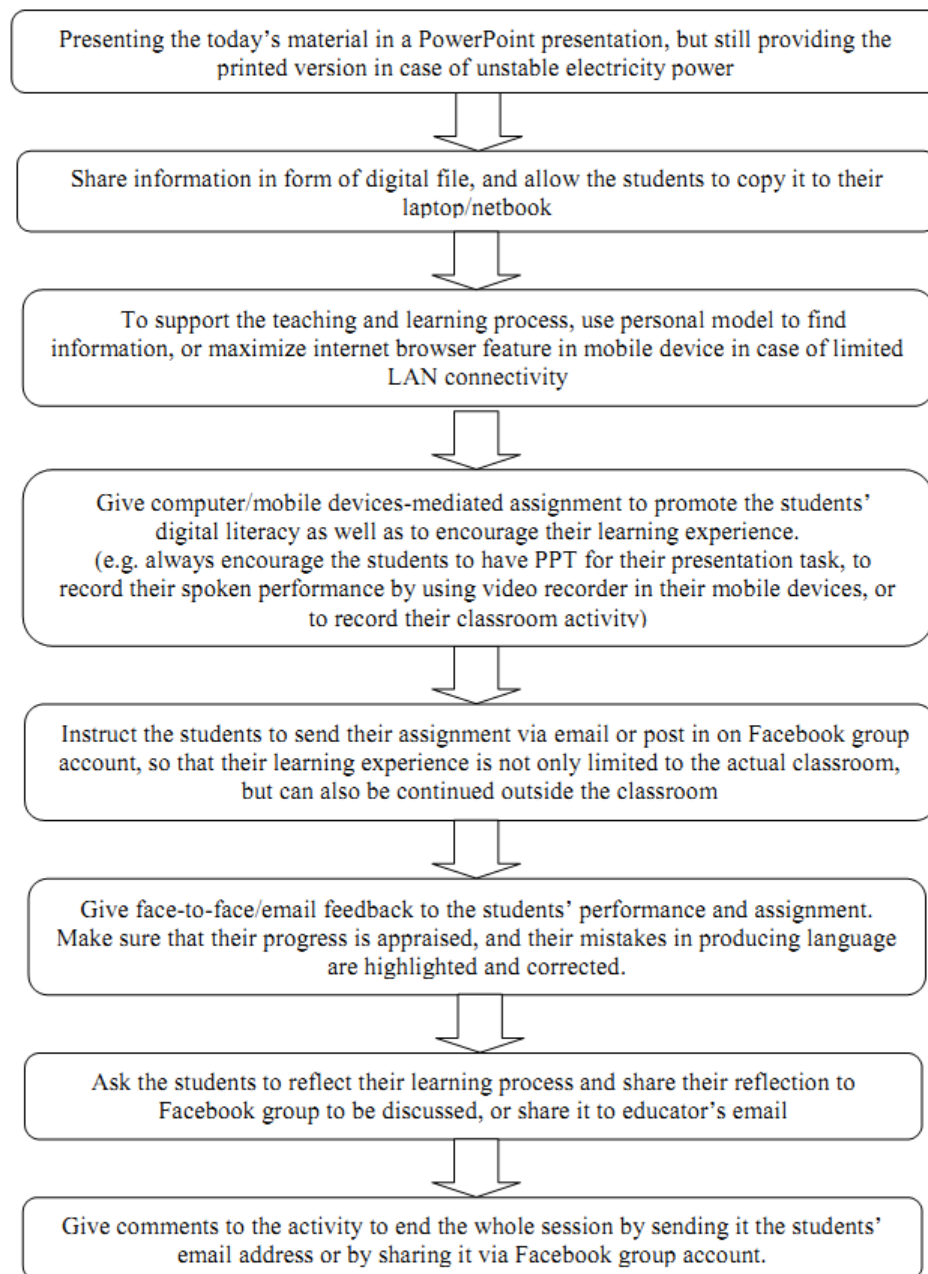
Figure 1.        Maximizing technical media in actual classroom

Figure 1 displays how EFL educators can use Facebook account, mobile phone and computer in an actual EFL classroom. The role of static whiteboard to display information and to present learning material is replaced by the role of computer screen in mediating the information sharing. Students' activity in practicing English is documented and then presented before the class to be reviewed and discussed together. Instructional materials are now available for students to download, store, and playback whenever and wherever needed.

Create Facebook group account as virtual classroom for students to access outside actual classroom, in order to continue the learning experience

Access the Facebook group account through mobile devices/computers. Encourage students to use mobile devices in case of unavailable computers unstable electricity or unreliable local data network

**For discussion:** Share topic to discuss by using "update status" feature in Facebook as a virtual whiteboard. Enrich the information by providing images/videos/weblink to another reading text to build students' background knowledge of the learned topic.
**For homework:** Ask students to update status related to the topic learned, enriched by images/videos/weblink to another webpage
Interaction model:

Students **experience** the production of English and are **exposed** to English by responding to others' status

Information is **shared and exchanged** among others and with educator

Students **produce** English in their status updates

Set the rules of virtual classroom in group description to be viewed by all students, such as the minimum requirement of giving responses to students' posted assignment, the responses and comments should be focused only to the discussion topic, other languages outside English are prohibited, and treat this virtual classroom as if you are in an actual classroom (having face-to-face communication with educator and other students)

Give feedback to the students' responses through Facebook message (for individual assignment), or write the feedback at the end of the students comments (for group assignment). Make sure that their progress is appraised, and their mistakes in producing language are highlighted and corrected

Ask the students to reflect their learning process and share their reflection to Facebook group to be discussed, or share it to educator's email

Close the session in virtual classroom by updating status to conclude today's material in Facebook group account. For addition, give link to supplement reading materials or give information about next topic.
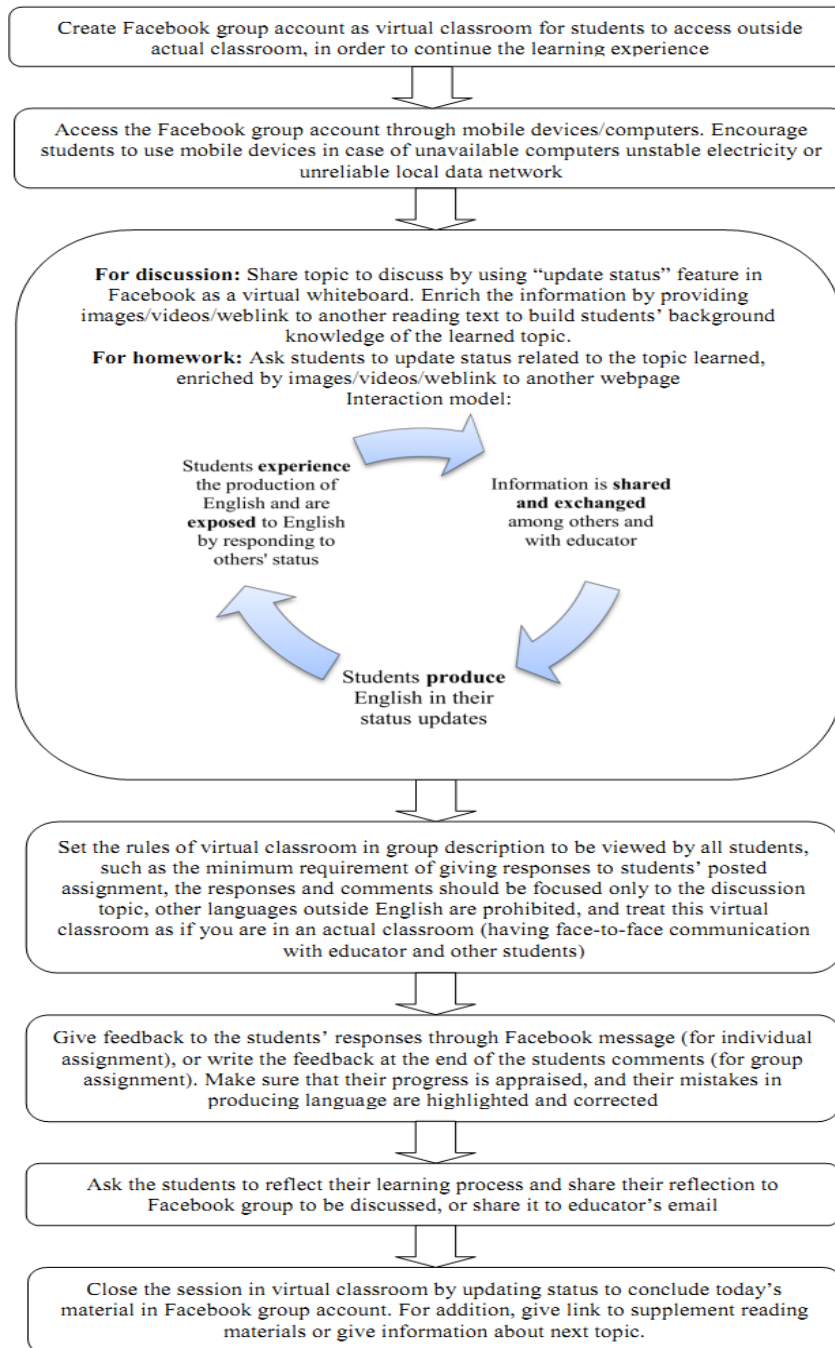
Figure 2.        Constructing virtual classroom by using technical media

This suggested virtual classroom in Figure 2 is to expand learning time and spaces which are sometimes limited by unsupported technological tools in classroom context, to facilitate the students' learning experience outside actual classroom. Facebook group account can be accessed by using both mobile phone

and computer, and therefore it can be accessed and updated whenever and wherever needed.

## DISCUSSION

The integration of Facebook, mobile phone and computer in an actual classroom in both actual and virtual classroom are designed to provide learning experience for the students without being limited by unavailable high technological tools or unreliable local data network for internet connectivity. As an educator, our job is to embrace technologies integration into our classroom activity, and to construct learning environment under the principles of language learning. In order to become more digitally literate, we need to be ready to explore the possibilities offered by technological tools around us.

During my experience teaching in EFL classroom with limited technology context, the integration of Facebook, mobile phone and computer in classroom activity has enabled my students to experience English learning in both inside and outside actual classroom. I observed that they enjoyed recording their spoken performance, uploading short videos and sharing images via email and Facebook, and giving comments on their peers' updated Facebook status. Constructing technology-mediated learning environment in both actual and virtual classroom has enabled the students to better experience the English learning process as suggested by constructivist learning perspectives (Slavin, 2012; Hampell & Lamy, 2007). The process of constructing their learning experience was demonstrated by the exposure to the English materials, interaction among peers and with educator, and the use of English in exchanging ideas, giving comments on peers' status updating, and reflecting the learning process.

When encouraging my students to construct their learning experience in virtual learning environment, I realized that a right attitude toward technology integration in classroom activity highly contributes to the students' learning experience. This attitude, which is directly shown by our readiness in anticipating limited technology context through selecting and maximizing more accessible technical media and in utilizing its features to process and to manage our digital files for teaching and learning process, has become very important to better response our students' needs which are more digitally aware to technology.

## CONCLUSION

I have discussed the ways technical media are maximally manipulated to cope with technological limitations in EFL classroom. The use of Facebook, mobile phone, and computer in actual classroom setting provides rich experiences for the students to use English in their face-to-face communication. The suggested figure of integrating these three technical media in creating virtual classroom has also offered possibilities to make mediated-communication experiences possible for the students as well as the educators themselves, and to let the interacting students create their virtual learning experience through their very interaction. The integration of these technical media promotes the

students' learning experience in actual classroom as well as increases both educator-student and student-student interaction in virtual classroom.

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