

## **Introduction**

The use of English as a foreign language has developed rapidly in this globalization era. People use English for international communication, in the commerce, health care, politics, education, and other fields. Therefore, English is taught and learned in almost every level of education in Indonesia.

Based on the development of the theory and concept of teaching and learning and the needs of teaching English at schools, teaching methods and techniques also develop especially in helping students more active in their learning. The traditional teaching technique has significantly improved from teacher centered to students centered. Students are not only sitting and listening to their teachers but also actively participate during the teaching learning process. The current development of the teaching techniques is also influenced by the vast development and use of information technology. It cannot be denied that most young people are familiar with IT. In their daily communication and activities, they use gadgets more than do things manually. Taking notes is not on paper anymore, but people use tabs to take notes. More and more assignments are finished on the computers.

The Self-Access Center of the English Department of Widya Mandala Catholic University develops exercises to be used as independent study materials for Structure classes and the Integrated Course. So far, this center has provided paper based exercises. In order to update the exercises and at the same time to increase students' motivation in doing the exercises deliberately, the SAC has developed digital exercises the materials of which are taken from grammar textbooks. For Structure A class, the exercises are developed using the Articulate Storyline 2 and the materials are taken from Grammar Dimension textbooks; book 1 written by Victoria Badalamenti and Carolyn Henner Stanchina (2000), book 2 written by Michelle Sadlier, Heidi Rigggenbach and Virginia Samuda (2000) and book 3 written by Stephen H. Thewlis (2000).

Up to the time when this paper was written, there were 7 computers provided for the students doing the digital grammar exercises. As independent study attached the Structure A class, the exercises also serve as structured assignments from which the scores contribute to the students' final scores. As such, the exercises are mandatory for all students of Structure A and should be finished within a scheduled time following the class progress. Based on the writers' observation of the students doing the exercises, the writer has realized that students have different opinions and attitudes towards these new digital independent study exercises. Hence, the writer is of the opinion that it is necessary to know students' perception of the use

of the digital exercises. Therefore, in this paper the writer will focus on the students' perception of the use of these new digital exercises for Structure A independent study.

### **What is SAC?**

Sturtridge (1992 as cited in Widiati, 1996) explains a Self-Access Centre as any system which provides materials for learners to be chosen so they can pick by themselves without any teachers' guidance. Self Access Center (SAC) in general is central to access various knowledge independently. Through SAC, students are expected to be able to improve their language skills. The students can pick their materials as they want and do it by themselves or within group. In such a center, there are various kinds of materials that can be accessed by the students: grammar, reading, writing, listening. The materials resources are obtained to ensure suitable support for the users. Gardner & Miller (1999 as cited in Gaona et al., 2012) explains that the resources may include any combination of the following: a space, self-access materials, technology, activities, training, tutors, a tutoring system, a system for feedback and self-assessment, and a system for evaluation.

Self Access Center (SAC) has Counselors that will help students when they have difficulty in doing the learning materials at the SAC. The counselors do not need to explain all of the materials as the lecturers do. They just give the explanations that students need in doing the exercises and give the tutorials for those who get low scores and for those who need to enrich themselves with the topics discussed by the lecturer based on the lecturer's request.

### **Kinds of SAC**

Sturtridge (1992) stated within any teaching-learning situation, there are various roles which can be played by a self-access center. They are the instruction center, the practice center, the skill center, and the learning center.

- The instruction center is where the pre-planned program is available for the students and the program may act as a surrogate teacher or as a supplement to a taught class. The students do the exercise by themselves independently while assisted by the counselor in giving feedbacks after students evaluate their learning. The independent exercises can be used to measure the students' ability in order to determine them going to the next units. The materials available at the SAC are mostly related to the topic that have been taught in the regular class.

- The practice center is a Self Access Centre that is related to assignments or tasks that have been done by the learners. It involves and extends of what is covered in class. It does not mean that the students can not learn something new but the the opportunities will be limited. These limited opportunities only give the students practices to reinforce their skills in which they are lack in or for which they feel the class has not provided them. It is only related to class learning program to the extent that students are directed to or can easily locate materials that are close to grammatical and lexical level to the work covered in class.
- A skill center is a Self Access Center that focuses on one skill only. This self-access is set up to help the students to improve their skill. It will help the students to practice the skill that they feel lack the most. This would otherwise take up valuable class-contact time, or as being able to give more feedback that is efficient. To improve their skill, they can learn independently and ask the counselor at the SAC if they have some difficulties. In some teaching situations a self-access centre that focuses on one skill may be more needed than a more general self-access learning centre.
- The learning center is a self-access that allows the students to extend their knowledge of the language. This self-access contains exercises and tests that can motivate the students to learn more and as well as improving themselves in learning the language. This center provides the types of materials that goes beyond the practice and testing which has been learnt in class. In the learning center, the students have more time to do the exercises that they want to practice.

### **The Function of SAC at the English Department of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University**

SAC in English Department of Widya Mandala Catholic University function as a skill center. It serves as a place to improve your English grammar, it focuses in Structure class. Although it also provides independent study materials for the Integrated Course students. Its purpose is to encourage students to learn independently. Students can do some extra work and study with their own pace.

There are some activities for those who are in the first semester. For their IC class, they have a portfolio while for their Structure Class; they have digital learning program as

their independent study activity. There is also tutorial program that will be held before the mid-term test and the final test. But the writer will just focus on the use of the digital learning exercises for the Structure A class.

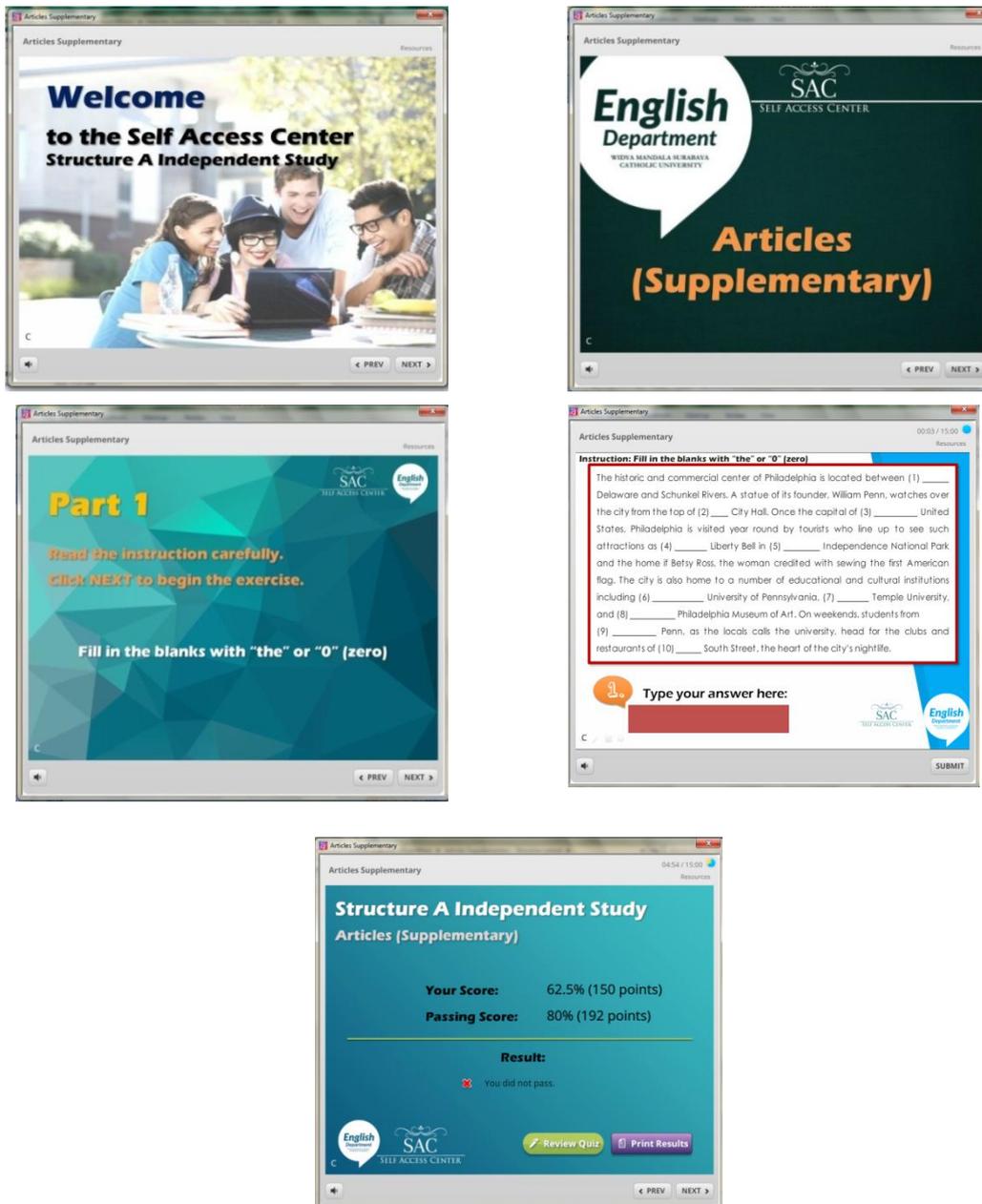
### **The Digital Exercises of Structure A**

The students of Structure A use the software in doing their Structure independent study exercises. The materials of the digital modules are attached to the Structure class. This means that the digital module materials cover the topics that the students have learnt in the classroom. They do the exercises on a certain topic in the syllabus one week after the topic is discussed in class.

The tasks from the digital module have to be done by the students individually because it is their independent study. They have to read the instructions carefully so that they can answer the questions in order. They will do the tasks for around 15 minutes, and after they have finished the tasks, the score will be shown on the computer and it will be taken by the counselors. They can review the the exercises directly in the computer or they can print the result. The score that they get from the digital module have a minimum passing score. Its minimum passing score for their digital module exercises is 80. If the students get the average score below 80, it is a compulsory for them to join the tutorial program before the mid term and the final test. Students who get score 80 or above can also join the tutorial. The scores of the independent study contribute to their Structure A mid-term and final test score.

Students also can do the supplementary exercises from the digital module besides the compulsory exercises. They can do the supplementary tasks to practice the learning materials more every time they intend to do after doing the compulsory exercises. As the independent study materials should be in line with the materials discussed in class and should be done by the students the week after the class discussion, exercises of a certain topic are made available on the computer just for one week following the class progress. Students are not allowed to re-do the same exercises, but they are allowed to do the supplementary exercises on the same topic.

We can see the examples of digital module at the pictures below (picture 1). The questions are divided into some parts with different instructions. There are several numbers of the questions that have to done by the students. the questions, there is a box where the they can write their answer. The students have to answer the questions so that they can go to next number. After they answer the question and click the “next” button, there will be a notice if the answer is correct or incorrect.



picture.1

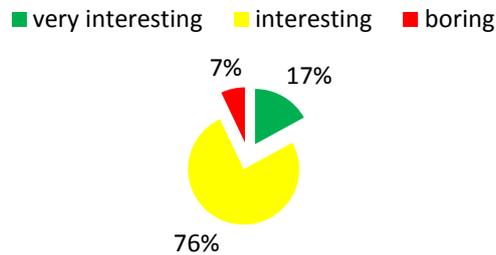
### Students' perceptions

To know the students' perceptions about the digital learning at the SAC, the writer constructed a questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to figure out the real opinion of students toward the SAC program. The questionnaire contained 7 questions about the software used at the SAC. It was about how the students rated the software, the questions or the content, the module format, how they valued the software and the reasons why they use the software. The writer gave the questionnaire to students who took Structure A. There were 30 participants of first semester students taking part in answering the questions. The result of the questionnaire is presented as follows:

Questions 1: **How do you rate the software?**

Chart1

**The Software Rating**

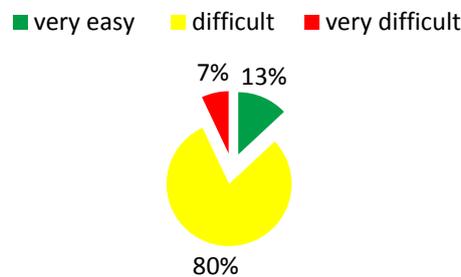


Based on the questionnaires that have been distributed, about how the students rate the software, we can see in the pie bar, 76% of the students stated that the software was interesting, 17% said that it was very interesting and 7% state that was boring. Most of the respondents stated that the software was interesting for them and it shows that the software is good to be used as the digital learning program at the SAC.

Question 2: **The content/ the questions**

Chart2

**The content**



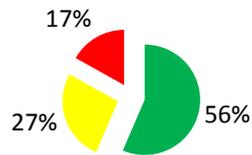
Based on the students' perception about the content, 80% of them stated that the content/ question module was difficult, 13% state that it was very easy and 7% stated that it was very difficult. The writer can draw a conclusion that the content of the digital module is challenging to challenge the students so they learn more. If the questions are very easy, it will make any improvement in their learning and if the questions are very easy or very difficult, it will not help the students to have any improvement in their learning.

### Question 3: **The digital module format**

Chart 3

#### The Module format

■ very easy to use   ■ difficult   ■ very difficult



As we can see at the pie chart about how was the students' perception about the module format, it shows that 56% state that the module format was very easy to use, 27% state that it was difficult and 17% stated that it was very difficult.

### Question 4: **Why do you do the exercises in the software? Because...**

Chart 4

#### Reasons of using the software

■ Want to learn independently   ■ The score will be taken



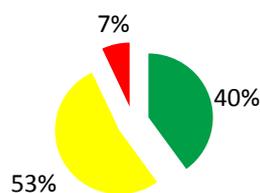
The reasons why the students do the exercises in the software, the results of the questionnaire showed that 53% of the students want to learn independently and 47% of them do the exercise because the score will be taken.

### Question 5: **How do you value individual learning using software?**

Chart 5

#### Software value

■ very useful   ■ useful   ■ useless



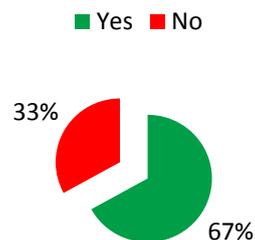
The pie chart of software value about how the students value the individual learning by using the software. 53% of the students value that individual learning by using the software was useful, 40% state it was very useful and 7% state it was useless.

Question 6 : a. **Do you want to learn by using the software more?**

b. **Why? State your reasons:**

Chart 6

**Plan to learn using the software more**



Last question of the questionnaire is do you want to learn by using the software more. As we can see at the pie chart, 67% of the students said that they wanted to use the software more and 33% said they did not want to learn by using the software more.

There were various reasons why the students want to use the software more and why they do not want to use it more. They stated that they want to use the software more because it is fun, interesting, useful and efficient to use moreover it is paperless. The digital module can develop their English skill especially for the grammar. By using the digital learning software they can learn independently and measure their own ability because after they have finished doing the tasks the know the score, they also can review the tasks directly and know which number is correct or incorrect.

While for the reasons why they do not want to use the software more, the students state that it is not practical, they can type the word wrongly and sometimes the computer network is error so they prefer the manual one or written exercises. Some of them state that it is difficult and confusing, the instruction is difficult to be understood. They also state that it is difficult to use because they never use the digital module before.

Most of the students did not give any suggestions for the SAC but some of them suggested that it would be better if there are some borders for each computer booths so that other students can not see their answer.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the questionnaire that has been delivered, the writer can conclude that the software is interesting. They said that content/question module is difficult for them, but the writer thought that it is challenging. The difficulty of the content is in accordance with their level. With the difficulty of the content that is not very easy or very difficult, they can learn more to improve their ability. If the content is very easy, it means that the students do not need to practice more and if the content is very difficult, they can not learn more. About the module format, the participants said that it is very easy to use because the software program is very simple.

The writer also can conclude that most of the students use the software in doing the exercises, because they want to learn more independently so that they can improve their English skill. Based on the question how they value their individual learning using the software, it is useful for them and it is related to the reason why they use the software. It is useful for them to measure their own ability. Most of them want to learn using the software because it is more practice.

The use of digital learning can make the students learn to be more independent and they can use the software easily. The exercises that have been prepared, especially for the supplementary exercise, can be done by the students whenever they want. The result can be seen on the computer after they finished doing the exercises automatically. In this way, the digital exercises are more efficient because the counselors do not have to check the students exercise and score the exercises.

To sum up, the independent activities using the software is useful and more efficient because it helps student to learn independently in their available time. As students thought that the softwares were interesting, it can be expected that they would learn by using the software more because the software could help the students to learn more independently. The use of the digital exercises are also expected to motivate students to learn structure materials more as young people like to work with computer although students also admitted that they did the exercises because the score would be taken. In terms of level of difficulty of the exercises, the students thought that the exercises were difficult; only a few of them said that the exercises were very difficult and very easy. It can be said that the exercises could challenge the students to learn the material more comprehensively.

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