Gifted Students' Use of Web 2.0 Technologies for English Language Learning

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***Abstract*—** Gifted learners' abilities call for a different approach to learning in order for them to truly achieve their highest potential, and become future assets for the progress of the country. Their special learning needs should be met through education so that they are not left behind or neglected. It is hoped that using Web 2.0 technologies in English language learning (ELL) will fulfill these learning needs and cater to their characteristics. As an indication of students' technological competence and familiarity, a study investigating gifted students' current use of Web 2.0 technologies and how they were used for ELL was conducted in PERMATApintar School, UKM, the Malaysian gifted school. The study employed a mixed-method of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to which 80 and 4 Form 5 gifted students of the school responded, respectively. The findings of the present study showed that the gifted students were not as frequent users of the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies as expected, neither did they own many technological devices. It was also found that the Web 2.0 tools were not always used for ELL purposes; certain tools not at all. However, there were a variety of ways in which gifted students reported using Web 2.0 tools for their ELL which include sharing information, deeper learning, searching for learning materials, practice for language skills, communicating with native speakers, requesting for feedback and exploring areas of interest. Several issues and implications that arose from the findings were also discussed. Nevertheless, it is worth considering incorporating Web 2.0 technologies that are challenging and motivating for gifted students in order to enhance their ELL.

***Keywords*—**Digital natives, English language learning, gifted education, gifted learners, ICT, Web 2.0

I. Introduction

PRENSKY [1] once declared, "Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach". The advent of the Internet has placed a heavier emphasis on the role of the learners themselves in the learning process, engaging them in learning like never before. Hence, the integration of Web 2.0 technologies in English language learning (ELL) is not just for novelty but probably necessity's sake.

The benefits of using the Web 2.0 to enhance the ELL experience of students have been widely explored and testified to in various other studies [2] whereby applying ICT helped students achieve educational goals and objectives, particularly in a multicultural setting such as in Malaysia [3]. However, the use of Web 2.0 technologies for the ELL of gifted students has yet to be fully investigated. Gifted students of today are "digital natives" too, whereby they speak the "digital language" of the Internet fluently and use it easily [1].

The unique capabilities of gifted learners call for a different approach to learning in order for them to truly maximize their potential. These special learning needs and abilities also go beyond the regular classroom. Using Web 2.0 technologies could not only fulfill these learning needs beyond the ELL classroom, but also bode well with their prominent personalities as gifted individuals.

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II. Understanding the Why, Who and What

A. The Problem

Those who possess more extraordinary cognitive abilities than those of their peers are referred to as gifted individuals [4]. The number of gifted children in Malaysia is estimated at 450,000 [5]. Such a significant number of potentially gifted students surely cannot be ignored. The latent gifts and talents of these individuals should be harnessed as future assets for the development of the country. As with all special needs children, gifted learners also have special learning needs that should be met through education in order to truly achieve their highest potential; failing which, there is a risk of losing them.

Consequently, in the area of ELL, the question that arises is "What tools can fulfill the learning needs of gifted learners?" Web 2.0 technologies as a creative platform for English language expression and collaborative and independent learning has been attested to since its integration into the education field. It is hoped that the use of Web 2.0 technologies will meet gifted students' needs for challenging learning environments and learner autonomy, thus enhancing their ELL experience.

B. Gifted Learners and Language Learning

Many experts and scholars have debated over the definition of giftedness. Initially, giftedness was measured in terms of intellectual ability (Terman 1926, cited in [6]) but was later contested with more liberal definitions that accounted for other areas of intelligences [7]. Newer ideas of giftedness are based on theories of expertise, where gifted learners may be

"experts" in certain areas, but not in others. However, gifted learners have higher potential in *becoming* experts, given the right conditions and factors [8]. They also enjoy a good challenge and do not give up easily when confronted with unfamiliar situations [4] [9] which implies that they may get bored easily if tasks presented pose no challenge for them.

In later years, scholars explored characteristics that appear to be shared by gifted learners. According to Munro [10], learners show characteristics of gifted thinking when they show a high level of understanding and like to take ideas apart. They make novel connections between ideas quickly, and solve problems in unusual ways. Spontaneously, they might ask complex questions about ideas and link ideas in lateral, unexpected broad ways. In addition, gifted learners are strong users of self-regulatory or metacognition (thinking about your thinking) strategies such as defining, correcting and solving [10].

Aliza & Hamidah [4] on the other hand, proposed a list of characteristics of gifted learners that is divided into seven domains as a result of the varying views of psychologists like Gardner, Renzulli, Clark and Sousa. The seven domains are, namely, General Intellectual Ability, Specific Intellectual Ability, Creative Thinking, Leadership, Psychomotor Ability, Visual and Performing Arts, and Social-Emotional. In addition, gifted learners seem to be perfectionists due to an inner drive to learn which makes them very inquisitive as well [4].

Shore [11] asserted that gifted learners displayed characteristics similar to those who are experts in their respective fields. They have more relevant prior knowledge and are better at recalling it when needed. They are often more reflective and display extraordinary problem-solving skills. Apparently, they even prefer complex problems, making them more complex just to amuse themselves.

In the language learning department, Halliwell (1992), as cited in Okan and Ispinar [9], suggested that children enter a foreign or second language classroom with a certain set of instincts, skills and abilities that help them to learn another language besides their first. More often than not, their language learning occurs indirectly rather than directly.

How do these characteristics vary for gifted students learning a second language? Referring to the general characteristics of learning that gifted students possess, they suggest a high potential for a rapid development in second language learning. Hayes et. al. (1998), in Okan & Ispinar [9], suggested that gifted students' characteristics for learning may transfer over to the domain of language learning. Certain qualities like their extensive vocabulary, extraordinary reading and writing capabilities, well-developed memory and even their perfectionism will likely facilitate their language learning efforts. Gifted learners, even at a young age, were found to be able to function beyond the linguistic and cognitive limitations of the language [12].

C. The Web 2.0

The Web 2.0 is not a new version of the World Wide Web, but rather the Internet but involving new possibilities, evolved over time mainly because of its users [13] [14]. It is defined as "a collection of second-generation web-based technologies and services" [15].

Web 2.0 applications allow its users to easily create, publish and share content with friends, colleagues or even a worldwide audience. Users are no longer just consumers, but also producers of content, or "prosumers" [13]. With this variety of applications, there are endless possibilities for channels of learning, especially for the "digital native" learners. With the Web 2.0, new learning relationships and interactions between learners, teacher and content are made possible [1] [13].

With the infinite possibilities that the Web 2.0 can provide for the "digital native" learners of today, if used wisely for ELL, learners will be able to achieve much greater heights, what more gifted ones who have extraordinary capabilities in language learning. In this paper, the researchers focused on four types of Web 2.0 tools: instant message software, blogs, social networks and video-sharing sites.

In the Malaysian gifted school—the PERMATApintar School—gifted students' current use of Web 2.0 technologies was investigated in terms of their access to the Internet, the ownership of technological devices, and whether they use certain Web 2.0 technologies. The frequency of their use of those Web 2.0 tools and subsequently, the frequency of the use of the tools for ELL purposes were also investigated. Besides that, the ways in which Web 2.0 tools were used for ELL by the gifted learners were also explored. It is hoped that this paper could give an idea of the technology-usage of the gifted "digital natives" of Malaysia and suggest steps for English language instructors in the integration of Web 2.0 technologies in ELL for the gifted.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to learn of gifted students' current use of Web 2.0 tools, and how they used them for ELL. It employed mixed methods involving a questionnaire with both close- and open-ended questions, and semi-structured interviews whereby respondents had freedom to respond based on their personal experiences without being limited by pre-supplied answers.

The study involved 80 Form 5 gifted students in the PERMATApintar School, UKM. They consisted of 26 males and 54 females making for 32.5% and 67.5% of the population respectively. Malays made up for 83.8%, the Chinese, 10.0% and the Indians, 3.8%. The Sabah and Sarawak bumiputeras made up only 2.5% of the sample. All respondents are aged between 16 to 17 years. Each respondent was coded RQ01, RQ02 and so on. For the one-to-one semi-structured interviews, 4 gifted students who had given prior consent to be interviewed were selected. Each interviewee was coded RI1, RI2 etc. and also given pseudonyms (Acap, Rania, Penguin and Annie).

IV. FINDINGS

In order to have a clearer picture on the current use of Web 2.0 technologies by the gifted students in the PERMATApintar School, several aspects were taken into consideration. It was important to identify if students had access to the Internet

outside of the gifted school, and the types of technological devices they owned. Besides that, whether or not the gifted students used these Web 2.0 technologies had to be determined. The follow-up would be to find out how much time did the students actually spend on these Web 2.0 tools, and more importantly, how much of the time spent online is for ELL purposes. Finally, the study gained information on how the Web 2.0 tools were used for ELL by gifted learners.

A. Access to the Internet

Table 1

Item	No (%)	Yes (%)
Do you have access to the Internet outside of the PERMATApintar School?	10 (12.8)	68 (87.2)

The first item in the questionnaire requested information on access to the Internet (Table 1). When asked if students have Internet access outside of the PERMATApintar School, a large majority responded *Yes*, while only 12.8% responded *No*. While there is no wireless local area Internet network (wi-fi) in the hostel building, the neighbouring UKM residential college, Pendeta Za'ba does at the cafeteria and the main office lobby. Besides that, students who were interviewed explained that the Internet services at the Cyber Café in Pendeta Za'ba were also available to them. Therefore, students can access the Internet outside of the school but not in their hostel.

However, Penguin (pseudonym) revealed that some students still felt the need to bring their own modems. She also insisted that although they are allowed to bring their own laptops, "[but] still, Internet we don't have it." Acap also lamented that he could not access the Internet at home because he did not own a modem. This indicates that Internet access outside of the school is not as extensive as presumed. However, even with available Internet access, students felt that they did not have much time to access the Internet due to other commitments especially schoolwork (RQ16, RQ25).

B. Ownership of Technological Devices

Table 2

Item	No (%)	Yes (%)
Do you have a laptop computer (also known as notebook) or a netbook?	22 (27.5)	58 (72.5)
Do you have a Smart phone (iPhone, Blackberry etc.)?	65 (81.2)	15 (18.8)
Do you have a Tablet PC (iPad, Samsung Galaxy Tab etc.)?	77 (96.2)	3 (3.8)
Do you have an iPod or an MP3 player?	33 (41.2)	47 (58.8)

Information in this section on the types of technological devices that gifted students owned may provide an idea of the technological competence and familiarity of the learners. This may also indicate which kinds of technologies gifted students are interested in, which can be considered as potential tools in ELL. As can be seen in Table 2, a majority of students own laptops (72.5%); however, few students owned Smart phones or tablet PCs, with 18.8% and 3.8% respectively. More than half of the students (58.8%) had music player devices. With rather discouraging figures, students may not be that familiar with technology or all that interested in it. However, the low possession of technological devices could possibly be due to the lack of financial means to purchase these devices as mere students, as they are costly. Next, the types of Web 2.0 tools that the students use and are exposed to are explored.

C. Use of Web 2.0 Tools

Table 3

Item	No (%)	Yes (%)
Do you use instant message software (MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Skype etc.)?	26 (32.5)	54 (67.5)
Do you write a blog?	54 (67.5)	26 (32.5)
Do you read blogs?	27 (33.8)	53 (66.2)
Do you use social networks (Facebook, Friendster etc.)?	1 (1.2)	79 (98.8)
Do you use video-sharing sites (YouTube, Vimeo etc.)?	16 (20.0)	64 (80.0)

The items in Table 3 ascertained if gifted students used Web 2.0 tools such as instant message software, write blogs, read blogs, social networks and video-sharing sites, or otherwise. For using blogs, reading and writing blogs were separate items because the researchers recognize that it is possible for users to read numerous blogs but do not write one of their own.

Overall, students are exposed to all these Web 2.0 tools. Of the four specified types, the top two used are social networks and video-sharing sites. The one that most students use is social networks, with all students (98.8%) indicating *Yes* except for one. This is probably due to the popularity of Facebook. This is followed by video-sharing sites (80.0%) since video-sharing sites like YouTube are also rising in popularity and the videos are easily shared and integrated into other Web tools. Next, is instant message software with 67.5% of students using them. Students read blogs more than they write them. This is probably because reading is a less time-consuming activity as compared to writing. Only 32.5% of students write their own blogs while 66.2% read them on the Internet.

All four interviewees used the Web 2.0 technologies mentioned, though some more than others. Acap and Rania used blogs more, although they are also familiar with applications such as Facebook, YouTube and Yahoo Messenger. However, they also read blogs more than they write in them. Rania does not own a blog while Acap claimed busyness to account for the lack of updates in his. Both often read blogs of people they know, like friends and family, and even roommates. Penguin, on the other hand, is a huge fan of the social network Facebook, bordering on addiction. She

gushed: "Of course, Facebook! Every time I get access. Um, if I'm at home, every day. But since I'm here, I don't have any access to the Internet so when I go to the computer lab in the school, so I will…I will log in and just update my status… Yes, [if I could, I would use it] every day." (Penguin, RI3)

This means that Penguin would go into Facebook every day, but does not only due to poor Internet access. The question that arises next is just how much time is spent on these tools in their daily lives?

D. Frequency of Use of Web 2.0 Tools

Table 4

Item	≥ 3 hours daily (%)	1-2 hours daily (%)	Several times a week (%)	Once a week (%)
If yes, how often? (Instant message software)	2 (3.8)	4 (7.6)	24 (45.3)	23 (43.4)
If yes, how often? (Write blogs)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.2)	13 (54.2)	10 (41.7)
If yes, how often? (Read blogs)	1 (1.9)	0 (0.0)	30 (56.6)	22 (41.5)
If yes, how often? (Social networks)	9 (11.4)	11 (13.9)	43 (54.4)	16 (20.3)
If yes, how often? (Video-sharing sites)	4 (6.3)	7 (10.9)	41 (64.1)	12 (18.8)

For this section, students chose between: *≥ 3 hours daily*, *1-2 hours daily*, *Several times a week*, and *Once a week* for the items as in Table 4. Students responded to these items only if they had answered *Yes* to the items in 4.1.3.

The findings showed that students do not spend that much time on instant message software. Out of those who use instant message software, only 11.4% used it daily, with only 3.8% using it for more than 3 hours a day. This is possibly because instant message software like MSN Messenger and Yahoo Messenger are becoming less prominent as more and more social networks have integrated message-chat features. Users are able to chat with friends on the social network itself without having to sign into their respective instant message applications. Interestingly, more than half of students are writing and reading blogs several times a week, with 54.2% and 56.6% of students involved in the two activities respectively. However, none spend more than 3 hours writing in their blogs. Only one student spends more than 3 hours reading blogs.

On the other hand, the highest percentage of students is on social networks every day, with 11.4% more than 3 hours and 13.9% on it 1 to 2 hours a day. This is probably because the social network Facebook is currently one of the most used online sites in the world, with over 955 million active users, as of July 26th, 2012 [16]. As for video-sharing sites like YouTube, which have the second highest percentage of students with daily usage, 6.3% use them more than 3 hours and 10.9% for 1 to 2 hours every day.

Social networks and video-sharing sites possess the two largest percentages of gifted student users (refer to 4.1.3) and it is reflected in the percentage of students who use them daily. However, the numbers are not as significant as expected. A total of only 25.3% and 17.2% of the students who use social networks and video-sharing sites use them every day. This is probably due to the gifted students' other priorities and poor Internet access. RQ16 and RQ25 explained simply that "I don't have much time to surf the internet" and "Don't really have enough time to access the Internet as busy with homeworks".

There is a wide range in Web 2.0 use among gifted students. While Penguin's response (in 4.1.3) showed a slight Facebook addiction in that she would log in to Facebook every day if she could, Annie's however showed only a modest interest for Web 2.0 technologies; implying that spending time on them was a waste of time. She insisted that, "Cos I feel like if I use very frequently, I spend more time to Facebooking. I spend more time then…wasting time for my studies." She only uses these Web 2.0 tools about once a week. Thus, among gifted students, there exists a rather wide range in terms of their technology use and its significance in their daily lives.

E. Frequency of Use of Web 2.0 Tools for ELL purposes

Table 5

Item	≥ 3 hours daily (%)	1-2 hours daily (%)	Several times a week (%)	Once a week (%)	Never
Instant message software	0 (0)	0 (0)	17 (31.5)	11 (20.4)	26 (48.2)
Blogs	1 (1.9)	0 (0)	20 (37.7)	13 (24.5)	19 (35.9)
Social networks	1 (1.3)	2 (2.5)	38 (48.1)	9 (11.4)	29 (36.7)
Video-sharing sites	2 (3.1)	2 (3.1)	29 (45.3)	16 (25.0)	15 (23.4)

Table 5 shows data on the frequency of use of Web 2.0 tools for ELL purposes. The previous sub-section illustrated how much time is spent using these Web 2.0 tools. However, how much of that time is spent for ELL purposes? Four options: *≥ 3 hours daily*, *1-2 hours daily*, *Several times a week*, *Once a week* and *Never*, were offered. The added option of *Never* is important to find out if it is possible that students are frequent users of Web 2.0 tools, but never use them for ELL. Students only responded to these items if they responded *Yes* to using these Web 2.0 tools in the preceding items.

The results from the survey revealed that none of the students spend time using instant message software for ELL purposes on a daily basis, while almost half of the students (48.2%) never use it for ELL at all. This is probably because students do not often relate "online chatting" with ELL, but more for interpersonal purposes. However, 31.5% and 20.4%

of students use it for their ELL several times a week and once a week respectively. Although more students use social networks than blogs on a daily basis (refer to 4.1.4), more students have indicated that they never use social networks for their ELL (36.7%) as compared to blogs (35.9%).

This is not entirely surprising since the primary concern of users of social media like Facebook is to socialize with other users on the site. What is interesting, though, is that students use video-sharing sites, like YouTube, for ELL purposes the most (76.5%) and not social networks (63.3%), even though the latter is more widely used by students. Based on the data, for ELL purposes, students choose to use video-sharing sites the most, followed by blogs (64.1%), then social networks and instant message software (51.9%).

The data indicate that learners may be frequent users of the Web 2.0, but do not use it for ELL purposes. This can be seen when learners indicated that they never use the Web 2.0 tools for ELL purposes. At least 15% of students do not use the Web 2.0 for their ELL, for each of these tools. This means that for these students, while they spend a large chunk of their time on the Web 2.0, none of it is spent on their ELL. Therefore, the anticipated positive relation between students' frequency of use of Web 2.0 tools and their frequency of Web 2.0 use for ELL purposes may not exist.

These results seem to converge on the fact that students spending a considerable amount of time on Web 2.0 tools does not necessarily mean that they would also use it for learning purposes. Neither do students spending a considerable amount of time on one particular Web 2.0 tool mean that they would use that same Web 2.0 tool the most for their ELL. The nature of the Web 2.0 tool would affect its use. In this case, social networks are seen as no more than social platforms. Video-sharing sites, however, are also home to an immense body of educational material that students can freely access depending on their learning needs. Learners search for different videos when they want to hone their speaking skills (RQ38) or grammar and vocabulary through songs (RQ48). This may explain why sites like YouTube are used more for ELL purposes than social networks. Yet, that may not always be the case either. RQ02 admitted, "I use YouTube the most but not always for English learning."

F. How Web 2.0 Tools Are Used for ELL

The responses in this section were obtained from the open-ended items as well as the semi-structured interviews. Web 2.0 tools are used by gifted students in a myriad of ways that include sharing information, deeper learning, searching for materials for ELL, as practice for the four language skills, to communicate with others internationally, to request for feedback and to explore their areas of interest.

1) Sharing Information

Firstly, Web 2.0 tools are not just a channel for information input but also for sharing information, even across distances. These tools connect learners with other learners and expert individuals that allows for valuable and productive discussions. RQ01 said, "It is useful for learning as we (my friends and teachers) exchange opinions and informations although we are apart." Web 2.0 has a two-way interaction that other web sources do not. They open up channels of communication with not just peers who are learning and practising the target language, but also experts, teachers and educators in the field who are able to provide valuable input and guidance apart from their own language teachers. This also promotes a community of learning where learners participate in an online community that indirectly helps one another in improving the language [17].

2) Deeper Learning

Besides that, students discuss topics of a deeper nature through these Web 2.0 tools. Instant message software like "Omegle" connects users all over the world and thus exposes students to issues that are beyond their comfort zone. RQ11 illustrated, "I can chatting with whoever online inside and outside of the country. We shared stories about our own countries and the education system in our own country." Discussing such issues involves a form of deeper learning and enables learners to learn the language not in isolation but communicatively, effectively, and meaningfully.

The discourse in which these issues or topics are discussed is also something that students can learn from, particularly through reading blogs: "The blogger always talk about some issues in their blog in English language. So, from that, I will learn how to use English for communication" (RQ23). While students may have knowledge of a particular topic, they may not know *how* to express their ideas, especially in terms of writing style and appropriate register. Web 2.0 tools exposed learners to various forms of discourse. While such topics and discussions can be conducted "offline" as well, the Web 2.0 tools offer higher connectivity and real-life interaction with users internationally that "offline" alternatives are not able to, and with more ease and convenience for students.

3) Search for Learning Materials

Learners also search for materials and use Web 2.0 tools that are most suited to their learning styles. Avid visual learners could explore video-sharing sites for helpful learning materials. RQ60 said, "…I'm a watching type learner so it really work best for me." Additionally, self-directed and independent learning is encouraged with the use of Web 2.0 tools. Learners can make their own choices about what and how they want to learn. RQ26 enlightened us: "Everyone has different ways of learning and teaching, through those technologies, I can find the most suitable way for me to improve my English language skills." This, however, is hinged on the fact that learners know their own learning style and what works most effectively for them.

Both Acap and Rania talked about how they used Web 2.0 tools to find materials for their learning. Acap found Web 2.0 tools especially useful for learning the English syllabus literature component. He would search for discussions on themes and other literature aspects from blogs and watch

videos of the novel synopsis. Sometimes, he searched for content for his schoolwork like assignments and essays. Rania divulged that she basically used YouTube to learn up on many different subjects. In addition, the learning materials on these Web 2.0 tools served as preparatory efforts for exams. Acap mentioned that he often searches for videos on YouTube to learn literature, particularly on themes and the novel. What is more, these videos were also very useful in helping him remember better.

4) Practice for Language Skills

Learners use these Web 2.0 tools as language practice to improve the four language skills. All these Web tools require some form of reading and writing. Students read for new vocabulary, "great stories" (RQ41), comprehension and enjoyment's sake. From blogs, learners discover new words and how to write creatively (RQ10). Even on social networks, students constantly read and write new posts and comments. Writing blogs in itself is great writing practice. Students concede that blogs are a great way of self-expression through words (RQ39). Learners also use the Web tools for listening and speaking practice. Videos, particularly, are where learners are able to listen to conversations and focus on how people speak. By doing so, students learn to "pronounce English words more fluently" (RQ78). Students found them helpful even for major English language exams. RQ50 elaborated, "…when I had to take my TOEFL last year, I frequently watch videos on YouTube to help me practise, especially for the speaking and listening section." Instant message software like Skype provides free voice calls over the Internet that allows students to practise their oral English and talk to friends verbally and not just through text (RQ74).

Penguin mainly used Web 2.0 tools for language practice, especially for reading and writing. Penguin maintained that she read only friends' blogs that are written in English. In addition, she owns a blog where she works on her writing skills. She also used social networks like Facebook, but somehow preferred blogs after she created one. She shared: "When I have new stories I will write them. [About] my day, my life. When I have something interesting to write, I'm very amazed by that so I will write." When she talked about writing in her blog, she seemed inspired and motivated to write, which may have contributed to how often she writes in her blog—once every two days.

5) Communicate with Native Speakers

Besides that, students use Web 2.0 tools to communicate with international friends in English. Web 2.0 tools connect learners with others all over the world. Exposure to the language of native speakers via videos and online chatting provides them with a language model that they can work towards. Interestingly, according to RQ11, the confidence to speak in English increases when communicating with a native speaker. She says, "I gain my confidence to speak English when I communicate with someone who knows pure English." In addition, the pre-set language of Web 2.0 tools like Facebook and YouTube is usually English, providing an English language environment for ELL. Students immerse themselves in the language, thus encouraging them to practise it. They attempt to communicate only in the language and make use of the default English language user interface of social networks, like Facebook (RQ67). Besides, as RQ80 put simply, "mostly the webs are in English."

6) Request for Feedback

The two-way interaction that is unique to the Web 2.0 allows students to ask for, and receive opinions from other users. This feature not only encourages more communication in the language but, as in Annie's case, enables students to request for constructive criticism in order to truly improve their English. In using Omegle, an instant message software, she explained, "Then I will ask them how's my English. Is it correct, or is there anything wrong? They usually, they say okay." However, she did not do this with just any user on the site. She asked feedback only from people she was comfortable with. Possibly, the lack of face-to-face interaction actually contributes to students' courage to request for feedback from other users whom they may not know very well. These comments seem to benefit students in improving their language from mistakes and weaknesses.

7) Explore Areas of Interest

Students seem to use the Web 2.0 to indulge in what interests them, be it English songs, movies, anime, or even proverbs and sayings. Many students showed an interest for music and songs by actively searching for these materials, especially on video-sharing sites. They look for the lyrics and music videos of English songs that help them improve their English. Past researchers have shown that songs have a positive effect on language aspects [18] [19] and even language acquisition [20]. RQ72 mentioned, "I often use video-sharing sites for several times a week. From that, I can learn English very well. The story or video or song in English might really helpful for me." RQ79 later confirmed this view by saying that his proficiency in the language increased by listening to music and attempting to learn the lyrics. Rania concurs. She said that she enjoyed English songs and watching music videos, especially favourite popular artistes like Bruno Mars.

However, sociolinguistic differences in the way native speakers pronounce certain words may interfere with the learning, as Rania explained: "I try to find out what they're saying cos sometimes when they sing, their slangs..." While students enjoy the activity on the Web 2.0, different accents and even jargon may cause difficulties for students in understanding, especially in listening comprehension. Interestingly, students watched Japanese anime (animated series) with English subtitles for their ELL. According to them, it helps in their grammar and vocabulary (RQ45). Penguin, on the other hand, prefers English sayings or proverbs that she can update on her Facebook status. Facebook became an avenue for her to share her fondness for inspiring quotes with

other users. She said: "... I often just search for sayings in Internet, that is, you know, linked to my life. And then I update my status with the sayings. I think it can improve my vocab and grammar" (Penguin, RI3).

Nevertheless, these areas of interest are not merely for fun, but, as can be seen in the aforementioned examples, using Web 2.0 tools to explore them seems to motivate learners in their efforts for ELL.

V. DISCUSSION

Several issues arose from the findings of the present study and are discussed in this section. They revolve around the use of Web 2.0 technologies and the Internet, Web 2.0 technologies use for ELL purposes and learner autonomy in an online learning environment.

A. Figures and Tables

The gifted students are part of the "digital natives" generation, where they supposedly speak the digital language of the Internet fluently, and should use and operate Web 2.0 tools easily and frequently [1]. This idea would encompass two assumptions generally held about these students of today. One is that the majority of students would have easy access to the Internet, and two, that today's generation of students are active users of technology.

However, based on the findings, access to the Internet is not as common as assumed. The gifted students described a difficulty to access the Internet even in their own homes, not owning even a modem. In Malaysia, this may be especially true for those not so well-off, or those living in rural areas. This is supported by Chen & Bonk's study where they referred to computers as "more of a luxury than a common commodity" in China [21]. This may explain why the figures for the frequency of use of Web 2.0 tools are not as significant, and therefore, why students are not online as often.

The findings also revealed that gifted students are not using Web 2.0 tools as much as expected. Students seldom use these tools on a daily basis. As digital natives themselves, it might be assumed that gifted students would be active users of Web 2.0 technologies, if not more than their non-gifted peers. However, the figures for the amount of time for Web 2.0 technology use obtained from the study were rather low. This could be because gifted students prefer to spend their time on other school priorities.

B. Web 2.0 Use for ELL Purposes

A direct proportional relation was expected between the frequency of students' use of Web 2.0 tools and the frequency of its use for ELL purposes. If students use Web 2.0 tools frequently, it is reasonable to expect that students would also use them frequently for their ELL, more so for gifted learners who are naturally independent and competent learners. However, from the findings of the present study, it was discovered that though learners may spend a considerable amount of time on Web 2.0 tools, this does not necessarily mean that they are used for ELL purposes. In support of that, other studies have found that students mostly use Web tools for general purposes instead [22]. From the findings, it was even possible that the tools are never used for the learners' ELL whatsoever. For each Web 2.0 tool, at least 15% of respondents have indicated that they never use them for their ELL. This confirms that using Web 2.0 tools and using them for ELL purposes are not one and the same. This is surprising, as students were actually found to be aware of the advantages of using ICT in language learning but only spend a mere 1-2 hours per week using them for learning activities [23]. This implies that awareness of its benefits does not necessarily compel them to utilize the tools for their ELL.

A possible explanation is that learners do not see the relation between their use of Web 2.0 technologies and ELL. Learners either think that it is a waste of time, or perceive Web 2.0 tools as tools of social-related capacities alone. The daily usage of Web 2.0 tools in decreasing order is social networks, video-sharing sites, instant message software and blogs. But the order of the daily usage of the tools for ELL purposes is video-sharing sites, followed by blogs, before social networks and instant message software. This could be because out of the four Web 2.0 tools, social networks and instant message software are considered the most "social" in nature. Students are unable to see the relevance of their "social life" on the Web 2.0 with their ELL. This finding is actually supported by previous findings in the literature. Students perceived writing on an online platform as "communication", but not "writing", which is related only to academic genres [24]. Facebook was seen as useful only for social activities and videos for entertainment alone [25] [26]. Hence, students may not be able to identify that the activities they do on the Web 2.0 may have educational benefits for their ELL in the form of informal or indirect learning.

C. Learner Autonomy on the Web 2.0

It is undeniable that the Web 2.0 provides a well of ELL resources that are available for students' use. From the findings, learners stated that they are able to search for, and find, ELL materials that best suit them. However, the question is, do students really know what "best" suits them? Findings from the present study suggest that even gifted learners, who are supposedly more cognitively aware, do not. Students are unsure of whether the materials are suitable for them or their level of English proficiency (RQ26). And left to their own devices, facing a multitude of videos, blogs and other materials, learners may become overwhelmed and lost with no direction for learning; even feel bored despite being in a stimulating environment like the Web 2.0 (RQ42).

While learner autonomy should be encouraged, absolute freedom may not do them any good either. The literature indicates that learners still need some guidance and explicit direction for their learning [27] [28]. Hourigan & Murray [28] (2010) argue that "using technology appropriately requires a certain degree of reflective and interpretative skills which students may not necessarily use in their daily consumption of Web 2.0 media". This implies that using Web 2.0 tools often also does not necessarily mean that students will be able to use them effectively for their ELL on their own. This seems true even for gifted students. The role of the educator as facilitator

is still relevant in the online learning environment; probably essential. Yet, the learner autonomy and independence that these Web tools offer should not be left unexploited. Safe and helpful ELL materials could be selected for them to start off with, but learners are still given the freedom to search for others on the Web 2.0 and incorporate them into the task. Therefore, a certain degree of learner autonomy is encouraged, while still providing a safe structure that will guide learners along to achieve their learning goals. As students gain more confidence, the facilitator's role should become less significant and the learner takes on more responsibility. Learning goals could also be decided by the learners themselves. The instructor can provide a list of learning goals that they can work on, and offer the choice of selecting what they want to learn. Ultimately, a balance should be achieved, whereby a facilitator who provides structure and direction for gifted students' learning while simultaneously allowing learner choices for personal learning is necessary for successful and effective ELL.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study have shown that certain assumptions about the gifted students of today's generation are untrue. This leads to implications for the English language teachers or instructors. Access to the Internet is not so easily acquired, especially outside of the gifted school. The students need to access the Internet via other means. Teachers need to be aware of the fact that the gifted learners may come from varying socio-economic backgrounds. Students may not have access to the Internet at home because they do not own Internet-providing devices like modems. Some may not even own computers. The teacher has to bear in mind that it is possible that the only Internet-time students can obtain for their ELL is when they are in the PERMATApintar School. Consequently, teachers should either allocate a specific computer time in the school's lab, or allow flexibility in terms of deadlines for ELL tasks using Web 2.0 technologies.

Besides that, the students access the Internet infrequently because they have other school priorities or do not see the relation between its use and their ELL outside of the classroom. Hence, the onus is on the teacher to explicitly tie the ELL objectives to their activities on the Web 2.0 outside of the classroom, or set time apart in the classroom to explain the aim of a task to the students so that they better understand what is to be achieved at the end of it. Apart from that, it was found that students used and spent most of their time on social networks like Facebook and video-sharing sites like YouTube. Therefore, teachers should acknowledge that students spend a large amount of time on these web platforms, which could be exploited as sources of ELL in-classroom and out-of-classroom materials that are beneficial for the students. However, because of the wide range in technology-use among gifted students, it was also discovered that the time spent on these Web 2.0 tools were not very frequent. Therefore, the teacher needs to consider that, for some students, the use of Web 2.0 technologies has to be explicitly encouraged and promoted for ELL.

Besides that, gifted students were able to use these Web 2.0 technologies in various ways which were helpful for their ELL. These include sharing information, deeper learning, searching for learning materials, as language practice, to communicate with native speakers, to request for feedback and to explore motivating areas of personal interest for ELL. However, several issues arose from the findings and were discussed. The Internet and Web 2.0 technologies use by gifted students did not meet expectations, and that using Web 2.0 tools and using them for ELL purposes are not synonymous. Besides that, a balance of learner autonomy and teacher guidance is necessary for effective and meaningful ELL.

Although using Web 2.0 technologies for ELL would be exceptionally significant if it allowed language learners to learn independently, thereby becoming exclusively self-directed and learner-centered, that may still not be possible at this point in time. Nevertheless, gifted students seem to be already exposed to these Web 2.0 technologies and a majority of them do use them often in their daily lives in a variety of ways for ELL. Therefore, implementing Web 2.0 technologies into gifted students' ELL would be a worthy effort indeed. Gifted students appear to be not only familiar but already able to utilize Web 2.0 technologies for their ELL, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Gifted educators and instructors may consider exploiting these Web 2.0 tools that are motivating and challenging for students in order to enhance gifted learners' ELL.

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