Article

The Use of Blended Learning Based Media in Improving Student Essay Writing Ability

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A B S T R A C T

The research focuses on the use of instructional media in the blended learning platform to improve students' ability in writing essays. The implementation of blended learning is carried out in three cycles: brainstorming, drafting, and final writing. At the end of each cycle, there is an evaluation to find out the progress of the learning. Feedback is given from the evaluation results to overcome problems that arise in the previous cycle. The subjects of the research are students of Universitas Andalas who divided as control class and experimental class. The purpose of this study is (a) short-term; To help overcome student problems and improve their ability to write essays in English (b) long-term is to provide a basis for learning models of English writing essays at universities. The pretest indicates that 59% of participants from the control class have a low score (below 60) while in experimental class, about 60% of participants get a score below 60. The result of the research shows significant improvement in essay writing performance with an average score of post-test 76.35. By using the t-test can be seen the significance value of 0.06> 0.05, which indicates that the use of instructional media in the blended learning platform can improve students performance in writing an essay.

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing competence is very important to be developed in learning English. Writing essays in English is an essential ability for students in higher education (Baghbadorani & Roohani, 2014), both for academic purposes, such as continuing higher education studies, as well as for professional purposes (The National Commission on Writing, 2004).

To develop the competence of writing essays for students, it is necessary to design a curriculum that is in line with the development of language learning. The problem occurs because students assume that writing skills are more complicated than listening and speaking skills (Handoko, Yanti, & Antaridha, 2016). This is because the competence of writing is not only related to grammatical abilities and sufficient vocabulary but also related to emotional and

cognitive aspects (Alluhaybi, 2015). There are several factors which affect students perception toward writing. Among other, writings requires a formal language, free from errors and grammar. More over a good writing should be complete, clear, and order in locagical structures (Wyrick, 2011).

Emotional aspects can be seen from students' perceptions of the difficulty of writing (Alluhaybi, 2015; Qashoa, 2014). It makes sense because the complexity of characteristics and elements with a series of interconnected ideas. The limited time writing courses also hinder students to write properly. In the traditional curriculum, at each meeting, students were asked to gather ideas, look for references, and then write them into an essay. Consequently, it is time consuming and ineffective. In order to get maximum result, students must be exposed to a learning environment which enables them to to improve their writing experience (Adas & Bakir, 2013). Time limitations also prevent students in the writing evaluation process, considering the number of lecturers and students is not balanced. If the lecturer gives feedback on the written draft of each student, it will take three to four face-to-face meetings. Moreover, space limitations can also hinder students in thinking critically to gather ideas about what will be written. In the classroom, students will difficult to observe and find relevant references to support ideas that will be poured into their essays.

Many students tend to ignore the stages of writing an essay because they assume that it is a waste of time (Alameddine & Mirza, 2016). In fact, to write a good essay, of course, students must follow the stages of writing essays. There are at least four main stages in writing a good essay; research and gathering ideas (prewriting), planning, writing a draft, and improvement (revision) (Manser, 2006). In other word, writing is not an instant process or a one-time process. Students must revision and re-write the essay based on theby feedback from lecturers.

To solve the writing problem, an alternative learning strategy or method is needed which allows students to do writing effectively and efficiently. Among the straties is the use of blended learning methods. Blended learning is a combination of face-to-face learning methods with online learning (Stein & Graham, 2014). With the online method, students can work anytime from any places. In addition to facilitating students in doing assignments, this method can also facilitate lecturers in examining essays with direct feedback through the online system. However, online methods are not completely separated from the role and direct interaction between lecturers and students. Face-to-face meetings must also be maintained where students get knowledge, feedback, directly comment from the lecturer. Moreover, face-to-face meeting is really needed to provide psychological support to the students. The synergy between traditional learning and online learning then is known as blended learning or hybrid learning.

This research focuses at the application of blended learning methods to improve the ability to write an essay at Andalas University. This study is limited to writing competence, especially essay writing. The current research that the researchers will do is different from the aspect of the research focus. Besides, the research subjects were also different, where the researchers focused on students at the Andalas University.

II. METHODS

The object of this research is the effectiveness of the application of blended learning methods in the acceptance and understanding of learning material. The type of data includes qualitative data and quantitative data, while the data source consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data obtained from the results of tests conducted to see the ability to write essays that include pre-test (pre-test) and post-test (post-test). Secondary data comes from the track record of evaluating the work of students and lecturer notes in both face-to-face and online learning activities.

The data source consisted of respondents, test results, and learning document records.

Data were analyzed using quantitative analysis and descriptive analysis. Quantitative analysis was carried out to find statistical values of the effectiveness of the application of blended learning. The statistical analysis performed is by using a T-test. The analysis using the T-test aims to see whether there is a difference between the conditions before and after the treatment of the subject. There are two types of T-tests, namely independent-sample T-test and paired-sample T-test (Larson-Hall, 2010: 241-242). In this study, a paired-sample T-test will be used where the study will compare the mean of the two non-independent data. This is because this research was conducted by comparing the results of the initial test (pre-test) and the final test (post-test) conducted with different time frames. In this study, the subject will take the initial test to see the ability to write his essay, then after the application of blended learning is complete, it is estimated that in the next three months, the subject will take the final test to involve the significance of increasing the ability to write his essay. Then, a statistical analysis will be carried out using the SPSS to describe the significance improvement of studetns' ability in writeing after the implementation of the blended learning.

III. RESULT

This study was conducted on class control consisting of 44 students and an experimental class consisting of 36 students. To obtain data on the ability to write essays, two tests were conducted, namely the pre-test and post-test. Then the test results were analyzed using t-test analysis to see the significance of the improvement in essay writing skills between the control class and the experimental class. The presentation of the results of the study begins with the results of the normality test of the data to see the distribution of data, then proceed with the presentation of the results of the pre-test of the control class and the experimental class. After that, the results of the post-test for each class were also explained. The results of the pre-test and post test were then compared to see the significance of the application of blended learning based learning media.

The t-test test aims to determine the significance of the class given treatment (class experiment) and the class that is not given treatment (control class). After doing the pretest and posttest for both essay writing classes, the following results were obtained:
Table 1 shows that the average essay score of the control class for the pretest is 55.23, and for the post-test is 62.39. The t-test test for both scores showed a significance level of 0.00 with a significance tolerance of 5%. The figure is 0.00 <0.005, which means that there is no significant increase in the essay score in the control class.

Table 2 shows the average score of the pretest essay for the experimental class is 55.27 and for the post-test 76.35. By using the t-test can

Table 1. Score for Control Class

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Essay Score Pre-	55.23	44	8.624	1.300
	Essay Score Post-	62.39	44	11.588	1.747

Table 2. Score for Experimental Class

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Essay Score Pre-	55.27	37	10.603	1.743
	Essay Score Post-	76.35	37	13.263	2.180

Table 3. Significance improvement for writing skills

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Skill 1 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.192	.255
Pair 2	Skill 2 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.416	.010
Pair 3	Skill 3 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.445	.006
Pair 4	Skill 4 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.316	.057
Pair 5	Skill 5 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.314	.059

be seen as the significance value of 0.06. Value of 0.06> 0.05, which means that there are significant differences between the pretest and posttest scores for the experimental class. Thus it can be concluded that the use of learning media based on blended learning in essay writing classes can improve students' ability to write essays.

From table 3 it appears that the skill with the highest significance level is skill 1, which is equal to 0.2, while the skill that increases the score that is not too significant is skill 3, which is 0.06.

From the results of statistical analysis using the t-test, it can be seen that the use of instructional media through blended learning can increase the ability of students to write essays. This can be seen from the level of significance of a significant increase in the score, which is equal to 0.06. These results also indicate that the ability to experience a very significant increase is the ability to write the introduction.

IV. DISCUSSION

The use of the blended learning model is very effective in increasing the ability to write essays because this model allows students to be able to access lecture material online, get direct feedback, and can make revisions easily. With the blended learning model, students have more time to develop their essays, look for reference sources, and also do editing. In addition, face-to-face meetings are also more effective because students have more time to discuss and get direct feedback.

The use of learning media in the form of videos also helps students in mastering skills in writing essays. With instructional videos added to the blended learning platform, students get a deep understanding and can follow the steps of good writing.

The results of the analysis also show that by using blended learning, students can improve their ability to write introductory sections. The introduction is a very important part of writing essays because, in this section, the writer can draw the attention of the reader to read the entire essay. Mistakes in writing the introduction can make the essay uninteresting and boring. By using brainstorming techniques, students can make good and interesting essays to read.

In addition to the introduction, other aspects that are also very important are aspects of cohesion and coherence. This aspect can be seen in skill 2 and skill 3. The use of the blended learning model allows students to create a cohesive and coherent essay because students have more time to do revisions and editing. In contrast to the traditional approach, the blended learning model allows students to easily arrange ideas logically and add conjunctions so that paragraphs become unified.

Blended learning emphasizes not only face-to-face systems but also uses computational instruments to facilitate learning. In other words, the use of blended learning models is a new way for both teaching and learning in a higher education environment. Blended

learning allows students to gain hands-on experience through computer mediation or smartphone learner simulations (Holt et al).

The Blended learning model consists of various learning activities, including face-to-face learning, e-learning (online) learning, and independent learning. As a mixed model of learning with blended learning methods include synchronic (asynchronous) and online learning. In the synchronic learning model, lecturers or mentors provide opportunities for students to participate through various features, such as video conference, chat, and presentations that are bound at a certain time. Meanwhile, in the asynchronous learning model lecturers or mentors provide a variety of task-based structured activities through media that are not bound by a certain time, such as discussion forums, e-mail, assignments, quizzes, and wikis (Stein & Graham, 2014). Briefly, the purpose of applying the blended learning method is to combine face-to-face classroom learning experiences with online learning experiences.

The blended learning model offers a collaborative learning method that allows students to communicate with each other between students. Besides being able to share learning resources such as video, audio, text, web links, and other material, lecturers can also control and monitor student progress during the lesson, especially in essay writing.

V. CONCLUSION

Writing an essay in English is a difficult task for many students because not writing essays does not only require English proficiency but must also consider technical and psychological aspects. Students need additional time to write their essays and learning media that can help them to improve their understanding of the technical aspects of essay writing. In addition, they also need psychological encouragement, such as motivation, encouragement, and praise, to keep them active and interested in the writing process. The blended learning platform offers the application of technical and psychological aspects of learning essay writing. Students can access learning materials and conduct online writing processes without limited time and space. They can also benefit from face-to-face meetings, including feedback and motivation from the lecturers. Both online and face-to-face meetings can help students improve their skills in essay writing. From the results of the research that has been done, it can be seen that the use of blended learning based learning models can increase the competence of student essay writing with essay score enhancement which is significant when compared to traditional or face-to-face learning models.

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