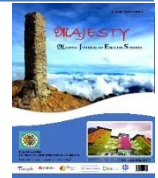




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Blended Learning Method to Optimize English Language Learning in Non-English Language Education Departments at Muhammadiyah University of Enrekang

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ABSTRACT

Limited time to direct learning in class often made learning English less effective, especially for classes with various levels of English proficiency. In a higher education climate that demands active learning, English teachers often find it difficult to help students whose English competency was below average to catch up with their peers who had good competence. In general, this compulsory course was only held for one semester. In fact, the target of learning English on campus was generally quite high, namely to make students had sufficient English proficiency so that they could write academic papers in English as an international language. To help overcome these obstacles, this study offers the use of the blended language learning method, which was a learning method that complements direct learning with distant learning using the internet. Blended language learning was able to complement the lack of direct time in class with distance learning using internet media. This research was the result of writer's experience in applying this method for one academic year along with the results obtained from the application of the blended language learning method in the teaching process. With the application of the blended language learning method, the writer found that language learning at the college level could be more effective, efficient, and more student-centered even though the author still faces some obstacles in its application.

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INTRODUCTION

For the undergraduate level at Muhammadiyah Enrekang, English is a compulsory university course given for one semester which is named University Courses (MKU) English as a series of compulsory courses. The main focus of this course is academic English. In accordance with their needs so that students are able to use English actively for their academic needs, the main focus of this course is to help students develop their study skills according to their academic needs, in contrast to the focus of General English which is indeed to improve English language skills (Caterall & Ireland, 2019: 45-78). With such a focus, the lecture materials used are lecture materials that suit their academic needs such as academic readings, essay writing, discussion skills in a formal setting, and listening to general lectures in English. This is of course in line with the aim of developing study skills, however, these materials require a fairly high level of English proficiency Ismail, I., & Tini, T. (2020). What is very unfortunate is that there are many students whose English language skills are not good enough to attend this course. Writer chosen one method to lose this problem and the method was using blended learning method.

Blended learning is a method that incorporates online self-study and face to face learning through the use of media and technology to make students more enjoyable and successful (Musdalifah, 2020: 3). In the context of higher education, the concept of blended learning is an educational method that provides a sizable portion of online learning, while physically direct reduced class (Vaughan, 2020: 100-190).

However, the blended learning that the writer adopts for the English MKU does not reduce the direct process portion in the class because this subject is a compulsory university subject which is conducted in parallel (William, 2019: 23-28).

The benefits of this blended learning method included: This method helps students carried out deeper learning and discussions outside direct time in class using the internet. Thus, they get a larger portion of learning to explore structure, listening, and reading. In addition, this method also helps students improve skills in active learning, which is the direction of education used at the Muhammadiyah Enrekang University, especially in the General Course (MKU) package (Musdalifah, 2020: 4-6).

Blended learning is ideally done to bridge the deficiencies that exist in conventional learning systems and online distant learning. Examples of limitations in a conventional direct learning system, an educator is only able to provide feedback on what students are doing is limited in class time only. In fact, from the time of submitting assignments by students to the time of returning the assignments after being given feedback, it can be several days from direct step to another. Direct process at this MKU is 2 x 150 minutes a week which is carried out for approximately 15 weeks. Online activities carried out by students include group discussions, reviewing videos and reading material related to discussion material which is then direct discussed, and making group papers and presentations that would be presented in class for material structure (Staker & Horn, 2018: 23-87). Changes made direct syllabus include, among others,

discussions related to structure materials carried out outside direct sessions and at grouped students shared the results of their discussions in class with other groups. Then in the listening material, the writer did not change the syllabus at all, it was just that the writer added a trigger for the speaking process in class by providing videos that could be watched and reviewed per group to be applied in speaking activities in class, either in the form of discussion or debate. All of that was added with independent exercises and quizzes conducted online using the Learning Management System (LMS) (Vaughan, 2018: 45-90).

Indeed, at the tertiary level, students should already have the ability to speak English at least at the intermediate level considering this ability has been prepared in advance through the English subjects they take for nine to twelve years of study at the primary and secondary education levels. However, the reality is that many students who speak English are not yet capable. This can be seen from the TOEFL scores tested at the beginning of lectures for students. From the results of the TOEFL test, the writer then formulates that the general problems faced in the teaching and learning process of this course as followed: (1) The condition of students' English proficiency varies with the majority having insufficient ability to take EAP classes; (2) Lack of learning portion, especially for structure and listening.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was a descriptive study using three instruments, namely observation (TOEFL result), interview guidelines, and student perception

questionnaire. The subjects in this study were comprehensive, non-English language departments that were BK combined with Library and science technology departments, as well as by 69 English language learning students on the Enrekang South Sulawesi Muhammadiyah University campus, taking extensive and intensive reading courses. The data collected during this study were determined by the predetermined objects of research: (1) implementation of blended learning through observation (TOEFL result) and interviews and (2) students' perceptions of learning through questionnaires. The data in this study that had been collected were then analyzed descriptively. In other explanations, to support the lecture process with blended learning method, writer used several applications available on the internet and other supporting applications. The online learning applications that the author used were as followed:

a. LMS Ummaspul

LMS (Learning Management System) Ummaspul was an application provided by Muhammadiyah University of Enrekang to support online learning process. LMS Ummaspul which was based on the open source Moodle system was quite comprehensive in supporting the learning process. Writer used this LMS Ummaspul as the main platform for online learning process. LMS Ummaspul also became way for writer provided instructions that would automatically appear per week, shared some basic reference material that could be accessed by students, provided quizzes and self-assessments whose scores could automatically appeared after finish

working. LMS Ummapul is also used as a means of group discussion for students.

b. YouTube

The author used videos on YouTube as a trigger for discussion and also as the main material for online lectures. The extensive and up-to-date you tube video database provided flexibility for students to share reference sources related to materials provided.

c. Line

The author used Line as a means of communication and discussion conducted online. In Line, the author created groups based on focus groups and groups for class discussion. In connection with the limitations of the LMS for discussion, among others, was related to chat plugins that did not use real-time Web 2.0, which caused delays in discussions. In addition, students prefer to use Line because they could have more mobile discussions used their mobile devices.

d. Twitter

Twitter is also used as a tool for assessment as well as for bulletin boards for students. With the previously agreed hashtag, the writer given a trivia quiz related to the structure every week.

e. Dropbox

Dropbox authors used for the collection of assignments. Although LMS Ummapul provided a place to collect assignments, the author found obstacles, included the limited size of the files that could be uploaded by students and there was not facility to download the assignments collected by students at once so the author must download one by one. After switching to using Dropbox, the task gathering process had become smoother.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. The Impact on Students' Scores

At the end of the odd semester, the writer given a post-test to classes that followed blended learning and classes with conventional methods. The post-test given was the TOEFL question for the basic structure section which was given as a pretest. As a result, the class that took part in blended learning experienced increase in value was greater than the class traditional. Meanwhile, there was no post-test for listening because the writer did not have an instrument for listening test. The increase in this value could be seen in the following table:

Table 1. The Average Value of Pre-Test

Learning Methods	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Direct Learning	34	35.471	7.826	20	56
Blended Learning	35	39.371	13.350	6	66

Total	69	37.421	11.153	6	66
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Table 2. The Average Value of Post-Test

Learning Methods	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Direct Learning	34	44.603	5.870	33	60
Blended Learning	35	62.147	12.460	31	87
Total	69	53.357	13.140	31	87

Data in these tables explained that mean of the Blended Learning class had a greater increase (22.775 points) compared to direct class (9.132 points). Thus, it could be said that the application of blended learning was quite effective although of course a more comprehensive research was needed to be able to see its effectiveness in a more real way.

2. Perceived Benefits Students

In addition to visible benefits of increasing scores on the post-test, writer also conducted a brief evaluation with students in the form of class discussions at the last meeting related to learning using blended learning. From the results of the discussion, the participants felt an increase in their grammar understanding and listening through online discussion. In addition, they felt that the atmosphere of discussions carried out online was more conducive than discussions in class. This was mainly because students felt they could more expressed their opinions and could discuss and look for discussion support materials on the internet simultaneously

as well. Another reason was that students felt more like being watched by the teacher when discussed because the teacher could see the discussion process in real time. Another benefit stated by students was that they felt that the lecture materials were more varied and up to date. Also, they felt that there was a correlation between online and direct learning so that they could more easily immerse themselves in class discussions, especially in speaking sessions. In addition, students argued that with this online class, learning as a whole became more effective. The first reason was that they could be more prepared direct because through LMS Ummaspul, they could see the lesson plans every week. In addition, online learning materials that correlated with the next meeting in class also made students able to discuss more effectively in class.

3. Obstacles Encountered

Although students felt the benefits of combining distance learning with direct learning, it did not mean that there were no obstacles and shortcomings that were felt by students. The most prominent

thing related to obstacles was the problem of time. Students argued that regardless of benefits they felt, they felt burdened by the obligation to discuss and carried out online activities. This obstacle was mainly because they were not used to learning with student-centered methods. In fact, there were still students who think that the teacher should provide a description of the materials they must learn as teachers in schools. In fact, before the active lecture period, these students had passed the Student Orientation period in which they learned the Learning Skills they had need to take courses actively.

The next obstacle was technical barriers such as their still slow internet connection which often hinders them from doing online activities. The next obstacle experienced by students was the technical problem of using LMS Ummaspul. The students felt it took a while to get used to the existing system in LMS Ummaspul. In addition, LMS Ummaspul also did not provide real-time discussion facilities so the discussion process was very hampered. However, this problem was resolved after using LINE for discussion.

CONCLUSIONS

This research was presented to share the writer's experience regarding the blended language learning process that writer applied in teaching MKU English. From a brief description of what writer was doing, there was an implication that blended language learning was quite effective in helping students, especially those whose language skills were inadequate, to be better involved in English MKU. However, the problem of slow internet connection and the lack of knowledge of

students in the technical used of applications used for online learning could hinder this process even though they felt the benefits of learning with the blended learning method.

Regarding the limitations of this research, which was still an initial description of the application of the blended language learning method, writer had several recommendations related to blended language learning: 1. There was a need for more comprehensive formal research with more reliable data to see the effectiveness of using blended language learning in ESL learning. 2. Further and in-depth research was still needed to see the benefits of blended language learning in classes consisting of students with different levels of understanding of English, especially to help students with less language skills to be able to keep up with their classmates who had good language skills

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