Developing blog for English essay writing class

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ABSTRACT

Learning needs a medium to help learners learning. The medium can provide the learners sources of knowledge and practice. Learning English essay writing subject required its learners to understand and to have essay writing skills of English as a foreign language. The essay writing is a subject conducted by English Education Department, Faculty of teacher training and education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, in Central Java province in Indonesia for preparing its learners to academic writing in the next semester. Blog which can be a learning medium for learning English Essay writing was necessary to be developed for fulfilling the learners' need. Conducting a research and development was chosen to develop the blog. This study involved 21 students in the fourth semester who took the English essay writing subject. This study took eight months from March to October 2016 in two academic years 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. Questionnaire was used to investigate students' need on learning media; to know feedback on blog's content, structure and navigation, and visual design from experts and students; and to find out students' perception toward the blog developed. Documentation was also used to describe the processes of developing the blog in this research. The results showed that the blog was successfully developed regarding to the learners' necessity for learning the subject and to the procedure passed in this research. Moreover, the blog was perceived positively (100%) to help the learners to learn the subject of English essay writing.

1. Introduction

Mastering writing skills has significant contribution to the language mastery. The mastery of these language skills helps a writer in communicating idea, thought, and feeling to the readers. Considering the proper medium for learning writing which is suitable with students' interest and need becomes one of supporting factors to improve students' ability and the learning quality of writing skills. Therefore, identifying the suitable medium for learning writing in accordance with students' interest and need, and implementing some efforts to develop writing medium are necessary to improve learners' writing ability and the learning quality.

Ideas, thought, and feeling expressed in writing require proper writing aspects. Content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics should be well implemented in writing. Therefore, the author's message will be easily understood by readers because it is composed well and fulfills the aspects of good writing (Broadman & Frydenberg, 2008). This goal should be considered by teachers and learners in the process of teaching and learning writing.

Achieving learners who have the ability to compose good essay is the subject goal of Writing 4 in English Education Department of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education in Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto in Central Java province, Indonesia. This subject trains and allows students to be able to write English essay (The syllabus of English Education Department, 2016). They are given the knowledge and practice of essay writing to support their ability.

Implementing blog-based learning medium in essay writing classroom is one way for educators to train and improve their learners' writing ability and the quality of learning (Santosa, 2007). Through this medium, educators and learners can interact well directly and indirectly in the process of learning. They can do writing activities then give and receive feedback; feedback among peers was proved effective (Listiani, 2016) and teacher's feedback perceived positively (Listiani, 2017). They can even receive writing theory and model in writing learning both inside and outside the classroom interaction. Furthermore, the availability of internet access, the easiness of making free blog, and the number of blog features which can be used for essay writing learning become the consideration of using blog as essay writing learning. The use of blog for learning has been used by many previous studies. One of them was by Arifin S and Darmowijoyo, Z (2014) which investigated *blog support* for mathematics learning in high school.

The number of benefits of blog is not the only factor for implementing it in the learning process. Knowing learners' need and conducting some development efforts toward the medium are also considered in applying the medium in learning. Therefore, this research aimed to develop blog as medium of teaching and learning in English essay writing classroom in Writing 4 subject in line with learners' need and lecturer's need.

2. Research Method

Research and development (R & D) is a research method used in this study. It results in a certain product and measures certain effective product using a qualitative approach, as mentioned by the department of national education cited by Arifin, S dan Darmawijoyo, Z (2014). This study took eight months starting from March to October 2016 in two different academic years (2015/2016 and 2016/2017) which involved 21 students who took Writing 4 subject in their fourth semester in English Education Department, the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education in Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto located in Central Java province in Indonesia.

To collect the data, semi-structured questionnaire and documentation were utilized. In the beginning of the research, the questionnaire was used to identify the students' need of using blog for the essay writing learning, and in try-out step, the questionnaire was to obtain the students' feedback and the students' perception towards the blog developed. The result of the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively and descriptively (Arikunto, S. 2010). Another data collection, which was documentation, was also implemented to portrait the process taken and the result achieved.

There were six components involved in this R & D (Sutopo in Depdiknas 2008, cited in Arifin, S. and Darmowijoyo, Z, 2014). The developing concept components included identifying the problems, formulating the research purpose, analyzing the needs of learning media and the users' characteristics, and planning and arranging the contents to appear in blog. Designing content and lay out, and designing flowchart were to develop a product component of this research. In designing content and lay out, the aims were to portrait the content of material and the performance of blog through drawing a sketch of blog content and lay out on a paper. Meanwhile, the flowchart development was aimed to develop the content in each icon available in the blog.

The next component was material collecting which was needed for blog content, and it was followed by constructing writing material or assembly in the blog. The fifth component was try-out which was done three times, namely: expert validation, user validation, and field validation. The expert validation (expert test) involved lecturers whose expertise is English writing materials and information and communication technology. The next test was user validation of which the scope was limited, and it was followed by field test. Finally, distribution was the last component of R & D in which the blog distributed to lecturers, students, and public.

3. Findings and Discussion

After conducting the data analysis of the questionnaire, the result was described based on the students' need for blog. Further, trying out was carried out referring to the expert test user test, and

field test. And then, the students' perception towards blog was developed. Meanwhile, documentation was to describe the process of developing blog.

The need of blog was collected from semi-structured questionnaire consisting five questions revealing the need of media for learning and the reasons. The questionnaire was distributed to ten students who took English essay writing subject. The result of students' need towards blog is presented in the following Figure 1.
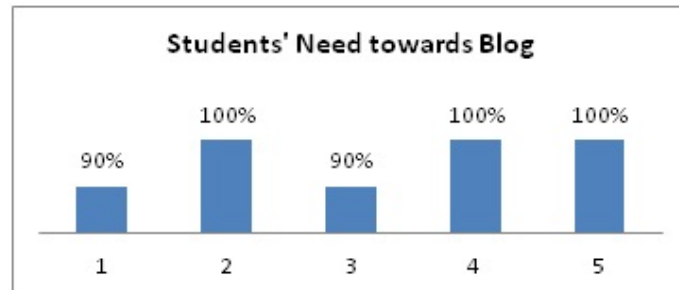

Fig. 1. Students' Need towards Blog

According to Figure 1, almost all students (90%) needed internet-based learning media for learning (item 1) and needed blog for learning (item 3). However, one student (10%) did not need the media for learning. Moreover, 100% students needed internet-based media for learning English essay writing (item 2), few needed blogs because they were attracted by the appearance (item 4), and some needed blog which was designed specially to learn essay writing (item 5).

The students mentioned that they needed an internet-based media for learning (item 1) mostly and, especially, for learning English essay writing (item 2). They found the materials are more accessible through blogs. Besides, blogs add to their references, develop their knowledge, allow them to be more creative with the writing, and develop their idea. Writing using blogs improve their understanding about the materials. They also preferred blog (item 3) because of its performance. It provides relevant content and interesting appearances. The respondents could access the blog easily through their smartphone and help them understand the materials. The materials were designed for the English essay writing subject, and easy interaction among lecturers and students contributed to the learning success (item 5).

Responding to the students' need towards a blog for learning the subject of English essay writing, some steps of developing the blog were conducted. First was concept developing. The blog should provide the activities scope of essay writing subject, adequate materials, and exercises. Further, relevant sources link fulfilling the subject aims and topics should be available in the subject syllabus. The blog should be supported by internet connection available in classroom and its surrounding, could be accessed easily and simply one click, and should only be provided with relevant information and the picture supporting the materials. After developing a blog concept, the next steps were collecting materials, assembly, and designing a blog for developing blog prototype one in the following Figure 2.

Fig. 2. Prototype 1

In Figure 2, the blog first prototype consisted of sources of materials, lecturer profile, syllabus, feedback checklist, practice, and useful link.

The first blog prototype was tested by two experts teaching writing and one expertizing on learning media, and by limited users studying writing subject for measuring content, structure and navigation, and visual design. The result showed that the content of blog required to be improved by adding more materials in sources feature and exercises in practice feature, and by adjusting the content of lecturer profile feature since the content was about the description of the subject. Therefore, the second blog prototype was completed to respond to the result of test as it is presented in the following Figure 3.

Fig. 3. Prototype 2

Figure 3 is the prototype 2. This blog improved on its contents and feature. Some writing materials and exercises were added and the lecturer profile was changed into about this blog feature.

The next step was conducting field test and gaining students' perception towards prototype two. In conducting the field tests, some students were taught the subject and they were assigned to use blogs during the teaching and learning process. They were also asked to write feedback for several aspects, which were content, structure and navigation, and visual design. The test revealed that adding more materials were necessary.

Meanwhile the perception towards blog, responding to seven indicators, namely: the benefit of blog on helping students accessing the materials simply and easily, on meeting students' need on the materials, on helping students comprehension on the materials, on completing the materials received in the class, on meeting the necessity of learning media in the class, on meeting students' learning independently, and on providing understandable and detail explanation, the result of questionnaire showed positive as it is presented in the following Figure 4.
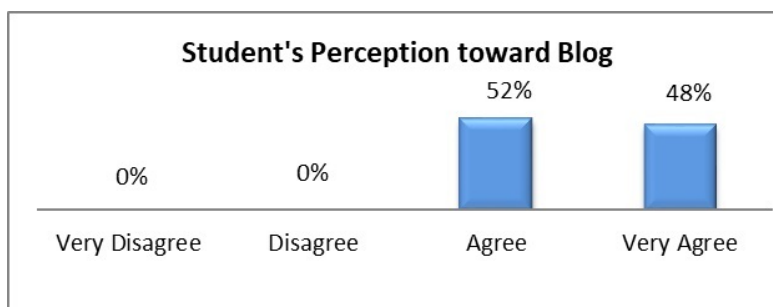

Fig. 4. Students' Perception toward Blog

Figure 4 illustrates that from 100% of respondents who gave positive perception toward blog, 52% of them chose agreed and 48% highly agreed.

Positive perception towards blog was also revealed by a research conducted by Arifin, Zulkardi and Darmawijoyo (2014) stating that 100% of students felt that the *blog support* developed was beneficial for learning process, and also proved by a research conducted by Hamuddin (2016) mentioning that the blog was perceived positively as a useful and effective media of learning.

Furthermore, students' responses toward seven statements about the benefits of blog available in the questionnaire was also analyzed. The results of students' responses for each statement were presented in the following Figure 5.
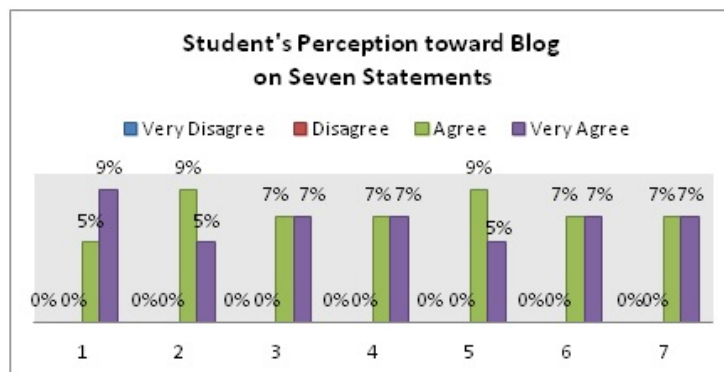

Fig. 5. Students' perception towards blog on seven statements

Figure 5 illustrates that from 100% of respondents gave positive perception toward blog from their selection on two options both agree and very agree towards seven statements. However, neither disagree nor very disagree were chosen.

The reasons why respondents perceived positively towards the blog were also investigated. The following are some reasons described according to each indicator of questionnaire.

3.1. Blog helps students using and accessing essay material easily

The respondent's agreement towards the first indicator was because the students only needed a simple step to access the material available in the blog. This quoted statement was taken from student 3 (s3). S3 said, "…it only needs one click to access the material". S8 also added that the blog could be accessed easily through cellphone.

3.2. Blog fulfills students' needs for learning essay materials

The reason why respondents agreed that the blog fulfilled their needs for learning essay because the materials to learn essay were available in the blog as it was stated by S2, saying, "…everything I need to learn essay is available in it."

3.3. Blog facilitated students to understand the essay material

There were two reasons why the students agreed with this third indicator. It refers to the difficulty level of vocabulary usage which could be understood. S6 said, "…the vocabularies used in the blog are easy to understand." Secondly, the arrangement of material starting from easy to difficult is correct and assists the students understanding. It was stated by S7, saying, "…the materials are arranged correctly."

3.4. Blog provides essay materials supporting the materials given in the classroom.

According to the respondents, the materials given in the blog completed the materials given in the classroom as it was stated by S4. S4 said, "…to complete materials given in the classroom."

3.5. Blog is needed to support lecture

In this indicator, students agreed because the materials available in it became supplementary materials which could be used in the classroom (S4). Moreover, the use of technology could support the learning stated by S3. S3 said, "...since blog used technology, it can be used in the class." The other reasons were their characteristics; they were paperless and easy to use. S8 said, "blog reduces the use of paper." S1 said, "blog eases the learning process", and S5 said, "it eases the acceptance of materials."

3.6. Blog encourages students to learn independently both in classroom and outside the classroom

The respondents felt motivated to learn Essay writing independently since the materials could be accessed through blog. S1 said, " since the class uses blog, I feel motivated to learn by myself." It

was also supported by S3 as it could be accessed anytime and anywhere. Another reason was stated by S5. S5 said, "it helps me to prepare myself before class and to review materials given."

3.7. Blog provides understandable materials

Since blogs provided detailed, complete, and practical materials with understandable word choices, student 1 agreed with this indicator. S1 said, "blog provides common words and detail information." Besides, S3 also said, "it gives detail and complete explanation." Finally, S5 said, " it presents specific and practical information."

Distributing the blog to lecturers, students and public was the last component of this R & D research. This blog could be accessed freely through *www.essaywritingpbiump.blogspot.co.id.*

4. Conclusion

The research concluded that blog was developed because it responded the students' needs to learn essay writing skills in English. The blog has fulfilled the experts' requirement and followed the students' need. The fulfilment was completed through some tests that measure the blog content, structure and navigation, and visual design. Besides, blogs were also perceived positively by 100% of the students because of its simple steps to access, easiness to get the materials, completeness of the materials availability, comprehensible materials, paperless benefits, and assistance for the process of teaching and learning. Further, it prepared the students' readiness to attend the class and encourage them to learn more independently.

Therefore, the research encourages lecturers to utilize blogs as an alternative medium to teach writing inside and outside classroom settings. Blogs attract the students' attention for its technology usage and provide abundant learning resources. Students can use blogs for their benefits, and the next researchers can use the present study as a reference to gain more data about using blogs for learning writing.

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