The Use of Instructional Media in Improving Student's Skill in Essay Writing Through Blended Learning Platform

Handoko
English Department
Universitas Andalas
Padang, Indonesia
handoko@lptik.unand.ac.id

Dwi Anggreini Waskito Putri
English Department
Universitas Negeri Padang
Padang, Indonesia
dwi2orchid@yahoo.co.id

Rabbi Antaridha
English Department
Universitas Dharma Andalas
Padang, Indonesia

Abstract— Abstract— The research focuses on the use of instructional media in the blended learning platform that to improve students' ability in writing essays. The research is based on the blended learning framework that integrates face-to-face methods and online learning methods. The face-to-face method is given to see students' activeness in delivering ideas and brainstorming before writing essays. The online learning method is used to see students' ability in elaborating ideas in from drafting to become a complete essay. Thus students can be effective in learning in class to discuss their draft and essay and not spend much time writing. The implementation of the 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 the 59% participants from the control class have a low score (below 60) while in experimental class about 60% participants get a score below 60. It is expected after the implementing of blended learning, there will be a significant improvement of essay score.

Keywords— essay writing, blended learning, instructional media

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing essays in English is very important for university students, both for academic purposes, such as continuing studies to higher levels, as well as for professional purposes [1]–[4]. Therefore, it is very important for the university to provides writing skill as one of the main competencies of the graduate profile.

To develop competence in writing, it is necessary to design a well-developed curriculum for language learning. In general teaching writing for university students can be divided into three stage: paragraph writing as a core skill, essay writing, critical writing. The series of courses are provided to develop students' writing skills

Many research indicates that writing skill is lower compared to other skills: speaking, reading, and listening. Moreover, many students also consider writing skill is more difficult than listening and speaking. This is because writing is not only dealing with grammar and vocabulary but also related to emotional and cognitive aspects [5]. There are several factors that contribute to the fact that writing is considered a difficult subject. Among others, writing skill requires formal language, error-free in grammar, complete and clear ideas, as well as logical order [4], [6]. Another aspect that also plays important role in writing is an emotional aspect. Emotional aspects can be seen from students' perceptions toward the difficulty of essay writing [3], [5], [7]. It is quite acceptable since that essay writing required a complex series of interconnected ideas. The limited time allocated for essay writing subject makes students unable to write essays well. In the traditional approach, students are asked to collect ideas, find references, and then write them into an essay. It is time-consuming and may not reach the optimal result. Therefore, students must be exposed to the learning environment which allows them to improve their writing experience by providing sufficient time [8].

Space limitations can also hinder the students thinking critically when they 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 elaborated into their essays. Time constraints also inhibit students in the evaluation process of the writing since the number of lecturers and students is not balanced. If the lecturer gives feedback on the draft writing of each student, then it will take three to four face-to-face meetings [9].

Besides, many students are impatient with writing essays. They tend to ignore the stages in writing an essay because they think that it is useless and wasting time [10]. To be able 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 idea (prewriting), planning, writing drafts, and revision [6], [11], [12]. In another word, writing an essay is not an instant process or a one-step process, students need to revise the essay several times based on the by feedback and evaluation from lecturers. Therefore, it

is necessary to provide the students with an alternative strategy which allow them to more effective and efficient.

With the advance of technology, lecturers can use sophisticated technology to provide a virtual environment which allows students to manage and elaborating ideas, as well as to revise the draft without spend time in the class. Among the approach that is quite effective is the application of a blended learning model. Blended learning is a combination of face-to-face learning methods with an online learning [9], [13]. With online methods, students can do the task anytime outside the class. Moreover, the method can also facilitate lecturers in examining essays with direct feedback through the online system. However, it must be highlighted that online learning cannot replace the face-to-face meeting totally. Face-to-face meetings still powerful to provide critical thinking, feedback, direct evaluations, and psychological support for the students [14]. Both traditional learning and online learning are the core concept of blended learning or hybrid learning.

Blended learning can be defined as the integration of traditional learning (face-to-face) with an online-based approach with the aim of increasing the effectiveness, efficiency, and flexibility of learning [14]–[17]. From this definition, it can be seen that blended learning not only emphasizes face-to-face systems but also uses computational instruments to facilitate learning.

There is a huge benefit in shaping students' knowledge and experience in integrating experience in the learning process. With this learning, students get knowledge that is internal and cognitive so as to produce in-depth and comprehensive knowledge [18], [19].

Blended learning has become a central issue for the last decade, including in the teaching English language. Many researchers report that blended learning has a positive impact on students performance [15], [18]–[22]. It provides easy access to learning material as well as assessment and evaluation for the student which will improve their skill in English. Most of the blended learning researches in teaching English focus on a general aspect of competence, such as grammar or vocabulary building. However, some other aspects, such as writing or speaking, are less discussed. This research is focusing on the implementation of a blended learning model to improve the writing skills. This research is limited to writing competence, especially writing essays.

II. METHOD

Participant

The number of participants in the study is 90 students. They were undergraduate students of Universitas Andalas who enrolled in English Communication class 2017/2018. The students were grouped into experimental group and control group. The experimental group consists of 45 students who exposed to used blended learning platform for essay writing. Control group consists of 45 students who did not use blended learning.

The object of this study is the effectiveness of the application of blended learning methods in the acceptance and understanding of learning material. The primary data obtained from the test conducted to measure students ability to write essays which included pre-test (post-test) and post-test (post-test). Secondary data comes from the track record of the assessment of students' work and lecturer records in both face-to-face and online learning activities. In this study, the subject

will take the initial test to see the ability to write his essay, then after the implementation of blended learning is complete, it is estimated that the next three months, the subject will take the final test to involve the significance of improving his essay writing skills.

Design and statistic analysis

The research was conducted using single-factor. The independent variable was the use of blended learning or non-use blended learning in writing an essay while the dependent variable is essay score. The essay scores included the evaluation of introduction and thesis statement, main points for body and conclusion paragraph, structure transition, style and diction, and grammar and punctuation. The data are analyzed by using the t-Test.

Rationale and hypothesis

The research assumed that the use of blended learning will provide students more time to write a good essay. By using online media, including video, web page, and online assignment, students will be able to develop skill in writing, especially dealing with essay structure and logical order. It is expected that the use of blended learning will have a positive effect on the quality of essay writing. The null hypothesis of the research was:

H₀: The use of blended learning platform will not improve the performance of the experimental group in writing an essay.

H₁: The use of blended learning platform will improve the performance of the experimental group.

Research question

To test the hypothesis, the following questions will be examined.

1. Did the use of blended learning increase the organization of the essay used by the experimental group in any of the essays to match with a control group?
2. Did the use of blended learning increase the style and diction of the essay used by the experimental group in any of the essays to match with a control group?
3. Did the use of blended learning increase the grammar and punctuation of the essay used by the experimental group in any of the essays to match with a control group?

III. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Pretest result

The research is ongoing process which has been done for one semester. The main independent variable was the use of blended learning by the experimental group in the essay writing. The independent is the essay score which includes the introduction (Skill 1), the main points in body paragraphs and conclusion (Skill 2), the organization (Skill 3), style and diction (Skill 4), and spelling, grammar, and punctuation (Skill 5). The maximum value for each skill is 20.

Table 1. Pretest result for control group

		Skill 1 Pre-	Skill 2 Pre-	Skill 3 Pre-	Skill 4 Pre-	Skill 5 Pre-	Essay Score Pre-
N	Valid	44	44	44	44	44	44
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		9,09	12,05	11,36	12,05	10,68	55,23
Median		10,00	10,00	10,00	10,00	10,00	55,00
Mode		10	10	10	10	10	50
Std. Deviation		2,229	2,710	3,300	2,487	2,768	8,624
Variance		4,968	7,347	10,888	6,184	7,664	74,366
Minimum		5	5	0	10	5	40
Maximum		15	15	15	15	15	70

Table 1 reflects the distribution of skills in writing an essay. It can be seen that the mean of each skill is quite low. The lowest score for skill is in skill 1 which reflects the student's competence in writing engaged and well-structured introduction. Table 2 shows the frequency of essay score from the control group.

Table 2. Pretest essay score for control group

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 40	2	4,5	4,5	4,5
45	7	15,9	15,9	20,5
50	11	25,0	25,0	45,5
55	6	13,6	13,6	59,1
60	7	15,9	15,9	75,0
65	7	15,9	15,9	90,9
70	4	9,1	9,1	100,0
Total	44	100,0	100,0	

The essay scores in table 2 show that 59% of students have less than 60 which indicates a low level of competency in essay writing.

Table 3. Pretest result for experimental group

		Skill 1 Pre-	Skill 2 Pre-	Skill 3 Pre-	Skill 4 Pre-	Skill 5 Pre-	Essay Score Pre-
N	Valid	37	37	37	37	37	37
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		10,41	11,62	12,03	10,54	10,68	55,27
Median		10,00	10,00	10,00	10,00	10,00	55,00
Mode		10	10	10	10	10	50
Std. Deviation		3,609	3,345	3,219	2,292	3,567	10,603
Variance		13,026	11,186	10,360	5,255	12,725	112,425
Minimum		5	5	5	5	5	25
Maximum		15	20	20	15	15	75

Table 3 reflects the writing skill of the experimental group. It can be seen that the mean for each skill is quite close to the control group. Moreover, the mean for essay score is also quite close to the essay score of the control group. This indicates that both the control and experimental group have the same level of competency in essay writing. In the experimental class, the lowest skill is skill 1 which is similar to the control class.

Table 4. Pretest essay score for experimental group

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 25	1	2,7	2,7	2,7
35	2	5,4	5,4	8,1
40	1	2,7	2,7	10,8
45	1	2,7	2,7	13,5
50	9	24,3	24,3	37,8
55	8	21,6	21,6	59,5
60	5	13,5	13,5	73,0
65	6	16,2	16,2	89,2
70	3	8,1	8,1	97,3
75	1	2,7	2,7	100,0
Total	37	100,0	100,0	

Table 4 indicates that the essay score for the experimental group. It can be seen that majority of the students have low

skill in writing. About 60% of students have essay score below 60, most of them are between 50-55. It can be inferred that students have difficulties in writing an essay.

Based on the essay scores from pretest in both control and experimental group, it can be inferred that writing an essay still remains as a problem in English learning. Students have difficulties in composing ideas with well-structured sentences. Moreover, the pretest result also indicates that from the five skills used as a measurement, students cannot produce a comprehensive and attractive introduction. Therefore, it is important to provide an appropriate approach to teach essay writing to the students.

Application of Blended Learning Models in Writing Essays

Blended learning platform offers a variety of instructional media, such as real-time collaboration software, online web-based learning, and technology that support performance-based learning by providing learning environments. These features are distributed through the Learning Management System (LMS) using blended learning platform. There are four features that LMS has that are very useful in implementing blended learning [14]:

1. Class management: such as student management, assessment, group management, peer review, and learning outcomes analysis.
2. Communication and interaction: such as announcement features, private messages, discussion forums, live chats, video conferences, notifications, and RSS feed.
3. Learning organization and resources: web page creation, learning distribution, learning outcomes, file uploads, and collaboration.
4. Practice and practice: quizzes and tests, surveys, online assignments, self-assessments, and rubrics.

The blended learning model consists of various learning activities, including face-to-face learning, online learning, and independent learning. As a mixed model, a blended learning should provide synchronous and asynchronous learning. In the synchronous mode, lecturers or teachers provide opportunities for students to be an independent learner by using the interactive material, such as instructional video, video conference, live chat, animation, and presentation. On the other hand, asynchronous mode offers a variety of activities such as discussion forums, e-mails, assignments, quizzes, and wikis [14], [23], [24].

By using the blended learning method, access to learning content can be easier. The access to learning materials, assessment, and evaluation can be accessed online. Thus, students can study anytime and anywhere. Likewise, teachers also can deliver learning material, assessment, evaluation, and communication can be done online. Even today the blended learning platform is accessible with smartphones which certainly makes it easier for the teaching and learning process.

Among the advantages of a specific blended learning model is the opportunity for students to build a sense of togetherness [18]. In a class that applies a blended learning model, besides face-to-face meetings, students also have the opportunity to communicate with other students by engaging in open dialogue through discussion forums. This facility allows students to trigger their creativity and reasoning skills through critical discussion. Other features also allow students to communicate with lecturers or teachers through the personal message and

email. These features allow lecturers to provide direct feedback on various learning activities done by students both at face-to-face and online class. The lecturer can share learning resources such as video, audio, text, web links, and other material. Moreover, the lecturer can also control and monitor the progress of students during the learning, especially in essay writing.

The implementation of blended learning models in writing essays can be implemented in four stages of writing, including brainstorming, drafting, writing essays, and editing or revision.

a. Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a critical thinking process to generate ideas that will be used as a material in writing an essay [3], [4], [6], [25]. Here students are invited to discuss by provoking creative ideas through pictures, videos, or articles related to the topic. In the application of blended learning, the stages of brainstorming can be done in class or face to face. Lecturers play an active role in directing students with questions which will lead students to certain arguments or conclusions. Brainstorming can be done in several ways, such as making lists, writing freely, and mapping.

To create a list, the lecturer can ask students to write down words, phrases, or sentences related to the topic of discussion. Freewriting can be used to provoke students' creative ideas and also can train their fluency in writing. Lecturers can ask students to write down whatever comes to their mind without paying attention to grammar or spelling. Finally, the lecturer can use the mapping method, writes students' ideas around the main topic, then connects ideas with a related topic. After all, ideas are collected, the lecturer can invite students to eliminate irrelevant information to the topic they are going to write.

b. Make a Draft / Framework for Writing

A draft is the starting point in writing that guides the writer to make a good essay. The drafting process started by outlining the topics and objectives which have been gathered through brainstorming. The outline of the essay is aimed to put ideas about the topic in a well organized and logical sequence [3], [25]. Here are the steps in writing an outline:

- 1) Write the topic at the top
- 2) Use Roman numerals I, II, III to write down the main part of an essay, starting from the introduction, the first main idea, the second main idea, the third main idea, and a conclusion. Provide a wide enough distance for each part.
- 3) In the introduction, write down the ideas about the topic. If the essay aims to be convincing, then give the best argument. If the essay aims to explain the process, write down the steps so that the reader can understand it. And if the essay aims to inform something, explain the main categories of information
- 4) Next to each Roman numeral, write A, B, and C slightly indented, then write down the facts or information that supports the main idea or statement.

To assist students in creating this essay framework, lecturers can provide a template skeleton in a blended learning platform that can be accessed and downloaded by students online. With this template, students will be able to collect the essay framework in a short. This stage can be done online without having to allocate special time face-to-face to discuss the essay framework.

c. Essay Writing

After writing an outline of the essay, students are asked to write their essays based on the outline. Students can explain, describe and provide complete arguments about the topics. Keep in mind that each of the important ideas that have been written in the outline is the main sentence that will be developed into paragraphs. To develop the main sentence into paragraphs, it is necessary to add supporting information (supporting detail). A paragraph has a structure consisting of main sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences [25].

The first paragraph is a very important part because the section provides an overview of the problem and determines whether the essay is interesting or not for the reader. To write a good opening paragraph, it may consist of five to ten sentences, provide an overview of the essay topic, provide background information on the topic, give important points to be discussed in the content section, and the most important is to attract the attention of readers [3], [5], [25].

In the blended learning platform, besides providing material, such as video or document file, the lecturer can allocate an assignment for the introduction section. Students can be grouped and asked to do peer review and the provide feedback for each writing. Then, the lecture may respond to the feedback and provide a suggestion. Do not forget to praise the students for their works, it is a way to engage students in the online platform.

After writing the first paragraph, then each main idea should be developed into a paragraph. The main idea contains the main sentence as a core of the paragraph. Then, the main sentence must be supported by supporting sentences or supporting details to support the statement of the main sentence. The supporting details may be varied according to the type of the sentence. They can be examples, facts, quotations, reasons, or opinions. This is done until all the main ideas that have been written in the framework have become complete paragraphs.

Finally, an essay is usually ended by writing a conclusion. The conclusion is a summary of the points that have been mentioned and gives the reader a final perspective. The points should not repeat what has been written in the discussion. A good conclusion also describes the opinions, feelings, or perceptions of the author on the topic [3], [25].

In the blended platform, writing an essay can be undertaken via online activities. Lecturers can provide assignment which can be accessed by the students at home and also can provide direct feedback or suggestion for the writing. This will allow students to have extensive time to consider about the developing the main idea into a paragraph by providing supporting sentences.

d. Revision and Editing

After a series of writing, students need to review and edit their writing. Here, students are required to review their essays by considering several technical aspects, such as the logical sequence of paragraphs, cohesion, the format of writing, and grammar and spelling. Revision in writing is very critical for English learners because they have limited access to English language. Some students may also have difficulties in finding appropriate dictions while some other have difficulties in writing cohesively. The revision will help them to consider the essay, check the ideas order, find appropriate diction, improve

readability, and check grammar and punctuation. It may take several times until students get their best essay.

Revision can be undertaken via online activities, lecturers can provide feedback, alternative diction, or grammatical revision. It will allow students to improve their writing by revising the grammar and cohesion based on the feedback. Besides, by using online platform, It is easy for students to rearrange the sentences or paragraphs.

From the series of writing, almost all processes can be carried out through the online learning process. However, face-to-face learning still plays an important role, especially in providing feedback and discussion to solve the problems faced by students in writing essays. With the combination of face-to-face learning and online learning, it is expected that the students skill in writing English essays will increase significantly.

IV. CONCLUSION

Writing an English essay is a difficult task for many university students because it is not only the matter of English proficiency but also deal with a technical and psychological aspect. Students need extended time to write their essay and also instructional media which can help them to improve their understanding of technical aspects of essay writing. Besides, they also need psychological treatment, such as motivation, encouragement, and praise, to keep them engaged in the process of writing. Blended learning platform offers both technical and psychological aspect of writing. Students can access learning material and undertake writing processes online without limited time and space. They also can get benefit by a face-to-face meeting, including feedback and motivation from the lecturers. Both online and face-to-face meeting can help the students to improve their skill in essay writing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research is funded by the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education under PDP Scheme 2018.

REFERENCES

- [1] E. A. Baghbadorani and A. Roohani, "The Impact of Strategy-based Instruction on L2 Learners' Persuasive Writing," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 98, pp. 235–241, 2014.
- [2] K. A. Nourse, "How to Write Your College Application Essay," 2001.
- [3] K. T. McWhorter, *Successful College Writing*, 6th ed. Boston: Bedford, 2016.
- [4] J. Connelly and P. Forsyth, *Essay Writing Skills*. London: Kogan Page Limited, 2012.
- [5] M. Alluhaybi, "Psychology and EFL Writing," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 192, pp. 371–378, 2015.
- [6] J. Wyrick, *Steps to Writing Well*. Boston: Cengage Learning ALL,

2011.

- [7] S. H. H. Qashoa, "English Writing Anxiety: Alleviating Strategies," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 136, pp. 59–65, 2014.
- [8] D. Adas and A. Bakir, "Writing Difficulties and New Solutions : Blended Learning as an Approach to Improve Writing Abilities PhD in teaching English Language Methods , AL-Quds Open University ,," *Int. J. Humanit. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 3, no. 9, pp. 254–266, 2013.
- [9] H. Handoko and W. Waskito, *Blended Learning: Teori dan Penerapannya*. Padang: LPTIK Universitas Andalas, 2018.
- [10] M. M. Alameddine and H. S. Mirza, "Teaching Academic Writing for Advanced Level Grade 10 English," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 232, no. April, pp. 209–216, 2016.
- [11] M. H. Manser, *The Facts on File Guide to Good Writing*. New York: Facts On File, 2006.
- [12] A. Cumming, *Goals for Academic Writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006.
- [13] J. M. Hatfield, "Social engineering in cybersecurity : The evolution of a concept," *Comput. Secur.*, vol. 73, pp. 102–113, 2018.
- [14] J. Stein and C. R. Graham, *Essentials for Blended Learning*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- [15] P. Ramakrishnan, Y. B. Yahya, M. N. H. Hasrol, and A. A. Aziz, "Blended Learning: A Suitable Framework For E-Learning In Higher Education," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 67, pp. 513–526, 2012.
- [16] D. Pérez-Marín, L. Santacruz, and M. Gómez, "A Proposal for A Blended Learning Methodology and How to Apply it With University Students," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 46, pp. 5458–5462, 2012.
- [17] B. Güzer and H. Caner, "The past , present and future of blended learning: an in depth analysis of literature," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 116, pp. 4596–4603, 2014.
- [18] D. R. Garrison and H. Kanuka, "Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education," *Internet High. Educ.*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 95–105, 2004.
- [19] J. Khlaisang and M. Likhitdamrongkiat, "E-learning System in Blended Learning Environment to Enhance Cognitive Skills for Learners in Higher Education," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 174, pp. 759–767, 2015.
- [20] N. Makhdoom, K. I. Khoshhal, S. Algaidi, K. Heissam, and M. A. Zolaly, "'Blended learning' as an effective teaching and learning strategy in clinical medicine: A comparative cross-sectional university-based study," *J. Taibah Univ. Med. Sci.*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 12–17, 2013.
- [21] A. BakarNordin and N. Alias, "Learning Outcomes and Student Perceptions in Using of Blended Learning in History," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 103, pp. 577–585, 2013.
- [22] S. B. Maulan and R. Ibrahim, "The Teaching and Learning of English For Academic Purposes in Blended Environment," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 67, pp. 561–570, 2012.
- [23] T. J. Bastiaens, *Design of an Authentic E-Learning Environment*. Pennsylvania: Business Science Reference, 2012.
- [24] R. Moreno and R. E. Mayer, *Interactive multimedia learning environments*, vol. 19, 2007.
- [25] D. E. Zemach and L. a. Rumisek, *Academic Writing: From Paragraph to Essay*. Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2006.