Blogs as Powerful Learning Tools: The Perception from EFL Students in Riau Main Island Indonesia

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Abstract: Promoting the potential value of blogs in English Language Teaching (ELT) for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students is the focus of this present study. It's aimed to explain in a quantitative way the perceptions from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in using blogs in Riau main island context. The students from PBIG FKIP Universitas Lancang Kuning in Riau mainland, Indonesia was selected based on the increasing trends of the blog used as alternative media to learn English during these two years. The analysis of this present study based its data from online questionnaire as the main instrument to collect the data. The online questionnaire was open from August 2016-February 2017 (6 months) and filled up by 161 students from English Department of FKIP Unilak who enroll in 6 different blog-based classes at PBIG FKIP Unilak. The analysis showing that the majority of the students had a positive perception that blog can be used as powerful tools to promote English language skills especially reading and writing. The data also reveals that using the blog as a learning journal can raise students’ motivation in learning English and publishing article. These positive results somehow showing that blog can be promoted as an alternative media of learning English for English as Foreign Language Students at PBIG FKIP Unilak or in other institutions around the globe that teach English as a Foreign language.

Keywords: Blog, ELT, EFL, Unilak, Riau Mainland.

1. Introduction

A mammoth alike studies rise in the past few years discussed the use of the blog in educational institutions to teach English as a Foreign language (henceforth: EFL). Blog In recent years has been widely used as an effective tool to reach the global result related to teaching EFL. In many studies, blogs were found increased students’ knowledge as well as their critically thinking. This trend happened around the globe because blog used, not only limited as media to improve students skills in English but also strategies to raise students motivation in EFL classrooms. There are many studies can be taken as references in teaching EFL context around the globe related to this matter such as Aydan: 2014; Aydin: 2014; Gutler: 2011; Noytim: 2010; Hamuddin: 2016, which have proven the effectiveness of blog to improve skills, motivation and critical thinking in many educational institutions. There are so many beneficial reasons in using the blog in the learning process. The study above underlined Blog can increase students’ motivation and ability to think critically. It also develops students’ motivation as well as to train the students more independent in learning. For that reason, the study above having a similar thought to use the blog as learning to raise the classroom’s creative atmosphere.
In many institutions blog usage has changed the education point of view to be more comprehensive and varied in contributing to ease English language teaching including in ESL or EFL context. Through the use of the blog, accessing information will be easy and allowed the students can learn anywhere and anytime, as well as the lecturer can upload their material with no limitation of time and place. The development of education which used a little touch from IT has to contribute the development and renews the conventional learning media. It becomes more creative and innovative as this is what is happened in Universitas Lancang Kuning (henceforth: Unilak) as one of the renowned private University in Indonesia expected so far. Realizing these benefits, English Department of FKIP Unilak (henceforth: PBIG) starts to used blog in teaching English for EFL students since two years ago in six different blog based classes. In the past two years the number of blog writers (blogger) in PBIG Unilak, Pekanbaru Indonesia increasing significantly [5].

Based on pre-observation in this study in May 2016, some lectures and hundreds of students in PBIG Unilak was an active blogger, this is in line with the department policy that recommended the use of IT in the ELT classroom. The trends of blogs usage increasing in PBIG FKIP Unilak somehow because blog was used as learning media as well as a strategy in some courses i.e. Reading, Writing, Intro to Linguistic, Semantic, Discourse Analysis, and Prose [5]. Moreover, blogging club also founded and becomes one of the favorite clubs in co-curricular activities in PBIG Unilak (Hamuddin: 2016). The pre-observation also found blogs in these classes were used to post an assignment such as article review, presentation slide, and discussion forum. Nevertheless, the pre-observation also found that in the learning process in some of these courses is somehow showing that blog is not only for writing and reading exercise in ELT context but also becoming tools for students to up-to-date with the recent study regarding their assignment and stay connected with peers and their lecturer [5].

2. Method

The study sees perception as cognitive processes with the aims of giving interpretation, brand, judgment, opinion, regarding on something, someone or situation, based on the experience, background, and the individual's knowledge to form a comprehensive idea about it. Therefore, this study employs quantitative descriptive to interpret the students’ perceptions on the use of the blog as a learning tool to study English in PBIG. This study was started in August 2016 focusing on two different semesters (2 and 4) students that enroll in 6 blog-based classes namely, Reading 2, Writing 2, Structure 2, Introduction to Linguistic, Semantic dan Morpho-syntax at PBIG FKIP Unilak. The data collection in this study was based on the questionnaire to maintain the quantitative perspective.

The online questionnaire designed to describe the majority of students’ perception on the blog usage as well as to see the major description for this topic regarding the blog as learning media, student’s journal or strategy in some courses at PBIG FKIP Unilak. The questionnaire in this study starts to distributed since the beginning of August 2016-February 2017 (6 months) and analyzed at the end of March 2017. The main data of this study comes from an online questionnaire. The questions in the questionnaire were designed to covers; demography, and the use of the blog as a learning journal at the English Department Faculty of PBIG FKIP Unilak. It consists of with multiple choice options to ease the students in answering the questionnaire. The students’ demography described in the next section below:

3. Result

The data recorded 161 out of 168 of the total students of 2nd and 4th semester who participated in the survey. This study calculated 89.8 % of the respondent was female with 136 students, and the remaining 10.2 % was 23 was male students as seen in the figure below.
The data showed that the majority who took part in this study somehow was female, this is clearly reflecting the quantity which indicates female students is more dominant in term of quantity at PBIG Unilak.

The questionnaire was softly distributed to the 2nd and 4th-semester students which consist of demographic questions, perceptions, and their problems. However only this paper only discusses and describe the students’ perception on blog usage at PBIG FKIP Unilak. The result described based on the items below.

On the question number 1-2 merely on demographic questions such as “Saya sudah memiliki blog selama?...” (I have been blogging since?) The data showed that majority of the students (84%) use blog for 1 month – 6 months, meanwhile 6 % have the blog for 6 month – 1 year. and as much as 5 % from students user blog has been blogging for less than 1 month. This is means that the students were newbie blogger or just blogging during the semester. The data somehow calculating 98% of the students enroll in the blog-based classes have positive experiences regarding blogging activities or blog based resources in PBIG Unilak.

On the question number. 3 “menurut saya media blog sangat... sebagai media pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di PBIG FKIP Unilak”. (In my mind blog is . . . as learning media in learning English at PBIG) Data on the diagram above showed that 75% PBIG students declared that blog was effective as learning media then followed 22 % with very effective and only 3 % students mention less effective. This data means that majority (97%) of students at PBIG giving a positive response about the effectiveness blog as media of learning. Therefore, this showing that blog was effective in the learning process at PBIG Unilak.

On the question number. 4 “Menurut saya, menggunakan blog sebagai media pembelajaran lebih tepat digunakan dalam membantu meningkatkan kemampuan /pengetahuan .... saya” (In my mind using Blog as media to learn English is useful to develop my…skill” Data on the diagram above showed most of the students (71 %) were prefer writing as one of the skills which can be increased significantly using blog as the media. While 18 % the students chose to improve the reading skill than 6 % from the students chose vocabulary skill followed with 3 % choosing grammar and 1 % answered speaking skill and 1 % choosing the other skills. This data showed that based on their experience, writing and reading skill were the 2 most improved skills regarding the use of blog at PBIG.
On the question number 5 “Dengan memiliki blog, saya...... dalam mengerjakan tugas yang diberikan dosen”, (by having a blog I feel ... to do my task) the diagram above showed most of the students (70%) feeling motivated in doing the task, while 26% of the students mentioned more motivated and only 4% of the students were less motivated in doing the task. This data indicated that the majority of the students at PBIG feel the motivation was rising regarding the use of a blog.

On the question number 6 “Saya percaya penggunaan blog sebagai media pembelajaran akan ..... skill saya dalam Bahasa Inggris” (I believe my English skill will be... with the use of blog as a learning) The data on the diagram above reveals that the majority students (81%) at PBIG experiencing improvement after studying using blog and only 2% of students were less improving with the use of blog.

On the question number 7, “Saya lebih suka belajar bahasa menggunakan blog dibandingkan belajar dengan menggunakan media lainnya” (I prefer studying using blog that other media in learning English) The data above showed that more than a half (53%) of students agreed that they would rather be using blog than other media, and 12% was very agree. However, 34% of students answered less agree to use blog than to learn using other media. However, 12% of students answered strongly disagree in learning using the blog, and 1% of the students mentioned disagree. From the data above showing the majority of students (67%) prefer to use a blog than to learn by using other media. This may be due to media blog that was easy to apply in learning English.

On question number 8, “Saya berfikir penggunaan media blog bisa diterapkan dihampir semua mata kuliah di jurusan Bahasa Inggris”(I think the use of media like blog as learning journal can be implemented in almost every courses in English department) This study showed 57% of students agree and 15% very agree. This is means the majority of the students (72%) having a positive perception on the implementation of blog in many courses, even though there were 15% of students answered strongly disagree and 4% of students’ answered did not agree with the use of blogs as a media can be applied in almost all courses in the department of English. From the data above this study believed blog can be used and implemented in many courses.
On the question number 9, “Saya berharap penggunaan strategi pengajaran menggunakan media blog bisa terus di terapkan di jurusan Bahasa Inggris FKIP Unilak” (I am expecting that blog can be used consistently as a teaching strategy in my department) the diagram above showed that 59% of students agree and 30% said very agree and expecting that blog can be used again in the next semester. Since only 11% of students answered less agree and disagree that blogs can be continued to be applied in PBIG Unilak.

The data above reveals that the majority students PBIG Unilak expecting that blog can be used continuously and consistently as a learning media and strategy at PBIG FKIP Unilak as it somehow effective and efficient to be applied.

On the question number 10, Menurut saya aplikasi maupun feature di blog itu... dalam belaja bahasa Inggris di PBIG FKIP Unilak” (in my opinion apps and features on blog …… to learn English). Data on the diagram above showing the majority of students (61 %) mentioned that apps and features on blog support to learn English and 34 % students mentioned very support in learning English, meanwhile only 5 % students felt less support. This data showed a positive perception that the apps and features on blog can help as well as facilitating the learning of English in PBIG Unilak.

Blog as learning journal somehow connecting students with many parties. It showing clearly On the question number 11, “Menurut saya, penggunaan blog sangat memudahkan saya dalam .....” (In my mind blog helping me a lot in … ) The data showed that most of students (57 %) were felt blog can be used as source of learning and 43% can share knowledge and getting feedback instantly. This data somehow showing a positive perception that blog is a powerful tools to help students in ELT context.

4. Conclusion

This descriptive quantitative study based its data from 161 students who enroll 6 different blog-based classes. This study tries to help academia in ELT context by sharing PBIG students’ experiences on what they have been through in the last few semesters regarding the use of the blog in the class. PBIG starts using a blog in the past two years to broadening their ELT perspectives. This present study conducted as to review the use of blog whether as a media of learning, strategy and learning journals at PBIG FKIP Unilak. The idea is to try to raise students’ English skills and rising their motivation in their ELT classes. Pre-observation and online questionnaire were used to find out students perspective on the use of the blog. This study starts with collecting data soon after the semester end, August 2016 until February 2017. The study can reveal some points based on the data collected.

The data revealed that PBIG students had a positive perception on the implementation of the blog in many courses. They believed their English skill especially writing, reading skills, as well as grammar and vocabulary developed significantly with the use of the blog as learning journals, media, and strategy at PBIG FKIP Unilak. Nevertheless, their positive perception also described in the data on how they believed its effective as learning media due as it facilitating them in learning of English at PBIG Unilak.
Nevertheless, it caused the majority of the students experiencing an improvement in learning English. The majority expressing that blog is a suitable strategy and effective media to help EFL students at PBIG Unilak. Through the blog, the students experiencing a positive academic atmosphere and help them to train their communication skill whether among peers as well as with their lecturers. This present study believed through the data lies in the analysis that blog somehow perceives as powerful tools for English as foreign students in PBIG FKIP Unilak. Therefore, this study recommended the blog as an effective tool and should be able to broaden ELT goals and objectives in a higher education.

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