

The Implementation of Blended Learning in Teaching Reading

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Abstract

In this rapidly-transforming way of teaching, blended learning has become popular across all education levels as it integrates the advantages of traditional classroom activities with online digital media. In the context of teaching English as a foreign language, teachers need to adapt with the use of technology in their teaching activities so that the learning objectives can be achieved successfully. This paper describes the implementation of blended learning in Engagement Reading class conducted in English Language Education Department of Universitas Nasional Karangturi. To get the data, the researcher conducted observation, interview, and documentation. The result of the study shows that the stages of building knowledge of the field, modelling of the text, joint construction of the text and independent construction of the text are applied in the reading class. To facilitate the teaching and learning process, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, Mozilla Firefox, and Chrome are utilised. At the end of the course, the students have positive perception toward the implementation of blended learning in the reading class. This is because they feel that the use of technology in blended learning facilitates communication and interaction, engagement, and collaboration. However, they still have problem commonly faced by the students in Indonesia, which is internet connection and credit quota.

Keywords: blended learning, teaching reading, text-based approach

Introduction

Technology **continues to transform today's classrooms and** has significantly contributed to the foreign language teaching and learning process. Nowadays, teachers incorporate technology into their pedagogical style. This means that traditional classroom teaching method is mixed with online learning. This combination enhances the achievement of learning objectives through the use of appropriate learning technology tailored to the individual's learning style. This is called as blended learning.

Blended learning is a type of distant learning that combines online and face-to-face instruction. The goal is to motivate students to be active in their learning by utilizing online technology to allow learning activities that take place outside of the classroom, as well as to urge them to be prepared in class. Thorne (2003) defines blended learning as a chance to combine the inventive and technological improvements of online learning with the engagement and involvement of the best of conventional learning.

Blended learning is widely applied in EFL teaching and learning process, including in the teaching of reading. As an essential skill to learn, reading needs to be taught to university students; and the teaching and learning activities should be designed so carefully that they keep up with the times. Thus, the concept of blended learning was applied in Engagement Reading Class conducted in English Language Education Department of Universitas Nasional Karangturi. By using this idea, the lecturer mixed face-to-face interaction and digital media to balance pedagogical instruction and technology to promote students' learning. This research intends to describe the use of blended learning in the teaching of reading. This paper specifically examines the process of the reading teaching and learning activities in the class and describes the students' opinion during the implementation of blended learning.

Literature Review

The development of technology has influenced every part of life, including education. The use of technology in education has transformed the way teaching. The innovation on teaching and learning process has now focused on how teachers deliver the material and how students acquire knowledge at school. Related to the use of technology in education, the innovation covers the integration of face-to-face learning with web-based learning (Tandoh et al.: 2013).

Many experts have defined the term blended learning. Blended learning involves the collaboration between instructors and students in face-to-face interaction and through technology to achieve learning objectives that are supported by tasks, activities, and evaluation in a way that is meaningful to the learner (McGee and Reis: 2012). This is in line with the definition of blended learning by Bersin. According to Bersin (2003), "blended learning is the combination of different training "media" (technologies, activities, and types of events) to create an optimum training program for a specific audience". Furthermore, Sharma and Barrett (2007) states that combining technology in teaching is commonly applied to a course in which all learners meet with the teacher in a face-to-face class and the course includes a parallel self-study component such as access to web-based materials. Students in blended learning can utilize their devices even during face-to-face class access internet resources when they need it. Blended learning occurs in response to the increasing availability of online materials, as well as the need for the component of human in the learning process. This method ensures the learner's engagement and he/she is in control of his or her own learning experience. It also helps respond to the learner's specific needs as most students have distinct learning styles, and this concept is more likely to meet those needs than a standard classroom teaching activities.

Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) states that blended learning is rich in pedagogy, easy for social interaction online, offers great access to knowledge, has personal agency, offers cost-effectiveness, and provides ease of revision. Besides, blended learning has many benefits. The benefits are (1) to improve the effectiveness of learning, (2) to provide simple access to education, and (3) to reach large audience in a short time with cost-effectiveness (Graham: 2006). The benefits of blended learning are also mentioned by Hande. Hande (2014) states that blended learning has the potential to establish independent, interactive, and meaningful learning; moreover, it can be utilized as a medium for discussion, asking questions, providing feedback, sharing knowledge, and assessing. Thus, it can be concluded that blended learning is encouraging in education. It offers flexibility for teachers in how they deliver the materials. Besides, as blended learning integrates many modalities of education, it produces an effective learning outcome for the majority of the students participating. Most students use technology in their daily lives, so they frequently interact with information more easily when technology is used in classroom settings. Finally, the students' competence becomes improved.

Blended learning is frequently used in EFL teaching and learning, including in reading instruction. To help students develop the skill of reading comprehension, teachers should supply curriculum-relevant resources and employ appropriate strategies in the teaching and learning process. Teachers should be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about students' reading materials in order to motivate the students. Besides the materials, appropriate strategy should also be considered. In teaching reading, there are three strategies: bottom-up, top-down, and interactive.

Bottom-up strategy is most congruent with existing instructional practice in reading and focuses primarily on letter, sound, and word recognition. This strategy, in particular, requires prior knowledge of the linguistic system (i.e., phonology, grammar, and vocabulary). This is consistent with Nunan's idea. According to Nunan (2003), a bottom-up strategy typically consists of lower-level reading processes, such as beginning with the fundamental basics of letter and sound recognition, which allows for morpheme recognition, followed by word recognition, and progressing to the identification of grammatical structures,

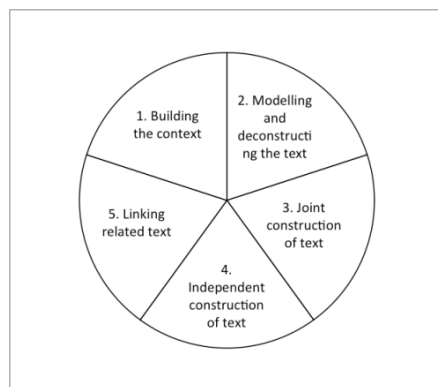
sentences, and longer text. The order of attaining comprehension involves letters, letter clusters, words, phrases, sentences, longer text, and finally meaning.

Meanwhile, in the top-down strategy, the reader uses prior information to create predictions and then explores the text to validate or reject those predictions. Top-down stresses meaning reconstruction rather than form decoding. The interaction between the reader and the text is key to the process, and readers bring to this interaction their knowledge of the subject at hand, knowledge of and expectations about how language works, motivation, interest, and attitudes toward the content of the text, rather than decoding each symbol or even every word; the reader develops hypotheses about text elements and then samples the text to see if the theories are valid. According to Grab and Stoller (in Anderson, 2008), understanding in a top-down way of reading is controlled by the readers' aim and expectation. Thus, even if not all of the individual words are understood, a reading passage can be understood. The teacher concentrates on meaning-generating activities rather than mastery of bottom-up abilities such as letter, sound, and word identification in a top-down approach to reading.

In addition to bottom-up and top-down strategies, there is interactive strategy. According to Vacca et al. (1991), interactive strategy is the reading process that begins with the formulation of hypotheses about meaning and the decoding of letters and words. Furthermore, she states that the process of translating printed symbols to meaning entails the use of both past knowledge and the printed symbols, and making prediction about meaning or deciphering graphic signals starts the process. Simanjuntak (1988) states that by using interactive strategy, excellent readers will become gradually more concerned with identification, rather than progressively less concerned with it, as their interpretative skills increase. In conclusion, interactive strategy will integrate components of both bottom-up and top-down strategies.

In addition to the strategy used in reading, the approach in teaching is key to the success of language learning. The approach that suits the current trend in language teaching and learning is Text-Based Approach. This approach is concerned with delivering information about the creation of effective texts for specific objectives real context and purposeful language use. The idea of Text-based Approach is demonstrated in the following stages of teaching and learning.

Figure 1. Stages of teaching and learning cycle (adopted from Feez dan Joice 2002)



The diagram shows that teaching and learning activities are put into the stages of building knowledge of the field, modelling of the text, joint construction of the text, independent construction of the text, and linking related text. The fifth stage, linking related texts, is optional because it requires a competent student who can relate texts together (Agustien, 2006).

The investigation about the use of blended learning in education is not something new. Behjat et al. (2011) explored the impact of blended learning on reading comprehension. They observed that reading materials on an e-tool promoted reading because they included links and learners could access them by

simply clicking on the underlined term to access other reading resources. Zahendi (2015) conducted a study investigating the use of blended learning in EFL setting as well. The study was carried out at Islamic Azad University. The result of the study proved that blended learning instruction was more effective than face-to-face instruction on the students' reading strategies.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Best, qualitative descriptive research is a research method that seeks to describe and interpret objects as they are. According to Sukmadinata (2011: 73), descriptive qualitative research is intended to describe existing phenomena, both natural and human engineered, by paying more attention to the characteristics, quality, interrelationships between activities. From this definition, it can be concluded that descriptive qualitative research is research with the aim of making a systematic description and relationship between the phenomena being investigated. The study was carried out in Engagement Reading Class of English Education Department of Universitas Nasional Karangturi in the Academic Year of 2020/2021.

This research was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How is the implementation of blended learning in teaching reading?
2. How is the students' perception toward the implementation of blended learning in teaching reading?

To answer the questions, the researcher used some techniques to collect the data needed. The data were analysed qualitatively because they are non-numerical data. The data were collected by using observation, interview, and documentation. Observation was conducted to obtain factual data in the field. The aim was to identify what approach was used in the learning process. Besides, interview was conducted to identify the students' perception toward the implementation of blended learning in the Engagement Reading class. Finally, the researcher reviewed documents relevant to research problems, that is Lesson Plans. After collecting the data, the researcher analysed them. Miles and Huberman (1994) states that data analysis involves data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. Data reduction means summarizing, choosing and focusing on things that are important. After the data were collected, the researcher then selected, abstracted, and transformed the data from the results of observation, interview, and documentation. Afterwards, the data were presented. In this step, the researcher described all the data obtained from observations, interview, and documentation. Finally, the data were concluded to answer the questions of the research. The conclusion was obtained from the observations and interpretations of researchers.

Findings and Discussion

The development of technology has influenced the way of teaching. The use of digital media has become popular in teaching, including the teaching and learning process in the Engagement Reading class. In the curriculum of English Education Department of Universitas Nasional Karangturi, it is stated that Engagement Reading develops knowledge about concepts and types of texts or genres including their communicative purposes, text structure, linguistic features and abstract meanings as well as short functional texts that are transactional in nature which aim to deal with daily affairs; develop an attitude of reading and responding to texts; and provide responses to recount, narrative, and short functional texts found in everyday life fluently, accurately and acceptably with performative literacy level. Hence, the learning objectives of the subject are for the students to:

1. Explain abstract meanings (metafunctions) in short functional/transactional texts found in everyday life including their communicative purposes, text structure, and linguistic characteristics;
2. Demonstrate an attitude of liking to read various texts as a means of entertainment; and
3. Respond to recount, narrative, and short functional/transactional texts found in everyday life, both in guided and personal responses, accurately, fluently and acceptably.

The Engagement reading class was conducted once a week and discussed short functional texts, such as announcement, notice, caution, warning, greetings, prayer, song lyrics, wise words, tips, instruction, meme, parody, advertisement, and label. Three days before the class starts, the lecturer delivered the materials to discuss in the class. The materials sent were examples of short functional text to discuss in the next meeting. They were uploaded in pdf form to the Google Classroom and were sent to the WhatsApp group consisting of the students and the lecturer as the members of the group. The objective to send the materials early before the class started was in order for the students to learn the materials in more flexible way, in terms of time and place, and be prepared before the class. Then as usual, as the class started, the lecturer stated the learning objectives. To catch the students' attention, the teacher displayed the materials containing the examples of the short functional text discussed in the meeting. The lecturer asked the students to read aloud the text displayed to check the students' pronunciation. When the students found difficulty to understand the meaning of particular vocabulary, the teacher asked the students to guess the meaning based on the context of the text, then look up the meaning in their online dictionary to confirm whether their prediction was true or not. Given some examples of one specific short functional text, the students were asked to find the similarity on the texts' communicative purposes, generic structure, and linguistics features; then discuss them. To make sure that the students understand the concept of the text, the lecturer asked the students to find another example of the short functional text on the internet and analyse the text. To check the students' understanding, the teacher asked the students to present and explain to their friends the text they found and the analysis. After the students presentation, the lecturer and friends asked the abstract meaning (metafunctions) of the text. The learning objectives of the subject were accomplished when the students can respond to the text accurately, fluently and acceptably.

Table 1. The stage of the teaching-learning process can be seen below:

Stage	Activities	Application
Building knowledge of the field	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3 days before the Engagement Reading class, the lecturer gives some examples of a short functional text (for example: warning) and provides material about imperative sentence. The lecturer asks the students to learn the materials given before the class starts 	Google Classroom, WhatsApp
Modelling of the text	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The lecturer states the objectives of the learning The lecturer shows the examples of warning The lecturer asks the students to read the text The lecturer and the students discuss the communicative purpose, generic structures, and linguistic features of the text 	Zoom
Joint construction of the text	The lecturer asks some questions (metafunction) based on the text, then the students discuss the answers of the questions	Zoom
Independent construction of the text	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The lecturer asks the students to find other example of warning, asks the students to analyse the text, and present it The students present the text and explain the communicative purpose, generic structures, and linguistic features of the text The lecturer asks some questions (metafunction) based on the text, then the student answers of the questions individually 	Mozilla Firefox, Chrome Zoom

The stages and activities in the teaching and learning process show that the lecturer applied the text-based approach in teaching reading. As preparation, the stage Building Knowledge of the Field was introduced so that the students were prepared and engaged, and finally they were ready to continue to the stage of modelling. This stage is necessary to activate the students' schemata. Because only after the

schemata is activated, the students can understand the text better because it matches with the pattern that he/she already knows (Harmer: 2001). After building the context, the modelling is presented. The activities in this stage include discussing the purpose, showing the linguistic features, and talking about the generic structure of the text. These activities are as suggested by Gibbons. Gibbons (2002) states that the modelling stage, the students are familiarised with the purpose, structure, and language features of the text. In the Joint Construction of the Text, the students were asked to answer the questions based on the text together; meanwhile, in the Independent Construction of the Text, the students were asked to explain and answer the questions individually. The stages and activities applied in the teaching and learning process are reflected in the lesson plan the lecturer designed as well.

Table 1 shows that the lecturer and the students used Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, Mozilla Firefox, and Chrome in the teaching and learning process. The activities and the use of these applications indicate that blended learning is applied. To know the students’ perception toward the use blended learning, the lecturer interviewed the students. The interview questioned the students opinion about blended learning applied, in terms of communication facility, engagement, collaboration, and ease of access.

Table 2. Interview results

Interview questions	Interview results
Communication facility	I can communicate easily with lecturer and friends ... the lecturer always gives feedback
Engagement	I am engaged with lecturer ... topic is relevant ... I am interested with the class. I like this class
Collaboration	I can collaborate with friends and discuss the material with my lecturer and friends ...
Access	Sometimes I have problem on the internet connection and because of quota ...

Based on the students’ responses, it can be concluded that the students have positive perception toward the implementation of blended learning in the reading class. The students feel that blended learning applied facilitates easy communication with the lecturer since the lecturer gives individual feedback to each student. Besides, the students’ engagement is promoted. It can be seen from the active participation of the students in the class. The students also think that the materials are relevant with their needs and daily lives. This makes the learning meaningful to the students. This is in line with the research finding of L. Litterio, “instructor feedback and relevant content both positively impact students’ perceptions of an online course” (Litterio: 2018). Blended learning implemented also facilitates collaboration as the discussion between the lecturer and the students ran well. However, they have problem related to the internet connection and credit quota.

Conclusion

Technology has influenced many aspects of life, including education. The way of teaching has now transformed from traditional face-to-face interaction into the instruction that combines traditional class with digital or internet-based media, which is called blended learning. The research shows that the implementation of blended learning does not interfere with the learning stages in the class. The teaching and learning process still involves the stages of building knowledge of the field, modelling of the text, joint construction of the text, and independent construction of the text. The use of technology facilitates the learning activities. The technology used are Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, Mozilla Firefox, and Chrome. Furthermore, the students have positive perception toward the implementation of blended learning in reading class. This is because they feel that the implementation still facilitates communication and interaction, engagement, and collaboration. However, they still have problem commonly faced by the students in Indonesia, that is internet connection and credit quota.

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