

EDMODO AS A VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN ACADEMIC WRITING CLASS

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Abstract

Minister of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia, through its substantial policy stipulated in Indonesian Qualification Framework (KKNI), has issued integrating technology into teachers' pedagogical practices. Responding creatively to the policy, the study explores 21 Indonesian undergraduates' perspectives on the use of Edmodo, a virtual learning environment as well as a pedagogical and collaborative communication system, in facilitating them to achieve the learning objectives in Academic Writing Class at English Language Education Study Program, Satya Wacana Christian University (ED-SWCU). Data were collected through an online questionnaire and interview. On the questionnaire, the participants responded 18 multiple-choice statements and 2 open-ended questions dealing with possible advantages and challenges in using Edmodo. In the interview process, the researcher involved 4 participants to explore their perspectives on how Edmodo facilitates them to achieve learning objectives in their classroom. The data analysis provides some evidence that the students respond positively the use of Edmodo. Further, with regard to the findings, the study would seem to indicate the essence of teacher-student communication and the teacher's feedback in helping the students achieve the learning objectives. Eventually, the study hopes to provide ED-SWCU students, regarded as an English teacher candidate, and Indonesian teachers with insights into the pedagogical applications of using Edmodo. It is expected that they can have more alternatives on conceivable educational technologies they can utilize to support their teaching activities and to facilitate their students achieve particular learning objectives in their classrooms.

Keywords: Edmodo, learning objectives, Academic Writing class, teacher-student communication, feedback

Introduction

Minister of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia, through its substantial policies, has issued integrating technology into teachers' pedagogical activities. One of the policies is stipulated in Indonesian Qualification Framework (KKNI) that technically consists of nine qualification levels with specific descriptions to perform (Kementrian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2012). With regard to the framework, Indonesian teachers who generally possess their Bachelor or Master Degree are in the level 6 to 8. In essence, the descriptions in those levels appear to encourage the teacher to make use of technology in their teaching activities. Therefore, this seems probable that the teachers cannot always traditionally depend their teaching and learning on the use of white board provided in their classroom.

Literature has discussed various online technologies that the teachers can employ to support their pedagogical activities. Some of them are Blogs (Pinkman, 2005; Ray & Hocutt, 2006; Fellner & Apple, 2006; Harwood, 2010; Ubaidullah, Mahadi, & Ching, 2013); Wiki and RSS (Duffy & Bruns, 2006); and Facebook (Al-Hammody, 2014). Without attempting to make any comparison with the above-mentioned technologies, the present study, in response to the Qualification Framework, discusses Edmodo as an alternative online technology that the teachers can use to support their teaching activities.

As a virtual learning environment (Light & Polin, 2010), in which "students can learn even when they are literally miles away from their teacher and classmates" (Harmer, 2007, p.121) and "a pedagogical and collaborative communication system" (Wallace, 2014, p.294), Edmodo, on the one hand, is said to possess some pedagogical advantages. It provides "a simple way for teachers and students in a virtual class to connect and collaborate" (Balasubramanian, Jaykurman, & Fukey, 2014, p.417) and helps to form a teacher-student bond (Lewis, 2014). A study conducted to 81 freshmen at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi also reveals that Edmodo helps the students to consult their teacher personally, review lessons posted by their teacher, submit their work, and get feedback from their teacher easily (Kongchan, 2012). Furthermore, a more recent study (Balasubramanian, et al., 2014) involved 285 students at a private university in Selangor district at Malaysia. The results would seem to indicate that Edmodo enables the students to access their teacher's resources, make enquiries on information posted by their teacher, have a fast communication (e.g. alerts, postings, notification) and make online appointments with their teacher. It is also highlighted that the students can submit their assignments and receive feedback from their teacher and classmates. It is also well noted that icons by their teachers for feedback and badges make the students feel

motivated. Essentially, Rahts (2013) believes that once students are put in small groups formed in Edmodo, they can collaborate with their classmates on particular classroom activities.

On the other hand, regardless its pedagogical advantages, there are still some possible challenges in using Edmodo. For instance, a study involving 22 undergraduates in Balikesir University in Turkey revealed that the students' interactions are limited as they cannot send any messages to other students in their Edmodo class list (Cankaya, Durak, & Yünkül, 2013). Al-Kathiri (2015) also argues, "The slow-speed internet of Edmodo Mobile is poorly suited for students' needs" (p.199). Besides, it was found that the students could not send an assignment and take a quiz by their Edmodo mobile application. That students still forget their Edmodo passwords is another potential pitfall in using Edmodo (DJohnson, 2009).

Considering the potential advantages and challenges from Edmodo, the present study specifically aims to explore Indonesian undergraduates' perspectives in using Edmodo during their learning process. More specifically, the study explores their perspectives on possible advantages and challenges in using Edmodo to support them in achieving learning objectives in their classroom and on how Edmodo facilitates them to achieve the objectives, which to the best of the researcher's knowledge, have not been discussed sufficiently in the literature.

Although I grant that the aims of the present study might follow the general trend of the previous related studies (Cankaya, et al., 2013; Balasubramanian, et al., 2014; Lewis, 2014), I still maintain that the study can conceivably provide students in the English Language Education Study Program of Satya Wacana Christian University (ED-SWCU), regarded as English language teachers' candidates, with experiences in using Edmodo. In that case, the experience hopes to provide them with new ideas to use an alternative educational technology to support their students in achieving particular learning objectives in their future classes. Furthermore, the study also hopes to provide insights for Indonesian teachers into the pedagogical applications of using Edmodo, specifically in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classrooms, so they can have more alternatives on possible educational technology that they can use to support their teaching activities and to facilitate their students to achieve particular learning objectives in their classrooms.

Method

The present study aims to explore perspectives of Indonesian undergraduates on possible advantages and challenges in using Edmodo particularly in their writing classroom and on how Edmodo facilitates them to achieve learning objectives in their classroom. To achieve the objective, the study was based on an online questionnaire designed by the use of *Survey Monkey* application and an open-ended interview (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

Participants and context of the study

The study involved 21 students of Academic Writing class D at ED-SWCU. The class aims to equip students with knowledge and skills in writing an academic paper, which requires library research and syntheses of literature, relevant information from a variety of sources (Hinkel, 2004) and discusses "a subject of common interest and gives the writer's view" (Bailey, 2011, p.3). Furthermore, at the end of the course, the students are expected to be able to achieve the following basic competence. They are [1] to identify key words and issues related to a particular course, [2] to position an argument in the mid of what others say, [3] to integrate what others say with what they say, [4] to quote, paraphrase, and summarize sources in an appropriate way and [5] to be critical and reflective toward their own writing and development as second language writers.

Materials

The researcher constructed an online questionnaire that comprises 18 multiple-choice statements and 2 open-ended questions. More specifically, the statements asked the respondents to agree or disagree with four-scale options related to possible advantages and challenges in using Edmodo. All statements were adapted from Al-Kathiri (2015) and developed from the related literature discussing the advantages (Kongchan, 2012; Balasubramanian, et al., 2014; Lewis, 2014) and the challenges (DJohnson, 2009; Cankaya, et al., 2013) in using Edmodo. Then, the two open-ended questions, adapted from (Al-Kathiri, 2015), enabled the respondents to convey their further perspectives on other possible advantages and challenges that the previous statements did not cover. In addition to the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview in which the interviewer may ask a series of structured questions to the interviewee and subsequently explore more deeply with open-form questions in order to obtain further information from the interviewees (Gall, et al., 2007). The interview was specifically intended to explore students' perspectives on how Edmodo facilitates them to achieve learning objectives in their classroom.

Data collection

The researcher met the students in Academic Writing class (on March 3rd, 2015), explained the web-address where the online questionnaire was uploaded, and asked them to respond it. After administering the questionnaire, the researcher, on March 4th 2015, interviewed 4 students and recorded their views towards the issues. The interviewees were those who gave various and rich written responses on the open questions posed in the questionnaire. Importantly, the willingness to take a part further in this study became another consideration on the selection of the interviewees. Unlike the questionnaire, the researcher conducted the interview in *Bahasa Indonesia* and allowed the interviewees to respond all questions using the same language. Its underlying reason was the researcher aimed to ensure that they could provide clear and deep responses during the interview. The researcher, afterwards, transcribed, analyzed the recorded oral information, and proceeded to the data analysis stage.

Data analysis

The questionnaire data were analyzed using mixed methods analysis. The researcher initially calculated the frequencies of choices made by the participants with regard to the four-option scales (strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree). Then, in analyzing the answers for 2 open-ended questions and the interview data, the researcher followed the qualitative data analysis procedures (Creswell, 2003). Initially, he read all the students' responses and highlighted particular ideas to find emerging themes related to the issues. The next step was to advance the themes and to represent them in the qualitative narrative. Creswell asserts that using a narrative passage to state the findings of the analysis is the most frequent approach in this step. Therefore, the researcher described every theme, supported it with excerpts of the students' responses from the questionnaire and the interview, and interpreted the data.

Findings

This part covers three main sub-sections. The initial two sub-sections present the findings obtained from the questionnaire discussing advantages and disadvantages of using Edmodo. Meanwhile, the last sub-section discusses the findings analyzed from the interview data exploring the students' perspectives on how Edmodo facilitates them to achieve the learning objectives.

The possible advantages in using Edmodo

The data analysis on the possible advantages was based on the students' responses to 13 four-option-scale statements and 1 open-ended question. The findings indicate that a large majority of the students respond positively the use of Edmodo in their Academic Writing class. In terms of communication, the students agree that Edmodo provides them opportunities to communicate with their teacher (61.90%) and with their classmates (57.14%) outside the class in order to discuss problems in writing and a particular learning material that they still do not understand well. Besides, through the communication, most of the students (66.67%) agree that Edmodo helps them to practice their writing skill.

The students' agreement on ideas that Edmodo promotes learning efficiency for them is also obvious. They can easily access their classroom learning materials (52.38%) and classroom essential information (47.62%) even when they cannot attend the class. In fact, the students agree the benefits of Edmodo through its mobile services application as it can keep them updated with the classroom essential information. They also favor that Edmodo enables them to access feedback given by the teacher (61.90%) and by classmates (66.67%) to their written work easily. Then, most of the students (52.38%) believe that Edmodo saves their time and reduces their learning costs as they can download the class learning materials and upload their assignments electronically. This is in line with the written responses to the open-ended statement:

Edmodo really helps me as I do not need to spend any money on printing my paper over and over again since I can upload my paper in Edmodo electronically. It also helps me to get or to upload my writing when I cannot come to the class and it is more efficient because I can open it whenever I want. (S13/EFC/QS)

I love the teacher's choice in using Edmodo, because the site is easy to access and if I forget to bring my material in class, I can just go online, log in to Edmodo, and download the material that I need. It really saves my time since I can easily upload my assignments through the site. Overall, Edmodo really helps me to learn Academic writing efficiently. (S6/EFC/QS)

Further, in relation to Edmodo's technological components, such as Icons and Badges, the findings show that the components make the majority of the students (57.14%) feel motivated to write better. Interestingly, most of the students (71.43%) also express their agreement on the fact that Edmodo helps to create teacher-student bonding. In responses to the open-ended statement, it is noted that Edmodo helps

teachers to monitor easily any late submissions of their students' assignments (see Figure 1). It is as what a student conveys:

In other classes that do not use the similar application, students usually submit their assignments in their teacher's box when s/he cannot come to the class. It is possible that they can submit their assignment after the deadline as long as their teacher has not checked the box. They are safe. This case will not happen in Edmodo since we can obviously know whether we submit our assignments late. (S16/LSM/QS)



Figure 1 Edmodo's Late-Submission Notification

The possible challenges in using Edmodo

Similarly, related to possible challenges in using Edmodo that can hinder the students to achieve the learning objectives in their Academic Writing Class, the data analysis was based on the students' responses to 5 four-option-scale statements and 1 open-ended question. The findings show two frequent challenges experienced by the students. The first challenge is related to lacking access to good internet connection outside the class (47.62%). This is in harmony with some students' written responses clarifying their difficulties in accessing the internet connection:

It is because the internet access (WiFi) from the Faculty is often in trouble; sometimes this disturbs the access to Edmodo. (S1/LIC/QS)

The problem is more on the internet connection. Even, when we rely on the campus' connection, it sometimes does not run well. Therefore, in a certain occasion, it is still difficult to log in to Edmodo and send an assignment. (S17/LIC/QS)

The other challenge deals with being unable to send direct messages to classmates listed in the Edmodo class members (38.10%), so it causes the limited communication among students. In addition, the students' responses to the open-ended statement appear to prove that students sometimes cannot open attachments containing more than 2 files uploaded by their teacher in Edmodo:

Sometimes I cannot open some attachments whenever the teacher uploads the attachments all at once (3 attachments in one post). There is an option telling that I should click "show 1 more attachments" and sometimes I found difficulties in opening the attachments since the link did not respond when I clicked it. (S20/ATC/QS)

Though the Edmodo mobile application, on the one hand, is regarded as an advantage, some students, on the other hand, view that it cannot show any notification when their teacher posts a particular assignment unless they directly open it. Besides, it cannot enable them to access their teacher's feedback:

Though I have an Edmodo application in my phone, the most frustrating thing is, it never shows any notification. I have to open the app regularl to check whether the teacher has posted an assignment in Edmodo or not. (S2/MBA/QS)

Edmodo in facilitating the students to achieve the learning objectives

This section presents the analysis results from the interview data exploring the students' perspectives on how Edmodo facilitates them to achieve learning objectives in their Academic Writing Class. The results reveal two major themes, namely students-teacher communication and feedback distribution as the answer towards how Edmodo facilitates the students to achieve the learning objectives in their classroom.

Students-teacher communication

In line with the questionnaire results, the students do not deny that Edmodo well facilitates the communication between a student with his/her teacher. Edmodo also enables students to consult their work when they cannot meet their teacher directly. This is in line with what a student conveys in the interview:

There is a person with his/her extrovert or introvert characteristic. In my case, I like to send messages to my teachers without directly meeting them. Therefore, I usually post my questions to Edmodo, so my classmates can also read them. Moreover, my teachers are usually busy with their work, so I sometimes find it uneasy to send them messages to their personal E-mail. In that case, I can communicate with them through Edmodo that has provided the specific context for discussions. (S5/STC/IW/translated by the researcher)

Feedback distribution

The interview result is also in line with what was found in the questionnaire data. In that case, some students believe that Edmodo helps them access any feedback given to their written work. More specifically, a student says that she could access the feedback without being able to come to the class. Therefore, she could revise her essay soon after she got the feedback uploaded in Edmodo.

Edmodo facilitates me, especially when I can get my feedback that helps to achieve the learning objectives. When I get it, I can directly revise my essay. Afterwards, I can send it back, so my teacher can read it and give me other feedback to improve my work. The more we revise, the better our essay will be. With the use of Edmodo, we can be more efficient as we do not need to wait the time when we meet our teacher in the classroom. We can get the feedback from Edmodo. It helps me. (S9/FED/IW/translated by the researcher)

Discussions And Conclusion

This study explores perspectives of Indonesian undergraduates on possible advantages and challenges in using Edmodo particularly in their EFL writing classroom as an attempt to achieve the learning objectives. In essence, the findings tend to show that the students perceive a number of advantages in using Edmodo that provides them opportunities to communicate with their teacher and with their classmates discussing any problems related to their writing class. This finding may be a demonstration of Balasubramanian et al.'s (2014) view that Edmodo provides teachers and students a simple way to connect one another. In that case, Edmodo is also said to help the students practice their writing skill.

Further, the findings would seem to show that Edmodo promotes learning efficiency as the students, wherever they are, can easily access their classroom learning materials and related-essential information. It also enables the students to access their teacher's and classmates' feedback to their written work easily. These findings reaffirm that Edmodo helps students to review lessons posted by their teacher, submit their work, obtain feedback from their teacher easily (Kongchan, 2012), and enables them to access the resources as well as to receive the feedback (Balasubramanian, et al., 2014). The students also perceive the learning efficiency in a way that Edmodo saves their time and reduces their learning costs as they can download the learning materials and upload their assignments electronically. They possibly do not need to come to their class in order to get a particular learning material to develop their academic essay.

Other obvious advantages are related to the use of Edmodo mobile application that can keep students updated with the classroom essential information and of Icons and Badges that make the majority of the students feel motivated to write better. Emphasizing the role of Icons and Badges in Edmodo, Balasubramanian, et al. (2014) believes that icons by teachers for their students' feedback and badges make the students feel motivated. Further, the findings reinforce Lewis' (2014) view that Edmodo helps to form a teacher-student bond. It is also highlighted that teachers can easily monitor any late submissions of students' assignments. This seems likely that they can expect their students in Academic Writing Class to make a serious effort by submitting all writing assignments on time.

Dealing with the possible challenges in using Edmodo, the findings provide some evidence that lacking access to a good internet connection is a well-noted issue as Edmodo is an on-line learning platform. Specifically, the students experience the poor internet access (WiFi) from the Faculty and the slow speed internet of Edmodo mobile application. This can possibly hinder them to access a particular file uploaded in Edmodo. The findings appear to confirm Kathiri's (2015) argumentation that "the slow-speed internet of Edmodo Mobile is poorly suited for students' needs" (p.199). In that case, I endorse a view requesting "a related Network Administration Team to provide high speed Wi-Fi freely in a university campus area" (Thien, Phan, Loi, Tho, Suhonen, & Sutinen, 2013, p.11) as a possible way to help the students deal with the internet connection issue. Another challenge is related to a limited interaction among students since they are unable to send direct messages to them. This is a similar issue revealed by earlier researchers (Cankaya, et al., 2013). Besides, the students also find it difficult to open attachments containing more a number of files uploaded in Edmodo. Therefore, having a regular classroom meeting to inform particular classroom information and assignments that the students probably cannot access from their Edmodo account is still necessary.

In relation to the students' perspectives on how Edmodo facilitates them to achieve learning objectives in their Academic Writing Class, the study reveals the fact that Edmodo helps the students to communicate with their teacher. It also helps them obtain feedback given by their teacher more easily. Further, the findings appear to prove the essence of the student-teachers communication and the teacher's feedback to achieve the learning objectives. Therefore, regardless the advantages of Edmodo, the researcher still believes that having a regular in-class discussion is essential, as it provides the students more time to communicate with their teacher and to discuss the feedback given to their written work.

In sum, the present study provides some evidence that the students respond positively the use of Edmodo as an attempt to help them achieve the learning objectives in their Academic Writing class. Besides, the study would seem to show the essence of teachers-student communication and teachers' feedback for the students to achieve the learning objectives in the class. The study hopes to provide the students, as an English teacher candidate, and Indonesian teachers with insights into the pedagogical applications of using Edmodo. It is expected that they can have more alternatives on possible educational technologies that they can use to support their teaching activities and to facilitate their students achieve particular learning objectives in their classrooms. Eventually, it is not a matter of on infusing a course of study with the latest and the most sophisticated educational technology, but is more on utilizing a technology that suits unique needs and interests of teachers and students (Chaney, Chaney, Eddy, 2010).

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