

BLENDED LEARNING VIA SCHOOLGY AS A LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN READING CLASS: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Ahmad Ridho Rojabi
IAIN Jember

ABSTRACT

Online learning integrated with face-to-face learning called blended learning is believed to be more useful than online learning or face-to-face learning itself. *Schoology* as a Learning Management System implemented in blended learning can help teachers to manage class information. *Schoology* allows students and teachers to share information, and provides access to content or administrative features of certain courses. However, despite the benefits of blended learning via *Schoology* mentioned, EFL teachers are still unwilling in exploiting blended learning via *Schoology* in their reading classes. This literature study reviews several papers investigating the benefits and challenges of blended learning via *Schoology* as a Learning Management System. The purpose of the study is to observe the benefits and the challenges of blended learning via *Schoology*. The data were collected through primary and secondary resources. It is expected that the findings will boost the EFL teachers' attention in applying blended learning via *Schoology* in their classes, and draw attention of EFL teachers in covering the challenges of blended learning via *Schoology* to improve students' learning experiences.

Key words: *blended learning, Schoology, reading, benefits, challenges*

I. INTRODUCTION

As technologies in the digital era rapidly develop, people satisfy in many conveniences that the technologies have provided. Communication and interaction become simpler due to the development of Internet technology and advanced communication devices or gadgets. These have some effects on various fields including education as well as teaching and learning. Low (2017) stated that teaching and learning is emphasized on learning rather than on teaching where the role of teachers will be the facilitators, knowledge navigators, and co-learners rather than the knowledge transmitters. The shifting of instructor jobs could be facilitated by the innovation of technologies, and teachers as well as education practitioners can improve their jobs in encouraging learning by applying the advancements of technologies. Bernard (2017) suggested that new technologies like artificial intelligence and educational software

have changed some aspects of education, like transforming the field for students, restructuring the educator roles, developing changes in approaches to teaching, and remodelling classrooms.

Sharples (2002) states that mobile learning provides companion and conflict with formal education: learners can broaden their classroom learning to homework, conducting field trips, and visiting museum, for example, reviewing teaching material on mobile devices, holding private conversation within and outside the school. In line with this, Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler (2005) mentioned that mobile learning has an attribute that contributes to its term, namely; spontaneous, personal, informal, contextual, portable, ubiquitous, and pervasive. It is concluded that these attributes refers to the mobile term itself so when it is applied in education, it could give the learning process everywhere and anytime.

Furthermore, Mikic, et. al. (2007) confirm that mobile learning has discovered a new learning environment that facilitate learners, by implementing action learning aids, exploring teaching materials, interacting between teachers and other learners, and learning anyplace and anytime. It means that the principle highlight of mobile learning is portability and the helpful of learning anyplace and anytime. It is recognized that mobile learning has the benefits tool for lifelong learning. It may also allow parents/teachers to check every intimate detail of learning, so that play and leisure turn into an extension of school activity, to be checked and assessed as consistent records of accomplishments. In line with this, Geddes, (2004); Kukulka et.al (2009) state that mobile learning provided EFL students with substantial contextual opportunities that extended outside the classroom. It is not only stimulated collaboration and interaction between students, but also enhanced their context-awareness about their surrounding environment. It means that mobile learning has role in enhancing contextual and authentic learning practices on reading comprehension. It can improve students' knowledge by associating the content of lesson into real life. It also helps the students to comprehend the topics discussed simpler.

Reading comprehension as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Comprehension entails three elements: the reader who is doing the comprehending, the text is to be comprehended, the activity in which comprehension is a part (Snow, 2002). It means that there is an interaction between the readers and the written language. The readers need to comprehend the information from the text both literally as well inferentially.

Hedge (2003) stated that a set of learning goals is covered in reading course, that is the ability to read the texts in English comprehensively. It means that the EFL teachers have long-range goal to explore through autonomous readers outside reading classroom, building a knowledge of language

which will facilitate reading ability, activating the students' background knowledge, developing the ability to adapt the reading style according to reading purposes, developing the students' knowledge of the structure of written texts in English, taking a critical thinking to the contents of the texts.

According to Dreyer and Nel (2003), teaching reading through technology facilitates student's involvement and increase motivation to learn. Moreover, Butler and Wiburg (2003) insist that technology can be a vehicle to practice reading skills based on each student's interests and needs by fulfilling a variety of purposes for reading. Most EFL learning opportunities are commonly classroom-based and/or teacher-centered rather than focused on students and their demands inside as well as outside of the classroom. However, there has been a growing interest in updating theoretical assumptions and new educational approaches and methods that can maintain effective learning, particularly, under collaborative, authentic, and meaningful conditions (Hu, 2002). In other words, technology or mobile device learning can support and boost student's knowledge, experience, and opportunities in learning reading.

In fact, many university students have insufficient exposure to English. Fo that reason, they have poor English ability, especially on reading comprehension. Majority of the students learn and use English only in the classroom and they need more time to practice and learning outside classroom. The students only have 100 minutes in every meeting in classroom. Thus, lecturers need to give additional time outside classroom to the students to learn by giving more tasks and assignments to them. So, students are required to accomplish their assignment after class. In addition, according to the researcher's observation, the students feel bored in doing conventional assignment in reading class.

Gabb (2000) stated that some learners face problems in fluency even though they have had basic decoding skills. She mentions a number of boundaries such as limited vocabularies and lack of background knowledge

(schematic knowledge). Many students with disabilities perform problems with reading fluency, text comprehension skills, vocabulary learning, and abstract from text presentations (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1993).

Because students with disabilities have difficulty organizing thoughts, getting through difficult words, working with difficult text selection, reading and reviewing, and summarizing and writing about what they have read, teachers should use technology tools to help those students become independent and provide opportunities for success (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1993). It means that teachers start understanding how they can implement various medias and technology tools for literacy instruction to the students based on how every EFL learners reacts to text-based information and support teaching and learning activities through blended learning.

Some experts mentioned the concepts of blended learning. Littlejohn and Pegler (2007) confirmed that the most recent term "blend" has been linked to e-learning so blended learning is the mixture of e-learning and traditional instructional methods. Bersin (2004) defined blended learning as "traditional method supplemented with online learning method". Meanwhile, Garrison and Vaughan (2008) defined blended learning as "a design approach whereby both face-to-face and online learning are made better by the presence of the other", and the combination of offline and online learning enables the one to compliment the other. It can be concluded that nowadays blended learning is characterized as an instructional approach which combines face to face learning with online learning method, and what is more, each learning method complement another learning method for better learning quality. By doing so, the blended learning is applicable for teaching reading especially helping the EFL learners to enhance their autonomy and motivation as well as to help them comprehend the texts.

Many people ask when they hear about blended learning, "what is being blended?". While there are a wide variety of responses to this question (Driscoll, 2002). The

three most definitions was documented by Graham, Allen, & Ure (2003) are: 1) BL is combining instructional modalities (or delivery media) (Bersin & Associates, 2003; Orey, 2002a 2002b; Singh & Reed, 2001; Thomson, 2002). 2) BL is combining instructional methods (Driscoll, 2002; House, 2002; Rossett, 2002). 3) BL is combining online and face to face instruction (Reay, 2001; Rooney, 2003; Sands, 2002; Ward & LaBranche, 2003; Young, 2002).

Technology-enhanced literacy teaching can accelerate students' learning and allow them to practice knowledge naturally. According to Egbert (2009), teachers can direct students to the effective use of technology in the interest of creating something innovative in the classroom. As a result, students will be motivated to explore their own ideas and thoughts and learn from others. Thus, these literacies will drive students toward a different kind of meaningful thinking and decision making that is strongly connected to their daily activities. This review of *Schoology* learning management system figures out how *Schoology* is suitably assigned with the students' learning and literacy activities in the classroom nowadays. The *Schoology* is one of learning management systems or online learning platforms which is applicable in blended learning and is reviewed dealing with the three design criteria from technology supported instruction by Cummins et al. (2007): provide cognitive challenge and opportunities for deep processing of meaning, promote self-regulated activity for collaborative inquiry, focus on multiliteracies in twenty-first century need.

The steps in teaching reading through *Schoology* LMS are as following: 1) The teacher makes an account of *Schoology* LMS as an instructor. 2). The teacher gives access code to the students to join reading course on *Schoology* LMS made by teacher. 3). The students make *Schoology* LMS account as student. 4). The teachers can post some materials about kind of texts in *Schoology* LMS. After that, the teacher can ask the students to answer some questions provided and discuss the texts on *Schoology* LMS. 5). Next, the students can post their answers, discussion and

summary related to the texts on *Schoology* LMS and the teacher can give feedbacks or comments.

Concerning the consideration that blended learning is the powerful learning method compared to conventional learning method or online learning method itself, this study aimed at grasping the benefits and challenges of blended learning via *Schoology* as the learning management system in reading class.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper was conducted as a literature study and the method of collecting data provided several steps. The first step was collecting data related to the topic of the study from primary and secondary resources. The primary data were taken from several research papers studying the implementation of *Schoology* in language teaching and learning practices in blended learning environment, while the secondary data were from articles and books which were used to support the topic of this study. The second step was classifying the data. The data collected from the research papers and articles were related to the implementation of *Schoology* in language teaching and learning practices, which focus on its benefits and challenges. After classifying the data, the next step was analyzing the data, and the last step was drawing conclusions based on the data analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In blended learning method, face-to-face learning and online learning supplement each other. The combination of these learning methods can beneficially improve the quality of teaching and learning. There are many reasons why some instructors, as well as learners might choose blended learning over other learning options for the benefits in teaching learning process. Osguthorpe & Graham (2003) mentioned 6 reasons why teachers choose to implement blended learning system: 1)

pedagogical richness, 2) access to knowledge, 3) social interaction, 4) personal agency, 5) cost effectiveness, and 6) ease of revision. Furthermore, Graham et al., (2003) found that some teachers implement blended learning to the following reasons: 1) improved pedagogy, 2) increased access/flexibility, as well as 3) increased cost effectiveness.

Moreover, Thorne (2003) confirmed that blended learning can equip the right learning both at the right time and at the right place for each learner, which make learning more accessible and personalized. However, Thorne (2003) stated that blended learning requires enthusiasm, energy and commitment that many do not possess. The other challenges are related with the limited information about the appropriate implementation of blended learning, insufficient infrastructure to support blended learning, lack of IT literacy from learners as well as teachers, and other impacts like overwork on teachers' part and cognitive load on students' part (Winstead, n.d.).

Schoology as a Learning Management System (LMS) has been applied by various institutions in many countries for online learning as well as blended learning. Byrd (2013) confirmed the benefits of *Schoology* including the easiness of use, the security for student's safety, and the efficient tools and resources for teachers. Catapano (n.d.) mentioned the benefits of *Schoology* for its features. There are, however, the challenges of *Schoology* cover the weakness of students to get troubled, the limited account that can be opened on one computer synchronously, and low moderation of student comments and discussions (Byrd, 2013). As *Schoology* is a closed system, any posts uploaded on *Schoology* would not be shared with people outside *Schoology*, and students are rather difficult to build their social media relationships because it is moderated by teachers (Catapano, n.d.).

Those benefits and challenges mentioned by some experts resemble to the findings of several studies exploring blended learning to enhance students' learning experience. Most of the studies discussed in

this paper were carried out to see some aspects dealing with reading course or General English course. In the article entitled "The use of *Schoology* to Enhance Students' Reading Comprehension at Lakidance University (Rama, Rahim & Albert, 2018). They conducted mixed-method research design. Data were collected by using Reading test and students' self diary. This study found that *Schoology* gives a significant enhancement on students' reading comprehension from pre-test to post test. Based on the students' self diary, it showed that the students in experimental group gave positive responses toward schoology, the advantages of schoology for teaching reading comprehension were responsible, collaborative, ease of use and accessible while the challenges were the internet connection, time of the schoology and monotonous.

In the article entitled "*E-learning Implementation in Foundation English Class: Learners' Perspectives and Learning Achievement*", Low (2017) stated that the implementation of *Schoology* in the class due to the quite large class he had and the attempts for students to practice English were limited. The students noted that *Schoology* was a good language learning tool, and the implementation of *Schoology* helped enhance students' achievements. *Schoology* improved students' motivation and developed students' positive attitudes toward learning outside classroom, increased interaction between teachers and students, and increased students' engagement in learning. However, students still faced technical problems, for instance the trouble in submitting answers to quizzes and the failure in recording the scores.

Furthermore, in the article entitled "*ELT Instructors' Attitudes towards the Use of Blended Learning in Tertiary Level English Language Programs*", Çepik, Gönen and Sazak (2016) also revealed that blended learning via *Schoology* as the online learning platform provided more opportunities for interaction between teachers and students, students and their peers, as well as students and materials. Furthermore, it allowed teachers to create online practices with automatic marking, producing automatic results to the students

and enabling the teachers to record their students' progress. As an online learning platform, *Schoology* supplied teachers with tools to upload materials in several formats like text files, audio files, images, videos, and links. Some challenges in blended learning cover the lack of instruction, deficient infrastructure, and lack of IT literacies.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Blended learning is believed as a new hope for quality learning, but despite its benefits it obtains some challenges. The benefits and challenges of blended learning are discussed more detailed particularly the blended learning via *Schoology* as a learning management system. As a learning method, the benefits of blended learning include its possibility to make learning more accessible and personalized, independent learning, give students with richer educational experiences, reduce face to face contact and save time, involve in active learning both independently and collaboratively. Meanwhile, the use of *Schoology* can give some benefits to the users; 1) there is a discussion forum; 2) no private information is required from student; 3) students join classes by access code; 4) teacher/instructor has fully management control; 5) teacher/instructor can track students' progress; 6) teacher/instructor can create assignment, quiz. Teachers can choose the form of quiz such as true/false, multiple choice, ordering, fill in the blank, short answer/essay question.

When *Schoology* as a learning management system used in the blended learning environment, it provides several benefits: providing ease of use, providing the students safety; providing efficient tools and resources for teachers in optimizing instruction; conducting the lessons enjoyable; enhancing learners' enthusiasm, self-confidence and responsibility; encouraging students' critical thinking; overcoming issues of the big class; enhancing students' motivation and learners' autonomy; developing students' positive attitudes toward learning outside classroom; increasing interaction between teachers and students, students and their peers, students

and materials; allowing teachers to do administrative tasks simpler; and improving students' learning outcome.

The challenges of blended learning in general include the lack of enthusiasm and lack of IT literacies for the students, they still want the teachers or instructors to provide some guidance for its use, limited information about the appropriate implementation of blended learning, insufficient infrastructure, lack of training and preparation for teachers using online tools in the classroom and they feel that they cannot implement them effectively to meet students' needs. The challenges on *Schoology* when it is implemented as a learning management system or online learning platform in blended learning, which cover the students unwilling in accessing the online platform due to poor and unstable internet connection, and lack of IT literacies; deficient infrastructure; lack of instruction and preparation; no two accounts can be opened synchronously on a computer; and students' comments or discussion cannot be moderated by teachers. In several articles, it is highlighted that *Schoology* should be applied only as the supplement to the face to face learning to complement each other. Since there are several benefits of blended learning, however it requires consistent and integrated plans in advancing effective plans of blended learning and in implementing it with appropriate strategies. It is necessary for the teachers or instructors to implement technology purposefully and make it clear how it is benefiting the students.

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