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ENERGIZING STUDENTS' LEARNING THROUGH E-LEARNING PORTAL

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Abstrak: Meningkatkan Pembelajaran Mahasiswa Melalui Portal Pembelajaran Elektronik. Studi kasus ini berfokus pada penerapan portal *e-learning* untuk meningkatkan kegiatan belajar di Program Studi Pendidikan Magister Bahasa Inggris Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Makassar. Ada tiga tujuan yang ingin dicapai, yaitu untuk menjelaskan: (1) jenis-jenis fasilitas *moodle e-learning* tipe portal yang mempromosikan lebih banyak interaksi di Program Studi Pendidikan Magister Bahasa Inggris Program Pascasarjana UNM, (2) jenis-jenis fasilitas dari portal *e-learning* yang paling memotivasi mahasiswa, dan (3) tantangan yang dihadapi mahasiswa dalam kaitannya dengan penggunaan portal *e-learning*. Penelitian ini menggunakan tiga macam instrumen, yaitu buku harian, angket, dan lembar observasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada tiga jenis kegiatan yang dilakukan, yaitu tugas, *forum*, dan *chatting* dan tiga jenis sumber daya, yaitu *file*, *folder*, dan *URL*. Pemberdayaan portal *e-learning* berbasis *moodle* dapat meningkatkan interaksi belajar dan motivasi mahasiswa. Namun demikian, ditemukan pula kelemahan yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa, yaitu koneksi internet yang lambat.

Abstract: Energizing Students' Learning Through e-Learning Portal. This case study focuses on the implementation of e-learning portal to enhance the learning activities at the English Education Study Program of Master Degree of Graduate Studies, Universitas Negeri Makassar. There are three objectives to be achieved, namely to describe: (1) the sorts of facilities of Moodle E-learning portal type that promote more interactions at the English Department of Graduate Studies Program of UNM, (2) the sorts of facilities of the e-learning portal that motivate students most, and (3) the challenges that students encounter in relation to the use of the e-learning portal. This study used three kinds of instruments, namely diary, questionnaire, and observation checklist. The result show that there are three kinds of activities performed, namely assignment, forum, and chat, and three kinds of resources, namely file, folder, and URL. The empowerment of moodle-based e-learning portal could generally enhance the students' learning interactions and motivation. However, it was also found that there was a drawback encountered by the students, namely the slow internet connection.

Keywords: e-learning portal, english language teaching, e-learning

The advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have significantly altered the teaching paradigm. The classroom environment has shifted from conventional to virtual learning modes, which is commonly called virtual learning environment (VLE). VLE has become a fashion in English language teaching. It is a set of teaching and learning tools which are intended to boost up students' learning experiences by incorporating the use of ICT tools and internet facilities in the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, it is expected that VLE

provide richer resources for both teachers and students, promote more interactions for students to practice the language they learn, provide plenty activities outside the classroom to accomplish the tasks given. It also allows teachers and students to interact and communicate each other online.

Of course there are some factors that we must consider in order to make VLE happen at schools or higher education institutions. The first is the infrastructure and ICT facilities which may include computers or laptops, server, computer

network, hotspots, LCD projectors, internet connection, e-learning applications, etc. The second is the contents which are relevant to and support the attainment of course objectives and goals. However, still many schools, including higher education level, are not yet equipped with adequate ICT tools and facilities. As a result, it is hard to manage VLE for the sake of supporting and enriching the students' learning activities. Another factor is the teachers' competence and skill in using the available facilities. The teachers are also demanded to have commitment and be more creative and innovative in incorporating virtual learning environment into the curriculum.

In English language teaching, VLE is very potential to support and enhance the learning activities. Since internet provides rich information and authentic materials presented in English, it is very prospective for teachers to manipulate and suit them with the objectives of the courses they teach. Besides, we can also find many ready use materials which can include English language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and language elements, namely vocabulary and grammar. This means that teachers of English are plentifully facilitated, so that they have more opportunities to maximize their teaching delivery. There are also authoring programs that the teachers can use to produce materials and exercises. Those materials and exercises, either taken from websites or created from the authoring programs, can be managed by using certain learning management system. In this study, the researcher will mainly utilize moodle which is already provided in E-learning portal of UNM. It is expected that the empowerment of this VLE type will result in favorable learning outcome for students.

The State University of Makassar has already provided e-learning portal to support the deliveries of courses offered every semester. Internet connection with hotspot facility has also been provided which enables students to access websites, especially the learning portal. However, not many lecturers make use of it. According to the initial observation, only 9.39% of the courses offered are delivered at UNM e-learning system. Based on the background and the problem statement above, the following research questions are put forward: (1) What sorts of facilities of VLE of Moodle E-learning portal type promote more interactions at the English Department of Graduate Studies Program of UNM? (2) What sorts

of facilities of the e-learning portal motivate students most? and (3) What sorts of challenges do students encounter in relation to the use of the type of VLE?

This study is aimed at describing the following: (1) the sorts of facilities of VLE of Moodle E-learning portal type that promote more interactions at the English Department of Graduate Studies Program of UNM, (2) the sorts of facilities of the e-learning portal that motivate students most, and (3) the sorts of challenges that students encounter in relation to the use of the type of VLE.

This study is expected to be useful for the lecturers who want to apply the VLE of the Moodle e-learning portal type. The good practices yielded by this study could become a model and reference for other courses at the English Department of Graduate Studies Program of UNM. For students, it can inspire them to apply when they become teachers for those who are not yet teachers and the student teachers when they come back to their school. For the institution, it can be useful for decision making, which leads to movement in relation to the implementation of VLE of Moodle type.

There have been many researches which are related to the use of ICT tools and VLE in English language learning. The types of VLE investigated vary according to the tools and facilities utilized, modes of interactions, learning outcomes, and affective domains, such as motivation, interest, attitude, etc. In relation to the teaching delivery, Noni (2009) found out that most students preferred the language learning materials used on the CALL programs as an addition to-face-to-face teaching with the material used in the classroom (CALL-Classroom) compared to the one with the material used in the students' own time (CALL-Owntime). This finding should be read in the context that the CALL activities are more favorably implemented to aid the EFL teaching in the classroom. Based on the above conclusions, it is important to note that when computer facilities are available in a unit of education, it is very unfortunate if CALL environment is not set up. This research and others have proved that CALL offers new opportunities for better language practice, especially in the latter phase of computer use in EFL teaching.

Based on the finding above, it is clear that the use of computer to aid English language

teaching is prospective, and therefore the teachers of EFL should make utmost effort to optimally utilize the computer facilities in their teaching deliveries. They should creatively manipulate possible applications and ready-use materials to support the achievement of the curriculum goals. There will be no time constraints due to time restriction at school, since they can be accessed anytime.

Blending face-to-face teaching with an online program as supplementary can be used to improve the achievement of students studying English as a foreign language (Al-Jarf, 2004; Al-Jarf, 2005; Bañados, 2006; Pazio, 2010). Teachers can assign complementary resources to students to improve their learning and engage them with English outside the class. Incorporating online tools such as an online LMS and authentic materials like articles and podcasts in class can foster student learning. This implies that LMS can enrich the students' learning activities.

In respect to the affective aspect, Bergen, French, and Hawkins (2012) reported that students using VLEs show differences in motivation to use online technologies and feedback, and in satisfaction with access to technology, as compared to non-users. This signifies that VLEs could encourage students to utilize and familiarize themselves with ICT tools which may become soft skill for them.

VLE (virtual learning environment) has become a popular term to indicate the use of computer facilities to support learning processes. Definitions on VLE vary among the experts. Shortt (2010) states that a VLE is a computer system, predominantly a web-based system, used to facilitate learning. There are a variety of terms used in relation to the definition, functions and role of a VLE. VLEs can be referred to as a Learning Management System (LMS), Course Management System (CMS), Learning Content Management System (LCMS), Managed Learning Environment (MLE), Learning Support System (LSS), Online Learning Center (OLC), or Learning Platform (LP). In this study, LMS is the term used to refer to VLE.

In many circumstances, the term Learning Management System (LMS) is synonymous with the other terms like Course Management System (CMS) and Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). LMS is basically designed to support academic courses. It is a web application consisting of a

set of tools that enables the instructor to create online course content and post it on the Web without having to handle HTML or other programming languages. The lecturer and students can access the system from anywhere with a LAN and Internet connection. In line with this, Daniels (2008) defines LMS as a software application that typically run on a web server or network server and allow educators to easily manage course and student data through a web browser interface. The primary functions available in LMS are to organize and distribute course content, administer learning exercises or quizzes, and track student progress. Ninoriya et al (2011) further explain that an LMS is a collection of procedures used to describe processes in an environment that requires collaboration between different actors. These procedures are designed to manage data access based on user roles, collecting and sharing information, data storage assistance, content redundancy check, and reporting.

According to Goertler (2009) LMSs, within which a teacher can create a site for his or her students with many Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) tools, are a virtual place for communicative activities with the computer. Common features of LMSs are announcements, calendars, class roster, discussion forums, chats, class email, grade books, content folders, and assessment tools and some LMSs also include blog space and wiki space. LMSs can help make the learning environment more accessible and promote independent learning and classroom responsibility.

In this study, the LMS type used is Moodle which is currently installed in the E-learning portal of UNM and can be accessed through the web address: lms.unm.ac.id. Moodle stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. Moodle has several features considered typical of an e-learning platform, in addition to some original innovations like its filtering system. Moodle can be used in many types of environments such as in education, training and development, and business settings. However, our focus here is the environment in education. Some typical features of Moodle are: (1) assignment submission, (2) discussion forum, (3) files download, (4) grading, (5) moodle instant messages, (6) online calendar, (7) online news and announcement (College and course

level), (8) online quiz, (9) wiki, and (10) gamification

Developers can extend Moodle's modular construction by creating plugins for specific new functionality. Moodle's infrastructure supports many types of plug-ins: (1) activities (including word and math games), (2) resource types, (3) question types (multiple choice, true and false, fill in the blank, etc.), (4) data field types (for the database activity), (5) graphical themes, (6) authentication methods (can require username and password accessibility), (7) enrollment methods, (8) content filters.

METHOD

To carry out the research, a case study was undertaken at the English Study Program of Master Degree in Graduate Study Program of State University of Makassar where an LMS of Moodle type of VLE has been utilized in some courses to supplement the face-to-face teaching. This study tried to seek information about the utilized VLE facilities promoting interactions, the facilities motivating students to learn, and the challenges encountered due to the use of the VLE type.

The research subjects consist of the students of Master Degree of English Education Study Program who take the course "ICT in English Language Teaching". The number is 17 students. They all have at least basic skill of computer, so that there should not be a prior computer training for the students to familiarize the e-learning portal of UNM.

The instruments used in this study were questionnaire and diary note. The diary note was taken to gather data on the circumstances and learning experiences of the students. The questionnaire was intended for the data about the motivation of the students. And the observation checklist was used to check the students' activities which is complimentary with diary notes.

The procedure of collecting data was done based on the instruments of the study. The diary notes were done by recording in writing all learning performance and facts carried out by students in every session. The data collected through questionnaire was done by distributing the questionnaire after the all sessions conducted through the e-learning program. And the procedure for the observation checklist included

filling out the form according to the activities performed by students in every session.

The analysis for the data diary was qualitatively done by describing all phenomena and learning facts occurred during the session. The data from the questionnaire was analyzed by using descriptive statistical analysis. For the data taken from observation checklist, the analysis was also done qualitatively.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion include the general information about the respondents, the sorts of modules which promote more interactions, the sorts of modules which motivate students to learn, and the challenges students encounter in relation to the use of the Moodle-based e-learning portal at the English Education Study Program of Graduate Study Program of UNM.

The General Information about the Respondents

This general information is intended to know the ICT background of the respondents. According to the data, the computer skill of most respondents is in good category. This means that most of the respondents have at least the basic skill of computer. As student role, this skill is absolutely enough to understand the instructions and use the modules of Moodle-based e-learning portal. The students do not need to have high competence and skill in computer programming to use and operate this portal.

In terms of the students' feeling of ease and comfort in using the Moodle-based e-learning portal, it is in very high category. This indicates that the e-learning portal was a very friendly use one. The students experienced that they could use it very easily and comfortably. However, the students very highly needed training on the use of Moodle-based e-learning portal. This is contradictory with their feeling of ease and comfort in using it. It can also be predicted that the need of training might lead to the use of the portal not only as a student but also as a teacher, or even as an admin for the e-learning system.

Another finding is the desire of the respondents to use this portal if they would become a teacher. The data show that they very

highly expect to use this portal to support their teaching process. In addition, they also very highly recommend their other friends to use this e-learning portal in their EFL class. They also claimed that this portal type was very relevant to the demand of curriculum. This implies that the respondents regarded that the portal could become an alternative device to enhance the students' learning.

The portal was also claimed to be very potential to create learner centered environment. This is quite relevant since the modules or facilities offer various activities that the students have to perform online. With this scheme, students spent more time to interact with lecturer and their classmates. However, the activities offered depend much on the lecturer who drives the course program in the portal. It is the lecturer who initiates assignment, chatting, discussion forum, quiz, or other activities using the portal. Therefore, the lecturer has to be creative in employing it, so that the students dominate the time to learn, not only in the classroom but also in the e-learning portal.

In line with the students' general view on the matters of motivation and interaction, it can be reckoned that the students were very highly motivated to learn the course program by using the Moodle-based e-learning portal and were highly triggered to perform more interactions, either with lecturer or classmates. This can be inferred that this portal is potentially employed as a scheme of e-learning system at the Graduate Program of the State University of Makassar, especially at the English Education Study Program. The management should take it into account for the sake of quality enhancement.

The Sorts of Modules Promoting Interactions

In the data analysis, the score of each sort of module or facility in relation to the students' interaction is presented which include *Assignment*, *Chat*, *Forum*, *Glossary*, *Lesson*, *Quiz*, and *Choice*. The analysis shows that all modules or facilities are either in good or very good category. It means that all modules employed in the course program could be (very) relevant to employ for promoting learning interactions. This finding is consistent with the general information on the learning interaction above which is also high. However, if we look at them separately, it is found that *Assignment*, *Lesson*, and *Quiz* are in

very high category. These three modules are very dominant to boost up the students' interaction in the learning process. This implies that the modules should become priority if we decide to use this Moodle-based e-learning portal. If they are ordered according to the score, *Assignment* should become the first priority before *Lesson* and *Quiz* successively. In the *Assignment* module, the interactions may be intensified through some activities. The lecturer can initiate interaction by, for example, providing a task through the e-learning portal, which may be completed offline using certain application, such as word-based processing, spreadsheet, or presentation slide. Of course, the students have to submit it at the same portal before the due time. The interaction can be further followed-up by the lecturer by assigning score to the submitted tasks and giving comments and feedback, so that the students know if they were doing their task correctly. These comments and feedback can then be discussed in the face-to-face interaction, and so forth.

The rest, *Chat*, *Forum*, *Glossary*, and *Choice*, are in high category, which signifies that these modules could also potentially promote learning interactions. Yet, the analysis to examine the differences among the modules is not carried out. To come to a general conclusion, the researcher performed mean analysis to see the overall picture. Based on the result of analysis, it is found that the average score is in very high category. It can be concluded that the use of Moodle-based e-learning portal can very potentially promote interactions for students to learn and accomplish the tasks given by the lecturer. Since the interactions are mostly done online and/or offline with the desired application, it is certain that the time spent by students is multiplied intensified. Hence, there are more opportunities for students to grasp more information and knowledge for the sake of gaining better understanding and mastering the course materials.

The Sorts of Modules Motivating Students to Learn

As in Subsection 2 above, the analysis include the data about the modules or facilities, i.e. *Assignment*, *Chat*, *Forum*, *Glossary*, *Lesson*, *Quiz*, and *Choice*. The result of data analysis shows that two of seven modules are classified

gh category. These three mod category, namely *Assignment* and nt to boost up the students' ndicates that the two modules could arning process. This implmotivate the students to learn. In s should become priority if the students had very high learning s Moodle-based e-learning pa relation to the use of *Assignment* lered according to the scoreodule of Moodle-based e-learning become the first priority bems that there is a similarity with *Quiz* successively. In the above in which *Assignment* appear , the interactions may bi high category. It can be postulated some activities. The lectureent is mandatory to be applied in the ion by, for example, provd e-learning portal for both the e-learning portal, whtudents' learning motivation and ed offline using certain appl

rd-based processing, spre in the Subsection2 above, the *Quiz* ition slide. Of course, the stuars to be in very high category in it at the same portal before ion, which means that students had raction can be further followarning motivation. It can be inferred by assigning score to the suflule is very applicable to encourage ng comments and feedbackant to learn and perform their tasks. know if they were doinjodule, the lecturer may set up a quiz . These comments and feedt consist of an objective exercise, such ssed in the face-to-face int choice, or literal or inferential re students have to answer it or them e rest, *Chat, Forum, Gl* have to notice the length of time are in high category, which answer the questions; otherwise they odules could also potentiat. This is sometimes challenging due interactions. Yet, the cted time. For inferential questions, the differences among the think quickly and construct their ed out. To come to a generalppropriate language.

cher performed mean analyable above indicates that there are icture. Based on the result o seven modules which are classified that the average score is igh category, namely *assignment* It can be concluded that *quiz* (93.33). The others, chat, forum, ased e-learning portal son, and choice are in high category. y promote interactions forhe average score is in very high l accomplish the tasks gamely 86.39. This is consistent with Since the interactions are i the general information above which l/or offline with the desiredy high category. This means that the ain that the time spent byl very high motivation in learning in lly intensified. Hence, thethe use of Moodle-based e-learning ties for students to gother words, the modules of the on and knowledge for ted e-learning portal should be taken etter understanding and mlt to boost up the students' motivation terials.

ness of Each Sort of Module

l on the data, of the seven modules, in Subsection 2 above, pl, namely assignment, chat, forum, e data about the modules sson, and quiz are claimed to be very ment. *Chat, Forum, Glossi* re is only one, i.e. choice which is *Choice*. The result of dnto useful. This means that most of the two of seven modules af modules offered by the Moodle-

based e-learning portal was very useful for the students in the course program. This implies that the English Education Study Program of Graduate Studies Program of UNM should encourage and recommend the lecturers to implement the e-learning portal to support their face-to-face teaching deliveries.

The Challenges Encountered by the Students in the Use of the E-learning Portal

Even though new technologies often bring new nuances and bright ideas, they are not without challenges. There are usually some pros and cons. The same thing happens to Moodle. Apart from the benefits, they also have drawbacks from both parties, teacher and student. This research tries to investigate those from the students' perspective.

Based on the result of analysis, it is found that the drawback is the internet connection which is claimed to be slow or even disconnected. Only one respondent (that is not significant) said that he did not have enough skill in navigating the portal. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Moodle-based e-learning portal is a friendly-use one. Of the seven modules employed in the course, no one was claimed to be difficult to use.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the enrichment of students' learning through the empowerment of Moodle-based virtual learning environment at the English Education of Graduate Studies Program of UNM was examined. From the result of analysis and discussion, it was derived that the empowerment of Moodle-based e-learning portal could generally enhance the students' learning interactions and motivation. However, it was also found that there was a drawback encountered by the students, namely the slow internet connection. Besides, the use of the e-learning portal to compliment the face-to-face teaching at the study program was still very few. It is regrettable because the e-learning portal has already been set up for free use.

In terms of promoting the students' interactions in the learning process, it is found that *Assignment, Lesson, and Quiz* are very dominant, which are in very high category, compared to the others, *Chat, Forum, Glossary, and Choice*,

which are only in high category. This implies that the first three modules should be prioritized to use in the portal to boost up the students' interactions. In addition, *Assignment* and *Quiz* are the two modules which are found to very potentially enhance students' learning motivation. The other five ones, *Lesson*, *Chat*, *Forum*, *Glossary*, and *Choice* should also be considered because they are still in high category. It is also claimed that most of the modules are very useful to support face-to-face teaching deliveries. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Moodle-based e-learning portal is very prospective to be

employed for the sake of enhancing the students' interactions and motivation.

The students' ICT background was also investigated to support the data. It is found that the most students have good basic skill of computer. They also found the modules in the Moodle easy and comfortable to use and were also eager to use them if they would become a teacher. They also articulated that this portal is very potential to create learner centered environment. These students' ICT background and views on the portal reinforced their experiences in utilizing the Moodle-based e-learning portal.

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