Measuring students' writing skills using Facebook group application in EFL context

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Abstract

This research aims   to measure the effectiveness of students' writing skill through the application of Facebook group in English learning. It employed a quantitative method using the pre-experimental design. The subject of the research was the second-semester students of one of the private universities in South Sulawesi, Indonesia in the academic year of 2017/2018. They were selected purposively due to the writing problems occurred in the class. The total number of the sample was 20 students, which were taken by census sampling technique. The instrument was a writing test to obtain data on the students' writing achievement through the Facebook group. The data analysis found that the students' mean score in English writing was significantly improved. The students' mean score in the pretest was 65.30 while their mean score in the posttest was 78.05. The t-table was also lower than the t-test, that is 2.093<6.04. Based on the result the researchers concluded that the application of Facebook group in English learning improved students' ability in writing.

Keywords:

Facebook group; social media; writing skill.

1 INTRODUCTION

Social media is a computer-mediated application, which allows its users to share ideas, exchange information, and upload pictures/videos. The social media is also known as a group of online communication channels provided to the community-based input, interaction, content sharing, and collaboration. It is becoming an integral part of online life as social website and has allowed changes in the ways people live, work, interact, do business, and learn and acquire knowledge and skills via the internet (Aichner & Jacob, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; G Sakkir, 2016; Salikin & Tahir, 2017; Tang, Gu, & Whinston, 2012). Today, the internet has become a part that cannot be separated from people's life, including; social activities, work, and acquiring knowledge. Based on Yahoo's survey on the number of internet users in 2010, 1 of 3 citizens of the world accessed the internet and 64% of the internet users are 15-40 years old. The online activities that they use are e-mail (64%); instant messaging (71%); social media (58%); writing on blog (36%); online news (47%); and online games (35%).

The most popular social media in Indonesia are Facebook, Twitter, and Google (Mufidah & Bin-Tahir, 2018; Geminastiti Sakkir & Abrar, 2018). Interestingly, although Indonesia has become the primary market for Path, the report suggests that Instagram and Pinterest are still more popular than the private social media. Numerous chat apps are battling for supremacy in Indonesia, and according to the report that WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Skype, and Line take the lead in the archipelago (Millward, Lee, & Bischoff, 2015). After experiencing meteoric growth from 15 million to 40 million users in just 18 months, Facebook has plateaued at around 47 million users. Twitter, on the other hand, is in the middle of its meteoric growth phase, with the number of users conservatively estimated at 35 million at the end of 2012. What these numbers show is the incredible impact of the network on a broad base of highly connected individuals. Neither Facebook nor Twitter has a physical presence in Indonesia, yet during their growth spurt periods each service put on 25 million users in the space of 18 months, driven purely by word of mouth.

Indonesia has about 70 million active Facebook users (an active user is someone who opens his Facebook account at least once per month) and therefore constitutes the fourth-largest Facebook community after the United States, India, and Brazil. It is worth noting that about 86 percent of these Indonesian Facebook users use a mobile device to access their Facebook account (Aeni, Jabu, Rahman, & Strid, 2017; Millward et al., 2015; Sakkir, Rahman, & Salija, 2016). The data show that the social media have enabled changes in the way of Indonesian citizen's life, work interacting, and acquire knowledge and learning. The take up of social computing and new participative approaches impact public services such as government, the health sector, and also in education and training that could be empowered as media of English teaching and learning at the schools and universities in Indonesia, especially in EFL context. Many lecturers have made efforts to create their classes interesting by using various methods, techniques, instruments and, materials to stimulate the students to learn English. In English class, for example, the students are served with conductive learning activity, so they can write in English as well as possible. The first thing that a lecturer should do is to create the best condition for learning as an instrument to see the learning take place. The lecturer is responsible for creating a pleasure situation that provides opportunities and stimulates the students to communicate in English. It can develop the students' self-confidence in producing a quality writing including their academic writing.

The use of social media somehow could improve the students' achievement in learning. It is in line with the result of some previous studies, which concern the use of internet and social media in language teaching and learning. The results show that the use of the internet and social media are effective to increase the students' achievement in activities such as listening, speaking, writing and reading (Aichner & Jacob, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Geminastiti Sakkir, 2011; Tang et al., 2012). However, those studies did not concern yet to material for teaching and learning English writing based on the social media. The researchers expected that it would be a useful and interesting medium in teaching writing to the students so that they can enjoy and be interested in learning how to write properly.

Therefore, the purpose of the research is to find out whether or not the application of Facebook group effective in improving students' writing. The scope of the research is limited to examining the effectiveness of the use of Facebook group in teaching English writing to university students in EFL context. This research is under applied linguistics. It means that this research focused on the application of Facebook group in teaching writing to university students. The researchers used 9 (nine) topics for all meeting; they are; Introduction, Profession/Jobs, Family, Describing People, Daily Activities, Unforgettable Moments, Muhammadiyah, Describing Place, and Short Story.

Some studies have been conducted in the field of social media, Facebook, and the effects. Yunus and Salehi (2012) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of Facebook groups on teaching and improving writing: students' perception. The research concluded that Facebook group is an effective tool in improving the students' writing skills especially in the brainstorming of ideas before the actual writing. Shih (2013) did research on Effects of Using Facebook to Assist English for Business Communication Course Instruction. The findings of this study indicate that incorporating Facebook in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course can effectively assist college students in learning business communication in English. Students can improve their professional knowledge not only from the in-class instruction but also through sharing on Facebook. Additionally, the blended learning approach can significantly enhance the students' learning motivation and interest. Finally, some useful instructional strategies are provided to educators and practitioners in the English education field. Wasoh (2014) conducted a study on "EFL Facebook: Integrating Social Networking Tool as a Medium in writing Classroom." The finding revealed that the use of Facebook in the teaching and learning of EFL writing English has to a certain extent been effective.

Those previous findings above are closely related to what the researcher does in research on writing. They provide valuable information about the development of students' ability in studying English, particularly in improving English writing by using a different medium. Relevant to this, the researcher is interested to improve students' English writing mastery through the Facebook group as a medium to improve the students' writing achievement. Social media is defined as a group of internet-based application that build on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Michael, 2010). Furthermore, social media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. They introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between businesses, organizations, communities, and individuals(Kietzmann et al., 2011). These changes are the focus of the emerging field of techno self-studies. Social media differ from traditional or industrial media in many ways, including quality, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence. Social media operates in a dialogic transmission system, (many sources too many receivers) (Pavlik & McIntosh, 2018). This is in contrast to traditional media that operates under a monologic transmission model (one source too many receivers).

Many effects stem from internet usage. According to Bannon (2012), internet users continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of site. At the same time, the total time spent on social media in the U.S. across PC and mobile devices increased by 99 percent to 121 billion minutes in July 2012 compared to 66 billion minutes in July 2011. For content contributors, the benefits of participating in social media have gone beyond the social sharing to build the reputation and bringing in career opportunities and monetary income, as discussed in Tang et al. (2012).

Facebook has the largest number of users. Established by Zuckerberg in 2004, it is used by more than 500 million active users worldwide (Tang et al., 2012). Facebook gains more popularity than many other social media because it provides more options for users to communicate with other and share many quantities of information through profiles, conversation, photos, and videos. Facebook is currently the leading social media with more than 500 million active users as of March 2011. Interestingly, 70% of Facebook users are from outside of the US. Indonesia has the highest number of Facebook users in Asia, numbering 18.9 million users, while Malaysia follows in the fifth rank with 5.1 million users. Writing means producing or reproducing oral message into written language. It involves an active process to organize, formulate, and develop the ideas on the paper so that readers can follow the writer's message. Besides, writing skills require an accurate and precise grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and vocabulary. Kroma (1988) described that writing is a kind of activity where the writer expresses all the ideas in his mind in the paper from words to the sentence, sentence to the paragraph, and paragraph to the essay. Ghaith (2002) also described that writing is a complete process that allows writer to explore thoughts and ideas and make them visible and concrete.

In writing something, the writer must focus on the sentence (Jacobs, 1981), he concluded that there are five significant elements of writing, they are content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. To have a good content of the writing, its content should be well unified and completed. The term usually known as unity and completeness, this became the characteristics of the good writing. The main idea must be explained and develop fully. Completeness is the controlling ideas, which developed thoroughly by the use of particular information. Unity means that every part of the sentence contributes to one principle, unifying thought. When we say that a sentence has a unity, we mean that everything in it, it has a logical relation to the purpose of the sentence as a whole and nothing is omitted which is necessary to that purpose. In the organization of writing concerns with the way, the writers organized the ideas or the message in writing. The purposes of the organizing the material in writing involves coherence, the order of importance, general to specific, specific to general, chronological order and spatial pattern that happened from the beginning to the end. One of the requirements of a good writing always depends on the effective use of words. In the personal description, wordplay a dual role: to communicate and to evoke, to let the readers perceive and feel. This twofold purpose is evident even such a practical and common form of writing as an advertisement. Effective use of words also deals with connotative or figurative language. They are all important nearly all form of writing, but particularly in the personal description, word rich in the association are more effective than those mainly transmit information. Language use writing involves correct usage endpoints of grammar. There are many points of grammar, such verbs, nouns, and agreement. Specific nouns and strong

verbs give a reader a mental image description. These specific nouns can be characterized by using the modifier of adjectives, adverbs, and participle form. There are many opportunities for errors in the use of verbs, and mistakes in the agreement are very common. Mistakes in written work, and however, are much more serious, and since we have an opportunity to reread and to correct what we have written. We should avoid errors in verbal forms, subject-verb agreement, and pronoun-antecedent agreement and in case of noun and pronoun. The use of mechanics is due to capitalization, punctuation, and spelling appropriately. This aspect is very important since it leads readers to understand or recognize immediately what the writer means to express definitely.

The process of writing through Facebook group has the same steps to the process of writing in general. There are four steps of the writing process namely pre-writing, writing, revising, and proofreading. Pre-writing is generating ideas and preparing to write. Whatever type of writings' students is only an attempting. The pre-writing stage can be the most important thing if the students can gather their information, and begin to organize it into a cohesive unit. This process can include reading, taking notes, brainstorming, and categorizing information. Pre-writing is the most creative step, and most students develop a preferable way to organize their thoughts. Writing a first draft or a discovery draft is putting our thoughts down on paper. The actual writing stage is essentially just an extension of the pre-writing process. The students transfer the information what they have gathered and organized into a traditional format. This may take the shape of a simple paragraph, one-page essay, or multi-page report. Teaching about writing can be good as simple as evaluation literature, and explore what makes the piece of writing enjoyable or effective. It also involves helping a student to choose the topics for writing base on their personal interest. Modeling the writing process in front of the students also helps them to see what the teachers struggle with words and have to work at putting ideas together. Revising or post writing is questioning, re-thinking, editing our draft until it says what we want to say, preparing a final copy, proofreading it, and publishing it, so that, we can share it with others. In addition, revising or editing is usually the least favorite stage of the writing process, especially for beginners. Commenting on own writing can easily create tension and frustration. Revising can include adding, deleting, re-arranging, and substituting words, sentences, and even entire paragraphs to make the writing more accurate as re-present on ideas of writing. This is a chance for the writers to scan their paper from grammar, punctuation, and spelling error (Limbong, 2016). It can be tempting the teachers to perform this stage of the writing process for the students. It is essential to know the proofreading skills can improve students' writing skill.

2 METHOD

The method consists of design, procedure, and data analysis. This research applied a quantitative method using Pre-experimental design. The independent variable was the application of Facebook group in teaching English writing. Facebook group is one of the social media that consisted of wall and group for sharing each other member. The dependent variable was the students' achievement in writing. Learning achievement is the result, which has been reached after doing some learning activities. The indicator used to determine students' learning achievement is the value, which the students reached after experiencing teaching and learning in the form of the average score.

The researchers involved the twenty English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students who were in the second-semester of a college in South Sulawesi, Indonesia in academic year 2016/2017. The sampling technique used in this research was census-sampling technique. In this study, the researchers used writing test as instruments for collecting the data. As stated by Brown (1995), a test is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain. The tests that will be used in this research are the pre-test and post-test. The pre-test is conducted for the purpose to check whether the students are familiar with the vocabulary. On the other hand, the posttest was used to know whether the students have mastered the vocabulary given.

3 RESULTS

This part described the students' achievement in the experimental class. The Students' achievement analysis deals with the percentage of students' achievement including the mean score, standard deviation, t-test value of students' pretest and posttest on the experimental classes.

3.1 Students' Achievement in Pretest

In Table 1, it is shown that the pretest result most of the students for the experimental class was in fair category. Four students (20%) got good, 8 student (40%) got fairly good, 5 students (25%) got fair, 1 students (5%) got poor and 2 students (10%) got very poor. None of them got a very good score. The following table presents the students' pretest score and percentage.

Table1. The percentage of students' pretest score

Classification	Score	Experimental Class	
		Frequency	Percentage
Very good	89-100	0	0%
Good	78-88	4	20%
Fairly Good	67-77	8	40%
Fair	56-66	5	25%
Poor	45-55	1	5%
Very poor	33-44	2	10%
Total		20	100%

3.2 Students' Achievement in Posttest

The following table shows the percentage of students' pretest score who were taught by using Facebook group.

Table 2. The percentage of students' posttest score

Classification	Score	Experimental Class	
		Frequency	Percentage
Very good	89-100	3	15%
Good	78-88	5	25%
Fairly good	67-77	11	55%
Fair	56-66	1	5%
Poor	45-55	0	0%
Very poor	33-44	0	0%
Total		20	100%

The data above shows that the students' achievement of experimental class in posttest improves. There are 3 students (15%) who get very good, 5 students (25%) get good, 11 students (55%) get fairly good, 1 student (5%) gets fair, and no students got poor and very poor.

3.3 The Mean Score and Standard Deviation in Pretest and Posttest

Before giving treatment to the experimental class, the pretest was given to know the students' achievement. Besides, the purpose of the test was to find out whether or not experimental class was at the same level before and after the treatment. The students using Facebook-based writing instructional materials can be seen in a table as follows gained the result of the mean score and standard deviation students' pretest score and posttest:

Table 3. The mean score and standard deviation on pretest and posttest

Class	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Pretest	65.3	13.52
Posttest	78.05	12.79

The table 3 above shows that the mean score of students' pretest of the experimental class is 65.3, which is categorized as fair classification and the posttest, is 78.05, which are categorized as fair classification. Therefore, based on the table above, it can be concluded that the students' mean score of the posttest is higher than the pretest score. It means that there is significantly different between the students' achievement in the pretest and the posttest after the treatment (using Facebook-based writing instructional materials). The standard deviation of the pretest is higher than the posttest (13.52 > 12.79).

3.4 Test of Significance

Inferential analysis was used to test the hypothesis. The researcher used t-test (test of significance) for the independent sample test. This is a test to know the significant difference between the result of students' mean scores in the posttest and the pretest of the experimental class after being taught by using Facebook. The level of significance (α) = 0.05, the only thing which is needed; the degree of freedom (df) = 19, where N-1 (20-1); then the result of the t-test is presented in table 4.

Table 4. The t-test of student achievement on pretest and posttest

Variables	t-test	t-table	Remarks
Pretest and posttest experimental classes	6.04	2.093	Significantly different

Based on the result of data analysis as summarized in table 4 in the pretest and the posttest the experimental class, the researcher found that the t-test is higher than t-table (6.04>2.093) which means that there is the significant difference. The mean score of the pretest and the posttest were remarked significantly different. It indicated that the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted and, of course, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. It shows that the use of Facebook-based writing instructional materials significantly improves students' writing achievement.

4 DISCUSSION

Having the findings of the research above, the researcher may point out that before the treatment (in pretest), most of the students got poor, and fair classification in developing the ideas in writing a paragraph. The students in developing and organizing the idea deal with some difficulties. Content concerns with the subject or theme of the essay, organization focuses on coherence between one ideas to another idea of the essay, language use focuses on structures of the sentences, vocabulary concerns with the words choice and range, and mechanics concerns with punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Furthermore, from the researchers' observation during the treatments for three meetings on different topics of writing that provided with the Facebook-based writing instructional materials. The students could improve their ability in developing ideas in paragraph through the Facebook group. The Facebook group that provided as the visual material was very helpful to stimulate and motivate the students in developing their ideas. However, the topic selected was challenging and interesting for the students, and they felt the topics become easier to develop their ideas in a paragraph by using Facebook as a medium.

The procedure of the treatment has an essential role in the students' achievement in improving their ability in writing skills. It is indicated by the improvement of students writing skills after giving the treatment by Facebook-based writing instructional materials for three times. The materials that presented in the Facebook group for three meetings worked well as visual material. The writing materials in Facebook group enable students to see the relationship between ideas and also to develop and relate their ideas as their mind makes associations. It was different from the students were tested in the pretest before giving the treatment. In the pretest, they were still difficult to organize and develop their ideas because of unstructured and unsystematic ideas. To solve the problem above, Facebook-based writing instructional materials offers an attractive and stimulating framework for writing practice. Since the students taught by the Facebook group, their ability in English writing skills, was rising significantly. This research found the students' improvement from fair to good. The students mean score of the pretest is 65.3 can prove this and mean score of the posttest is 78.05. Posttest score is higher than the pretest score. The t-test is higher than the t-table (6.04 > 2.093). Shortly, learning writing through Facebook-based writing instructional materials is better to be applied because it can improve the students' achievement significantly higher than the conventional technique.

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion above, the researchers concluded that the application of the Facebook group improved students' ability in writing. It was proved by the students' mean score in pretest is 65.30 which was lower than the students' mean score in posttest, that is 78.05. The t-table also lower than the t-test, which is 2.093<6.04.

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