

BLENDING LEARNING USING *SCHOOLGY* AS AN ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORM Potentials and Challenges

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Abstract

The emphasis of educational instruction has shifted from teaching to learning where the role of teachers is not knowledge transmitters but the facilitators, knowledge navigators, and co-learners. Advanced technologies have a place in the shifting of teacher roles, for example the Internet technology which enables online learning to be held to enhance the teacher roles in facilitating learning. Online learning integrated into face-to-face learning which is called blended learning is believed to be more beneficial than online learning or face-to-face learning alone. However, despite the substantial benefits of blended learning frequently mentioned, teachers are still reluctant in implementing blended learning in their practices. This literature study reviews several papers studying the potentials and challenges of blended learning using *Schoolgy* as an online learning platform. The purpose of the study is to find out the potentials and the challenges of blended learning using *Schoolgy*. It is expected that the findings will raise teacher awareness about the importance of bringing technologies in their practices, encourage teachers to utilize online learning platforms such as *Schoolgy* in blended learning environment, and draw attention of education practitioners and any relevant parties to participate in addressing the challenges of blended learning to improve students' learning experiences.

Keywords: blended learning, *Schoolgy*, potentials, challenges

Introduction

In the digital era when technologies rapidly develop, people indulge in many conveniences that the technologies have provided. Communication and interaction become easier due to the invention of Internet technology and sophisticated communication devices. 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 teacher roles could be eased by the advanced technologies, and teachers as well as education practitioners can enhance their roles in facilitating learning by utilizing the 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 remodeling classrooms.

Computer and Internet technologies have introduced a new learning method, namely online learning method, which has flourished since the late of 20th century. It is believed that online learning method can answer learning issues that are difficult to be addressed by a traditional face-to-face learning method. However, online learning alone is considered not sufficient because there are some disadvantages of this kind of learning method. Epignosis LLC (2014) stated that it is rather difficult to acquire practical skills through online learning because such skills require hands-on experience. Online learning may also cause health problems like eyestrain and bad posture in addition to a sense of isolation it can create. Moreover, learners have different styles of learning, different preference of

learning strategies, and different response to one teaching method. Providing learners with more than one learning environment is the best option for gaining good results of teaching and learning. It can be carried out through combining two different learning methods, such as face-to-face learning and online learning. Such combination of learning methods is called blended learning.

Some experts have suggested the concepts of blended learning. Littlejohn and Pegler (2007) asserted 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 instructor-led training supplemented with electronic formats" (p. xiv). 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" (p. 5), and the combination of offline and online learning enables the one to compliment the other. It can be inferred that in recent days blended learning is defined as an instructional approach that combines offline learning method with online learning method, and each learning method is the supplement to one another for better learning quality.

Regarding the aforementioned consideration that blended learning is the effective learning method compared to face-to-face or online learning method alone, this study aimed at capturing the potentials and challenges of blended learning especially using *Schoology* as the online learning platform.

Methodology

This paper used a literature study as the method of collecting data, which involved 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 use 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 use of *Schoology* in language teaching and learning practices, which focus on its potentials 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.

Findings and Discussion

The learning methods in blended learning, namely face-to-face learning and online learning, both supplement each other. The combination of these learning methods can potentially enhance the quality of learning. Thorne (2003) stated that blended learning can provide the right learning at the right time and in the right place for each learner, which make learning more accessible and personalized. Epignosis LLC (2014) claimed that "students who complete online coursework followed by interactive, face-to-face class activities have richer educational experiences" (p. 70). However, Thorne (2003) stated that blended learning requires enthusiasm, energy and commitment that many do not possess. The other challenges are the limited information about the proper implementation of blended learning, insufficient infrastructure to support blended learning, lack of IT literacy in students and 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 used by various institutions in many countries for online learning and blended learning. Byrd (2013) listed the advantages of *Schoology* including the easiness of use, the security for student safety, and the efficient tools and resources for teachers. Catapano (n.d.) mentioned the advantages of *Schoology* based on its features. There are, however, disadvantages of *Schoology* that include the tendency of

students to get distracted, the limited account that can be opened on one computer at the same time, 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 potentials and challenges mentioned by some experts correspond to the findings of several studies investigating blended learning to improve student learning experience. Most of the studies discussed in this paper were carried out to see some aspects dealing with writing course. In her article entitled “*Enhancing College Students’ Proficiency in Business Writing via Schoology*” Sicat (2015) mentioned that most students in her study are digital natives who enjoy and grow up with technology and gadgets, so the use of *Schoology* has made them enjoy the lessons. The use of *Schoology* as an LMS increased students’ self-confidence and responsibility because they had to monitor the LMS for the materials uploaded. The assigned activities encouraged the students to think more critically. Nevertheless, a few students were reluctant to use learning management systems such as *Schoology* because of various problems like poor access to internet, unstable connections, inadequate computer knowledge and skills, and personal issues such as less motivation and responsibility. It is suggested that *Schoology* as a learning management system should be utilized only as the supplement to the traditional teaching method.

In the article entitled “*E-learning Implementation in Foundation English Class: Learners’ Perspectives and Learning Achievement*” Low (2017) stated that the use of *Schoology* in the class where the study took place was because the class was quite large and the chances for students to practice English were limited. The students perceived that *Schoology* was a good language learning

tool, and the implementation of *Schoology* helped improve students’ achievements. *Schoology* increased students’ motivation and developed students’ positive attitudes toward learning outside classroom, increased interaction between teachers and students, and increased students’ engagement in learning. Students, however, still encountered technical problems like the trouble in submitting answers to quizzes and the failure in recording the scores.

Çepik, Gönen and Sazak (2016) in their study entitled “*ELT Instructors’ Attitudes towards the Use of Blended Learning in Tertiary Level English Language Programs*” also found out that blended learning using *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 track the progress of their students’. As the learning management system, *schoology* provided teachers with tools to upload materials in various formats like text files, audio files, images, videos, and links. Some Challenges in the use of blended learning include the lack of training, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of technological knowledge.

In the article entitled “*Analysis the Use of Schoology E-Learning towards Students’ Learning Motivation Enhancement in STKIP Surya*” Rosalina (2018) claimed that most students got motivated because the use of *Schoology* was easy, favorable, and challenging at the same time. Although the course in her study was not writing, this study showed that *Schoology* used as the online learning platform in blended learning environment increased students’ motivation. Another paper entitled “*Blended Learning and Teaching Writing: A Teacher Action Research Project*” written by Camahalan and Ruley (2014) revealed that blended learning using *Schoology* has built students’

enthusiasm in learning and improved the outcomes on writing skill.

Conclusions

Blended learning is seen as a new hope for quality learning, but despite its potentials it possesses some challenges. The potentials and challenges of blended learning are discussed more detailed particularly the blended learning that uses *Schoology* as the online learning platform. As the learning method the potentials of blended learning include its possibility to make learning more accessible and personalized and provide students with richer educational experiences. Meanwhile, the potentials of *Schoology* alone include the easiness of use, the security for student safety, and the efficient tools and resources for teachers. When the online learning platform used in the blended learning environment is more specific, that is *Schoology*, the blended learning has many potentials: making the lessons enjoyable; increasing students' self-confidence and responsibility; encouraging students to think more critically; overcoming issues of the class with big size; increasing students' motivation; developing students' positive attitudes toward learning outside classroom; increasing interaction between teachers and students, students and their peers, students and materials; increasing students' engagement in learning; allowing teachers to do administrative tasks more easily; building students' enthusiasm in learning; and improving students' achievements.

The challenges of blended learning in general include the lack of enthusiasm, energy and commitment that could possibly happen, limited information about the proper implementation of blended learning, insufficient infrastructure, lack of IT literacy, and other impacts like overwork on teachers' part and cognitive load on students' part. These challenges are quite similar when *Schoology* is used as the online learning platform in blended learning, which include the students' reluctance in using the online platform due to poor access to

internet, unstable connection, and inadequate technological knowledge and skills; insufficient infrastructure; and lack of training. In several articles, it is emphasized that *Schoology* should be utilized only as the supplement to the traditional teaching method. Since the potentials of blended learning needs to be exploited and depend on several aspects, it requires consistent and integrated plans in developing effective scenarios of blended learning and in implementing the scenarios with proper strategies.

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