

Students' Engagement, Writing Performance and Perception towards the Utilization of Edmodo in a Writing Course

Wahyu Kyestiati Sumarno and Ali Shodikin

Universitas Islam Darul Ulum, Airlangga Street No. 3, Sukodadi, Lamongan, Indonesia
{kyestiatisumarno, alishodikin}@unisda.ac.id

Keywords: Writing course, Edmodo, ICT, Classroom Action Research.

Abstract: The utilization of technology in the language classroom is currently a common matter. Moreover, the achievements and the engagement of students are believed to be enhanced by the usage of technology. Yet, very few studies are concerned with how to create a digital environment for the teaching of writing. Edmodo, a mobile application similar to Facebook made specifically for educational purposes, is believed to well-assist teachers and students in writing instruction. By doing a Classroom Action Research to a university academic writing course, how Edmodo facilitated students' engagement, improved students' writing performance and how students perceived the use of Edmodo were investigated. This study was participated by 24 students in the 5th semester of English Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Darul 'Ulum, Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia. In eight meetings, their engagements, writing skills' improvement, and response towards the application of Edmodo were measured. Four instruments were utilized to collect the data, namely observation and document analysis, pre-and-posttest, and questionnaire. It was noted that Edmodo facilitated the students' engagement, improved students' writing performance and students took advantage of this application usage. However, some barriers to its implementation need to be taken into consideration, e.g. the internet access.

1 INTRODUCTION

Teaching 21st-century students requires innovation and creativity of the teachers since alternation from conventional teaching to a more communicative and technological style seems to be imperative (Purnawarman et al., 2016; Sumarno et al., 2017). Preserving traditional way of teaching may make digital era generations uninterested in class, discouraged, get bored, and unwillingly to complete the tasks (Felder and Silverman, 1988; Godleski, 1984; Oxford, 1990; Smith and Renzulli, 1984, Mokhtar, 2016). Therefore, integration of technology into the classroom is highly encouraged.

A mobile application called Edmodo, one among numerous online platform utilized for educational purposes, is believed to well-assist teachers and students during the teaching and learning process (Purnawarman et. al, 2016). In line with them, Arroyo (2011) sees Edmodo as an excellent and secure communication tool for learning via social

networking. Furthermore, Fujimoto (2012) also argues that the free Edmodo mobile application allows learners to access any materials wherever and whenever. Despite this potential of Edmodo in supporting teaching and learning process, the utilization of this tool in language classrooms, including writing course, is still very limited.

The usage of Edmodo in writing class will provide opportunities for students to submit their written works without the need for any face-to-face interaction. Besides, writing, which seems to be bothersome and boring, will be less demanding, as Edmodo provides a lot of interesting features to practically aid teachers and students during the writing class, either in classroom sessions or students' individual learning time at home. Abadi et al. (2015) also noted that online collaborative work by the teacher and other learners at any time during the week makes them more motivated and creative than before and can increase their self-efficacy and help decrease their anxiety in the process of writing. Lots of teachers have welcomed these developments

enthusiastically, seeing the integration of new technology-based pedagogies will potentially improve students' writing skills, and facilitate collaboration and interaction both within and beyond the classroom (Hyland and Hyland, 2006).

In addition to the skills of writing, the engagement of students is also trusted to be enhanced by the usage of technology, including Edmodo (Coffman, 2009; Rank et al., 2011; Kearsley and Shneiderman, 1999). Engagement itself is defined as a reflection of a person's active involvement in a task or activity (Reeve et al., 2004). The involvement here could be cognitively (flexibility in problem-solving, preference for hard work, and positive coping in the face of failure), emotionally (students' affective reactions in the classroom), and behaviorally (positive conduct, involvement in learning tasks, and participation in school-related activities) (Fredricks et al., 2004). Many studies have claimed the benefits of using technology for increasing engagement but very few provide measurable evidence of engagement, including in writing course (Reading and Levins, 2008). Thus, it is worth studying.

Kearsley and Shneiderman (1999) further affirm that technology is able to facilitate engagement through two things: interaction and meaningful tasks. Type of interaction will include learner-content interaction, learner-lecturer interaction, and learner-learner interaction (Moore and Kearsley, 1996; Lonn, 2009). Meanwhile, meaningful tasks refer to tasks which are able to be defined by students and they can focus on applying their ideas to a specific context (Kearsley and Shneiderman, 1999).

A number of studies had shown positive impacts of Edmodo implementation in the classrooms (Beltran-Cruz and Cruz, 2013; Ekici, 2017; Durak et al., 2017; Al-Said, 2015; Mokhtar, 2016) and positive attitudes of the users towards the implementation of it (Yunkul and Cankaya, 2017). In EFL classrooms, Edmodo has also found as helping the students improve their achievements (Al-Kathiri, 2014; Okumura, 2016; Khodary, 2017; Delacruz, 2013) and enhance their engagements (Maguire et al., 2017; Parsons et al., 2014; Burch et al., 2015). Regardless of these numerous studies on Edmodo utilization, very few researches concerned to create a digital environment for the teaching of writing (Purnawarman et al., 2016; Abadi et al., 2015; Gardner, 2013). Thus, the present study attempted to examine how Edmodo helps EFL learners improving their writing performance, especially their engagements and writing skills; while, their responses towards the use of this application were also seen.

2 METHOD

To pursue the research objective, a classroom action research with Kemmis and McTaggart's model (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) was utilized. This model suggests classroom action research to be done in one or more cycles. Each cycle consists of four phases, namely plan, action, observe, and reflect. The number of cycles will depend on the research's aim. Once it is achieved, the cycle is discontinued.

This study was conducted in two cycles within eight meetings, four meetings for each cycle. In the planning phase, the researchers prepared the materials, lesson plan, and designed the steps for the action phase. The researchers also prepared writing class in Edmodo application, completed with its teaching-aids, prepared sheets for classroom observation, document analysis, pre-and-post-test, and questionnaire. Meanwhile, during the action phase, the teacher-researchers followed activities based on the lesson plan. In the observation phase, the researchers observed the effects of treatments on the students' writing skills and engagement based on the instruments used. Finally, in the reflection phase, the researchers analyzed the data noted in the observation phase and decided whether the next cycle needs to be done or not.

The study was done in an Academic Writing course involving 24 students in the 5th semester of English Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Darul 'Ulum, Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia. In eight meetings, their engagements, writing skills' improvement, and response towards the insertion of Edmodo were measured.

Four instruments were used to collect the data. First, observations, and second, document analysis, were used to see how Edmodo influence students' engagement. Second, pre-and-posttest was done to measure the students' writing skills improvement. In pre-and-posttest, the students were asked to make an essay by choosing the given themes. Their essays were evaluated by some categories, namely idea, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Third, a closed-ended questionnaire was used to check students' opinions about the use of Edmodo.

Each collected data was interpreted in such a way to make it meaningful. The notes from classroom observation and the documents containing online activities via Edmodo were descriptively analyzed. Meanwhile, the students' pre-and-posttest was evaluated by using a writing rubric and then was compared to see whether their skills were improved or not. Aspects measured in the rubric were the idea,

organization, grammar, vocabulary styles and mechanics or punctuation. The questionnaires were analyzed by using the Likert scale with an interval from 1-5 (disagree-strongly agree). Both the students' writing skills and engagement were noted as "complete" in this study if the students have passed 75, meaning that the students have done their work well and are ready for the next material.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Findings

Before conducting the research, the researcher did a preliminary observation and pretest to know the students' prior ability. Table 1 showed the results of these first activities.

Table 1: Initial condition.

No.	Indicators	Achievements	Category
1.	Students' engagement	63%	Poor
2.	Students' outcomes	35%	Poor

It can be seen from the initial condition that the average students' engagement was 63% of the minimum target of 75%. It means that the students' engagement was still low. Meanwhile, the total student who passed 75 in the pretest was only 35%, with the average score of 54 on a scale of 1 to 100. Based on these data, the students' engagement, which was gotten from the researchers' observation at this class' previous semester writing course, and students' writing skills, taken from the pre-test given in the first meeting of Academic Writing course, were regarded as low, thus it needs to be improved.

The above initial condition serves as the basis for the action done in the research. In order to reach the expectations, the researchers did a variety of preparations, including syllabus and lesson plan development, materials development, media selection and assessment planning (the planning phase). Difficulties faced in each step, especially regarding the students' engagement and writing outcomes, were identified and resolved. Suggestions for students to facilitate the students' learning were also given.

Action phase of Cycle 1 was conducted in four meetings. The first meeting was to discuss the academic writing process, including the pre-writing and planning stages. The discussion was led by the researcher-lecturer. She started by giving the theory of how to do pre-writing and makes an outline. The

students paid attention carefully. After that, the students did some practices on pre-writing and outlining. Each of them made their own pre-writing and outline. In the second meeting, the students had ready with their own pre-writing and outline to be evaluated together. They edited and revised their outline until it seemed appropriate to be developed after consulting with the lecturer one by one. In the third meeting, the class paid attention to the lecturers' explanation on developing an outline into a paragraph. They learned about what a paragraph usually consisted of. In the end of that meeting, the students were asked to develop their own paragraph into a good paragraph. The paragraphs they developed by the end of this meeting were the ones being assessed to know their writing score during the action phase of Cycle 1. As treatments, for each meeting, the students were given examples to broaden their understanding via Edmodo (off-class activities). The lecturer also encouraged them to ask questions if they have problems and share opinions in the platform provided (Edmodo's Feed). Using Feed, both the teacher and students interact with each other by adding new message or assignment at anytime and anywhere. Their outlines and paragraphs were also submitted online, to make it quicker and easier to be scored. They can see their scores directly once the lecturer posted it. Complain was also welcome online and offline. During this action phase, the researcher acted as teacher-researcher. Thus, other than giving the explanation to each topic, she also observed the students' activities, both in the classroom and via Feed in Edmodo, by making notes to record the students' engagement. The level of engagement and students' writing scores can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' engagement and writing scores in cycle 1.

Cycle 1	Students' Engagement	Writing Scores
Average Scores	67.72	72.5
Passing 75%	71%	68%

The data showed that the students' engagement had increased to 71%, but have not reached the minimum target of 75% yet. The students' writing scores were also improved, from 35% to 68%, with the average scores increased from 54 to 72.5. However, it also still did not reach the minimum target of 75%. Based on these, the researchers decided to continue to the second cycle.

Action phase of Cycle 2 was held in four meetings based on the lesson plan made in the Cycle 2 planning phase. The first meeting was to discuss the unity and coherence. They did some practices by analyzing

some texts to evaluate their unity and coherence. In the second meeting, the students revised their paragraph to make it coherence and have a uniting idea. In the third meeting, the students learned about developing an essay. By the end of this meeting, they were expected to be able to develop their outline into a good essay. They submitted their essays in the fourth meeting through Edmodo. During this cycle, the students were also encouraged to share opinions or just ask problems they encountered via Edmodo. Their activities, both in class and online, were recorded to see their engagement. The engagement was assessed based on the observation (for at class activities) and document analysis (for online activities). This research only focused on behavioral engagement, thus it only evaluated the students' positive conduct, involvement in learning tasks, and participation in school-related activities, online and offline. The results of cycle 2 can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Students' engagement and writing scores in cycle 2.

Cycle 2	Students' Engagement	Writing Scores
Average Score	78	79
Passing 75%	80%	84%

Results of cycle 2 showed that both the students' engagement and total students who passed 75% have reached the minimum target. The students' engagement has increased from 71% to 80% and the students' writings which passed 75% have improved from 68% to 84%. These data were actually showing the benefits of Edmodo application in a writing course.

Furthermore, to know the students' responses towards the utilization of Edmodo in their writing class, the researchers distributed a closed-ended questionnaire which containing 21 questions. The students might show their responses by crossing the number, 1 to 5 which means disagree to strongly agree, for each statement.

The questionnaire results showed that generally, the students gave positive responses towards the utilization of Edmodo. In other words, they said that Edmodo is satisfying, helpful, increase student-student and student-teacher interaction, increase their knowledge, and enable them to learn effectively. Although, there were still a few of students who felt isolated (e.g. having bad internet access), got trouble using the technology, and more anxious while Edmodo was utilized.

3.2 Discussions

3.2.1 Edmodo Facility for Students' Engagement

Based on the research results, it can be seen that Edmodo has improved the students' engagements. Engagement in this study is viewed as the active role of students as the participant during the teaching and learning process. Through Edmodo, which is designed to increase the interaction activities among students and between teacher and students, it is hoped that emotional attachment will grow greater because this attachment will lead to knowledge articulation and community actions. Knowledge articulation and community actions are actually the roots of knowledge among the young generation. In their study, Won, at al. (2015) found that youth appropriated "Edmodo" to exhibit engagement and articulate knowledge through reciting facts, acknowledging learning, and documenting progress with the guidance of instructors and facilitators. A similar finding is also noted from the research of Beltran-Cruz and Cruz (2013) which showed that students had a better experience, better engagement, and appreciated both the social learning experience gave by the online social network. Results revealed that students through student-student interaction and student-teacher interaction enhance their own experiences and improve their learning ability.

To improve the students' engagements, teachers can put students into small groups (Edmodo provides platform for this) or individual projects that ask for their personal views. Teachers can also create opportunities for them to do experiments. In this research, the students are encouraged to share what they think and the problems they encountered during their writing processes, both in face to face meetings and in the platform provided via Edmodo. Their engagement will clearly be seen from their posts in Edmodo. Students who lazily give comments can be noted as less engage.

3.2.2 Edmodo Improves Students' Writing Skills

After the second cycle, it can be seen that students' writing skills are improved. It means that the application of Edmodo for the writing courses gave positive influence to the students' development of writing skills. This improvement could be seen from the improvement of students' writing scores which included the organization of writing, idea or content, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics or punctuation. Yet, the organization and idea got the highest improvement.

Edmodo was used not only as a place to hand in the students' works but also as a media for online discussion, which can be accessed anywhere at any time. Both students and teachers can easily give mutual comments and suggestions towards the students' writings. From those experiences, students can learn more naturally through everyday informal communication. Jones and Rice (2017) also found that the use of Edmodo can improve the students' writing skills.

3.2.3 Students' Perception towards the Use of Edmodo

From the questionnaires, it was noted that generally, the students gave positive responses towards the utilization of Edmodo. In other words, they said that Edmodo is satisfying, helpful, increase student-student and student-teacher interaction, increase their knowledge, and enable them to learn effectively. Although, there were still a few of students who felt isolated (e.g. having bad internet access), got trouble using the technology, and more anxious while Edmodo was utilized. Similar results are also found by Al-Said (2015), Al-Kathiri (2014) and Ekici (2017) who saw pre-service primary teachers generally had positive views about the use of Edmodo in teacher education programmers. Most pre-service primary teachers stated that Edmodo provides the possibility of sharing knowledge, experiences, and views.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicated that (1) Edmodo facilitated the students' engagement. It can be seen from the active role of students as the participant during the teaching and learning process, at class and via Edmodo; (2) improved the students' outcomes. It can be seen from the improvement of students' writing scores which are including the organization of writing, idea, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The organization and idea got the highest improvement; (3) and students took advantage of this application usage. To conclude, it can be said that Edmodo can be used to create an online community of practice in teacher education programmers.

However, despite those virtues, it cannot be ignored that some participants stated that Edmodo has some limitations; for instance, the fact that it requires the user to have a good internet access.

REFERENCES

- Abadi, B. B. S., Ahmadi, S. D., Mehrdad, A. G., 2015. The effect of Edmodo on EFL learners' writing performance. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*. 2, 88-97.
- Al-Kathiri, F., 2014. Beyond the Classroom Walls: Edmodo in Saudi Secondary School EFL Instruction, Attitudes and Challenges. *English Language Teaching*. 8(1), 189-204.
- Al-Said, K. M., 2015. Students' Perceptions of Edmodo and Mobile Learning and their Real Barriers towards them. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*. 14(2), 167-180.
- Arroyo, G., 2011. On-Line Social Networks: Innovative Ways towards the Boost of Collaborative Language Learning. *ICT for Language Learning*. Retrieved Oct 7, 2013, from <http://conference.pixelonline.net/>
- Beltran-Cruz, M., Cruz, S. B. B., 2013. The use of internet-based social enhancing student's learning experiences in biological sciences. *Higher Learning Research Communication*. 3(4), 68-80.
- Burch, G. F., Heller, N. A., Burch, J. J., Freed, R., Steed, S. A., 2015. Student Engagement: Developing a Conceptual Framework and Survey Instrument. *Journal of Education for Business*. 90(4), 224-229.
- Coffman, T., 2009. *Engaging students through inquiry-oriented learning and technology*, Rowman and Littlefield Education. Maryland.
- Delacruz, S., 2013. Online reading response using Edmodo. *The Florida Reading Journal*. 49(2), 9-12.
- Durak, G., Cankaya, S., Yunkul, E., Ozturk, G., 2017. The Effects of a Social Learning Network on Students' Performances and Attitudes. *European Journal of Education Studies*. 3(3), 312-333.
- Ekici, D. I., 2017. The Use of Edmodo in Creating an Online Learning Community of Practice for Learning to Teach Science. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Sciences*. 5(2), 91-106.
- Felder, R., Silverman, L., 1988. Learning and teaching styles in engineering education. *Engineering Education*. 78(7), 674- 681.
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., Paris, A. H., 2004. School engagement: potential of the concept, the state evidence. *Review of Educational Research*. 71(1), 59-109.
- Fujimoto, C., 2012. Perceptions of mobile language learning in Australia: How ready are learners to study on the move? *Thejalt call Journal*. 8(3), 165-195.
- Gardner, M., 2013. Social media and peer review: Edmodo in the composition classroom. *Dissertations, Theses and Capstone Projects*. Available on www.digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu.
- Godleski, E., 1984. Learning style compatibility of engineering students and faculty. *Proceedings Annual Frontiers in Education Conference*. ASEE/IEEE, Philadelphia.
- Hyland, K., Hyland, F., 2006. Feedback on second language students' writing. *Language Teaching*. 39(2), 83-101.

- Jones, J. S., Rice, M. L., 2017. Exploring Classroom Microblogs to Improve Writing of Middle School Students. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*. 15(1), 26-41.
- Kearsley, G., Shneiderman, B., 1999. *Engagement Theory: A framework for technology-based teaching and learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.gwu.edu/engage.htm>
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., 1988. *The Action Research Planner*. Deakin University, Australia.
- Khodary, M. M., 2017. Edmodo Use to Develop Saudi EFL Students' Self-Directed Learning. *English Language Teaching*. 10(2), 123-135.
- Lonn, S. D., 2009. *Student use of a learning management system for group projects: a case study investigating interaction, collaboration, and knowledge construction*. Michigan University, Michigan, 4th edition.
- Maguire, R., Egan, A., Hyland, P., Maguire, P., 2017. Engaging Students Emotionally: The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Predicting Cognitive and Affective Engagement in Higher Education. *Higher Education Research and Development*. 36(2), 343-357.
- Mokhtar, F. A., 2016. Rethinking Conventional Teaching in Language Learning and Proposing Edmodo as Intervention: A Qualitative Analysis. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Technology*. 4(2), 22-37.
- Moore, M. G., Kearsley, G., 1996. *Distance education: A systems view*, Wadsworth Publishing Company. New York.
- Okumura, S., 2016. The use of an educational social networking site for English language learning beyond the classroom in a Japanese university setting. *Research Bulletin of Education*. 11, 39-45.
- Oxford, R., 1990. *Evidence from research on language learning styles and strategies in Georgetown University Round Table on language and linguistics*. Georgetown University Press. Washington, DC.
- Parsons, S. A., Nuland, L. R., Parsons, A. W., 2014. The ABCs of Student Engagement. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 95(8), 23-27.
- Purnawarman, P., Susilawati, S., Sundayana, W., 2016. The use of Edmodo in teaching writing in a blended learning setting. *Indonesia. J. Appl. Linguist.* 5, 242-252.
- Rank, T., Warren, C., Millum, T., 2011. *Teaching English using ICT: a practical guide for secondary school teachers*, Continuum. London, UK
- Reading, C., Levins, M., 2008. ICT in learning: Negotiating criteria to measure engagement. In *Australian Computers on Education Conference Proceedings*. Australian Council for Computers in Education. Belconnen, Australia.
- Reeve, J., Jang, H., Carrell, D., Jeon, S., Barch, J., 2004. Enhancing students' engagement by increasing teachers' autonomy support. *Motivation and Emotion*. 28(2), 147-169.
- Smith, L., Renzulli, J., 1984. Learning style preferences: A practical approach for classroom teachers. *Theory into Practice*. 23(1), 44- 50.
- Sumarno, W. K., Tatik, T., Shodikin, A., 2017. Constructivist-Webquests: A Tefl Course Teaching 542 Media In Digital Environment. *UNNES Int. Conf. ELTTLT Engl. Lang. Teach. Lit. Transl.* 6, 542-545.
- Won, S. G. L., Evans, M. A., Huang, L., 2017. Engagement and Knowledge Building in an Afterschool STEM Club: Analyzing Youth and Facilitator Posting Behavior on a Social Networking Site. *Learning, Media and Technology*. 42(3), 331-356.
- Yunkul, E., Cankaya, S., 2017. Students' Attitudes Towards Edmodo, A Social Learning Network: A Scale Development Study. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*. 18(2), 16-29.