



Articles

Teaching Writing in Blended Environment*Handoko Handoko¹, Ayumi Ayumi²**^{1,2}Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University, Indonesia***SUBMISSION TRACK**

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The article aims to describe the implementation blended learning environment in teaching writing skills. The research is based on the blended learning framework that integrates face-to-face methods and online learning methods. The face-to-face method is given to see students' activeness in delivering ideas and brainstorming before writing essays. The online learning method is used to see students' ability to elaborate ideas from drafting to become a complete essay. Thus, students can be effective in learning in class to discuss their draft an essay and not spend much time writing. The implementation of blended learning was distributed to three session: brainstorming, drafting, and final writing. The evaluation was done for each cycle. After the evaluation, students get feedback for their performance in the previous session. The result post-test shows that students in the experimental class have indicated a significant improvement in essay writing performance with significance $0,06 > 0,05$ with an average score of 76,35. The result of the research is very important as a framework to develop learning models for teaching writing at universities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing essays in English is very important for university students, for academic purposes, such as continuing studies to higher levels and professional purposes (Nourse, 2001; Connelly and Forsyth, 2012; Baghbadorani and Roohani, 2014; McWhorter, 2016) . Therefore, the university needs to provide writing skill as one of the graduate profile's main competencies.

To develop writing competency, it is necessary to design a well-developed curriculum for language learning. In general, teaching writing for university students can be divided into three stages: paragraph writing as a core skill, essay writing, critical writing. The series of courses are provided to develop students' writing skills.

Many research indicates that writing skills are lower than other skills: speaking, reading, and listening. Moreover, many students also consider writing skills is more difficult than listening and speaking. It is because writing is dealing with grammar and

vocabulary and related to emotional and cognitive aspects (Alluhaybi, 2015). Several factors contribute to the fact that writing is considered a difficult subject. Among others, writing skill requires formal language, error-free grammar, complete and clear ideas, and logical order (Wyrick, 2011; Connelly and Forsyth, 2012). Another aspect that also plays an important role in writing is an emotional aspect. Emotional aspects can be seen from students' perceptions toward the difficulty of essay writing (Qashoa, 2014; Alluhaybi, 2015; McWhorter, 2016). It is quite acceptable since that essay writing required a complex series of interconnected ideas. The limited-time allocated for essay writing subject makes students unable to write essays well. In the traditional approach, students are asked to collect ideas, find references, and then write them into an essay. It is time-consuming and may not reach the optimal result. Therefore, students must be exposed to the learning environment to improve their writing experience by providing sufficient time (Adas and Bakir, 2013).

Space limitations can also hinder students from

thinking critically when they gather ideas about what will be written. Students will find it difficult to observe and find relevant references to support ideas that will be elaborated into their essays in the classroom. Time constraints also inhibit students in the writing evaluation process since the number of lecturers and students is not balanced. If the lecturer gives feedback on each student's draft writing, it will take three to four face-to-face meetings (Handoko and Waskito, 2018).

Besides, many students are impatient with writing essays. They tend to ignore the stages of writing an essay because they think it is useless and waste time (Alameddine and Mirza, 2016). To be able to write a good essay, of course, students must follow the stages of writing essays. There are at least four main stages in writing a good essay, research and gathering idea (prewriting), planning, writing drafts, and revision (Cumming, 2006; Manser, 2006; Wyrick, 2011). Writing an essay is not an instant process or a one-step process; students need to revise the essay several times based on the feedback and evaluation from lecturers. Therefore, it is necessary to provide the students with an alternative strategy that allows them to be more effective and efficient.

With the advance of technology, lecturers can use sophisticated technology to provide a virtual environment that allows students to manage and elaborate ideas and revise the draft without spending time in the class. Among the approach that is quite effective is the application of a blended learning model. Blended learning combines face-to-face learning methods with online learning (Handoko and Waskito, 2018). With online methods, students can do the task anytime outside the class. Moreover, the method can also facilitate lecturers in examining essays with direct feedback through the online system. However, it must be highlighted that online learning cannot replace face-to-face meetings. Face-to-face meetings are still powerful in providing critical thinking, feedback, direct evaluations, and psychological support for the students (Stein and Graham, 2014). Both traditional learning and online learning are the core concept of blended learning or hybrid learning.

Blended learning can be defined as the integration of traditional learning (face-to-face) with an online-based approach to increase the effectiveness,

efficiency, and flexibility of learning (Pérez-Marín, Santacruz and Gómez, 2012; Ramakrisnan *et al.*, 2012; Güzer and Caner, 2014; Stein and Graham, 2014). From this definition, it can be seen that blended learning emphasizes not only face-to-face systems but also uses computational instruments to facilitate learning.

There is a considerable benefit in developing students' knowledge and experience in integrating experience in the learning process. With this learning, students learn internal and cognitive knowledge to produce in-depth and comprehensive knowledge (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Khlaisang and Likhitamrongkiat, 2015; Koraneekij and Khlaisang, 2015).

Blended learning has become a central issue for the last decade, including in teaching the English language. Many researchers report that blended learning has a positive impact on student's performance (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Maulan and Ibrahim, 2012; Ramakrisnan *et al.*, 2012; BakarNordin and Alias, 2013; Makhdoom *et al.*, 2013; Khlaisang and Likhitamrongkiat, 2015; Koraneekij and Khlaisang, 2015). It provides easy access to learning material and assessment and evaluation for the student, which will improve their English skill. Most of the blended learning research in teaching English focuses on a general aspect of competence, such as grammar or vocabulary building. However, some other aspects, such as writing or speaking, are less discussed. This research is focusing on the implementation of a blended learning model to improve writing skills. This research is limited to writing competence, especially writing essays.

II. METHODS

Participant

The number of participants in the study is 90 students. They were undergraduate students of Universitas Andalas, who enrolled in English Communication. The students were grouped into experimental group and control group. The experimental group consists of 45 students who exposed to a used blended learning environment for essay writing. The Control group consists of 45 students who did not use blended learning.

This study's object is the effectiveness of the

application of blended learning methods in the acceptance and understanding of learning material. The primary data were obtained from the test conducted to measure the student's ability to write essays, including pre-test (post-test) and post-test (post-test). Secondary data comes from the track record of assessing students' work and lecturer records in both face-to-face and online learning activities. In this study, the subject will take the initial test to see the ability to write his essay. After the implementation of blended learning is complete, it is estimated that the subject will take the final test to involve the significance of improving his essay writing skills in the next three months.

Design and statistic analysis

The research was conducted using a single-factor. The independent variable was the use of blended learning, or non-use blended learning in writing an essay while the dependent variable is essay score. The essay scores included the evaluation of the introduction and thesis statement, main points for body and conclusion paragraph, structure transition, style and diction, and grammar and punctuation. The data are analyzed by using the t-Test.

Rationale and hypothesis

The research assumed that blended learning would provide students more time to write a good essay.

By using online media, including video, web page, and online assignments, students will be able to develop writing skills, especially dealing with essay structure and logical order. It is expected that blended learning will have a positive effect on the quality of essay writing. The null hypothesis of the research was:

H_0 : The use of a blended learning environment will not improve the experimental group's performance in writing an essay.

H_1 : The use of a blended learning environment will improve the performance of the experimental group.

Blended Class Design for Essay Writing

The research focuses on the blended class design with applied to experimental class. In the blended class, students develop their writing ability in different context, stating from formulating idea to submitting the final assignment. This class consists of 16 meeting which covers 10 topics. However, for the research purposes only 8 meetings were monitored for both control and experimental group. For control group, all learning activities were done by face to face meeting, while for experimental group, the activities were delivered with both face to face and online. The activities design for experimental class is reflected in table 1.

Table 1. Activities Design for Blended Class

Writing Process	Face to face Activities	Online Activities
<i>Pre-writing</i> Finding topics and formulating the outline	Brainstorming, Small group discussion, Class discussion	Reading essay examples Watching instruction video Discussion Forum Online quiz Writing the outline
<i>Drafting</i> Writing a draft based on the outline	Presentation Direct feedback from the instructors	Writing the draft, Watching instruction video Self-review, Peer review, Detail feedback, Private message
<i>Writing the essay</i> Developing the essay based on drafting feedback	Presentation Direct feedback	Self review (rubric), Peer review, Annotation feedback Discussion forum
<i>Rewriting</i> Improving the writing based on the feedback	Provide motivation for students, Provide one to one discussion	Peer review, Feedback

Table 1 shows some activities that provided during face to face and online meeting which include both synchronous and asynchronous activities. Implementing blended learning models in writing essays can be implemented in four stages of writing, including brainstorming (prewriting), drafting, writing essays, and editing or revision (rewriting).

a. Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a critical thinking process to generate ideas that will be used as a material in writing an essay (Zemach and Rumisek, 2006; Wyrick, 2011; Connelly and Forsyth, 2012; McWhorter, 2016). Here students are invited to discuss by provoking creative ideas through pictures, videos, or articles related to the topic. In the application of blended learning, the stages of brainstorming can be done in class or face to face. Lecturers play an active role in directing students to questions that will lead them to certain arguments or conclusions. Brainstorming can be done in several ways, such as making lists, writing freely, and mapping.

To create a list, the lecturer can ask students to write down words, phrases, or sentences related to the discussion topic. Freewriting can be used to provoke students' creative ideas and also can train their fluency in writing. Lecturers can ask students to write down whatever comes to their mind without paying attention to grammar or spelling. Finally, the lecturer can use the mapping method, writes students' ideas around the main topic, then connects ideas with a related topic. After all, ideas are collected, the lecturer can invite students to eliminate irrelevant information with the topics they are going to write.

b. Make a Draft / Framework for Writing

A draft is the starting point in writing that guides the writer to make a good essay. The drafting process started by outlining the topics and objectives which have been gathered through brainstorming. The essay's outline aims to put ideas about the topic in a well organized and logical sequence (Zemach and Rumisek, 2006; McWhorter, 2016). Here are the steps in writing an outline:

1. Write the topic at the top
2. Use Roman numerals I, II, III to write down the main part of an essay, starting from

the introduction, the first main idea, the second main idea, the third main idea, and a conclusion. Provide a wide enough distance for each part.

3. In the introduction, write down the ideas about the topic. If the essay aims to be convincing, then give the best argument. If the essay aims to explain the process, write down the steps to understand it. And if the essay aims to inform something, explain the main categories of information
4. Next to each Roman numeral, write A, B, and C slightly indented, then write down the facts or information that supports the main idea or statement.

To help students create this essay framework, lecturers can provide a template skeleton in a blended learning environment that can be accessed and downloaded by students online. With this template, students will be able to collect the essay framework in short. This stage can be done online without having to allocate special time face-to-face to discuss the essay framework.

c. Essay Writing

After writing an outline of the essay, students are asked to write their essays based on the outline. Students can explain, describe, and provide complete arguments about the topics. Keep in mind that each of the important ideas that have been written in the outline is the main sentence that will be developed into paragraphs. To develop the main sentence into paragraphs, it is necessary to add supporting information (supporting detail). A paragraph has a structure consisting of main sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences (Zemach and Rumisek, 2006).

The first paragraph is a very important part because the section provides an overview of the problem and determines whether the essay is interesting or not for the reader. Writing a good opening paragraph may consist of five to ten sentences, provide an overview of the essay topic, provide background information on the topic, and give important points to be discussed in the content section. The most important is to attract the attention of readers (Zemach and Rumisek, 2006; Alluhaybi, 2015; McWhorter, 2016).

Besides providing material, such as videos or document files, the lecturer can allocate an assignment for the introduction section in the blended learning environment. Students can be grouped and asked to do peer review and provide feedback for each writing. Then, the lecture may respond to the feedback and provide a suggestion. Do not forget to praise the students for their works. It is a way to engage students in the online environment.

After writing the first paragraph, then each main idea should be developed into a paragraph. The main idea contains the main sentence as a core of the paragraph. Then, the main sentence must be supported by supporting sentences or supporting details to support the statement of the main sentence. The supporting details may be varied according to the type of sentence. They can be examples, facts, quotations, reasons, or opinions. It is done until all the main ideas that have been written in the framework have become complete paragraphs.

Finally, an essay is usually ended by writing a conclusion. The conclusion is a summary of the points that have been mentioned and gives the reader a final perspective. The points should not repeat what has been written in the discussion. A good conclusion also describes the author's opinions, feelings, or perceptions on the topic (Zemach and Rumisek, 2006; McWhorter, 2016).

In the blended environment, writing an essay can be undertaken via online activities. Lecturers can provide an assignment that the students can access at home and can provide direct feedback or suggestion for the writing. It will allow students to have extensive time to consider developing the main idea into a paragraph by providing supporting sentences.

d. Revision and Editing

After a series of writing, students need to review and edit their writing. Here, students are required to review their essays by considering several technical aspects, such as the logical sequence of paragraphs, cohesion, the format of writing, and grammar and spelling. Revision in writing is very critical for English learners because they have limited access to the English language. Some students may also have difficulties in finding appropriate dictions

while some others have difficulties in writing cohesively. The revision will help them consider the essay, check the order of the ideas, find appropriate diction, improve readability, and check grammar and punctuation. It may take several times until students get their best essays.

Revision can be done via online activities. Lecturers can provide feedback, alternative diction, or grammatical revision. It will allow students to improve their writing by revising grammar and cohesion based on the feedback. Besides, it is easy for students to rearrange the sentences or paragraphs by using the online environment.

From the series of writing, almost all processes can be carried out through the online learning process. However, face-to-face learning still plays an important role, especially in providing feedback and discussion to solve the problems faced by students in writing essays. With the combination of face-to-face learning and online learning, it is expected that the student's performance in writing English essays will increase significantly.

III. RESULT

Pre-test result

The main independent variable was the use of blended learning by the experimental group in the essay writing. The independent is the essay score, which includes the introduction (Skill 1), the main points in body paragraphs and conclusion (Skill 2), the organization (Skill 3), style and diction (Skill 4), and spelling, grammar, and punctuation (Skill 5). The maximum value for each skill is 20.

Table 2. Pre-test result for the control group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Skill 1 Pre-	44	5	15	9.09	2.229
Skill 2 Pre-	44	5	15	12.05	2.710
Skill 3 Pre-	44	0	15	11.36	3.300
Skill 4 Pre-	44	10	15	12.05	2.487
Skill 5 Pre-	44	5	15	10.68	2.768
Essay Score Pre-	44	40	70	55.23	8.624
Valid N (listwise)	44				

Table 2 reflects the distribution of skills in writing an essay. It can be seen that the mean of each skill is quite low. The lowest score for skill is in skill 1, reflecting the student's competence in writing engaged and well-structured introduction. Moreover, the pre-test result also shows that 59% of students have less than 60, which indicates a low level of competency in essay writing.

Table 3. Pre-test essay score for the experimental group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Skill 1 Pre-	37	5	15	10.41	3.609
Skill 2 Pre-	37	5	20	11.62	3.345
Skill 3 Pre-	37	5	20	12.03	3.219
Skill 4 Pre-	37	5	15	10.54	2.292
Skill 5 Pre-	37	5	15	10.68	3.567
Essay Score Pre-	37	25	75	55.27	10.603
Valid N (listwise)	37				

Table 3 reflects the writing skill of the experimental group. It can be seen that the mean for each skill is quite close to the control group. Moreover, the mean for the essay score is also quite close to the control group's essay score. This indicates that both the control and experimental group have the same level of competency in essay writing. In the experimental class, the lowest skill is skill 1, which is similar to the control class. The result of the pre-test indicates that majority of the students have low skill in writing. About 60% of students have an essay score below 60; most of them are between 50-55. It can be inferred that students have difficulties in writing an essay.

Based on the essay scores from the pre-test in both the control and experimental group, it can be inferred that writing an essay remains a problem in English learning. Students have difficulties in composing ideas with well-structured sentences. Moreover, the pre-test result also indicates that students cannot produce a comprehensive and attractive introduction from the five skills used as a measurement. Therefore, it is important to provide an appropriate approach to teach essay writing to the students.

B. Post result

Post-test was done to figure out the result of the learning process for both control and experimental classes in writing essays. Students were exposed to the traditional face-to-face meeting in the control class, while the experimental class uses a blended learning approach. As in the pre-test, post-test also focuses on five aspects of writing an essay, including introduction (skill 1), main points (skill 2), organization (skill 3), style (skill 4), and mechanics (skill 5). The maximum point for each skill is 20 point.

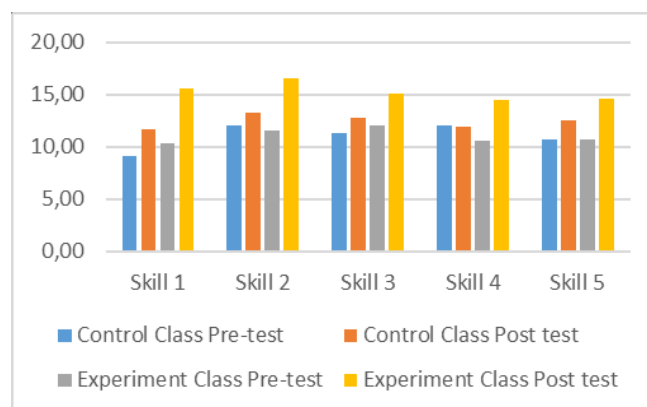
Table 4 shows that the control class's writing skill improved, especially for skill 1 and 5. Some other skills improved slightly, and the other is decreased.

Table 4. Post Test Result For Control Group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Skill 1 Post-	44	10	20	11.70	3.225
Skill 2 Post-	44	10	20	13.30	2.841
Skill 3 Post-	44	5	20	12.84	3.125
Skill 4 Post-	44	5	20	11.93	3.274
Skill 5 Post-	44	5	20	12.61	3.492
Essay Score Post-	44	40	85	62.39	11.588
Valid N (listwise)	44				

In general, the average score for essay writing skill of control class is 62.39.

The post-test result in the experimental class shows there is a significant improvement in writing skills, especially for skill 1, 2, and 3. It indicates that the use of instructional media through blended learning environments significantly impacts students' performance in essay writing. Figure 1 shows the comparison of pre-test and post-test for both control and experimental class.

**Fig.1 Result comparisons of pre-test and post-test in control and experimental class**

The pre-test result indicates that there are improvements for each skill both in control and experimental classes. It can be inferred from figure 1 that students in the experimental class have improved their essay scores higher than the students in the control class. Skill 1 and 2 have improved significantly in the experimental class.

C. T-Test result

The T-test is used to figure out the significant difference between control and experimental class. It includes both pre-test and post-test results, which are compared to figure out the result's significant improvement. From the analysis, the control class's result shows the mean for the pre-test is 55,23, while the post-test is 62,39. The T-test results of both test are 0.00, which indicates no significant improvement in the control class. Meanwhile, the experiment class shows different results. Based

on the t-test analysis, the result shows that the significant improvement is 0,06 with the mean of the pre-test is 55,27, and the post-test is 76,35. The significant improvement of the experiment class indicates that the use of instructional media through blended learning environments can improve students' competence in writing essays. Hence, it can be concluded that the hypothesis 1 (H1) is accepted with a significance score $0,06 > 0,05$. Furthermore, regarding the skills in the writing essay, the experiment class indicates different significant results.

Table 5. T-Test For Pretest and Post Test For Experimental Group

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Skill 1 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.192	.255
Pair 2	Skill 2 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.416	.010
Pair 3	Skill 3 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.445	.006
Pair 4	Skill 4 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.316	.057
Pair 5	Skill 5 Pre- & Skill 1 Post-	37	.314	.059

Table 5 indicates that skill 1 has the highest significance improvement, about 0,2 while skill 3 has less significant improvement, about 0,06.

It can be seen in Table 5 that the use of instructional media through blended learning environments can improve students' competence in writing an essay. By using an online environment, students can access learning material easily. Students can also get direct feedback regarding their assignments and revise the essay based on the feedback. Moreover, the online environment enables students to allocate more time to develop their essays, find the references, and do editing. Moreover, during the face-to-face meeting, students have more time to discuss within a group, get a peer review, and get direct feedback from the teacher.

The use of instructional video in the online environment helped students understand the concepts and strategies in elaborating a good essay. Students can replay the video until they get a better understanding of the topic. The result of the current indicates that the skill in writing the introduction is improved significantly. The introduction is very important in writing an essay since it describes the general overview of the essay. Writers have to elaborate an interesting introduction to engage the reader. Blended learning allows students to

contemplate and elaborate on their ideas to generate a good introduction. Besides the introduction, cohesion and coherence are also necessary to create a good essay. From the result of the research, cohesion and coherence are indicated by skill 2 and skill 3.

Online environments can be used to deliver descriptions of how to develop a good introduction, while face-to-face meetings can be used to discuss their works and get feedback from the lecturer. In writing the introduction, students can rewrite their writing based on the lecturer's feedback via the online environment. Students can edit their assignments without having to start writing from scratch. Regarding coherence and cohesion, blended learning environments enable students to rearrange the sentences and paragraphs into a logical order and add coherence devices, such as conjunctive adverbs and personal references.

IV. DISCUSSION

Blended learning environments offer various instructional media, such as real-time collaboration software, online web-based learning, and technology that support performance-based learning by providing learning environments. These features are distributed through the Learning Management System (LMS) using the blended learning environment. There are four features that LMS has that are very useful in implementing blended learning (Stein and Graham, 2014):

1. Class management includes student management, assessment, group management, peer review, and learning outcomes analysis.
2. Communication and interaction: announcement features, private messages, discussion forums, live chats, video conferences, notifications, and RSS feed.
3. Learning organization and resources: web page creation, learning distribution, learning outcomes, file uploads, and collaboration.
4. Practice and practice: quizzes and tests, surveys, online assignments, self-assessments, and rubrics.

The blended learning model consists of various

learning activities, including face-to-face learning, online learning, and independent learning. As a mixed model, blended learning should provide synchronous and asynchronous learning. In the synchronous mode, lecturers or teachers allow students to be independent learners by using interactive material, such as instructional video, video conference, live chat, animation, and presentation. On the other hand, the asynchronous mode offers a variety of activities such as discussion forums, emails, assignments, quizzes, and wikis (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Moreno and Mayer, 2007; Bastiaens, 2012; Stein and Graham, 2014).

By using the blended learning method, access to learning content can be easier. Access to learning materials, assessment, and evaluation can be accessed online. Thus, students can study anytime and anywhere. Likewise, teachers can also deliver learning material, assessment, evaluation, and communication online. Even today, the blended learning environment is accessible with smartphones, making it easier for the teaching and learning process.

Among the advantages of a specific blended learning model is students' opportunity to build a sense of togetherness (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004). In a class that applies a blended learning model, besides face-to-face meetings, students also have the opportunity to communicate with other students by engaging in open dialogue through discussion forums. This facility allows students to trigger their creativity and reasoning skills through critical discussion. Other features also allow students to communicate with lecturers or teachers through personal messages and email. These features allow

lecturers to provide direct feedback on students' various learning activities both in face-to-face and online class. The lecturer can share learning materials such as video, audio, text, weblinks, and other material. Moreover, the lecturer can also control and monitor students' progress during the learning, especially in essay writing.

V. CONCLUSION

Writing an English essay is a difficult task for many university students because it is a matter of English proficiency and deals with a technical and psychological aspect. Students need extended time to write their essays and instructional media, which can help them improve their understanding of essay writing's technical aspects. Besides, they also need psychological treatment, such as motivation, encouragement, and praise, to keep them engaged in writing. Blended learning environment offers both technical and psychological aspects of writing. Students can access learning material and undertake writing processes online without limited time and space. They also can get benefit from a face-to-face meeting, including feedback and motivation from the lecturers. Both online and face-to-face meetings can help the students to improve their skills in essay writing. However, the use of instructional media through blended learning environments in the experimental class has a significant impact on the student's performance in essay writing.

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