Integrating a Comic Maker Site as an Alternative Educational Technology in Indonesian EFL Classroom

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Abstracts

Using latest technology as a teaching strategy, teacher could create a captivating classroom where students' motivation can be grasped. As an attempt of fulfilling students' needs of real-world education, MALL is explored. Pixton, the digital comic maker is the highlighted resource in this research. The purpose of this research is to investigate the advantages and challenges of changing the comic strips resources from conventional to digital for teaching writing comprehension in higher education. By applying Project Based Learning as the framework of creating research cycles, content analysis and qualitative study are used to evaluate the use of Pixton. The advantage of using Pixton in higher education is to encourage students' autonomous learning's skills such as learning to learn, critical thinking, and collaboration. In other hands the challenges divided into technical and non-technical area. This study definitely answers the questions regarding the advantages and challenges of applying Pixton in higher education.

Keywords: Mobile Assisted Language Learning, Project Based Learning, higher education, Pixton, Comic strips

INTRODUCTION

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is one of teaching approaches which leads the students and teachers to explore mobile devices as the media of learning in the classroom. Teachers could use it to make students engage in learning activities by using their mobile phones. It is a teaching strategy to create a captivating classroom by getting closer to students' real-world to grasp their interest. A closer look at the real-world can encourage students to follow classroom discussion mindfully. As a digital media, Mobile Assisted Language Learning came from its pioneer; Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) that was developed in 1960's and has various ways of used to teach English comprehensions. There are wide range of choices can be chosen by teachers in providing appropriate digital contents and features to be brought to their class and MALL is a tool to cope those activities. As one of the areas of Teaching English as Foreign Language, writing comprehension can be introduced by using digital media. One of the media that can create an interesting atmosphere in the classroom and motivate students in following the discussion is through comic strips. In the other hand, by creating MALL, the comic strips are transformed into digital forms. Not only using it as a real-world media but also fulfilling the pedagogy, digital comic strips can foster students' language proficiencies. As pointed out by Megawati and Anugerahwati (2012), the effectiveness of teaching by using comic strips can encourage students to write based on given themes. Furthermore, the result of her research showed that comic strips could be a tool of generating, organizing students' ideas, and selecting appropriate grammar, vocabularies, and punctuations. It was also reinforced by research that was conducted by Anggraini, Martono, and Rais (2015) which pointed out that teaching writing by using comic strips led students to generate their ideas and wrote using target language properly.

Before the findings of digital self-made comic strips, teachers took the strips from magazines, newspapers, and internet or manually self-made. One of the techniques in teaching writing using comic strips is by giving students empty comic's speech bubbles. One of the activities is by letting students to fill the bubbles with sentences based on the pictures and given themes. The themes are usually related to English text genres like spoof, descriptive text, narrative text, short text etc. Both Megawati and Anugerahwati (2012) and Anggraini, Martono, and Rais (2015) applied this teaching technique in conducting their research. In other hand, the existence of comic strips somehow inaccessible, so teachers tend to have a self-made comic strip to be distributed to their classroom as stated by Novitasari (2020). The lack of technology in classroom was one of the main factors that made teachers brought printed comic strips in the class. Novitasari (2020) mentioned that the insufficient classroom technology such as LCD and OHP projector availability forced teachers to bring their printed self-made comic.

Nowadays, EFL teachers are encouraged to explore digital features to make teaching and learning more effectively and more real-world. Teaching writing using comic strips is still related to today's situation. It can be done by upgrading the way of making comic strips by providing a media to make students more involve in building it together in the classroom. Pixton as one of the application teachers can use in the class both by computer or mobile devices. This application matches to the Mobile Assisted Language Learning Approach as a media in teaching writing using comic strips digitally. As one of the alternative teaching media, Pixton provides students in making their own comic avatars or characters. This is a way of attracting students in building a set of characters in their comic strips with themselves as the main character. In addition, Pixton has detail physical features section in building each comic character like the hair, skin tones, clothes, accessories, etc. Those features again can make students more motivated to build their comic strips because they have freedom since the beginning of creating it. As the tagline of this application "Pixton Comic & Story Board for Education", it has a feature where teachers can arranged and control their class because it is specially build for education. So, this application has a part for teachers to create their own classroom and have interactive rubric with their students. So, by using this rubric, teachers can see the progress of students' comic strips and can give feedback to them.

This research brought Project Based Learning framework as the fundamental approach in making the lesson plans in order to get good research cycles. The project Based Learning method is an inquiry-based instructional method that engages learners in constructing knowledge and creating meaningful real-world products (Brundiers & Wiek, 2013; Krajcik & Shin, 2014). As stated by Chen and Yang (2019) in the result of their study, the PjBL enhances strudents' academic performances through meaningful projects they were engaged with. It was shown that PjBL has better impacts on students' academic achievements rather than direct instructional did. As this research was done in higher education, the PjBL has more challenges to be applied but also it beneficial for students' learning outputs. As the fundamental remarks of using PjBL in this research, the learning outputs coped major skills, those were: cognitive, affective and behavior skills, Guo (2019).

The researcher had two main focuses of doing this research. Firstly, were the advantages of using Pixton in MALL in EFL classroom. Secondly, were the challenges of using Pixton in MALL in EFL classroom. In addition, the aim of this research was to explore the technologies especially Pixton to support teaching and learning. As the research was conducted in higher education, the researcher wanted to show the advantages and

challenges of using Pixton in teaching which highly impacted to the development of 21st century global students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

MALL as defined by Polakova and Klimova (2019) is an approach which including the theory of constructivism and has it goals in developing students' critical thinking, increasing learning motivation and learning outcomes. Similarly, Ezra and Cohen (2018) stated that mobile assisted language learning is a language learning facilitated by any kinds of mobile devices. Besides, MALL is a strategy of enhancing students' to learn language independently. Eight characters of a mobile application in education provided by Mehdipour and Zerehkafi (2013) are (1) portability, it is accessible anywhere, (2) individuality, fits individual learning preferences, (3) unobtrusiveness, as the way people using mobile personally, (4) availability, it is accessible to be used whenever it is needed, (5) adaptability, technology could fit any education's need (6) persistence, the technology always improved and upgraded to fit any kinds of students' need, (7) usefulness, it is beneficial for education, (8) usability, the technology is easy to be used and applied for teaching and learning activity. Moreover, Andujar (2016), Chang (2017), and Alam and Mizan (2019) found that utilizing students with mobile phone in EFL class could improve their writing skills. The improvements were at students' linguistics accuracy such as lexical and grammatical aspects.

From the researches above, it can be concluded that MALL can boost students' productive skills and especially in writing skill, the accuracy of lexical and grammatical use can be grasped.

Comic strips

As one of the media in applying MALL, Pixton, a digital comic strip maker for education is a web-based comic platform. According to Eisner (1985) as cited in Wulandari and Sofiyah (2017), comic strip is a communicative media between the creator and readers with a series of meaningful pictures. The use of comic strips for teaching has been investigated by many researchers. By conducting pre-test and post-test, Wulandari and Sofiah (2017) found that using comic strips effectively could improve students' achievements in reading skills which proven by the improvements of students' scores as the outcome of their study. In addition, Csabay (2014) and Dony (2009) had investigated that comic strips could create an interesting atmosphere in language classes in Hungary and Belgium.

The studies above stated that teaching language using comic strips effectively could improve students' independent learning and motivate them to achieve their language skills mastery.

METHOD

This research was a qualitative study and focused on students' perspectives toward the advantages and challenges of the implementation of Pixton in MALL in EFL classroom. In addition, as a means of creating richer and deeper discussion, the writer applied content analysis. Mobile phones or smart phones were used both by lecturer hers and students as the media of doing this research. PjBL was done through some steps successively in conducting this research in a class of 38 students of Tourism and

Hospitality department. The data were taken from some sources, the questionnaires through Google form, classroom observation, literature studies, and interview. The following table would discuss about the PjBL model:

Table 1. The PjBL Model

Project based learning stages	Activities 1 (conventional's version)	Activities 2 (Pixton's version)
1) Brainstorming	Lecturer Introduced the activities and brought students to discuss about writing a conversation text about job interview. "have you ever attended a job interview?". Followed by other essential questions.	Lecturer introduced the topic and also Pixton app. "have you ever made a comic strip?"
2) Observing	Tried to engage with the students by asking them about their experiences and understanding about job interview and writing conversation activities in their previous education level. "why did job interview needed before hiring someone to work in a company?"	Lecturer asked students about their experience in writing conversation text. Followed by asking them about enhancing writing skill through comic strip. "can you imagine how fun is making a comic". Lecturer observed students' reactions and arguments.
3) Getting an idea	Explained about the stage of becoming a job seeker and asked students to share their experiences to motivate their critical thinking. "what kind of questions and why did the interviewer asked about it?"	Lecturer explained the steps of making a comic strips using Pixton and asked students to use their mobile phone to follow the activity. Students were asked to switch the previous conversation text project from a piece of script into comic strips.
4) Providing various solution	Lecturer guided students by giving them open ended questions. "what can we prepare before going into an interview?", "what kind of manners should a interviewee have in a job interview?", "how will you overcome your anxiety when attending a job interview?". Facilitated students to solve those kinds of problems and had discussion together.	Lecturer asked students to share their thoughts about the coming up project and provided any solution when students needed. Some students who has difficulty in using their gadgets in doing the project, lecturer provided solution to switch the group.

5)	Designing the project	Lecturer Provided a material as the project. "write a conversation between an interviewer and an interviewee for any hospitality position". Followed by discussing about the rules of doing the project. "This is a pair project. Each group has to write a job interview conversation to be performed later but you need to observe any things dealing with job interview".	Students and lecturer discussed about the templates of the project, the due date and the technical rules of attempting it.
6)	Arranging the implementation steps	Lecturer asked students to get more information and observe through any references about a job interview. Then asked them to write the conversation as a script.	Lecturer and students discussed together about the best way of finishing the project. "all group should have account on Pixton and make your own avatar then make your work saved and place the comic strips from all groups in a bundle"
7)	Doing in depth discussion	As a facilitator, lecturer asked not only about students' difficulties in writing the text but also their reflections about the activities. "Did you find this activity fun?"	Lecturer as the mentor helped students to finish their projects and guided them whenever they needed it.
8)	Carrying out the project	Lecturer role was as the facilitator while students performing their work.	Students presented their project and had questions and answers session with other groups.
9)	Exhibiting the project for next project	After students performing their project, students were asked to share their reflections. This activity can help lecturer in designing the next project.	Students were asked to share their reflections of doing the project by filling questionnaires made by lecturer.
10)	Assessing the project	lecturer assessed students' work by giving them feedback and evaluations.	lecturer assessed the classroom project and gave students feedback.

After doing the teaching and learning activities by applying PjBL, the researcher then tried to evaluate the activities by using CALL evaluation By Chapelle. As the pioneer of MALL, this evaluation rubric can be used to evaluate both activities conducted by using computer and mobile phone. Moreover, the researcher tried to use this rubric as the

guidance and measurement of Pixton utilization in classroom and use it as the benchmark of making the questionnaires.

Table 2. The CALL Evaluation

CALL Evaluation
1) Does Pixton provide learners the opportunities to use target language to complete the task?
2) Do the tasks fit learners in a particular setting?
3) Does Pixton interactive?
4) Can lecturer use Pixton to provide feedback to the students?
5) Is Pixton appropriate to learners of particular age?
6) Is Pixton appropriate to students of Hospitality?
7) Do learners interact and negotiate meaning while they are working in Pixton?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The use of technology in Indonesian EFL classroom is still growing. In other hand the need to fulfill students' satisfaction of learning based on their real-world is urgently required. Therefore, teachers in Indonesia have started to use technology in teaching, but Pixton was rarely used by them. Thirty students in this research shared their experience of learning language using technology.
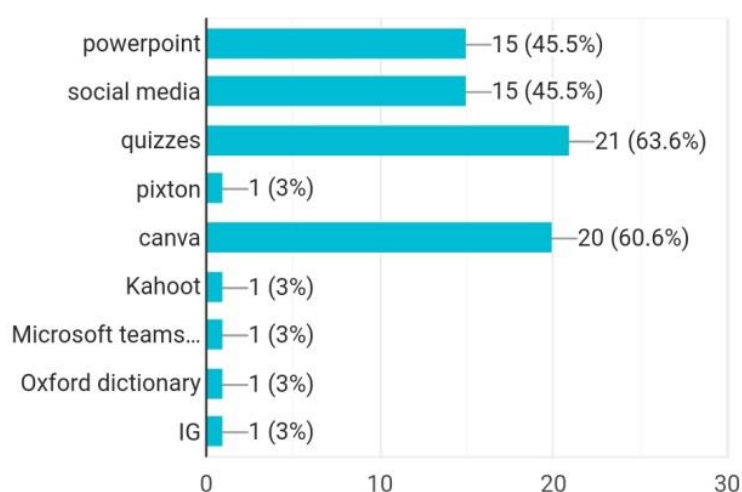

Chart 1. Students' Experiences of Technology Utilization in Previous English Classroom

Some students had experience in using Kahoot, Canva, Pixton and other social media for learning in the classroom. Furthermore, Quizzes and Powerpoint were two frequently used applications.
Discussions

1) The advantages of Pixton in EFL class:

As stated at the beginning of this paper, today's' education is to prepare students of having 21st century global skills. The advantage of using Pixton in classroom can be seen from its contribution in enhancing students' cognitive skills. These cognitive skills could be grasped through students' autonomous learning. Developing autonomous habits in the classroom is one of the students' needs in getting the

learning more personalized and meaningful to them. So teaching writing in the classroom is not only to teach them specific language skill but also helping them to develop all different kinds of skills, for example critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, and learning how to learn.

a. Learning to learn

To make the learning more effective and attractive, Pixton is a media that can encourage students' active role in the classroom's discussion. It is an application that has various features to attract students in engaging in the learning activities. The features are relevant to students' real-world that can make them following the discussions actively. This was a feature on Pixton which can make students engage in learning activities by personalizing their character or avatar for building a comic strip.

Figure 1. The Classroom Avatars to build students' active role

Image above was the classroom avatars, including lecturer-students' avatars. They were personalized based on self-preferences. Creating students' avatars without any borders can motivate them to be more engaged in following the classroom's discussion because they could personalize their comic. It could be used as a strategy in developing students' active role in creating their project.
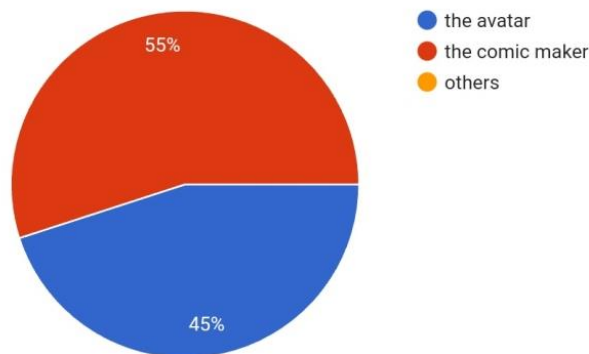

Chart 2. Pixton's Features Based on Students' Preferences

The chart above shows students preferences of using Pixton for learning writing. Their freedom of making free characters in their comic can motivate them to involve in the process of project makings. The comic maker itself has some more details can be personalized by students. It was the blank paper where every kind

of comic concepts could be started freely by students. They could set settings of the comic including setting of time, place, and situations.

Figure 2. Students' Comic Product

In previous ESL writing activity by using comic strips as the media of teaching, students were asked to fill the empty bubbles on the comic strips. Contrary, in Pixton, students could develop their own comic from basic part, such as their freedom to choose the location of the story by choosing appropriate background based on the topic they brought. Some details preferences were also available, such as the characters based on the occupancies. The type of the writing in speech bubble was also can be set by clicking some choices, for example: the speech, thought, shout and whisper. Those features can facilitate students more active in exploring the use of each type of bubble in writing their comic.
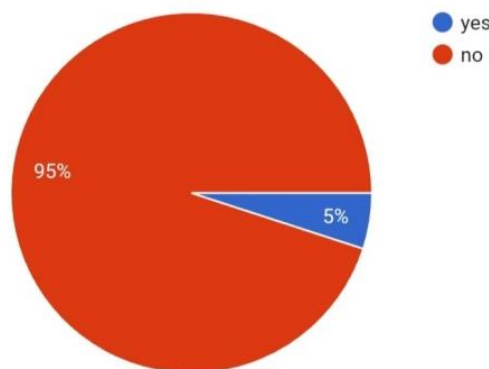
b. Critical thinking

Chart 3. Students' understandings towards Pixton's Presence and Utilization before being introduced by lecturer

The chart above shows that most of students (95%) never known about Pixton and became first time users. Although this was a new application for them, the term comic was not a new thing. So they have already known about how the project

would be. This students' involvement was also shown at the beginning of the discussion because PjBL was applied. They decided the strategy to do the project, arranged the schedule to do it and Pixton facilitated them to be more engaged to their decision making. The critical thinking is also can be seen when students started to build their comic. Lecturer gave an instruction by mentioning numbers to build students' sense of achievements "make comic strips consist of at least 6 slides by using Pixton!". In other hands the decision making could be done by students in comic editing section. They had freedom in creating the scene of the comic based on the theme. Their decision of choosing the scene preferences could build the plot of their writings. This freedom of building comic strips digitally can manage their motivation to think critically and boost their motivation level.

c. Collaboration

Collaboration is the advantage of using Pixton coming from the students and lecturer's side. Both lecturer and students could evaluate and reflect the classroom's projects. Through Pixton, lecturer could see students' progress in building their comic and helping them in making decision by monitoring their work by Pixton's "student comic" section. All student comic progress could be monitored through this feature and it allowed lecturer to give feedback to students. Moreover, students' difficulties can be managed from this section.

Figure 3. Lecturer -Students Interactive Rubrics

Additionally, students could also evaluate and identified what "success" for a project to be. The chart 4 below shows students' writing comprehension after doing the project using Pixton.
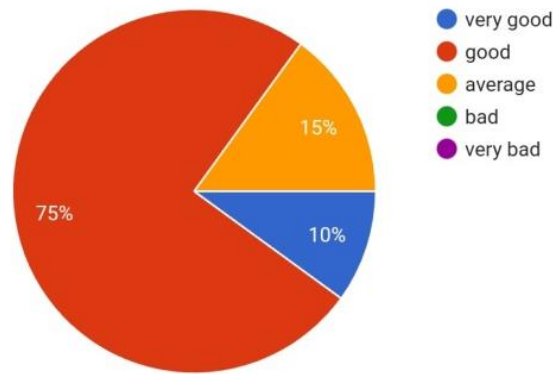
Chart 4. Students' Writing Comprehensions after Using Pixton

75% said they had good writing mastery after practicing writing through classroom project using Pixton. It followed by average (15%) and very good writing mastery (10%). The features of the comic editing in Pixton allowed students to explore their writing range with various vocabularies. The various scenes and characters could motivate students to fill their own empty bubbles based on their preference settings. Through the features had been mentioned above, students could draw their reflection as can be seen from pie chart above.
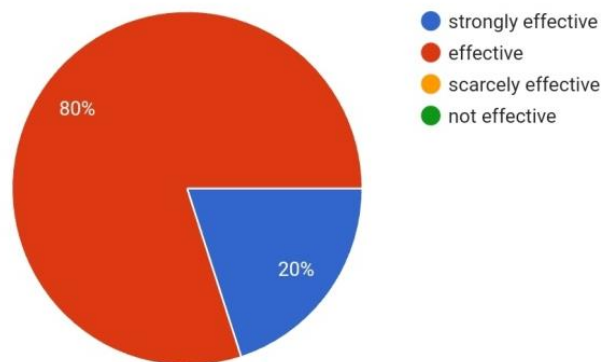

Chart 5. The effectiveness of Pixton

In addition, the effectiveness of using Pixton for learning was being evaluated by students with the result as pie chart above. Pixton for students of hospitality in higher education was told to be 80% effective for grasping writing comprehension. As the digital function make the process of creating comic easy and fun. It was said to be effective for students to use it.
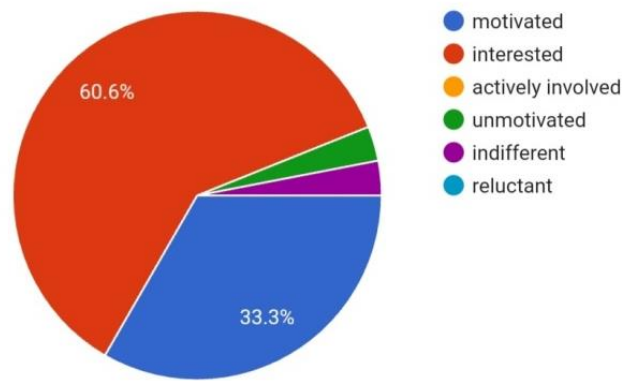
Chart 6. Students' Reflections towards Pixton

As the sum up, students evaluation about the project was 60.3% interested, 33,3% were motivated, and the rest 6.7% said the project was indifferent and unmotivated. Students' motivation could be seen during the process of building their project. Based on their reflections, teaching writing comprehension by using Pixton could show their collaborative skills. Students could evaluate their activities and set the next learning activities using Pixton. As result, building comic strips through Pixton could boost students' learning outcomes in the form of giving their reflections and evaluation toward the project. It was because the stage of engaging students' involvement in the project could be achieved by providing appropriate media, content, and approach.

2) The challenges of using Pixton in EFL class

The challenges of using Pixton in EFL class could be classified to the technical and the teaching issues. Since MALL is a teaching approach where technology and internet as the key of making it work well, poor internet connection became one of the main problems in conducting this activity. Most students had difficulty to fine good internet connections through their mobile data in campus area. Although the institutions had internet connection in the whole buildings, but students found it hard because the internet user numbers were limited. So, this was one of the constraints that played a big role in MALL activities. This poor internet connection also effected to the time management of finishing the project. It consumed a lot of time because low signals made the Pixton application only buffered at the same page. So students could not move and explore to Pixton's features smoothly. The last technical challenges faced by students were unsupported devices. Pixton tend to be a heavy application for certain mobile phones. Some phones with old operating systems could not process Pixton application properly. So students needed to change the Pixton application's appearance on their phone screen to be "website view" which caused their phone to freeze. Beside the technical constraints above, the lack feedback from the lecturer also played a big role in this project through the feature of this application. The only feedback from lecturer was by seeing students' progress through "students comic" section and there was no detail information about students' difficulties. So, lecturer could only see the process of comic making by reading their comic bubbles. Whether it was still empty or unfinished, lecturer could only monitor students' by asking them personally. From students' point of view, there

was no section in Pixton where students could have question and answer or reflect their activity while the comic was still ongoing or finished.

Conclusion

Considering all of the facts based on the findings and discussions of this research, so the researcher could conclude that using Pixton in teaching writing comprehension as the strategy of applying MALL in the classroom is suggested. The result showed the advantages of using it to enhance students' cognitive skills. It can make students familiar to digital comic maker and became autonomous learners. By using it effectively to sharpen their writing skills, they could also explore various English's text genres by making the strips to achieve their writing comprehensions. So, it is not merely a media of learning language, Pixton is helping students becoming 21st century global learners. The first advantage students could achieve was learning to learn skill. Pixton could be students' resources of building their learning strategy. Secondly, Pixton could boost students' critical thinking skills and facilitated them to make decision in doing their project. Lastly is the collaboration skill to reflect and give their feedback about the project.

The challenges were appeared when applying MALL using Pixton in the classroom. They were divided into two challenges. Firstly, were the technical challenges and secondly were the teaching challenges. The technical challenges included poor internet connections, unsupported mobile devices, and time consuming. Whilst the teaching constraints found in the Pixton feature itself where there was no part in it for students to reflect about their comic making activity or for lecturer to give feedback to students' ongoing and finished project. Dealing with technical challenges above, the education provider is expected to improve their internet service as it plays a big role in MALL activity.

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