

The Implementation of Combining Blended Learning and Project-based Learning in Teaching EFL Critical Reading to Students of STKIP PGRI Jombang

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Abstract:

The distance learning policy during the COVID-19 pandemic created new problems for students. The implementation of education and learning has undergone drastic changes. Learning is no longer using conventional face-to-face meetings, but is starting to be integrated with online learning. This is what causes the reading learning process, especially reading comprehension, is lacking. This research is designed to solve problems in reading class. The subjects in this study were students of STKIP PGRI Jombang, students majoring in English Education in the fifth semester who were taking critical reading courses. The research design uses classroom action research. The instruments used here were interviews, observations, field notes, questionnaires, and tests. The results of the study show Combaining of Blended Learning and Project Based Learning in Teaching EFL Critical Reading to Students can be an alternative teaching strategy that benefits for improving students' achievement, ability, and participation in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Blended learning, project-based learning

Introduction

Critical reading is valuable to implement because it does not only develop the cognitive aspect (understanding the text) but also the affective aspect (reading behavior). The importance of critical reading has inspired ELT researchers to study it more intensively. (Fatwa,2000) conducted small-scale action research for postsecondary ESL Chinese students in Singapore. The study reveals that the students were high motivated with a critical reading discourse when they were facilitated with scaffolding and opportunities to practice.

Critical Reading is one of compulsory courses at English Language Education of STKIP PGRI Jombang. This course is designed for helping

students to sharpen their critical reading skill, to improve their academic literacy, and expand their general knowledge. Students will read a variety of texts in order to improve their analytical, interpretive, and evaluative skill. The students will analyze, evaluate and synthesize text in all forms in order to develop new ideas and conclusions. They will apply critical and evaluative skill for academic article from journal, proceeding and other texts. This course is taken in the fifth semester.

When teaching critical reading abilities, teachers must make sure the students learn how to think critically (Morton, et al., 2006 and Jackson, 2014) Because of their ability to comprehend beyond the content of the text critically, critical readers have a tendency to react to what is being read (Jackson, 2014 & McGrath, et al., 2016). As a result, critical reading and thinking skills are essential for understanding the content of a text (Kurland, 2000).

In other words, having an effective teaching strategy becomes the main concern to improve the students' critical reading. A reading class facilitates the students with the text representing the advanced level. One alternative learning model that is considered capable of improving critical thinking skills in critical reading is Project-Based Learning (PjBL). Students are expected to be able to produce a product during the learning process (McGra,et al., 2016). In learning by using the PjBL model, they are required to work together in a group, share ideas and arrange a project timeline assigned to finish on time. Project-based learning is an authentic learning model or strategy in which students plan, implement, and evaluate projects that have real-world applications beyond the classroom (McGra,et all,2016).

Based on the researchers' observation in one of the classes of a one of private colleges in Indonesia, STKIP PGRI Jombang of English Language Department, most of students showed their low ability when they were asked to read critically in English. They seemed confused or nervous when the lecturer asked them to read an English text critically. It was only about 35% of 30 students in the class who could understand critical reading as well as their critical thinking confidently, but others seemed nervous and confused. When the lecturer asked them why they felt the anxiety to join the critical reading class, almost all of the students said that they were worried about the mistakes

they made especially in grammar and meaning. Some of them were also not confident in practicing English.

Based on the preliminary study, the problems that occurred during a critical reading course were that the students were less able to improve critical thinking skills. The main cause of the problem is that the teacher did not vary learning models in teaching reading to the students, some of them had lack of reading motivation. Therefore, PjBL in the critical reading course is needed. Based on the description above, the researchers were encouraged to conduct this research that aimed at explaining the implementation of PjBL (Jackson, 2014 and McGrath, et al., 2016), finding out whether blended learning and PjBL is effective to improve the students' level of critical thinking, and describing the students' responses towards the implementation of PjBL in a critical reading course that can develop students' critical thinking skills. The results of the study are expected to be useful to enrich the learning of critical reading especially by using PjBL to enhance students' critical thinking skills.

Projects with high complexity require sufficient processing time so that the resulting product meets the targeted criteria. In order for the project to be implemented properly, the lecturer as the facilitator needs to monitor the projects undertaken by students to stay on the right track. The project monitoring process can be done by providing input or feedback on website design projects undertaken by students. Generally, the monitoring process is carried out face-to-face (F2F). However, this method has limitations, especially related to the availability of time to review student projects. In addition, with the F2F approach, input or feedback from lecturers is difficult to complete immediately considering that website design activities are experimental activities that require time to work (Nambiar, D. 2000, Nejad, et al., 2020 Giovanella, 2020)

Based on the pre research and previous studies, there are some scholars doing studies about project based learning but in some different gaps. The previous studies have almost focused in the productive language skills such as PjBL in teaching writing and speaking. It prompts researchers to conduct a research dealing with blended learning and project based learning in teaching critical reading to students with different motivation levels. This study will

investigate how if the blended learning and PjBL is implemented in receipted language skills such as in reading course.

Review of Literature

a) Online Learning

There are several previous studies that discuss the implementation online learning, one of which shows that the implementation of online learning is not going well, because it does not deny the fact that online learning is very helpful in the learning process during a pandemic like now. The response from students has been unsatisfactory due to a number of factors, including a lack of signal in each student's area and the high cost of the data package used for online learning (Wiyaka, et al., 2018). However there are some scholars doing research by implementing PjBL with productive language skills and some scholars also have also conduct E- PjBL with other different field of knowledge as the following previous studies.

The process in project learning consists of identifying problems; looking for information or data; exchange ideas; and applying knowledge to projects (Davis, et al., 2018). Through a website design project, students will be motivated to learn, improve student attitudes in learning, and improve student soft-skills and hard-skills (Gannaway, et al., 2018). However, this method has limitations, especially related to the availability of time to review student projects. In addition, with the F2F approach, input or feedback from lecturers is difficult to complete immediately considering that website design activities are experimental activities that require time to work (Gannaway, et al., 2018). F2F activities in BL can be in the form of exercises, discussions, and presentations, while online learning activities can be focused on training activities, deepening of material, discussion, or discussion of exercises (Basri,et al., 2019). This means that through the BL approach, lecturers can provide input and feedback on website design projects undertaken by students with flexible time.

The effectiveness of PjBL on the students' English performance has been proven by previous studies. A research in a Malaysian university conducted by Musa et al. (Naeem, 2018) found that through PjBL, students acquired relevant reading skills such as skimming and scanning, gathering

information, and identifying relevant ideas related to the project undertaken by their group. Another research at the University of Memphis conducted by (Dwivedi, et.al) showed that there was increased effort and performance, improved learning, and the acquisition of a variety of academic and non-academic skills through PjBL. Besides linguistics performances, PjBL has also been found to effectively boost students' positivity in learning. Shin (2018) discovered that learners could boost up their self-confidence in a language classroom after they were taught by using PjBL. In his research, Shin (Nguyen, et al., 2019) found that project-based learning brings a significant impact on their confidence so that it can be part of the learning process. Similarly, Fried-Booth (Carroll, et al., 2019) showed that through the implementation of PjBL not only were the learners able to produce the final product as expected but also, they could increase self-confidence and independence within learning.

b) Critical Reading

Critical reading is an attempt to find potential strategies to help students think critically in responding to texts. asserts that through critical reading one might be able to encourage students to think effectively, analyze accurately, and evaluate texts carefully. Meanwhil (Carroll, et all.,2019) suggests that the steps of critical reading strategies are: annotating (making a note, circling keywords, and writing comments), previewing (learning about a text before really reading it), contextualizing (placing a text in its cultural contexts, biographical contexts, and historical contexts), 4 outlining (identifying the main ideas), analyzing (analyzing the main idea and supporting idea), summarizing (restating main ideas in their own word), paraphrasing (paraphrasing the main idea without changing the meaning), synthesizing (producing something by combining different things), questioning (asking questions about the content), and reflecting (testing the logic of a text as well as its credibility and emotional effect).

c) Project Based Learning[PjBL]

Project-based learning is a systematic teaching method by integrating knowledge and skills through the research process in planning and producing a product (Basri, et all, 2019). Project-based learning (PjBL) is a learning model that refers to philosophical constructivism so that students can

construct their own linguistics knowledge through real experiences. Thus, the application of the PjBL model can enhance students' critical thinking skills and overall linguistics competence. Based on existing studies, PjBL is proven to integrate all four language skills possessed by learners such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing to complete implemented activities. Project work makes learners deliberately involved in learning a language so that they can learn it in an authentic context. In the collaboration process carried out, learners will increase their communication skills, which can, in turn, open up opportunities for them to exchange information, negotiate ideas, and increase decision-making abilities (Ainley, 2012). Moreover, PjBL can attract learners to be actively involved in the language learning process. (Fredericks, 2014) also finds that there are possibilities for learners to do project work, not only during classes but also outside of classes. This is due to the fact that PjBL is able to sustain the students' interests in the learning process.

d) Blended learning

Osguthorpe and Graham (Glav, 2016) define blended learning in three main themes, i.e., combining instructional modalities, combining instructional methods and combining online and face to face instructions. The first two positions debate the influences of media versus method on learning. According to them, both of these positions defined blended learning so broadly that they encompass virtually all learning systems. In other words, it would be hard to find a system that did not involve multiple instructional methods and multiple delivery media. So using these two definitions cannot convey the meaning of blended learning. The third position is the most accurate one and it also emphasizes the central role of computer based technologies in blended learning. Blended learning is defined simply as a learning environment that combines technology with face-to-face learning. In other words, blended learning means using a variety of delivery methods to best meet the course objectives by combining face-to-face teaching in a traditional classroom including teaching online (Mai, 2021). According to (Sumami, 2016) "blended learning is the combination of different training "media" (technologies, activities, and types of events) to create an optimum training program for a specific audience".

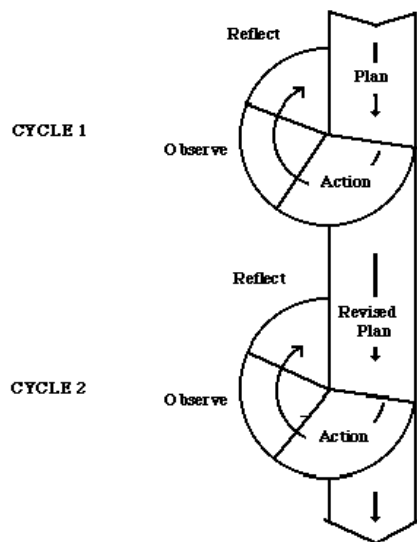
e) Reading Motivation Level

Reading motivation has been described as an individual's subjective reasons for reading (Mai, 2021). For example, a student may be motivated to read because he or she has a personal interest in a particular topic. Alternatively, the student's motivation to read may arise from external incentives, such as the desire to obtain satisfactory grades in school or to gain recognition from others. These differing reasons and incentives are usually subsumed under two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation (Sumami, 2016) which are theoretically distinct. *Intrinsic reading motivation* refers to the willingness to read because reading is perceived as rewarding or satisfying (Sumami, 2016). This motivation usually arises from an individual's personal interest in a particular activity or topic and is satisfied by pursuing that activity or topic. Conversely, *extrinsic reading motivation* refers to reading because of external demands and values as opposed to reading for its own sake. Extrinsically motivated reading tends to be driven by expected consequences, such as achieving positive outcomes or avoiding negative ones.

Method

Classroom Action Research (CAR) is the best research method as Combining of Blended Learning and Project Based Learning in Teaching EFL Critical Reading to Students is the best strategy to solve classroom problems. The function of CAR is to solve classroom problem which means a classroom practice that can still be developed in resulting better learning achievement of the students (Rukminingsih, et al. 2020). CAR activities involve repeated cycles. Each cycle consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The result of one cycle would have been used to determine the need for the following cycle, until the problems get solved by the strategy.

Figure 1
The Action Research Spiral



Kemmis, & McTaggart (1998)

Planning

Planning was activities of doing preliminary study, planning strategy, and arranging criteria of success.

Planning the Strategy

Planning the strategy is a step to arrange the classroom instructional strategy to be developed in the study to solve the instructional problems (Rukminingsih, et al., 2020).

Teaching Strategy

After finding problems, These are the steps of implementing as the following, (1) lecturer explains the materials by using Zoom or Google Classroom, (2) the lecturer shares text as the material for the class, (3) in the face to face class, the lecturer divides students into heterogenous member of groups reading based on the result of preliminary test, (4) the lecturer gives different text to the groups. In this part, groups are asked to read silently and work together, (5) the groups answer questions and try to present their task,

(6) then each student is asked to produce a text. Students are given test. (7) the lecturer evaluates and gives feedback.

- Lesson Plan

The lesson plans are designed with the purpose of providing the teacher with guidelines of teaching and learning activities. In this step the lecturer prepares a lesson plan using a combination of blended learning and project based learning which is designed in three meetings

- Criteria of success

The criteria of success were used to find out the students' improvement after the implementation of a strategy. For this paper, the criteria of success were students' achievement and students' participation. Students' achievement was measured from the score of minimum passing grade of sub base competence through test of critical reading through on going process whereas students' participation was measured from students' questionnaires. Furthermore, the action research considered successful if: their critical reading score was passing minimum passing grade of sub base competence that was 65; their writing score was passing minimum passing grade of sub base competence that was 64; and students' participation was above 50%.

- Participants

The subjects were 27 students of the fifth semester who is taking critical reading course

- Instruments

The instruments that were used to collect the data were interview, questionnaires, observation check list, field note, and test.

- Interview

The researcher got data of lecture's problem, students' characteristics (includes their input, motivation, and self confidence), lesson plan (how was the lesson plan preparation, materials, media, teaching strategy, evaluation, "kartu soal", scoring system, and lecture' follow up)

- Questionnaires

Questionnaires were given for students which were used to know the information from students as their participation. Questions in questionnaires

to reveal students' characteristics, students' learning device, facilities and source of learning, students' participation, and learning critical reading.

- Observation Checklist

Researcher as an observer. It was used to know the teacher's and students' activities in the class during preliminary study.

- Field Note

It was used to know the atmosphere of class between lecture and students during preliminary study by seeing their strength and weakness. The researcher took field note of the class during preliminary study. In teaching critical reading, the strength of the teacher was in giving motivation before materials, explaining materials clearly, and pronouncing the words. Meanwhile, the strength of the students was their curiosity to know the material and they were cooperative.

Data Analysis

Collecting data during implementing combining of blended learning and project based Learning in Teaching EFL Critical Reading. The data collected were related to the criteria of success. The following would like to describe the findings in cycle 1:

Cycle 1

The data collected were students' achievement and students' participation.

a. Students' Achievement

Students' achievement was from test. It was used to measure students' proficiency in reading. Critical Reading test, there were 20 questions of multiple choices. From the students' reading comprehension test, only 7 students got score more than 65, the minimum passing grade of sub base competence.

b. Students' Participation

Questionnaires were given after implementing the strategy. Questionnaires after implementing Combining of Blended Learning and Project Based Learning in Teaching EFL Critical Reading (whereas as students' participation after implementing Combining of Blended Learning and Project Based

Learning in Teaching EFL Critical Reading) were different from questionnaires in preliminary study (whereas to know the evidence). These revealed 4 aspects that were students' characteristics, learning device, critical reading.

Results and Discussions

Combining of Blended Learning and Project Based Learning in Teaching EFL Critical Reading is one of cooperative learning which uses the curriculum package approach to develop basal readers and to conduct reading, writing, spelling, and language mechanics. It can be an alternative teaching strategy that benefits in improving students' achievement, ability, and participation in the teaching and learning process. To be successfully improving students' critical reading, the teacher should be more innovative in delivering the material. Furthermore, Combining of Blended Learning and Project Based Learning in Teaching EFL Critical Reading has many activities so this needs sufficient time allocation in gaining the goal.

These are the steps of applying Combining of Blended Learning and Project Based Learning in Teaching EFL Critical Reading First, the practitioner explained the materials. Second, the practitioner gave one exercise to the class to be answered together. Third, the practitioner divided students into heterogeneous member of groups reading based on the result of preliminary test. Fourth, the practitioner gave a different text to the groups. In this part, groups were asked to read silently and work together. Fifth, groups answered questions by discussing the characters, setting, problems, plot, resolution, finding main idea, and reference words. Here, lecturer helped students when they found their difficulties. Sixth, groups presented their works in front of the class. Seventh, each student was asked to produce a narrative text. Here, teacher guided students when they found their difficulties. Eighth, students were given test. Ninth, the practitioner reflected the material.

Conclusion

Based on the finding, it can be concluded that there is improvement in critical reading achievement and stimulate students' participation in critical reading course after they got the implementation combining blended learning and project- based in critical reading course.

Students interviewed not only worked in project-based and blended learning environments, but they also built and balanced their mixed learning contexts through project implementation. The interviewed students employed various tactics and processes to accomplish this. While some students completed their projects nearly entirely online, others used a combination of online and face-to-face interactions, while some students completed their projects entirely in person. Students who went the digital route mostly report positive effects such as (a) the ability to record sessions using video conferencing software, (b) the distribution of digital materials before and during project sessions, (c) the ability to gather and share information online and simultaneously, (d) the ability to meet without using a car or public (e) the time-saving aspects of digital communication.

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