

Integrating Wiki in Hybrid EFL Writing Class: Exploring Indonesian Students' Perceptions of Its Benefits and Challenges

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Abstract

This case study put forward a hybrid learning practice in English as a foreign language (EFL) writing classroom through the integration of Wiki. The purpose of this study was to investigate Indonesian students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of Wiki integrated in a hybrid EFL writing class. Seventy-nine EFL students enrolled in *Advanced Writing 1* classes at a state university in Medan, Indonesia, were recruited to be the participants. The data for this study were collected using three instruments, namely; observation, online questionnaire for all participants, and interview with 10 voluntary participants. The collected data were later analyzed using content analysis. The results revealed that overall, the participants found Wiki integration in EFL writing classes advantageous because it allows them to have meaningful interactions with their peers while also improving their writing skills. They, however, also identified some functional difficulties when navigating the platform, highlighting the necessity to adapt their past learning processes in order to adopt new, technology-enhanced learning approaches.

Keywords: face-to-face learning, hybrid learning, technology-assisted language learning, Wiki

1. INTRODUCTION

Since advancing technology has become accessible in education, technology integration has become a vital part of modern global educational system, including in language teaching and learning (LTL). LTL has been optimized by the application of computers and other technological advances, such as the internet and online learning (Beatty, 2003; Fithriani & Alharbi, 2021).

Online learning creates 'anywhere and anytime' interaction among learners, offers them access to instructional resources, and provides opportunities to learn and practice the target language beyond the classroom (Fithriani & Alharbi, 2021). Researchers (Beatty, 2003; Chang, 2005;

Crook, 1994; Gonzalez-Bueno, 1998; Kessler, 2010) also found that technology-assisted language learning demonstrates a number of qualities to enrich second/foreign language learning such as language functions, greater levels of participation, less anxiety and greater autonomy.

However, despite all advantages of online learning, the practice of LTL does not necessarily leave the traditional face-to-face learning. In fact, by combining both traditional and on-site classroom meetings which is popularly known as hybrid learning, learners will experience more. Hybrid learning, as defined by Colin and Moonen (cited in Rovai & Jordan, 2004, p.3) is “the combination of traditional face-to- face and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online and where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning.” A lot of studies that have been conducted to investigate the effect of implementing hybrid learning on students' performance find out that designing a hybrid course gives positive effects on students' improvement (Boyle et al, 2003; Dowling et al, 2003; Dziuban et al, 2004).

Wikis have increasingly been accepted as a learning platform in hybrid classes due to their practical use. Wiki is an application that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser. Users of wikis need neither specific software nor advanced technical skills to operate them. Furthermore, Hadjerrouit (2011) explained that wiki technologies provide a number of useful functions, such as tracking of edits, threaded discussions, special and protected pages, read and edit rights, and use of different types of multimedia, e.g. images, graphics, sounds, and video. The use of wikis has also been reported to give positive effects on students' learning experience (Elgort, et al, & Toland, 2008; Carter, 2009; Heafner & Friedman, 2009). Furthermore, some studies (Kasemvilas & Olfman, 2009; Lin & Yang, 2011; Vratulis & Dobson, 2008) concur that the use of wiki can positively enhance learning in the second and

foreign language classrooms and improve learners' writing skills. The results also confirm positive uses of wikis which include the development of a student's analytical skills and the development of a sense of community through a collaborative learning environment.

Regarding the positive findings of the use of wikis in various ESL and EFL settings, it would be interesting to find out if these quantitative results also echo students' positive perceptions of its integration as a learning platform in EFL hybrid writing class in Indonesia context. Thus, this study illuminates this one research question 'How do Indonesian EFL students' perceive Wiki as a learning platform in a hybrid EFL writing class?'

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Technology Integration in LTL

Learning a new language has always been difficult, particularly when done outside of the country where the target language is spoken. One of the most difficult problems is to provide learners with a genuine setting in which to practice the language. Fortunately, in this day and age of technological technology, those difficulties can be reduced to a minimum. Technology is now widely used in LTL, particularly in EFL/ESL classes, to improve learning outcomes. Early research revealed that using computers and other technological advances can improve foreign/second language (FL/SL) learning by providing more language functions (Beatty, 2003; Chang, 2005; Crook, 1994), improving student participation (Gonzalez-Bueno, 1998), less anxiety (Kessler, 2010), and increased motivation and interest (Kessler, 2010). (Chang, 2005; Kessler & Bikowski, 2010).

Furthermore, the use of computers in language classrooms could also promote interaction through at least some of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) by providing a

platform for collaboration and cooperation (Bahrani, 2011; Hwu, 1997). Consistent with those findings from early studies, current researchers have also reported multiple benefits of technology integration into EFL education (Fithriani, 2021; Fithriani & Alharbi, 2021).

In terms of its efficacy on second/foreign language learners' achievement, according to Ajayi (2009), a computer networked environment enhances language acquisition and exposes students to authentic reading material, which is beneficial to second/foreign language learners. In a separate study, Ramchandran (2004) discovered that effective use of technology in the classroom aids students' literacy growth. Ghaemi, et al. (2012) also discovered that audio/voice conference was one of the most effective techniques for teaching speaking skills, particularly IELTS speaking. In a recent study by Hermes and King (2013), technology-based language learning was found to be beneficial in the early stages of learning and practicing the language.

Researchers also report positive findings in terms of learners' impressions of the use of technology in language acquisition. According to Warschauer (1996), during electronic debate, students had higher equality of involvement and were able to express themselves openly, comfortably, and artistically. Kung and Chuo (2002) found that students' attitudes toward learning through ESL websites were favorable. Furthermore, Conroy (2010) found that students independently utilized Concordancer (software that searches, accesses, and analyzes language from a corpus) and Google search to improve their writing skills, and that the majority of them were interested in utilizing Concordancer in the future. Finally, Wu and Wu (2011) reported improvement in students' reading and writing abilities through the utilization on blogs.

B. Hybrid Class in LTL

Students' favorable opinions of technology-assisted language learning have been documented in numerous studies. These findings have prompted adjustments in the language

learning instructional strategy. Because of the limited time and opportunity for learners to participate, traditional teaching and learning approaches are no longer deemed successful in producing the greatest results. However, due to limited infrastructure and resources, not all institutions are able to incorporate technology into their curriculum. Many teachers nowadays combine traditional face-to-face training with internet-based instruction to tackle this challenge, which is known as hybrid/blended learning.

Many researchers have sought to define the term "hybrid learning" by focusing on one common theme: "the combination of face-to-face and online sessions." According to Metcalf (2003), hybrid learning takes teaching and learning outside of the classroom and incorporates two types of interaction: face-to-face and web-based. Brew (2008) defined hybrid learning as "the integration of online and face-to-face forms to provide a more effective learning experience." This study employs Colin and Moonen's definition of hybrid learning: "hybrid learning is the merging of traditional face-to-face and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online, and where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning" (as cited in Rovai & Jordan, 2004, p.3).

The particular aspect of hybrid classrooms is that they provide two ways of instruction delivery, thereby generating two distinct classroom communities: the community of face-to-face engagement and the community of online interaction. Although each community has its own advantages, as Laurillard (in Towndrow & Cheers, 2003, p. 57) points out, "a combination of teaching and learning methods will always be the most efficient way to support student learning because only then can all the activities of discussion, interaction, adaptation, and reflection, which are essential for academic learning, be embraced."

Hybrid learning is especially beneficial for learners because internet-based classes have no time or place constraints, so learners with varied learning styles can work at their own speed and in any convenient location. It also provides access to knowledge sources and facilitates meaningful connections between students and teachers (Greeno et al, 1998). (Tan & Wong, 1996). As a result, online learning systems such as Wikis, Claroline, Moodle, and EdWeb are increasingly being used in the classroom to support active learning since they allow for a high level of student involvement and participation.

C. Wikis as Learning Platform

Due to its potential benefit for teaching and learning, Wikis are becoming more widely embraced as a tool to integrate technology into education (Clark & Mason, 2008; Fitch, 2007). Wiki technologies also offer a variety of useful functions, such as edit tracking, comparison of different versions of edits, roll-backs to earlier versions of the wiki, threaded discussions, special and protected pages, customizable access to pages, read and edit rights, and the use of various types of multimedia, such as images, graphics, sounds, and video (Hadjerrouit, 2011, p. 431).

From a pedagogical point of view, Wikis provide instructors and educators potentially big opportunity for developing socially engaged projects that demand active student engagement and cooperation, rather than passive and behaviorist learning, replication, and transmission of knowledge (Hadjerrouit, 2011). Wikis also enable students to collaborate to create a collaborative project, which promotes reflection, knowledge sharing, and critical thinking. Furthermore, Nicol et al. (2005) stated that the easy accessibility, simplicity, and transparency of wiki pages facilitates learners' sharing of information and resources among team members and between groups, as well as making it easier for students to work at their own pace.

Many studies have found that using wikis improves students' learning experiences (Elgort, et al, 2008; Carter, 2009; Heafner & Friedman, 2009). Furthermore, several research show that wikis have a favorable impact when utilized in writing classes (Vratulis & Dobson, 2008; Kasemvilas & Olfman, 2009; Lin & Yang, 2011). Aydn and Yldz (2014) described the beneficial benefits of wikis as enabling learner autonomy, resulting in aggregated output, and placing a greater emphasis on structure and organization.

III. METHOD

A. Design

A qualitative case study approach was used in this investigation. Baxter and Jack (2008) define a case study as a research approach which makes it easy to explore a phenomenon within its context by means of a variety of information resources, ensuring that the problem is not investigated through one lens but rather through a variety of lenses to reveal and understand multiple facets of the phenomenon. This study used an instrumental case study design to acquire insights into a specific phenomenon, in this instance hybrid learning implementation in EFL classrooms, with an emphasis on the usage of Wiki in writing class for adult EFL students.

B. Participants

The research was carried out at the English Education Department of a state university in Medan, Indonesia. The study participants were chosen using a purposeful sampling technique. With a total of 79 students, two parallel courses of *Advanced Writing 1* presented in the fifth semester in this department were recruited as participants in this study (46 females and 33 males). All participants were assessed to have comparable writing skill competency because they had previously attended and passed two writing courses (*Writing Skill I* and *Writing Skill II*).

Concerning the study's ethical implications, all participants were required to provide an informed consent letter prior to their involvement in this investigation. The consent letter was meant to offer participants with sufficient information about the study, comprehension of the research objectives, and voluntary involvement. The issues of anonymity and secrecy were also considered and explained to the participants.

C. Data Collection and Analysis

To ensure the credibility of this study, certain instruments for data collecting were used in a methodological triangulation. First, students were requested to complete an online survey on www.surveymonkey.com. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first had topics relating to students' perspectives on the usage of Wiki in writing classes, and the second contained items designed to identify the benefits and drawbacks of Wiki as an online learning platform for writing classes. Furthermore, 10 student participants were voluntarily invited to participate in the study's interview phase, which aimed to dig a more detailed explanation of students' perceptions; hence, volunteer-based participants were used to obtain broader responses to semi-structured interview questions.

The data gathered from the questionnaire, transcribed interviews, and field notes were evaluated using content analysis for classification, summary, and tabulation. Furthermore, once the data were evaluated, the researchers performed a thorough checking process to ensure the study's credibility. The data interpretations were presented with the participants so that they may discuss and clarify the findings, as well as bring new or additional views on the problem under investigation.

IV. RESULT & DISCUSSION

A. Perceived Benefits

The results of data analysis revealed that the students perceived at least two benefits from the integration of Wiki as part of a hybrid EFL writing class; namely; meaningful interaction with peers and improvement of their writing skill through reading others' works. The first perceived benefit is much related to the fact that writing on Wiki as the platform resembles an activity conducted for a real audience (Hyland, 2003; Lin & Yang 2011). In this case, the emerging social meaning of Wiki writing appeared to have a positive impact on students' learning as they could immediately provide and receive responses and comments from other people, either from their instructor or from peers. The students in this study valued this social practice and acknowledged it as a benefit Wiki could offer to improve their learning. This meaningful interaction is something they could not easily get during the class activities in face-to-face class meeting.

Looking closely to the responses the students provided in the survey, it could be seen that some statements that highlight this particular benefit included immediate online responses from peers and lessons learned from the mistakes of others particularly on issues of grammar, vocabulary, and writing mechanics, The following excerpts illustrate how a student named Halimah (pseudonym) reflected on her Wiki-based writing experience.

After I finished writing on Wiki, I keep checking (the page) because I want to see what my friends (peers) say about it. I'm happy if I get compliment... but I also hope they give me suggestion and revision so I know how to make my writing better. (Excerpt 1, interview)

I think I could see the mistakes on other people's writing easily but when I check my writing again, I make the same mistakes too [laughing] (Excerpt 2, interview)

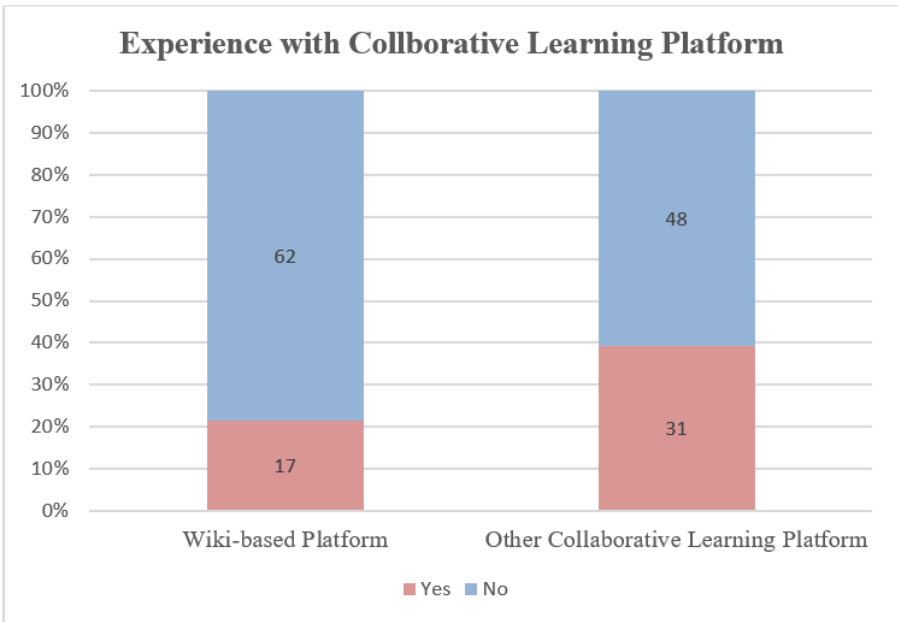
As seen in the two excerpts above, besides opportunities to immediate interaction with peers through the Wiki platform, many participants also mentioned that they can identify and revise their writing mistakes in terms of grammatical and mechanical issues as well as sentence structure by reading the work of their peers on the Wiki pages and learning from the writing they produced. These perceived benefits in general demonstrate that meaningful interaction particularly with peers is embedded in the Wiki-based writing practice.

The emerging social functions are consistent with the findings of Lin and Yang's (2011) study exploring the benefits that students perceived through the integration of Wiki in EFL teaching and learning, while that related to the improvement of learning outcome had also been reported in other research (Kessler, 2009; Mak & Coniam, 2008; Lin & Yang, 2011).

B. Perceived Challenges

Beside some perceived benefits, the students also mentioned some difficulties they face in practicing writing on Wiki, which in general could be categorized as functional challenge. This challenge was mostly caused by their unfamiliarity with some features of the learning platform since most of them had little to no prior experience on learning on Wiki-based platform (look at Figure 1 for detail).

Figure 1. Students' Experiences with Wiki-based Platform



Familiarity with the features is mentioned as one paramount aspect for a positive user experience in utilizing technology (Yang & Chen, 2007). Thus, as a consequence, this functional challenge that the students mentioned in this study had hindered them to maximize the use of platform and to actively participate in the class activities as shared by Budi (pseudonym) in the following excerpt:

What I found to be a hassle is the time I need just to edit what I have already written (on Wiki). Often when I finished doing it, I don't bother to spend more of my time to provide feedback on my friends' writing although I know there are some mistakes (that) need to be revised (Excerpt 3, Interview)

As what the participant in Excerpt 3 explained that the aspect of usability and familiarity became the main reason why he did not want to participate in feedback provision as one activity usually done on Wiki-based writing. In this case, he found that the editing functions of Wiki is time-consuming. Other students also mentioned some other challenges related to the platform's function such as the inconvenient Wiki interface and lack of auto-saving feature.

Despite many previous studies reporting the convenience of Wiki-based learning platform, some students in this study still experienced difficulties using the tool. These major concerns indicate that the new tool disrupted the learning experience. Similar finding showing students' reluctance to participate in class activities due to unfamiliarity with Wiki features was also reported by Yang and Lin (2011). This functional challenge related to unfamiliarity and usability might be alleviated by some problem-solving activities such as training in the first meetings of the class, in-class demonstration, and more practice with the tool.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was conducted in the context of an institution pilot of hybrid learning. The aim of this study was to investigate students' perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of Wiki as an additional alternative for traditional classroom meetings. The finding of this study may lead to some implications.

Firstly, this study provides additional literature to the previous studies on Wiki-based learning in EFL context. Secondly, the findings of this study may provide references for English language teachers intending to implement new steps, procedures, activities and techniques based on technology such as Wikis to improve students' writing skills. Thirdly, this study may stimulate specialists' and supervisors' interests in conducting training courses for EFL teachers to equip themselves with the skills needed to implement wikis in their teaching. Finally, the findings may point the way for future research investigating the effect of wikis as a learning platform on students' writing skills in any other EFL skill classes.

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