

ENJOYING LEARNING WRITING THROUGH FACEBOOK GROUP

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Received: 15th March 2019/Revised: 09th April 2019/Accepted: 23rd April 2019

How to Cite: Aziz, Z. A., & Khatimah, H. (2019). Enjoying learning writing through Facebook group.
Lingua Cultura, 13(2), 115-119. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v13i1.5513>

ABSTRACT

This research showed the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Aceh who struggle in learning English writing as they had a lack of interest in it. This descriptive qualitative study aimed to find out in what ways Facebook Group facilitate the enjoyment of the students in learning this skill. Data were collected using interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis. Ten students from UIN Ar-Raniry were purposely chosen for the interviews that was done one by one at a time. The research findings show that there are four themes causing participants enjoyment of the learning writing in the group: (1) it provides unlimited timing; (2) it facilitates the participants' freedom and creativity; (3) it provides the interactive feedback; and (4) it helps them in brainstorming the ideas. These four themes directly enhance the students' situational interest in learning writing related to an environmental factor; but it results in the development of their individual interest. This research suggests that the teacher should combine the learning process in the classroom with the Facebook group media to fasten the enhancement of the learners' writing skills. For the learners, it is suggested that they should utilize their social media such as Facebook group not only as their communication media but also for developing their learning in writing.

Keywords: learning enjoyment, learning writing, Facebook group

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English writing skills to the university students in Indonesia, especially in Aceh, has always been a challenge. The lack of a proper medium may have driven them to have less interest in learning writing. Online learning can facilitate students and teachers to have active written communication at any time and places. By using technology as such online learning facilities, it will require 'a degree of autonomy' and the awareness towards the roles of learners and teachers in the process (Reinders & White, 2016). Many researchers have considered that this written communication plays a significant role in promoting students' autonomy in learning writing (Misir, Koç, & Koç, 2018). Indeed, social media such as Facebook is one of the options suggested by many researchers for this reason, and Li (2017) has said that the use of social media in teaching English has developed quite progressively.

Facebook as a network that initially targeted high school and college students goes globally and starts to dominate the social media sphere. In January 2018, it was reported that active Facebook users make up two-thirds of

the market with more than 2,17 billion users (Global Digital Report, 2018). *The Jakarta Post*, an Indonesian's English newspaper, has reported in March 2018 that Indonesia has been the fourth highest number of Facebook users in the world. Up to January 2018, there are 130 million accounts on the social network or 6 percent of the total global users. This makes Indonesia, the Southeast Asian country with the most Facebook users.

Facebook group allows students to manage communication as privately as they want. They can share only with whom they are allowed to join the group. It creates the environment such as a classroom because they will communicate with certain people in the group, but luckily it is more flexible.

The effectiveness of using Facebook for students in teaching English as a Foreign Language (ELF) has been found by researchers, for example, Khan et al. (2016); Sulisworo, Rahayu, and Akhsan (2016). Yu (2014) has also conducted research on Facebook usage for EFL writing class which is found positive results for learning writing. Ramadhani (2018) has also found a similar result that the comments post on Facebook have enhanced and improved

students' writing skills. Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh, and Abu-Melhim (2014) have specifically studied about utilizing Facebook group in teaching and improving students' writing. This research has focused only on how Facebook develops students' preparation process in writing, which is brainstorming before they are doing the real writing.

The lack of interest and motivation to learn writing as well as lack of media that facilitate their learning has been blamed for students not being motivated. It is, however, important to notice that the majority of students are nowadays active Facebookers who write at the minimum of one 'status' every day. Most of the time they write it in English, but it is simply for having fun. They are not aware of the usage of fun written communication on Facebook (especially Facebook group) for their writing learning process. Undeniably, those students spend more time online on Facebook, than for learning.

Therefore, it is really urgent to look at how fun activities such as Facebook is connected to learners' learning writing. Zheng, Yim, and Warschauer (2018) have argued that social media (e.g., Facebook) has a contribution to give opportunities and motivations to practice writing skills for English learners to communicate in the written language with the native speakers. In this research, therefore, it focuses on the use of Facebook group toward students' learning of English writing. It is expected to discover how Facebook develops university students' interest and joy in the actual process of learning English writing.

Writing has been regarded as one of the most difficult skills that learners need to master (Sabouri, Zohrabi, & Vafa, 2014). It requires learner's competency to receive the information, processes it, and at last, produces it. It is inadequate to learn writing if a learner only relies on the 'two or four hours a week' learning in the classroom. Writing is about long processes, which requires more time, effort, as well as guidance.

Learners need to learn more outside of the classroom in order to be a good writer, especially an English writer. It is undeniable that the demand for autonomous learning in writing is such a crucial issue to be focused on. Therefore, in this research, the researchers would like to explore how autonomous learning of writing can be developed by using Facebook group media. The Facebook group provides more spaces for the learning process outside of the classroom, but with the consideration that the learners are still in touch with their social environment, as well as friends, teachers, or even English native speakers or writers.

Learners should develop their interest and passion in writing so that they will be able to deal with the difficulties in learning writing. Many researchers believe that interest holds greater power on learners' engagement and learning. Interest has been found to play a key role in influencing student learning behavior and intention to participate in the future (Harackiewicz, Smith, & Priniski, 2016). Interest is a powerful motivational process that energizes learning and guides academic and career trajectories. To be understood easily, McCarthy (2014) simply defines interest as 'what learners care about and like to do.' In other words, learners' interest is something that learners found enjoyment in.

There are two types of interest; individual interest and situational interest (Subramaniam, 2009). Individual interest refers to individual psychological preference to re-engage in particular classes of objects, events, or ideas over time and is content specific (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Situational interest, on the other hand, refers to "the affective reaction triggered at the moment by stimuli in

the environment which may have a short-term effect, and may marginally influence an individual's knowledge and values" (Subramaniam, 2009). In addition, they point out that both types of interest tend to interact and influence each other's development. It means that situational interest which influences by environment also contribute to the development of long-lasting individual interest.

Fortunately, situational interest can be enhanced through the modification of certain aspects of the learning environment and contextual factors such as teaching strategies, task presentation, and structuring of the learning experience (Harackiewicz, Smith, & Priniski, 2016). Scott and Glaze (2017) have also suggested that giving a choice to students in their learning process will make them feel a greater sense of competence and intrinsic motivation, and they perform better on related tests which mean that it develops the students' situational interest. Giving the opportunity for the learners to work with others would also positively develop their situational interest. McCarthy (2014) has emphasized that the higher level of activating interest is to have students propose their own choice and ideas for products and activities. Therefore, Subramaniam (2009) has suggested that teachers provide ample exploration opportunities during student-task interaction that ultimately results in instant enjoyment for learning.

In line with learners' interest, the problems faced by learners during the learning process also influence their success and failure in learning. According to Noriah, Hussin, and Darus (2012), the problems that are faced by ESL learners in learning writing are the lack of practice time being allocated in class, dull writing activities, and the lack of emphasis towards critical thinking in their writing course. Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) reveal that one of the writing problems affecting students' success in college compositions besides language areas difficulties is the students' writing anxiety. Noriah, Hussin, and Darus (2012) have suggested that the online writing course can be one of the solutions.

METHODS

This research applies a descriptive qualitative research. In qualitative research, the focus is usually given on the, "Way people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals" (Mohajan, 2018). This research is therefore in the form of an explanatory rather than statistical analysis. In order to conduct this research, a Facebook group named 'We are Popular Writer' is created. Then the research participants' Facebook accounts are added into the group. To begin the conversation flow, a simple topic, asking them to do free writing about themselves, such as self-introduction is initiated. They are free to write anything they want to about themselves, activities, and so on.

The learning process in the Facebook group is activated through 'posting' as the instructional learning and 'comment' as the learning response to one another. The participants have to follow the instructional processes in the Facebook group based on the notion of scaffolding (Gonulal & Loewen, 2018), which is started from the lower level to the next. It means that the researchers' roles are as researchers, administrators, and lecturers.

The subjects of this research are all students in the English department who are taking Writing II Class in UIN Ar-Raniry. There are 18 units or about 495 students who

are taking Writing II class, but this research is conducted to 10 students from unit VII who are chosen on purpose with the criteria that they have actively been using Facebook and they are willing to participate in this project. Data for this research are obtained through the interview with the students who have participated in putting postings in the Facebook group that are created especially for this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

During 40 days of learning, the 10 participants are asked to practice their writing as often and as much as they could. None of the participants has hesitancy unless agree on the idea that the use of Facebook group assisted them to practice their writing more than the classroom. After this learning process, they are asked their responses on the use of such type of media in studying. In presenting the data, the students are coded with P1 up to P10 indicating Participant 1 or Participant 10 in order to hide their privacy.

The interview results reveal that all of the participants enjoy the learning writing process on the Facebook group. There are four aspects found that cause the participants' enjoyment of the learning writing in the Group as well as developing their interest in writing. They are; (1) it provides unlimited timing, (2) it facilitates the participants' freedom and creativity, (3) it provides the interactive feedback, and (4) it helps them in brainstorming the ideas.

The first and foremost benefits that learners may get from using Facebook group is that it could facilitate the learners to obtain enjoyment in learning writing because it provides unlimited timing for their learning process. Albeit the deadline given is inevitable, the fact that the participants have the whole authority to select and set their own learning time, are enhancing their interest in learning writing by the use of the Facebook group.

This is unlike the classroom learning in which is limited only to the two credits given. P1, P2, P3, P5, and P7 aver that the unlimited length of time given is the source of their enjoyment in the Facebook group learning. P2 comments that:

“For example, we have deadline three days after today, during three days I can figure it out, not like in the class, understand or not understand we have to write in on that day.”

Having her own opinion, P6 has stated that the use of the Facebook group is saving her time from being wasted, as she says:

“Our time is becoming shorter than if we have to go to campus for learning. So, we have more time for composing our writing.”

Additionally, P4, P8, and P9 perceive the Facebook group learning timing from the other perspective. They enjoy group learning because they have the entire authority to select their own learning time and place, as P9 puts it:

“I prefer learning on Facebook than in the class because I can set my time, for example, after I am back from my work in the coffee shop.”

Besides the unlimited timing that the learners get from this learning strategy, most of the participants also

apprehend that in the group, they have the freedom to control their learning because it is free from other peer's disturbances. P3 has said that he is often distracted by his friends in the middle of writing tasks in the class because some friends disturb him asking about ideas, etc.

P1, P2, P3, P4, and P8 have experienced the same circumstances and elaborate further about the use of Facebook group which could assist their creativity and self-actualization by bestowing the opportunity to share their writing with others without meeting in person. P2 feels that it is so much fun because she could complete the tasks without the hassle and share what she had written online, so it is not worthless since everyone could read her writing.

As mentioned, after posting their writing in the group timeline, the participants reciprocally comment to give revision or appraisal toward each other writing. The interactive feedbacks that the learners get from their peers have stimulated their motivation to improve their writing even more. Astonishingly, this chance is professed as the cause of their enjoyment to learn writing in the Facebook group media, and none of the participants feel down because most of the comments are constructively criticizing their writings. It has motivated them to write better, as P1 comments:

“I feel motivated from the comments as feedback of my writing, I never feel down because of it. I feel proud of my writing when they comment; it means my writing is read by them.”

Indeed, the positive feedback given by lecturers and friends obviously motivate them to develop their writing, as stated by P5:

“Group members reciprocally comment on my writing to give feedback, I like it, especially when the lecturers give us such words, “*Chayo*, keep it dear!” and it undoubtedly motivate me!”

Helping the learners in brainstorming the ideas that they want to develop in writings is other advantages in using the Facebook group as the media. Initially, most of the participants admit that the lack of ideas is one of the reasons why they feel bored to practice writing. Nonetheless, after this approach is used, they affirm that the Facebook group supports them in brainstorming the ideas, and therefore it gets much easier for them to begin writing. Distinctively, each of the participants has their own estimation on how it assists them. P1, P2, and P6 claim that the clear instruction and topics given by the lecturers support them to find their own ideas. In a statement of P6 as saying that:

“The lecturers give us many topics, so those topics help us to find the idea. Most of the time, I chose the topics from something that I have researched. Somehow it helps me to take conclusion.”

P5 finds the suggestions from friends who help her generate good ideas, as she mentions: “By receiving suggestions from other friends, it helps me to generate a good idea.” In addition, P4, P7, and P8 experience that it assists them to find ideas by browsing or searching the materials from the internet. Different from the other learners, P3 deems the unlimited timing provided by the group as the help in finding her ideas, as she avers:

“I have time to think about the idea, preparing for the

material; I have enough time to read many sources to develop my knowledge.”

Surprisingly, P9 has stated that his responsibility to post on Facebook is the reason for him to easily find the ideas. This could be studied in his statement: “It is my responsibility to post on Facebook, so later on the idea will come up little by little.”

This research shows that interest has been found to play a key role in influencing students’ learning participation. Yu (2014) has also suggested that by using Facebook in EFL language learning settings learners would have more opportunity to practice their language skills beyond the classroom sessions. Based on the research findings, one of the reasons shared by the participants as the cause for their enjoyment in group learning is that it provides them the unlimited timing for their learning. Besides unlimited timing, the choice is given for them to set and select their own learning time also enhanced their situational interest (Scott & Glaze, 2017). Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh, and Abu-Melhim (2014) have also found that the benefit of using Facebook group because students have enough time to brainstorm during group discussions, and it is different from traditional classrooms where time is limited and the interference of teachers.

Creating a learning environment that evokes the situational interest could play an important role in the development of individual interest. Situational interest can be enhanced through the modification of certain aspects of the learning environment and contextual factors such as teaching strategies, task presentation, and structuring of the learning experience (Harackiewicz, Smith, & Priniski, 2016). Scott and Glaze (2017) have suggested that giving students choices seems to improve situational interest. Furthermore, McCarthy (2014) emphasizes that the higher level of activating interest is to have students propose their own choice and ideas for products and activities. In other words, the learning process must facilitate the learners’ freedom and creativity to control and manage their own learning.

Indeed, all of the participants reveal their own unique experience on how Facebook group facilitated their freedom and creativity. Therefore, it is obvious that the use of Facebook group fosters the learners’ interest and enhances their enjoyment to learn writing by facilitating the participants’ freedom and creativity.

Actually, boosting the learners’ situational interest would develop the learners’ long-term individual interest. One of the ways is by structuring the learning experiences (Harackiewicz, Smith, & Priniski, 2016), specifically by giving the opportunity for the learners to work with others. It positively would develop their situational interest. As the interactive feedbacks are the result of their cooperation in the group, the feedbacks given by friends have triggered the participants’ enjoyment in learning writing by using the Facebook group. Therefore, it infers that one of the ways the use of Facebook group helps the learners to enjoy their learning writing is by providing the interactive feedback to be shared interchangeably.

Indeed, this situational interest is not innate in the learners, but it is “triggered by the stimuli in the environment” (Subramaniam, 2009). The findings elaborate that most of the participants feel bored to practice writing because they have a lack of ideas to be written. However, after the learning process is completely done in the Facebook group, all of the participants reveal that they enjoy practicing

writing in that social media because it supports them in brainstorming their ideas for their writing. There are six reasons in which the group usage assisted the participants to brainstorm their ideas: (1) the clear instruction given by the lecturer makes the participant easily understands how to write; (2) the optional topics that are given by lecturers; (3) the suggestions from friends; (4) the unlimited timing given; (5) the fact that the Facebook group is a social media connected to the internet; (6) the responsibility they have to the group helps them to strive in finding ideas.

The change of participants’ attitude from not loving to loving learning writing by the help of Facebook group usage is because they find the instant enjoyment in the group. This instant enjoyment is essential as it will assist the learners in developing their individual interest which is stronger and long-lasting to influence the success and the failure of their learning process. Since the development of instant enjoyment for learning positively contributes to develop the learners’ situational and individual interest, Subramaniam (2009) has suggested that teachers should afford “ample exploration opportunities during student-task interaction that ultimately results in instant enjoyment for learning.”

CONCLUSIONS

Facebook group helps learners to enjoy the interactive learning writing atmosphere. It can also foster their interest in learning writing because the Facebook group provides unlimited timing for their learning so that it facilitates the participants’ freedom and creativity. Learning writing through this medium provides interactive feedback and facilitates the learners to brainstorm their ideas.

It is suggested that the teacher should combine the learning process in the classroom with the Facebook group media to fasten the enhancement of the learners’ writing skills. For the learners, it is suggested that they should utilize their social media such as Facebook group not only as their communication media but also for developing their learning in writing. Further research on experimental research comparing between ‘the combination of classroom and the Facebook group’ and ‘the only Facebook group’ may be conducted.

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