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Blended Learning Program: An Alternative Solution to Improve Students TOEFL Score

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Abstract: This action research aims at finding out how the blended learning can improve students toefl score. The design of this research is an action research which consists of four steps in a cycle, they are: planning, action, analysis and reflection. In planning step the reserachers did FGD which involved the students, instructors, the dean, the head of language centres and staff to discuss the problems and the alternative solution, designed the syllabus and prepared the materials. In the action step, the blended learning was implemented , 50%was in Face to Face (F2F) mode and other 50% was in information and technology (IT) mode (CALL, email, WA and SMS).The subjects were 20 students from 16 Study Programs in FKIP at the eight semester who have ever joined TOEFL but have not achieved the target score stated by the university, 477.The implementation of Blended learning was observed and analyzed as the next step. The Reflection result showed that Blended learning could improve the students TOEFL score. The students also enjoyed the activities and they believed blended learning helped them improve their TOEFL score. Therefore it is recommended that the University implement the Blended learning program as an alternative solution to solve the problem.

Keywords: Blended learning; Test of English as foreign language; face to face Mode; information and technology Mode

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INTRODUCTION

Most of students in FKIP could not reach an ideal learning time (4 years) to finsih their study as stated by National Acredetation Biereu of Higher Education (BAN PT). One of the causes was the students coud not achieve the minimum requirement of TOEFL score (477) to finish their study as stated by the University. Data from Language Centre of Unsyiah (2016) showed that only 2 students (1%) of 201 students could achieve the target score though some of them have joined in the test more than three times.

There are some factors that cause the problems above, such as, students' attitude, motivation, anxiety, facilities, preparation, and so on. Therefore, an Action research is needed to find out students difficulties in achieving the standard score and design an appropriate model based on Blended learning approach (Alonso, López, Manrique, & Viñes, 2005; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Valiathan, 2002). Analysing the learners' needs is the first priority to be considered to determine the learning materials and strategy in TOEFL preparation test (Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016; Manan, Alias, & Pandian, 2012; Tayebinik & Puteh, 2013).

Blended learning approach integrates technology and face to face (F2F) interaction of students and teacher in a classroom (Bonk,

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Kim, & Zeng, 2005; Hoic-Bozic, Mornar, & Boticki, 2008; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Rahmi & Darmawan, 2018). Grgurovic (2011) found out that Blended Learning in ESL class could help students improve their language ability, and the instructor could monitor the students'progress in class room (F2F) or in computer laboratory. In addition, by using on line technology, students can also learn through available authentic materials that can help them improve their English proficiency such as TOEFL and IELTS (Domalewska, 2014; Harrington, 2010; Kirkgoz, 2011; Liu, 2013; Yang, Chuang, Li, & Tseng, 2013). Jones (2006) reported that English training proses through Blended Learning had helped students face the test well. The research results above indicate that Blended Learning can be used to overcome the students in Teachers Training and Education Faculty in achieving the minimum standard of TOEFL score.

The prelimenary study showed that most of students got difficulties in all aspects tested in TOEFL, especially Listening test (Shaykina, 2015; Tomlinson & Whittaker, 2013). They also stated that they felt anxiety, worried too much in doing the test. Therefore, this action research was done in the first cycle to investigate the real condition of the students in facing TOEFL that could be used as the basis of developing an appropriate syllabus which was based on thier needs and concept of Blended Learning (Ferriman, 2013; Pazio, 2010).

The implementation of Blended learning was conducted in the last cycle to see how Blended learning could improve students TOEFL score and investigate the students perception on the implementation of Blended Learning in TOEFL preparation (Lee & Lee, 2012; Liu, 2013; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Obari, Kojima, & Itahashi, 2010; Sari, 2014; Sheu, 2011; Turney, 2001; Zhang, Song, & Burston, 2011). The result of the study could be used as an alternative solution to overcome not only the students' problem in achieving TOEFL score but also in achieving the ideal learning time in Teachers Training and Education Faclulty (FKIP).

METHOD

This research was an action research which was based on Cycles in which each cycle consisited of planning, acting, observation and reflection or evaluation. In the first cycle the focus was on investigating students TOEFL score, and their attititude and perceptions toward TOEFL. The information was collected through document, interview , survey and FGD. All data were analyzed and evaluated as a considerationin doing the reflection. Based on the Reflection on cycle 1 , the cyle 2 was conducted.

The focus on the cycle 2 was on the implementation of blended learning to improve student' TOEFL score. FGD was conducted in planning phase which involved the instructors, the Head of Language Centre, IT staff and students. FGD was conducted to get any information concerning with the design of the program of blended Learning which was based on the students' needs, especially in designing the syllabus, teaching materials, test strategy and IT mode concening with the implementationof Blended learning based on (Neumeier, 2005).

The pilot study was conducted in a-60 hours course from September to November 2016, 50% was in F2F mode and 50% was in IT mode. The subjects were 20 students from 16 Study Programs in FKIP at the eight semester who have ever joined TOEFL but have not achieved the target score yet. Toefl tests were conducted before and after the implementaion of Blended learning. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to see the students' perception toward the study.All data were collected and analyzed based on the order steps of the cycle in action research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was an action reserach which consistedof four steps in a cycle threfore the results and discussion follow the design. The followings are the result of each steps in the study.

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Planning

In this step the team did FGD which involved the instuctors, IT team, students and the Head of the Language Centre concerning with the implementation of Blended learning. The syllabus was designed based on the students' needs and characteristics of blended learning. Therefore the materials, topics, tasks, and learning modes were considered. The study was conducted in a 60-hours course. There were two modes used, 50% was in face to face/F2F mode (in classroom) and 50% was in IT mode (CALL in computer laboratory, email, WA, and SMS).The materials covered all aspects tested in TOEFL but Listening was given more times since it was considered the most difficult aspect. So, in this step the team prepared the schedule, teaching materials, and other instruments needed.

Action

The study was done based on the syllabus and schedule arranged. There were 3 English instructors and 1 IT instructor involved in the study.All activities were observed and recorded.Instructors could monitor students works on both modes. TOEFL test practices were done on line and off line. Most of the tasks were in IT modes since the students could manage their own learning time. However, they had to be ready with the tasks prior to classroom discussion.

Observation

Based on the action done in 60 hours meeting times during the study in both modes (F2F) and IT, all activities and data collected were analyzed and observed. Before implementing the blended learning program, the students were given TOEFL test to see their base line score.In the last meeting, the students were given another TOEFL test to see their achievement after the study. A set of questionnaire was also distributed to the students to see their opinion about the program. The following table shows the comparison of the students' score before and after the study.

Table 1. The students' TOEFL score comparison

No.	Value of Criteria	TOEFL score	
		Before	**After**
1.	minimum/smallest	270.00	330.00
2.	maximum/largest	506.67	513.33
3.	mean	385.17	415.98
4	median	385.00	398.17
5	Toefl Score ≥ 477	2	4
6	Toefl Score ≤ 450	15	12

From table above it can be inferred that in general the students' TOEFL score improved after the implementation of blended learning.Although only 4 students could achieve 477 after the study but the students who could achieve 450 increased.The lowest and the highest score also increased. The average score before the study was 385.17and it became 415.98 after the implementation of Blended Learning.

In addition to the improvement of the students' Toefl score, the students' perception was also investigated. There were 15 items in the questionnaire in the form of Likert scale that contain aspects involved in the study. Most of the students show positive opinion toward the implementation of blended learning. Some students even wrote on the comments stated that they would be very happy to join in another blended learning program to improve their toefl score. The following table shows the students' perception.

Table 2 . The students' Perception toward Blended Learning Program

No	Statements	strongly disagree (%)	disagree (%)	agree (%)	strongly agree (%)
1	Enjoy the blended program	-	-	17	83
2	Materials are relevant to the needs	-	-	58	42
3	Materials sent by email helps Toefl preparation	-	-	47	53
4	Tasks given by email helps	-	-	29	71

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No	Statements	strongly disagree (%)	disagree (%)	agree (%)	strongly agree (%)
5	Times to finish the tasks sent by email are sufficient	-	-	65	35
6	Instructors teach appropriately	-	-	52	48
7	F2F times are sufficient	-	17	48	35
8	Materials sent by email support TOEFL preparation	-	24	52	24
9	Test strategy and Tips help TOEFL preparation	-	-	52	48
10	TOEFL exercises and practice help	-	-	48	52
11	WA and SMS help to communicate with friends and instructors in TOEFL preparation.	-	8	52	40
12	Enjoy doing the test on line using computer in the laboratory	-	8	40	52
13	fell nervous doing TOEFL practice in computer	12	24	40	24
14	TOEFL practices in computer laboratory help much	-	12	59	29
15	The integration of F2F and electronic media/IT (email ,wa, sms, comp lab) is useful in TOEFL preparation course	-	-	12	88

Based on table 2 above, it can be noticed that 83% of students enjoyed the program, and all of them considerd that materials used were relevant to their needs and none of the students disagreed when the materials were sent by email. Indeed, they believed that the tasks sent by email had helped them and the times given to finish the tasks were sufficient. Although all students agreed that all instructors taught them apprpriately, but some students (17%) considered that times to study in F2F were not sufficient and 24% others thought that materials sent by email did not support them. All students also agreed that TOEFL Tips/Strategy and exercises helped them also.

Concerning with the use of IT media such as WA, and SMS, most students agreed that they were beneficial, only 8% of them thought they were not useful. 52% of them strongly agreed that they could enjoy doing TOEFL test on line, only 8% of them did not enjoy TOEFL test on line. However most of students (64%) felt nervous doing the pratice on line in computer laboratory though they believed it had helped them. In conclusion, 88% of students strongly agreed , and 12% others agreed that blended learning or integration of F2F mode and IT mode was useful. They recommend that Blended learning is used to improve students TOEFL score, especially students of FKIP.

Reflection

The second cycle of this action research focused on implementing blended learning to improve students' toefl score. The study ran well though some problems occured, for example, students could not use computer laboratory as the schedule arranged because at the same time the lab was used for other programs. The use of electronic media such as email was beneficial for the students since they could get the materias and the tasks easily. They also could send their works directy.However, some students still did not use other media effectively to discuss their problems.They stll prefered to see the instructors directly (F2F). Due to the limitation of the time in implementing blended learning, some students suggested longer time. The students also believethat to improve their toefl score they need qualified teacher as they experinced in this study.Blended learning program had helped students improve their toefl score though the time was limited.

Compared to the previous studies, this research found almost similar things. Grgurovic (2009) found out that blended learning model which integated CALL and conventional F2F could improve students ability,ease instructors monitor students' progress and helped them learn and practice in a laboratory. Tasks sent by email also helped students controll themselves in toefl preparation, they also learned to manage their own way of learning. Other researches also

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found similar findings Chenoweth & Murday (2006); and Green & Youngs (2001).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The integration of F2F and IT or known as Blended learning could help students improve their toefl score. Moreover, all setudents enjoyed the activities. Since there is no well managed TOEFL preparation program yet in Teachers Training and Education Faculty, it is recommended the faculty arrange FGD soon to discuss a follow up program to implement the result of this study.

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