

Web as A Lifelong Media for Building Language Learning

Meita Lukitawati Sujatna 1
Alvii T.B. Siregar 2
meitalukitawati@yahoo.com, meita.sujatna@widyatama.ac.id
alvii.siregar@widyatama.ac.id

Introduction

These days there are many ways / methods available to improve the learning process both in-class or outside, individually or collectively. One of the most common methods is the adoption of Information Technology (IT) in the learning process. This is in line with the fact that learners today are now familiar with computers earlier. Language learning through web or blog becomes the options to confer the students in enhancing and elaborating education. This lifelong learning has been very demanding and encouraging for the teachers to recuperate and persevere the method of teaching. Again! Information Technology (IT) venerate the learners to advance their learning process.

New forms of learning arising from developments in ICT and other technologies –distance learning and blended learning and the need to increase the provision of part-time, community and work-based learning, including students learning off campus have become more popular. Like many other definitions, Lifelong learning is also defined as the process of keeping your mind and body engaged—at any age—by actively pursuing knowledge and experience.

Lifelong learning is all learning activity undertaken throughout life, whether formal or informal. The concept is closely linked to *continuous education* and to continuing education and continuing professional development.

In Lifelong learning

- Educators are guides to sources of knowledge
- People learn by doing
- People learn in groups and from each other
- Assessment is used to guide learning strategies and to identify pathways for future learning.
- Educators develop individualized learning plans
- Educators are lifelong learners. Initial training and ongoing professional development are linked
- People have access to learning opportunities over a lifetime.

- Learning is put into practice.
- Learners reflect upon learning and analyze their personal development

Theoretical Review

Lifelong Learning may refer to an individual's continuous acquisition of knowledge and skills over time and the ability to pass them on to others in a manner that is understood. The ability to pass this knowledge and skills on from one person to another is very important as it keeps the learning cycle in motion and makes it 'lifelong'.

Stage of Lifelong Learning

Lifelong education means education resulting from integration of formal, non-formal, and informal education so as to create ability for continuous lifelong development of quality of life. Learning is therefore part of life which takes place at all times and in all places. It is a continuous lifelong process, going on from birth to the end of our life, beginning with learning from families, communities, schools, religious institutions, workplaces, etc.^[4].

Age 0-5 years

During this age group, a lot of learning takes place and it provides very important insight into learning as and a foundation for future learning habits and resourcefulness. This is probably the age with the highest amount of informal learning as children imitate almost everything from parents, peers and their environment.

Learning in the 6-24 age group

Learning of the 6 – 24 age group primarily takes place in educational institutions, from primary and secondary to tertiary levels. Family life, social organizations, religious institutions, and mass media can also play a role in non-formal and informal learning during this time. The objective of learning in this period is the holistic development of learners in four aspects, namely: physical, intellectual, social capacity, emotional and mental development.

Learning in the 25-60 age group

Learning during the working life of the 25 – 60 age group can learn informally through the use of instructional media, mostly from their occupations, work-places, colleagues, touring, mass media, information technologies, environment and nature. Adults learn from experiences and problem solving. They therefore need continuous development of intellect, capability and integrity.

Learning in the 60+ age group

Learning in old age (over 60 years old) elderly people can learn a great deal from activities suitable to their age e.g. art, music, sports for the elderly, handicrafts and social work. They can also carry out voluntary work in community organizations, clubs and associations. Such work makes their lives meaningful as well as bringing benefits to society.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifelong_learning^[1]: cited in 07/27/2011 at 7.25 am

In the last decade, the use of computers has developed rapidly throughout the world. For educational purposes, computers play a crucial role where they function as 'an added tool or resource, as a model or a real-world phenomenon or system, and as a training environment to prepare users for real-world tasks and experiences'

(Pennington 1995:11)^[2]. The purpose of language teaching has changed a lot from time to time. Linguists, for example Allwright^[3] and Kumaradivellu^[4] criticized that the model of Teaching English has shifted from improving learning to improving methods.

Educational conditions and facilities supported by technology in Indonesia are extremely heterogeneous, ranging from those institutions that use conventional methods to very modern ones. Inevitably, every educational institution must compete to improve the methods and educational facilities to support their students in pursuing job in the future, especially those candidates who are willing to work. Educational institutions should prepare graduates who are ready to compete in the real world.

Lack of English competence is often still a handicap for our students. Learning English at school since primary school to university level is not a guarantee for the students to be able to absorb and use English optimally. Most of the time both learners and teachers as well as the curriculums are not in their best condition. They are constrained by the many limitations, such as time and opportunity to practice as an individual. The situation is worsened in classes with large numbers of students. Many of the students are lacking in motivation, they simply learn English only because they have to, not because they need to or know what the benefits are. They have never been in a situation where they are forced to use English. How then can we encourage our students to learn and to communicate properly? Therefore, to encourage them we should be more innovative in supporting and providing conditions for effective and efficient learning.

The use of technology should be able to facilitate and to enhance Self Access Language Learning. Unlike in Indonesian context, the use of Technology, in this case computers in Self Access Language Learning (SALL) may not be a very phenomenal. In some developed countries, it has been applied in the early 1960s. The problem is how to make benefit of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in language teaching which is also known as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Learner autonomy or learner independence has been a central issue in discussions of language learning in distance education.

Rose Paul as cited by Chynthia J. White and Priowirjanto^[5] pointed out that the most important criterion for success in distance learning should relate to learner independence and that the learners should be responsible for his or her own learning, that is by doing the Self Access Language Learning (SALL).

There are different approaches to help learners to move from teacher dependence towards autonomy such as in self-directed, self-instructional, individualized instruction, independent learning and self-access learning. Each approach encourages learners to get and pursue their personal goals, and to take an active role in autonomous learning.

Language learning through web or blog becomes the options to confer the students enhancing and elaborating education. This lifelong learning has been very demanding and encouraging for the teachers to recuperate and persevere the method of teaching. Again! Information Technology (IT) venerate the learners to advance their learning process. Another media to support this LL; self-access method is quite flexible. It can be used on a large scale or a small scale implementation. It

caters for all levels of learning. It can function for different degrees of independence, involving both teacher-directed learners and autonomous ones. It can involve individual learners, pairs and larger peer-groups. It can be carried out in the classroom or in a specially designed Self Access Centre.

The aims of this paper are:

1. Using Technology as one of the alternative media in enhancing language learning.
2. Introducing Web as an alternative way of lifelong learning process
3. Encouraging English language teachers to enrich the teaching mechanism by integrating technology to the current teaching method

Model Analysis, Design And Implementation

The independence of learner becomes an interesting issue related to distance learning. Paul Rose as quoted by Priowirjanto (2009)^[5] explained that the criteria for success of distant education (outside class) must relate to the independence of learning and that learners must take the responsibility for their learning needs, and the interactive web is a very appropriate place to build language learning.

3.1 - Interactive Web

The advent of the Internet and the wide spread of technology in our life create new opportunities for language learning. Since most of the Internet content is in English, the teachers of English gain access to the enormous variety of authentic materials relating to all spheres of life at almost no cost. The Web is the invaluable source of information, both for teachers to create classroom materials and for their classes to explore the whole world just by clicking the mouse (Krajka). <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Krajka-WritingUsingNet.html>^[6]: cited: 08/22/2011 at 19:05

3.2 - What is Blog?

‘A blog is a web in which items are posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order. The term blog is a shortened form of weblog or web log. A blog comprises text, hypertext, images, and links (to other web pages and to video, audio and other files). Blogs use a conversational style of documentation. Often blogs focus on a particular “area of interest”, such as Washington, D.C.’s political goings-on. Some blogs discuss personal experiences.’

3.3 - What is Blogging?

What is blogging, really?

Authoring a blog, maintaining a blog or adding an article to an existing blog is called “blogging”. Individual articles on a blog are called “blog posts,” “posts” or “entries”. A person who posts these entries is called a “blogger”.

(a) It’s Writing on a Blog

The fact that the writing takes place on a blog makes it different than other forms of writing. How do you know it’s a blog? Articles, called posts, are listed in reverse chronological order. Each post has its own unique web page address called a Permalink. Posts usually (but not always) allow

readers to leave comments. Writing in any other environment which lacks these “bloggy” characteristics is not blogging. Blogging must be done on a blog, or using blog software of some kind. This is the most technical definition of what is blogging, and it’s an obvious one, but it’s not the only one.

(b) **It’s a Dialogue, Not a Monologue**

In the days before the Internet, if you wanted dialogue, you met someone face-to-face, or you chatted on the phone (land line), or you corresponded via post or telegram. That was about it. There was nothing else. When you write a blog post, people can leave comments and even reply to each other in the comments, as though it were a miniature forum just for that post (which it is). In other words, they can talk back to you and they can talk to each other.

(c) **It’s Writing for Others, Not Yourself**

Even though early blogs really were, in a sense, “online diaries,” the paradox is that a blog written to satisfy oneself is nearly always worthless to others. A blog written to satisfy others will nearly always satisfy oneself. In other words, there’s a lesson to be learned from a blogger’s personal story. The personal is the universal.

(d) **It’s Beyond Writing**

Blogging is not just writing. It can include images, audio, video, slideshows, e-books, and all other manner of what we call “embedded media.” Blogging does not even have to include words: a blog post can have only pictures, for example.

(<http://remarkablogger.com/2010/02/26/what-is-blogging/>)^[7] cited in 07/27/2011 at 7.35 am

This learning model is still a relatively new concept for some learners, therefore, the method of teaching-learning needs to be provided ‘ready’ to create an active interaction between the learners with the teacher. Each person may have their own uniqueness in doing so.

George and Gagne cited by Tarjana^[8], Sheerin^[9], mentioned the followings:

1. **Learning process is life-long.**

In the process of development, human beings are engaged in learning most of their life-times. Each individual needs to take responsibility for his own learning in order to become a representative member of the society.

2. **Learning takes place in both long- or short-range phases.**

Instructions can be done by means of setting up separate learning tasks, which demand learners to put time, effort and intellectual challenge to accomplish them. Learning will expectedly take place after each task has been completed.

3. **Learning takes place when materials are systematically designed.**

Learning must be planned rather than haphazard. Although learning may occur in a natural situation without the imposition of any plan, a better nurturing condition for learning, challenging them in "an effort after meaning" situation, will enable learners to use and develop their talents to the fullest degree.

3.4 - The Role of Technology and its Implementation at Classroom

The IT can be applied in the delivery of all materials used at classroom activities. Some examples of IT usage at classroom are:

1. Weblog as media for storing data, operating the software and also as communication tools between teachers-students-students.
2. Internet as media that can link the users to sites or to other users like other learners or teachers.

The Proposed Language Learning at Essay Writing 1 Class in Widyatama University

4.1 - Writer's Experience

The learning process was initiated as the result of project plan proposed for completing the summer course-online scholarship offered by the University of Oregon, the United States.

The course was conducted in ten weeks and was provided to develop and support the participants in enhancing their teaching methods and experiences. The materials given have been sources for valuable information in developing the participants' skills as well as the knowledge of innovative technology, tools, project plan and assessment instruments to augment the teacher skills.

The course has shown the writer how web as a media can be 'a very powerful' tool to influence life-long learning process.

The fact that web can be accessed anywhere, anytime, and even by anybody has obviously proved and guaranteed that the learning continues. How web open our eyes to see the world and facilitate the students to take a trip in digital life.

The goal of the project is to observe the impact of the implementation of a technology-based technique in teaching-learning activities. More specifically, it aims to provide a means to monitor the progress of the students in a writing class and a tool to maintain in-class and off-class communication between the students and the instructors. Although the technique might have been used in other institutions with various results, it is yet to be implemented in the institution for which the author works.

As mentioned earlier, the main intention of the project is to allow the students to maintain discussions even after the class meeting is over. This entails an entirely different method than previous method of teaching-learning.

To instigate the issue the author starts with a class design. The first activity is to set up a class web <https://sites.google.com/a/widyatama.ac.id/essaywriting1beta>^[10] to communicate the lesson plan, students' blogs <https://sites.google.com/a/widyatama.ac.id/essaywriting1beta/blog-roll>^[11] to post the works and comments, internet classroom assistant on www.nicenet.org^[12] to conduct discussions, email to communicate personal issues and a short message service and Jupiter grades www.jupitergrades.com^[13]

as grading tool. A Webquest room www.zunal.com/tasks.php?w=108896^[14] to support the lesson's exposure will be provided as well.

At the beginning of the lesson, a power point presentation assists in explaining the detail and the syllabus of the course. The presentation shows what activities, tasks and assessment are expected in the semester. It also serves as a means to share the author's experience of becoming 'student' of the summer course, focusing on anticipating the obstacles in the initial stages and the preparations needed to achieve the goals. As the semester progresses, the instruction materials is focused more on writing skills rather than interacting in the aforementioned facilities.

4.2 - Essay Writing 1; Online class

Background

The learners

The learners are the class members of Essay Writing 1, comprising of 35 students in their third semester of the Bachelor's Degree program majoring in English. Their age ranges from 19 to 25 years. Bahasa is their mother tongue, although they come from various cultural backgrounds with various dialects. Their family backgrounds are also diverse in terms of origins and economic status. Their learning styles vary from visual, auditory to read/write and kinesthetic.

The Setting

This class project is be jointly conducted by two instructors: a class teacher and online teacher. Responsibilities are divided into the following areas: the class teacher delivers the materials and prepare them to actively engage in the assignments to be completed after the class. The online teacher monitors, responds, and assesses the students' works through class blog.

The institution has provided a sufficient and conducive technology-supported teaching – learning activities. The classroom instructor provides instructions through visual presentations using a laptop and a projector, leading to a session of discussion among the students focusing on gathering additional information from or experiences of peers to arrive at the intended comprehension of the instructions and the corresponding assignment. To complete the assignments, there are three digital language laboratories for the students to gather information and compose their essays. Moreover, there is also a Self-Access Centre as a supporting media that provides writing assistance software, references and access to the Internet with a specific list of links of writing-related topics. Paper-based references are provided to support students to independently refresh their memories on or build on the necessary skills in the fundamentals of writing, namely grammar, writing guides and linguistics.

The current teaching method is still influenced by the traditional way of learning. It is due to the fact that the learners still need to be motivated as autonomous learners as they are accustomed to the teacher-centered model than learners-centered model. The new model of teaching, to the author's opinion, will make room for learner autonomy and learner's involvement.

Another influence on the traditional learning methods is that the focus of English language learning in Indonesia is more emphasized on grammar rather than applying it to writing, for example. In general, the students experience difficulties when they have to write reports or even paragraphs in good English. It is evident that learners need more writing practice. So, this project is expected to accelerate their skill building especially in written communication.

The course goals

The course is intended to build on the fundamental of paragraph writing that the students learned in second semester and to give them the confidence they need to venture into the realm of writing. This course is also intended to help students become competent, independent writers by engaging them in the process of writing and by encouraging them to explore and organize their ideas in writing.

What the author deemed ideal about this project is that the teacher seemed consistently giving the feedback and reinforcement to students. Therefore, the goals are perceived as easier to achieve.

The author's decision to create a web and a single blog to cater for the needs to is based on practical and applicable considerations at the beginning. Limited time and the responsibilities of the teacher to control, check, give feedback or comments to all the posts are some constraints that have to be dealt with. Also, it is an efficient way to build learner autonomy and peer feedback as they search individually for information and interact collectively in a common virtual room. But then to encourage the students' habit of writing, it was decided to let them creating their own blog, so the collaborative learning and peer assessment can be easier done through posting and commenting method.

Learner Needs

In fact, most of the students are eager to have new experiences in writing, but the available academic atmosphere is sometimes not supporting enough to motivate the students to write outside the class. They write only to fulfill their obligations in the courses. In this case, they need a new condition or environment to encourage them in writing. They need to actively participate in fun, engaging, and rewarding writing activities supported by technology.

The author considers interactive web, blog, Webquest, Jupiter grades, and Nicenet as the essential technology. The activities are conducted in a class room for instructional purposes and Self Access Centre or outside the class with internet connection for asynchronous discussions.

Other factors to consider

The technology-supported learner autonomy which is being introduced may be still unfamiliar for some students. A well-designed class, ground rules, and SAC' activities are prepared before the class begins. Assessment tools is provided and monitored in accordance with the lesson needs.

Issue or problem to be addressed that technology can help with

Regarding to the difficulties the students experience as they attempt to write individually and to express the constraints to their instructors, it is hoped that the habits to be offered through this program are motivational for them to improve their writing skills. Posting comments to blogs is anticipated as an effective means to the skill development issue.

Technology used in this project is designed to help teacher to enhance and provide an interactive class, but knowing that not all students can easily cope with new technology introduced will take the teacher's time more in preparing the instructions and facilitating the students in getting accustomed to the new method.

The issue that also will arise is how to answer the questions about how to motivate and encourage the students to write and comment more. Usually, they deliver short responses such as "so-so", "good", or "excellent."

Conclusion And Suggestion

5.1 - Conclusions

An IT-supported language learning should be considered as an important facility in a curriculum that bolsters lifelong language learning. It serves as a useful facility to allow a certain degree of autonomy for the learners to augment their language skills and conduct the learning activities synchronously or asynchronously.

Materials in the digital form can easily be updated for the purpose of procuring reliable information as well as methods of learning. Also, they can be adapted to the needs of the learner in order to allow self-pacing, progression, and monitoring.

With the technology available, it is possible to set up an interactive class activities as a less rigid yet teaching learning experience and to guarantee the lifelong learning process.

5.2 - Suggestions

Although the use of technology may be considered to be costly and time consuming in the preparation of the services provided, SAC support is relatively flexible towards the needs and ability of the institution. Thus an institution may want to set up a smaller scale facility and gradually increase the capacity.

Teachers may also take advantage of the facility by assigning students to complete assignments anywhere supported by internet connection.

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