

Using Weblog to Enhance Students' Motivation and Engagement in the Introduction to Journalism Class

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Abstract: Motivation, what causes someone to act, both extrinsically and intrinsically, is very significant in determining the achievement of the objectives of a learning. An action class research which employ web blog as a teaching aid was conducted to examine students' motivation and engagement in the Introduction to Journalism class. Eighty -five students enrolled in the Introduction on Journalism course were treated as the participants of the research. The students were assigned to make a web blog as a place to place their writings to be read by their friends and the public. The students' involvement or engagement in the course is assessed from the number of the task they do, the quality of their writing while their motivation is seen from their feedback about the class at the end of the course. The research shows that 45% of the students got a very good grade (≥ 86); 27% good ($\geq 80-85$), and 19% fairly good ($\geq 76-79$), 5% passed, and 5% failed. Both the learning achievement and the students' comments indicate that using web blog as a teaching aid has satisfactorily made students engaged in the class and are enthusiastic about news writing.

1 INTRODUCTION

Journalism is the activity or profession of writing for newspapers, magazines or news websites or preparing news to be broadcast (Oxford, 2016). Introduction to Journalism is a compulsory subject for students of English Department of Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University. The learning objectives of the course are 1) to introduce students to journalism; 2) enable them to write news of certain types, and 3) provide them with some experience in journalistic activities.

Journalism is a form of communication, but it's distinct from other forms. It is unique because it's a one-way message, or story, from the journalist to the audience. It's most unique because the message isn't the journalist's personal story or subjective thoughts. Instead, the journalist acts as a conduit, narrating an objective story about something that happened or is happening, based on his or her observations and discoveries. This type of storytelling comes in many different forms, including:

1. Breaking news
2. Feature stories
3. Investigative reports
4. Editorials
5. Reviews

6. Blogs

The students appears to have limited knowledge of journalism. And, when they are asked whether they want to work as a journalist the answer was primarily 'no'. One study (Alkazemi et.al., 2017) shows that journalism is the second lowest top career choices to the students of a senior high school in Ghana, although 38% of 2000 sample students state that journalist is a prestigious profession. In fact, today journalism seems to have a peculiar fascination for young people in seeking careers (Alkazemi et.al., 2017). A recent study by Acheampong (2017) on the students' motivation on mass communication class shows that most respondents have a positive view on journalism education.

Thus, in order to make 'Introduction to Journalism' course interesting to all students, a teaching method that may attract their attention to engage in the class is required. A class action research was done to study whether or not blog may improve students' motivation and engagement in the Introduction to Journalism class. It is particularly to examine the effect of using weblog as an online media to the students' participation (motivation and engagement) in the class activities and to the students' achievement in the learning objectives. Here, blog is treated as a media for students to write

their tasks and one tool for the lecturer to assess the students' learning achievement.

In psychological perspective, motivation is described as “*a state that energizes, directs and sustains behavior*” (Acheampong, 2017). It is a term that is used to refer to factors that activate, direct, and sustain goal-directed behavior (Alkazemi, 2017), and is believed as ‘always be at the heart of teaching and learning (Kormos and Csizér, 2008). Motivation is the main reason that inspires a person to move forward (Kormos and Csizér, 2008). It is described (Kormos and Csizér, 2008; Lo and Hyland, 2007; Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000) that one’s motivation might be stimulated or inspired by others or events (extrinsic motivation) or it may come from within the individual (intrinsic motivation). Motivation may be affected by one’s self determination, the ability to make choices and exercise a high degree of control. It is described (Ryan, 2000) that self-determination can be supported by providing students with opportunities to be challenged and then increasing students' interest, competence, creativity and desire to be challenged and increase students’ engagement in their study.

In education, student engagement refers ‘to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education’ [4].

Several research have proved that motivation is essential in learning process and affect students’ engagement in the class activity (Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Ryan, 2000). Alkazemi (2017) has done a research to observe students’ perspective toward journalism and career as a journalist, and find that journalism is not popular to the students and being a journalist is not the main choice of career. A contrast result is shown by Acheampong (2017) who did a survey on the motivation of Kuwaiti students who intend to major in mass communication. They have faced a long process that begins in high school. The finding depicts that all respondents viewed the field of journalism positively and journalism education in a positive light. The two research show that students from different places and different exposure to journalism may differ in viewing journalism or journalism education.

A study by Jodai and Zafarghandi (2013) investigates the effect of motivational factors on English achievement in an intensive English course attended by 164 Iranian male military staff (aged from 20 to 30). The study which adopts a contextualized version of the mini-Attitude Motivation Test Battery ($\alpha=.70$) uses four principal

variables, which are motivation, integrativeness, organizational influence, and anxiety. The finding shows that ‘integrativeness predicted the motivation to learn English positively, and that motivation was a positive predictor of English achievement’.

Blog has been considered as one of a great educational tools in classroom teaching and is considered as an ‘online journal’ that an individual can continuously update with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do so (Cambell, 2003). It gives students complete freedom to publish content on the web. A study by has proved that students viewed Weblog as ‘giving an opportunity and freedom for self-expression in English and writing for both a local and global audience’, It also can foster creative, analytical and critical thinking skills, creates social interaction and good relationships between writer and reader, and supports the learning community (Cambell, 2003).

2 METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The participant of the research is 85 students of English Department who take ‘Introduction to Journalism’ course. They are enrolled in the 3rd semester of the 2016/2017 academic year.

- Every student is assigned to make a web blog and post the class assignments and teaching materials on the blog.
- The students are assigned to write at least 3 news in different forms (photo news, feature story, and broadcasting news). There is no restriction as to the topic of the news to allow the students choose topic of their interest. All the assignments have to be posted on their blog.
- Besides posting their works on journalism, the students are also assigned to post the teaching materials obtained from the internet.

2.2 Assessment

The Marking System follows the system used by the University. One’s achievement is valued using number system, ranging from 0 to 100. The numbers are then transformed into a letter system, ranging from A to E. The value of each letter is based on 5 points scale basis. Thus, the highest grade is A, which has a value ≥ 86 and the lowest is E (failed), which is ≤ 45 ,

Students’ engagement in the class activities is assessed from 1). Number of Posting/Writing, 2).

Diversity of Topics, and 3). Blog Performance. Students' engagement is also assessed from their attendance during the semester and punctuation in the dateline set to post every task/writing on the blog. Both contributes 10% to the final grade.

The number of posting/writing. The number of writing is seen from the number of task posted on every student' blog. There are 5 tasks given during the semester: two news, one feature story, one opinion, and one broadcasting news (news based on a video-taped interview). The highest grade is given to those who do at least three works. Those who write more that the compulsory tasks are considered as the motivated students and those who write less is less motivated.

Diversity of topics. The diversity of the topic is assessed from the students' choice of the topics of the news or opinion based on the event in the surrounding (university life or neighborhood situation) to the international events or news. Those who write on relatively the same topic is considered as less interested in the class activity.

Blog Performance. The students' blog performance is used to assess student's interest in the activity of writing and journalism. It is measured from the design of the blog such as the use of color, picture and supporting media (such as pictures, caricatures, video or music) and the size and type of font used that may affect the readability of the text. They are marked as very interesting, interesting, and less interesting.

The motivation of the students in the course is seen from the students' comments about the course written as the feedback to the methods used and the class in general. A response is categorized positive if it uses a verb or an adjective to express a positive opinion or feeling toward something like the verb 'like', 'interest', 'enjoy' or adjectives 'interesting', 'good', 'excited', etc.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result of the class action research is described from the two main aspects being assessed.

3.1 Number of Posting.

The number of postings is seen from the number of writing posted by the students on their blog. The compulsory writing is 5. Of 85 students, 4 did not follow the class at all and thus were considered failed. The lowest number of posting or writing is 3, the highest is 7. Table 1 shows that 40 (47%) of the

students posted more than what is required, and 22 (26%) posted less than the minimum number assigned.

Table1: Number of Posting on the students' blog

Number of posting	Number of Students
0	4
1	1
2	2
3	14
4	8
5	16
6	22
7	18
$\Sigma = 85$	

Table I shows that only 11.9% of the total students do the assignment as the minimum requirements. They are students who retake the subjects. About 55% of the students do the assignment above the minimum requirement, of which 21.6 % has more than what is required.

3.2 Diversity on topics

The topic of the students' writings varies. The topic ranges from events or situations found in various places in the university to those in overseas, such as Korea and US.

3.3 Blog Performance

It is found that all students' writings about news or future stories are supported by at least one picture or photo. Of 85 students, 22 use videos for their news or future stories and the teaching materials. Only one blog used music as the background of the blog. Figure 1 presents the students' grade for blog performance.

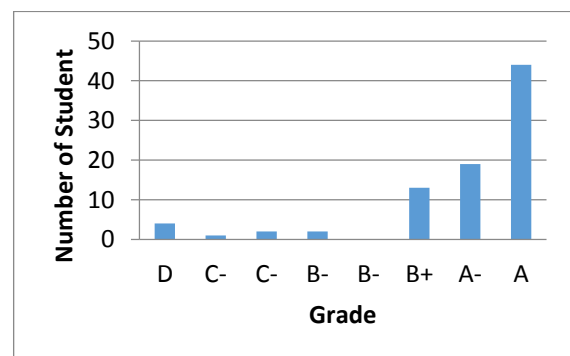


Figure 1: Students' Final Grade

Figure 1. shows the distribution of students final grade calculated in the end of the class. As it can be seen from the figure, 45% of the students got a very good grade (≥ 86) ; 27% got good grade ($\geq 80-85$), 19% got fairly good grade ($\geq 76-79$), 5% passed, and 5% failed.

3.4 Students Motivation in the course

The students' comments about the class as stated in their feedback to the class varies significantly. The number of response belong to the positive response is 83%, neutral is 10% and negative is 7% and the content of the statement as shown in the students' responses below:

- Because of that, I know how to write a news in blog
- I began to understand how to make the news well and correctly
- I feel this class is much trained me in doing a research like knowing the right way of interviewing, writing a news with precise and accurate.
- This class goes as what I expected and I'm very satisfied. I have learnt about the necessary things about journalism, but I still want to learn more about this subject.
- the first i feel heavy to write the blog but after i realized that this blog can make me string beautiful words
- this class is interesting and helped me with my writing and conversation skill. This class also gives me an understanding of what is journalism and what its role in society. The class was taken very enjoyably.

Similarly, a negative response is viewed from the adjective used and the content of the statement. There are only 4 students whose comments falls to the negative type. The statements are:

- It's just that this class is not conducive because the number of students is too much
- Class is crowded
- It is better to have two classes in the future
- I cannot learn a lot as the class is too crowded. I cannot hear the voice of the lecture because students at the back are noisy.

Neutral. Statements that describe the aim of creating the blog or do not contain a particular judgment about the class or method used are considered neutral. There are two students who have no specific view of the class.

- I make this blog for the Introduction to journalistic tasks.

- This is blog is aimed to fulfil my task in Introduction to Journalism class.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This small research has proved that:

1. weblog as a teaching aid can improve most students' engagements in the 'Introduction to Journalism' class. Although only a few students claim that they are interested in working as a journalist, using blog as a tool in teaching journalism can enhance students' engagement in the class activity and result in a good achievement in the learning objectives.
2. Weblog appears as an appropriate teaching tool to involve students in writing activities. Most of the students claim that the activity of writing news is an enjoyable thing.

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