MOODLE AND READING COMPREHENSION MATERIALS
FOR THE EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: Moodle and the internet have modernized the means English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students communicate and acquire the target language. With a click of a button or a touch on the screen, any students who are lined to the internet can gain access to a riches of information, varying from books, poems, articles, newspapers, magazine, graphics, cartoons, etc. In addition, the students can interconnect with all people over the world using their English. It is vital that educational system and classroom practices be revolutionized to better prepare our 21st century students. This article contends that the idea of Moodle and Reading Comprehension Materials are not just fascinating notion. It is an essential, for it has a vast prospective to recommend in assisting the development of EFL students’ reading skill through moodle. This article first presents a theoretical basis in the use of moodle and reading comprehension material for the EFL students, particularly in terms of authenticity and learners’ autonomy. Secondly, it discusses kinds of reading comprehension materials for the EFL students. It, next, reviews sample materials for teaching English reading comprehension skill. Finally, it concludes how reading comprehension materials for the EFL learners can be served in Moodle.

The development of non-interactive technologies such as radio, television, compact-disk players, and stand alone software packages have been gradually replaced by the interactive ones. Internet is mostly used to communicate by people all over the world since it connects them quickly and facilitates long distance access. Interactive communication via internet has reformed human daily communicative practices. Email, mailing list, and social networking have been possibly and potentially used in several aspects of education. Over the past decade, pedagogical practices in higher education (HE) have undergone a significant move toward students-centered and community-based modes of learning (Rovai & Jordan, 2004). At the same time, the development of Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment), an instance of Course Management System (CMS) (www.moodle.org) has facilitated both the instructors and students to have conducive community learning environment supporting them to access teaching learning activities not only in the classroom but also from outside the class. Such a learning environment also enables them to interact with each other and thus the activities can be centered towards the students and be geared towards their needs, interests, learning pace, etc.

Created by Martin Dougiamas in the 90s, nowadays Moodle has grown into one of the most popular open source Learning Management System (LMS) as it offers myriad potentials in education, particularly in language teaching. Using Moodle, teachers can create powerful, flexible, and engaging online learning experiences. Moodle offers a complete, self-contained system that can manage the whole activities that a language classroom should deal with, starting from administering the students, providing materials, delivering assignments, providing feedback, evaluating and grading the students, etc., all in one integrated system.

Moodle has become so popular among university students’ life because it has formed an integral community of the students’ academic and social lives. Deng and Tavares (2013) state that learning within a community is concerned with participation in the community-based activities of creating, sharing, and co-construction (p. 167). It is thus vital to explore students’ engagement in online communities, in particular the facilitating and debilitating factors that affect their participation. Taking those into considerations, educators should be aware to examine possible efforts of this emerging technology on university students to assist them learn better in the new dynamic environment. In English Foreign Language (EFL) learning, various attempts and initiatives have been developed and documented in different learning setting, especially in Indonesian context.

Using Moodle in the EFL teaching learning context is not to transform students’ learning behaviours directly, but it aims at building toward autonomous learning through culturally familiar learning practices. By doing so, the students would like to take part actively via online or offline learning activities and prepare for their own autonomous learning. Holec (1981) defines that learner autonomy is “an ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (p.3). Little (2003), moreover, describes that learner autonomy is manifested by the learners’ ability to initiate, monitor, and evaluate learning process. It is one of the principles in language learning that should be addressed seriously by a language classrooms by means of encouraging the students to use the language outside of the classroom context (Brown, 2007). To encourage the students’ participation in Reading Comprehension class, for example, Moodle facilitates a structured environment that accomodates the students learning needs and learning materials. In addition, by providing an online mode of delivery, Moodle enables the students to learn “beyond the walls” of the classrooms (Brown, 2007, p. 71) and thus adjust their learning to their own style, pace, and time. This in turn can encourage them to be an autonomous learners.
Cahyono (2011) reveals that the teaching of reading as a foreign language (EFL reading) in Indonesia can be generally included in the teaching of reading comprehension. This is because it aims at improving the skills of learners, who have been able to read in their first language and in EFL, in understanding the meaning of a written text. Reading comprehension can be defined as an active thinking process through which a reader intentionally constructs meaning to form a deeper understanding of concepts and information presented in a text (Blanton et al., 2007; Neufeld 2006; Rapp et al., 2007). To comprehend English texts, readers must use their prior knowledge to analyze, interpret, organize and indicate the available information of passages. Richard and Renandya (2002) recommend teachers facilitate students performance of these abilities in comprehending texts, and provide students with many opportunities for practice, are encouraged in a number of comprehension (p. 277).

English teachers, thus, have responsibilities to motivate reading by selecting appropriate materials. Richard and Renandya (2002) describe that the materials provide the basis for the content lessons, the balance of skills taught, and the kinds of language practice students take part in (p. 66). For learners, materials may provide the major source of contact they have with the language apart from the teacher. Tomlinson (2011) proposes that teachers are also materials developers and that they are ultimately responsible for the materials that the learners use(p. 2). To aid the students in improving their English Reading Comprehension skill, the teachers might adapt the materials to make them more appropriate for particular levels of students. Guthrie (1996) states that meaningful conceptual content in reading instruction increases motivation for reading and text comprehension.

**Reading Comprehension**

Sahu and Kar (1994 cited in Ismini, 2000, p. 13) state that reading comprehension is the process of inferring the ideas and information that the author intends to convey. The comprehension itself depends on the information contained and the background information available with the reader. Concerning the reading comprehension, there are some findings which state that a successful reader is affected by some factors. One of them is what Goodman and Smith (1996, cited in Singhal, 1998) claims that successful readers will consciously or unconsciously use the specific behaviours to enhance their comprehension. For example, readers apply some strategies and use their background knowledge to improve their comprehension of the text. Effective reading comprehension involves not only understanding cognitive process of the message on a printed page but also as a metacognitive process in which readers are aware of and have control over their comprehension (Taylor et. al., 1988:200). It means that there are some factors that influence reading comprehension performance.

From the definitions above, it can be concluded that reading is a mental activity of inferring ideas and information both for recreational and functional purposes. There are some factors that influence reading comprehension. They are individual development, experiential knowledge, cognitive and metacognitive ability, attitude, information contained, and background information.

**Reading Comprehension Materials for EFL Students**

Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write in a language, in many dictionaries. But actually, it refers to much more than that. Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute, and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy has been portrayed as the tools, and it involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in society as a whole (Ferdman & Weber, 1994). It is also: the ability to interpret graphics and visuals, the ability to speak properly in multiple situations and communicate ideas effectively, the ability to comprehend what is heard, the ability to navigate through a technological world, and the ability to write effectively in multiple genres.

Facing the fact that “Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century” will read and write more than before in the history of human development. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. To deal with the huge and flood of information, they will need literacy. In a complex and sometimes even dangerous world, their ability to read will be crucial (IRA, 1999).

Reading means reacting to a written text as a piece of communication. We can assume the intention of a communication on the writers part through reading, which the reader has some purpose in attempting to understand (Wallace, 1992, p. 4). Reading is not only merely a matter of transferring printed symbols into oral forms, but also an activity that involves mental process. It is more than the ability to understand the explicit and implicit meaning. Therefore, in reading the readers’ existing knowledge interact with the text. Teacher should know how reading should be taught and how the goals of reading instruction should be formulated. Putting the framework of 21st century learning (e.g. http://www.p21.org/) into the perspective, this definition of reading has been expanded into ICT literacy which requires the learners, among others, to be able to “Use digital technologies (computers, PDAs, media players, GPS, etc.), communication/networking tools and social networks appropriately to access, manage, integrate, evaluate and create information to successfully function in a
knowledge economy” (ICT Literacy, n.d). This situation thus requires us to expand our reading skills to using digital media as the sources of information, i.e., not only should we be able to read printed materials, but also the digital/online ones.

Integrating Reading Comprehension Materials into Moodle: An Example

As a part of our project in integrating reading comprehension materials into Moodle so as to provide an online learning materials to supplement oconventional face-to-face classrooms, a Moodle site is being developed at http://eltunja.web.id/moodle. Moodle version 2.6 was used and several additional plugins were installed to enrich the capabilities. A Moodle course named ING314 Reading for Academic Purposes was further created with a blended/hybrid course approach (Blake, 2009) in mind. That is, this course is aimed at supplementing the face-to-face meetings. The materials provided here are used to provide an opportunity for the students to enrich their learning experience outside of the classrooms by having more sources, practices, etc., that they can access anywhere, anytime, and at their own pace. This in turn is expected not only to develop their reading skills, but also their autonomy in learning.

As a supplement to the face-to-face class, this Moodle course follows the outline of the Reading for Academic Purposes syllabus, Curriculum 2013, English department, University of Jambi whose main aim is to provide the students with reading comprehension skills particularly in facing TOEFL and IELTS reading tests. As such, the materials provided in the Moodle are geared towards the skills commonly found in the tests, such as finding main ideas and topics of a text, finding details, making inferences, etc. The materials were taken from various sources, including text books, newspaper, magazine, online articles, etc., with various relevant topics. Such sources are expected to provide an opportunity for the students to be familiarized with authentic texts.

Furthermore, this course uses Topic course format. That is, the course is organized into several blocks based on topics so as to facilitate easy navigation. The first block named INTRODUCTION consists of several resources that the students will need throughout the semester, they are News & Announcement and Discussion Forum, both built upon Forum module that will facilitate communication among the teachers and the students; Chat which serves as an online chatting system; and the syllabus of the course, built upon Resources module which will enable the teachers upload the needed materials and the students download and save them. The second block, COURSE MATERIALS, are aimed at providing various resources for the course. These materials can be in form of digital documents (e.g. pdf and word documents), links to online resources, teacher-created internal webpage, etc. All of these materials were created using Resources modules. The third and fourth blocks are READING EXERCISES and READING TESTS which were both created using Quiz module and consists of several reading tests similar to TOEFL and IELTS reading tests. At the current stage of development, ten reading exercises, each focusing on one skill in TOEFL test, and two reading tests each comprising of one full TOEFL reading test have been created. The two blocks, however, are different in their use. Reading Exercises are meant as reading practices, thus students can do each for several times. After each attempt, the students will receive feedbacks and grades that they can use to improve themselves in the next attempt. This condition will allow them to manage their own learning which means that they can learn at their own pace. Those who manage to get good scores can proceed with the other activities, while those who don’t can review their attempt and improve themselves. Reading Tests on the other hand are meant to be a kind of formative tests where the students only get one chance to answer and the scores can be used as a formative evaluation on their learning achievement. The fifth block is COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES where the students can do several collaborative activities. Currently, the only content is a Glossary module where the students can work collaboratively in creating a glossary containing the vocabulary that they encounter in their reading practices. This activity was prepared with a common sense that knowledge of vocabulary, at least partially, account for the success of reading, and lack of of might be an obstacle in reading (see for example Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007). The sixth block is ADDITIONAL MATERIALS which is intended to provide the students with some additional materials that can enrich their learning experience. Among others, this block is planned to contain links to various interesting online materials for reading. Besides the blocks, this Moodle site is also equipped with various modules in the sidebar which add to the functionality of the Moodle so that it becomes a self-contained system capable of managing the course comprehensively. One of the module worth mentioned here is a module named Remote RSS Feed whose main function is to acquire news or story feed from particular RSS subscription. Besides news, RSS feed can also be used to display the types of reading texts for pleasure such as short story, etc. As concluded by Brown (2007), extensive reading is one of the key to students success in learning to read (p. 360). Harmer (2007) further suggests that extensive reading is mainly aimed at encouraging the students the students to choose what they like to read for pleasure (p. 283). Thus, this module is expected to provide them with various reading texts from which they can choose.

To sum up, those are several components that we have built in our Moodle course with an intention to enrich students learning experiences by providing various activities related to reading, including but not limited to reading materials, learning resources, and quizzes and tests in reading, etc. This Moodle course also has some
features that can facilitate the learning process and is thus a perfect choice for a course management system that can manage all learning activities.

Conclusion

The vast development of technology has changed the world as we know it. Not only has it changed our lifestyle, but it has also changed the way we view the world. Technology offers various potentials to enhance all aspects of our life, including education. Internet and computer technology, in particular, has offered various potentials yet to be explored and exploited by educators to improve the learning process. Moodle, as an instance of course management system, for example offers various features that can be used in teaching learning process including language learning. It provides varied, rich, and systematic activities built upon the theories and approaches in the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In particular, as explained in details above, Moodle offers some potentials in language learning as it can be used to provide authentic language use and autonomy to the language learners; two aspects that are known to be beneficial in language learning (see for example, Brown, 2007). This project therefore aims at integrating materials of Reading for Academic Purposes into the Moodle site, which includes reading materials, practices, etc. In the future, it is expected that more materials can be fed to the system and the Moodle site be validated by experts and be implemented in Reading classrooms.

References