

## **Blogging in Extensive Reading: Students' Voice in Blended Learning Classroom**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The use of a blog as a platform for extensive reading becomes valuable since it provides the possibility of readership and opportunity for interaction and collaboration. As the online journal facilitating users to display information in chronological order and connected to the Internet, the blog also can help students to get a wide variety of reading materials, which should be conducted in extensive reading activities. However, the use of a blog in this study is integrated with the process of learning in the classroom so that the students can use it for reporting their reading activities and share what they read beyond the classroom. This study is conducted during one semester in one of the universities in Indonesia using six students of the first grade joining an extensive reading course as the participants. In this research, a case study is used as a research method. It aims at analyzing the students' perception of the use of blogs in extensive reading. Findings show that the blog is beneficial for promoting the students' reading interest, building autonomy and creativity, and providing a reflective platform. The blog consists of several features allowing students to get the numerous reading sources that are appropriate with their language level and interest. Therefore, it becomes useful since it can facilitate students to build their responsibility to select their reading material and to reflect the progress of their learning activities.

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### **Introduction**

Extensive reading is a fun reading activity where the reader reads a large number of texts without any pressure to understand all the words contained in the reading. It has a vital role for students' language development related to vocabulary mastery, reading

speed and confidence, grammatical awareness, basic comprehension, and language learners' motivation, especially learners of English as a foreign language. Extensive reading provides an opportunity for language learners to choose the reading preferences based on their ability to read English texts. Day and Bamford in Milliner and Cote (Milliner & Cote, 2015) argue that extensive reading allows students to read large quantities of self-selected reading materials that are below or at their language level. In this activity, they are encouraged to choose their texts without any coercion from the teacher when choosing their reading source. In addition, readers may not finish their reading if they find it difficult to read because there are many unknown foreign words in the process of reading comprehension. Therefore, they can adjust their extensive reading activity by changing the source of reading based on their level of interest and ability.

In an extensive reading class, where a free choice of reading is provided, lecturers still have their classroom duty in several ways such as providing various kinds of text the students can read, evaluating weekly reading log (provided in a blog), and leading class discussion related to their reading progress. Therefore, most of the classroom activities are group discussions related to their reading, students' reading log evaluation, reporting interesting points, and creating responses for the texts they read. In connection with these activities, students are encouraged to have lots of exposure to different kinds of reading activities outside the classroom.

Based on the pre-interview, it is found that in extensive reading class held in the previous year, students' reading logs were made in written form, on the notebook provided by the teacher. It often overwhelmed the lecturer to read those reading logs since it was not practical by the vast amount of notebooks. As a result, she needed to stay on the desk to read all the reports. In addition, according to the students' reflection in the previous year, some of the students were also overwhelmed to report the results of the reading as they have to write in hand-writing while inserting the text copy of their reading. All in all, most of their reports were careless and inaccurate.

Based on the previous explanation, effective media is needed to carry out the extensive reading class efficiently. Blog, as a web application used to load text and images, is believed to be applicable in extensive reading. It is a media publication to channel ideas and notes in written form so that they are easily accessed widely. The blog has a function to directly access the links contained in the text because it is connected to the Internet. In addition, it provides more paperless work, which becomes one of the overwhelmed factors of assessment. Krause (Krause, 2005) stated that blogs are really valuable as they create a good atmosphere and save the teacher from getting lots of papers.

However, numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the use of blogs in English classes, especially for teaching reading (Fathy, Said, & Fattah, 2016) and (Hsu & Wang, 2011). The studies found that the actual blog was very beneficial as an independent learning tool to develop the students' reading skills. A blog is known as

one of the personalized websites on the Internet which also can facilitate the students to find thousands of reading sources and promote their reading motivation. Conversely, the previous studies focus on investigating the effect of using a blog without clearly examine the students' perception of the use of this platform in their extensive reading activities. Therefore, this present study is carried out to investigate the students' point of view about the use of blogging as a blended learning strategy in extensive reading classroom.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Extensive Reading in EFL Classroom***

Extensive reading is a reading activity carried out as much as possible to get personal pleasure. It is a fun activity that encourages the students to read many easy texts without the pressure to understand the specific components of their language. Different from intensive reading, which focuses on gaining the deep meaning of the text, extensive reading is known as reading for enjoyment in which the readers read a lot of easy texts in the new language and independently read for general understanding and overall meaning. In these activities, students can choose books according to their abilities of language and minimize the use of a dictionary on those activities (Delfi & Yamat, 2017). Boakye (Boakye, 2017) claims that extensive reading, along with the other kinds of reading, is conducted to help students increase their reading skills and develop their cognitive and affective abilities. The objective of extensive reading is to make students prefer to read in the target language and motivates them to get understandable texts to be read for pleasure (Pretorius & Lephala, 2012). In the extensive reading activity, students can guess the meaning of words that are unfamiliar with them by looking at the reading context. As a result, it can increase their vocabulary and develop their language skills.

In the process of conducting extensive reading activities, there are several characteristics that make it different from intensive reading activities. Day and Bamford (Day, Richard and Bamford, 2002) mentions that there are ten principles in teaching extensive reading; they are:

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding.
6. Reading is a reward.
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower
8. Reading is individual and silent
9. Teachers orient and guide their students

10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

As the activities to get an enjoyable situation, this kind of reading encourages the students to find easy texts which are suitable for their interest and language ability. By having the appropriate texts, the students will be easy to understand and get the general meaning of the text. In addition, the teacher only has a role as the facilitator and motivator for the students. A teacher should be a role model that encourages their students to promote their activeness in the reading process. As a result, they will be motivated and interested in their learning.

To teach extensive reading, teachers need to consider the way to monitor the students' reading progress and motivate them to continue their reading. Pichette (Pichette, 2006) explain that there are many activities of extensive reading which can be applied by the teacher. Different with intensive reading activities encouraging teacher to teach and guide the students to understand the strategies of reading and to comprehend all of the pieces of the words, extensive reading activities can be divided into several sections: getting started to read, introducing the material of reading, motivating and supporting the students to read, monitoring the students' reading progress, evaluating them and conducting oral reading reports. Moreover, the students can also create and perform drama or role-play, which frequently makes them enjoy while learning—performing play or drama after reading becomes one of the most appealing activities done by the students. They can also give the tasks to write creatively, such as changing the ending or beginning of the story, writing letters to the character, writing a diary, or writing poetry for the character. These activities are really valuable because it not only influences their reading skill but also has an effect on other language skills, such as speaking, listening, and writing.

Furthermore, the benefits of Extensive Reading on English language students' language development have been documented by a number of researchers. It is noted that extensive reading does not only increase the ability of students to read, but also to enlarge vocabulary, increase the overall level of language testing, and enhance writing fluency (Chew & Lee, 2013) and (Robb, 2013). In addition, this kind of reading activity is also considered as one of the most vigorous ways to promote the students' speed of reading, basic comprehension, and vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, it also helps students to love reading, give the motivation to read, encourage independent reading, and contribute to cognitive and affective reading improvements (McLean & Rouault, 2017).

### ***The Use of Blogs in English Classes***

A blog is the appealing web 2.0 applications and can be used in teaching languages, especially English, as a foreign language. It is one of the internet-based applications that can be used as a media for widely publishing writings. According to Black, as quoted by (OED, 2010), a blog is an optimized internet tool for the second generation. It is defined as an online hypertext journal that others read and respond

and regularly updated. Davis and McGrail (Davis & McGrail, 2009) argue that blog is known as a method to communicate by which authors can post their written work to Web pages that display in reverse chronological order. Paquet (Paquet, 2003) explains that there are several characteristics of blogs; they are:

1. Easy and free function
2. Personal editorship
3. Public access to the content
4. Archival features
5. Hyperlinked post structure (RSS)

However, there are several kinds of a blog which facilitate the students to learn. Zawilinski (Zawilinski, 2009) mentions that blogs can be classified into classroom news blogs, mirror blogs, showcase blogs, and literature response. The first type of blog, classroom news blogs, can be used by the teacher to give the information about the curriculum, announcement, and news about activities in the school. In addition, a mirror blog can be used by the students and the teacher to reflect on the posts posted in the blog. They can post the book or their activities and get the comment from the audience. By using this kind of blog, students can get comments and feedback related to their posts and do discussions about it. Moreover, a showcase blog is a platform used to show the students' art projects, podcasts (audio clips), and their writing. This kind of blog is beneficial to help students have a more authentic audience for their work. Finally, literature response blogs are used by the teacher to motivate the students to write about the materials that the students have in the class. This kind of blog can be a bridge between in-class activity and their out-of-school activity, inspiring them to respond to the texts they read in the classroom. Moreover, Campbell (Campbell, 2003) also adds other classifications of blogs, including tutor or teacher blog, student blog, and class blog. In this classification, a tutor blog is a blog made by the teacher to write or publish the course syllabus, tasks, scores, and other announcements. On the other hand, a student blog is made by the students frequently to publish their tasks and write their thought, opinion, or reflection about the course. Finally, the class blog is a blog used by teachers and students in which they can discuss the material and work collaboratively about the project in the classroom. This kind of blog is beneficial because students can directly interact with their teacher and their partners in the classroom. As a result, their learning skill is improved, and their critical thinking will be better.

The blog has many advantages that can be used to facilitate language learners in improving their language skills. Yu (Yu, 2014) states that the blog offers many benefits for students. It helps enhance students' skills in communicating, reflecting, analyzing, and keeping records. Furthermore, Miftachudin (Miftachudin, 2017) describes that

blog has several advantages, such as 1) easy to use, 2) provides literacy facilitating reading and writing skills, 3) facilitates interaction and collaboration. The blog has several features that are simple to operate and easy to maintain. In this case, the students do not have to create a high effort to create a blog in the process of learning. The blog also allows students to discuss or communicate with their partners or teacher. Therefore, it can provide two or more side communication, which also facilitates the students to make a collaboration in their tasks. In addition, Noytim (Noytim, 2010) stated that a blog is very beneficial to improve the students' vocabulary mastery and their language skills, including writing and reading. A blog can also be used as a writing publishing medium that learners can use to report their reading outcomes more creatively. Arslan (Recep Şahin ARSLAN, 2014) states that the blog offers many new chances for students to practice their writing skills and make this process more manageable for both teachers and students. Not to mention, it can contribute to learning motivation and opportunities for authorship and readership.

On the other hand, previous studies also found that students may face some challenges in using blogs for learning a language, such as time-consuming and too personal (Eastment, 2005) and (Wang & Hsua, 2008). A blog can allow the students to have many resources on the Internet, which are occasionally not relevant to the topic or materials given by the teacher. Moreover, they also need extra time and energy to write and post comments on the blog. The students may feel uncomfortable and frustrated if they do not have an internet connection or do not understand the instruction on the blog. Therefore, the teacher's guidance and support are always needed in the use of this tool for learning.

### ***Using Blog in Extensive Reading Program***

A blog offers students a private room that gave them more control to develop their learning. Moreover, students can use it to get reading texts easily. Teachers can also include links containing reading resources as reference material that students can read in their extensive reading activities. Chew & Lee (Chew & Lee, 2013) state that extensive reading activities should have a variety of reading material that effortlessly allows students to choose the texts which are suitable for their interest and level. Besides, blog members also should have Internet access as a resource for reading material. It is undoubtedly that no question about the Internet becomes the most significant resource that provides a wide variety of reading material. It means blogs can be a tool for students to be able to find various reading texts that can be chosen according to their level of ability and interest. Furthermore, research has uncovered that actually, the use of blogs can influence the student' reading comprehension. In their research, Izquierdo, and Reyes (Leiva De Izquierdo & Reyes, 2009) claim that social environments through online learning were more effective than the activities in the traditional classroom. In their research, they focus on investigating the effectiveness of blogs to develop an extra reading practice for the students in EFL

science and technology reading program. The results uncovered that this kind of blog was really perceived by the students.

## **Methodology**

The study uses a case study as a research design. Bryman (BRYMAN, 2010) argues that a case study is a research design that involves the detailed and exhaustive analysis of a single case. However, in this study, a blended learning strategy using a blog and four wall classroom were used simultaneously. This study is conducted during one semester in one of the universities in Tasikmalaya. In terms of the aim of extensive reading, a blog encourages the students to read a large amount of the texts; students are forced to read many texts beyond the classroom and report what they read through their blog. Furthermore, the lecturer also creates her blog in order to show the guidelines for the reading log and written response. The students have an obligation to follow the rule provided on the teacher's blog, including the way how to report what they read and give a response to the discussion in the classroom. Considering the characteristics of extensive reading, a blog encourages the students to read numerous texts, students are allowed to choose their text, the easy and interesting ones, and report the general understanding of their reading activities. However, although they can choose what they read, the teacher still has the responsibility to monitor, facilitate, and motivate the students in their reading process. There are several topics provided in this class, including reading comic, fable, short story, synopsis of the film, news, biography, description of the place, journal, and procedure text. The students are necessary to read at least two texts a day and report what they read once a week on their blog. After the process of discussing texts in the classroom, students need to make responses to the texts. The responses should be put on the blog in the form of written text such as changing one of the characters on the story, changing ending/beginning on the story, writing a letter to one of the characters, writing a diary for one of the characters, writing an opinion about the book, writing a letter to the author of the book, and so forth.

The participants of the study were six students in the first grade of the English Education Department at Siliwangi University, Indonesia. The students mostly used a blog for the first time in this course. They consist of two males and four females having 18-19 years old. However, interviews and document analysis were used to collect the data. In the process of interview, Bahasa Indonesia, the participants' first language, was used to avoid misinterpretation and to have clear data. The interview was given after the participants finish their extensive reading course in their second semester. This interview is recorded using a voice recorder on a smartphone in order to have an in-depth analysis. Moreover, document analysis was conducted by analyzing the reading logs created by the participants on their blogs to see the progress of their reading during that semester. Finally, data were analyzed using thematic analysis by

Braun & Clarke (Braun, V., & Clarke, 2006). There are six stages in this analysis; familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. In the process of analysis, the data are read and re-read in order to familiarize the data considering the aim of the research. In addition, the data were coded, and they are identified to attach the labels and index them as they relate to a theme in the data, data then were sorted and collected into themes. After that, it is reviewed and named to give the readers a sense of what the theme is about. Finally, it is written-up as the report (Braun, V., & Clarke, 2006).

## **Findings and Discussion**

It is no doubt that there are many technological platforms that can effortlessly be used for facilitating the students' activities in learning. Especially for extensive reading, blogs, one of the technological platforms, is appropriate since it is easy to use and provides the ability of readership and show journal of the students' writing. To facilitate the students' activities in extensive reading, blended learning in which the students use blogs for reporting what they read beyond the classroom is used. The activities of extensive reading forcing the students to read as much as possible, become necessary to do in this class. The students are encouraged to enjoy their reading activities by finding suitable texts based on their level and interest. However, this study found that there is several students' point of view related to the use of blog in blended extensive reading activities; they are as follows:

### ***Promoting Students' Motivation and Reading Interest***

It is found in the study that the use of media technologies such as a blog engages the students to learn. A blog can be called as electronic diaries in which the students can put their written work and get many reading texts from the link on the Internet. Related to the aim of the extensive reading course investigated in this study, the teacher created an instructor blog where the students can get the guidelines and the sources for their reading. As a result, the students are easy to find the text which is suitable for their interest and level. Creating a blog for this course becomes necessary since the teacher asks the students to read beyond the class and report it on their blog. In addition, it is found that almost all of the students previously never make a blog before joining this course. The result of the interview shows that actually, the students feel curious to use blogs for their activities. Student 1 (male) asserts,

*This is my first time using blog. I previously think that creating blog is difficult. But actually I really enjoy using this tool.*

The simplicity of creating and using a blog becomes one of the factors promoting the students' motivation in this study. Moreover, student two also said that using a blog for extensive reading is really helpful. He is motivated to find and read his texts. Yang



(Yang, 2009) also adds that Internet access, especially by the use of blogs, can motivate many students to read extensively. Moreover, the use of blended learning in which the students use blogs for their reading activities is flexible and allows them to read the text everywhere and every time. Senffner and Kepler (Senffner & Kepler, 2015) argue that the use of blended learning is really flexible and provides a meaningful way of teaching and learning. Activities of extensive blended reading forcing the students to have fun situations are helpful by using this platform. Therefore, it motivates the students to read because they can find many texts from the Internet suggested by the teacher on the blog.

*My motivation to read in this course is really high. I am easy to find my text. I really like this course because I can be free to choose the text that I like. It is different with the intensive course that I took in the previous semester, I am forced to read the text given by the lecturer and I feel bored to read from the paper (Student 2, male)*

*I like to use blog in my reading activity. I am motivated to find the text that i like. It is really helpful (Student 4 , female)*

The previous statement shows that blended extensive reading activities give an enjoyable learning atmosphere for the students. The students are enthusiastic about reading the text and not constrained to find their texts. The use of blogs also provides interactive activities in which the student can read and also comment on what their peer reads published on their blog. A blog can be a good application empowering the students' learning progress through facilitating active interaction between students, teacher, and their course content. Therefore, this situation helps the students to get feedback from the other audiences, and they are motivated to give their best effort on their reading report on their blog. Davis and McGrail (Davis & McGrail, 2009) explain that the use of blogs can encourage the students to write well in order to attract other students' attention. Having a wide audience on the Internet also helps students enhance their enthusiasm to give the best effort on their reading activities and improve the quality of their writing reading reports. This situation can happen because the audience is no longer just a teacher or their peers. Relevant to the study conducted by Karchmer (Karchmer, 2001) the findings show that the students usually had high motivation because of the prospect of other people reading their work on the blog.

### ***Providing Reflective Platform***

The use of blog allows students to reflect what they read and what they learn. Blog is known as an electronic journal in which the students can document their written work and easily see what they have done in the previous time. Johnson (Johnson, 2004) states that blogs have the function of an online portfolio in which students can see their previous work and check their progress. By seeing and checking their work on the blog, students can effortlessly reflect what they read and learn through the text. In addition, based on the guidelines posted on the instructor's blog, the students have an obligation to post texts which they read, write the summary, and also new, unfamiliar

words on the texts. Although there is no encouragement to translate all of the words provided on the texts, the students can guess the meaning of the words from the text. By having this experience, they also can reflect the process of their learning through the help of a blog.

*I usually want to see what I have read and reflect what i learnt from those texts. Using blog can help me to reflect because I only need to click the time I read the text and I can easily see my reading progress on it (Student 5, female)*

*I like to see the progress on my reading on my blog. It is easy to reflect what i have leant using my blog, i only need to click the time i report my reading log (Student 6, female)*

The statements show that blogs can encourage students to critically reflect upon their reading and learning by seeing their works and communicating with others through comments on their posts. Yu (Yu, 2014) states that the blog offers many benefits for students. It helps enhance students' skills in communicating, reflecting, analyzing, and keeping records. It is supported by Martinez (de Andrés Martínez, 2012), arguing that blog members should have the skills to write a blog involving the use of cognitive skills such as communication, collaboration, self-reflection, and critical thinking. Developing the habit of self- reflection becomes important since it is one of the factors influencing the students' success in learning. By usually reflecting what they have read and learned, the students can evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in their learning. By doing so, the students can improve their responsibility and become more aware of the process of their learning. In addition, the blog also gives a more flexible time and space to reflect and voice their feeling. As a result, students become more relaxed to express their ideas and arguments.

### ***Building Students' Creativity and Autonomy***

The blog consists of several features facilitating the students' creativity and promoting their autonomy. Fatimah, in her previous study (Fatimah, 2019) argues that the use of a blog is very different from traditional tools such as pen and paper. It has many insights providing the opportunity to get feedback and encouraging the students to be creative on the content of their blog. Furthermore, a blog can also be effortlessly used by the students because it is easy to use and easy to maintain. By having a blog, the students can be forced to improve their creativity in creating their blog. It is found on the interview,

*Using blog in this can build my creativity. I can easily put the amazing template for my blog and insert picture that I like (Student 3, female )*

*I become the creative person when I use blog in this class. I can insert sound and picture related to the texts I read (Student 5, female)*

A blog allows users to create, create, edit, and publish their written work called blog posts into their blogosphere (blog community in cyberspace) through a blog platform. The blog also has innovative features in which users can add hyperlinks within it. Teachers also can create more learning resources by adding hyperlinks in their blogs. Consequently, students get more knowledge through links to many sites by following the hyperlink. The inclusion of these hyperlinks also allows for self-directed exploration within the topic. According to Campbell (Campbell, 2003), the blog is like the individual library where everyone can get valuable information and obtain interesting activities that are suitable for their needs and interests. To sum up, this tool is effective and can encourage students to increase their independent learning. The blog also can allow students to write what they like effortlessly and promote their responsibility in their learning. A blog works as an online journal in which they are capable of updating their reading experience. Although there are the guidelines posted in the instructor's blog, but the students can freely choose their texts and manage their blogs. In other words, they can upload anything based on their preferences.

Moreover, there is no time, and place limits exist on the use of a blog. Students can read and learn from the texts whenever and wherever, as long as they have internet access. This situation can influence the development of student autonomy, and they could also take their responsibility in the learning process. Fattah (Fathy et al., 2016) states that blogs are very effective in promoting the students' independent learning. It allows them to learn independently and more motivated to learn English as a foreign language. The use of blogs also can be the way of moving students from being dependent on the teachers' guidance in the class towards independent learning. Therefore, they become more responsible with their learning and focus on their effort to get their learning objectives. Campbell (Campbell, 2003) also adds that a blog is like a personal library where learners can get valuable information and enjoyable activities addressing their needs and interest. Consequently, it becomes an effective tool that can encourage self-study for the students.

## **Conclusion**

The use of a blog for extensive reading activities is precious since it is easy to use and facilitates the students to read a large number of texts by using an interesting way. The blog is electronic diaries that allow the students to put their written work and get many reading sources for their reading activities. In this study, it is found that extensive blended reading through blogs can promote the students' motivation and their reading interest. Because of the availability of million reading sources on the Internet, the students are helped to get the texts which are suitable for their level and interest. The students are easy to report what they read through the blog in chronological order. As a result, the blog also becomes the reflective platform in which students can easily

evaluate their reading progress and reflect what they have learned through extensive reading activities. These activities also build their creativity and autonomy in which they developed their responsibility in their learning. Finally, extensive blended reading also helps the students to develop their language development, including their word recognition, vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, and reading confidence.

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