THE FLOW OF INTERACTION THROUGH ONLINE DISCUSSION
IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract: This research entitled The Flow of Interaction through Online Discussion in the English Language Classroom. Specifically, the aim of this research is to find out the flow of interaction within online discussion in fourth semester learner of English Study Program. The method was Case Study. The data was collected through printing all posting from Yahoogroups because the discussion and information exchange took place in that online group discussion. Firstly, this research produced how all learners respond to instructor’s posting. It can be from the instructor to the learner, the learner to the instructor and learner to the other learner with an expanding posting. Secondly, the writer categorized the learners’ postings into four categories represented their responses toward the topics given in the online discussion forum. From four episodes that were analyzed, the learners’ responses were distinguished into five categories, they are: social function, asking question/clarification, answering question, agreement/disagreement, and emerging ideas. The result of the data analysis have been significantly provides useful evidence on the instructor’s communication, the online interaction and the learners responses categories. Learners have expressed their satisfaction with online learning and with collaborative work. The flow of interaction among instructor and learners were more intensive toward teaching learning with ICT.

Keywords : ICT, Online Discussion, The Flow of Interaction


Kata kunci: ICT, Online Discussion, The Flow of Interaction
Online communication as a media represent people who are come together to communicate through information and communication technology. The essence of online term can be described as ICT. ICT stands for Information and Communication Technology. Moreover, the development of ICT nowadays creates an easiest way to get connected each other, especially in teaching learning. It is now possible for people to make a good deal to another people around the world. It is also easier to do lecturing by long distance communication.

The benefits and contributions of ICT access firstly entered into the development of education. There are some online terms are growing popular, especially for those who want to get flexibility in time and place particularly in their study. For example, learners already familiar with e-mail, social network, and chatting room in their daily life. Learners can take advantage of online learning although there is no a face to face classroom meeting. They also can communicate in both synchronous and asynchronous environment with or without traditional face to face meeting and get the learning achievement.

Synchronous and asynchronous are different based on the sender and receiver. Synchronous online tools emphasize that the sender and receiver to be present at the same time to communicate. For instance, chatting room and video conference. On the other hand, asynchronous online tools be obliged the sender and receiver to have the communication without being present at the same time. For instance, e-mail, social network, and discussion forum. However, there is one more term that integrate between synchronous and asynchronous setting which named blended learning. Despite the benefits of asynchronous learning, the two drawbacks are: there is a high dropout rate among students and there is difficulty for teachers to engage students compared to the physical face-to-face classroom environment (Chen, Ko, Kinshuk, & Lin, 2005). The following functionalities should be included in synchronous learning, such as: an audio and video communication tools as a media to get connected each other. A Synchronous text chat means the communication between two persons or among many people is taking place at the same time. An online synchronous classrooms for group activities means all of the members of group discussion technically get connected each other at the same time but different place.

This research is more focuses on the interaction among the users, such as instructor and all of the learners. The writers particularly analyze how was the flow of interaction and the content of messages in online class or discussion forum which as a part of asynchronous online tools. In detail, how was the instructor create a communication with all learners, how was the learner’s interaction in online discussion and the learner’s response category was went to be analyze. Then, the ideas, opinions, comments, and thoughts that posted by the learners and instructor through online postings are acceptable in discussion forum or discussion board. Others are also able to deliver their respond by critics or questions. With
discussion forum as the online tools, the shy learners can deliberately construct their respond because sometimes in traditional face to face meeting, they hesitant to speak.

There were two subjects for Teaching Learning with ICT since 2008. Teaching Learning with ICT 1 was held in the third semester, when Teaching Learning with ICT 2 held in the fourth semester. In detail, this research is concern on the class of Teaching Learning with ICT 1. The class promoted the way of online discussion by using yahoogroups as the discussion forum. The learners have a big expectation on this online learning because they can communicate each other anytime and anywhere.

A total 298 messages have been posting in the online discussion forum but with some kind of considerations, the writer took 251 postings as data analysis. However, the writer analyzed a total 251 postings because the other 47 postings consisted of notifications, reposts, empty postings, unfinished postings, attachments and commercial notifications. Based on the online communication forum, all of the episodes were started by the instructor. Even though the learners were not the starter but they actively involve within online discussion. The flow of online discussion went dynamic since the learners posted their messages that relate with topic discussion. There were some learners asking, answering and giving opinion for those who involve in discussion. Regarding to these explanations, the roles of the instructor is the biggest part and definitely important.

Moreover, the writer hopes this research will deliver a good contribution and beneficial for those who involve in teaching learning with ICT, including the instructor, learner and reader. By doing this research, the writer found out the concept of an online classroom was implemented in the class of Teaching Learning with ICT 1 of English Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty.

METHOD

Rovai and Barnum in Paloff and Pratt (2007) noted that the interaction of the instructor with the learners together with the development of highly interactive course activities help increase the perception of online learning. This will also happen for the teacher in campus situation. There are some possibilities of the direction that happen in the online classroom, such as instructor to learners, learner to learners or learner to learners/peers. Because of this reason, writer would like to state that the way of connection among the members is a reflection of the flow of online interaction.

Orvis and Kearsley in Orvis and Lassiter (2007) stated that in learner-learner interaction, they help themselves to learn, by sharing ideas and discussing problems, often in areal or virtual group setting. Paloff and Pratt (2007) even stated that the beauty of online learning lies in the ability
to discuss content with one’s peers. Holmes and Gardner (2006) noted that interaction with peers and tutors in a social learning context online will also ensure a degree of higher-order skills activity, including the sharing of ideas and formulation of questions. Based on the above statement, the writer classify three kinds of online interaction which are possibly to happen, they are: online interaction from learner-instructor, learner-learner, and an expanding discussion responds to another learner.

In this research, the writer used case study research to support the action of the research. Cohen (2000) stated that case study research provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. Moreover, Marczyk (2005) stated that the goal of the case study is to provide an accurate and complete description of the case.

This research discussed in the online discussion and the flow of interaction among the learners in a class called Teaching Learning with ICT-1 B in FKIP Tanjungpura University in academic year 2009/2010. It was held in two kinds of meeting, face to face meeting and online meeting. Face to face meeting particularly means the learners and instructor come and meets together in classroom in a certain limitation of time. On the contrary, online meeting is considerably as a meeting that using internet to support the undertaking of discussion forum. It was officially considered as a new implementation the way of learning because there was a condition when blended learning was happening. The media used in the online discussion was yahoogroups. The online discussion was started by topic discussion posted by instructor; the learners started and follow the path with their comment then. In this online discussion, all of learners already run the online discussion, they posted their thought and discussed it together to catch a better understanding and becomes knowledgeable.

The learners have some directions to go while they interact with the others, such as, a single posting directly responds to the instructor, to another learner, and to peers. A single posting directly responds to the instructor means the learners gave responses directly to the instructor. Moreover, the distinguish between a single posting directly responds to another learner and peers was to whom the message for. For instance, Learner 1 (L1) posted the message to Learner 2 (L2), this case is categorizing as a single posting directly responds to another learner, but, when L1 compose answers in response to the L2’s question and L3 come to join L1 and L2 discussion, it takes considerable as an expanding posting. So, in this case L3 join and participate in online discussion forum dealing with L1 and L2.

The writer conducted a qualitative research. The technique of data collective in this research was by downloading all postings and as the archives to analyze. The aim was to find out how the flow of interaction among the learners to respond each other and also to investigate the
scheme of the learners responded to the instructor’s communication in the electronic discussion forum. The pattern of the flow of social interaction within the forum will be seen from the messages posted by the learners. It can be from the learner to the instructor and learner to other learner. Then categorizing showed how the learners respond to other instructor’s communication.

In this research, the data are all posts in online discussion forum. The writer also use observation checklist as data collecting which were used to see social interaction of the students and types of responses they had during the discussion. The interaction in electronic discussion created by learners and instructor during the learning were developed using just free software that available in internet. The discussion and information exchange using Yahoo groups. About collecting data, it will be, In the first week, instructor and learners whose role will mediate the environment interacted much more than others. After the three months, messages on electronic discussion board will be much more than first week and learners interacted much more.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

1. Instructor’s Communication and Instructor’s Communication Category

The first analysis effort to the writer was count the instructor’s communication to see how frequent the instructor appeared in the discussion forum. Based on the result of table 1 (frequency of the Instructor’s communication), the writer concludes that the learners on the first month of discussions, there were 112 postings available. It seems like the learners getting more excited than with the new way of learning. Among those 112 postings, 7 posting were reposts from a learners. On the contrary, the discussion forum on January 2010 was participated by only 1 posting. It was from the instructor and unfortunately there was no reaction from the learners.

Furthermore, the instructor’s communication category shows the presence of the instructor in the discussion forum of Teaching Learning with ICT 1 B class. From the analysis of every single posting of the instructor, the chart of instructor’s communication category was made to provide a legible visualization of the data (see figure 1. The instructor’s communication category chart). From the chart available, it can be seen that from categories most of the time the instructor appeared in the discussion forum by asking questions/clarification and announcement. There were 4 postings which consisted in asking questions/clarification.
postings, the instructor did this to initiate a topic to discuss in an episode.

Table 1
Frequency of the Instructor’s Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Frequency of the instructor’s communication</th>
<th>Episode appeared</th>
<th>Total Postings</th>
<th>Posting to analyze</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>December 2009</td>
<td>1 posting</td>
<td>Learners believe about learning something through internet and collaborativ learning</td>
<td>112 postings</td>
<td>105 postings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>1 posting</td>
<td>English learners’ and teachers’ role as internet user</td>
<td>49 postings</td>
<td>27 postings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
<td>1 posting</td>
<td>Subscribing the online discussion that relate with English education</td>
<td>34 postings</td>
<td>33 Postings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td>1 posting</td>
<td>The guideline to create a blogspot</td>
<td>36 posting</td>
<td>36 posting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The presence of the instructor in the discussion forum of Teaching Learning with ICT 1 B class, the writer categorized the instructor’s postings from December 2009 up to July 2010. Then categories can be seen as follow: The first category of the instructor’s postings is asking questions/clarification. This is how the teacher commonly appeared to support and guide the learners’ learning and interaction. The posting below is an excellent example for this category:

*Dear students, thank all that you have discuss some valuable things here, but now I want to bring about issue*
that you need to discuss among your friends. Some students claim that by exploring the internet they learn. Do you think that learning REALLY takes place or happens in that way? Give your argument why it is yes and why it is not. Thank you
Happy discussion (posted by I) Tue Dec 8, 2009 11.52 am
[asking questions/clarification]

The second category of the instructor’s postings is providing information. The example of the posting is seen below:

Dear all students,
I am very sorry for having given you the wrong place (egroup) like English_Language_Practice community. That group is really rubbish and no use at all. Now, I order that EVERYONE has to UNSUBSCRIBE from English_Language_Practice yahoo-group [providing information], and then I will explain it in my next email.
Thank you for your cooperation. (posted by I) Thu Mar 25, 2010 8:39 am

The third category is synthesizing opinion which means the instructor took the string of the learners’ opinion about a certain topic discussed and made brief conclusion of it. This action could bring the discussion to further and deeper issue of learning. This category is exemplified through the one posting below. In this example, combination of the first and category of instructor’s presence were vividly found:

Dear students, thanks for all your discussion. I can see that almost everyone agrees that he/she learns something from internet. Some of you explicitly said that the learning itself is somewhat informal one. [synthesizing opinion] I also agree with the ideas that the birth of internet broadens the definition of learning; learning is not necessarily about formal knowledge but also anything about our daily life. Now let us talk specifically about formal knowledge, in our case of learning English. The questions are:
1. As an English student, does the internet help you learn English? How it helps you, give a real example as what you have experienced.
2. If you were a teacher, how do you think the internet would help you teach? [asking questions/clarification]
Happy discussion.
(posted by I) Sat Jan 16, 2010 7:55 am
The last category of the instructor’s communication in the online discussion forum Teaching Learning with ICT 1 B class is announcement. Some of the announcement here consisted of technical thing of assignment submission date submission, the closing of the class, and the announcement of the final test of the learners.

Dear student the examination period of the ICT class has now been closed. I will not consider anything you post or upload after midnight today 1st Feb 2010. Please observe this class for new information regarding your results. 
[announcement] Good luck with your study and have a nice rest.

(posted by I) Mon Feb 1, 2010 9:45 am

To sum up, from the analysis of every single posting of the instructor, the chart of instructor’s communication category was made to provide a legible visualization of the data (see figure 1. The instructor’s communication category chart). From the chart available, it can be seen that from categories most of the time the instructor appeared in the discussion forum by asking questions/clarification and announcement. There were 4 postings which consisted in asking questions/clarification In some postings, the instructor did this to initiate a topic to discuss in an episode. Similar with above explanation, announcement also took 4 postings in the electronic discussion forum. The instructor made this category of postings when the forum was about to be closed. The rest of the postings consisted of providing information and synthesizing opinion. Providing information which is category number 2 had a number of 3 postings and the 1 more posting were in category of synthesizing opinion.
DISCUSSION

The first analysis which was investigated by the writer was the instructor’s communication within the electronic discussion forum. It is important to know since the instructor has some significant roles to support the learners learning, foster the interaction, and ensure that the learners feel engaged to learn with another learner. To know how the teacher was present for the learners, in this case through online postings, will then bring reflection of how electronic postings can be beneficial for the learners and support the blended learning environment.

The writer also pays attention to the instructor’s postings which were included into four categories: asking questions/clarification, providing information, synthesizing opinion, and announcement. However, among these categories, the instructor appeared mostly in the form of asking questions/clarification. In this category, the instructor’s communication, in some cases, helped the learners to know what topics they could go into, for instance, in the first episode. The statement of the instructor explicitly showed that the discussion forum was not about to start when he had not appeared. Therefore, the first posting from the instructor really helped the learners to know how to start a topic since combining face to face and virtual communication was still a new experience for the learners. In the last episode, the instructor also required the learners’ reflection of what they had discussed in the previous episode. Thus, it will help them build their own understanding through discussion with an expanding posting.

Figure 1
The Instructor’s Communication Category Chart
2. The Learners Interaction in Online Discussion

To highlight the case of learners’ online interaction, the final finding reveals the fact that all of the episodes were started by the instructor and the learners mostly made a good way to connected directly with their friends. In addition, the first episode of the discussion which was started by the instructor had the most participation from the learners. Moreover, Based on figure 6 (the learners’ in online discussion chart), the communication between learner and instructor seems practically works and dominant in second episode than the other episode.

Table 2

The Percentage of the Learners’ in Online Discussion Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode order</th>
<th>Episode topics</th>
<th>Online Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learner-Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 1</td>
<td>Learners Believe About Learning Something Through Internet And Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>47,57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 2</td>
<td>English learners’ and teachers’ role as internet user</td>
<td>77,77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 6</td>
<td>Subscribing the online discussion that relate with English education</td>
<td>22,58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode 8</td>
<td>The Guideline to Create a Blogspot</td>
<td>36,66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the findings of the learners’ interaction in online discussion, it was found that there were similar kinds of patterns when the starter of the episode was the instructor. This similarity somehow reflects the learners still depended on the instructor as the center of the electronic discussion. For example, in the two episodes which were started by the instructor, it appears that the learners’ online interaction focused more to the instructor. It indicated that the learners still considered that participating in the discussion forum directly to the instructor was more important than probing the peers’ arguments and giving feedback to others. Still in the similar episode, even though the starter of the episode was the instructor but still some of the learners interacted each other. It was evident that more interaction from the expanding posting was made. It was
positive phenomenon for it helped the learners to learn more independently and come to better learning from others.

However in some cases it still seemed that the online interaction in the discussion forum Teaching Learning with ICT 1 B had more focus on the instructor, this forum has helped the learners to have more chances to participate on the course content than it would be possible in traditional classroom meeting, in addition, such discussion forum can ready and enrich learners experiences in the face to face classroom setting.

3. The Learner’s Postings Based In The Episode And See To Whom The Postings Were Delivered (The Learners’ in Online Discussion Category)

After having the analysis of the learners’ online interaction, to answer the second research problem, the writer classified the responses of the learners based on five categories, they are: social messages, asking question/clarification, answering question, agreement/disagreement, and emerging ideas. The detail explanations are as follow:

a. Social Messages. The first category of the learners’ responses is social messages. social messages as a “statement or part of a statement not related to formal content of subject matter.” Social cues might include a self-introduction, expression of feeling (e.g., “I’m feeling great,”), greeting (e.g., “Hi, everyone”), closure (e.g., “That’s it for now”), jokes, the use of symbolic icons (e.g., : ) or ( : -)), and compliments to others.

b. Asking question/ Clarification. The second category may consist of two things; the first one is asking question and the second one is asking for clarification. The learners can ask question about the other learners’ opinion in the beginning or the middle of the episode. If the question is given in the beginning of the discussion, it means that the learner is also starter of the discussion. It is also possible for the learners to ask for clarification in this category which means to ask for explanation whether what they thought about certain opinion is right or not.

c. Answering Question. In this category, the learners only respond based on the question given.

d. Agreement/Disagreement. This type of category can also mean that the learners post the messages to answer certain questions. However, the significant difference of this category (agreement/disagreement) compared with the third category (answering question) is that to make this kind of postings the learners are required to read and understand the previous postings from their friends.
e. Emerging ideas. In this category of emerging ideas, the learners’ responses can include the statements to relate and reflect their ideas, personal experiences, and previous discussion to raise some sort of ideas by their own opinion.

**Table 3**

Total numbers of responses based on the learners’ types of responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Social messages</th>
<th>Asking question/Clarification</th>
<th>Answering Question</th>
<th>Agreement/Disagreement</th>
<th>Emerging ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners Believe About Learning Something Through Internet And Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English learners’ and teachers’ role as internet user</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscribing the online discussion that relate with English education</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guideline to Create a Blogspot</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>66</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the learners’ responses categories, the challenges faced by the learners suggest that they need to learn more emerge ideas, construct the knowledge together and reflect on their learning at the end of each forum.
in order to achieve quality learning from their participation in such asynchronous online classroom. By having more collaboration with another learner, deeper discussion that requires high thinking order will appear. It is also suggested that the instructor can appear more not only in the form of giving questions and information so that the learners will also have varies responses and chance to improve the discussion.

Based on the flow of interaction among the members, such as; a single posting directly responds to the instructor, to another learner and an expanding discussion responds to another learner; the learners had the experience differently in each episode. On the first episode, the learners were dominant to send their message to instructor rather than to another learner and to peers. It happened also on the second episode when the instructor got the highest attention from the learners. A good flow of interaction comes from the second last episode, it was sixth and eighth episode. In the sixth episode, the learners talk about the topic that given by instructor but here, the learners responded directly to another learner. Furthermore, on the eighth episode, the flow of discussion comes smoothly because among the learners got a good direction to post their respond each other. Even though it was just one posting but this posting create a good feedback. The learners also got the clarification about the topic from their friends. From here, the instructor needs to be able to shed light on the topic discussion.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Based on the positive result of the learners’ online interaction, the writer believes that the problem of this researcher is already well answered. The flow of interaction among the members have improved and also created a condition of confidence among the learners. Furthermore, learners have acquired new knowledge and skills in the use of ICTs for their communication and learning. There were few problems owing to power failures during online discussion sessions when a group discussion has attacked by ads and notifications from their private social network. There have also been some problems because of the slow speed of the internet connection.

Suggestion

For these reason, the writer who is offer everybody to continue the research on flow of online interaction uses the final case study in this research for further research on similar topic. The final case study in this research presents an inspiring example of how electronic communication can help address English as foreign language in English classroom. The case study, describes the flow of interaction through online discussion.
among the stakeholders and freely available online learning were used to overcome the problems.

REFERENCES


