

**Research Report Summary**

**INVESTIGATING THE IMPACTS OF VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT  
(VLE) ON EFL LEARNERS AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENT  
IAIN ANTASARI BANJARMASIN**

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**by:**

**Rahmila Murtiana, S.S., M.A.**

**PUSAT PENELITIAN IAIN ANTASARI  
BANJARMASIN**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Background of study**

The proliferation of computer technology and internet access over the last decade has brought significant changes to the mode of language learning. If previously learning mode depends on conventional face-to-face classroom instruction, today online learning mode has added to the way institutions deliver their courses. Initially, the use of online instruction is more prevalent in distance education as a means of communication between course instructors and learners. Online instruction is really helpful for learners who are unable to meet the requirement of attending the class full time.

The advance of ICT enables teachers or instructors to create a virtual learning environment (VLE), and allow learners to study beyond the limit of classroom walls. Popular terms used to refer to learning mode which apply or utilize VLE are e-learning and blended learning. The term “e-learning” refers to a range of information technologies at use in schools and corporations for education and training. In e-learning courses, information is presented over computer networks to instructors and students who are often in different locations, but all accessing the same materials through their personal computers (<https://www.mindflash.com/elearning/what-is-e-learning>). Meanwhile, blended learning is a term used to describe the way e-learning is being combined with traditional classroom methods and independent study to create a new, hybrid teaching methodology. In other words, the term “blended learning” is used to describe the use of both face-to-face and online modes of instruction. It is used as supplement to enhance conventional classroom teaching. The practice has become more common and has encouraged educators to explore its use in a variety of ways (Stacey & Gerbic, 2007).

Experts believe that the future direction of language learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will head toward blended learning and virtual learning (Crogovic, 2011). This is supported by the evidence that the practices of blended learning have been implemented in many higher institutions throughout the world. For example, data from a national sample of over 1,000 colleges and universities in the U.S, almost 55% of all institutions offer at least one blended course while 64% offer at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2007). In addition, a survey conducted by Browne et al in 2006 reported that 95% of higher education institutions in the UK used virtual learning environments (Wadman, 2013). With the encouragement of governments

worldwide, more and more students are enrolling in courses which incorporate e-learning (Boulton et al, 2008).

To create a virtual learning environment (VLE) and enable e-learning, higher education institutions needs to have a learning management system (LMS) using particular web application. Golonka et al (2014) used the term CMS (course management system) which refers to “Server-based application used to present materials and services required for blended or distance learning (such as syllabi, required readings, calendars, etc.). Teachers and students access a CMS over a network through a web browser, using a menu driven interface. This system enables sharing of course materials, allows accessibility to content at anytime and anywhere, facilitate course content organization, and communication between teacher and student or between student and student.

The institutions may decide whether to use paid software packages such as Blackboard or WebCT, Lotus Learning Space and COSE, or free web application such as Moodle and Edmodo. In addition to LMS, some famous social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter can also be used for virtual language learning but with certain limitations.

In IAIN Antasari, virtual learning has been introduced since last year to support student learning through e-learning site which uses Moodle application. There has been a series of training and workshop for lecturers on how to apply e-learning in their courses. Preliminary observation on the e-learning site shows that a number of lecturers have started to utilize the site or their courses. In addition, based on information from the students, they have used the site to get the study material and assignments posted by the lecturer.

Other web application that can be used as VLE is Edmodo, which the writer has used since last year. Compared to Moodle or e-learning, Edmodo is not that familiar for students and lecturers at IAIN Antasari. Only a few lecturers have tried to use it. However, in some schools and higher institutions in Banjarmasin, teachers and instructors have introduced it to the students. Therefore, the writer is interested in exploring more about the use of Edmodo as an alternative VLE in IAIN Antasari.

Another underlying reason is to learn more whether the use of Edmodo as VLE has positive effects on student learning. Ideally, virtual learning should be able to increase learner motivation and it is often linked to learner autonomy. As Kim (2008) suggested, the use of virtual learning can increase student interaction of the

target language in the form of exchanging and discussing, and it will enhance their motivation to engage in their learning. Moreover, the use of virtual learning could facilitate the implementation of a constructivist approach and assist individual learners in constructing their knowledge and expanding their perspectives. It helps students become independent learners by allowing them to explore and discover content to be learned on their own. In other words, it transforms teachers' pedagogical practices from teacher-centered to student-centered ones (Kim, 2008, p. 244).

However, in many cases it remains an open question whether the increased use of technology has fundamentally changed the way students learn, which moves toward the notion of being an autonomous learner, or whether it is simply a case of students typing up their essays on computers and sending their assignments to instructors through online tools, or instructors sending the students course reading lists or work assignments with little feedback of student works (Boulton et al, 2008).

In the case of virtual learning at IAIN Antasari, particularly at English Department, it has not been much identified to what extent students make use of the available virtual learning environment (VLE) for increasing their knowledge, skills, motivation, and autonomy to learn English. Therefore, in order to find out more about how students utilize VLE and what impacts it has on student learning, the writer will conduct a research entitled "Investigating The Impacts of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) on EFL Learners at English Department IAIN Antasari Banjarmasin."

## **B. Statements of problem**

The following are statements of problem which have been formulated for this research.

1. What impacts does VLE have on language learning? Does it positively affect language learning in general or in learning certain subject at English Department? Does it enhance learner motivation?
2. To what extent does it lead to students' autonomy in learning?
3. What other benefits do the students perceive of learning through VLE?
4. What are the constraints of learning through VLE?

## **C. Definition of key terms**

1. Investigating: researching or finding out what happened
2. Impacts: influences or effects
3. EFL : English as a Foreign Language
4. EFL learners: students who live in a non-English speaking country and learn English as a foreign language. In this research the students are those who study at English Department Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training IAIN Antasari Banjarmasin.
5. Virtual Learning environment (VLE): a virtual classroom that allows teachers and students to communicate with each other online. Class information, learning materials, and assignments are provided via the Web. Students can log in to the class website to view this information and may also download assignments and required reading materials to their computers. Some VLEs also allow assignments and tests to be completed online (<http://techterms.com/definition/vle>). In this research VLE is limited to asynchronous learning by using web tool Edmodo.

#### **D. Research Purpose**

In general the research is conducted with aims to explain the current usage and practices of virtual learning at English department. To be more specific, the aims are:

1. To investigate the impacts of VLE on student learning
2. To find out whether VLE can enhance student motivation and autonomy in learning
3. To gain more information about the benefits of VLE from students' point of views
4. To identify the constraints encountered by students in using VLE

#### **E. Research significance**

The outcome of this research is expected to bring several advantages as follows:

1. It will contribute to the research related to TELL (technology-enhanced language learning)
2. It will add to the knowledge about particular practice of language learning through virtual learning environment (VLE)
3. It will raise learners' awareness of how to utilize virtual learning environment (VLE) effectively for English language learning

4. It will suggest the instructors/teachers to improve instructional practice by applying appropriate pedagogical approach in regards to the use of virtual learning environment (VLE)
5. It will put into consideration for English department about the importance of integrating technology in the curriculum and teaching learning process

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. Virtual Learning Mode**

Rapid developments in communication technology have increased the demand for virtual learning that involves connection of learners, both asynchronously and synchronously (Compton, 2009). Asynchronous virtual learning involves coursework delivered via web, email and message boards that are then posted on online forums. Asynchronous learning can be carried out when the student is offline. It allows students to communicate and collaborate via their computer without the constraints of time and distance. Students complete the course at their own pace, by using the internet merely as a support tool rather than volunteering exclusively for an online interactive classes. In contrast, synchronous virtual learning is real time. It involves chat and videoconferencing, which allows students to ask, and teachers to answer questions instantly, through instant messaging. The common online tools which can be used for synchronous learning are Skype and GoogleHangout.

### **B. Development of LMS and e-learning tools**

As described earlier, the term “e-learning” broadly refers to a range of information technologies at use with the purpose to improve the process of education at secondary and higher institution. Tavangarian et al (2004) defines e-learning as all forms of electronic supported learning and teaching, which are procedural in character and aim to effect the construction of knowledge with reference to individual experience, practice and knowledge of the learner.

To support e-learning, a learning management system (LMS) needs to be developed at the institutions. Learning management systems (LMS) provide e-learning materials and tests for students. LMS can perform variety learning tasks such as providing study materials for students, enabling chats between students and instructors, administering test and recording scores. Learning content management system (LCMS) is used to create the materials and tests that are then given to the

LMS for students and instructors to utilize ([https://www.mindflash.com/learning management system](https://www.mindflash.com/learning-management-system)). Among e-learning tools which are widely used as VLE are Blackboard or WebCT, Lotus Learning Space, Moodle and Edmodo.

Edmodo was developed by two former Chicago education administrators, Nic Borg and Jeff O'Hara in 2008. Primarily used in the United States, it has served over 17 million users. In its appearance and design, Edmodo resembles Facebook, so that some people name it educational facebook. The advantage of Edmodo over other LMS is both instructors and students can sign up and create their own account without having to wait for the administrator approval. Edmodo contains features which allows students to post comments and send notes, links, files, alerts, assignment and events, and send direct messages to the instructor.

Edmodo has collaborative learning features where multiple and simultaneous discussions can take place within a group. To facilitate multiple, simultaneous discussions, teachers can create 'groups' for each of their classes. Each group is assigned its own unique code, which is distributed by teachers to all the class members. The groups are self-contained so those without access will be unable to view the discussions, unless the instructor designates them as public. Instructor can also create-a-quiz feature and ready-made quizzes (open-ended or multiple-choice questions) to formatively and summatively assess students' performance, and reward badges, which a teacher can assign to a student, acts as a motivator. An added feature of Edmodo is that students can create their own groups as well. Participants can choose to receive posts through their cell phones, e-mail, or through an RSS feed posted on the course home page (Looi & Yusop, 2011).

### **C. The ideal practice of language learning through VLE**

In general, virtual learning brings some advantages to the teaching learning process; the most obvious one is it solves instructors' problem of inadequate class time. Through virtual learning, instructor or teachers can optimize the timeliness and focus of the curriculum, and students can better fit learning time into their schedules. Other advantages are the online delivery allows instructors to keep materials up-to-date, through links that can be found through various websites, and share with the students, meaning that instead of having to buy textbooks, the students can save cost. It is also a better fit for 21st-century learners, as today's learners are generation who

are technology savvy and spend much of their time communicating and finding information in the virtual world.

In order to get the optimum benefit of language learning through VLE, Chinnery (2008) suggests that virtual learning and teaching should be productive, informative, collaborative, communicative, aggregative. Productive means that language learners need to be given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to create in the target language. Informative means learners should have the ability to seek out accurate information autonomously, become self-directed and self-empowered researcher, editor, and selector of information. Collaborative means that learners should collaborate towards the completion of tasks, which will generate intense motivation from many students and encourages learning from peers. Communicative means that virtual language learning and teaching must strive to provide learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes. Aggregative means that virtual language learning and teaching should recognize multiliteracies possessed by learners (Chinnery, 2008).

Furthermore, the practice of virtual learning and teaching brings impacts to both students and teachers. According to Gruba (2009), in the part of students, responsibility for learning is heightened as students must learn to get and use digital materials. It will also affect student learning style. Students who were coming from 'traditional' systems of learning, must adapt to the modern learning environment by being more active and participatory. In the part of teachers, virtual language teaching is a new competency for instructors as it requires greater flexibility and a keen knowledge of the materials, how to access them and when to use them for best effect. In short, virtual learning and teaching should apply pedagogical principles which are based on a constructivist and social constructionist approach, emphasizing that learners, not just teachers, can contribute to the educational experience. In other words, it should promote learner autonomy.

### **III. Research Method**

#### **A. Type**

The type of this research is field research. Field research is a study where a researcher observes the subject in its natural environment, in this case, the classroom and VLE at English Department IAIN Antasari Banarmasin.

#### **B. Approach**

This research will use mixed method approach. Mixed methods research is empirical research that involves the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. In mixed methods research, qualitative and quantitative methods and data are mixed, or combined in some way (Punch, 2009, p.288). Creswell divides mixed method design into three kinds: triangulation design, embedded design, and explanatory design. This This research used triangulation design

Triangulation design is a one-phase design, where the two types of data are collected at the same time (Creswell, 2008, p. 560; Punch, 2009, p. 296). Data can be collected through a questionnaire, observation, interview, or documents. The results of quantitative data and qualitative data are merged into one overall interpretation.

### **C. Research location**

The research will be located at State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) Antasari Banjarmasin, to be specific at English Department Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training.

### **D. Population and sample**

The population of the research is the students in IAIN Antasari Banjarmasin who have learned through virtual learning environment. The writer chooses students from the fourth semester academic year 2014/2015 because all of them are currently taking up a subject which uses Edmodo as VLE. Because there is a large number of population, the respondents will be taken by sample. Sampling technique which will be used is proportional purposive sampling. From each class the sample is 50% of population. The table below shows the population of the students and the sample.

**Table 1. Data of English Department Students Fourth Semester Academic Year 2014/2015**

No	Class	No. of active students	Sample
1	A	32	16
2	B	34	17
3	C	34	17

4	D	34	17
5	E	26	13
	Total	160	80

### **E. Techniques of data collection**

Data are collected using questionnaire and documentation. The questionnaire is used at the first stage of this research to identify the impact of VLE on student learning activity. The questionnaire consists of three parts (see appendix). The first part consists of 8 items and asks the personal background of the respondents and their general habit in online activities, while the second part asks the respondents about their habit in using Edmodo and their opinion about how they perceive the use of VLE in learning. The third part which is open-ended questions is intended for data triangulation. In the third part there are 12 items which ask the respondents about their activities in Edmodo, their purposes, the benefits they get, their difficulties, their learning mode preference, and their expectation regarding virtual learning.

Documentation in the form of records and notes on student online activities on Edmodo sites will be used to support the findings from the questionnaire

### **F. Techniques of data analysis**

The first step is analyzing quantitative data from the questionnaire. In analyzing the quantitative data, the researcher used the following steps:

1. Input the data:

This step is done by transferring the data from the responses on the questionnaire to a computer file. The program that will be used is SPSS because it can transform the result and count the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation quickly.

2. Score the data:

The researcher assigns a numeric score for value to each response category for each question on the questionnaire. In scoring the response, the researcher will use single-item scores, that is, an individual score for each question answered by each respondent.

3. Check and clean the data

It is the step to clean and account for missing data whether there are incomplete answer (the respondents do not give the answer), check which data is relevant to the research questions, and which need to be left out from the analysis.

#### 4. Analyze the data

The data that have been scored will be analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics indicate general tendencies of the data such as mean, mode, and the spread of scores, so it can help the researcher to summarize the overall trends in the data (Creswell, 2008).

The next step is analyzing qualitative data. The responses of the students to the open-ended questions are coded and organized based on emerging themes. Their responses are useful to support and confirm their responses in previous parts. Another qualitative data, that is documentation taken from the student posts and notes in Edmodo will also be used to support the finding from the questionnaire.

The overall findings then will be interpreted and summarized. The conclusion will be drawn and confirmed with the existing literature.

## **IV. FINDINGS**

One of the question items in the questionnaire asked the students to rate themselves in the continuum whether they hate technology (technophobia) or love technology (technophilia). The range is between 1 to 7. The result shows that the majority of the students love and enjoy technology and rate themselves 6 and 7. Only 1 student gave rate 3 meaning that he/she is not really into technology.

The students are also asked whether they have ever participated in online or virtual learning before. Half of the respondents (50%) responded that they have ever participated in virtual learning. The students mentioned e-learning and a Facebook group created by their lecturer as the types of virtual learning that they have ever joined. Meanwhile, 35 or 43 % of the students stated they never joined in virtual learning, and 5 students or 6.3% did not provide answer.

### **A. The impacts of Edmodo as VLE on Student Learning**

#### **1. Impact on learning the subject**

Despite the finding that students love technology and quite active online, not many of them seem to make use of technology for learning activity, particularly Edmodo as an educational site. This can be seen from the students' response that

most of them rarely visit Edmodo site (45%). The rest visit Edmodo site once a week (28.8%), 2-3 days per week (23.8%), and only 2.5 % of the students visit more frequently, that is 4-6 days per week.

Although the students rarely use Edmodo to post a note or respond to a note, the students feel that Edmodo add to learning. The majority of students (72.5%) feel that Edmodo posts add to learning, and 20% feel that it adds significantly to learning. Only 2.5% think that it has no effect, the same percentage of the students who think that it subtracted to learning. The mean score for this item is 4.13, meaning that the effect is quite strong, and the standard deviation of .567 implies that there is not much difference in the response range. The following table presents the result.

**Table 2. Effect of Edmodo Post**

Edmodo Post	Frequency	Percent
subtracted to learning	2	2.5
no effect	2	2.5
added to learning	58	72.5
added significantly to learning	16	20.0
Total	78	97.5
Missing	2	2.5
Mean = 4.13		
Std Dev. = .567		

In their responses to the open-ended questions, students stated that they can learn from the material posted on the Edmodo group such as the power point made for group presentation. One student stated *“although I never post anything on it, it’s really effective I guess, especially when it becomes a routine... I can see a lot of powerpoint that other groups post”* (ST 27). Another student stated that *“I can get knowledge not only from my lecturer but also from my friends... I learn from posts from my friends, and quote or motivation form lecturer”* (ST 10).

There are many other benefits of virtual learning through Edmodo. Among them is it gives a chance for the students to use their English outside the classroom, and the students think it can improve their language ability. Here are among students’ responses:

4) *“because it was English site so I must find something new for my vocabularies”* (ST

*“Edmodo help me to improve my reading and writing skill and add my knowledge about the course”* (ST 28)

In Edmodo the instructor actually expected that students can interact with each other discussing about topics that has been brought up during the class but could not discuss further due to limited time. However, many students do not use Edmodo to discuss the material, but just log in to Edmodo to do assignment or check their scores.

Regarding to the overall effectiveness of Edmodo for one of the course they take in the fourth semester, that is Introduction to Literature, 47.5% of the students think that it gives minor help, and 21.3% think it gives significant help. Meanwhile, 13.8% think that gives significant hindrance, 11.3% think it gives minor hindrance, and 6.3% think it has no impact to the effectiveness if the course. The mean score of this item is only 3.51, with standard deviation 1.322.

**Table 3. Overall effectiveness of Edmodo**

Overall effectiveness	Frequency	Percent
significant hindrance	11	13.8
minor hindrance	9	11.3
no impact	5	6.3
minor help	38	47.5
significant help	17	21.3
Total	80	100.0
Mean = 3.51		
Std. Dev. = 1.322		

## 2. VLE and student motivation

Among Edmodo features that actually have purpose to increase student motivation in learning are quiz and badge. The instructor can design quiz with various types such as multiple choice, true-false, fill in the blank, or giving short answer. The template provided by Edmodo makes it very practical for the instructor, besides the scores can come automatically if the instructor set a point for each correct answer. Then the score will be automatically inputted in the student gradebook, and student can check their result regularly. One of the limitation of the quiz is student cannot answer the questions through their smartphone. Instead, they have to use their PC or laptop.

The next table presents the student opinion about the quiz. Based on the table, the majority of the students (60%) feel that quiz added significantly to learning, and 30% of the students feel that it added to learning. Only 4 students think that it subtracted to learning, and 1 student respectively feels that quiz subtracted significantly to learning and gives no effect to leaning. The mean score for quiz ( $M = 4.46$ ) is the highest among other items asked in the questionnaire, meaning that the impact of quiz is very strong.

**Table 4. Effect of quiz**

Quiz	Frequency	Percent
subtracted significantly to learning	1	1.3
subtracted to learning	4	5.0
no effect	1	1.3
added to learning	24	30.0
added significantly to learning	48	60.0
Total	78	97.5
Missing	2	2.5
Mean = 4.46		
Std. Dev.= .863		

Generally, the students like to do the quiz. They stated this in the response to the open-ended question. One of the students stated *“I find several knowledge from the answer of the quizzes”*( ST 30). Another student stated *“I like answering the quizzes from our lecturer because the quiz make our scores more (increase our score)”* (ST 30).

### 3. VLE and student autonomy

Autonomy in learning means that student have control over their own learning, which comprises of active involvement in learning process, and responsibility for its content (Benson & Lor, 1998, p. 8). The virtual learning environment through Edmodo is actually expected to create student autonomy in learning, meaning that students should not depend on the instructor all the time. Instead, they have to be active either in searching information or extending their knowledge through virtual discussion.

However, since not many students are active in posting something in the group wall or in responding to their friends as explained in the previous section, it can be implied that student autonomy is not yet achieved. In the open-ended questions, students also

respond that they only post something on Edmodo if asked by the instructor such as sharing the presentation materials or when they have to submit assignments. For example, one student stated *“I use Edmodo just to work a homework by the lecturer”* (ST 29). It means that the students are not yet independent learners.

A few students who actively make use of Edmodo as a means to communicate with their friends or with the instructor, mostly use it to ask about their assignments. They also admit that the purpose is merely to share the presentation material to other friends, not for further discussion. The students are not yet aware with the features and real purpose of virtual learning. They still think that virtual learning is only to get the material from the lecturer, or to submit assignments. As a matter of fact, it is more than that as VLE is intended to make them become autonomous learner.

## **B. Constraints of Edmodo as VLE**

Despite some benefits that the students get from Edmodo, there are also constraints that the students face. Based on the responses to the open-ended questions, most of the students stated that the constraint in using Edmodo is related to the slow connection and network. Students find difficulties when they have to upload their assignment or when answering the quiz. The trouble with the connection often makes the students unable to finish the quiz and make them worried about the result, as stated by one student: *“When I take the quiz, and the internet disconnected, my answers stop. I cannot continue the quiz and the result my score is bad”* (ST 75). Other constraints are limited capacity of Edmodo file, and some features cannot be opened through smartphone,

Although many students nowadays can get internet access in various places, they cannot always get strong internet connection such as in the student resource center. Even if the students use smartphone, they sometimes have limited budget to buy their phone enough credits. That is probably why students prefer to use traditional face-to face learning, although virtual learning seem exciting and more sophisticated.

*“I prefer traditional face-to-face because it’s easier to understand when I see the teacher when they explain”* (ST 4)

*“I think I must consider, something I will prefer virtual instruction cause it is more easy in time, and I prefer the traditional face-to face for getting more detailed information”* (ST 75)

The students expect that if virtual learning mode is to be applied in campus, there should be supporting facilities, particularly strong internet connection.

*“It’s good but I think our campus isn’t ready for it. The campus has to make a new rule that all of assignment as to collect on virtual learning” (ST 2)*

*“In Indonesia the internet connection is worst. When we can’t get a good quality of connection that provide us with a good access, we have to rethink about a virtual learning program that will be used by us, is it really a good program? or it can be a weight (burden ) for the learner because the quality of the access.” (ST26)*

## **V. CONCLUSION**

From the findings, it can be concluded that

1. Virtual learning through Edmodo generally gives quite positive impacts for the students. Although only a few of them who are actively involved in virtual discussion, the majority of the students think that learning activities through Edmodo such as posting notes and sharing materials have helped and added to learning. Activities in Edmodo also have benefited the students in their language skills since they are required to communicate in English, and they have to know the vocabulary and try to write well.
2. One feature that receives the highest mean score in the questionnaire is the quiz ( $M = 4.46$ ), which means that the students have maximally made use of the quiz, in which they can review the materials, beside they can get scores which makes them more motivated to learn the subject. In this way, the quiz has increased the students’ motivation in learning, although it is still an extrinsic motivation.
3. Regarding student autonomy, many students are still passive learners and are not yet into the habit of controlling their own pace of learning. They still like to wait for the instruction from the lecturer in posting something to Edmodo and seldom take their own initiative.
4. The constraints in Edmodo as VLE mostly occurs because of slow internet connection that hampers students online learning activity. Therefore, the mean score for the overall effectiveness is 3.51, meaning that the student view about Edmodo effectiveness falls between minor help and no impact. Although the virtual learning seems more practical, convenient and enjoyable, many students still prefer traditional face-to-face learning mode, or combination of both (blended learning).

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