

**USING E-LEARNING TO SUPPORT LEARNING AND  
TEACHING LANGUAGE:  
The Importance of Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) to Improve Students`  
Sepaking Ability**

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**ABSTRACT**

It is not enough to train and empower students through out-dated and traditional methods of learning. Technology has the power to transform education. It is essential to bring it into the classroom to empower learning. Besides the extensive impact on communication and business, the Internet is poised to cause a paradigm shift in the way people learn. Nowadays anywhere, anytime, education is possible. Recently speaking has played an increasingly important role in second/foreign language settings. However, in many universities in Indonesia, EFL students rarely communicate in English effectively. This present study aims at investigating the implementation of Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) and its effect on EFL learners` speaking in one college in the southern of Bandung. This college already makes Memorandum of Understanding with one of prestigious college in Malaysia. One of the programs is making a long distance lecturing using VLE e-learning. Speaking pretest and post test, student interaction in VLE e-learning recording analysis, student questionnaires, and student interviews constitute data collection during the 4-week instruction period. Results show that VLE e-learning have positive effects on improving students` speaking in terms of language quality and the improvement of vocabulary, and students express opinions on the implementation of VLE e-learning.

**Keywords:** VLE e-learning, technology, education

**A. Introduction**

Among the four language skills, speaking is increasingly important in second/foreign language settings. However, in Indonesia it is very difficult for students to communicate with other people in English effectively. This situation almost the same with the case founded in China. Hu (1988 and Wang (1996) described this situation of English learning in China as “dumb English”. “Dumb English” refers to the situation when student want or need to communicate in English but they cannot perform the task successfully due to such possible reasons as tension shyness, and/or lack of effective communication skills in English.

In order to develop college English learning and teaching in Indonesia, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been suggested to be one plausible way to improve the situation. Computer technology is nowadays becoming more and more prevalent in many aspects of people`s lived. The development of computer technology and the internet has become the trend in language learning and teaching. In this light, The Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) has been introduced to some Indonesian college since 2008.

Laurillard (2002) stated, that the student`s learning in the teacher`s responsibility by clearly stating that the quality of learning of a student is correlated to the efficiency of the teaching.

With language, teaching consists of mediating and facilitating learning. The technology provides the perfect tools and allows students to construct their own learning.

Distance learning is a model used by a growing number of universities mainly for economic reasons and it is certainly giving access to studying to some people who would normally not be able to do so. In the research location, the learning model blended learning approach which can be defined as “the integrated combination of traditional learning approach which can online approaches (Martin and Keith, 2005). This approach also has the advantage of being perfectly compatible with the new higher education horizon in Indonesia. Although higher education represents a great cost, the concept of lifelong learning remains popular and thus motivating people to go back to studying at any point in their adult life.

From the explanation above, we can see that numerous students, especially those in public universities, are in paid employment. Perhaps due to the fact that tuition is so expensive, there is generally a good attendance to classes where students are enabled to practice their speaking skills with peers and ask the lecturer for instant support and correction, a more difficult occurrence in an online environment. Students, therefore, continue to value and appreciate a face to face experience with the teacher and peers (Lorenzo, 2007). To support and enrich this face to face learning and teaching Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) can be utilized.

## **B. Literature Review**

### **1. Virtual Learning Environments (VLE)**

Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) is the perfect tool to support learning in general and in particular. In the classroom, the activities can be performed within a VLE. These kinds of activities make the learning and teaching more enjoyable and diverse. Using the technology also suits the students` needs and interests, especially young learners (HEA and JISC, 2009). Consequently, if the facilities and the time permit it, it is always valuable for school to organize sessions in a computer room. Those session allow students to work at their own pace and practice independently whist being supported by the lecturer and peers alike. Moreover, if they do not finish their activity in time, they can continue it at home. The role of the teacher in that case is to circulate around the room in order to provide advice and support answer questions, guide and praise (Merlin, 2012).

Taking advantage of the technology and particularly a VLE outside the language classroom is the most common use as it offers extra practice to the students, be it listening, writing or reading, and can save class time which could be dedicated to more speaking practice. A VLE unquestionably gives students freedom to learn in their own time and certainly maximize their learning experience. The world, the media and education have gone social. The keyword is collaboration and this collaboration can take diverse forms (HEA & JISC, 2009). On a VLE for example students can post their creation (audio, video, text, Power Point Presentation, etc.) for public viewing.

New technologies match the students` way of learning by using games, online video, blogs, wikis, etc. The time students spend either on their computer or on their mobile phone doing all sorts of activities is very obvious. University students are curious and willing to learn and discover new technologies bound to help our student in their studies or that they can reuse in a different context. Whether it is in the form of a VLE or not, online environment allows access to instruction and of other learners, and using technology unquestionably supports a lifetime of learning.

## **2. VLE e-learning : from teachers and students` standpoint**

Since the 1990s, the topic of students` engagement has been well researched (Zepke & Leach, 2010). It can be defined as “students` cognitive investment in, active participation in and emotional commitment to their learning” (Chapman, 2003). Yet a multifaceted concept, engagement is necessary to achieve successful studies. Amid diverse approaches to engagement, student agency and motivation have been the focus of some researchers as factors in engagement (Schuetz, 2008).

Emerging from the synthesis of the engagement literature. Zepke and Leach (2010) identify ten proposals for action:

- Enhancing students` self belief
  - Enabling students to work autonomously, enjoy learning relationships with others and feel they are competent to achieve their own objectives
  - Recognizing that teaching and teachers are central to engagement
  - Creating an active and collaborative learning, which fosters learning relationships.
  - Creating educational experiences for students that are challenging, enriching and extend their academic abilities.
  - Adapting to changing student expectations
  - Ensuring institutional cultures are welcoming to students from diverse backgrounds
  - Investing in a variety of support services
  - Enabling students to become active citizens
  - Enabling students to develop their social and cultural capital
- (Summarized from Zepke and Leach, 2010)

Amongst all those points above, the six first ones are totally relevant to online learning where students can feel lost, lose motivation and finally stop using the technology. Individual and collaborative engagement is, indeed, a key issue for the e-learning process. Bringing the learners to an online environment can be easy but keeping them there can be more difficult. This is the reason why it is important to establish an online presence at different levels. This presence can be divided in 3 categories: a cognitive presence, depicting students learning on their own and together, a teaching presence describing the teacher`s input and a social presence, defining the interaction between the students in a more relaxed manner (Garrison and Andersen, 2003).

In those three scenarios, the focus is placed on the link between students, the teacher, and material, thus emphasizing the importance of human relationship as well as course design and quality. This clearly means that the teacher has to develop a set of new skills to be able to support the students and foster their learning. Hence, besides knowing how to design online activities, s/he must be a facilitator and a moderator as clearly explained by Garrison and Anderson (2003).

## **C. Research Methodology**

### **1. Research questions**

This study aims at investigating the implementation of VLE e-learning on EFL learners` speaking in one college in Bandung. This college already uses VLE e-learning almost 4 semesters. To achieve this the present study addressed the following research question:

- 1) Does VLE e-learning have any positive effects on improving the speaking performance of students with different levels of proficiency?
- 2) What are students` opinions of the VLE e-learning in their college?

## 2. Participants

60 third-semester non-English major undergraduate students were chosen to be the sample in the study. They had experience of and were familiar with using the existing VLE e-learning.

The students were classified into three groups in terms of language proficiency level, high-medium and low, based on their TOEFL score. And then, these 60 students were randomly assigned into an experimental group of 30 students and a control group of 30 students.

## 3. Research Method

**Table 1:** Summary of research questions and instruments

Research Questions	Instruments
Does VLE e-learning have any positive effects on improving the speaking performance of students with different levels of proficiency?	Pretest and post-test student VLE e-learning recording analysis
What are students` opinions of the VLE e-learning in their college?	Student questionnaires Student interview

Table 1 above shows the instruments used in the present study: speaking pretests and post-tests, student VLE e-learning recording analysis, student questionnaires and student interviews.

In this 4-weeks research study, all 60 students were required to learn 3 units of *Look Me in the Eye*(Robinson, 2007) novel for 2 hours each week – 1 hour for the tutorial class and 1 hour for the computer lab class. In the one-hour tutorial class, all the participants in the experimental group and the control group analyzed the same book. After the tutorial class, students began the one-hour computer lab class to discuss each other with the tutor from Malaysia using VLE e-learning. All of the student`s conversations were recorded automatically by the e-learning system.

The researcher implemented VLE e-learning for the experimental group in the one-hour computer lab class. The VLE e-learning computer lab class provides the platform for students to practice speaking by interacting with their classmates activity. It is an interactive instrument for text presentation and learner interaction. Students effectively construct new conversations based on what they have learnt from the novel. After that, students began to do their own project related with the story of the novel. The project could be a power point presentation, a poem, a book review using their own words, etc. Assistance and answers to students` questions were provided by the tutor from Malaysia and the s/he offered feedback to students after they finished their project. The important point of VLE e-learning is the student have to make explanation orally based on their project. All of instructions, assistance, answers and feedback served as scaffolding which allowed students to pose questions and engage in interaction instead of sitting in front of the computer, reading the book, and recording the conversation.

The control group worked with the existing traditional teaching process. Students began the 3 chapters of books by reading in front of individual computer for 30 minutes. It provides the platform for students to practice speaking without interaction among themselves. Students came to class, sat in front the computer and kept reading the same book out from the screen. Students passively practiced speaking at a low cognitive level without scaffolding provided by the tutor.

After the 4-week instruction, students in the experimental group and the control group were required to take the speaking post-test to determine the effects of VLE e-learning on their speaking performance. The post-test mean score in the experimental group were compared to the scores of the control group. The data obtained from the pretest and the post-test scores were used for further quantitative analysis. Students in the experimental group were required to do the questionnaires and interviews, and the data attained from these instruments were used for the qualitative analysis.

**D. Result**

After the 4-week experiment on implementing Virtual Learning Environments E-learning from the data analysis, the results of the study can be summarized in terms of 1. Students` speaking performance, 2. Students` attitudes towards the implementation of VLE e-learning.

**1. Speaking Performance**

All of the 60 participants were post-tested. As shown in table 2. From the paired samples t-test analysis, the mean scores of the post-test of the two groups (experimental/control) are 9.854 and 7.834 respectively.

**Tabel 2 : Comparison between the two tests scores between the experimental and control group**

Group	Scores	Mean	SD	N	df	t	Sig
EG*	Pretest	7.867	7656	130	127	-	15.112** 000
	Post-test	9.854	9976				
CG*	Pretest	7.834	7656	130	127	-187	767
	Post-test	7.956	6785				

\*EG =Experimental Group CG = Control Group

\*\*t value of experimental group is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

In the experimental group, there is a statistically significant difference between the two speaking test scores, significant at  $p = 0.000$ . However, in the control group, there is no statistically significant difference between the two speaking tests scores because the p value is higher than 0.05 ( $p= 0.717 > 0.05$ ). The means scores of the pretest and the post-test are nearly the same (7,834/7.956)

In addition, in terms of different language proficiency levels, in the experimental group, from the paired samples t-test analysis as shown in table 3, the post-test mean scores for each level (high/medium/low), are 9.9778/8.989/8.3 respectively higher than the pretest means scores (9.869/8.878/7.684)

**Table 3 : Comparison between the two tests scores among high, medium and low proficiency levels in the experimental group**

Proficiency level	Scores	Mean	n	df	F	Sig.
High	Pretest	9.867	14	13	-12.002*	000
	Post-test	9.978				
Medium	Pretest	8.878	97	96	-16.331*	000
	Post-test	8.989				
Low	Pretest	7.684	19	18	-5.091*	000
	Post-test	8.3				

- t value are significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

From the data shown in table 3. It is noticeable that students in the experimental group at all language proficiency levels displayed an improvement on their speaking performance. This result validates the answer to the first research question, that the VLE e-learning have a positive effect on improving the speaking performance of students with different levels of language proficiency.

## 2. Students Attitudes

All of 30 students in the experimental group were required to answer the questionnaires after they finished their 4 week study. The result are presented in table 4.

**Table 4 : Responses from Student`s Questionnaire on the Linkert- scale ( N = 60)**

Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The instruction before using VLE is necessary	31.3 %	61.5 %	3.8 %	2.3 %	0.0 %
2. The VLE e-learning are interesting	43.1 %	40.8 %	14.6 %	1.5 %	0.0 %
3. The VLE e-learning make learning information on how I can speak idiomatic English	49.2 %	40.8 %	8.5 %	1.5 %	0.0 %
4. The VLE e-learning make learning to speak English enjoyable	22.3 %	53.1 %	20.0 %	4.6 %	0.0 %
5. The VLE e-learning help me generate similar conversation easily.	15.4 %	56.9 %	33.8 %	3.8 %	0.0 %
6. The VLE e-learning helps me improve my speaking performance	28.5 %	54.6 %	12.3 %	4.6 %	0.0 %
7. The VLE e-learning motivate me to practice more	22.3 %	48.5 %	25.4 %	3.8 %	0.0 %
8. The VLE e-learning should be utilized more in speaking classes	20.8 %	47.7 %	26.9 %	4.6 %	0.0 %
9. I feel that time is not enough for me to use VLE e-learning.	7.7 %	25.4 %	46.2 %	16.9 %	3.8 %

Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
10. I prefer reading out the novel/book with a partner	0.0 %	16.9 %	23.1 %	42.3 %	17.7 %

In addition, one third (10 students) of the students in the experimental group were randomly chosen to participate in interviews in order that more informative data could be gathered. In general interviewees delivered constructive opinion. These are the result of interviews:

1. 20 % of the interviewees could not decide whether they approved of the implementation of VLE e-learning or not because they reported that they were not sure whether VLE e-learning could really help them to improve their speaking or not.  
 10 % of the interviewees who expresses their disagreed with the utilization of VLE e-learning because they reported that they still preferred listening and reading activities.  
 70 % of the interviewees agreed that VLE e-learning could improve their speaking and it should be incorporated mre to speaking classes.
2. 75 % of the interviewees reported that scaffolding and instruction provided by the teacher on how to conduct VLE e-learning helped them understand better be fore they began the discussion part.  
 Moreover 25 % of the interviewees said that they were actively involved in the whole learning process instead of passively accepting what the teacher taught. They felt they were at the center of the learning and teaching process instead of the teacher. They said that they can make and create a new dialogues by using different words and sentences instead of repeating the same materials again and gain.
3. 88.9% of the interviewees mentioned that the VLE e-learningwere more active than the existing traditional teaching process.
4. The individual difference is another aspect which may affect the implementation of VLE e-learning.

### E. Pedagogical Implication

The present study aims at investigating the implementation of VLE e-learning on EFL learners speaking in one college in Bandung. Some pedagogical implications can be concluded as follows.

1. From the result of the study, it can be found that the appropriate integration of CALL and internet technology is essential to the success of EFL speaking learning in college English study, especially for speaking classes because students can actively participate in the whole learning process instead of passively accepting what the teacher teaches. The findings from this study are directly beneficial in other researchers aiming at developing students L2 speaking abilities as well as teachers L2 speaking instructional methods.
2. The present study has explored the effectiveness of the change from teacher-centered instruction to student centered learning. Based on the previous result explain, student are at the center of the whole process of English learning and teaching, and the teacher`s role has changed.  
 The emphasis should be placed on the learners rather than the teachers, so future research studies could continue to investigate how a Virtual Learning Environments e-learning could provide effective learner-centered learning.

3. This study is not generalized to all areas of EFL speaking learning and teaching since the aim of this study is to investigate the process of implementing VLE e-learning and how it can benefit students` learning to improve their L2 speaking.
4. While using VLE the focus must be placed on learning and how the students will engage with the online material. Learners appreciate the variety of activities and the alternative style of teaching made possible through the use of a VLE e-learning.

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