INVESTIGATING EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE USEFULNESS OF CANVAS LMS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the usefulness of Canvas LMS in Sociolinguistic courses. This study involved three students of English Education at a university in West Java, Indonesia. The data collection method used was the semi-structured interview. Data were analysed using Thematic Analysis with the Braun and Clarke analysis framework. The research results are divided into three aspects, namely the ease and beneficial features for learning, interesting ways to access course material and independent learning skill development. The finding discusses the usefulness of Canvas LMS as a learning medium in Sociolinguistic courses. Therefore, the results of this study provide empirical insight for other students about the benefits of using Canvas LMS in learning that will help them use technology that can support their learning.

Keywords: Student Perception, Usefulness, Canvas LMS.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education adopts a variety of educational technologies to improve the quality of the learning process. Lee (2010) states "many universities and colleges, nowadays, have been opening more distance learning courses to meet the individual needs of current students as well as to provide learning opportunities to other learners who could not attend campus-based programs (as cited in Dang, 2020, p. 1). Distance learning or online learning can be viewed as an instruction that is received through the use of various technologies. According to Urdan and Weggen (2000), online learning is a subset of distance education and embraces a wide set of technology applications and learning processes including, computer-based learning, web- based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaborations (as cited in Kengwee & Kidd, 2010, p. 533).

To support online learning, the use of a Learning Management System (henceforth LMS) is needed so the learning process can run well. "LMS is a web-based application that supports teaching and learning by enabling instructors to create and organize content for learners" (Sanga, 2016, p. 11). Furthermore, Kakasevski, Mihajlov, Arsenovski, and Chungurski (2008) stated that "Learning Management Systems allow students to communicate with their teachers and each other in learning communities, download course materials, take online quizzes and submit homework and classwork assignments' (p. 613).

The idea of examining EFL students' perceptions of the usefulness of Canvas LMS comes from my own experience in the Sociolinguistics course. I had noticed that Canvas was being used as an online learning platform because using Canvas in learning activities is very useful. The features contained in Canvas are easy to use and I can access the material provided by the lecturer easily. Not only that, the transparency of grades can increase my enthusiasm and motivation in learning. This is in line with Road (2014) who states, "Canvas is a cloud-

based Learning Management System that can design courses in less time and have a greater impact on the students' learning experience. It allows students and instructors to engage each other in environments students are familiar with. Canvas can be used to deliver course materials and assessments, support instructor-students and students to student interaction and feedback, and grade work". Besides, Cleveland (2015) also states that Canvas provides a group feature. The teachers can set up pages for groups to allow enhanced collaboration for the group projects. In this space, students can share files, communicate via private discussion boards or charts, and collaborate effectively as a group via distance.

In online learning, the students are expected to participate and interact well in the learning process. Although most of the students argue when online learning the interaction between students and teachers does not occur well, the learning content is not conveyed accurately and many students answered that it was difficult to concentrate in class for a long time (Fatoni et al., 2020, p. 572). Therefore, with the use of Canvas, the learning can be more interesting because Canvas LMS has many features that can fully support the learning process. As supported by License (2021), "Canvas includes a variety of built-in course construction and management tools that can be customized to create unique and accessible teaching and learning experiences" (p. 6).

This phenomenon makes researcher interested in examining students' perceptions of the usefulness of Canvas as an online learning platform in the Sociolinguistics courses.

Contextually in this research, there were several students majoring in English Education who were currently taking Sociolinguistics course in one of the universities in West Java, Indonesia. They used Canvas as an online learning platform. They stated that the use of Canvas in the Sociolinguistic course was very useful and helped them especially regarding the features of the canvas (personal communication, April 13, 2021). There were 14 features that made it easier for them to follow the instruction and the learning process.

Moreover, there have been some researchers doing the same research about students' perceptions of the usefulness of Canvas LMS such as Dang, (2020) in the University of Gothenburg studied factors influencing students' perceptions of the usefulness of Canvas as an LMS. This research aims to find out students' perceptions of the usefulness of Canvas as an LMS and factors that might influence their understanding of the usefulness of Canvas. This study found that students tended to perceive the usefulness of Canvas concerning its course administration's functions namely course structures, assignments, grades and feedback, and flexibility and mobility of the platform, for example, the ability to learn anytime and anywhere. Therefore, the students stated in the open-ended questionnaire that all of the courses utilized Canvas to primarily manage the courses progress, which was consisted of some main tasks such as providing general information about the course (e.g.: modules, learning materials & other resources, schedule, assignments, announcements, learning outcomes' criteria), and giving feedback and grades of the assignments.

Furthermore, from the explanation above this paper explores students' perceptions of the usefulness of Canvas LMS. To conclude, this study addressed a gap with the previous study as explained above that the distinctive aspects of this study are the research method, focus of the study where this research focuses on students' perceptions of the usefulness of Canvas in the Sociolinguistic course, and participants of the research. This research could be very important for universities in evaluating the use of Canvas as an LMS and making students' voices heard.

METHOD

In this research, the researcher uses a case study as the design of this research. Education researchers Gall et al. (2003) described case study research as "the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon" (as cited in Duff, 2007, p. 436). The use of case study methodology is chosen because it best facilitates the construction of a detailed, in-depth understanding of what is to be studied, and because case study research can engage with the complexity of real-life events (Stake, 1995). Furthermore, it can be used to investigate EFL students' perceptions of the usefulness of Canvas LMS.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study reveal the three themes: 1) the easy and beneficial features for learning, 2) interesting ways to access course material, 3) independent learning skill development.

1. The Easy and Beneficial Features for Learning

Canvas is one of the Learning Management Systems (LMS) that is used to access and manage online course learning. Canvas offers modern learning tools that support instructor innovation, student engagement, and widespread connection and collaboration (Arsyi, Nuraini, Ramdani & Agum, 2021, p. 317). As well, Arsyi et. al. (2021) found that "Canvas enhanced the teaching and learning process in English classrooms because it offers various features. It has features for giving the material, creating the discussion media, assigning learning assignments, communicating in online meetings and collaborating with other platforms to support the management of teaching and learning process" (p. 320). Then, this section discusses the features of Canvas LMS and its functions. There are three points related to the features of Canvas LMS. Those are the announcement feature, discussion feature, and grade feature.

1.1. The Announcement Feature

Announcement is a communication tool that can be used to send information and updates to all of the students in a course. According to License (2021), announcements allow instructors to communicate with students about course activities and post interesting course-related topics. Announcements are designed to allow instructors to broadcast information to all course members. In the announcements feature, you can

see all the notifications in your course. Announcements are presented in reverse chronological order with the latest first appearing and the oldest announcements appearing at the bottom (Arsyi, et al., 2021). This announcement will be sent via email. This allows students to stay updated with the latest information about the course. To begin Anita (1st participant) said that all notifications about learning activities will go through her Gmail :

"The canvas is connected to my Gmail so that all notifications about learning activities such as modules, assignments will go to Gmail". (Interview, Anita, 27th May 2021. Author's translation).

In addition, Bilqis (2nd participant) claimed that this feature is very useful because she doesn't miss any information about learning :

"For all learning information, I always get notifications because Canvas is connected to my email. Notifications are never late so this feature is very useful because we will not miss any information". (Interview, Bilqis, 27th May 2021. Author's translation).

For the last, Cici (3rd participant) has the same opinion as Bilqis that this feature is very useful because she doesn't miss any information about learning :

"Because Canvas is connected to the email that I use, so any notifications will go to the email such as assignments, grades, modules, or feedback. And it helps so I don't miss any information." (Interview, Cici, 5th June 2021. Author's translation).

Based on the data above, it showed the usefulness of the announcement feature for learning activity. Announcements are used to communicate between lecturer and students related to the course. Canvas LMS provides this announcement feature which helps students to get information about assignments, modules, grades, or discussions that must be completed. The participants stated with the notifications they received via email, they could find out information about learning activities. Thus, they have no reason to be late in collecting or completing assignments.

1.2. The Discussion Feature

The discussion feature is a feature for conducting online discussions. This feature will help students think more deeply about the material through discussions.

Discussions allow interaction between two or more people; users may take part in discussions with a whole class or community. Discussions can also be conducted within student groups (Arsyi, et all., 2021). As shown in the following excerpts :

"There is a discussion feature on Canvas to conduct discussions with other students, such as discussing a module or giving personal opinions on a topic. So far I think the discussion is going well even though it's online." (Interview, Bilqis, 27th May 2021. Author's translation).

"In Canvas there is a discussion feature. Several tasks require us to give our opinion. In addition, we can't see other people's opinions before we give an opinion. So, there is no plagiarism of people's opinions. and we can give feedback from our friend's opinion" (Interview, Cici, 5th June 2021. Author's translation)

"I think the discussion can run effectively because the discussion on Canvas will be reviewed during the virtual meeting with the lecturer". (Interview, Anita, 27th May 2021. Author's translation).

According to the excerpt above, the students showed their statement about the usefulness of Canvas LMS in the discussion feature. This feature allows students to be able to discuss with other students to give each other opinions and give feedback. By discussing, students can practice their critical thinking skills and the students can comment on the opinions of other students.

1.3. The Grade Feature

Grades can serve as a communication tool between students and instructors and allow instructors to track the progress of students in the learning process. According to License (2021), the grade feature helps instructors easily input and distribute grades for students. Grades for each assignment can be calculated as points, percentages, complete or incomplete, pass or fail, and assignments can be organized into groups for weighting as well. It is shown in the following excerpt :

"In Canvas there is a grades feature. By this feature, I can see the grades given by the lecturer such as quiz scores, attendance scores, the activeness scores, presentation scores, midand final exam scores. When I know the mid-test score is small, I become motivated to do better in the next assignments". (Interview, Anita,

27th May 2021. Author's translation)

> *"Yes, on Canvas there is a grades feature. I feel happy because I can know my grades but I'm still confused about how to calculate the score. However, because I'm used to using Canvas, I understand how to calculate the score. From this feature I became motivated because when I got small grades, I will try to do better". (Interview, Bilqis, 27th May 2021. Author's translation)*

> *"In Canvas we can know our grade because there is a grades feature. In that feature, we can see the grade we get or the accumulated grade of all assignments. So, I have a target so I get good grades". (Interview, Cici, 5th June 2021. Author's translation)*

Regarding the excerpt above, this grade feature allows students to know the scores they get such as quiz scores, presentations, mid and final exams, and attendance scores. Explicitly, Bilqis and Anita have one main object of focus on the usefulness of the grade feature in learning, namely increasing their motivation to always try their best. By knowing the grades each week, the students can evaluate their learning outcomes.

The previous explanation proves that Canvas LMS has useful features for students to support the learning process. As supported by research was conducted by Arsyi, et all., (2021), entitled "The Implementation of Canvas to Enhance English Teaching and Learning", the research results showed that the teaching and learning process in English classrooms is enhanced by the use of Canvas because it offers various features. Canvas has features to provide material, create discussion media, provide learning assignments, and communicate online to support teaching and learning management.

2. Interesting Ways to Access Course Material

In the Canvas LMS, there is a feature named "Module". A module is a tool that can unite all course contents into structural components. The module can contain files, assignments, quizzes, and other learning materials. Furthermore, module content can be grouped by week, topic, or day. Modules can be set up to require students to complete materials in a sequential fashion (OpenStax

and Allies, 2016). Using a module allows the students to know what should be read, completed, and discussed in a course.

In the module feature, there is an interesting way to access learning materials that is a lock system. This way makes the module cannot be opened until the prerequisites are met. The modules that are already open will be black and there will be a green tick, while modulesthat are still locked will be gray. For example, there are 3 modules where the first module isan introduction to courses, course structure and things that must be considered during

learning. The second module contains the introduction of lecturers and self-introduction. The third module contains material, quizzes that must be done for the first week. When thestudents want to open the quiz or read the material in the third module, they must completethe prerequisites first, that is accessing the first and second modules. It aims to make studentsmore disciplined and focused in following the learning process. Furthermore, this way alsoaims so the students do not miss out on assignments, quizzes, and discussions. In the following excerpt below, the participants shared an interesting way to access learning materials in Canvas LMS. To begin with: Anita (1st participant) said with a lock system in accessing learning materials makes her more disciplined:

"There is an interesting way to access learning materials, quizzes, or other assignments. There is a module feature that uses a lock system. The lock system makes us more disciplined to do assignments regularly every week". (Interview, Anita 27th May 2021. Author's translation)

The next example from Bilqis (2nd participant) claimed that the lock system on Canvasis a challenge for her.

"The lock system is a challenge for me because if I don't open the module this week, then the module for next week can't be opened. That means I will miss materials or assignments. Not only that, if I don't work on the module from the first week until the time the exam is held, then automatically I can't take the exam". (Interview, Bilqis, 27th May 2021. Author's translation).

Another example from Cici (3rd participant) she said that with the lock system, she is motivated to always complete the module on time:

"The lock system is interesting, for example the lecturer asks us to work on the module for this week and before the module is finished we can't open the module for the next week, so we have to followthe sequence of the module. Then I became motivated to always complete the module every

week according to the allotted time so the modules do not pile-up". (Interview, Cici, 5th June 2021. Author'stranslation).

From those excerpts, the data showed that all participants feel there is an interesting way to access learning materials that use a lock system in Canvas LMS. This lock system willopen until the prerequisites are met. Prerequisites are defined by associated requirements in a module, meaning that students must complete all requirements within one module before moving to the next module (Fall, 2015). For Cici (3rd participant) she feels the existence of thislock system makes her more motivated to always complete the module on time. For Anita (1stparticipant) the impact of the lock system in Canvas makes her more disciplined in completingthe modules every week. Bilqis (2nd participant) also felt that the lock system is a challenge forher to always complete the module so she does not miss the material or assignment. The statements of all participants showed that the interesting way of accessing course material in Canvas LMS makes them more disciplined and focused in completing assignments or materialsgiven by the lecturer. It can be concluded that they feel that Canvas is very useful to support them in the learning process.

3. Independent Learning Skill Development

Independent learning skill is one of the secrets to be successful in the learning process. Independent students are students who are active in directing and organizing their learning.These involved students acquiring an understanding of their learning, being motivated to
learn and collaborating with teachers or other students to structure their learning environment. This is in line with what Meyer et al (2008) said that "the most common meansof independent learning is 'self-regulated' learning in which the students are understandingtheir learning; being motivated to take responsibility for their learning; and working with teachers to structure their learning environment" (as cited in Sukowati, Sartono, & Pradewi,2020). Rusman (2011) also said that "learning independence is essential to be developed tomake sure that students are responsible in managing and developing their study ability consciously". Not only that, independent learning is also defined as learning that is carried out with or without the presence of a teacher, so the students did not rely on the teacher.

In the following data based on the results of the interviews, the three participants statedthat with the use of Canvas, they felt that Canvas can improve their independent learning skills. Here,

the participants express their voices about the canvas that improves their independent learning. Anita (1st participant) said that with the use of Canvas she can improveher independent learning:

"Canvas can improve my independent learning skill because before class starts we are requiredto learn independently, for example doing quizzes, problem solving, or simple questions on Canvas.Then I am also used to understanding the material that is already on the Canvas before the class soI can easily do the quizzes. (Interview, Anita 27th May 2021. Author's translation).
Next voice from Bilqis (2nd participant):

"The reason Canvas can improve my learning independence is: first, before the class, there isan obligation to do modules, quizzes, read power-points and that is a positive thing for me. Second,usually, I learn the material before class and during the virtual meeting with the lecturer, I understand more deeply. Last, I also realized that Canvas is one of the technologies that can help me to learn independently with effectiveness and quality". (Interview, Bilqis, 27th May 2021. Author's translation).
Next voice from Cici (3rd participant):

"In my opinion Canvas can improve independent learning because before the class there is awarming up or quiz, so before filling out the quiz we find out first about what is being asked. Furthermore, I usually learn the material that will be discussed at the meeting". (Interview, Cici, 5th June 2021. Author's translation).

The excerpts above showed that the students have the perception that Canvas can develop their independent learning skills. They explained there are two reasons why Canvas LMS can improve their independent learning skill. First, before the learning begins they are required to do assignments such as quizzes or questions related to problem-solving given by the lecturer through Canvas. Second, they become accustomed to studying the material beforethe class. All of these activities can be classified as independent learning where they understandwhat they have to do and they have a measure of control over their learning. As supported by (Meyer et al, 2008, p. 15), independent learning is the process in which learners develop the values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to make responsible decisions and take appropriate actions regarding their learning. Furthermore, all those activities showed that the students have a greater role and responsibility in the learning process where students are expected to contribute to the learning process inside and outside the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Canvas LMS is a web-based software that helps teachers and students to work interactively and collaboratively. Canvas allows students to manage the learning such as accessing learning materials, working on modules, submitting assignments, discussing with other students, and viewing all grades. By the use of Canvas, the students can develop their independent learning skills. Moreover, Canvas has features that can support learning such as the announcement feature, discussion feature, module feature, and grades feature. The announcement feature makes it easy for students to always know the latest information about learning activities. The discussion feature allows students to have discussions with other students and improve students' thinking skills. Meanwhile, the grade feature allows students to always know the scores of the various tasks they have done.

Furthermore, this present study only focuses on students' perception of the usefulness of Canvas in the Sociolinguistic course. For future research, the researcher recommended examining the teacher's perception of the usefulness of Canvas. Moreover, it is also recommended to investigate the challenges of using Canvas in the learning process faced by the teacher.

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