EFL STUDENTS' LEARNING MOTIVATION AND DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY IN THE CONTEXT OF BLENDED LEARNING DESIGN

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Abstract: EFL students should consider writing motivation in a blended learning (BL) framework. Previous studies have discussed findings related to whether motivations can make students write essays better. Few studies have examined descriptive essay learning motivation in BL design. This study examined EFL students' learning motivation on descriptive essays in BL designs and their perceptions on essay writing motivation. The respondents were 32 EFL students in one reputable private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. This study was a correlational survey. The data was collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire and a descriptive essay

writing test with a scoring rubric developed by Oshima & Hogue (2006). The result showed that there was a positive and significant contribution of learning motivation on descriptive essay in a BL design. It also showed that learning motivation contributed 12.9% to the students' descriptive essay writing skill. In addition, most students felt happy to practice writing in a BL design. Thus, it is inferred that EFL students could perform their essay writing quality in a BL design when they had strong learning motivation which included the intrinsic and extrinsic domains.

Keywords: *blended learning, descriptive essay, learning motivation, writing*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is the aspect of English language ability that is believed to be the most complex and challenging to master (Yusuf et al., 2019). It is a skill requiring producing an idea, using the appropriate style of writing and understanding elements such as spelling, punctuation and ideas organization (Hassan et al., 2021). In the EFL context, one type of writing activity that is produced is essay writing, which is not an easy type of writing. Bulqiyah et al. (2021) revealed that affective problems impacted essay writing for the students in their research, such as the students' attitudes while taking an essay writing course. In addition, some students are not motivated to write essays because their teachers do not provide enough practice or feedback (Fareed et al., 2016). Additional potential problems include lack of ideas and vocabulary as well as lack of understanding of how language can be best used to write the ideas (Ayana, 2020; Marue & Pantas, 2019; Solikhah, 2017). However, some students could have good learning motivation to improve their writing when teachers provide instruction in writing processes, such as spending time with the students on pre-writing phases, editing and re-drafting until producing a completed version of their writing (Durga & Rao, 2018; Harmer, 2015). Thus, motivation

could affect students' writing knowledge (Ling et al., 2021) and contribute to their writing skill (Bai & Wang, 2021).

In the era of information and communication technology (ICT), the utilization of ICT in education has become a necessity for teachers and students (Albugami & Ahmed, 2015; Gil-Flores et al., 2017). Additionally, the Covid-19 outbreak is ongoing and it is not known when it will end. Therefore, online learning with some delivery types and platforms is still the only solution to ensure teaching and learning processes continue (Ong et al., 2022). In Indonesia, some schools in green and yellow areas have returned to face-to-face activities in the classroom with strict health protocols, while some other schools or universities are still conducting fully online learning. In this situation, blended learning (BL) could be one method to apply for students to anticipate the possibilities of teaching and learning in the future (Güzer & Caner, 2014). BL is a promising idea for improving teaching and learning activities (Dziuban et al., 2018). Therefore, an increasing number of schools and universities are using this mode of learning. This encourages more teachers to teach English because BL has some advantages in promoting the process of English learning, language skills and English learning environment (Hashemi & Si Na, 2020). In addition, BL is preferable to use in the Covid-19 era because physical risk should be limited during the pandemic (Mali & Lim, 2021).

In line with the discussion above, BL as a means of instruction delivery that mixes learning models could benefit English teaching, mainly by improving the students' essay writing skills. There are related previous studies on essay writing for EFL/ESL students. Ling et al. (2021) conducted a study on the relationship between writing motivation and students' performance. Hosseinpur & Kazemi (2022) investigated the writing strategy for high and low performance of EFL writers in essay writing. Other studies focused on how online learning improved students' argumentative writing (Latifi et al., 2021) and comparison and contrast essays (Toba & Noor, 2019). However, there is still limited research on EFL students' descriptive essay writing in relation to learning motivation. It is therefore important to conduct

research aiming to investigate the effect of EFL students' learning motivation on descriptive essay writing in a BL design.

In the context of EFL instruction, writing is a written communication activity that contains words, sentences, expressions and communicative function to convey information to other people. Writing is a complex skill for both native and non-native speakers to master as there are many elements in writing, such as purpose, audience/readers, content, organization, vocabulary, spelling, capitalization and punctuation to consider (Hasan, 2022). In general, most writing teachers and raters consider language, content and organization in constructing EFL essays (Junfei Li & Huang, 2022). There are some relevant previous studies on how students' essay writing improves (Jo, 2022; Melekhina & Levitan, 2015; Teng et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2020; Zhai, 2021). Most studies found that in writing essays, students would be motivated and engaged when they were provided opportunities for peer and self-feedback and expressive feedback. Initially, students would be demotivated to complete their writing projects because of time constraints and linguistic challenges. After there was a growing awareness of satisfying writing outcomes collaboratively, they became re-motivated and gained further achievements. The studies also found that the features of academic writing supported the quality of students' essays. Thus, important factors for the students to write essays were found to include knowledge about learning strategies, learning motivation and academic self-efficacy.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, BL is one method of writing instruction facilitated by EFL teachers. BL is understood to be a combination of two elements: online and face-to-face instruction, which allows students to access the materials freely and learn independently since the learning materials are stored online (Dewantara & Dibia, 2021). BL is also viewed in the context of synchronous and asynchronous instruction (Müller & Mildenberger, 2021). Synchronous instruction is a learning activity between students and teacher at the same time. Asynchronous instruction is a learning

process between students and learning sources anytime and anywhere (Chaeruman et al., 2018). BL combines conventional classroom and online instruction within synchronous and asynchronous modes of instruction in which students can actively and freely access learning sources and learn independently.

Jia Li & Mak (2022) conducted a study on expository essay writing skill in which sixty-nine first-year students enrolled in an English course at a Canadian college participated in the study. They found that the utilization of online learning to deliver writing instruction may provide benefits for undergraduate students with underdeveloped language skills. To examine whether BL design significantly affects the students' essay writing, there was a study on the effectiveness of a BL approach on students' argumentative writing. An experimental study was used and the data sources included pretest and posttest of essay writing, students' online Edmodo posting and interviews with students and teachers. A significant improvement in students' argumentative essays was found when instruction was facilitated with BL design (Lam et al., 2018).

These two studies discuss writing quality for expository and argumentative essays and were conducted using quasi-experimental and experimental designs. However, a study of descriptive essays is still a rare undertaking. An essay is understood as a piece of writing discussing one main topic which consists of some paragraphs and is divided into three parts, such as an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs and a concluding paragraph (Chin et al., 2012); moreover, an essay is about one topic, just as a paragraph is, but the topic of the essay is too complex to discuss in one paragraph. Therefore, it is divided into several paragraphs (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). This study focuses on descriptive essays, which deal with the senses; they explain how something or someone sees, smells, tastes, touches and/or hears (Langan, 2010). A description usually uses an organizational pattern of spatial order, or the arrangement of things in space (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). From these ideas, it is inferred that a descriptive essay is a group of paragraphs comprising an introductory paragraph, body

paragraphs and a concluding paragraph that describes an object, place, or person in a spatial order in a written form.

Woolfolk (2008) defined motivation as an internal state stimulating, directing and maintaining behaviors (Marsh, 2010). As it is known, motivation could be intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is a desire that has no obvious external reward, such as learning motivation, and stems purely from completing a certain activity. It denotes that students will be driven to complete a work due to personal variables such as needs, interests, curiosity, and enjoyment (Oxford & Bolaños-Sánchez, 2016). Extrinsic motivation refers to students' experiences when they receive a reward or allowance or avoid punishment without any connection to the given task (Legault, 2020; Locke & Schattke, 2019).

Previous studies found both significant and non-significant relationships between motivation and writing performance. In one study, Taiwanese students completed a questionnaire on motivation and a creative story and the study compared this with the total scores of creative writing performance; the research found that motivation for achievement could not significantly predict the students' creative writing performance (Wang, 2021). In contrast, Yu et al. (2019) found that Chinese students were generally enthusiastic about writing in English and engaged in second language writing classes. These students were pursuing English undergraduate degrees, and there were some EFL writing courses available to them. Yu's research finding is supported by (Cahyono & Rahayu, 2020) who revealed that there was a positive relationship between EFL students' motivation and their writing skill. This study was conducted at an English department in Indonesia and involved 55 students who were required to complete a questionnaire on motivation in writing and to write essays.

In short, past relevant studies on learning motivation in the context of essay writing in a BL design yielded inconsistent results. Most researchers examined how language components, content and organization contributed to the quality of essay writing (e.g. Junfei Li & Huang; Jo; Melekhina & Levitan). Learning motivation of EFL

students was also found to be important as it could affect their essay writing skill and predict their writing performance (eg. Yu et al.; Wang; Cahyono & Rahayu). However, there are limited research studies on EFL university students' descriptive essay writing in relation to learning motivation in the context of blended learning design.

Thus, this study addresses two research questions: (1) Is there a significant contribution of EFL students' learning motivation toward their essay writing? and (2) How do EFL students perceive of their learning motivation in writing essays in BL design?

METHOD
Research Design

The approach of this study was a quantitative paradigm with a survey method. This study used a correlational design which provided a numeric description of trends of the population among variables and helped answer a question about the relationships between two variables (Ellis, 2012). The first variable is EFL students' learning motivation, and the other variable is descriptive essay.

The context of this study was a reputable private Islamic university in Jakarta, Indonesia. The population was all the EFL students who were sitting in the fourth semester from English Education Department in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. A total of 36 EFL students attending an essay writing course were willing to fill out the e-questionnaire and complete the essay writing test. After a screening process using a box plot, four responses were identified as outliers and were deleted and 32 responses were included for analysis. The table below shows the demographics of the participants including gender, age, home location and the students' most preferred English language skill.

Table 1.
Demographics of the Participants

Categories		Number of Participants (N=32)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	7	21.9
	Female	25	78.1
Age	< 20	7	21.9
	20	14	43.8
	>20	11	34.3
Home Location	Jakarta	18	56.2
	Banten	2	6.2
	West Java	7	21.9
	Central Java	1	3.1
	Outside Java	4	12.6
Most Preferred English Skill	Listening	5	15.6
	Speaking	7	21.9
	Reading	17	53.1
	Writing	3	9.4

Instruments and Procedures

Survey questionnaire

There were two instruments used to collect the data. The first was a survey questionnaire containing two sections: identity of the respondents, with eight items, and 24 items to measure the students' learning motivation with a Likert-type scale, which is also called a summated rating scale (Phillips, 1976). There were five categories for the responses: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1) for positive statements and strongly agree (1), agree (2), neutral (3), disagree (4) and strongly disagree (5) for negative statements. The following is the blueprint of learning motivation in writing after the try-out. Of the 24 items, there were 12 valid items and reliability was 0.834.

Table 2.
The blueprint of motivation in writing after the try-out

No	Dimensions	Indicators	Item Number	Amount
1	Intrinsic motivation	Needs	1, 2, 3	3
		Interests	4	1
		Curiosity	5	1
		Enjoyment	6, 7	2
2	Extrinsic motivation	Rewards	8	1
		Punishment	9	1
		Compliance	10, 11	2
		Reactance	12	1
		Total		12

Writing test

The other instrument was a writing test. This test measured the students' essay writing. There were two raters to assess the results of the students' descriptive essays by using the scoring rubric for essays developed by (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). The students' essays were scored on five elements: format, mechanics, content, organization and grammar and sentence structure.

Data Collection and Analysis

The two instruments: a questionnaire and a writing test were distributed to the EFL students in the classroom after the class ended. After the data were collected, the series of steps of analysis comprised: (1) reporting information about the number of sample members who did and did not return the survey, (2) determining the response bias, (3) providing a descriptive analysis of data for learning motivation and descriptive essay writing skill, (4) identifying statistics for testing the inferential research question, and (5) presenting the results in tables and interpreting the results from the statistical test (Creswell, 2018).

FINDINGS

The Contribution of Learning Motivation on Descriptive Essay Writing in the context of BL Design

The analysed descriptive data are presented in the following table.

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics

		Learning Motivation	Descriptive Essay
N	Valid	32	32
	Missing	0	0
Mean		48.81	70.94
Median		50.00	71.00
Mode		44	70
Std. Deviation		4.185	7.020
Variance		17.512	49.286
Minimum		36	43
Maximum		56	82

As shown in Table 3, The maximum score for learning motivation was 56, while the lowest score was 36. The data displayed a mean of 48.81, a median of 50, a mode of 44, and a standard deviation of 4.185. The highest score on the descriptive essay was 82, while the lowest score was 43. The data showed that the standard deviation was 7.020, the mode was 70, the median was 71, and the mean was 70.94. Before the hypothesis was tested, it was necessary to test the normality for the normal distribution.

Table 4.
Normality test

		Unstandardised Residual
N		32
Normal Parameter[a,b]	Mean	.000000
	Std. Deviation	6.55339978
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.133
	Positive	.091
	Negative	-.133
Test Statistic		.133
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.163

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, which was used to determine the normality of the data, revealed that the data were normally distributed because, as Table 4 illustrates, 0.163 was greater than 0.05. After the data distribution was normal, the next phase was to test the hypothesis using the correlation analysis as described in Table 5.

Table 5.
Correlation Analysis

		Learning Motivation	Descriptive Essay
Learning Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.359
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.044
	N	32	32
Descriptive Essay	Pearson Correlation	.359	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	
	N	32	32

Table 5 shows that the significance level of learning motivation on the descriptive essay writing skill was 0.044, and as 0.044 < 0.05, it was significant. Meanwhile, the P-value was 0.359, and it was found that $r_{observed}$ was higher than r_{table} (0.359 > 0.349) at the 5% of significance level. As a result, there was a strong correlation between the ability to write descriptive essays and the learning motivation of EFL students.

Table 6.
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Errors of the Estimate
1	.359	.129	.100	6.662

In line with the calculation using the model of fit, the result showed that the impact of learning motivation on descriptive essay writing skill contributed 12.9%, which was considered low as presented in Table 6. Therefore, there were other psychological and non-psychological factors (87.1%) affecting the students' descriptive essay writing in a BL design.

EFL Students' Perspectives of their Learning Motivation in Writing

In supporting the result above, it is also important to describe the questionnaire data on EFL students' learning motivation in writing, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7.
EFL Students' Learning Motivation in Writing

No	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
1	For my future career, I need to write.	0	0	12.5	68.8	18.8	4.06	0.56
2	Writing helps me learn new things.	0	0	6.25	53.1	40.6	4.34	0.60
3	For my studies, writing is not required.	50	40.6	6.25	3.13	0	4.38	0.75
4	I listen carefully to my teacher's instructions on writing.	0	0	6.25	59.4	34.4	4.28	0.58
5	Before I write, I'd like to read some relevant material.	0	0	40.6	50	9.38	3.69	0.64
6	I enjoy learning to write in English online	0	0	31.3	56.3	12.5	3.81	0.64
7	I am bored with writing material	9.37	53.1	31.3	6.25	0	3.66	0.75
8	Even though my teacher does not appreciate my writing, I am still doing my best	0	0	6.25	56.3	37.5	4.31	0.59
9	If I do not pass my writing class, I will be upset and hate writing	12.5	53.1	31.3	0	3.13	3.72	0.81
10	I will do what my teacher instructs to improve my writing	0	0	3.13	50	46.9	4.44	0.56
11	I write my essays without	3.13	56.3	34.4	6.25	0	3.56	0.67

	considering the readers							
12	When my classmates tell me that I am not good at writing, I keep learning to write in English	0	0	3.13	50	46.9	4.44	0.56

The mean ranged from 3.66 to 4.44 in Table 7, and the standard deviation ranged from 0.56 to 0.81. In terms of intrinsic learning motivation, the results revealed that the majority of students believed that writing was important for their future because they planned to be English teachers after graduating from university (87.6 percent). In addition, they believed that writing would allow them to have more knowledge (93.7%). As a result, they disagreed that writing was not required for their studies (90.6 percent). Related to their interest in writing, most students also showed high attention to what their lecturer explained about writing techniques (93.8%).

The results also showed evidence of the students' curiosity. They found curious enough to read some relevant articles or books before writing (59.4 percent). In the context of BL design, which includes online and offline learning, the students felt happy to learn to write in English using online methods (68.8%). This is understandable, as the students had been learning in full online for almost two years. Additionally related to their enjoyment, more students reported not feeling bored with the writing materials delivered by the lecturer (62.5%).

The next results illustrated extrinsic learning motivation, in which the students still did their best even though the lecturer did not appreciate their writing (93.8%). The students also reported that they would not be disappointed and hate writing if they did not receive good grades (65.6%). In line with compliance, almost all of the students reported that they would do what the lecturer asked to improve their writing (96.9%). Additionally, most students did not agree that they would write essays without considering the audience (59.4%). The last

result is about reactance, and most students reported they would keep learning to write in English even if their peers said that they were not good at writing (96.9%).

DISCUSSION

This research was intended to investigate the contribution of EFL students' learning motivation on descriptive essays in the context of BL design and EFL students' perspectives of their learning motivation in writing. Teaching and learning activities designed using BL are something new for some lecturers and students after fully online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. BL design is one environment that creates learning situation on the two learning modes in one certain length of time. In BL, the students practice learning to write online synchronously and asynchronously in some sessions and they learn to write in the classroom in other sessions.

The first finding demonstrated that learning motivation positively contributed to the students' descriptive essay writing skill in a BL design. This is supported by a study conducted by Valero Haro et al. (2019) showing that online learning design could increase the quality of argumentative essay writing and improve specific knowledge acquisition. Students' argumentative writing has also been found to improve after online instruction (Luna et al., 2020). Ling et al. (2021) found a relationship between students' motivation in writing and writing domain knowledge.

Online intervention during the instruction of expository writing also provided a positive effect for students, including those students with lower language proficiency skills (Jia Li & Mak, 2022). A BL model was also believed to increase students' motivation in writing as well as their achievements (Lozano-Lozano et al., 2020). One BL model, the flipped classroom, was also used to enhance writing instruction, and it was found that the students' had positive perceptions of the online flipped writing which had been considered to demotivate the students in English writing (Wu et al., 2020).

The second finding pointed out that most EFL students had positive learning motivation in writing, mainly descriptive essay in the context of BL design. This finding is in line with a study showing that undergraduate students in China were generally motivated to write in English for EFL writing courses (Yu et al., 2019). In contrast, Wijekumar et al. (2019) found that motivation did not significantly promote students' writing quality. Wijekumar et al. identified writing knowledge, strategic behaviors and skills that more strongly supported writing quality. Research also indicated that students' writing skill was influenced by another factor, such as writing knowledge (Rofiqoh et al., 2022).

Thus, this current study on the students' descriptive essays and learning motivation indicates one important aspect of writing skill for teachers of writing to consider, it is learning motivation. Obviously, it is divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and this contributes EFL students' descriptive essay. Needs, interest, curiosity and enjoyment as intrinsic motivations encouraged the students to write better descriptive essays, facilitated by a BL environment (Apoko, 2023). Meanwhile, rewards, punishment, compliance and reactance as extrinsic motivations were considered to have enthusiasm and eagerness for learning English and produce students' descriptive essays as lecturers and classmates supported their writing practice (Karlen et al., 2019; Komlósi, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

CONCLUSION

As described in the results and discussed in the previous section, it is inferred that learning motivation intrinsically and extrinsically contributes to the increase in writing achievement for descriptive essays. Most of the students are also found to show affirmative perceptions of their learning motivation to write essays in a BL design to support and facilitate the instruction of essay writing. As this research was conducted in one private Islamic university in Jakarta, this could not represent the EFL students at all universities in Indonesia, mainly in writing quality of the descriptive essays.

Therefore, in the future, this type of research should include students at more Indonesian universities as the respondents of the research. In addition, this research was designed in a BL during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, this research could have some recommendation. Firstly, there is a boosting of intrinsic motivation on the students in writing, and university lecturers should consider rewards and punishments as motivators for the students' writing quality in descriptive essays. In addition, mixing modes of online and offline learning may be an effective alternative design for writing practice. In other words, it is important for lecturers to better accommodate students' writing instruction in a BL environment as it motivates them to practice writing in English. Finally, writing lecturers should motivate the students to write essays well by understanding their needs, interests, enjoyment and curiosity as well as considering rewards and punishments for the students.

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