USING LIVEMOCHA FOR INDEPENDENT LANGUAGE LEARNING: A STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION

Gita Andriani and Yorina An'guna Bansa
Graduate Students of English Education Department
Sriwijaya University
E-mail: andriani.gita@yahoo.com

Abstract

Livemocha is an online language learning site which claims itself as the world's largest online language learning community in the world. It offers opportunity to learn foreign languages autonomously. The objectives of this paper were to examine students' perception on the use of this site for independent learning and to know its strengths and weaknesses. The subjects were 23 first-year students of Sriwijaya University majoring Mining Engineering and the data were collected through questionnaire and interview. The respondents were required to set up account in Livemocha and used it as independent learning. The findings showed Livemocha was useful in helping the students learn English independently. They could choose the material based on their level so it could raise their confidence in learning English. The listening and feedback featureswere also the strengths of this site. Besides, some weaknesses were also found. The respondents reported they did not like the point system in Livemocha and they were also dissatisfied with speaking section since it required them to use microphone to record their voice. It is hoped that the results of the study give an insight on students' perception on the use of Livemocha to help learners learn English independently.

Key Words:Independent language learning, Livemocha, students' perception.

INTRODUCTION

Learning English should not be limited to learning in classroom or in formal situation. Students should be willing to absorb in the target language by doing more independent activities. They should also maximize the resources they can find anywhere. With the growth of technology, it has brought a new era in language learning. Technology functions as resource of information and means of communication. Besides, it also promotes independent or autonomous learning. Reinders & White (2011, p. 1) state that "technology has the potential to not only provide access to resources for learning in a superficial sense, but also to offer increased affordances for autonomous learning." Further, Mullamaa (2010) explains that ICT fosters student-centred learning, individualisation and support building up a sense of belonging to a community.

Currently, the users of social media like *Facebook* increase significantly. Based on the data published by Smith (2013), facebook users in the world is 1. 11 billion users. With the high number of users, *Facebook* becomes the most popular social network. There are some studies related to the use of *Facebook* in language learning. For example the study conducted by Shih (2011). The researcher investigated the effect of integrating *Facebook* and peer assessment with college English writing class instruction through a blended teaching approach. The findings suggested that incorporating peer assessment using *Facebook* in learning English writing can be interesting and effective for college-level English writing classes. Another study was by Yunus & Salehi (2012). The study was conducted

to investigate the students' perception on the effectiveness of *Facebook* groups for teaching and improving writing. The finding showed that *Facebook* group is an effective tool in improving the students' writing skill.

Facebook is not intended specifically for language learning. However, based on the results of the studies mentioned before, it could be inferred that social media could be an effective tool in language learning. The question is how about the sites which are intended specifically for language learning? do they also result the same or even better? There are many sites which serve as language learning sites. *Livemocha* is one of them. It used to be a web-based language learning integrated with social media but now it focuses more on language learning. It fuses traditional learning methods with online practice and interaction with native language speakers from around the world (www.livemocha.com, 2013). It also claims itself as the world's largest online language learning community that consists of language enthusiasts such as language experts, teachers, language learners, and native speakers. It offers opportunity to not only learn foreign languages but also contribute as teacher or content creator. The community members help each other by leaving comments or feedback in response to practise exercises. Jee & park (2009) state that Livemocha supports a new online learning community in which people all over the world get together to learn languages. Native speakers can be teachers while learners can improve their learning autonomy by choosing the material based on their level.

. Due to the phenomenon, the writer was interested in conducting research which focused on site intended specifically for language learning, *Livemocha*. The writer would like to know students' perception in using this kind of media in learning English, especially for autonomous learning. In this study the writer formulated the research questions as below:

1. What is the students' perception in using Livemocha for independent language learning?
2. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of this language learning site?

It is hoped that this study will give an insight of students perception in using this website to help them learn English independently. It is also useful to know the strengths and the weaknesses so that teachers could decide whether or not to recommend it to their students. Moreover, it is hoped that this study will add more literature review related to the use of livemocha in language learning.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
Internet and Language Learning

Internet is a form of technology which is growing rapidly nowadays. It is a rich resource for students to learn English since much information on the Internet is provided in this language. It also gives opportunity for students to interact with native speakers around the world and communicate directly with them. Sumalatha (2013, p. 21) argues that "internet will take over from the classroom as the place of choice to learn English." Teachers and students should take advantage of it for a more successful learning process.

At first, people were only able to take information or knowledge on internet passively. They visited websites and read the content without being able to share their own. Only the webmasters were able to fill in the contents. At present time with the development of web 2.0, it enables users to participate actively to transfer information. Social network, blogs, wikis, and podcasts are examples of websites which are based on web 2.0. This development has led to a new opportunity in language learning. As stated by Elam & Nesbit (2012), "Nowadays, with web 2.0 tools, educators and students alike find the internet as a participative medium in which users can collaborate." Moreover, Harrison

This paper has been presented at Sriwijaya University Learning and Education-International Conference 2014. Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, Palembang, May 16—18, 2014.

B29-287

& Thomas (2009) validates that "Web 2.0 technologies have been advanced as potentially transformative in the area of education in general and foreign language learning in particular."

Social network as one example of web 2.0 allows people to connect to each other easily. It offers opportunity to meet people and interact with them virtually. There are also social network sites which are intended for the use of language learning. People could use them to interact, communicate as well as learn language. According to Sumalatha (2013), Social Media Language Learning (SMLL) becomes the link from social interaction to language learning. This enables students to develop communication and language skillsandpromote active and interactive language learning by providing content, exercise, even chat feature for communication practice. Other advantage is that this kind of website offer autonomous or individual learning.

Livemocha and Independent Learning

Livemocha is an online language learning sitewhich was founded by Shirish Nadkarni. It was launched in 2007 and it has over 16 million members from 195 countries. Livemocha was a web-based language learning integrated with social network. After purchased by Rosetta Stone in 2013, it emphasizes more on language learning. This website offers free basic and paid version. Its membership is free and learners can practice over 35 languages for free with Basic Vocabulary Courses 101, 102, 201, and 202 which include Learn, Review, Write and Speak exercises.

The way to sign up is almost the same as other social network. Learners are asked to fill their personal data with valid email then they can continue to set their profiles. Then, they are allowed to choose the level that they would like to study. Here is the screenshoot of choosing the level.

Livemocha implements point system like a game. Users are provided with two choices for enrolling in a course. After setting up the account, Livemocha will give virtual point which can be redeemed to take course, for example taking vocabulary course. They can also add their points by completing one lesson. They will be given 2 points each time they have completed a lesson. Besides, helping others in learning their native language could increase their point. The user could also use 'beans' feature to take a course but it means they have to purchase first. For example, if the learners would like to take English Alphabet course, it needs 99 beans. Livemocha offers 199 beans for $2.29 USD.
Here is the screenshot of the courses feature.

There are four features in *Learn* section; *Get new lessons, My lessons, Help others, and Language Partners*. *Get new lesson* consists of new courses that can be taken. One lesson contains introduction, review of the vocabulary term in the lesson, review of the language usage, practice of the language usage, practice reading and writing, practice reading and speaking, practice listening and speaking, and practice conversation with live language exchange. In the course, user can get feedback from native speakers related to the exercise or practice they have completed. *My lessons* contains the lessons that have been completed by the users. *Help others* contains other users who need user's help in learning his/her native language. So in this website users can learn another language as well as teach those who would like to learn their native language. Users can ask feedback from native speaker and also can give feedback to people from other countries.

This is the screenshot of starting a lesson, video explanation about the lesson.

Schmidt (2009) asserts that over 1 million learning tips are exchanged within the Livemocha community every month. The feedback exchanged promote cultural sharing and this interaction provides motivation to keep learning. Besides, Chwo et.al (2012) support that Livemocha is designed to enhance learner autonomy. Users could find opportunities to learn language outside the classroom, engage in the language learning community in self-paced and self-accesslanguage course. Furthermore, they argue that students can improve their learning autonomy and motivation by checking the progress regularly and by doing the exercises provided by Livemocha.

Autonomy does not mean that learners work in isolation (Lee, 2011). Autonomous learners are involved in the learning process actively. They are also responsible for their own learning. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) becomes a powerful means for developing learner autonomy (Lee, 2011). Livemocha fosters independent learning since they could choose material they want to study based on their need. They make their own decision of which one to study or whether they want to review it again and again for a better understanding.

Previous Related Studies

There are some studied related to the use of livemocha in language learning. First, a study conducted by Chwo et.al (2012). The objectives were to assess technology university EFL learners' perception of and attitudes to web 2.0 informal learning with Livemocha and whether learning style and strategies affect them. The result showed that writing, chatting and speaking are the most attractive functions. However, it was found there is no correlation between learning style or strategy and attitudes to Livemocha. Among four measures of attitude to and perception of livemocha: learning attitude, degree of satisfaction and judgment of visual interface design and website function, significant correlations were found.

Clark & Gruba (2010) conducted a study to investigate Livemocha to study Korean from their perspectives as native speakers and experienced teachers of English using an auto-ethnographic approach that included self-aware participation, learrner diaries and peer debriefing. They focused the questions on aspects of socio-collaborative principles and practise. The results showed that the site had number of counter-productive pedagogical impediments to language learning that included, for example flaws in site design.

Liu, et.al (2013) examined how university ESL students use websites with social network features (*Busuu, Livemocha, and English Cafe*) and their perceptions of these language learning experiences. In relation to Livemocha, the participants reported that it was helpful for improving their English. Most participants said they would like to recommend it to someone learning English and they also would return to the site in the future to help others learn their native language.

METHOD

Participant

This study was conducted in Language Institute of Sriwijaya University, Inderalaya, Indonesia,fromMay to June2013.The population of the study were 97 undergraduate students of Mining Engineering, Sriwijaya University, Inderalaya who were taking course of *English 2* in the even semester of academic year 2012/2013. 24 students consisted of 23 males and 1 female participated in the study as sample which was taken based on convenience sampling.

Procedures

At first, the students were introduced about Livemocha and were explained about the functions, features, and also the use of this site. Then, they were asked to set up their own profiles and use it to help them learn English independently. The students used the websites at their own needs meaning that it is free for them to select which course they would take but they were encouraged to use all the features and to do the exercises provided by Livemocha daily.After a month, the researcher distributed questionaire and interviewed the participant on their perception of using this site for autonomous learning.

Instruments and Data Analysis

The researcher used quantitative method in this research. After the project, the participants were given questionnaire and were interviewed by the researcher. The questionnaire and the interview were intended to explore students' perception in using livemocha and to know the strengths as well as the weaknesses. There were 10 questions in the questionnairewhich was adapted from Lin & Warschauer (2011). It contained two sections. First section included 5 questions related to basic use of Livemocha. Second section contained 5 questions related to students perceptions. The interview consisted of their overall opinion or perception about this websites and also the strengths and the

weaknesses.For the analysis of the questionnaire, percentage analysis was used. Then,the qualitative data were used to support and give meaning to the quantitative data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented in three sections. First the result of questionnaire is divided into two, the usage and the perception toward Livemocha. There were 23 respondents who participated in using Livemocha and responded to the questionnaire. There were 22 males and one female and all of them have used this website for a month during the research. 60% used it for one to two hours a day. 17.3 % used it less than an hour a day, 8.7% used it for more than two hours a day and 13% did not answer. Livemocha provides level of language learning starting from beginner to advanced. 47.8% decided to start using it from beginner level and 43.4% used the material intended for intermediate learners. The rest, 8.6%, skipped the beginner and intermediate material and learned the lesson for advanced level. Based on the chosen material, it means that most of the students were in lower-intermediate level.

The features used by the respondents covered listening (95%), vocabulary (95%), grammar (87%), video (4.3%), audio (13.04%), text (21%), and helping others learn their L1 (17.39%).In this study, vocabulary is one of the most favorite features used by the students with the percentage 95%. This finding is consistent with the result of survey conducted by Liu, et. al (2013) in which it was reported that vocabulary exercise was the most popular feature. However, the other most chosen feature in this study was listening, while adding friends was the other most popular in the study by Liu et.al (2013). This difference could be caused by some changes made in Livemocha platform. After Rosetta Stone took over the website, the companywas no longer focusing on social media but more on language learning.Thelast question in the first section related to the skills that the learners were most interested in improving through livemocha. It covered listening skill (100%), reading skill (82%), writing (82%), speaking (52.17%), grammar (60%) and vocabulary (60%).

The second section of questionnaire asked questions related to students' perception in using livemocha. Firstly, it asked about how helpful the features of livemocha. The results can be seen from the table below.

Table 1 How helpful do you find the following features for your language learning? (check "not applicable " if you do not use that feature)

	Very helpful (%)	Somewhat helpful (%)	Not helpful (%)	Not applicable (%)
Free courses or lessons	87	13		
Posting audio recordings	34.78	17.4	8.6	39.13
Posting written practice	52.17	34.78		8.6
Feedback from others	39.13	8.6	21.73	21.73
Premium/ paid courses	4.3	8.6	4.3	82.6
Live/paid tutoring	13	4.3		78.26

From the table above, it could be seen that 87% of the respondents found free courses/lesson are very helpful, and 13% found it somewhat helpful. It means that almost all of the respondents agreed that free courses help them. In relation to audio recordings, 39.13% did not use the feature, 52.18% thought that it helped them, while 8.6% stated it was not helpful for them. In written practice feature, most of them found it helpful. It can be seen from the table that 86.95% stated so. The table

This paper has been presented at Sriwijaya University Learning and Education-International Conference 2014. Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, Palembang, May 16—18, 2014.

B29-291

also shows that most of the respondents did not use premium course and paid tutorial. In other words, the respondents used only the free version of this website.

The next question asked more about the language skills. The results can be seen below.

Table 2 What language skills does Livemocha help you with? ? (check "not applicable " if you do not use that feature)

	Very helpful (%)	Somewhat helpful (%)	Not helpful (%)	Not applicable (%)
Writing	34.78	60.86	4.3	
Speaking	34.78	52.17		13.04
Reading	43.47	43.47		4.3
Listening	69.56	30.43		4.3
Grammar	47.82	52.17		4.3
Vocabulary	56.52	39.13		4.3

The data showed that only a small part did not use the language skill feature. 4.3% means only one respondent and 13.04% means 3 respondents. Those who used the feature agree that the language skill section offered by Livemocha help them in mastering the skills. The next question discussed about attitudes and perceptions in using Livemocha. The results are shown in this table.

Table 3 Attitudes and perceptions

	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral or no opinion (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Not applicable (%)
I am motivated to spend more time learning a language after using it on livemocha	17.39	65.21	17.39			
Learning on Livemocha increases my self-confidence in the language	17.39	13.04				4.3
Negative feedback from others on Livemocha discourage me		4.3	13.04	30.43	21.73	30.4

Based on the table above, it can be inferred that most of the respondents agree that Livemocha motivated them in learning English independently. Besides that, it also increased their self-confidence in the language. They also thought that feedback from others did not discourage them even though the feedback is negative. This result validates what Jee & Park (2009) explained that feedback is one of the most important features that corresponds to the spirit of community. Receiving feedback on specific content helps to heightens learners' attention for noticing not only errors in their language use but also linguistic features to be learned that have not been noticed (Schmidt, 1990) as cited in Jee

&Park (2009).Liu et al. (2013) support that participants had particularly favorable perceptions toward the sites when they received feedback.

The next question asked which features are the most important to the respondents.

Table 4 Which of these features are the most important to you?

	Very important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Not important (%)
Free/low cost	82.60	13.04	4.3
Available at all times and locations	69.56	30.43	
Individualized, self-paced learning	26.08	69.56	4.3
Quality of language learning materials	47.82	47.82	4.3
Opportunities to practice	47.82	52.17	
Opportunties to get feedback from others	26.08	65.21	8.6

The data showed that most of them agree Livemocha's strengths are very important to help them learn English. The strengths are for example free courses, available at all time and locations, self-paced learning or independent learning, the quality of the material, opportunities to practice, opportunites to get feedback from others and opportunities to meet people. In line with what has been explained in theoretical background that according to Chwo et.al (2012) livemocha is designed to enhance learner autonomy. Users could find opportunities to learn language outside the classroom, engage in the language learning community in self-paced and self-access language course. Students can improve their learning autonomy and motivation by checking the progress regularly and by doing the exercises provided by Livemocha.

The last questions asked about how much the respondents learn from Livemocha. 21.73% stated that they learned a lot. 65.2% said that they learned some and 13% stated they learned a little from Livemocha.

Another instrument used was interview. In this section, 18 respondents participated. The researcher asked two main questions: (1) what is your overall opinion about Livemocha? (2) what are the strengths and the weaknesses of this website? The result showed that 88.8% stated that it is helpful for them and it is effective to help them learn English independently. Only 11.1% stated that it is not useful because the content is too easy. 80% agreed that free courses which involve listening, writing, reading, grammar, vocabulary and feedback are the strengths while speaking section, point system and the easy content are the weaknesses.

Below is the sample of the respondents' interview.

1. *I think it is not very useful and it does not improve my confidence because it is very easy. It is not effective for communication but I recommend it for beginner. The strength is it is good in vocabulary lesson and the weakness is it is not good for speaking. It needs microphone so I can not use it.*
2. *It is a good website. I can learn some other languages, not only English. The feedback feature is very helpful for me.*
3. *It is effective to learn English because it can be used whenever and wherever.*
4. *Livemocha is very helpful for me because I can learn listening. But I don't like the point system because sometimes my point is not enough to take a new course.*

5. *Livemocha is effective because it helps me in simple material. I'm not a good student so I can start from the beginner. I don't like speaking part because I need microphone in this activity.*
6. *I think it is helpful for me to improve my listening skill because I seldom get listening activity in class.*
7. *It is a good application and helpful. People can comment on our work in feedback feature. The problem is the point system but I can watch the introduction lesson again to get more points.*

CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

Based on the results of the questionnaire and interview, it can be concluded that Livemocha is useful in helping the students learn English independently. It can help them learn anywhere and anytime. However, there are some strengths and weaknesses of this website. Language skill features like listening, grammar, vocabulary and writing sections are the strengths of this website, in addition, free courses, available at all time and locations, self-paced learning, the quality of the material, opportunities to practice, opportunites to get feedback from others and opportunities to meet people are also the strengths. Meanwhile, the weakness is that it needs microphone to take part in speaking activity. Most of the respondents did not use this feature due to the lack of the tool. It is suggested that further studies are conducted and focus on the use of Livemocha in classroom and its challenges. Experimental studies could also be done to see the effectiveness of using this website.

REFERENCES

Chwo, G. S. M., Lin. Y. S., Chen, P. J., Lai, G. W., Liu, H. C., Ho, C. C., & Wang, Y. P. (2012). Engagement with livemocha as an informal learning resources- initial findings from a technology university reading course in central taiwan. *Proceeding of the 20th International Conference on Computers in Education*. 809--813.

Clark, C., & Gruba, P. (2010). The use of social networking sites for foreign language learning: An autoethnographic study of Livemocha. In C.H. Steel, M. J Keppel, P. Gerbic & S. Housego (Eds), Curriculum, Technology & Transformation for an Unknown Future. *Proceeding Ascilite Sydney 2010*. 164--173.

Elam, J. R., & Nesbit, B. (2012). The Effectiveness of project-based learning utilizing web 2.0 tools in EFL. *Jaltcall Journal.* 8(2): 113--127.

Harrison, R., & Thomas, M. (2009). Identity in online communities: social networking sites and language learning. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies & Society.* 7(2): 109--124.

Jee, M. J., & Park, M. J. (2009). Livemocha as an online language-learning community. *Calico Journal,* 26(2): 448--456.

Lee, L. (2011). Blogging: promoting learner autonomy and intercultural competence through study abroad. *Language Learning & Technology.* 15(3): 87--109.

Lin, C. H., & Warschauer, M. (2011). Integrative versus instrumental orientation among online language learners. *Linguagens e Dialogos*. 2(1): 58--86.

Liu, M., Evans. M., Horwitz, E., Lee, S., McCrory, M., Park, J. B., & Parris, C. (2013). A study of the use of language learning websites with social network features by university ESL students. In M. Lamy & K. Zourou (Eds). *Social Networking for Language Education*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan, in press.

Mullamaa, K. (2010). ICT in language learning- Benefits and methodological implications. *International Education Study*. 3(1): 38--44.

Reinders, H., & White, C. (2011). Learner autonomy and new learning environments. *Language Learning and Technology.* 15(3): 1--3.

Schmidt, C. (2010). Livemocha and the power of social language learning. *Ih Journal,* (Online), *28,* http://ihjournal.com/livemocha-and-the-power-of-social-language-learning

Shih, R. C. (2011). Can web 2.0 technology assist college students in learning english writing? integrating facebook and peer assesment with blended learning. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology.* 27(5): 829--845.

Smith, C. (2013). *How Many People Use the Top Social Media, Apps and Services.* (Online), http://expandedramblings.com/index.php/resource-how-many-people-use-the-top-social-media/.

Sumalatha, D. (2013). A new media to explore english language learning skills: A perspective approach. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature,* 1(1): 21--24.

Yunus, M. M & Salehi, H. (2012). The effectiveness of facebook groups on teaching and improving writing: students's perceptions. *International Journal of Education and Information Technologies.* 1(6): 87--96.