

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES IN USING BLENDED LEARNING FOR TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE NEW NORMAL ERA

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini berkaitan dengan persepsi dan tantangan guru EFL dalam menggunakan pembelajaran campuran mengajar bahasa Inggris di Masa Normal yang Baru. Oleh karena itu, mengidentifikasi persepsi mereka tentang penggunaan pembelajaran campuran dan tantangannya menjadi tujuan dari penelitian ini. Penelitian kualitatif dilakukan dengan melibatkan dua guru bahasa Inggris Sekolah Menengah Pertama di Surabaya. Ditemukan bahwa persepsi guru tentang penggunaan pembelajaran campuran sangat positif. Para guru mendukung penggunaan pembelajaran campuran karena memiliki keunggulan dalam proses pembelajaran. Siswa dapat belajar pada saat yang sama dalam pelajaran online dan offline. Mereka juga lebih semangat belajar dengan teknik campuran ini karena lebih mudah mengakses materi di platform online. Namun, masih ada beberapa kendala yang disebutkan guru, seperti jaringan internet yang buruk, motivasi siswa yang rendah, persiapan penggunaan pembelajaran campuran dan masalah listrik.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran campuran, Persepsi guru, Era normal baru

Abstract

This research concerns EFL teachers' perceptions and challenges in using blended learning to teach English in the New Normal Era. Therefore, identifying their perceptions of using blended learning and its challenges becomes the objective of this research. A qualitative study was conducted by involving two junior high school English teachers in Surabaya. It was found that teachers' perceptions of the use of blended learning are very positive. The teachers supported the use of blended learning since it has advantages in the learning process. Students can learn at the same time in online and offline lessons. They are also more enthusiastic about learning in mixed learning technique because it is easier for them to access materials on the online platform. However, there are still some challenges that the teacher mentioned, such as poor internet network, low student motivation, the preparation for using blended learning and the problem of electricity.

Keywords: Blended learning, Teachers' perceptions, New normal era

INTRODUCTION

The spread of COVID-19 makes all teaching and learning activities carried out from the home to minimize the spread of the coronavirus. As soon as the COVID-19 case was decreasing, the Indonesian government decided to reopen schools by holding offline classes. Only some students have to come to the school. Students must pay attention to the health protocols such as wearing masks, washing hands, and keeping a distance. With this phenomenon, it is necessary to have a suitable learning technique for the current situation. The use of blended learning is considered applicable in this new normal because it combines online and offline learning

simultaneously. Therefore, the number of students attending school can be only partially, and others can join through online classes.

According to Capone et al (2017), blended learning is becoming more relevant in education as it is a new technique that includes online and face-to-face modalities. This technique allows students to access the material quickly, and they can access it at any time. Abbas, N.,F.& Qassim, T (2020) mention that; It is a flexible method that allows learners to access digital learning materials, activities, and even online conferences anytime, synchronously, and asynchronously. In this teaching process, the teacher can teach and organize the students, and the students can also play their primary role in independent learning (Bi & Shi, 2019). The blended

learning model makes the learning process more effective than the traditional learning process supported by e-learning (Islam et al., 2018). By combining online and offline learning into one, teachers and students can learn more practical than only through online classes. Capone et al. (2017) stated that this method combines traditional education with computer-based activities using tablets, smartphones, and other technology devices, a mix of a face-to-face or online class that integrates mixes and matches the two approaches. It captures students' interests more effectively to improve the positive learning environment. Thus, blended learning is an excellent recommendation to implement in this new normal era.

According to Wright (2017), blended learning is still relatively new in general teaching practice. It provides students with possible learning and teaching experience and supports the teacher as a facilitator (Kharb & Samanta, 2016). By using blended learning, students will be easier and more flexible in accessing the material provided by the teacher so that they will learn more efficiently and be better prepared to take classes. Using blended learning is one thing that is effective because students who are at home with students at school can study together at the same time. Combining traditional technique (face-to-face education) with technology-based education can overcome the time constraints of traditional face-to-face education and improve learning (Kharb & Samanta, 2016). During the learning session, the teacher can maximize learning materials during face-to-face classes and provide assignments through online applications to overcome the limited time. In the use of the blended learning method, student learning is not only limited to the classroom but also more flexible and independent learning opportunities and times (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). The use of Blended learning is one of the innovations to be used in this new normal era because students can also learn the material that has been taught by the teacher flexibly with unlimited time, and it is easy to access because of the use of technology such as cellphones, laptops, and others. In addition, teachers can also have new experiences using blended learning method because it helps in the teaching process in this new normal.

Blended learning certainly has various advantages that make the learning system more developed. There are various advantages since learning is no longer limited to the usual face-to-face framework between educators and learners (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). The benefits derived from the blended learning model depend on how face-to-face and computer-based instructions are combined (Marunić & Glažar, 2015). Caravias (2018) mention that blended learning also gives flexible time for students to access the material, meet the diverse needs of students

and learning styles, improve engagement and complement flexibility in teaching and learning. Through blended learning, students can self-study when and where according to their needs, turning passive learning into active learning (Bi & Shi, 2019). However, blended learning also has disadvantages in the teaching and learning process. According to Bi & Shi (2019), in the online teaching process, it is difficult for teachers to keep track of students' learning progress, and therefore the teaching process is more sporadic without the exchange of opportunities between teachers and students. Hubackova & Semradova (2016) also mention that there are some disadvantages such as its inappropriate use by certain types of students; its inappropriate use in some areas of education, the lack of technology devices, requires its content arrangement suitable for teachers.

Furthermore, the use of blended learning has various challenges. Students and teachers must first know about the blended learning because this is a new technology. The challenge concerns the signal constraints teachers or students must face caused by the erratic weather factor. Marunić & Glažar (2015) mention that the challenges of using blended learning comes up because the new information and communication technologies, face-to-face learning, and newly developed learning environments can affect student learning. All teachers certainly felt these challenges because this is one of the innovations recently used in Indonesia, but with this blended learning, all teaching and learning processes can be optimal. However, not all schools implement this blended learning because of the lack of technological factors such as cameras, projectors, and computers. During the implementation of blended learning, internet access must provide consistently and efficiently so that all students can be comfortable knowing the content or material to study during a study meeting (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). With these various challenges, blended learning is intended to run well due to the increasing use of technology requiring internet signals; this is a good innovation in this new normal era.

The previous research related with the use of blended learning Rahim (2019) focused on the use of blended learning in high school students. He mentioned that a blended learning approach is a flexible learning platform that can enhance learning anytime and anywhere. Another previous research from Bisriyah, (2020) focused on the teachers' perception of the use of blended learning. This previous research finds that this mode of learning is seen as effectively integrating the two main components, face-to-face and internet technology. Meanwhile, Gulnaz et al. (2019) focused on teachers' and students' perceptions of the effectiveness of using blended learning at the university level. This previous research mentions

that Blended learning environments meet the needs of learners with diverse learning styles by giving them control over the place, pace, and path in an online mode of delivery and a teacher-led environment in an onsite mode of instruction. In addition, study from Wright (2017) focusing on students' perception of blended learning mentioned that the use of online technology, materials, and media in language learning must be skillfully implemented to enhance a lesson. However, it is essential to gain face-to-face instruction classes with EFL teachers. Most of the previous research is the perception of students and teachers at the university level, while this present research used the perception from teacher-related with blended learning implementation at the middle school level. Thus, this research aims to identify the use of blended learning based on EFL teachers' perceptions and the challenges while using blended learning in teaching English due to covid-19. These are some of the questions that cover this research:

1. What are the EFL teachers' perceptions toward the use of blended learning in teaching English?
2. What are the challenges for EFL teachers' to apply blended learning in teaching English?

METHOD

This research used the qualitative research. The focus of qualitative research is multi-method and naturalistic approach to its subject matter so that qualitative researchers can investigate phenomena in their natural settings to attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people assign to them (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This present research was conducted in Junior High School located in Surabaya. The data was collected from the school which implemented blended learning in this New Normal Era.

The research participants were two EFL teachers who teach English subjects in junior high school using blended learning. Participants also receive training in the use of blended learning such as workshops and seminars so that they can apply blended learning according to the training. The research participants were senior teachers who taught English subjects for twenty-seven years and were active in the teacher association. These experiences are why those teachers were already chosen as the research participants.

The research instruments for this present research were interviews and observation. The interview consisted of 11 questions related to the teachers' perception of the use of blended learning in teaching and learning. The teachers' interviews lasted about thirty minutes and used the Indonesian language to get the data. Whereas, the observation checklist was used to see how the teachers implement blended learning in their teaching and learning

process. The observation was done after the interview session. The researcher observed the teaching activities in the classroom while they were using blended learning in their teaching and learning process.

The data analysis for this present research used qualitative data analysis with three stages: data reduction, data display, and data report. Data reduction was done by the transcript the interviews from the teachers. The researcher sorts the information from the interview to find the data essential for the research and then leaves the data which were not crucial for the research. Then, data display was used to classify the data from the interview, which is related to the research questions. Thus, the researcher can write the result by categorizing the data into a report.

RESULT

A. Teachers' Perceptions toward the use of Blended Learning

Blended learning is a technique used in the new normal era to combine online and offline learning at the same time. Based on this EFL senior teachers' perception, both of the teachers have a great perception about blended learning, which makes them interested in the use of blended learning because the blended learning, both students who learn at school and students who learn at home can study together in the same time. Teacher A stated that,

"By using blended learning, students who study at school with face-to-face learning and students who study at home with online learning can get the same learning. Some of them study at school, but some learn from home. This is done alternately, but students can still learn together through this method."

Teacher B supports the use of blended learning in this new normal era because students can study together through online and offline lesson. The interview session as follows,

"The use of Blended Learning makes all students can study at the same moment, and it makes them enthusiastic. Before the new normal era, students learned through online classes, so there was very little interaction between students and teachers. However, all students can learn together through blended learning, even in two ways, with online and offline learning".

It is also can be found from the result of observation. Implementing blended learning in this new normal era also gives some the benefits, such as reducing the transmission of covid-19 while still being able to carry out more optimal learning with face-to-face and online learning. In the use of blended learning, students can access materials and assignments more efficiently. This is also in accordance with the results of observations.

Students look more enthusiastic because they can access material easily through online platforms. This makes it easier for students to be able to learn anytime and anywhere by accessing material online. Teacher A mention that,

"After the teaching and learning are over, students can do the assignments through the Microsoft Teams application, making it easier for teachers to carry out the assessment process."

While teacher B mention that,

"The use of blended learning provides benefits in the learning process. Teachers can give assignments through an online platform, Microsoft Teams, where after students collect, the teacher will easily give grades. In addition, students can also easily access material so that they can study at any time".

Both teachers perceive that blended learning is an excellent innovation to implement for teaching English in this new normal era, even though before implementing this blended learning, teacher's got training related to the use of blended learning. Both teachers had the same idea about the innovation of this technique used during the new normal era. Teacher A stated that,

"Blended Learning is a good technique to use nowadays. This method is an impressive innovation in combining online and offline learning. Students are more enthusiastic about learning using this method than just online learning".

Teacher B also supported the innovation of blended learning technique. The interview session as follows,

"Combining online classes and offline classes is a great innovation. In light of this new normal, students and teachers are adapting to online classes that took place during the pandemic. So the existence of this blended learning technique makes students more enthusiastic about studying at school even though they have to take turns for occasional online learning".

Based on the observations, the researchers found that the use of blended learning is an innovation that can be used in the new normal. Using blended learning can limit the number of students studying at school so that they can implement health protocols such as maintaining distance, washing hands, and wearing masks. Students and teachers must also receive vaccinations before carrying out offline learning so that their immune systems are stronger and avoid the corona virus.

Thus, Teachers are interested in using blended learning because it combines online and offline classes simultaneously. They also have an excellent opinion about this technique because it gives flexibility in learning sessions and it is a good innovation for combining online and offline classes. Teachers feel

pleased and comfortable using blended learning during the new normal because it makes easier for teachers to provide materials and assignments through an online platform, and they can teach through face-to-face systems in the classroom and online learning simultaneously.

B. The Challenges using Blended Learning

Blended learning has several challenges; one of them is poor internet networks. These make teachers find it challenging to open the Microsoft Team platform, and it impacts the delayed use of blended learning. In the interview session teacher A mention that,

"The most common challenge in using blended learning is about a signal. If the signal has a problem, it can lead to not being able to use blended learning on that day, as well as if blended learning is already running; sometimes, students who take online learning can suddenly leave the room due to unstable signals, so with this problem, the teacher must be able to understand this condition".

While teacher B also stated about the challenge of signal in the use of blended learning.

"Blended Learning has some challenges, but the main obstacle is signal. Sometimes students find it challenging to join online classes because of unstable signals. Erratic weather factors cause this. When it rains heavily, students are usually unable to attend class due to signal problems, but if their signal is stable, they will usually join the middle class."

The observation also confirmed the result of the interview related to the challenges in the use of blended learning. It has been found that the main challenge of using blended learning is the signal. The internet network affects the use of blended learning. Due to this covid-19, the use of online classes has increased, which causes signal delays. However, signals in the school area also experienced problems that delayed blended learning activities. The teacher informed the students who studied from home to wait due to the delay.

Another challenge is the low student motivation. This problem comes because they have been studying from home for too long. The teacher must support the teaching and learning because sometimes students feel bored while online learning. Using blended learning in this new normal era hoped students' motivation would be high again. The teacher can increase students' motivation since they go to school even though not all of them can study together because there is a limitation on the number of

students in one class. However, all students can still learn simultaneously using blended learning. Teacher A stated that,

"By using blended learning, it is possible for students to learn face to face in turn. Therefore, the role of teachers and parents is significant in motivating students because, during the early stages of the covid-19 pandemic, students were fully studied online at home, which at this time, students had to adapt again to offline learning. It is not easy, but teachers and parents' support can increase students' motivation to learn face to face again like before".

Teacher B agree that blended learning can make students' motivation high than before. The interview session as follows,

"With blended learning, students are more enthusiastic about taking part in learning. Even though they cannot go to class simultaneously, they can still study together simultaneously."

It can also be seen from the observation that students who study online with blended learning interact less with teachers. However, students who study in class more often interact with teachers such as answering questions and asking questions related to the material being taught by the teacher.

In this junior high school, blended learning activities used several pieces of equipment. For the teacher, she used a laptop, and there was another teacher responsible for operating a personal computer that allowed students who studied from home to see what happened in the classroom. However, the problem comes when the electricity of the power supply is not very good because it is often for the teacher to wait for the power supply of the electricity to be ready to be used. The power supply is interrupted, making the projector and even the computer not turn on, which makes students who take online learning unable to join because the computer cannot be turned on.

During the observation, the researcher found these particular problems. Teacher with another teacher who is responsible struggles with the problem of electricity. Teacher A mention that,

"Sometimes it is quite often that the electricity has the problem. So the blended learning technique will be too late to implement or even no blended learning during the

lesson. Nevertheless, if possible, it will still be able to run even though the time will be reduced."

While teacher B mention that,

"Sometimes there are certain classes whose electrical connections have problems, so if that happens, the teacher will inform the WhatsApp class group regarding whether or not blended learning is implemented. If they cannot carry out blended learning, the affected are students who study online at home because they cannot study together with their friends at school."

Another challenges faced by the teachers were related to their ability to master the technology. During the observation, the researcher found that the teachers needed another teacher who proficient in computer technology and they knew how to operate the tools such as computers, cameras, and a projector to guarantee the teaching and learning run well. This preparation requires aloud of time and energy. The researcher also found that this preparation stage took a very long time, which affected the teaching and learning process length.

The use of blended learning has various challenges such as unstable signals and disrupted electricity which can hinder the blended learning process. Even the complicated preparation for using blended learning makes teachers also need other teachers in preparing this technique. However, students who join online classes often lose motivation because they lack direct interaction with their friends and teachers. From these challenges, it can be concluded that the use of blended learning is indeed an excellent thing to apply in this new normal era, but the preparation for the use of blended learning needs adequate technology; thus, the teaching and learning can run optimally.

DISCUSSION

A. The Use of Blended Learning in the New Normal Era

This present research found that teachers' perception of blended learning is very positive. They stated that blended learning is a suitable technique in this normal era because it combines face-to-face and online learning. This technique allowed the students to be able to study together simultaneously in online and offline lesson. It is in line with Rasmitadila et al (2020), who stated that Blended learning is the combination of multimedia technology, video CD-ROM, virtual classroom, voicemail, e-mail, conference calls, online text animations, and video streaming.

Teachers are very confident in the use of blended learning. They felt that blended learning gives some benefits to teaching and learning activities. One of them is flexibility in the learning session. By using blended learning, students can access the material in the platform of Microsoft Teams after the lesson has finished. It makes it students easy to study the material. It is in line with the Caravias (2018) statement that blended learning gives the flexible time for students to access the material and creates flexibility in teaching and learning.

Blended learning is a good innovation for combining online and offline classes. With this technique, learning can run well than just online learning. However, teachers and students must use this blended learning innovation as well as possible so that learning can run well while still paying attention to health protocols. It is in line with Wright (2017) stated that in blended learning, both teachers and students must work together to make online learning successful in order to be effective.

B. Challenges that teachers must face while using blended learning

In the application of the blended learning, there are always challenges that teachers face; one of them is poor internet networks. Internet network is the main challenge in the implementation of blended learning. The internet networks at school must be in good condition because signals affect the use of blended learning. It is in line with the previous research from Rasmitadila et al. (2020) that, in the use of blended learning, internet access must provide consistency so that all students can be comfortable knowing the material to study during the lesson.

Another challenge is the low student motivation. Given that some students lack the motivation to participate in online learning, the teacher's role is significant in motivating students to make them ready for learning. Online learning can make students bored because they only see the cellphone screen, which can cause a lack of interaction. Thus, with the combination of online and offline learning through blended learning, it is hoped that the role of teachers and students can interact well during learning. It is in line with Hubackova & Semradova (2016) mention that the success of blended learning depends not only on the quality of the course and the virtual environment but also on the degree to which students are prepared to work in their virtual learning environment.

In addition, the flow of electricity is also a challenge in using blended learning at this time. The use of blended learning requires the use of computers and projectors that require electricity, but if there were problems, the

implementation of blended learning can be delayed, and there is a possibility that it cannot be used during the lesson. Therefore, the teacher can explain using the face-to-face learning when experiencing problems with electricity so that learning can run effectively. It is in line with Alaidarous & Madini (2016), there are no disadvantages to blended learning as long as there is a good teacher who clarifies and explains difficult points.

However, in the use of blended learning, the teacher's role in technology also influences the implementation of this technique. Another challenge is that teachers need other teachers who can use computers, cameras, and projectors to assist in the preparation of blended learning. It is in line with Bi & Shi (2019), blended learning need the teachers roles who able about the information technology skills and classroom teaching design.

CONCLUSION

According to the interview and observation conducted in this research, the researcher formulated two conclusions for this research. First, the teachers' perception of the use of blended learning states that this technique is a good innovation to use in the new normal. This technique can combine online and offline learning at the same time, making it easier for students to study together and access material flexibly through online platforms. Second, the challenges that teachers must face in using blended learning are signals, electricity flow, low student motivation, and the preparation of equipment in the application of blended learning. Even so, the application of blended learning in this new normal is acceptable for teaching English.

SUGGESTION

Despite the recent findings on teachers' perceptions of the use of blended learning in the new normal, this research is limited to EFL teachers at the secondary school level. It is hoped that future research can find out teachers' perceptions at a higher school level.

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