

Language Teaching Post Pandemic Covid-19: Is It Time for Blended Learning?

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Abstract

Today, digital transformation is changing how we work and learn. During the Covid-19 pandemic that resulted in the disruption to global education, the educators and students face challenges on the ongoing e-learning system. Besides the physical, psychological, and emotional challenges, both teachers and students are more engaging with the technology. Reflecting on the Covid-19 pandemic challenges to our education system, should the education post-pandemic Covid-19 transform from face-to-face to online learning or an alternative learning system that is suitable for education stakeholders? According to several studies during the new normal of Covid-19 students, preference for blended learning system are increasing significantly. Blended learning has the potential to be studied by rethinking the implementation of the education system and the concept of instructional delivery, place, time, and how various parties benefit from this system. By integrating new forms of online instruction, learning management systems, and richer device experiences, blended learning can enable more dynamic and rich learning experiences. For the researcher as language teachers, changes in the field of teaching English to technology-savvy students have eliminated several unnecessary costs, such as the production of expensive textbooks which are now being replaced by electronic books. Another advantage is that teaching and learning are carried out remotely and students can access interactive and creative learning media. Blended forms of distance education and learning have advantages in teaching English.

Keywords: blended learning, distance, face-to-face, online, post pandemic, language, teaching

1. Introduction

After the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a change in the way we do activities, including studying around the world. In the field of education, a new experience has emerged for lecturers and students, namely distance online learning. It has also fostered the use of online and digital learning technologies in times of crisis around the world.

Blended learning can be interpreted as a combination of online with face-to-face learning. From the perspective of synchronous and asynchronous learning, blended learning is an effort to apply learning experiences such as face-to-face interactions with lecturers and collaborative collaboration with fellow students (Chaeruman & Maudiarti, 2018). As a response to technological developments, blended learning

is basically a combination of face-to-face learning with online learning that provides the best learning experience. Thus, blended learning is dynamic in responding to technological developments and the needs of the learning itself. As a result, the application and use of technology in blended learning may vary according to needs (Ali et al., 2018).

During the implementation of online learning, there were several obstacles experienced by lecturers at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the lack of mastery of technology, especially for old lecturers. Lecturers have difficulty in providing a satisfying learning experience and in assigning assignments. On the other hand, lecturers have difficulty in preparing learning materials from textbooks into digital format in a relatively short time. This is also experienced by the author himself as a lecturer in English courses and also teaches translation training for students. A common problem that is unavoidable is the availability of stable internet access to support online learning with real-time face-to-face interaction. This is generally experienced by students who take online learning from home with minimal availability of telecommunication infrastructure.

Covid-19 pandemic has lasted almost 2 years, both lecturers and students are starting to get used to the new full-time online experience. They begin to adjust and gain a better experience in using online learning technology. Lecturers and students begin to be able to manage time well so that they can overcome physical obstacles due to full online learning. The availability of online learning tools and media is getting better, for example, universities are building e-learning portals that provide a better learning experience.

English language teaching requires the incorporation of technology into curriculum as well. Given the significance of ongoing interaction in English language learning is a reason why blended learning needs to be taken into consideration as an approach in language teaching. The purpose of this descriptive study is to uncover the related studies that pointed out the possibility of blended learning use for language learning. Based on researcher experience on online learning and the readiness of the available technology infrastructure, the researcher presented the brief students preferences regarding the learning model post pandemic Covid-19.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Blended or Hibryd Learning

In the last decade, there have been debates and theoretical developments about what blended learning definition. Blended learning is a topic of great interest among researchers and education practitioners. Although, the term blended learning came into use in the late 1990s, at that time experts had not yet agreed on one generally recognized definition and way of conducting research and practice in related fields (Hrastinski, 2019).

(Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) define blended learning as "the integration of face-to-face learning experiences in the classroom with online learning experiences". This definition is similar to that proposed by Graham (2006) that mixed learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction. From these two definitions it can be concluded that there is general agreement that the main element of blended learning is face-to-face and online teaching or learning.

The use of the term blended learning is still relatively new. Before this term was widely used, the term hybrid learning was used quite often. Currently the terms blended learning and hybrid learning are used interchangeably. Similarly to the definition of blended learning reviewed, a hybrid learning environment has been described as combining face-to-face education with access to online learning tools (Hall & Davison, 2007). Thus, these two terms (hybrid learning and mixed learning) are used alternatively, but they refer to the same concept.

According to Watson (2008), blended learning uses online and traditional face-to-face learning settings. Blended learning has the following characteristics: 1) Fully online curriculum with all learning taking place online and remotely and without a face-to-face component, 2) Full online curriculum with options for face-to-face instruction, but not required, 3) Mostly or completely online curriculum with certain days required in classrooms or computer labs, 4) Most or completely online curriculum in computer labs or classrooms where students meet on a daily basis, 5) Classroom instruction with a significant and necessary online component that extends learning outside the classroom and outside the school day, 6) Classroom instruction integrates online resources, but there is limited or no requirement for students to be online, 7) Traditional face-to-face settings with little or no online resources or communication.

2.2 Blended Learning Is an Emerging Instructional Pedagogy

The use of the internet in learning or what we usually call E-learning is increasingly in demand and compulsory in Pandemic Covid-19 period. E-learning helps anyone to be able to learn regardless of time and place. However, some students still need face-to-face meetings in class to discuss and complete the learning process that has been passed through the internet. This is similar to blended learning. So the notion of blended learning itself is a learning method where the face-to-face learning process is combined with the e-learning process in harmony.

But let's see how the need for e-learning has also increased before the Covid-19 pandemic era. At the university level, learning materials are most often taught using lecture and textbook formats. In this pedagogical approach, students are assigned to read a textbook at home before class and listen to the instructor's lecture on the assigned material during class. Educational practitioners and researchers recognize the limitations of traditional learning approaches that use textbooks and lecture formats. These limitations have attracted the interest of researchers to examine alternative methodologies that are suitable for technological developments.

In recent years, online learning options, including massive open online courses (MOOCs), have become increasingly available in a variety of ways and are attracting a large number of students who cannot attend classes in person. Online learning has been proposed as an alternative learning paradigm. However, the achievement of learning outcomes with online learning, such as MOOCs alone is low, and the importance of instructor-student and student-student interactions in the classroom has suggested that online learning alone is not sufficient to be the most effective strategy in teaching and learning (Feitosa de Moura et al., 2021). Therefore we need a combination of face-to-face and online teaching and learning that refers to blended learning.

According to (Klimova et al., 2017) the application of blended learning requires an integration full of consideration of face-to-face learning and the instructional component is entirely online. That includes 1) innovative use of technology; 2) reconceptualization of learning paradigms; and 3) Sustainable Assessment and Evaluation of Mixed Learning.

2.3 Advantages and Challenge

Learning in class and e-learning each have advantages and disadvantages, that is what underlies the formation of this Blended Learning method. For example, the lack of learning in the classroom tends to be limited by place and time, but the advantage is that by meeting the teacher, students can immediately get feedback from the teacher on the achievements they have made. On the other hand, learning to use the internet is not limited by place and time, but in the absence of an accompanying teacher, participants do not receive immediate feedback and tend to experience misunderstandings. Blended learning can provide benefits in learning (Lee et al., 2016).

Flexibility. By using the blended learning method, students do not have to come to class every day. Learning can be done via the internet, then one day a week there is a meeting with the teacher/lecturer in the classroom, to get feedback on what has been learned.

Saving time and cost. Using the blended learning method saves more money and time. Learning to use the internet does not have to have a physical book because the material is already available online and participants only need to download it. In addition, students can also save time because they don't have to pay to come to campus, with blended learning methods you can save on transportation costs to get to campus several days a week.

Interactive Material. The subject matter presented via the internet is made into interactive media to make it more detailed and attract the attention of participants. The learning media can be used according to the way each participant learns. For example, through interactive videos, video explanations from lecturers, podcasts and written material in e-book format. All of this is coupled with various live sessions, online chat with lecturers and various other technological support.

Effective and Efficient. Every student has a different way of learning from one another. There are participants who are comfortable studying in the morning, afternoon or even studying at night while relaxing and listening to music. There are also students who are more comfortable studying in their own room, in a coffee shop or in a classroom. That way, using this blended learning method, students can set their own time and place to study.

Although it has benefits and advantages, of course, to implement the blended learning method, students and teachers have their own challenges. Moreover, this blended learning method is a very new method and has not been widely practiced. The following are various challenges that must be faced when implementing the blended learning method.

Rely on technology. The blended learning method, which is a combination of online learning and face-to-face learning, still relies on technology. Schools that start to apply the blended learning method must have the tools, facilities, or infrastructure, as well as financial support that supports them to meet their needs.

Requires good ITC. Not only students are required to master the technology used, teachers are also required to be able to master the technology used for learning to regulate all activities and teaching and learning processes. Teachers are also expected to be able to evaluate and utilize data to address gaps in student learning outcomes.

3. Method

This qualitative research method uses a narrative review. The research was conducted by reviewing the literature on peer reviewed articles within the scope of the study adopted as a research method (Ferrari, 2015). The search was conducted on the sciencedirects database and articles published in journals relevant to the topic of blended learning and preferences for learning methods during the covid-19 pandemic. The steps in conducting this narrative review are (1) finding conditions according to the criteria for online learning and blended learning, (2) stating the conditions and findings from the online learning experience, (3) searching for the required literature and (4) classifying the findings that indicate preference for blended learning, and (5) draw a conclusion.

This study also presents students preferences of language learning post pandemic Covid-19. The participants of this study were students of Economic and Engineering Faculty of Al-Azhar University and the University of North Sumatra who are attended the second semester for academic year 2020/2021. A set of questionnaire contain 8 items are distributed to 95 students. Each items were assessed in Likert-type three-point scales namely, A = Agree, N = Neutral, and D = Disagree. In addition, one item is featured with choices. The setting of this study is the online learning for English class conducted from March 2021 to August 2021.

4. Result and Discussion

Firstly this section provide the finding and discussion on the students preferences on online learning. Lastly, the descriptive review is provided of the finding of narrative review related to this study.

4.1 Students Preferences on Online Learning

Table 1. Frequency of Students Preferences

No	Questions	Responses					
		A	%	N	%	D	%
1	Use support devices on online learning	41	43,2%	46	48,4%	7	7,4%
2	Clarity of lecturer instruction	63	66,3%	29	30,5%	2	2,1%
3	Clarity of learning materials	41	43,2%	48	50,5%	6	6,3%
4	Interaction with lecturers online	59	62,1%	28	29,5%	6	6,3%
5	Interaction with students online	58	61,1%	31	32,6%	6	6,3%
6	Completing the assignment on time	60	63,2%	29	30,5%	5	5,3%
7	Well managed time	51	53,7%	39	41,1%	5	5,3%
	Choices	1*		2*		3*	
8	Preferred Learning System	37	38,9%	25	26,3%	33	34,7%
	Average	37	55,88%	25	37,5%	33	13,6%

Description: A = Agree; N = Neutral; D= Disagree

1* = Face to face ; 2* = Online learning; 3 * = Blended Learning

N = 95

Table 1 above figure out the frequencies of students preferences on online learning that consisted of technology usage, instruction and material clarity, interaction, assignment, time management and preferred learning system. Out of 95 students, only 43,2% use support device in online learning. Supporting devices is a crucial factor in online learning implementation. The devices quality affects the instructor and learners experience on learning. It was found that 43,2 to 66,3% experienced the clarity of instruction and materials. It reflect that the quality of audio and video and material formats the key students comprehension on material presented online. Concerning the assignment, 63.2% of students complete the assignment on time. It is reinforced by the students ability to manage their schedules.

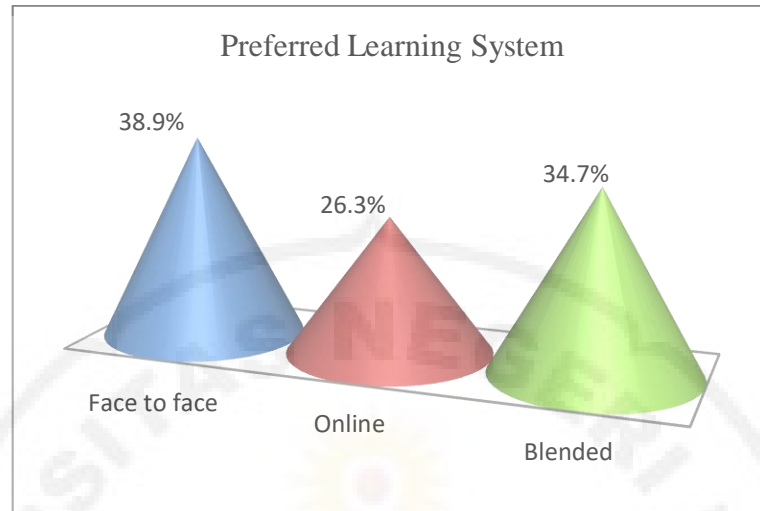


Figure 1. Students preferences on learning system post-pandemic

Figure 1 shows that out, 38.9% of students prefer face to face learning system, 26.3% of students prefer online learning, and 34.7% of students prefer blended learning system. The blended learning is at the second place preferred learning system post pandemic COVID-19. Based on Table 1 and Figure 1, the average of students experience on online learning is 55,8% and preferred blended learning is 34.7%.

4.2 Blended Learning Advantages

Blended learning can be applied in an effort to increase students' academic abilities through a combination of LMS and virtual face-to-face. Applying the blended learning model using Schoology can improve students' academic abilities. Based on (Setiawan & Aden, 2020), the class that applied blended learning showed that the students' academic ability was higher than the academic ability of the control class that did not apply blended learning. The use of the blended learning model has a positive effect in increasing test scores. Through a series of research results obtained that blended learning tools have very good validity to be used as learning tools (Wijayanti et al., 2017).

The findings of (Alsahhi et al., 2019) reveal that there are statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups in research using blended learning. It is known that the attitude of the experimental group is also more positive towards the use of mixed learning. This study is important because it shows that blended learning is effective in education, especially in higher education. This means education can be more effective when the advantages of the web environment are combined with face-to-face interactions in courses that contain more visual elements. This study recommends that lecturers apply a combination of technology and direct teaching through the use of blended learning. From the perspective of students who can access online lectures and use the zoom application for meetings, it shows that the internet is sufficient for online use in the country, so

it can be assumed that technology to improve learning has developed. Blended learning is just as effective for teaching medical students as traditional learning (Makhdoom et al., 2013).

(Suwannaphisit et al., 2021) conducted two learning models on medical students in developing countries, the final test scores of the two model treatments were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the two methods providing more reliable results than survey-based assessments. Evaluations like this on the effectiveness of blended learning for health professionals are timely and very important during the COVID-19 pandemic for both health educators and students.

4.3 Blended Learning Requirements

Concerning to the required device, (Dihamri et al., 2021) shows that learning will be more effective if all students have laptops, have a Wifi network, internet quotas are met, lecturers provide additional explanations and there are opportunities for material discussion during face-to-face lectures, and lecturers compile and present lecture materials using an online learning system that interesting, short and easy for students to understand.

Blended learning can be an optimal learning alternative in four stages. First; presenting digital material asynchronously means that all the material that we want to provide should be able to be seen by students before the start of learning in the form of for example PDF, Word, Power Point, pictures, videos on Learning management systems such as Moodle, Google Classroom and so on. Second; keep the asynchronous guidance and discussion of material through chats, mailing lists and discussion forums. Third; process of elaboration, demonstration and practice. Fourth; evaluation of the learning process in the form of quizzes, written tests (objective and subjective), project learning in the web or media or technology used for learning (Aritonang et al., 2021).

Moodle and web courses provide easier access to information and knowledge exchange. Instructors can encourage students to use the live chat feature in Moodle when communicating and working on group assignments. There are also sites like PBworks, Wikispaces, and Edmodo, which give instructors the opportunity to create a student-centred and collaborative learning environment. Attending webinars and live events adds interest and increases student motivation. Students can listen and benefit from the lectures given. There are many other ideas that instructors can use in their courses to blend technology with face-to-face teaching. The choice of ideas will vary depending on student needs, and learning objectives.

Although there are indications the emerging need to integrate technology into face-to-face language classes, there are still some limitations that could be the subject of new research. The new generation is equipped with digital backgrounds; so the mixed learning approach can be very useful because it will improve the quality of learning and increase students' access to information. Technology collaboration with face-to-face instruction can stimulate learning and provide a more collaborative learning experience. Furthermore, universities need to adapt to

these changes to keep up with the evolving demands for both students and the workplace. In addition, since instructors aim to provide students with the knowledge and skills required for discovery and experimentation, it is their job to select the appropriate tool depending on the learning objectives. Student involvement, motivation, and interaction are key factors to achieve a successful learning process. Students will be motivated when they see the benefits of learning from personal experience with the use of technology. Therefore, blended learning can offer its own challenges according to the circumstances experienced by students (Okaz, 2015).

Other researcher taking a blended learning approach that uses video assignments in front of each class to stimulate interest in the topic and provide basic knowledge, coupled with lectures that have problem solving in class, is a more effective strategy for science education compared to traditional approaches. It was found that giving video assignments did not increase student test scores but increased attendance and satisfaction. Giving assignments in such a way can create time in the classroom for active learning (Stockwell et al., 2015).

4.4 Students and Teachers Experience on Blended Learning

Students generally prefer offline meetings because of the higher levels of all types of student interaction (student-student, student-content, and student-teacher), and higher levels of engagement. However, students appreciate the possibility to do small group work outside of class in an online environment. Students literally state that they learn more during offline synchronous meetings as compared to online meetings, for the reasons listed above. These results support the application of blended learning. (Meulenbroeks, 2020). This is in line with recent research on the level of interaction in online and offline environments in general. (Shu & Gu, 2018) suggesting the interconnectedness and benefits that are shared in the room in offline meetings. Connectivity is one of the three basic human psychological needs.

Students generally prefer synchronous offline meetings over synchronous online meetings. Students feel a higher degree of connectedness among themselves and with the teacher. Students do not have to face obstacles in asking questions, reporting more focus, and respecting the physical environment during offline meetings. According to them, the most important difference between online and offline synchronous meetings is the higher perceived level of student interaction in offline meetings (Thaariq & Anggraini, 2021).

This higher level of interaction is facilitated by 1) quick reactions to one another's comments; 2) direct eye contact between students and teachers; and 3) body language. Studies support the application of the blended learning concept but provide some rather specific directions on blended course design as well (Stein & Graham, 2020). Students stated that offline meetings are an important part of education because of the perceived high quality of all types of interactions and in terms of interconnectedness and connectedness with each other and with the teacher (Meulenbroeks, 2020). The advantages of blended learning are increasingly being

recognized; these include the provision of new learning environments, more opportunities for learning, less dependence on teachers, facilitation of collaboration among students, and recognition and reinforcement of student efforts (Gil & García, 2011).

4.5 Blended Learning and Language Teaching

An observation to the differences between traditional, web-based, blended learning and online courses; application of blended learning courses in the process of learning English was conducted at universities setting. The survey results prove that the integration of blended learning courses can be carried out successfully through a combination of online learning and face-to-face classes. The findings described will be useful for teachers and researchers working in this field to overcome barriers, become more experienced and understand the main concepts of blended learning (Hubackova et al., 2011).

Blended learning as a combination of online learning and face-to-face classes should be the top priority mode for teaching and learning foreign languages for technology literate students. The importance of the integration of blended learning is justified by the fact that learning a foreign language implies a mandatory communication activity that can be realized both in the classroom and in the e-learning environment. Students get the opportunity to develop their communication skills outside of the classroom through online interactions with each other while discussing issues in forums and chatting and doing other activities. Furthermore, blended learning provides a number of important advantages for both teachers and students, making them active participants in the learning process who are responsible for their own work (Dias & Diniz, 2012).

In developing online learning, lecturers need time to optimize and maintain the quality of the teaching process. Therefore, the suggested learning mode is a model that can keep pace with time and in accordance with the new requirements of the education system where information technology and use of online resources (Buran & Evseeva, 2015)

In learning translation, (Lou et al., 2014) observed that students showed better learning satisfaction when learning to translate English sentences using the blended teaching method. Students interact actively, and accept other people's suggestions with an open mind; interaction with the teacher is also active and positive, and the learning effect is better than through traditional learning. The weblog platform motivates students to study and practice often, consequently leading to the improvement of English translation skills; students prefer to translate English sentences through weblogs rather than through traditional teaching methods.

(Kofar, 2016) reported the main challenges of students on learning can be overcome by training teachers on how to apply a blended learning approach. If lecturers are given training that can explain to them about the application of effective and appropriate blended learning, lecturers can manage time efficiently, and thus, their workload may not increase as much as they imagined. Lecturers can

also find ways to make learning interesting for students with different learning styles and take action to create a learner-centred environment.

The blended learning approach to foreign language teaching has become of great interest to language teachers around the world. Blended learning complements traditional face-to-face teaching and learning environments with various types of technology-based instruction that are not achieved alone by the use of pure online learning. Many higher education institutions currently use blended learning as an additional means of developing students' language (Tosun, 2015).

5. Conclusion

Based on the students preferences and related literatures on blended learning, the main reasons for promoting blended English learning are user autonomy and flexibility. There are different experiments with collaborative learning, constructive learning, cooperative learning and transformative learning have shown that by adopting the available technology, users i.e. lecturers and students find flexibility and affordability during online learning. On the other hand, the lack of direct interaction often results in the dissatisfaction of lecturers and students towards online learning. So new way should be discovered, namely by utilizing learning experiences that combine distance learning and face-to-face substitute learning named blended learning.

The promotion of blended learning in language teaching has been echoed by many studies. However, transitioning from one learning model to another is time-consuming and requires a lot of effort, so initiatives to support mixed learning environments are likely to be achieved by mutual agreement of students, lecturers and institution.

The use of technology can be seen as an innovative challenge to restructure teaching and learning processes, integrating technology, collaborative and interactive learning. Understanding and responding to the specific needs of the academic community is a must for planning the blended learning. At the same time, awareness of learning strategies allows lecturers to select more accurate teaching strategies to meet the specific requirements of students. Therefore learning efficacy, engagement, and interaction on blended learning can be tailored and personalized to potentiate students' learning success.

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