

THE CHALLENGES OF APPLYING BLENDED LEARNING IN ELT FOR INDONESIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DUE TO COVID-19: A REVIEW

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 disease widespread globally forced the world to shut down the direct interactions, educational field has alternative way to overcome this phenomenon by applying blended learning. This model becomes popular because the teaching and learning process are done in both online and offline settings to ease students and teachers, especially during pandemic. Higher students have felt familiar to blended learning in some subjects, such as English subject for EFL students, meanwhile for the use of blended learning high school students in Indonesia is low.

Keywords: *Blended learning, English language teaching, Indonesian high school students, pandemic COVID-19*

INTRODUCTION

The spread of COVID-19 disease had shut down the world by minimizing all the social activities and interaction physically. This disease outbreak started around 2020 where it became a global pandemic affected Indonesia as well (UNICEF et al., 2021). Because of this unfortunate phenomenon, educational process had to get impacted on being paused for a while—in certain condition which forced them to do the distance learning, such as the use of distance learning as a replacement for teachers and students from a face-to-face activity that they used to do, also is beneficial to stop the widespread of COVID-19, so it could not infect more people (Basith et al., 2020). Until early July 2020, according to the Ministry

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Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
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of Education and Culture of Indonesia with a note that each region had fully preparation of school administration, the parents, and government itself (Kristiyanto et al., 2020). Up to 6 September 2021, the government approved to reopened the schools in limiting face-to-face learning by following national guidelines policy (Karana, 2021).

Students nowadays in the need of speed and easily access technology, hence language learning must be applied to the latest tools by integrating both traditional (face-to-face learning) with modern (online learning) environments, or in short as blended learning. By providing both learning settings, the expert digital users as students is expected to respon positively, so teachers can get the chances to apply technology outside the classroom to learn language (Prihastiwi et al., 2017).

With all the unexpected change of situation, the students were not given many times to be adapted to the whole online learning, so they were not fully prepared (Dwiyanti et al., 2020). The teacher who has a role along with administrators to make sure that the aims of academic learning are achieved in the midst of widespread of COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmad & Triastuti, 2021) to avoid low infrastructure and inability to access the technology that can cause the inference in blended learning (Namyssova et al., 2019).

From the statements, there are some reasons and factors influence the use of blended learning in class to be recommended, especially during pandemic times. The sudden transition undoubtedly challenge the teachers and students to have some obstacles that possibly occur within the teaching and learning process which require some determination on how to maintain the learning process to keep going on. Therefore, the researcher takes an interest to investigate the challenges of applying

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (AICELT)

Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
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blended learning in ELT for Indonesian high school students during COVID-19 with the question: How are the teachers and students face the challenges of blended learning in ELT for Indonesian high school students during COVID-19?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a call from government's advice and education experts to use blended learning as the best choice in making learning to be convenient because it integrates both traditional methods with modern ones (Mahmud, 2021). Some educational institutions had applied this model to their classroom. The idea of online learning may be not an unfamiliar concept for higher education except for lower level like secondary and primary educations for teacher, parents, and students (Ramli et al., 2022), as well as combining face-to-face learning into the online learning as a modern construct that represented as blended learning (Al-Bazar et al., 2021).

Blended learning had been implemented into educational setting recently, especially in foreign language context (Tobing & Pranowo, 2020), but it increased in popularity once the pandemic affected globally that made online learning to be more popular for the teachers, even in Indonesia it became alternative way to learn and teach with the help from the government to develop a suitable strategy for online learning throughout pandemic (Ardinengtyas & Himawan, 2021). Combining both online and offline learning settings, blended learning is appropriate to be used during pandemic (Watrianthos et al., 2021).

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Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
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Online learning implication is provided by technology such as digital materials that can be accessed by both teachers and students wherever and whenever they want to (Mannong, 2020). Nevertheless, the use of face-to-face learning still cannot be replaced with online learning, which lead both learnings to be combined together with two different settings (Ramli et al., 2022).

Latest blended learning environments even included computer-assisted language learning technologies or is known as CALL, where these new technologies online system is brought through a learning management system that can have more flexible and simple platform (Xu et al., 2020). There had been a survey where students preferred blended learning rather than pure online nor offline learning; they least agreed on pure online, but favor online assignments, quizzes, and videos that can improve their online learning better (Zhou & Chen, 2021).

There had some studies on using blended learning into the ELT. For the start, blended learning use in developing country like Mexico proved blended learning to be more effective than traditional learning and had a positive influence on students' grades and competition rates in English by using administrative data as the source from a big public university in Mexico (Xu et al., 2020). As for Indonesia, the use of blended learning in ELT done in a higher education, Universitas Negeri Malang by comparing two classes consisted of 53 students in total of writing courses via Google classroom to the other class which had a traditional way. It was found later the class who had blended learning method got better result in learning writing than the one with traditional learning method (Cahyono et al., 2019).

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Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

METHOD

This article followed Synder (2019) guidelines in conducting literature review method by dividing the process into 4 steps: designing the review, conducting the review, analyzing the review and writing the review. According to this review about the challenges in applying blended learning in ELT, the very first step is designing the topic that fits to the objectives of review by using a systematic review approach— to investigate blended learning challenges during COVID-19 in Indonesian high schools that has been going on and is still a fresh subject to discuss after seeing the relevant phenomenon. After deciding the topic of review, next conducting the review by selecting some relevant journals that might similar from one article to another on Perpustakaan Nasional Indonesia, Google Scholar et cetera. At step 3, analyzing resources that fits the topic of review; related article journals and books with the year from 2017 until 2022 indexed on Sinta 1-3 and Scopus Q1-Q3 about blended learning and its challenges related to it. Finally, at step 4, the related studies and topic are compared to the other ones by writing them out with organized information in details then connect it to the relevant sources.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Before COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, blended learning is not as unfamiliar as it seems for educational setting, especially in higher education because most of researchers and educators took a liking to combine technology into their face-to-face teaching and learning process (Amenduni & Ligorio, 2022), however, some institutions did not have any obstacles and challenges in using online learning since they had applied blended learning previously (Junus et al., 2021).

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Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

As for the school, SIKL (School Indonesian Kuala Lumpur) in Malaysia had used blended learning model strategy in their learning, so they were well-prepared to implement it when pandemic occurred (Hanik et al., 2021). The implication of blended learning before COVID-19 pandemic seemed constantly developed more for private schools, since it was mentioned by a study in developing country, for instance in India about how blended learning is more familiar in private schools and universities including the urban area where they facilitate advanced tools and digitals as well as the competent and skilled teachers are mostly available there (Deshpande & Shesh, 2021). In Indonesia, the use of blended learning was also not very widely used in every schools due to the same factors as the other developing countries, especially in rural area and public schools.

When COVID-19 breakdown, the government of each country had demanded educational settings to switched their usual face-to-face teaching and learning process into full distance learning. The latest blended learning method that combine online and face-to-face teaching seems fit to be applied during pandemic (Watrianthos et al., 2021). There is a positive impact of using online learning unexpectedly due to the lockdown of pandemic spread which causes the students to be more successful in class despite limitation of sources and flexibility with an internet connection only (Ramli et al., 2022).

The moment COVID-19 virus spread started slowing down, Indonesian government had commanded schools to reopen after months. According to a study done about Post-Pandemic and E-learning sustainability, even though the use of e-learning influence a positive responses, both students and teachers prefer to just feel neutral about

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Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

continuing post-pandemic teaching and learning proses of e-learning (El Rizaq & Sarmini, 2021). Another study about the implication of blended learning after pandemic also concluded the involvement of government to pursue the blended learning methods post-COVID-19 in order to develop societies (Devi et al., 2021). The role and policy of government are definitely important here to keep supporting the use of blended learning even after the pandemic is over.

There have been many implementations of blended learning, specifically in ELT for higher education level. As for lower education level, however, has not applied as many as the latter before pandemic occurred, but blended learning of general English will most likely to be used among schools and educational institutions in the world (Tomlinson, 2018) and Tomlinson is right when pandemic unexpectedly happened. All subject was forced to prepare the online learning as soon as it needed, especially English.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach of blended learning in ELT where the students have a communication with other people in the target language in order to complete communicative task prior to discuss the language in use and connective task (Tomlinson, 2019). To prove the effectiveness of English teaching to organize it with blended learning system based on the data mining and cloud classroom blended learning sources, a study approved blended learning might help students to increase their English skills (Yang, 2022). It is clear that language learning has a strong connection to blended learning strategy to support the ELT process.

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Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
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A study about the implementation of social media on English subject as a blended learning method with Communicative approach conducted by inserting Be-Smart, Zoom and Google Classroom along with Instagram, Facebook and YouTube to increase students' English competence during COVID-19 pandemic. The students were from higher education level located in university in Yogyakarta. Based on students' activeness, creativity and self-confidence they were proven to be improved in English skills because of social media engagement that boost up their interest (Mustadi et al., 2021).

Most of higher education institutions have applied blended learning in ELT way before pandemic. The comparative study between face-to-face, distance and blended learning for EFL students in university took survey to saw which learning strategy is more effective in learning English and apparently blended learning was more favorable among students to made them be more competent to learn English (Podoliak, 2022).

One of a few examples blended learning in ELT context for secondary school students about creating short story by using Moodle. In this method, teachers' role to make interface and blended learning autonomy-facilitation (synchronous and asynchronous), task items (e-quiz, assessment, e-forum), short story topic (exposition, resolution, plot structure, vocabulary and comprehension) with students' interrelation. When they would like to study with blended learning system, students are given a choice to what kind of blended learning types or form they want to and the materials they choose are going to show up on their platform together with students' grade level. The exercise are e-quizzes, e-fill-in-the-blank question, and multiple choices (Wong et al., 2020).

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English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

A pre-experimental study done on EFL university students in based on speaking and listening with blended system by using Hitutor. With the aims to increase students' performances in English, the results from 136 participants that separated into 3 teams to learned English separately as well both in face-to-face teaching and online learning stated they had a positive attitude towards the use of Hitutor to improve their English communication with the help of online platform such as Hitutor (Wang, 2021).

The application of blended learning is not that newly fresh, but the implication of blended learning in high schools level may still be called as new since it happened for an alternative way to avoid physical contacts to anyone with distance learning by using internet, especially during COVID-19 pandemic. English as a subject has many creative ways to create interesting materials with blended learning in many more skills such as Reading and Grammar, or even Vocabulary. Some schools, even public schools in Indonesia regions for instance who were barely using internet to submit tasks before pandemic, stay using some websites or applications for assignments meanwhile the students got to study at school directly in the classroom with their classmates.

Ever since COVID-19 pandemic, teachers must prepared themselves to switch the teaching and learning setting into a complete opposite one; online learning. A recent study about English teachers preparation and challenges they face on blended learning in term of online setting; unable to engage students on online learning, low parental guidance and students' activeness, have qualms whether the students are not "robot" but "the real human" who assign the tasks and test (Alimyar & Lakshmi G, 2021).

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (AICELT)

Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

During COVID-19 pandemic, teachers had tried their best to be adaptable to the new transition of teaching and learning process, so they can come up with better strategies to cope with the loss of effectiveness due to limited interaction in learning for the students (Saboowala & Manghirmalani Mishra, 2021). Some challenging factors contributed to the Saudi Arabians' teachers in blended learning environment; Lack of training and support (including administration support and time-consuming because of low training) with system and technical issues (unable to connect the internet, obstacle to access the system) (Aldosemani et al., 2019). Shortly, teachers' preparation as the determinant for teaching and learning process to be successful in the first place.

Although students might be way too familiar with technology parts in blended learning more than the teachers, there are still some difficulties happen. Students and other educational participants might find the use of technology as a positive movement, but in reality language teachers still have obstacles in this sudden transition, also students and even government cannot fully prepare the whole change in learning process. They do not have enough time to be competent in using gadgets and any digital tools to teach, so they can bring themselves to be enjoyed (Alimyar & Lakshmi G, 2021). Another challenge might be how to maintain students' learning management during online learning (Simbolon, 2021) she also mentioned in her result about the challenging learning online setting is choosing suitable materials for students and guiding students to complete their learning, including the technical issue.

The use of blended learning in ELT has some challenges especially during pandemic can be seen clearly in school levels, particularly public schools in Indonesia where they mostly did assignments without any e-

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (AICELT)

Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

learning materials to support such as applications or websites but mostly Google machine. With the unexpected pandemic, teachers and students in public high school must adjust to the new transition, and when the COVID-19 virus slowly slowed down, they used to divide group of students to study at school into two sessions in a day with assignments done online via Google classroom, for instance in English test to answer some multiple choices questions. Students who are not familiar with such application might find it challenging to use.

CONCLUSION

The use of blended learning for ELT had been applied in the classroom, especially in higher education and private schools with perfect facility since most of materials related to the social context; such as songs and speech that can easily be gotten from online platform, but when Blended learning has reached its peak among educational field the moment when COVID-19 virus was announced to become a global pandemic, teachers, students, and even government took a lot completely distinguished teaching and learning system to be online until about a year later in mid-2021 Indonesia government stated to reopened the school. The students who are familiar with internet are not used to the educational platforms as well as the teachers, which lead to the challenging process to do. In Indonesia public schools, some facilities and connection are still major challenges. For the next research, it is recommended to do some study about students and teachers' satisfaction about blended learning use in ELT due to COVID-19 pandemic.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (AICELT)

Mataram, Indonesia, 7 - 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>
English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

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English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

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