EFL STUDENTS’ VOICES ON BLENDED LEARNING: PREFERENCES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: The objective of the present research was to know how EFL students perceive blended learning by using LMS with Moodle in speaking class at State Islamic University of Mataram especially in English Language Education Study Program. This research employed mixed method by involving 94 students as the respondents to fill out the questionnaires items and were invited to the interview. It is found that students positively perceive the use of blended Learning using LMS in speaking class. Most of the students chose “agree” and “neutral” on their responses to the questions. Furthermore, through the interview, they mostly view LMS positively. It means that Learning speaking with blended learning using LMS had a good impact on them in learning process. Therefore, Blended Learning can be an alternative way in managing a learning process, especially during online learning. Challenges experienced by the students were also discussed in this study.

Keywords: blended learning, learning management system, students’ perceptions

Received: Jun 4, 2023 Accepted: Jun 21, 2023 Published: Jun 23, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Web-based education uses communication technologies and the internet to conduct online courses. E-learning can be used to describe any learning electronically mediated by or facilitated by commercial software. Reflected to Covid-19 pandemic, the government reopened offline learning in April 2021. However, it was still limited in terms of face-to-face access to the school. This condition is an appropriate momentum to introduce blended learning as one of the learning strategy (Watanapokakul, 2022). Blended delivery is a method of delivering information in a variety of ways which combines a traditional classroom approach with an online learning strategy through web-based learning.

Online education provides exciting opportunities to expend the coverage of education and reduce its costs. The most important thing for us is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Blended learning blends the traditional classroom with the online learning model. It provides learners with an efficient and effective educational experience, as well as the extra benefit of increased flexibility (Ariawan, 2021). It means that students are able to access the learning remotely from home without physically attend the class. This concept seems visible and applicable to any learning, not to mention English language learning either in writing, listening, reading or speaking class (Rahman, 2020). This occurs in almost entire level of education especially in higher education. However, there must be a pedagogical consequence for teachers where they have to be more creative and adaptive toward effective learning (Ribahan, 2023). To enhance the online learning experience for students, educators may employ diverse pedagogical approaches and strategies to furnish them with improved learning.
prospects. Within this particular context, educators have the option to utilise Blackboard technology as a means of facilitating increased learner motivation and active engagement throughout the educational experience (Tawalbeh, 2018).

During the critical period of Covid-19, State Islamic University of Mataram took an initiative to start generating blended learning by mixing the online mode through Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle with offline class. The lecturers were asked to provide at minimum 70% meeting online and 30% meeting offline or the proportions are fully based on the class agreement between lecturers and students. In online learning, there are certainly a lot of dynamics that occur both leading to positive changes and challenges that hinder the effectiveness of learning. This research is significant to explore how EFL students perceive LMS with Moodle as a learning platform during Covid-19. The present research aims to investigate EFL students’ perceptions on blended learning using LMS in speaking class by taking a case study at English Language Education Study Program State Islamic University of Mataram.

The present study is focused on exploring students’ perception toward blended learning with LMS as the blackboard. Perception theory posits that perception is a subjective phenomenon that is influenced by contextual factors. Individuals’ perceptions and interpretations are shaped by their personal experiences, knowledge, backgrounds, and self-assessments (Yammarino & Atwater, 1993). The self-perception of individuals can potentially exert a noteworthy impact on their intentions, as posited by Maselli & Altrocchi (1969). To clarify, when a system enhances an individual’s perception of their abilities and performance, it will bolster their inclination to continue utilizing the system.

In terms of blended learning, this research will explore students’ perspectives on blended learning in this case the LMS used as a learning platform. Some experts define blended learning as a mode of learning by combining face-to-face and online meetings (Fuller, 2021). Blended learning is a term that encompasses various combinations of instructional methods, pedagogical approaches, and technologies (Hrastinski, 2019). Another definition also posits that the conceptualization of blended learning ought to be grounded in pedagogical theory and encompass a combination of didactic instruction and experiential learning (Cronje, 2020).

Lim & Morris (2009) identified three categories of factors that impact students’ learning in blended learning environments: instructional variables, motivational factors, and learners’ variables. Instructional variables pertain to the caliber of educators and educational activities, provision of learning assistance, and academic workload. The motivational factors that are considered in this context comprise six distinct variables, namely reinforcement, course relevance, interest, self-efficacy, affect, and learner control. Regarding learner variables, this pertains to factors such as prior experience with online coursework, level of computer proficiency, student preference for delivery format, and typical study duration. Lu et al., (2012) conducted a study that examined various factors affecting students' satisfaction in blended learning, utilizing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Information System Satisfaction Model (ISSM). The variables that are considered in this context are the attributes of students, instructors, courses, infrastructure, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use.

A previous study conducted by Truong (2021) indicated that a majority of the subjects found the supplementary Learning Management System (LMS) techniques to be beneficial in enhancing their oral communication abilities, particularly in terms of grammatical proficiency, encompassing syntax, lexicon, and phonetics. In a similar vein, a survey study by Tandy Rerung (2018) see how successful blended learning has been at making an impact on learners as well as creating a different learning environment based on the chosen subject course It may also offer some new perspectives on language learning, particularly in terms of listening and speaking abilities. The findings of this study is face-to-face learning continues to play an important role, particularly in the learning process of students, however, online learning can be
viewed as a tool to help them practice the skills outside of the classroom. To promote and improve the effectiveness of online learning, teachers should explain in detail how students can use the portal in conjunction with face-to-face learning in term of use, the study will find it easy (Shaheen, 2022). Online learning as a self-driven learning platform (Liaw & Huang, 2013), hopefully, will gradually assist students in becoming independent learners or Al-Shaikhli (2023) called self-regulated learning ability. According to García-Pérez et al., (2021), self-regulated learning refers to the capacity of learners to establish their learning goals and strategies, and to implement these strategies in accordance with their intended outcomes. According to Zimmerman (2002), self-regulated learning refers to the capacity of learners to autonomously and actively participate in self-motivating and behavioral procedures that enhance the attainment of goals. During the lesson, the teacher can also act as a facilitator, assisting and monitoring students’ discussions. Because a lack of teacher attention may demotivate students to work with online learning, it is suggested that teachers bring some feedback and reviews into the classroom to keep students motivated.

Another relevant study is a survey study by Sari & Wahyudin (2019) who investigated students' attitudes toward English language learning and the use of Instagram in their English for Business class. The findings of this research are Instagram could be one of the options for promoting language teaching at the tertiary level. It is also regarded as an effective pedagogical tool for learning EFL in order to ensure the success of the online educational environment to encourage students' interaction, motivation, and attitudes toward learning English. A study by Aji et al., (2020) also highlighted teachers' perspective about blended learning where the teachers claimed several benefits, including enhanced learning outcomes, increased learner autonomy, and user-friendliness. In contrast, with respect to the perceptions of students, they also conveyed advantages of blended learning such as adaptable learning, enhanced motivation, increased interaction, and the development of their information and communication technology (ICT) competencies.

Next review of previous study is a survey study by Al Zumor et al.,(2013). This research was conducted at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. The objective of their research is to identify students’ perceptions of blended Learning Environment: Advantages, Limitations and Suggestions for Improvement. The findings of this study demonstrate the intervention's transformative potential, there may be a problem with generalizing the findings to all courses in a university setting. Another study was reported by Dewanto (2021). The findings of his found that students view offline learning to be more successful than online learning. Students like online lectures because they find it simple to understand the information due to direct communication; also, there are more engaging activities that can be done in the classroom to make students feel more focused, active, and engaged in the learning process. Moreover, students find it difficult to communicate with lecturers, which prevents them from fully comprehending the material, and they are easily distracted by the surrounding environment, which is not conducive to learning. They also have poor internet connections, limited activities, and are easily bored. Furthermore, study by Siahaan (2020) indicated that the utilization of Edmodo had a positive impact on the language proficiency of the participants. It facilitated the development of interaction and communication skills, provided greater opportunities for idea sharing, and fostered the growth of vocabulary and creativity. Nevertheless, they held the view that online learning should not supplant the conventional method of in-person instruction. The researcher appeared to propose the integration of the two modes of learning.

Besides the positive perception towards blended learning, there are also students who perceive that blended learning has some obstacles. A significant finding found that students perceive blended learning by using LMS a lack of engagement between the instructor and students, as well as among the students themselves, in both virtual and blended learning formats (Gaffas, 2023). Notwithstanding, educators encountered impediments in delivering instruction
through blended learning, including inadequate internet connectivity, protracted time consumption, and limited expertise. Furthermore, inadequate internet connectivity and incomprehensible learning materials were identified as impediments to the acquisition of knowledge (Aji et al., 2020).

Another study also reported that in relation to the current system (blended learning), the evaluations of quality and contentment among students were inferior during the initial year of use, but improved with prolonged use over two or three years (Naveh & Shelef, 2022). Furthermore, the issue of slow Internet connectivity and inadequate Internet availability for certain students situated beyond the university premises impeded the efficacy of the blended learning milieu for a subset of students (Gyamfi & Gyaase, 2015).

Most of the studies indicate that students’ have various perspectives toward blended learning, however, they mostly focus on determining positive or negative perception without providing a neutral option which indicate a balance between positive and negative viewpoint. The present study is aimed to take part on revealing findings from both survey and interview by highlighting positive, negative or neutral preference for students. Furthermore, the combination of survey and interview research design will complement the data from this study.

RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher tries to find the students' perceptions on Blended learning. Qualitative research methods were developed to study, primarily by educational researchers and other social scientists e.g. motivation, communication, understanding. The researcher chooses mixed method because it can provide detailed data in order to achieve the objective research where the quantitative data were gained through questionnaire and qualitative data employed interview. The presence of a researcher in this study indicates that the researcher is an important component in the design of data, collection of data, analysis of data, and reporting of data. The researcher gathered the necessary data through questionnaire and interview in this study. The study was conducted at English Language Education Study Program, State Islamic University of Mataram. The researchers selected students in second semester of ISCP 2 subject as the subject of this research. The students experienced both online and offline mode in this class setting. The researchers employed interview as the instrument to collect the data.

In this research, the researchers used descriptive qualitative analysis to analyze the data in this study. According to Mathew. B, Miles and Huberman, there are three steps in qualitative data analysis: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. First step is data condensation as the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming data from a large corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials. The researcher used this step after collecting the data to analyze the data, such as selecting the appropriate data that is relevant to the case or transforming data into another form, such as from the interview result in the audio record becoming a written form of text. Qualitative data can be transformed in a variety of ways by data condensation, including selection, summary or paraphrase, subsumption in a larger pattern, and so on. The second step is data display as the follow up of data selection. This process is defined as an organized, compressed assembly of information that allows conclusion drawing and action. Data visualization assists readers in understanding what is going on and taking action based on that understanding, whether it is further analysis or action. Data visualization and data condensing are aspects of analysis. A good display design is based on clear data condensation. The last step is conclusion drawing/verification. This step aims to draw conclusions and verify them. After condensing and displaying the data, the researcher draws conclusions. To make a verification based on the analyzed data, the data must be cross-checked with other previous studies and the process is repeated by other researchers to ensure
the data reliability. The researchers also compare the data to the findings of previous studies on students’ perceptions of blended learning.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Students’ Perception**

In terms of general preferences, more than 50% of students prefer direct learning (face-to-face) as in a normal classroom setting. Meanwhile, students who choose blended mode are 45.7%. This means that students basically want to return to normal classroom conditions where they can directly interact at school with teachers and friends throughout the semester. However, this figure of more than 45% is also categorized as high if considering the conditions at that time where it was not possible to carry out full offline learning activities.

### Table 1. Students’ General Preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Total of students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Offline learning</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Blended learning</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Online learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, when students were asked more operational questions related to the perception of blended learning, most of them chose the neutral option, except for the question item related to the ease of completing tasks on the LMS where they perceived it positively with a rate of more than 50%. It can also be concluded from the data below that students have a positive perception towards using LMS in speaking learning because they believe that LMS can improve their speaking skills and motivation in learning speaking.

### Table 2. Students’ Perceptions on Blended Learning Using LMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I like to learn speaking with blended learning using LMS</td>
<td></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Blended learning using LMS helps me to learn speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Through blended learning using LMS I am able to increase my motivation to learn speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I think learn speaking with blended learning using LMS helps me to finish my assignment easier</td>
<td></td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To complete the data from questionnaire, interview was conducted and the result from interview clearly confirmed the questionnaire data. Students believe that blended learning is very useful both in online mode and offline mode. The students believe that at least three perceptions in research namely positive, negative and neutral which really depends on the effectiveness. It means that the students rely their preferences on the ease of understanding to the lesson. Positive voices from the students are due to their awareness on a critical situation where they have to combine both face-to-face learning and online learning. They assume this situation will force them to be more independent in learning. In addition, it seems also become a solution for those who live in a rural part.

P1:

"Actually, for me it doesn't matter whether the learning process by offline or online as long as I can understand the materials and also blended learning is quite good because of the pandemic constraints".
P3:
“I like new things including this LMS so I can learn a lot. So far my rating is positive. This is good for us who live far from campus and good to learn by ourselves.”

In addition, another response is neutral perception which means that they have both agreement and disagreement on blended learning, they believe that learning is very useful but at the same time they also complain about something in blended learning, but overall they mostly perceive it in a positive way. The statements from the respondents can be seen as follows:

P2:
“It’s more effective but you will get bored. This is what I don’t like from the blended one, but it is easy to use.”

Students’ Learning Challenges
From the questionnaire data, it can be seen that EFL students experience problems when learning speaking using the LMS. These obstacles include difficulty accessing, not being able to practice speaking directly and other technical obstacles such as weak internet access.

Table 3. Students’ Learning Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I get difficulties to learn speaking through blended learning using LMS because I cannot practice directly</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I get difficulties to learn speaking through blended learning using LMS due to low connection of internet</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I get difficulties to learn speaking through blended learning using LMS because of the application is very slow to access</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I get difficulties to learn speaking through blended learning using LMS because of the application is error</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the students (in interview), blended learning, sometimes, is not useful because of some reasons such as: network problems such as signal and connection, application often error and the application is slow to access. Another response is about the negative perceptions, they stated that blended learning was not a good way to learn, even they think the mode is not fair for the students who could not afford the internet data.

P4:
“The learning is less effective because of low connection of internet and sometimes I experience trouble in accessing the signal”.

P5:
“When covid-19, I learn speaking with Blended learning using LMS, but I found the application error and very difficult to access”.

P6:
“Because when we go online, we have to have a lot of data packages, so I can't afford to buy. This is where online learning is unfair.”

The researchers can conclude from the questionnaire and interview data that EFL students have three perceptions as a result of their experience in learning speaking by using the LMS: positive, negative and neutral. These three perceptions have their own reasons. Students
who have positive perceptions argue that blended learning with LMS helps to improve their speaking skills. In the interview they also explained that blended learning with LMS made it easier for them to complete their assignments due to its ease of use and other benefits such as being a replacement platform in a critical era making it easier for those who live far from campus. This finding is in line with a study by Ariawan (2021 and Lu et al., 2012) who found that the EFL students tend to address the ease of use and its flexibility. This leads them to positively perceive the use of LMS. Furthermore, this type of learning also encourages students to be more independent (Al-Shaikhli, 2023) and it is good to develop their capacity to autonomously and actively participate in self-motivating and behavioral procedures that enhance the attainment of goals (García-Pérez et al., 2021; Shaheen, 2022). However, those who disagreed cited difficulties in accessing the LMS application as well as technical factors such as weak signals and empty data packages as the main reasons for their disagreement. This finding is similar with previous studies who reported that internet access and signal connection tend to be a significant factor that might support the success of blended learning (Al Zumor et al., 2013; Gyamfi & Gyaase, 2015). Therefore, they recommended that learning should be conducted in person so that they can interact with their teachers and peers. Meanwhile, those who have a neutral perception seem to stand in the middle between agreeing and disagreeing. They tend to accept the blended learning policy, but are critical of some of the obstacles experienced.

CONCLUSION

Students can enjoy learning when a lecturer uses a blended learning method such as LMS, according to the respondents in this study. Students' positive judgments came from their experiences of learning with blended learning techniques using LMS and experiences of learning with non-blended methods. Researchers found that the blended learning method with LMS among students stimulated interest in learning. Results from both of questionnaire and interview also show that researchers found some benefits and challenges from this method. The students have become more active and responsible for learning, according their responses in interview. However, students with negative and neutral perceptions also have substantial and technical considerations related to the effectiveness of blended learning. This debate should be a concern for teachers to find the right strategy in teaching both online and face-to-face. Furthermore, related stakeholders should also design an effective and communicative online platform so that it can be a more effective learning alternative.

REFERENCES


