

UNDERGRADUATE EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES ON BLENDED LEARNING METHOD FOR READING COMPREHENSION

Risky Novia Rahmadany¹, Muhammad Yunus², Nuse Aliyah Rahmati³.

^{1,2,3} Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris FKIP Universitas Islam Malang

Email: ¹ Riskynovia318@gmail.com

Abstrak

Blended learning, a combination of online digital media and traditional classroom methods, aims to maximize the benefits of both face-to-face and online learning. This study explores students' perceptions of blended learning in reading courses at the University of Islam Malang. Conducted at the English department of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, the research employs descriptive qualitative methods to deeply understand how EFL students perceive blended learning for reading comprehension. The data collection involves in-depth interviews with three fourth-semester English major students, selected based on questionnaire results. The results reveal that students hold a predominantly positive perception of the blended learning method in their reading comprehension. Their positive judgment stems from using this approach for about two years and experiencing several benefits. They find blended learning to be a balanced and enjoyable learning experience. Online reading instructions allow for flexible and self-controlled learning environments. Students also report that the blended learning method makes the reading course easier to follow and enhances their overall learning. The reading materials are clearly illustrated and easy to understand. Moreover, the integration of online activities increases interaction, thoughtfully structured in terms of duration and purpose. The study concludes by providing implications and recommendations for further research, emphasizing the importance of observing the application of blended learning methods for achieving improved outcomes.

Kata kunci: Students' perceptions, Blended Learning, Reading comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the world found itself in an uncharted territory, compelling individuals and institutions to adapt swiftly to the new normal. Educational institutions were no exception, as colleges and universities faced the daunting task of ensuring academic continuity while prioritizing the safety and well-being of students and staff. In response to the pandemic's evolving circumstances, the Indonesian government's Ministry of Education and Culture devised an innovative solution to navigate these uncharted waters: blended learning.

Blended learning, also known as the hybrid lecture system, emerged as a transformative educational approach that seamlessly combined both direct and distance learning methods. The rationale behind this approach was to harness the advantages of face-to-face interactions and traditional classroom experiences while leveraging the flexibility and accessibility of digital technology in the form of online learning. Online learning provides teachers and students with materials, virtual communication, and remote activities (Suhartoyo et al, 2021). Circular Letter No.

4 of 2021 from the Directorate General on Higher Education, Research, and Technology played a pivotal role in guiding universities to implement blended learning. The circular mandated that learning activities during the 2021/2022 academic year should incorporate limited face-to-face interactions, strictly adhering to health protocols and supplementing traditional teaching methods with online learning.

At the forefront of this blended learning revolution stood the esteemed University of Islam Malang, alongside other educational institutions, as they embraced this innovative approach to enhance the quality of education while ensuring the safety of their academic community. Embracing blended learning required careful consideration and adherence to specific rules and conditions, including health protocols, vaccination requirements for lecturers and students, parental permissions, and additional safety measures to create a conducive learning environment.

The adoption of blended learning drew upon the collective wisdom of scholars and researchers in the field of education. Hadiyanto (2019), Muhaimin et al. (2019), Mukminin et al. (2019), and Syaiful et al. (2019), have extensively researched and championed the benefits of blended learning. This approach not only addresses the challenges posed by the pandemic but also capitalizes on the technological advancements of the digital age to create an enriched learning experience for students. The integration of computer technology into blended learning, as highlighted by Hockly (2018), empowers students to engage with course materials at their own pace, fostering independent learning and exploration. Furthermore, Bataineh & Mayyas (2017) emphasized the versatility of blended learning in offering various teaching techniques and modalities, accommodating different learning styles and preferences.

Ayun and Yunus (2017) highlight the complexity of the reading process, emphasizing that readers must decode text and make interpretations to comprehend the entire text. They also stress the importance of using guidelines and background knowledge to aid in understanding the text. Comprehension activities typically involve reading textbooks, answering questions, identifying main ideas, synthesizing information, and summarizing the content to demonstrate a strong grasp of the material (Yunus & Ubaidillah, 2021). To alleviate anxiety, comprehension can also be facilitated through the use of technologies. Arif et al. (2022) suggest incorporating technology in education, as the prevalence of technology use is increasing, to reduce students' anxiety.

The integration of blended learning into English language instruction has garnered significant attention, as it effectively addresses various aspects of language learning. Studies by Djiwandono (2018) and Ghazizadeh and Fatemipour (2017) have illuminated the positive impact of blended learning on EFL students' reading test scores and their overall reading comprehension skills.

The inclusion of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching and learning activities, as explored by Ang and Yunus (2018), has proven to be a motivational factor for students, captivating their attention and fostering a love for reading through digital platforms. According to Santosh (2013), blended learning is a formal education program where Students engage in learning by utilizing a combination of online content and instruction, which grants them a degree of control over the timing, location, approach, and speed of their learning. Lian and Yunus (2018) emphasize the importance of applying a transformational learning model to learn reading, enabling students to arrive at the meaning of the existing text rather than simply knowing the meaning of words

In light of the University of Islam Malang's exploration of blended learning, the researcher embarked on a journey to delve into students' perceptions and experiences with this innovative approach, with a specific focus on reading comprehension in English Language Teaching (ELT).

The study titled "EFL Students' Perception on Blended learning Method for Reading Comprehension" sought to gain invaluable insights into how students embraced and interacted with this modernized pedagogical approach.

This research holds profound significance both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study contributes to the expanding body of knowledge on the blended learning model, serving as a foundation for future studies on this transformative approach. Moreover, the exploration of students' and lecturers' perceptions provides a deeper understanding of their motivations, preferences, and learning experiences within the blended learning context.

On a practical level, the findings of this research offer valuable guidance to lecturers and educators seeking to optimize their teaching methods through the application of blended learning. As the English Department of the University of Islam Malang, along with other institutions interested in similar studies, embraces this educational innovation, the study serves as a compass, steering them towards effective implementation and successful integration of blended learning into their academic curricula.

The scope of the study is centered on delving into how EFL students describe the blended learning approach to their reading comprehension. By narrowing the focus to this specific aspect, the research aims to provide in-depth insights and valuable recommendations for enhancing reading comprehension skills and language learning within the blended learning framework.

As the University of Islam Malang embarks on this transformative journey of embracing blended learning, it sets an example for educational institutions worldwide to adapt and innovate in the face of adversity. The researcher's determination to explore the perceptions and experiences of students regarding blended learning showcases the university's commitment to fostering a conducive and enriching learning environment for its academic community. This pioneering endeavor sets the stage for further advancements in education, paving the way for a generation of resilient, adaptable, and forward-thinking learners, well-equipped to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of education in the post-pandemic world...

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher set out to explore students' perceptions of blended learning in reading courses at the University of Islam Malang. To gather relevant data, the researcher opted for the Qualitative Descriptive method, deeming it suitable for capturing the students' perspectives. The Qualitative Descriptive approach focuses on providing insights and answers to questions related to the true status of the research topic. For this study, it sought to uncover the nature of the situation as it exists, particularly concerning how EFL students perceive the blended learning approach to their reading comprehension.

The research was conducted at the English Language Education Study Program of the University of Islam Malang, where blended learning and online learning were employed for reading courses, using university-provided e-learning platforms. Three students from the English department in the fourth semester of the 2021/2022 academic year were selected as research participants: YLM, FN, and YTR. These students provided valuable insights through in-depth interviews that aimed to explore their perceptions. To collect data from the participants, the researcher conducted interviews either face-to-face or through online voice calls, depending on the situation. The interviews were recorded and notes were taken for analysis. Before selecting the participants, a questionnaire was distributed to twenty-five fourth-semester students in reading class. Three students with the highest questionnaire results were interviewed to represent both positive and negative perceptions.

The data analysis followed the three-step process proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). Firstly, data reduction involved condensing and highlighting key elements, eliminating unnecessary details, and creating a concise dataset for clearer understanding. Secondly, data visualization presented the information in narrative form for easier comprehension and planning of further steps. Finally, the conclusions were drawn and verified, aiming to establish a comprehensive understanding of the students' perceptions of blended learning and addressing the research question. To make this study more trustworthy, researcher conducted members checking. During member checking, researchers go back to the participants who were involved in the study and present them with the key findings, themes, or conclusions derived from the interviews. The participants are given the opportunity to provide feedback, corrections, or additional insights on the data, ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are accurately represented.

This research sheds light on the students' perspectives and experiences with blended learning in reading courses, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of this approach on English language teaching at the University of Islam Malang..

FINDINGS

In this comprehensive study, the researcher sought to gain valuable insights into EFL students' perceptions and experiences with blended learning in reading courses at the University of Islam Malang. As the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the world, educational institutions faced unprecedented challenges, compelling them to adopt online and hybrid learning models to ensure academic continuity while safeguarding the health of their students and staff. Blended learning, a dynamic educational approach combining face-to-face and online learning, emerged as a promising solution to address these multifaceted challenges.

Guided by Circular Letter No. 4 of 2021 from the Ministry of Education and Culture, which mandated limited face-to-face interactions and the integration of online learning methods at universities, the University of Islam Malang embraced blended learning as a means to navigate the pandemic's impact on education. In response to this context, the present study set out to explore the students' understanding, experiences, and feelings toward this novel approach to learning, focusing on the critical aspect of reading comprehension.

Employing the Qualitative Descriptive method, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with three fourth-semester English major students, thoughtfully selected to represent diverse perspectives on blended learning. Through careful analysis and categorization, the interview findings were grouped into distinct points, each unveiling significant aspects of students' engagement with blended learning.

The first point addressed the students' understanding of blended learning and the duration of their exposure to this method. Notably, participants shared similar perceptions of blended learning, viewing it as an educational program that ingeniously amalgamates direct and indirect learning modalities, incorporating both face-to-face and online components. They acknowledged that this approach deployed more media and technological tools than traditional methods, granting them greater access to learning resources. Having utilized blended learning for approximately two years, the students expressed comfort and familiarity with the method, highlighting its frequent application across various courses, particularly when face-to-face classes were impeded. This adaptability allowed teachers to seamlessly shift to online assignments via platforms like WhatsApp or email, ensuring continuous learning despite any disruptions.

The students' sentiments toward the application of blended learning in English classrooms emerged as a central theme in the second point. Participants enthusiastically endorsed this teaching strategy, citing its efficacy in making English language learning more accessible and successful. The blended learning approach was lauded for its ability to enhance students' learning progress, ease comprehension of course materials, and increase their motivation to engage actively in the learning process. The seamless integration of online and offline methods was praised for alleviating the monotony of traditional learning, as it offered a balanced and enjoyable learning experience.

In the third point, students candidly shared the challenges they encountered during online learning within the blended learning context. Common issues included mobile device storage constraints due to multiple required applications, such as Zoom and Google Classroom. Additionally, connectivity and internet data emerged as critical concerns that impacted students' online learning experiences. Despite these difficulties, the majority of participants acknowledged that the benefits of blended learning outweighed occasional obstacles, while others claimed not to have encountered any significant problems, affirming the method's overall effectiveness.

Moreover, the fourth point illuminated the positive impact of blended learning on students' understanding of learning material. Participants unanimously agreed that the blended learning approach facilitated their access to course content, even when outside the traditional classroom setting. This flexibility and accessibility were deemed invaluable in nurturing students' enthusiasm for learning. Students praised the comprehensible nature of the presented content and found the online mode of learning particularly helpful in improving their reading skills.

In conclusion, the research findings provide compelling evidence of the positive impact of blended learning on students' English language learning experiences at the University of Islam Malang. The study highlights the method's effectiveness in enhancing reading skills, fostering motivation, and providing a flexible and enjoyable learning environment. By offering a holistic exploration of students' perceptions and experiences, the study adds depth to the ongoing discourse on innovative teaching methodologies and educational technology integration.

In the broader context of the Covid-19 pandemic, blended learning has emerged as a transformative approach to navigate the challenges faced by the education sector worldwide. As institutions continue to adapt to the ever-evolving landscape, the insights gleaned from this study offer a foundation for continuous improvement and adaptation of pedagogical approaches to meet the evolving needs of learners. Moreover, the research provides a platform for future investigations, urging scholars and educators to explore the impact of blended learning on other language skills and consider longitudinal studies to assess its long-term effects.

Ultimately, as blended learning continues to shape the future of education, its potential to optimize language education and enrich students' language learning journeys remains a beacon of hope and innovation. In the face of adversity, the transformative power of blended learning offers a promising avenue to nurture a generation of resilient, adaptable, and motivated learners, ensuring a brighter future for education in a rapidly changing world....

DISCUSSION

The research began with a detailed exploration of the background and context in which blended learning was introduced at the University of Islam Malang. The Covid-19 pandemic's impact on educational institutions necessitated the adoption of online and hybrid learning models, leading to the implementation of blended learning as a solution to maintain academic continuity. The circular letter from the Ministry of Education and Culture mandated the incorporation of limited face-to-face interactions, ensuring safety while incorporating online learning methods. Blended learning, as an educational approach, was highlighted for its potential to maximize the benefits of both face-to-face and online learning, as corroborated by various studies.

The research question aimed to delve into the students' perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of the blended learning method for reading comprehension in English Language Teaching (ELT). To gain a comprehensive understanding, the research adopted a two-stage data collection approach. Initially, a questionnaire was used to select participants who demonstrated positive responses to blended learning. This ensured that the chosen participants had experiences relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted to provide a deeper exploration of the students' views, providing rich qualitative data.

The study's findings illuminated the positive perceptions of the participants towards blended learning in reading comprehension. They expressed appreciation for the balanced and enjoyable learning experience resulting from the integration of both face-to-face and online learning modalities. The students found the reading material to be clear, concise, and easily comprehensible, contributing to their understanding of the content. Moreover, the structured online activities were viewed as effective tools to increase interaction and engagement, with clear learning objectives that facilitated the learning process. (Suhartoyo et al, 2021) stated about flexibility. The system of online learning enables learners to know and decide their own learning styles, aims of study, as well as content knowledge. Having individuals learn at their own pace is considered a flexible learning environment.

Blended learning was seen as a complementary approach to traditional face-to-face education, serving as additional classes that enriched their learning experiences. The flexibility and autonomy offered by blended learning were highly valued by the participants, empowering them to adapt their learning journey according to their individual preferences and needs. This aspect of blended learning resonated well with the participants, who expressed a sense of control and ownership over their learning.

Throughout the research, references to other relevant studies reinforced and contextualized the findings. Hadiyanto (2019) studied supported the versatility of e-learning, emphasizing its role as a supplementary or substitute form of learning within the blended learning context. Radial (2019) research further underscored the positive impact of blending various approaches, leading to improved pedagogy and addressing diverse student needs.

The positive feedback and perceived advantages reported by the participants shed light on the potential of blended learning as a successful and effective educational approach in English language teaching. The study's findings have significant implications for language educators and learners, emphasizing the importance of well-designed and coherent blended learning strategies to optimize language learning outcomes.

This research contributes to the body of knowledge on blended learning, particularly in the context of English language instruction. The insights gained from the students' perceptions and

experiences can inform the development of pedagogical practices, curriculum design, and educational technology integration to further enhance language learning experiences in the University of Islam Malang and beyond.

As the academic community continues to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the post-pandemic era, the research serves as a compass, guiding educators and researchers towards innovative and effective approaches to language education. The positive reception of blended learning by students underscores its potential to revolutionize language teaching and create a more inclusive and adaptable learning environment. The findings also highlight the importance of continuous research and evaluation of blended learning strategies to optimize their effectiveness and ensure the continual improvement of language education in an ever-changing world..

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Students in the fourth semester of the English Department at the University of Islam Malang express largely positive perceptions regarding the implementation of the Blended learning method for Reading Comprehension. The positive response was derived from questionnaire analysis and in-depth interviews, where students showed satisfaction and appreciation towards the blended learning approach. They also reported gaining new educational experiences from this method, which they found to be balanced and enjoyable, combining face-to-face and online learning.

Students find the blended learning method more accessible and beneficial for their learning. The reading material provided is clear and easy to comprehend, enhancing their understanding of the subject matter. The online activities are well-structured in terms of duration and purpose, ensuring a meaningful relationship with the planned learning objectives.

Overall, students readily embrace blended learning and find numerous benefits in its use. However, they do encounter challenges during online learning, such as the need for multiple apps like Zoom and Google Classroom, leading to reduced phone storage capacity. Additionally, network-related issues and internet data requirements pose occasional obstacles, such as missing online classes due to poor internet connections. Despite these challenges, students feel that the advantages of blended learning outweigh the occasional difficulties they encounter.

Based on the comprehensive findings of this research, several valuable suggestions emerge for lectures, college students, and future researchers, with the potential to enhance the implementation and understanding of blended learning for reading comprehension in English Language Teaching (ELT).

For Lectures:

The positive results revealed by the participants underscore the potential of blended learning in enhancing student learning outcomes. Lecturers are encouraged to leverage and optimize the use of blended learning methods in their English language classes. As students expressed comfort and familiarity with this approach, lecturers can capitalize on this positive perception to create a more engaging and effective learning environment.

Blended learning can prove particularly beneficial when face-to-face instruction is not feasible on a regular basis. Lecturers can take advantage of this method's flexibility to ensure that learning continues seamlessly, even in challenging circumstances. By integrating online learning

platforms and interactive activities, lecturers can maintain a continuous learning experience, irrespective of potential disruptions.

For College Students:

Students are advised to fully embrace the resources and opportunities offered through blended learning. To maximize their learning experience, students should proactively prepare the necessary devices and ensure reliable internet signals that support the smooth implementation of blended learning. By being well-prepared and equipped, students can fully immerse themselves in the learning process and make the most of the blended learning approach.

Additionally, students can utilize the flexibility of blended learning to adapt their learning schedule to suit their individual preferences and needs. By leveraging the asynchronous nature of online learning, students can manage their time effectively and engage with course materials at their own pace. This autonomy empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey, leading to enhanced comprehension and achievement.

For Future Researchers:

This research serves as a solid foundation for future studies in the realm of blended learning. While the findings presented valuable insights, future researchers can expand and enrich the understanding of blended learning through a variety of research methodologies. To gather more comprehensive data, future studies can incorporate observations and in-depth analyses of the blended learning process. This approach will provide a more holistic view of how blended learning is applied in practice.

To further investigate the long-term effects of blended learning on language proficiency and overall language learning experiences, future researchers may consider longitudinal studies. By examining the sustained impact of blended learning beyond a specific academic period, researchers can determine its efficacy and potential as a sustainable pedagogical approach.

Moreover, future research can explore the specific elements of blended learning that contribute to its effectiveness in enhancing reading comprehension. Investigating the role of various instructional design strategies, content presentation, and technology integration can provide valuable insights for educators seeking to optimize blended learning approaches.

.

REFERENCES:

- Ang, T., & Yunus, M. (2018). Blended learning: To read or not to read. *IJIE (Indonesian Journal of Informatics Education)*, 2(29), 29-36.
- Suhartoyo, Eko & Heriyawati, Dwi & Ismiatun, Febti. (2021). Unveiling students' writing argumentative essays barriers in online learning. *EnJourMe (English Journal of Merdeka) : Culture, Language, and Teaching of English*. 6. 87-96. 10.26905/enjourme.v6i2.6800.
- Arif, T. Z. Z. Al, Sulistiyo, U., Ubaidillah, M. F., Handayani, R., Junining, E., & Yunus, M. (2022). A Look at Technology Use for English Language Learning from a Structural Equation Modeling Perspective. *Call-Ej*, 23(2 Special Issue), 18–37.
- Ayun, Q., & Yunus, M. (2017). The Efficacy of Reciprocal Teaching Method in Teaching Reading Comprehension to Efl Students. *ELT Echo : The Journal of English Language Teaching in Foreign Language Context*, 2(2), pp. 134-146. <https://doi.org/10.24235/eltecho.v2i2.2174>
- Ayuningtyas, R. D., & Yunus, M. (2022). Investigating the pleasure of reading habit during the Covid-19 pandemic: A study in University of Islam Malang. *Journal of Research on English and Language Learning (J-REaLL)*, 3(2), 120-127.
- Bataineh, R. F., & Mayyas, M. B. (2017). The utility of blended learning in EFL reading and grammar: A case for Moodle. *Teaching English with Technology*, 7(3), 35–49.
- Djiwandono, P. (2018). The effect of blended learning on reading abilities, vocabulary mastery, and collaboration among university students. *The New English Teacher*, 12(1), 23-42. doi:10.33225/jbse/19.18.595
- Hadiyanto. (2019). The EFL students' 21st century skill practices through e-learning activities. *IRJE (Indonesian Research Journal in Education)*, 3(2), 461-473. <https://doi.org/10.22437/irje.v3i2.8036>
- Hockly, N. (2018). Blended learning. *ELT Journal*, 72(1), 97–101, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccx058>
- Lian, A., & Yunus, M. (2018). Transformative reading pedagogies: Perspectives from Indonesia. *International Conference The Future of Education (p. 1). Florance: The Future of Education 2019*.
- Miles, M.B. Hubarman and Saldana, J.(2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Third. Ed. United States of America: SAGE Publication, Inc. Edition. New York: State University of New York Genesco
- Muhaimin, Habibi, A., Mukminin, A., Pratama, R., Asrial, & Harja, H. (2019). Predicting factors affecting intention to use web 2.0 in learning: Evidence from science education. *Journal of Baltic Science Education*, 18(4), 595-606.
- Radial, B. (2019). Approaching a reading course via moodle-based blended learning: EFL learners' insights. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Method*, 1-12
- Santosh, B.K. (2013). *Different forms of Blended learning in Classroom*. <http://edtechreview.in/trends-insights/trends/562-different-forms-of-blended-learning-ended-learning-in-classroom?start=12>

- Yunus, M. (2015). Becoming Critical Thinkers: A Narrative Inquiry of Indonesian EFL Lecturers. *International Journal of English and Education*, Volume: 4, Issue:3, July 2015, 326-339.
- Yunus, M., & Ubaidillah, M. F. (2021). EFL teacher educators' experiences in teaching critical reading: evidence from Indonesia. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 11(2), 422–441. <https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v11i2.3133>

Malang, 11 July 2023
Advisor I,

Dr. Muhammad Yunus, S.Pd., M.Pd
NIP/NPP. 2090200002