

EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS BLENDED LEARNING IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSROOM

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Abstract: Speaking ability is a form of communication that can be used by an individual to convey ideas and thoughts to the listeners. Online learning has changed speaking teaching practice from face to face into remote teaching, and blended learning is a combination of online-based learning and classroom learning. This learning can be applied to teach speaking skills. Therefore, it is important to understand how speaking class was like in a blended learning setting. In this case, the researcher is interested in conducting research about students' perception towards the implementation of blended learning in speaking class.

The study was conducted qualitatively on three students at the University of Islam Malang who had experienced blended learning. The research data was collected using semi-structured interviews and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis model by Creswell (2018) which includes data reduction, organization, coding, display and interpretation.

The findings indicate that most students have a positive opinion of blended learning, which they believe increases student interest in learning, simplifies learning through the use of technology, opens up new learning opportunities, and gives them flexibility in terms of time, place, and resources so they can design lesson plans that suit their needs, objectives, and learning preferences. However, learning to speak might be hindered by low internet connections and other distractions. Students also mentioned a number of advantages, including increased self-assurance, improved speech skills, flexible application, and a promotion of student autonomy. The ease of learning, adaptability, and usability of the current approach should be maintained; however, it could be enhanced with regard to internet connectivity, platform comfort, and user training to familiarize users with the technology. The study suggest that blended learning for EFL learners should be optimized in terms of usability and features, offering flexibility and online learning materials. Speaking instructors should balance online and offline learning to enhance confidence? Future research should consider participants' learning features, such as anxiety, confidence, achievement, and speaking skills, to understand how these affect perception towards blended learning.

Keywords: *students' perception, speaking skill, blended learning*

INTRODUCTION

English is a crucial subject for human resources development in various sectors, with many courses available in Indonesia. The four main components of studying English at university level are speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Speaking is essential for interaction due to the foreign language's vocabulary and structure. Baron (2020) stated that speaking is a communication skill that one can utilize to share ideas and thoughts with others. Additionally, Octaviani et al., (2022) emphasize the importance of proper grammar and word choice in conveying precise and accurate meaning. They suggest that these skills are crucial for various vocations, including public and private speaking, requiring clear communication, object portrayal, enunciation, and tone. Alifah et al., (2021) stated that speaking is the most important language competency among the four for efficient communication in today's globalized world. If you can learn this talent, you will be able to converse with others. Speaking is also the most significant form of notion communication. Additionally, Sholeha et al., (2023) describe speaking competence as the ability to transmit ideas, facts, emotions, or feelings through efficient verbal communication.

In March 2020, Indonesia proposed a regional quarantine with Large-Scale Social limitations (PSBB) to combat COVID-19. The pandemic led to government regulations requiring social distancing and online teaching and learning activities. The Ministry of Education and Culture announced a rule requiring school and university administrators to adopt remote work and learning, allowing students to complete coursework from home during times when in-person meetings were unavailable (Setiati and Azwar, 2020). This results in the shift from face to face learning model to remote learning that allows students to learn indirectly. Online learning offers flexibility for students to study EFL according to their needs and learning style. Despite the shift to face-to-face instruction, some lecturers continue to use online instruction, including the benefits of COVID-19, to enhance teaching and learning processes. Blended learning combines online and offline learning models (Yin et al., 2019).

In spite of the benefits of online learning in the time of a pandemic, learners and instructors still have to adapt to the situation, as learning curriculum and technique at that time is not fully adapted to online learning. Therefore, it is imperative to consider ways to preserve the learning practice in face-to-face learning in online learning, and one way that can be done to reach that is by combining face to face and online learning

into blended learning. According to Ulya et al., (2022), blended learning, combining web-based and in-person instruction, benefits all English language components, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Universities that facilitate efficient learning often use the web for educational purposes to better fit for student learning and can better meet the diverse demands of today's students. According to Alberti and Alshareef (2019), blended learning is a teaching and learning approach that is distinct from traditional or online learning. Thus, by combining both in-person and virtual learning modes, blended learning seeks to improve student learning and better meet the diverse needs of today's students.

The implementation of blended learning through media technology enables educators and learners to access materials, engage in traditional face-to-face instruction, and learn online. In elementary and secondary schools, web-based learning strategies allow students to study autonomously through online platforms like videos, modules, and Zoom sessions, or engage in in-person interactions (Zainuddin & Keumala, 2018). Considering the importance of English-speaking skill and the implementation of blended learning, it is essential to study how the students perceive blended learning implementation in speaking class.

Students' perception can shed light about blended learning implementation in speaking class. Perception, is defined as how we observe things through our senses. It involves using one's five senses to describe something seen or felt. Understanding perception is crucial for improving speaking abilities (Qiong, 2017). As stated by Andriyani (2022) that student perception is the process by which students interpret and assign meaning to sensory observations of objects in a school setting, particularly in the classroom. It provides essential information about events, surroundings, and learning processes, making researchers interested in students' activities, surroundings, and learning processes.

Several studies have been done in regards to the implementation of blended learning. Research by Rachman et al., (2021) shows that integrating blended learning into ELT can increase student motivation by encouraging active participation in online activities like group discussions and assignments. This approach can also help inactive students become more self-assured, thereby boosting their motivation to learn. Another study by Rerung (2018) found that blended learning gives students the chance to

investigate many resources in order to enhance their language proficiency, namely in speaking and listening. Moreover, Sari (2016) conducted prior research to assess how students perceive blended learning, which blends online and in-person education with Schoology for speaking practice and found that blended learning is considered unfamiliar to pupils, yet this atmosphere makes it easy for them to grasp. More research was conducted by Oktania (2021) and showed that students' perceptions of blended learning in speaking courses in professional contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and met students' needs.

Based on these previous studies, it can be stated that blended learning is a powerful method for improving English speaking and listening skills by combining online platforms with classroom discussions. This approach enhances language and critical thinking abilities through online exercises and discussion boards, providing a dynamic and flexible learning environment. Previous study has also demonstrated the efficiency of blended learning for students in speaking courses. The two previous studies and this one differ in a few respects, while questionnaires were employed in two previous studies that were similar to this one, interviews were used in this study to collect data. Therefore, the researcher is interested in understanding students' perceptions of this difficulty. Thus, it is important to conduct a study regarding the students' perception towards the implementation of blended learning in speaking class.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study utilized a qualitative approach, using descriptive research design, to investigate students' perceptions of blended learning in the speaking class. Qualitative research aims to understand how individuals interpret social or human problems, using speech and actions as primary data sources. The fourth semester English Education students at the Universitas Islam Malang were chosen as the study's subjects. The study focuses on the perceptions of English Education students in a fourth semester class, using random sampling and speaking classroom data. The aim is to understand if blended learning is useful or not for students.

The researcher used interviews as a primary method for data collection, aiming to gather perspectives and opinions from participants through a limited number of questions. The interviews were conducted twice for data consistency. The research involved several stages, including question preparation, advisor's revision, reaching out

to informants, and conducting interviews after receiving informed consent. Ten questions were asked to three informants to explore the research topic of students' feelings about blended learning in speaking classes. The data was collected on general perception, technology and tools used, advantages and drawbacks of blended learning, benefits of learning speaking, and future perspectives on blended learning.

This study employs a data collection technique of conducting interviews. The researchers compile instruments, select participants, and explain the topic. Due to time constraints, interviews were conducted online using voice notes via WhatsApp. The researchers conducted two interviews, testing participants' answers for consistency between the first and second interviews. This meticulous approach ensures the accuracy and reliability of the research findings. The data analysis involved participants' responses to an interview using voice notes, which were then analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involves organizing and preparing the data, reading or viewing the data, transcribing the data, categorizing the data, generating descriptions and themes, and representing the description and themes. The researcher conducted voice notes to facilitate data collection and transcribed the responses multiple times. They then reread the data to ensure accuracy and make necessary adjustments. The coding process was used to create multiple themes for analysis. Finally, the researcher tied several themes to the analysis results and summarized them in tabular form to help researchers find the necessary data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that blended learning significantly enhances students' enthusiasm for learning by making lectures less dull, simplifying learning through technology, and offering new learning possibilities by allowing students to study in both online and offline classroom environments. This is in line with Sari (2016) who discovered that blended learning is considered as rather new for students, but this environment makes it easier for students to understand. Furthermore, the present study discovered that blended learning is flexible enough to allow students to construct learning plans that are tailored to their own requirements, goals, and learning styles. This is similar with Oktania's (2021) prior study, which discovered that students' impressions of blended

learning in speaking classes for professional contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic were successfully implemented to meet students' learning requirements.

The study also reveals that blended learning students face challenges like slow internet connections and distractions, which hinder productivity and concentration. However, the adaptability and flexibility of technology can spark curiosity and boost confidence in those struggling with speaking, ultimately enhancing their abilities in speaking classes. These findings indicate similarities with the statement of Rianto (2020) who found that blended learning offers various benefits in EFL learning through the utilization of wide variety of learning tools, but it should be noted that the utilization of learning tools in blended learning requires stable connection to be effective. It is also stated by Suhartoyo et al., (2021) that low internet connection became the other reason why students perceived the difficulties in learning. Furthermore, another study by Irawan (2020) also revealed that students are more interactive in speaking activities in online synchronous learning using LMS-Edmodo.

Students highlight the advantages of blended learning, including increased interactive learning activities in speaking classes and direct knowledge sharing in both offline and online settings. This is consistent with the statement of Cahya (2023) about the nature of Blended learning which can be both synchronous and asynchronous settings allowing the learner and teachers to interact directly in online situations or interact asynchronously through assignments. It also has been shown that students feel anxious while speaking in person, therefore blended learning allows them to engage more actively in speaking sessions. Furthermore, because students may use audio or video resources to practice speaking independently, blended learning allows for greater flexibility in terms of time, place, and resources. It is also said that students learn speaking more easily when they have access to user-friendly technology. It is congruent with the findings of Heriyawati et al., (2023), who discovered that blended learning enhances student autonomy in learning and expands the extent to which teachers may nurture student autonomy.

It also should be noted that several students also voiced their opinions regarding the drawbacks of blended learning. For example, in the past, when blended learning was implemented, certain students who were not tech-savvy may have found it difficult to adjust their learning style. Furthermore, blended learning may limit students'

opportunities for face-to-face interaction, make it harder for them to understand the materials, and reduce the efficacy of the program's execution when internet connections are bad. This is in line with the study by Wakano (2023), who found that synchronous learning in online settings is a decent alternative to face to face learning due to its intractability, adaptability, and usability. However, connectivity and learning costs also become major problems that the students encounter.

The researcher explores the advantages of blended learning, focusing on three main areas: enhanced confidence, enhanced speaking ability, and adaptable application. Blended learning provides students with fresh experiences, expands their vocabulary, and allows them to interact with peers. This mixed learning environment, which combines offline and online learning, allows students to converse and work together regularly, despite the constraints of remote online settings. A previous study by Oktania (2021) also found that blended learning was revealed to be beneficial for creating a learning environment that is easier for students to understand. The results also found that blended learning offers backup plans in case the lecturer is unable to impart knowledge by assigning the pupils to various activities. In terms of confidence, some students who struggle with public speaking find that they have greater confidence when speaking online. It is also stated by Sayfudin (2017) that blended learning is more enjoyable and active. It means that, this learning model can make the learner more active in their learning process.

The study suggests that in the future, blended learning should focus on improving and preserving student perceptions, ensuring learning convenience, flexibility, and usability. This includes easy access to learning materials at any time and place, and the ability to apply the information provided for independent learning. This is in line with the statement of Alshahrani (2023) that within the recent 10 years the introduction of the new technological innovations filled the gap between traditional face-to-face learning and distributed learning environments and recent developments in technology encourage teacher educators to apply blended learning in their classrooms. Furthermore, Müller and Mildemberger (2021). Finds that blended learning has future opportunities to facilitate flexible learning by replacing classroom time with an online learning environment. Future blended learning could benefit from improved technology, internet access, and platform convenience, along with user training to familiarize users with the

technology and themselves. It is recommended to utilize these features for acquiring independent speaking skills. This is consistent with the findings from Rasheed et al., (2020) that blended learning opens new prospects for learning and teaching in the future, but the study also found that user readiness for teachers and students needs to be carefully established as well as decent infrastructure such as decent internet coverage to support suitable online and blended learning environments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the study, blended learning has been found to increase students' interest in learning and simplify it by using technology. It offers new learning opportunities and flexibility in terms of time, location, and resources, allowing students to create learning plans that meet their needs, goals, and learning styles. However, it also has issues such as slow internet connections and outside distractions that hinder classroom productivity. Blended learning also allows for more interactive learning by allowing direct knowledge sharing in both offline and online settings. It also allows students with anxiety to participate more actively in speaking classes. Students reported benefits such as enhanced confidence, speaking ability, adaptable applications, and promotes autonomy. To improve blended learning, it is suggested to optimize the usability and features of applications used in teaching speaking, as well as optimizing the usability and features of applications used in blended learning can help develop speaking skills that suit their learning style. Speaking instructors should consider a balance between online and offline learning, as online settings make it easier and more confident for students to speak directly. Future researchers should sample participants based on their learning features to understand how different learning features affect their perception towards blended learning.

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