

Students' Experiences during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Blended Learning Class

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia has to deal with Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) since early 2020 and it caused a big impact on the education system in Indonesia. Because of that, the government instructed the Study from Home policy, then, permit higher institutions to carry out limited face-to-face classes with strict protocols by running blended learning in a new normal situation. This article will discuss students' obstacles and their strategies to overcome the obstacles in blended learning. Blended learning is a new experience for students at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. This research is classified as a qualitative descriptive and the English Education Department students as the subject. An open-ended questionnaire was used to gather data. The findings show that students' obstacles in blended learning related to time, the internet, adaptation of class schedule, and miscommunication. While their strategies to overcome these obstacles are balancing time division, preparation, and make a daily schedule, sending learning materials in class groups, moving to a place with a good internet connection, and having 2 different internet providers, the need for time for adapted of changing environment based on class schedule, and make confirmation with the lecturer.

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1. Introduction

Every aspect of life is affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, including the education system in Indonesia in early 2020. Indonesian government must take steps to hinder the spread of Covid-19 by enactment a lockdown, working from home, and studying from home policy for education (Kemdikbud, 2020). Application of these regulations makes lecturers, also the students on education purposes carried online through devices. It is a new thing for the education aspect with applied devices and applications to keep teaching and learning activities running in the middle of a Covid-19 pandemic. This kind of education activity done temporarily replaced the face-to-face class so it makes limited social presence as well as less the interaction (Baber, 2020). The running of online learning under the government's regulations is to prevent the spread of the virus makes a positive result that is lower cases of the Covid-19 pandemic. At this time, Covid-19 cases are lower, so, it gains remained steady. It makes interactions and social activities more relaxed while still carrying out strict regulations



also supervision so Covid-19 cases do not increase and minimize the spread of Covid-19 that causes new clusters. This situation is called the new normal, then, the government started to think of new learning breakthroughs through blended learning.

Applied blended learning in the new normal situation is an adaptation of online learning into combination learning activities ranging from primary education to higher education with certain conditions along with compliance with existing protocols. Bonk & Graham (2005) stated that blended learning combines face-to-face classes with virtual classes using technology to run the teaching-learning activities and attain the learning goals (Widiyanti et al., 2020). It has various types of learning that can be applied in combining English courses with the use of technology. Students in English courses with blended learning can learn independently and be more active. Beside the teacher, lecturer, and student, technology is another important point in the implementation of blended learning in English courses. Technology is very supportive of blended learning for both of lecturers and students. This can be put to good use to maximize blended learning so that they can get access as well as convenience in the teaching and learning process regardless of time and place.

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan is one of the higher institutions in Yogyakarta that implemented blended learning in their English Education Department study program. The English courses that implemented in English Education Department done with blended learning face-to-face mixed with online learning. Blended learning provides convenience for students, especially in this study program, to take classes by utilizing technology and the internet. The students who attend the blended learning classes, must follow strict healthy protocols set by Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. Implemented of blended learning is a novelty to Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, particularly English Education Department, in implementing blended learning in the midst of a pandemic in a new normal situation. In the midst of its implementation, students experience obstacles at some aspects but how to overcome these obstacles has not been researched (Sudewi, 2020). As the explained before, blended learning is very relevant to the current situation so research on blended learning was conducted to find out students' obstacles and how to overcome these obstacles in blended learning courses.

2. Literature Review

Blended learning can be defined with various meanings (Hrastinski, 2019). Mostly, blended learning is defined as mixed mode, combination instructions, and technology mediated (Wang et al., 2015). From these repeated terms, it can be interpreted that blended learning combine computer based instructions with traditional class instructions, so, the communication in the blended learning class runs with computer (Bonk & Graham, 2005). Related to that, blended learning known as the combination of vary brick-mortar and online learning by using technology in the academic approach (Köse, 2010). Semler at Widiyanti et al., (2020) supported the statement blended learning in academic context that it combines explanation modes, modes of teaching and learning activities, and every training section involved in open communication. The combination of digital media and internet in blended learning, make some possibilities in the class involved physical meeting between the lecturers and students existence (Tambunan et al., 2020). It allowed teaching and learning activity done remotely with the controlled elements. It means, blended learning not limiting learning time, place, teachers' teaching instructions, and the usage of devices (Staker & Horn, 2012).

The balance of components in blended learning makes learning effective. This is done with careful planning, so that the learning environment in blended learning is more advantageous (Güzer & Caner, 2014). First component in blended learning is learning environment. The environment in blended learning is synchronous and asynchronous. Secondly, media which convey the content at learning activity to support learning environment in synchronous and asynchronous. Lastly, instructional to uphold the learning objectives in deliver of the knowledge during the learning process. On learning English, several examples of media which can be used such as printed media, audio, video, and interaction of learning schemes. The mentioned media arranged for English learning in general.

The implementation of blended learning on English Language Teaching (ELT) has benefits in completing face-to-face and online classes (Rachman et al., 2021) Blended learning potentials various choices of learning activities so that student-centered learning on English classes can be carried out optimally (Arta et al., 2019). One of the examples in extensive listening class, quality improvement was found in communication and interaction of students and lecturer (Sofiana, 2015). Improvements in understanding in English classes are affected by the use of media (Puspitaloka & Hasanah,

2020). The implementation of blended learning shows that there are advantages and disadvantages found during the learning process. Various advantages are seen relevant with time delivery of learning, interaction opportunities, convenience learning materials access, and use of various techniques in technology (Thorne, 2003). The availability of online materials benefit students for study independently. It allows students to hold the discussion with their lecturer outside the classroom hours. This learning activities can be controlled so the lecturer has authority to give the learning materials via internet, arrange learning activities with quizzes, and giving feedback. Blended learning makes it easier to share students' learning material files with classmates (Husamah, 2014). Some of the disadvantages of blended learning are two sides of learning at the same time, online learning that can be applied to other learning models, encourage students to keep participating in online class sessions, create a learning environment that suits students' learning styles, technical support and coaching need (Thorne, 2003). Similar to that, Puspitaloka & Hasanah (2020) revealed the obstacles faced by lecturers and students in online section of blended learning, that are internet connection, online attendees list, online quizzes, and video editing capabilities. Noer also stated the disadvantages of blended learning related to technology knowledge, facilities, and learning media. Implementation of blended learning will burdensome students with low economic level because of the inability to procure blended learning tools such as internet access and computers. Further, lack of understanding and knowledge in operating technology by blended learning implementers like teacher, lecturer, and the students. Moreover, the need for a variety of learning media to be implemented in blended learning cannot be done if it does not have adequate infrastructure (Husamah, 2014).

Students as actors in the implementation of blended learning have various perceptions, problems, and suggestions for the implementation of this learning model (Rianto, 2020). But, implementing blended learning in the middle of Covid-19 pandemic become an alternative strategy that affects learning achievement and student liveliness in learning section, although there are still challenges (Masadeh, 2021). Students have overall positive perceptions of implementing blended learning in English course (Ferheen Bukhari & Mahmoud Basaffar, 2019). Sriwichai (2020) also investigated the students' readiness, problems, and the challenges of blended learning in English courses. It found that students quite ready to take blended learning classes even though there are problems and challenges such as learning focus in the classroom, lack of skills and experience on digital tools, and managing the time. Rianto (2020) revealed that students experienced the obstacles during online section of EFL class primarily on the internet connection and e-learning system. The students intended the department's plan to solve the obstacles for successful blended learning class. Istiqomah (2021) found students have positive perceptions because of the advantages of its implementation in ELT and found blended learning disadvantages related to facilities. The limitations of research related to the implementation of blended learning have resulted in gaps that need to be addressed (Wong, L, Tatnall, A, Burgees, 2014). Therefore, a further review related to blended learning was carried out which explored students' experiences regarding blended learning obstacles.

3. Method

Considering that previous research used quantitative data, this research collects data through open-ended questionnaire that are described qualitatively to find out students' obstacles and describing their strategies to overcome these obstacles. The subject are the students of English Education Department of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan who take blended learning classes in the middle of Covid-19 pandemic by online and offline at the campus. The data analysis from the subject gained from the participants who filled out the open-ended questionnaire. Qualitative data is collected until it is saturated so that there is no additional data. The data were analyzed in a correct and appropriate way following data analysis techniques for qualitative research. On the collecting data instrument, there written explicitly of agreement with study participants so privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of the data can be maintained (Miles et al., 2014). From the description, the data has the trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014). Miles and Huberman at Sataloff et al., (2014) stated that data analysis was carried out by collecting data, sorting data containing important information by coding, presenting data by describing and using figures, and verifying data. As the result, the researcher can draw explanation of conclusion (Miles et al., 2014).

4. Findings and Discussion

Several previous blended learning researchers found that there are obstacles faced by students regarding the implementation of blended learning in EFL. The obstacles mostly experienced in online sessions. The previous researches findings associated with internet connection, e-learning system, facilities, lack of interaction, lack of skills and experience on digital tools, also managing the time. In the face-to-face sessions of blended learning, previous researchers found that students have not experienced many obstacles than in online sessions such as lack learning focus in the classroom. Those obstacles are the findings of previous research findings which it is similar to the results of this research. Based on the collected data, the obstacles that students' experienced are related to time, the internet, adaptation of class schedule, and miscommunication both of online and offline session of blended learning class. Different from the previous researches, this research tried to describe the students' strategies to overcome the obstacles which it has not been studied in the previous researches. Participants stated several strategies to overcome with blended learning class obstacles such as balancing time division, preparation, and make a daily schedule, sending learning materials in class groups, moving to a place with a good internet connection, and having 2 different internet providers, the need for time for adapted of changing environment based on class schedule, and make confirmation with the lecturer.

4.1. Students' Obstacles

Blended learning combined online learning and face-to-face learning using technology. It becomes a learning model and is used as a learning transition from online learning amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The blended learning implementation in the English Education Department of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan started began in 2021. English classes in this study program were carried out by online and face-to-face learning. Blended learning has many advantages for teachers, students, and institutions (Mizza & Rubio, 2020). Although blended learning is advantageous, in this transition, obstacles were also encountered and experienced by students who took blended learning classes both follow the class by online and offline at the campus. From their statement of experiences in blended learning classes, they frequently mentioned obstacles in English classes related to time, the internet, and miscommunication.

Time management is one of the obstacles that students often face in learning (Vaughan, 2007). Moreover, students in blended learning courses must complete both of online classes with offline classes (Alam & Collings, 2005). This challenge is one of the obstacles for English Education Department students, as stated by Participant 1:

“The problem I'm having in blended learning class is bad time management.”

Other students (Participant 5) also experienced the same difficulty on the obstacles of time in blended learning implementation. She explained more specifically related to time management:

“The habit of taking online to offline classes with blended classes is a challenge in dividing the time that was originally at home, now added to the time allocation for activities on campus.”

Based on the statement, the students need the adaptation to learning environment changes from online to offline classes by blended learning. Implicitly from the participant's statement, the habit of learning models from online to blended makes the student find it difficult to manage time because the activities carried out become more complex. It is similarly experienced by Participant 4, who stated:

“Colliding class schedules because the students adapted to changing environments from online to offline class by blended learning.”

The adaptation of class schedules in the blended learning environment is one of the students' obstacles. Transitions of online classes to face-to-face classes in a blended learning environment cause students to experience class schedules that collide. It refers to the opportunity to attend offline classes of blended learning that are not scheduled due to conflicting times. Furthermore, the obstacles in blended learning implementation that is often mentioned by students is miscommunication between students and lecturer, as the statement of Participant 3:

“The lecturer did not confirm the change of the latest class implementation, that is from online to offline meeting so that students thought that the lecturer was not present at the predetermined class time.”

Blended learning allows students to study online and face to face alternately, and it can cause problems in changing the implementation of blended learning classes from online to offline or vice versa. The implementation of the blended learning class during the online session was found to have problems as stated by Participant 6.:

“The obstacles experienced during this class are signal and quota internet.”

Signal and quota internet is another obstacle experienced by students in the online section. Furthermore, this obstacle was explained by Participant 2, the participant stated:

“The loss of internet signal from the lecturer during class, especially when the lecturer doing share-screen being a problem for me.”

This obstacle refers to the lecturers who affect students when participating in learning in the online class section, particularly on screen-sharing in the online class. This becomes a problem for students in processing learning.

4.2. Students' Strategies

The change in student's effort to become more better at learning require planning actions by carrying out strategies (Hanik et al., 2021) and the strategies to solve obstacles in blended learning class among English Education Department students are revealed from the questionnaires that have been distributed. The students' strategies revealed is related to the students' obstacles as written in the previous discussion.

“I did my best to handle my activities and my time in balance.”

“Maybe by asking the lectures more time for us to get ready for the next classes and I can more prepared for the next classes.”

The statements above are the participants' strategies to overcome the obstacle related to handling the time or management of time. The first participant prefers to set time division to keep its balance with the activities. In contrast, the second participant relied on the timing of the course lecturers. According to the second participant, preparation is a way to solve time management obstacles in blended learning in the face-to-face section, such as preparation for changing to the next classes takes more time, so students prefer to ask for more time from the lecturers. Another student (Participant 5) stated:

“I make it like a daily schedule that I record so I don't forget if there is a time when I will do offline classes on campus.”

In managing the time, the student has their way of solving problems related to allocating time between activities at home and on campus by compiling a schedule that aims as a reminder.

According to Participant 4, solving the obstacle to adapting the class schedule in blended learning is about time.

“The solution is only in time.”

The student (Participant 4) also mentioned the need for adaptation to changing environment in the previous discussion on students' obstacles above as described in Northern Illinois University Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (2012) that students must learn adapt the learning environment. The change blended learning of online class into face-to-face class situation cause miscommunication between students and the lecturer. Participant 3 solve this obstacle by make confirmation with the lecturer, as stated:

“Reconfirm to the lecturer whether his class will be offline or online on that day.”

The student did this to avoid miscommunication when learning with online or offline in blended learning is carried out in the class and get confirmation of class schedule. Other participants mentioned several strategies to overcome obstacle due to internet as below.

“Submit material in the group, then can read it asynchronously.”

“Go find a better signal (go to an area with good signal or buy a wi-fi voucher)”

“Because it (losing the signal) is sudden maybe I have 2 internet connections (2 different internet providers).”

The first student (Participant 2) constrained by lecturer’s internet signal when sharing screen in online section. The student anticipated this by suggesting that the lecturer should send the subject matter to the class group first. Other students also mentioned that move to the place with a good internet connection and having 2 different internet providers be their solution of bad internet signal.

5. Conclusion

Blended learning gives many advantages to teaching and learning activities, moreover, it maximizes learning by combining online and offline activities supported with technology. Nevertheless, based on the data presentation and data analysis from the previous chapter, it is revealed that students face obstacles in implementing blended learning in English courses at the English Education Department of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. More than that, students also have strategies to overcome these obstacles. It found there are 4 obstacles related to blended learning, that is time, the internet, the adaptation of class schedules, and miscommunication. Based on the student’s statement, to overcome time as an obstacle is by balancing time division, preparation, and making a daily schedule. The next strategies to overcome the obstacle of the internet are backing up learning materials by sending in class groups, moving to a place with a good internet connection, and having 2 different internet providers. Related to the adaptation of class schedule, it found that students need time for adapting to changing environments into blended learning. Miscommunication between students and lecturer that become problem can be handled by make confirmation with the lecturer.

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