

Teacher's Difficulties in Adapting to Blended Learning Approach during the New Normal: A Study in the Selected High Schools in East Lombok, Indonesia

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Abstract

After two years of school closure, the Government of Indonesia has released a new approach to accommodate the need for the teaching and learning process in the new normal time. Such an approach is expected to enable teachers to manage the classes flexibly through both offline and online channels. The present study aims to explore how English teachers in Indonesia respond to the implantation of Blended Learning approach at schools in the post-pandemic situation. The study employed a multiple case study approach to reveal the lived experiences of four English teachers from selected senior high schools in East Lombok. In collecting the data, the researchers employed observations, interviews, and documentation. The process of data analysis was went through a number of processes. The data resulted from interviews were transcribed, grouped and sorted according to emerging themes. The overall findings of the study show that the problems of implementing blended learning apparently appeared due to

- i) The lack of teachers' knowledge of technology,
- ii) Inadequate internet access,
- iii) The students' lacked ability to adjust to the learning system and
- iv) The lack of parental supports.

The implementation of blended learning by the three English teachers was found to be unsuccessful because the teaching and learning process went inadequately through the synchronous learning activities only. The study found that teachers' responses to the policy of blended learning went into two directions. Three participants accepted the blended learning whereas one teacher did not. These types of responses insinuate that what is laid down in the policy is not always responded accordingly. Furthermore, the problems in implementing blended learning were discussed thoroughly in this article.

Keywords: The teaching of English, online learning, blended learning, new normal

1. Introduction

A number of previous studies conducted during the school closure in Indonesia indicate that the implementation of online learning in Indonesia faces a number of problems. Authors such as Damayanti & Irwan, 2021; Bhuana & Apriliyanti, 2021; and Soepriyanti et.al. 2022, identify that the common problems experienced by English teachers in implementing online learning appeared due to teachers' limited knowledge and skills to use and utilize online devices; the lack of teachers' supports, and the decline of students' learning achievement. Besides, it was also reported that teachers had insufficient training in internet technology and thus they got difficulties in designing and delivering online learning materials.

With the coming of new normal era, schools are open and students return to their classes as usual. However, strict protocols and reduction of learning time are applied. As a response to the situation, the Government of Indonesia has released a new policy related to the use of teaching and learning approach in schools in the New Normal. The policy was written under four ministerial decisions 2021 (Kemendikbud, 2021)^[1]. In this policy, the implementation of

teaching-learning process after the COVID-19 pandemic time should be carried out through two instructional delivery channels, i.e. face-to-face and online. Based on this policy, school teachers are supposed to utilize both online and offline channels for the learning process. The policy insinuates that even though schools could run face to face learning mode, the online learning mode is still employed as a vehicle of learning. In this regard, the Minister of Education, Mr. Makarim (Kompas News, 2020)^[10] stated that adaptation of online technology for learning should continue despite the coming of New Normal. The use of technology for teaching and learning activities should remain fundamental to Indonesian education system. It is expected that the use of internet technology at schools will provide ample of opportunities for teachers and school management to develop their creativity to adopt various teaching learning models. In this context, the Indonesian Minister of Education, Mr. Makarim, explained that the blended learning approach would be used partially to support the face-to-face learning system. Theoretically, according to Siemens, *et al* (2015)^[13], blended learning is a combination of traditional face-to-face instruction and online instruction using technology-mediated

instruction. In the same token, Staker & Horn (2011) [15] stated blended learning is an educational approach that combines online educational materials and opportunities for online interaction with traditional place-based classroom methods. Similarly, Friesen (2012) [8] explains that blended learning brings about the range of learning possibilities that combine internet, digital media and face-to-face classroom engagement. The latter necessitates the physical presence of both the teacher and the students. From all of those definitions, it can be inferred that

1. Blended learning is the combination of face-to-face learning and online learning;
2. It cannot be separated from the use of technology in the implementation process;
3. The learning process is not limited to the classroom and can be completed from distance area and
4. The learning process allows teachers and students to express themselves creatively.

Furthermore, there are two major settings for the implementation of blended learning approach, i.e. synchronous and asynchronous settings (Almpanis *et al.* 2011) [2]. In the synchronous setting, learning is carried out in real time, where teachers and students can communicate directly through two-way communication that allows teachers to see directly the learning process experienced by students. Bower *et al.* (2014) [4] state that synchronous mode of learning is similar to regular learning. Communication occurs in real time. The teachers present and discuss the learning materials through classical interaction. They may post the materials in the website beforehand and the students are assigned to access the assigned materials for web-based conferencing activities. In the blended learning, synchronous learning can take real face-to-face meetings, video conferencing, Google Meet and chat room. In this situation, teachers can provide feedback directly to students during and after the learning process.

Conversely, in the asynchronous setting learning occurs more individualized. It is characterized by students' higher flexibility in accessing materials and interacting with other students through internet platform. In this learning setting, the teacher provides students with ample of opportunities to explore learning or teaching materials posted in the online platform. Researchers like Lucas & Moreira (2015) [11] concur that the flexibility of asynchronous allows students to reflect on the learning input at their own time. Asynchronous enables teachers to develop various learning materials in the form of video recording, documents, messages, and the like posted in the online platform. As such, students can access them in their time for further discussion and/or interaction with their teachers. Similar to synchronous learning, asynchronous learning is commonly carried out through the use of media such as e-mail, Moodle, Google Classroom and the like.

As regards blended learning, Chaeruman & Maudiarti (2018) [6] divides more detailed learning settings in blended learning into four learning modes. The first mode is known as a live synchronous mode. In this setting, the learning process is carried out face-to-face directly between teachers and students in the same time and place. Teachers deliver the learning materials in the classroom or face to face learning in the classroom. The activities could be in the forms of group discussion in the classroom, direct practice in the field, and so forth. The second one is named virtual synchronous mode. In this study setting, the learning process is carried out at the same time but the teacher and the students are in a different place. The learning process of this approach can be carried

out with synchronous learning technology such as audio-conference, web-based conference, and video conference. The third mode is identified as self-directed asynchronous setting. In this setting, the learning process is aimed for the individual students to carry out the learning activities independently. In another word, students are not limited by space and time. The fourth mode is known as collaborative asynchronous. In this study setting, students carried out the learning process more flexibly as they can explore learning resources independently and collaborate with others to take the gist of the learning resources. In the collaborative space, they can discuss, evaluate, and compare what they understand from the learning resources. All of these explanations inform that in the blended learning approach, the role of the teacher is to facilitate students with the learning process by providing learning resources that can be accessed independently.

To account for the phenomenon investigated, the present study employs both behaviourism and constructivism as a substantive theory. While behaviourism theory is used to account for the concepts of synchronous learning, constructivism is used to address the concepts of asynchronous learning. The synchronous learning mode in blended learning is closely related to the behaviorist learning theory because in this learning mode the teacher controls the interaction in the face-to-face meeting. In this learning model, the learning process is arranged systematically with the time and learning activities that have been set by the teacher. The teacher in this case directly controls the students' learning activities. Furthermore, asynchronous learning activities are referred to the learning concepts contained in constructivism learning theory. In the asynchronous setting, the learning activity aims to lead students to learn independently through the learning materials prepared by the teachers. In this learning process, teachers and students do not meet directly, but the teacher acts more as a facilitator for students in constructing their understanding of the materials being studied.

Along the explanation above, the objectives of the present research are formulated as follows:

1. To describe how do English teachers respond to the policy of implementing Blended Learning at school in pandemic situation.
2. To describe how English teachers implement Blended Learning as learning method and
3. To explore challenges are faced by English teachers in implementing Blended Learning

2. Method

This research used a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design. This research focused on one understanding of the phenomenon regarding the implementation of blended learning from the perspectives of four English teachers as the research participants. This research followed the idea shared by Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2012) [9] that stated the objective of qualitative research is to explore an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon based on the perception of the research object. This research design was chosen as a guide for the researchers to get comprehensive data to answer the research questions. To seek the answer to the research questions, the researchers conducted interviews, observations and document studies from the research participants.

This case study was conducted in three high schools in East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The present study was focused on understanding the high school teachers' efforts in responding to the policy of blended learning. To reveal participants' perspectives, the researchers

used semi-structured interviews with a total of 4 English teachers from one school. The researchers developed an interview guide that was arranged in the form of a list of themes. The interview occurred approximately between 40 to 50 minutes for each of the participants. To follow the research protocol, the participants were given interview guides and informed consent before they were interviewed. They were informed beforehand that the interview was not intended to reveal their mistakes. The interview was purely done for research purposes. The researchers noted that in doing the interviews the researchers did not experience any difficulty. All of the participants showed enthusiasm and cooperative attitude all the time.

As the researchers chose semi-structured interview model, the interview guides used were in the form of a list of themes. This interview aimed to look for participants' general perspectives concerning the implementation of blended learning in high schools. In the same vein, the data resulted from observations were sorted and categorized according to the themes that emerge from the data. Document checks were also done subsequently. The researchers double checked the data to seek for the consistency among other types of data. The data that were relevant to the themes or categories were grouped into sub-themes whereas any single data did not belong to either categories would be sorted out. The researchers used the qualitative analysis procedures as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) [12].

Further, the researchers used thematic analysis techniques to account for the meaning of the data. According to Braun and Clarke, (2006) [5] thematic analysis was a handy method used to identify particular data, analyze and report patterns of data. In analyzing data through thematic analysis, this research followed the six steps including

1. Familiarization,
2. Coding,
3. Generating themes,
4. Reviewing themes,
5. Defining and naming themes, and
6. Writing up.

This technique was adopted because the focus of the research was on the teacher's experience and views on changing mode of teaching. The data resulted from interviews were then transcribed, grouped and sorted according to emerging themes. The researchers then checked the consistency of every type of data. The relevant data were grouped into sub-themes until they were saturated.

3. Findings and Discussion

The present study yields two different types of teachers' responses pertaining to the application of blended learning in school during the pandemic time. Of the total participants studied, three participants, namely RP1, RP2 and RP4 stated that they used blended learning in the learning process whereas one participant, RP3, stated that she did not employ blended learning approach in the learning process. The three participants explained that they felt confident to employ blended learning in their classes because they received training from their peers. However, these participants admitted that they lack competence in varying the learning materials for blended learning. The one participant who rejected said that she did not have any background to run blended learning. She also informed that her school did not have any adequate device to run blended learning. Thus, she ran her class only on face-to-face basis. With the reduction of

learning time, i.e. 60 minutes per week, she had to struggle to deal with the learning target.

The data show that participants had various reasons to adopt the blended learning mode. Two participants, for example, stated that they used blended learning because of some reasons. Two participants, RP1 and RP2, stated they had similar reasons for implementing the blended learning model. They employed blended learning to comply with the directives from the government. They expressed the positive side of using blended learning. The first participant, RP1, contended that through blended learning she and her fellow teachers had many choices of media and learning resources to use in the learning process. RP 1 said, *"We have many choices of how to deliver material to students. We have to keep up with the times too. Maybe the lesson from this pandemic is that we use various platforms to teach, otherwise we will only use traditional learning even though our curriculum is new. Like K13, the spirit was student center. But we were negligent, it turns out that we have various platforms that we can use."* In line with this, the fourth participant stated the same thing, RP 4, *"With blended learning we learn more, and became more creative during the teaching and learning process. We also have varied learning methods and resources. We can show videos, we can make our own videos. The point is that the blended learning has honed teachers' creativity"*

Another positive side of blended learning was uttered by RP1 and RP4 participants. These participants considered that blended learning was able to motivate teachers to improve their ability to use technology as a learning medium. The first participant stated, *"Maybe the lesson from this pandemic (we got) is that we use various platforms to teach students, otherwise we will only use traditional learning even though our curriculum is new. The spirit of blended learning is student centeredness"* In line with this, RP 2 stated the same thing about blended learning *"With blended learning we learn more. With that (blended learning model) we become more creative in running the learning process. We also have a large selection of learning methods and resources. We can show videos from YouTube or we can make our own videos"* In addition, participant RP2 stated that her reason for using blended learning was because of the push of the existing conditions, the instruction from the education authority and/or following the Government' policy. In this relation, RP 2 expressed her thoughts *"During this COVID 19 period, the government recommends 50:50, 50% using offline and 50% using online. Actually, using the blended learning model is not what we want, but the condition forces us. As students are not allowed to have full face-to-face meetings, whether we like it or not, we are compelled to implement the blended learning"*

Different from her fellow teachers, the third participant, RP3, stated that she did not use blended learning because of some reasons. First, there was no clear regulation that directed teachers to implement blended learning. She explained, *"There is no clear direction. I do not know when the policy came into being"* She thought that it was optional. Teachers could adopt or reject the policy. Second, RP 3 considered that she felt more comfortable with face-to-face class meeting only. She thought using online class meeting was not effective. *(in the face-to-face meeting) I don't have to double my working hours to develop materials for online learning. So that's what we can do"* The third reason was related to participant's beliefs about online learning process. This participant stated, *"I believe the learning process should be*

simple and can make students understand. I noticed students understood English lessons better in the face-to-face meeting. Many of the students protested us that they don't understand individualized online English meeting materials. Many of them can't participate and return their assignments in my Google Classroom"

The observational data gained from three teachers show that they used blended learning during the learning process but the learning process was not yet maximally achieved. The data were matched with the claims made by these participants. Three of the English teachers delivering learning materials through Google Platform but most of the time they used synchronous virtual learning models or video conferences. Similarly when they conducted face-to-face classroom meeting, they mostly used synchronous learning. They approached the class using behavioristic approach. Teacher talk dominated the class. Thus, students did not have any opportunity to explore the asynchronous activities through the use of internet resources. In this relation, participant RP 1 contended, *"I send my assignment to students. The asynchronous learning model seemed to be used for formality only"*. She perceived that teachers mainly used WhatsApp to send learning resources and student assignments. The files sent were similar to the hard copy of the teaching modules available in the school. Although the teachers admitted to be able to use Google Classroom, they preferred to use WhatsApp to send the assignments. RP1 and RP4 stated that they felt uncertain to collaborate face-to-face and online class meeting because of their lack of knowledge and experience to implement blended learning model.

Regarding the problems faced by teachers in implementing blended learning, the data from interviews and observations show that a number of problems occurred during the implementation of blended learning. Results of data analysis generated four major problems faced by teachers, i.e.

1. The lack of knowledge and skills in utilizing online technology,
2. Students' poor attendance and lack participation.
3. Students' lack of parental support from home.

Regarding the problem with the use of technology, three participants stated that during the online blended learning process, many students were unable to participate in the learning process due to quota limitations and interference with the devices used. These problems occurred when teachers carried out virtual synchronous learning. RP 2 said, *"When we use Google meet or zoom, a number of students complained that they didn't have enough quota to participate in the Google Meet. I therefore dropped online meeting. I just sent the material via WhatsApp. We cannot force students to use Google meet or zoom when they are not ready financially"* The data from the observation show similarly. Teachers indeed experienced problems in dealing with students' various abilities to engage in the online class. Some students showed that they could not learn independently because of the shortage of technological devices. Some of them even did not participate in the learning process due to the bad connections in their home. This caused the teachers to experience difficulties in running the online learning classes. Additionally, due to the scarcity of personal learning device, the level of students' engagement in the blended learning could be categorized low; a number of facts supported this observation. For example, the attendance rate of the students participating in online learning was lower than face-to-face class. In this relation, RP2 admitted, *"the average of students'*

attendance was between 50% to 60%, or maximally of 70%. I saw their names on the screen of Google Meet but when I checked, the person was not there. So, I think the implementation of blended learning in my class is not quite effective" In the same way, participant RP4 contended that students did not participate well in the classroom interaction *"If I deliver the material in the form of a video, students were just passively watching. They did not give comments or feedback from what they watched"*

The next problem is students' inability to adjust to the demand of blended learning, i.e. Learning independently. The data from observations show that students still depended on teachers' direction. Many of them did not do teachers' assignments posted online. They preferred that their teachers gave copies of assignments during face-to-face meeting. In this case participant RP 4 stated *"Many of the students have not adapted to the blended learning style. It happens in all levels. Students perceive that study from home using online device was not real learning activity. They seem to be enthusiastic to learn English through face to face mode"* The same responses were uttered by other participants. Participant RP 1 concurred that students' low morale in participating in the blended learning due to the lack of support from their parents. *"Lack of parental role in supervising students to participate in the online learning was obvious. It turns out that many parents think that during online learning their children can be told to go to the market, babysit their younger siblings, feed their younger siblings, etc. I heard these from my students."* In line with this, the fourth participant stated RP4, *"The main obstacle is that there is no support from parents. I often find that students sign in, then I heard nothing. It was just a silence.....When students study from home, parents think that their children are on vacation. Thus, they can tell their children to do house work"*

Results of data analysis show that synchronous learning activities seemed to be dominant than the asynchronous ones. This can be seen from teachers' strong inclination to employ the principles of behaviorism learning theory. Even the learning activities devised by the teachers in the asynchronous mode did not facilitate students to learn independently. The research also yields that blended learning was not implemented maximally because teachers tended to dominate the class with their explanations and disregard students' participation. From the observations made, the learning process tended to be teacher-centered.

To conclude, the study has identified a number of problems faced by teachers in implementing blended learning. These problems include:

1. Teachers' lack of knowledge and skills in using online technology,
2. The scarcity of personal learning device such as internet access
3. Students' low participation and lack of independence in the online learning,
4. Unviability of parental supports.

The present study supports the research findings reported by Damayanti & Irwan, 2021; Bhuana & Apriliyanti, 2021; and Soepriyanti et.al. 2022. The unsuccessful implementation of running the blended learning in the research sites happened due to teachers' unchanged teaching habits. limited ability to device blended learning, and the lack of supports for both teachers and students.

4. Conclusion

The study found that teachers' responses to the policy of blended learning went into two directions. Three participants accepted the blended learning whereas one teacher rejected the policy if blended learning. The implementation of blended learning by the three English teachers was considered unsuccessful because the teaching and learning process was only centred more on the synchronous learning activities. There are a number of obstacles and challenges faced by the three English teachers who ran blended learning approach, i.e.

1. The lack of knowledge and skills in developing asynchronous learning activities;
2. Lack of internet facilities and access to internet and
3. The lack of parental supports.

Although these teachers had attempted to use various teaching, strategies, they still experienced difficulties as they were not used to adjusting to the blended learning approach. They kept employing conventional teaching methods which emphasized more on teacher-talk rather than students' participation. Overall, the study revealed two different types of participants who responded to the policy of teaching English through Blended Learning approach:

- i) Acceptance and
- ii) Resistance.

These two types of responses insinuate that what has been laid down as a policy is not always responded accordingly

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