**EFL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION ON A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

**IN TEACHING ENGLISH**

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**Abstract**

This research aimed to find out the implementation of blended learning and students’ perception on a blended learning in teaching English. A qualitative descriptive method used as the framework for this research. This research also applied coding method in data analysis. The subjects of the research were taken from the students of English Department in Post Graduate Program, State University of Makassar. The data of this research were collected through observation, self report and interview. The result of this research showed that the students expressed a highly positive perception generally. They believed that blended learning will make them more interested in learning English and it will help them to improve their language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). This could be attributed to the flexibility and accessibility that blended learning environment offers. Also, it was very interesting to see that EFL students were highly optimistic about how blended learning will help them in improving their performance.

**Key words**: face to face learning, e-learning, blended learning, teaching English

**Introduction**

Technology is becoming important in both personal and professional lives, and learners are using technology more and more. Technology in language teaching is not new. Indeed, technology has been around in language teaching for decades. An online learning environment has been adopted by many higher education institutions for years. It has been suggested that such learning environment promotesstudent centred learning and encourages increased student interactions.

There are many uses of technology in education, especially in the conventional pattern learning system or traditional patterns into mediated modern information and communication technology (ICT). One of them is a computer with internet media, which in turn gave rise to e-learning. In this ICT mediated learning patterns, the learner can choose their own learning materials based on their interest, so that learning becomes fun, not boring, full of motivation, enthusiasm, attract attention and so on.

E-learning is a common method that it is able to present the content of the course in a longer period of time compared to classroom environment and other methods; it allows education for seven days and twenty four hours; it reaches more number of learners; and it ensures a learning environment which is independent of time and place.

As Brown (2003) stated that blended learning supports all the role of e-learning including cost reductions, time efficiency and location convenience for the learner as well as the essential one on one personal understanding and motivation that face to face instructions presents.

There are several reasons why a blended learning approach can be beneficial. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) identified the following six reasons on using blended learning :Pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost-effectiveness and ease of revision.

The purpose of this research was to explore EFL students’ perceptions on a blended learning environment in teaching English. With this overarching question in mind, the following two research questions were developed: (1) How is blended learning implemented in Graduate Program at State University of Makassar and (2) What is the EFL students’ perception on a blended learning environment on teaching English in Graduate Program at State University of Makassar?

**Methodology**

A qualitative descriptive method used as the framework for research. Yin (2011) states that qualitative research differs because of its ability to represent the views and perceptions of the participants in a study. Capturing the students perception may be a primary goal of a qualitative study. Thus, events and ideas emerging from qualitative research can represent the meaning given to real life events by those who live them, not values, prejudices, or meanings hold by researcher.

The description was in the form of self report. Some selected participants were interviewed by using open ended questions by applying semi-strutcured interview to have a deep and detail explanation about their perception. The data in the form of self report and the transcription of the interview were analyzed by applying coding method, those are open coding and focused coding.

**Findings and Discussions**

The students’ perceptions on a blended learning in teaching English based on the result of the students’ self report and interview which related to personal, professionalism, pedagogy, social and appearance were categorized and subcategorized as follows:

1. Positive perceptions

Many studies have been conducted recently to explore the effectiveness of blended learning and how it affects teachers’ and students’ performance. In general, findings were in favour of blended learning, showing how it improves their performance and leaves them with a positive perception.

There are some positive perceptions in regarding to how EFL students perceive the role of blended learning environment in teaching English. The following themes would be positively the EFL students’ perceptions:

1. An effective approach

There is a variety of teaching and learning approach. Each approach depends on the learner’s preferences and needs. In designing the approach, few things have to be considered such as to provide easy access of content, to provide a good experience for learners and to provide guidance and feedback and how the students interest using this approach. One of them is a blended learning; blended learning is the combination between face to face and e-learning in teaching or traditional class and virtual class. One of the special qualities of blended learning is an effective approach. This perception was stated by Marni in her self report as follows:

*“Also, l could find answers to the questions l was not able to ask in the class due to lack of time. So, blended learning is an effective approach in teaching English based on my experiences when my lecturer taught me thought face to face learning and e-learning”*

Blended learning is defined simply as a learning environment that combines technology with face to face learning. In other words blended learning means using a variety of delivery methods to best meet the course objectives by combining face-to-face teaching in a traditional classroom with teaching online. So, it is Reasonable when the student stated if blended learning is an effective approach in teaching English.

A blended learning approach is flexible, using the most effective delivery options for each stage of learning. It is more effective than any single form of learning at creating the results you want such as sustained behavioural change that increases the return on your training investment.

1. Think in-depth about the subject

Think in-depth about the subject is one form of effectiveness on a blended learning teaching. The students can think in-depth because teachers’ approach is interesting. This result showed from Hamranis’ self report.

*“Technology holds an important role in language teaching. Blended learning can define as process of learning that utilize the varies of approach on media and technology. I found that blended learning more convenient than face to face learning only; it helps me to think in-depth about a subject”*

Blended learning can be very helpful for the teacher and student if applied properly. It gives students more time to communicate face-to-face with their teacher in class to make them participate in various activities and discuss different topics with them. Students can be given sources to enrich their knowledge and to develop their skills. Adding to that, blended learning can be fun and rewarding when interacting with autonomous and confident students.

1. Confidence

The integration of e-learning environment and traditional learning environment may combine ideally the useful aspects of both methods. E-learning environments ensure the flexibility and efficacy which cannot be found in a classroom environment where as face to face learning environment provides the social interaction which is required for learning. Because this study is combination between face to face and e-learning so the students believe on their self confidence in learning English. In other words, it helps to decrease students’ level of anxiety and shyness. This perception was stated Faudzih self report as follows:

*“In addition, this reflects the interaction between teachers and students, and gives me enough time to do my tasks. Not to forget that it helps me to decrease my level of anxiety and shyness”*

This could be explained due to the flexible process that blended learning offers. It gives students more time to learn with an active environment that provides new experiences and outcomes. Not to forget that it helps to decrease students’ level of anxiety and shyness. Furthermore, Blended learning provides more guidance and accessibility to students.

1. Support another learning

Blended learning is the integration of face to face EFL classroom interaction and e-learning. This is a complementary learning strategy that can support each other in learning process in the classroom because we use two strategies in learning process to obtain the goal of instructional objectives. This followed by Ali Husni’s subject self report:

*“There are some strategies in teaching and learning English. One of them is blended learning. Blended learning is the integration of face to face EFL classroom interaction and e-learning. This is a complementary learning strategy that can support each other in learning process in the classroom because we use two ways strategies in the learning process to obtain the goal of instructional objectives. By these strategies we hope can solve some problems that found in EFL classroom using traditional methods”*

Our life is rapidly changing due to the effect of technology and much has changed in the field of education as part of this revolution. Learning is no longer confined to the four walls and whiteboard of a classroom, due to a variety of tools and resources that instructors can use to create a rich teaching experience.

1. Support teacher’s role

Teachers integrate two strategies in the learning process so blended learning is interesting and good way to transfer knowledge to the students. Beside using face to face meeting in the EFL classroom interaction by various activities such as: speech, discussion or presentation, lecture can also give some assignments to the students through e-learning. If the lecture cannot hold face to face meeting, he or she can share their materials by giving assignment to his or her students so the role of e-learning can support the lecturer’s role even though it can be done outside the classroom. Ali Husnis’ self report as followed:

*“If the lecture can not hold face to face meeting, he or she can share their materials by giving assignment to his or her students so the role of e-learning can support the lecturer’s role even though it can be done outside the classroom”*

1. Developing motivations

Motivation has long been identified as one of the main factors effecting English language learning. Blended learning can stimulate autonomous learning to the students by searching, finding and overcoming an issue by themselves, so this strategy can develop the students’ motivation. The following perception from Ali Husni to subject’s self report:

*“The role of e-learning can support the lecturer’s role even though it can be done outside the classroom. Another point is blended learning can stimulate autonomous learning to the students by searching, finding and overcoming an issue by themselves, so this strategies can develop the students’ motivation”*

The case above showed that blended learning can improve students’ motivation in learning English that because, blended learning can stimulate autonomous learning to the students by searching, finding and overcoming an issue by themselves. In addition, motivation is as an important component or factor in the learning process.

Another student stated that about blended learning is the good way to improve the students in learning because it can collaborate between two media that can motivate the students. The perception was from Fahrul:

*“The blended learning is the good way to improve the students in learning because it can collaborate between two media that can motivate the students because use the media that very close with the students and also give new information by use modern media such as internet and many instruments in teaching we can use”*

Motivation was as the process aroused by stimulus to achieve desired purpose, behaviours or conditions. Motivation is the continuous process based on the person’s desire.

1. Control the learning

Blended learning is coming from traditional and technological technical term where the two methods of learning are mixed each other to make one style of new learning. Blended learning also incorporating technology that can aid the students in seeing the relevancy of what they are learning to the world outside of class and how the integration of technology will affect life after high school either in college or in careers. Blended learning also allows the students to take control their own learning because they can do their assignment wherever or whenever they want. As the subject’s self report followed by Rafi:

*“Another way, blended learning allows me to take control my own learning because l can do my assignment wherever or whenever l want”*

Sometimes, learners need to be controlled. Sometimes, they need to delegate control to others, typically teachers. Often, with the aid of dialogue, the control is negotiated. Social software such as wikis, blogs and link sharing systems offer the potential to create online environments that enable students to choose the level of control that they need, However, it is very easy for this to be scary for both teachers and learners, and the extreme equalizing effect of such tools can lead to dangers that the blind might lead the blind, or that learners and teachers can become lost in a complex and uncoordinated structure of their own making.

1. Can access anywhere

Using blended leaning in teaching made the students easily to understand the lesson because the students have many opportunities to access their lesson whatever they need. This followed from Rafi’s self report said:

*“I can access my subject out of class and I can express my ideas without controlling by the teacher. I feel free to study by my own self”*

1. Quite exemplary

A blended teaching and learning methods will always be the most efficient way to encourage students’ learning because it is only possible to embrace all discussion, interaction, adaptation and reflection activities, which are essential for academic learning. Blended learning is a learning approach where it process is held by doing face to face and internet based learning. The student felt this learning is quite exemplary in this digital modern. This was stated from Azwar:

*“As I know that blended-learning is a learning method where it process is held by doing face to face and internet based learning. I think, this method is quite exemplary for the students in this modern era”*

Face to face is the method that has been using as an oldest method in learning process in the world where the students and teacher conduct their learning process in the “real world” situation. While internet based learning is new method where the students and teacher conduct their learning process on internet.

1. Digest instruction

Blended Learning is a learning model that combines face to face learning in the classroom with online learning. It gives ELL and ESL students the ability to read and hear the instruction (often at the same time), while utilizing their already established context and schema to help create connections between the English words and their meaning. Essentially, the individualized instruction aspects of blended learning let the student digest instruction at his or her own pace, it let the students easier to understand the instruction, this one of an effectiveness of blended learning in teaching. As Luqman’s self report:

*“Essentially, the individualized instruction aspects of blended learning let the student digest instruction at his or her own pace, while concurrently developing the necessary lexicon understanding”*

1. Encourage new vocabulary

Blended learning environments put the device straight into the hands of the EFL students, allowing them to interact kinaesthetically with laptops, computers, and mobile devices. The personal hands on relation between student and technology, engagement and the student’s connection between language reception and individual understanding. By using blended learning the students can encourage their new vocabularies because they can find it in their device. This perception was stated Luqman’s self report as follows:

*“By providing self-driven learning tools (via digital content and resources), schools can finally give their ELL/ESL students the engaging, effective learning experience they need to improve progress and connection with their new language and new vocabulary”*

Blended learning, when well implemented, has the potential to support vocabulary learning process since it increases the amount of learning compared to that in-class learning.

1. Interesting

It is important to note that there is no single way of blended route. Blended approach could be effective to help EFL learners improve their knowledge if digital tools are selected in accordance with students’ needs and interests. Needs analysis should be conducted to make the best selection of online tools and activities for each particular group of students. Nunun’s self report expressed:

*“Applying blended learning in teaching English courses will make me like English more and display more interest in learning it. I have found the English courses easier to learn when applying blended learning in teaching. Blended learning to English courses will be more interesting and relaxing than using traditional approach”*

From the stated above, it showed that using blended learning to English course will be more interesting and relaxing that using only traditional approach. Therefore, designing the approach, few things have to be considered such as to provide easy access of content, to provide a good experience for learners and to provide guidance and feedback and how the students interest using this approach.

1. Improving communication both teacher and student

I confirm that the need for a blended learning training program for EFL teachers. It will help to give an insight into the importance of blended learning and why it is not “a waste of time”. Some teachers may think that they will give the same materials in class and on the internet. “Student proficiency remains the goal not covering every page of the course book in class”. The students need to access it in out of class via e-learning. This can improve their communication with teacher because they not only interact in the class but out of class also with e-learning, the students can use their device, mobile or another access to do it. Nunun said in her self report:

*“Generally, EFL students believe that blended learning helps improve communication between teachers and students. This might be because of how blended learning encourages the students to be active and independent”*

Communication between teacher and student is most important to make the student fells in close with the teacher so, the student will not afraid to make communication or interaction with teacher. Distance education systems now involve a high degree of interactivity between teacher and student, even in rural and isolated communities separated by perhaps thousands of miles. Moreover, virtual learning communities can be formed, in which students and researchers throughout the world who are part of the same class or study group can contact one another at any time of the day or night to share observations, information, and expertise with one another

1. Self-discipline

Blended learning allows both instructor and student more extended and effective educational experiences than only face to face instruction. For faculty members, blended learning is seen as providing more opportunities for teacher student interaction, increased student engagement in learning, added flexibility in the teaching and learning environment, and opportunities for continuous improvement. Nunun said in her self report:

*“Using visual aids with Blended learning will make learning English more interesting and the blended learning approach will motivate me to learn better. Blended Learning can encourage learners’ creativity and simplify the learning environment in order to enhance their self-discipline and motivation”*

Blended learning can improve the student self discipline because the student can control their own learning in e-learning. They access their e-learning class whenever and wherever they want.

1. Foster critical and reflective thinking

Using blended learning is can help foster critical and reflective thinking to the students in online instruction, it is no worse than traditional instruction in terms of student outcomes, then online education initiatives could be justified on the basis of cost efficiency or the need to provide access to learners in settings where face to face instruction is not feasible. As Andi Haryani stated:

*“I think learning with blended learning can help foster critical and reflective thinking”*

In this blended learning the students have to think deeply because this approach combining from two approaches, so it is need reflective thinking to apply this approach.

 Controlled over the time and place

E-learning is a practical and common approach since it presents the learning content in a longer period of time compared with classroom environment and other tools. It ensures the continuation of education twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Andi Haryani stated:

*“Yes l do, the students can be controlled over the time and place their task and it easy and creatively to do the task”*

In this perception the students can manage their time when they use blended learning in teaching and learning English.

*“Yes, because l feel easy for me to do the online assignment where can do whenever and wherever l want”*

1. Solving the face to face learning problem

The integration of an online learning environment and a classroom environment is likely to combine ideally the advantageous aspects of both types of instruction. Online or web-based learning environment provides the flexibility and the efficiency which cannot be assured in a classroom environment whereas a face-to-face education class ensures the social interaction in which the students will need guidance for learning. Interviewed from Ali Husni said:

*“Blended learning can solve the problem in face to face learning for example it can run without lecturer presence in the classroom”*

1. Cost effectiveness

Using blended learning in teaching and learning English very efficient and cost effectiveness because we do not need to spend all of time in the classroom because we can do of have the class in internet classroom. As the Azwar said in interview session:

*“Blended learning is cost effectiveness”*

We can say this blended learning is cost effectiveness because we only need an internet connection to have this online class.

1. Learning about technology

Learning with blended learning means that we learn about technology, it teaches us to know the function of technology in teaching and learning especially in teaching and learning English. Hamrani said in interview session:

*“I think blended learning is very important to employ, because when we talk about learning, it can be separated with technology (pc, lcd, internet)”*

1. Skills development

The students believe that using blended learning can improve their skill development, as the students viewed from interview session:

*“Yes of course, with using blended learning can employee and skill development especially with online learning or assessment. Those are good combination (blended learning)”*

1. Negative perceptions

There were some negative perceptions in regarding to how EFL students perceive on a blended learning environment in teaching English. The following themes would be negatively the EFL students’ perceptions:

1. Difficult to understand the instruction

Blended learning is learning based on various combinations of classical face to face lectures, learning over the Internet, and learning supported by other technologies, aimed at creating the most efficient learning environment. Blended learning also incorporates other elements such as online and traditional learning environments, technology and media for learning content delivery, different teaching and learning methods (both online and traditional), group and individual learning activities, and synchronous and asynchronous interactions. Because of this learning is combine from two approaches then the students sometimes fell difficult to understand the instruction from the teacher moreover when the teacher did not replay or answer the students’question via e-learning or email question. This one the negative impact of the blended learning in teaching. As Faudziah said on his self report;

*“In other side of Blended learning is difficult to do, knowledge is not less than face to face knowledge, the instructions are not easy to follow, frustrating to use”*

The instruction is needed in teaching and learning interaction because, good instruction can make the students fell clearly understand the lesson.

1. Wasting the time

The classic approach in education shows a number of problems for both educational establishments and learners. Such problems can be the mobility of the learners, the waste of time that could be devoted to learning, the high direct and indirect cost is caused by the expenses of travelling and mainly the inability of the learner to accommodate his personal needs because they need to be informed at all times of the advancements around their profession. The respond of the informant about negative expressions of blended learning is about wasting time. Faudziah commented about blended learning:

*“In addition, the materials of blended learning are not well organized. Also the other drawbacks of difficulties of blended learning are wasting the time, lead students to cheating and other unethical practices”*

Blended learning was more time consuming than traditional courses because of using communication via email or discussion board need more time than conducting face to face class.

1. Lead students to cheat

Blended learning courses have some face-to-face class meetings, but also have some class sessions that are replaced with online instruction. The students can access the internet whenever or wherever they want to attend the e-learning class. From that, the students can cheat with other students because they can access their friend’s assignment in e-learning class. This followed by the Faudziah’s perception:

*“Blended learning is wasting the time, lead students to cheating and other unethical practices”*

In the same perception of blended learning he said that, blended learning allows the students to cheat each other.

*“Yes l do, it is allow students to cheat each other”*

1. Slow internet connectivity

Blended learning also has some difficulties to apply when the tools were not supported; the facilities were not covered for all the students. One of the problems is slow internet connectivity. Internet connection is very important role in teaching using blended learning because the students have to access their assignment via online but how about the students who are in remote area? They have not strong internet connection. This one the problem for the user of blended learning. As Hamrani said in his self report:

*“But, l think that blended learning also has some difficulties to apply when the tools were not support, the facilities were not covered for all the students and access of internet is slow”*

Another perception about bad internet connection said that if low internet connection made her difficult to do e-learning class or to do some online assignments. As she said:

*“When I have bad connection in internet that made me confuse how to do my assignment in e-learning classroom”*

*“Yes l do, when l have a bad signal, low internet connection or bad wify connection so l feel lazy to do the task”*

*(Self report from Hamrani, March 23 2017)*

*“Blended learning is using internet connection tool, the problem is there is to not always good internet connection access before starting the lesson”*

*(Interview with Azwar, March 23 2017)*

*“It is difficult to apply it when the tools are not supporting and the access of internet connection sometimes low and they can not apply the facilities properly”*

*(Interview with Hamrani, March 23 2017)*

In recent years the spread of computer use, development of Internet technologies and fast Internet connection have paved the way for providing a significant part of distance education through the Internet. That is why, concepts such as e-learning, online learning or web-based learning, where Internet and network technologies are overwhelmingly used in the presentation and reception of the content, are used to refer to these learning environments rather than the concept of distance education which defines a quite larger area, including models of learning through letter and radio broadcasting.

1. Lack of face to face interaction

In this modern day digital age, technology has changed the way we study and communicate. Yet despite the clear advantages of digital communication and telecommuting, there are many restrictions that still exist, and it would be a mistake to assume that face-to-face communication in the classroom could lose its worth. Communication can be undervalued in teaching because it’s difficult to measure. See below for the top benefits of face-to-face communication, and scenarios where digital should be the last choice. This one of the student’s perception that blended learning is lack of face to face interaction between teacher and students because they spent another time with e-learning. Hamrani said:

*“The facilities were not covered for all the students and access of internet is slow, teachers don’t reply to emails, lack of face to face interactions and it also difficult for some students who are in the remote”*

Another perception said, he prefer face to face learning than e-learning because it easy to understand the face to face instruction.

*“Because I myself prefer learning face to face than internet based learning, I can faster understand the teacher when explain the lesson by face to face method. Besides that, I don’t like learning especially reading something such a text in front of the computer’s screen” (Self report from Azwar)*

Communication between teacher and student is the key of successful learning, and it allow the students to communicate in meaningful ways both online and face to face that will help bridge the gap, If students can understand that the teacher is very interested in communication and the social interaction that necessarily has to occur for students to learn, then the students will buy into the fact that they need to be active face to face and online.

1. Not perfectly effective

Students can imitate the answer of the other students because no one observes the students behaviour. Students can know the questions before his turn to answer so they can prepare well by searching or imitating the answer of the other testee so the output result does not reflect the real mastery or the real performance of the subject. We can said that this approach not good effective based on Ali’s perception:

*“By using e-leaning in giving assignment or examination to the students is not perfectly effective since the items in the assignment are the same. Students can imitate the answer of the other students because no one observes the students behaviour”*

Results of the findings showed that face to face interaction is a must for students. Besides, the students’ reflective reports and their feedback showed that blended learning was felt to have enhanced their learning opportunities. Student feedback revealed that the provision of the blended learning was highly appreciated and positively rated by them.

**Conclusions**

As shown in the findings discussed here, the students perceptions can be concluded if the application of blended learning in teaching can be helpful for student but few things have to be considered such as to provide easy access of content, to provide a good experience for learners and to provide guidance and feedback and how the students interest using blended learning. The context of the learning environment has also shown to be very important to student learning experience.

The students expressed a highly positive perception in general. They believed that blended learning made them more interested in learning English and helped them to improve their language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). This could be attributed to the flexibility and accessibility that blended learning environment offers. Also, it was very interesting to see that EFL students were highly optimistic about how blended learning helped them in improving their performance. Students had more time to interact with their teacher in class through communicative activities. Students would be more relaxed and motivated to express their opinions. Blended learning also offers a variety ways on how to teach and learn for both teachers and students respective.

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