

Pre-Service English Teachers' Challenges and Opportunities in Flex Model Blended Learning -Assisted: Narrative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Hybrid or blended learning is an alternative method during Covid-19 Pandemic. In this context, flex model blended learning is one of the ways for handling teaching and learning processes because it can be done without face-to-face interaction. This narrative research aims to investigating the challenges and opportunities of pre-service English teacher in implementing flex model on blended learning teaching. The data was collected through interview. This research was conducted to five Pre-service's English teachers at University in Karawang who conduct online teaching in various public schools. The findings revealed that there are some challenges and opportunities appeared while implementing flex model blended learning. The challenges were low media utilization, low connectivity, disordered time allocation and low student interaction. Furthermore, the opportunities of flex model blended learning were resources and flexibility. This research is expected to help pre-service's English teacher, English teachers, student and school to be better in implementing flex model blended learning.

Keywords: Flex Model, Blended Learning, Online Learning, Pre-service English Teacher,

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) affected education all over the world. It makes Indonesia's Government issued a policy to limit offline face-to-face learning to reduce the spread of virus. The policy forced the school to switch their learning process from face-to-face learning offline into online learning class or blended learning. Hybrid or blended learning is a better method as long as Covid-19 Pandemic. As this context, blended learning is one of the ways for tackling teaching and learning processes due it can be implemented without offline face-to-face interaction. It is strengthened by Hockly (2015) that stated the teaching and learning process can be implemented without face-to-face meeting that was known as online learning. Blended learning can be better in flexibility than traditional learning that must be face to face meeting offline. Brysch (2020) stated that blended learning give teachers much more flexibility than face-to-face classes since barriers to attendance arising from time or location constraints either are removed or reduced.

Teachers are needed to be creative and innovative to keep excellent teaching. Here, teachers continue teaching by many innovative platforms to facilitate blended learning. Platform that used to be used are Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Team and so on. It is

strengthened by Istiqomah (2021) that stated the conventional learning or the face-to-face offline meeting interaction that is usually done offline or meeting directly in the classroom is switching into the virtual meeting through video conferencing such as Zoom, Google Meet, and so on. So that, Pre-service teacher have to be creative in integrated technology as teaching media in classroom such as implemented in blended learning.

Blended learning implementation has been a trend method for teachers and students in Indonesia in order to facilitate the effective teaching and learning in COVID-19 pandemic. This approach of learning forces the teachers to develop technology and material in the process of teaching and learning such as using some online platform. Rachman, Sudioyono and Phonix (2020) stated that Bandung as the urban area in West Java Province, almost 164 senior high school in Bandung have been forced to implement technology in the process of teaching and learning in order to achieve Bandung as the smart city. They also argued that regarding to the new normal era of Covid-19 pandemic, almost all the schools in Bandung have no choice to implement blended learning as the way to facilitate the teachers and students in conducting teaching and learning process. Meanwhile, since Bandung as one of big city in West Java

In implementing blended learning, teachers encounter obstacles in the middle of their teaching. Aji, W.K. (2020) stated that teachers find the challenges when applied blended learning, they are poor internet connection, time consuming, and less of experiences. He revealed poor internet connection is being matter because not every students have a good signal.

Previous study that entitled the Blended Learning Implementation of ELT based on Teachers' and students' perspectives in new normal condition of covid 19 from Rachman, Sudioyono and Phonix (2020) reveal that the perceptions of teachers and students towards the implementation of blended learning in English has a positive impact for teaching in learning. They stated implemented blended learning have the advantages of English teaching learning process. The subject of the research only focus on teachers' and students' perspective, thus the different subject were still need to be explored. The research about The Students' Perceptions on Using Blended Learning for English Learning during Covid-19 Pandemic from Istiqomah (2021) revealed the weakness of blended learning. This study have the same area in objective with the researcher, however this study participant are students in university. In this study, researcher participant are pre-service English teacher, which are candidate to become a teacher and lack of experiences. The study from Hidayat, D. N. (2021) entitled The Aftermath of COVID-19 Education Disruption: Readiness of Pre-Service English Teachers for Blended Learning revealed participants could be considered 'adequate' up to a 'high' level of readiness

for blended learning. Unfortunately, the research only focus in general blended learning. From those previous research above, the researcher assume that the study about Implementing Flex Model on Blended Learning English Teaching in Senior Highschool by Pre-service Teacher's Perspective during Covid-19 Outbreak: Narrative Research is still less in Indonesia, because this research specified blended learning in flex model. So that, the aim of this study is investigating the challenges and opportunities of pre-service English teacher in implementing flex model on blended learning teaching. Then, the research question were 1. What challenges do Pre-service English teachers face/encounter in flex model on blended learning teaching? ; 2. What opportunities do Pre-service English teachers have in flex model blended learning teaching?. The outcome of this research is expected to contribute ideas in practicing teaching and learning process especially in implemented blended learning during Covid-19 Pandemic. Then, this study be able to enrich strategy in implemented flex model on blended learning to improve the quality of learning.

Review of Literature

Blended Learning

According to Nasution, N. et al (2019), they stated that blended learning is combination between conventional learning (face-to-face) and learning which utilize information and communication technology. Blended learning is also known as hybrid learning or mixed learning. Sharma (2014) said that the terms 'blended,' 'hybrid,' 'technology-mediated instruction,' 'web-enhanced instruction,' and 'mixed-mode instruction' are as often as possible used reciprocally in today's research literature. It was supported by Syam, et al (2019) that stated hybrid e-learning or Blended Learning unites conventional learning with digital learning to oblige the present improvement innovation technology era as Industrial Revolution 4.0. It is in line with Istiqomah (2021) that stated blended learning can integrate both modes of teaching and learning process in which the traditional and online learning are mixed in the classroom setting. She add "the traditional learning or the face-to-face interaction that is usually done offline or meeting directly in the classroom is shifted into the virtual meeting through video conferencing such as Zoom, Google Meet, and so on". In addition, Kazu, et al (2014) add blended learning is a new type of education prepared for a certain group by combining the positive aspects of different learning approaches. It can be concluded that blended learning is traditional learning which face to face learning that combines with online class using technology.

In handling English teaching learning process, blended learning can be alternative method that relevant in Covid-19 Outbreak because blended learning is flexible. Shivan & Sing (2015) stated that blended learning is defined as a combination of digital content and face-to-face content that has characteristics namely, cost-effective, time-saving and flexible. Related with health protocol, teaching and learning academic processes was not conducted only in classroom. It can be conducted in wherever, even in home. Istiqomah (2021) stated blended Learning has been widely used nowadays since the pandemic has been experienced and affected all sectors in the world, including the education sector. She also add “In blended learning mode, the students got instruction in the virtual classroom and did the learning activity outside of the classroom.”

According to Staker, H., & Horn, M. B. (2012) definition of flex model was a program in which content and instruction are delivered primarily by the Internet, students move on an individually customized, fluid schedule among learning modalities, and the teacher-of-record is on-site. The teacher-of-record or other adults provide face-to-face support on a flexible and adaptive as-needed basis through activities such as small-group instruction, group projects, and individual tutoring. Some implementations have substantial face-to-face support, while others have minimal support. For example, some flex models may have face-to-face certified teachers who supplement the online learning on a daily basis, whereas others may provide little face-to-face enrichment. Still others may have different staffing combinations. These variations are useful modifiers to describe a particular Flex model.

Challenges in Implementing Flex Model Blended Learning

According to Victoria Education research, Watterston, J. (2012) stated that there are a number of challenges for teachers and students in implementing blended learning strategies. They are:

- a. Teachers encountered challenges in re-design or re-develop the curriculum. The instructor have to track content and instruction both face-to-face and online. Most negative feelings towards blended forms of learning tend to be generated poorly designed approaches. Teacher should prepare their students for the blended learning style and discuss the new roles and responsibilities. Some students won't be used to working independently or may be unfamiliar with some of the technologies.
- b. The capacity for teachers to utilize new technologies into teaching and learning programs may be limited if it implemented without an expended time commitment, and support from IT staff and additional professional development.

- c. Access to technical assistance and ICT training opportunities remains an issue for some educators. Common technological issues that need to be resolved: a lack of bandwidth, and IT support, web proxies and internet filters impacting on program delivery and the cost of student access to the internet.
- d. Instead of teacher, student also need preparation and support for transition to becoming more independent learners and self-managers. Student required additional assistance in understanding internet protocols especially those of cybersafety and intellectual property.

Opportunities in Implementing Flex Model Blended Learning

Throne (2003) revealed that implementing blended learning will have numerous opportunities. First is student and teacher be able to learn together by creating a learning community which provide group work. Students will have learning experiences in communicating by having more interaction, whether in face-to-face learning and indirect teaching in an online class. After that, the course could be directed as flexible as direct teaching in a face-to-face class and indirect teaching in an online class.

Furthermore, according to Victoria Education research, Watterston, J. (2012) stated that blended learning approaches had a benefits or opportunities. There are:

- a. Student were able to vary their pace of learning, drawing on as few or as many resources as necessary, choosing task/resources that best suited or matched their learning styles and level of prior knowledge. Student could use teacher created vodcast to review class work, practice their knowledge of a text by playing their aligned online games, and demonstrate knowledge of principles by recounting their own understanding of the topics through claymation storytelling. Blended learning allowed students to shine in competencies other than the traditional literacies, as leaders, ICT technical experts, cultural experts, resource managers and negotiators. They also acquired new literacies of intercultural understanding through exposure to global connections, and constructing knowledge from non-linear content. As a result from Victorian Education research, students became more informed, more resourceful and constructed their own learning paths, ultimately producing better work outputs. Increased system knowledge of how to use and integrate ICTs into better teaching and learning practice raise expectations and outcomes for students.
- b. Student change their behaviors to become more reflective, collegial, and collaborative (engaging I peer coaching and team activities) and far more accepting of peer review and external feedback. Engaging in more reflective and self-monitoring task also enhanced their understanding.

- c. The positive impact of ICT on student learning outcomes is strongly linked to improved pedagogy and course design, especially the development of more authentic, student-centered learning tasks. When ICTs were fully integrated into classroom practices, it was noticed that teachers took a more deliberate approach to lesson planning. The teachers more intently on developing tasks relevant to student-centred approach to learning activity design; designing tasks to accommodate different learning styles and purposes; making use of more diverse teaching resources; and improving their understanding of the technologies and subject content. The research revealed that teacher confidence and knowledge of teaching with ICTs contributed to a more engaging and considered curriculum and subsequently, better student outcomes.
- d. The technology on blended learning not only allowed the students to further develop their ICT skills, the more exciting methods of communication also helped enhance their communication skills.
- e. Flexibility and the freedom to learn anytime, anywhere
- f. Some level of control over the pacing of their learning. Difficult concepts can be reviewed as often as necessary
- g. More engaging content that they can create and use their own initiative and networks to shape

METHOD

This study uses a narrative research design which is a qualitative study that aims to explore the participants' experiences of how difficult implementing blended learning in their first-time teaching. Creswell (2013) says that narrative research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. It means that narrative research describes the perspective for some individuals from their life experiences about a this topic. In this research, the researcher attempt to expose stories from pre-service's English teachers from University of Singaperbangsa Karawang who applied flex model as their model of blended learning approach. .With various stories, the perceptions and experiences is resulted.

Respondents

The participants of this research were five Pre-service's English teachers at University in Karawang who conduct online teaching in different public schools. To obtain data in accordance with the research objectives, researcher used interview data collection techniques.

Interviews in this study is used to obtain data on pre-service English teacher in implementing flex model blended learning teaching.

Instruments

The researcher used semi-structured interview as an instrumentation. A semi-structured interview is one where the interviewer has a clear picture of the topics that need to be covered (Croker, 2009). Keith R. (2009) also add that semi-structured interview has the great of both worlds in terms of what it offers, this does not mean that it is simply a combination of the two other interview types, which open interview and structured interview. The interview serves related open-ended question of pre-service's experience using blended learning as a main question. Then, the interviewer can ask more to go deeper to specific object from the answer.

Procedures

This study used interview with online media such as WhatsApp with voice messages (voice notes) for data collection. Participants have been briefed about the objectives of the interview and this research, so that their responses can be more structured and directed to achieve the objectives of the research. Croker (209) said that the interview should be based on an interview guide that identifies key topics that need to be covered.

Data analysis

In analyzing the data, the researcher refer to Murray, G. (2009) that said data analysis procedures draw on categorical content analysis and the constant comparative method. He stated steps to analysis; 1. Code the interview transcripts, 2. Look for connections between codes and start to group codes into categories, 3. Configure the participant's story from the interview data, 4. Send the story to the participants for their comments, 5. Carry out a 'cross-story' analysis, 6. Note themes as they emerge from the stories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Challenges in flex model blended learning

The findings was collected based on the result of interviews with pre-service teachers to find out the challenges and opportunities of implementing Flex Model Blended Learning. The researcher conducted this study to pre-service teacher from university in Karawang, West Java, Indonesia by 5 participants who have done their teaching program in various schools.

Flex model blended learning is, as described in the background, a program in which content and instruction are delivered primarily by the Internet, students move on an individually customized, fluid schedule among learning modalities, and the teacher-of-record is on-site. Flex model blended learning has many advantages, such as flexibility, that can be

conducted online. However, there are some challenges occur when teacher applied flex model. According to Aji, W.K. (2020), He stated that teachers find the challenges when applied blended learning, they are poor internet connection, time consuming, and less of experiences. The instrument of this research is the interview, and the researcher found similar challenges as previous study and other challenges that was encountered by pre-service teacher while applied flex model blended learning.

The first challenges that was encountered by pre-service teacher when using flex model blended learning is low media utilization. There were lack of experiences in utilize the media such as operating 'Google Meet', 'Zoom' or 'Google Classroom' that impacted gap in flex model. In a few schools, implementing flex model blended learning was their first time. Teacher did not get any training in implementing flex model blended learning or using application such as Google Meet, Zoom, or etc that made them confuse in operating it. They just discussed in operating video conference application between teachers, did not come from the expert in implementing it. Because this was their first time, so they felt difficult in making interesting material. The impact of did not create interesting material was student give less attention to the teacher. This is in line with previous study from Aji, W., (2020) that stated other challenges in blended learning lack of motivation, which caused teachers to be less proficient in applying blended learning, and a lack of making interesting material which caused students to feel bored and inactive when they learning. Then, other participant revealed that certain media was took much mobile data. Student spent their mobile data just for studying, whereas they have necessities in using their mobile data inside of outside learning process. If their mobile data run out, they have to buy it first to rejoin the class, or even they can not join the class all day. It can be strengthen by Aji, W., (2020) that said Zoom applications requires many internet data that make asynchronous is difficult.

Then, second challenge was low connectivity. In a few of participant, connectivity always be the topic discussion in every meeting because it makes learning process difficult. The causes of low connectivity were the distance between tower and student home, or trouble with their internet provider. Internet provide gave a big part in implementing flex model blended learning. When student's internet provider get trouble, students can not do anything except waiting until the internet get better. The impact of this was student absence in class or did not absorb the material totally. According to Victorian Education (2012) research, Watterston, J. (2012) stated that the lack of broadband bandwidth and IT support were issues that hindered the rural schools' use of digital resources. This affected student learning and the outcomes. Istiqomah (2021) stated that blended learning will be difficult to be implemented if the facilities and

infrastructures do not support such as internet access and networks needs are inadequate". Then, Ammirudin and Jannah (2021) also added the first problem that students faces was the unstable internet connection. The previous studies were strengthen the finding if low connectivity was a challenge in implementing flex model blended learning.

The third challenge was low student interaction. The student was not really interactive because of many students turn their camera and mic off, they did not pay attention to the teacher or student did not study before the class. Less interaction made teacher difficult in make sure students' understanding. Many reason why their turn camera and mic off, such as broken microphone or camera, did not have any mobile data, they have something to do, or they just felt sleepy because they felt studying online is enjoyable then offline. So that they did not take seriously about the class or material. According to Yuzulia, I. (2021), internet access required amount oh mobile data, that is why during teaching learning process, they prefer to turn their camera off to save their mobile data.

Another challenge in implementing flex model blended learning was disordered time allocation. It made delivering learning material was ineffective which only 50%-70%. The causes were low connectivity or unstable connection, and trouble in device. For instance, after we waiting for the connection get better, the time for delivering is wasted. So that the delivering material is unoptimal. For the device troubling, it is commonly unpredictable. The impact of the device was teacher can give the material and the worst was can not rejoin the class.

The opportunities in flex model blended learning

The second research question in this research is about opportunities in implementing flex model blended learning. From results of interviews between researcher and respondents, it can be concluded that the opportunities of implemented flex model blended learning was resources and flexibility.

Resources means student can find their topic in arranging text by themselves. They do not rely on teacher in choosing theme what they interest. Then, both teacher and student can use many additional resources that available on the internet that relevance. So that, it can widely increase their knowledge rather then only given book from school. According to Victorian Education research, Watterston, J. (2012) stated that student enable to vary their pace of learning, drawing on as few or as many resources as needed, choosing resources that most suited their learning styles and level of prior knowledge. Watterston, J. (2012) added blended learning approaches allowed students to all out in competencies other than the traditional literacies, as leaders, ICT experts, cultural experts, resource managers, and negotiators. As a result, student became more resourceful and constructed their own learning paths, ultimately

producing better work outcome. This is inline with Istiqomah (2021), tha stated student can found supplementary material or reading on the internet to enhance their understanding deeper about they topic they learnt.

Another opportunities was flexibility. Flex model blended learning provide flexibility in time and distance. Student be able to made group discussion without face-to-face meeting, teacher can track students task's progress, and if there any obstacle, student can just ask immediately to the teachers. It means that discussion include student-teacher, student-student, student-community can be conducted online. Istiqomah (2021) revealed that by implementing blended learning, teacher be able to discuss the material with the student, or students with their friends in a virtual learning conference. She added students can have discussion with teachers or other students without having face-to-face meeting or in the same place. Another insight from Istiqomah, she stated teacher can control and manage the class anytime and anywhere. Aji, W., (2020) during pandemic coronavirus, blended learning help the teacher in providing learning material to students because of its flexibility. It meant teachers could conduct teaching learning activities online wherever and whenever they want.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of finding and discussion, it can be concluded that flex model blended learning has an essential role in the learning process and it has challenges and opportunities in the learning process. The researcher answer the first research question of challenges in implementing flex model blended learning. The challenges was low media utilization, low connectivity, time allocation and low student interaction. Lack of experiences in utilize the media such as operating 'Google Meet', 'Zoom' or 'Google Classroom' that impacted gap in flex model. Whether teacher and student had the same challenges in operating media. Instead of operating, the media also require much mobile data which was incriminating student. Low connectivity. Low connectivity such as poor internet connection makes learning process difficult. The impact of low of connectivity was disordered time allocation in learning schedule that made delivering learning material was ineffective. Another challenge that appear when applying flex model blended learning was low student interaction. Many student turn their camera and mic off that make the class not really interactive.

Then, the opportunities in flex model blended learning was resources and flexibility. Both teacher and student can use many additional resources that available on the internet that relevance. So that, it can widely increase their knowledge rather then only given book from school. So they can choosing resources that most suited their learning or teaching style and

level of prior knowledge. The next opportunity in flex model blended learning was flexibility in time and distance. Student be able to made group discussion without face-to-face meeting, teacher can track students task's progress, and if there any obstacle, student can just ask immediately to the teachers. It means that discussion include student-teacher, student-student, student-community can be conducted online.

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