

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN CALL COURSE: ADVANTAGES, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the perception of the students English Teaching Study Program (ETSP), Christian University of Indonesia. The participants were 64 students who participated in CALL course conducted in the odd semester of 2013/2014 academic year. The quantitative data were collected using questionnaire and analyzed by using Microsoft Excel 2010. The qualitative data were collected using interview and analyzed descriptively. The findings revealed that the students responded positively to the use of BL to improve their vocabulary and grammar mostly through writing activities. The students also perceived by using BL, their computer skill and interest were developed. Regarding the advantages, connectivity was indicated as a major problem followed by social isolation. As a result of the problems addressed, increasing the number of computer labs and training were suggested by the majority of students. Based on the findings, it is recommended to ETSP to continue with BL by increasing the number of computer labs and training for students.

Keywords: BL, CALL, course, perception.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi mahasiswa program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (PBI), FKIP UKI, terhadap penerapan pembelajaran Blended Learning pada matakuliah CALL. Responden berjumlah 64 mahasiswa yang mengambil matakuliah CALL pada semester gasal tahun akademik 3013/2014. Data kuantitatif diperoleh dengan menggunakan angket dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan Ms. Excel 2010. Sementara data kualitatif yang dianalisis secara deskriptif diperoleh melalui wawancara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa merespon positif terhadap penggunaan Blended Learning (BL) untuk meningkatkan penguasaan kasakata dan tatabahasa yang pada umumnya melalui aktivitas menulis. Mahasiswa juga mengungkapkan bahwa dengan penggunaan BL, kemampuan menggunakan komputer mereka meningkat. Namun, koneksi internet menjadi masalah utama sehingga pada umumnya mahasiswa menyarankan penambahan jumlah lab komputer yang terkoneksi baik dengan internet dan pelatihan. Temuan ini merekomendasikan agar PBI melanjutkan penerapan BL, menambah jumlah lab komputer, dan pelatihan untuk mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: BL, CALL, kuliah, persepsi

INTRODUCTION

Along with the progress of information technology (IT), the tremendous educational changes has been brought all over the world. The use of technology in teaching and learning extends beyond the classroom and consists of material and communication over the internet access directly from the learners' PCs (personal computers). This phenomenon has experienced an obvious growth in recent years based on the responses not only from teachers but also from learners and academia.

The explanation above indicate it is obvious that to answer the demand of IT and globalization era should be made the first priority. Literature on technology use as a tool in language learnings assert significant role in language learning. Pardede (2012) emphasized that innovations in ICT are expanding the range of possible solutions that can improve teaching and learning inputs, processes, and outcomes. He added that through the internet access, ICT now offers abundant devices for developing and delivering audio-visual products, multimedia presentations, visual materials and end-user

software which could be easily applied to create new learning and teaching practices. Those tools have made it possible to prepare a varied learning environment which will address to students' individual differences. Multimedia and network technology has made it possible for students to learn information anytime and anywhere. Since the on-line data are rich, flexible, and easy to be accepted by the learners, network provides students with an open, realistic language environment (Shen, 2004). Riley (2000) stressed that teaching and learning that use technology effectively can lead to greater academic achievement and make a real difference.

Research evidences, particularly those conducted in the use of synchronous (live training online-realtime) learning activities support the effectiveness of technology use in improving learning experience (Burrus, 2009). One of the studies has been to investigate the learning strategies that implement online along with the advantages of face-to-face instruction, from which the concept of Blended Learning (BL) has emerged. Blended learning in EFL setting can be defined as pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness and socialization opportunities in the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of online environment (Dziuban et al., 2004). It was found that the combination of face-to-face classroom instruction, online monitoring, and the use of ICT have shown a substantial improvement in students' language skills, as well as high satisfaction levels with the program (Bañados, 2006). Bijeikienė, Rašinskienė, Zutkienė's (2011) research revealed that English language teachers display a generally positive attitude towards blended learning. The teachers to a large extent agree about the efficiency of the blended learning courses in terms of the resources contained there, such as video lectures, theory presentations, interactive exercises for self-check and others.

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) was designed to introduce new types of input that lead to a richer language environment. Lee (2000) found that CALL can (1) provide students with experiential learning practice; (2) motivates students to learn; (3) potentially increase students' academic achievement; (4) increase available authentic materials; (5) encourage interaction between instructor and students and students and peers; (6) place emphasis on individual goal; (7) allows students to use multiple sources for information ; and (8) create a sense

of global understanding (as cited in Burrus, 2009, pp. 10-11).

One of the most effective the Internet tools EFL teachers can utilize to develop their students' writing skills is blogs. Several studies (e.g. Sun, 2009 and Lee, 2010) reported that integrating digital technologies, namely blogs, in the classroom to develop writing skills foster a sense of collaboration and community, develop a sense of voice and foster critical and analytical skills. The results of Arani's (2005) study on the use of blogs to develop writing, reading and communication skills in English for Specific Purposes among non-native speakers of English at Kashan University of Medical Sciences in Iran revealed that students preferred to write on the weblog than the traditional ways, and weblogs can improve English in the context of ESP. These findings are in line with Pardede's (2011) study on student teachers' interest and perception on the use of BALL (Blog Assisted Language Learning) as an additional component in writing skills development in Christian University of Indonesia. The study revealed that a majority of the respondents basically viewed the use of BALL to develop writing interesting and effective. More than a half of them admitted they wrote more productively after joining BALL. The internet facilities (authentic articles and writing manuals) they could easily access while writing in the blog were very helpful to produce good writing. They also used fellow students' works as a 'mirror' to prevent errors. The greatest motivating factor for the respondents in writing in the blog is their realization that their works were visible to many people in the world. This awareness motivated them to check word choice and spelling more carefully.

The use of many educational tools makes CALL obviously has advantages and limitations found by researchers. Studies and research findings have shown the use of CALL has brought positive effect on the achievement level of ESL students. At the same time, CALL, however, has limitations and disadvantages, such as financial aspect, participant isolation, and technology knowledge requirements (Burrus, 2009).

Realizing the advantages of BL environment in language learning, the researcher in this current study would like to investigate the perception of the students. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions: (1) What is students' perception toward BL use in improving English language skills and components? (2) What is students' perception

regarding the advantages using BL? (3) What is students' perception regarding the limitations using BL? (4) Do students suggest to improve blended courses?. Realization of these perceptions may help teachers modify their teaching methods and techniques to help their students improve their English learning process and reduce the limitations.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey research which was conducted on May 2014 in Christian University of Indonesia, Cawang, Jakarta. The participants were 64 students who participated in CALL course conducted in the odd semester of 2013/2014 academic year consist of sixth and eighth semesters. The quantitative data was collected using questionnaire and analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2010. The qualitative data was collected using interview and analyzed descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Students' Range of GPA

Semester	GPA		
	2.50–2.99	3.0–3.49	3.50–4.00
VI	2 (7%)	18 (62%)	9 (31%)
VIII	1 (3%)	28 (80%)	6 (17%)

Due to administrative and budget constraints, only 64 students could be included to collect the data. As shown in Table 1, the 64 students consisted of 29 (45%) sixth semesters, and 35 (55%) eighth semesters.

Language Skills and Components Improvement

The obtained data related students' perception in improving English language skills and areas using BL revealed the majority of students perceived some improvement of their English language skills and components. More than a half of students (66% up to 92%) showed agreement on the improvement of listening skill, writing skill, grammar, and vocabulary.

Table 2. Students' Perception Regarding Language Skills and Components Improvement using Blended learning (N=64)

No	Skills	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
1	Listening	2 (3)	4 (6)	16 (25)	39 (61)	3 (5)	3.58
2	Speaking	1 (2)	9 (14)	23 (36)	31 (46)	0 (0)	3.31

No	Skills	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
3	Reading	2 (3)	3 (5)	21 (33)	29 (45)	9 (14)	3.63
4	Writing	1 (2)	2 (3)	18 (28)	39 (61)	4 (6)	3.67
5	Pronunciation	1 (2)	12 (19)	23 (36)	25 (39)	3 (5)	3.27
6	Spelling	1 (2)	9 (14)	23 (36)	29 (45)	2 (3)	3.34
7	Grammar	1 (2)	4 (6)	15 (23)	33 (52)	11 (17)	3.77
8	Vocabulary	1 (2)	0 (0)	4 (6)	43 (67)	16 (25)	4.14

In details, it seemed that 92% of the students accepted the idea that using BL has improved their vocabulary and less than a half of them (44%) "agreed" and "strongly agreed" about the idea of pronunciation improvement. This is supported by the preference of 69% and 67% of them in the idea of grammar and writing skill improvement, whereas only 48% of them accepted the idea of speaking skill improvement.

The majority of the students perceived the idea that using BL, vocabulary and grammar were improved through writing and reading activities. Findings revealed that vocabulary and grammar improvement were rated highly. It was followed by writing skill improvement; whereas, the data showed some skepticism on pronunciation and speaking skill improvement by using BL.

The findings were supported by the interview result of 8 students consists of 3 sixth semester students and 5 eighth semester students. Interviewee 1 said that most of the activities offered in this course is reading that is why she thought that she gained vocabulary a lot from the lessons and instructions. Interviewee 6 also had the same idea. However, interviewee 2 and 5 had a slightly different thought. The first one said she appreciated the webinars and gained new words indirectly by listening to the speaker who are native English speakers, while another one said she had chance to improve her writing skill by indirectly improving her grammar and vocabulary.

The Advantages Using Blended Learning

The data obtained concerning students' view about the advantages using BL were allotted using sixteen statements. In general, findings revealed that the majority of students agreed with the idea of BL developed their computer and internet skill, creativity and interest. However, almost a half of the students were skeptical to the effective use of time using BL.

Table 3. Students' Perception Regarding The Advantages Using BL (N=64)

No	Statements	SD		D	N	A		SA	Mean
		f (%)	f (%)			f (%)	f (%)		
1	More convenient	5 (8)	8 (13)	24 (38)	22 (34)	5 (17)			3.22
2	Improves interaction between students	1 (2)	10 (16)	24 (37)	22 (34)	7 (11)			3.38
3	Improves students – teacher interaction	1 (2)	9 (14)	22 (34)	27 (42)	5 (8)			3.41
4	More effective modes	0 (0)	4 (6)	15 (23)	38 (60)	7 (11)			3.75
5	interesting	0 (0)	4 (6)	10 (16)	40 (62)	10 (16)			3.88
6	useful	1 (2)	3 (5)	16 (25)	37 (57)	9 (14)			3.81
7	Self-paced learning	0 (0)	2 (3)	21 (33)	33 (52)	8 (12)			3.73
8	Develops creativity	0 (0)	1 (2)	13 (20)	37 (58)	11 (17)			3.88
9	Develops critical thinking	1 (2)	2 (3)	21 (33)	33 (52)	8 (12)			3.73
10	Develops computer skills	0 (0)	1 (2)	5 (8)	43 (67)	15 (23)			4.13
11	Develops internet skills	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (16)	38 (59)	16 (25)			4.09
12	Broadens horizon	0 (0)	2 (3)	19 (30)	39 (61)	4 (6)			3.7
13	Increases confidence	1 (2)	12 (19)	15 (25)	28 (44)	8 (13)			3.47
14	Effective use of time	0 (0)	9 (14)	31 (45)	22 (35)	2 (3)			3.27
15	Useful feedback	1 (2)	4 (6)	27 (42)	29 (45)	3 (5)			3.45
16	Access to authentic materials	0 (0)	4 (6)	20 (31)	38 (56)	4 (6)			3.63

The finding concerning the advantages and benefits using BL indicated by the majority of them (90% and 84%) viewed BL was helpful in developing their computer and internet skill. However, less than three-fourth of them responded positive toward the other included ideas of confident improvement, access to authentic materials, effective mode, and critical thinking development.

The data obtained concerning students' view about the advantages using BL were allotted using sixteen statements. The idea of BL developed interest and computer skill were responded positively by both sixth and eighth semesters. Along with the learning experience, eighth semesters showed familiarity with online learning. However, some of them still preferred face-to-face to online learning, it was represented by interviewee 1.

From this course I found out that not only chatting on social network, but also studying and making teaching materials can be easily done using internet. (Interviewee 1).

The Limitations Using Blended Learning

The data obtained concerning students' view about the limitations using BL were allotted using nine statements. In general, the majority of students agreed with the idea of slow internet connectivity as the major problem. The students also were able to recognize that limited computer access should not be the reason having difficulties using CALL.

Table 4. Students' Perception Regarding The Limitations Using BL (N=64)

No	Statements	SD		D	N	A		SA	Mean
		f (%)	f (%)			f (%)	f (%)		
1	Social isolation	0 (0)	11 (17)	24 (37)	26 (41)	3 (5)			3.33
2	frustration	4 (6)	16 (25)	29 (45)	14 (22)	1 (2)			2.88
3	connectivity	1 (2)	3 (5)	7 (11)	29 (45)	24 (37)			4.13
4	Technical problems	3 (5)	11 (17)	25 (39)	21 (33)	4 (6)			3.19
5	Preference for books	2 (3)	19 (30)	26 (41)	13 (20)	4(6)			2.97
6	Cheating and plagiarism	2 (3)	11 (17)	23 (36)	23 (36)	5 (8)			3.28
7	Less effective	2 (3)	19 (30)	20 (31)	17 (27)	6 (9)			3.09
8	No computer access	15 (23)	30 (47)	13 (20)	5 (8)	1 (2)			2.17
9	Online instruction difficulty	4 (6)	27 (42)	24 (38)	9 (14)	0 (0)			2.59

The finding disclosed that the only idea that clearly stated by the majority of the students on the view in using computer-assisted learning related to computer belonging. This idea was unaccepted by 70% of students. It was also showed on the demographic data that majority of both semesters have computer at home. However, the skeptical response of frustration was 45%. Another finding also disclosed on the view how technical problem students had while use computer-assisted learning. The percentage of students who were "neutral" as many as students who accepted the idea (39%).

The data revealed that the salient limitation was connectivity since both sixth and eighth semesters showed high response means. It was supported by the interview result. Three interviewees confessed how internet connection became the major problem while they were learning online, especially on the webinar class that require good connectivity to access audio and video.

Due to my teaching activities, I could only use my personal modem that has limited access. (Interviewee 2).

The next salient limitations are social isolation and technical problems. Sixth semesters view high response means to the idea of social isolation; whereas, the eighth semesters viewed technical problem more crucial than social isolation. It was supported by interviewee 1 as the eighth semester student who experienced one of technical problems.

Another limitation is no computer access. Findings revealed that students were able to recognize the idea technology cannot merely guarantee better academic achievement. It was indicated on the response means of both sixth and eighth semesters were just moderate. They seemed disagreed that having no computer access is the main reason cannot using CALL.

The Suggestions for Improvement

What were considered as the limitations, the new experience using learning mode, proposed suggestions for enhancing the quality of web-based learning. The data obtained concerning students' view about the suggestions using BL were allotted using six statements. In general, findings revealed that to provide training was the most urgent suggestion forwarded by the majority students.

Table 5. Students' Suggestions to Improve Blended Courses (N=64)

No	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
1	Increasing number of blended course	2 (3)	7 (11)	21 (33)	29 (45)	5 (8)	3.44
2	Increasing number of computer labs	0 (0)	3 (5)	12 (19)	31 (48)	18 (26)	2.88
3	Solving technical problems	0 (0)	3 (5)	13 (20)	35 (55)	13 (20)	3.91
4	Providing CALL training for students	0 (0)	3 (5)	9 (14)	39 (61)	13 (20)	3.97
5	Reducing number of online courses	4 (7)	16 (25)	27 (42)	15 (23)	2 (3)	2.92
6	Rewarding distinguished learners	0 (0)	6 (9)	24 (38)	29 (45)	5 (8)	3.52

The obtained data related to the suggestions toward BL implementation revealed that the majority of students preferred to be provided by computer assisted training. More than three-fourth (81%) students "agreed" and "strongly agreed" if computer-assisted training provided to all students. An idea about increasing the number of internet lab was also positively responded by more than three-fourth (76%) students.

The findings revealed concerning the suggestions of BL implementation is to support the previous section about limitations. Six statements were allotted an expressed into chart to address and discuss this section. What were considered as the salient limitation, the facilities such

as internet connection was the major problem in learning online. Therefore, the idea of increasing number of computer labs received the highest response means from sixth and eighth semesters.

I think the most important to be focused is the internet connection, because it has important role in blended learning. Finding a way to solve that problem is important. (Interviewee 7)

The similar suggestion also expressed by interviewee 3 and 2. They confessed how difficult for them to get good internet connection, especially to participate in live webinar so they can communicate in real-time instead of playing the record. Because of the issue, another suggestion was also delivered. Interviewee 1 also suggested the similar idea. She realized how important participate and experience the real-time interaction in live webinar. In the course, webinars conducted twice with different topics but the same speaker who was native speaker. Therefore, in order to experience the authentic task and live interaction with native speaker and other students, join live webinar is a big deal to all students.

Despite of the above findings, it still obviously revealed the uncertainty of sixth semesters toward blended courses. It is indicated by slightly different means between the ideas of decreasing and increasing blended hours. Whereas, the eighth semesters seemed obviously suggest the idea of increasing blended courses instead of decrease it. Another solution proposed was provide training which also received high response. Sixth and eighth semesters showed high response means to the idea of provide training for students.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Findings revealed that using BL, students experienced explicit grammar and vocabulary learning mostly through writing activities. Students also perceived their computer skill and interest were developed. However, connectivity was indicated as a major problem followed by social isolation. Based on the problems perceived, majority of the students suggested to increase the number of computer lab and training for students.

Since this study was designed to offer a first step of a wide variety of research, the area of BL use in English classes, further researches investigating students' attitude of BL in regard to

gender, age, English language proficiency are recommended. In addition, the study also showed that there is connection between English mastery level and students' preference. However, these conclusion were drawn based on descriptive analysis technique. Thus, researches administering statistical analysis to investigate these areas are also recommended.

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