

Blended Learning for English Speaking Skill Activities: Students' Perspective

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to investigate students' perspectives on learning speaking skills using blended learning. This study was conducted in one of the public junior high schools in East Belitung. A narrative inquiry approach is used to collect personal accounts of the students' perspectives during the teaching and learning process. To obtain interview data, as was recommended by the teacher, six 8th-grade students were involved. The results showed that in blended learning, students learned both face-to-face at school and asynchronously at home. They explained how they learn to speak asynchronously at home with the help of technology. They think positively about speaking learning activities with blended learning. They felt that blended learning made them more confident, more independent, and more flexible in learning to speak. In addition, blended learning offers a more flexible study time so that students feel their speaking and public speaking skills are better than before. However, the disadvantages of blended learning, especially when it is asynchronous, are the problem of poor internet connection and the high cost of internet packages and learning devices.

1 Introduction

Online learning due to Covid-19 is currently experiencing a leeway since the pandemic began to stabilize. Although many schools have now gone back to implementing offline learning, in fact, there are still some schools that prefer to use a hybrid model in the teaching and learning process. One of the methods that can be used is blended learning. It is the main choice that has been recommended by the government and education experts and is believed to be one of the learning solutions during the pandemic [1].

Blended learning is the term most commonly used to refer to the combination of face-to-face teaching with computers [2]. It is an integrated instructional approach to teaching and learning that was born from a combination of two learning models, namely traditional learning and learning based on computer and internet technology [3]. In addition, blended learning pedagogical techniques are educational innovations that unite past and future teaching and learning [4]. Blended learning combines face-to-face learning with online learning, both in terms of the delivery of subject matter and learning styles that create a combination of teaching that emphasizes technology-based social interaction.

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However, there will be some differences felt by students regarding the learning model they used before and during the pandemic. Learning English, especially speaking skills, should be done more optimally if the learning is done in a face-to-face class. However, due to the pandemic, English speaking skill lesson has a short time to implement, whereas speaking skill is considered the most difficult skill for students [5].

Consequently, there are several factors that cause speaking skills to be difficult skills. Some of them are because students are afraid to make mistakes, and students tend to have anxiety [6]. In addition, another cause of the difficulty in speaking English is a lack of vocabulary mastery coupled with intense practice [7]. In this case, the teacher should tell the students that they do not need to worry about the mistakes they can make and should provide the necessary motivation to the students considering that speaking skills play an important role in communication and language learning [5].

Furthermore, the implementation of blended learning in speaking skill learning is not considered a substitute for conventional classes but rather a supplement that gives teachers and students more opportunities to communicate and share information [8]. Online learning should not be viewed as a substitute for the enormous value of face-to-face educational experiences [9]. However, the use of blended learning in supporting learning can provide benefits and a positive effect on four speaking skills, including teaching speaking [10].

The purpose of teaching speaking skills is for communicative efficiency [11]. Students are required to be communicative in verbal communication with teachers and friends if they want to be said to be able to develop their speaking skills. Blended learning emphasizes students' learning in face-to-face classes with the help of the teacher and independently at home with the help of media and the internet. It allows them to learn more about existing technological advances. In addition, teachers can use media such as videos, pictures, and others to be used as sources and teaching aids for speaking through blended learning [11].

The application of blended learning aims to promote social interaction among students and their engagements [12]. Blended learning increases learner engagement in a collaborative environment where students are given new opportunities to interact with their peers, teachers, and content inside and outside the classroom [8]. This form of interaction certainly encourages students to be more active in speaking. In addition, blended learning can increase oral production, provide learners of different personality types with opportunities to speak, and help learners get at their own pace [13].

2 Method

This study is a qualitative study that employs a narrative inquiry approach to collect students' experiences during learning speaking skills in blended learning classes [14]. This study was conducted in a public junior high school in East Belitung. This is unique to study because blended learning during the pandemic is rarely studied in remote schools such as schools in East Belitung. To obtain interview data, six 8th-grade students were involved as participants, as recommended by the teacher. Interview guidelines are used as a reference for questions that consist of 11 questions. Since this is an in-depth interview, it was possible for the author to develop questions in order to get a deeper perception of the participants.

3 Results and Discussion

In dealing with a learning activity, students have a perception of what they have experienced, such as challenges, advantages, and disadvantages that arise when implementing blended learning. While studying asynchronously, participants used several learning applications such as Google Translate, Ruang Guru, Brainly, Cake, and Google. In addition, there were

also participants who used social media as the medium for learning to speak, such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The following are the perceptions of students about blended learning in learning speaking skills:

3.1 The Advantages of Learning Speaking Skills with Blended Learning

Learning speaking skills with blended learning in its implementation presents several advantages that students feel. Based on interviews conducted by the author, the participants stated some of the advantages they face in learning speaking skills with blended learning.

3.1.1 Confidence

A student's confidence in learning, especially in speaking skills, is marked by their courage to ask questions, speak in front of the class and not be afraid to make mistakes in learning activities. Of the six participants interviewed, five had the same opinion: that blended learning positively impacted their confidence to speak. There are many instruments to increase students' self-confidence, and one of them is by using blended learning as a tool [15]. The following are some statements of the participants, namely P6 and P5, that blended learning can have an effect on their confidence in speaking:

"Because during face-to-face learning, we will meet face-to-face with many people, and that makes me less confident. Blended learning prevents us from meeting directly with many people, thus making learning more flexible." – P6.

"... I have no shame because we were the only ones talking there." – P5.

According to P6, blended learning prevents students from meeting directly with people frequently so that students are more daring to speak. Sometimes, meeting many people makes students tend to be afraid to try to speak. This is because of low self-confidence. Similarly, P5 stated that blended learning prevents them from feeling embarrassed because no one is watching them while they are speaking. That way, they avoid insecurity and anxiety in speaking.

3.1.2 Independence

Blended learning is believed to be able to foster students' independence while studying because they are required to learn independently without any help from the teacher—especially when studying asynchronously at home. Of the six students who were interviewed, three participants indirectly revealed that learning with blended learning, especially asynchronously, made them study independently.

"It makes students look for answers on their own, and it makes me want to know how to pronounce a word." - P2.

According to P2, blended learning makes him more independent in learning to speak because he can find his own material and learn to speak by accessing various applications on the internet. He can figure out how to pronounce words and sentences in English correctly. In addition, blended learning makes students independent in their learning and gives them the opportunity to learn at their own pace [13].

3.1.3 Flexibility

Blended learning offers a more flexible speaking learning time. Flexible learning means that we can determine our own time to learn by arranging it in such a way that it fits the time that exists in our daily lives. It allows us to study over and over again and have a long time

and free time to study with the aim of maximizing learning. All participants agreed that blended learning offered flexibility in learning to speak. The followings are some statements of the participants, namely P1 and P3 that showed that blended learning has flexible learning times:

"...So, the advantage of it is that it makes our time of learning longer"- P1 (GF).

"...we can repeat the learning material that has been explained." - P3 (RMNSP).

According to P1, blended learning offers flexibility in learning because students have a lot of time to study, especially when they are asynchronous. In addition to the long learning time, students can also access and study the material repeatedly until they can master learning more optimally without any time limit, as P3 said. According to P3, learning speaking using blended learning gives the students the flexibility to repeat the learning material or repeat learning to speak as much as they want until they master and speak better than before. Blended learning offers an opportunity to use time in a more effective and flexible way by extending teaching time from the classroom wall.

3.2 The Disadvantages of Learning Speaking Skill using Blended Learning

Learning speaking skills with blended learning in its implementation presents several disadvantages that are felt by students. Based on interviews conducted by the author, the participants stated that some of the disadvantages they faced in learning speaking skills with blended learning were mostly caused by internet connection problems. As the internet is considered the main source that can allow students to learn at home, without the internet, the students will find it difficult to access learning on the internet and, of course, hinder their learning. Of the six participants, five of them thought that the problem with blended learning was the problem of the internet. The following are the statements of P6 and P1 regarding internet problems in asynchronous blended learning:

"In blended learning, sometimes there are some students who have a very bad internet connection." - P6.

"...there are also those who have no money to buy internet packages or gadgets for learning. So, it tends to be not really effective." - P6.

The internet problem expressed by P6 needs to be fixed. This is also supported by Ramírez et al. (2014), who stated that in implementing blended learning, problems that occur are caused by poor internet connections. Consequently, it makes the delivery of material less clear and understanding of the material incomplete [15]. Learning speaking skills with blended learning requires a fairly strong internet network because students have to use applications in learning. Moreover, according to P6, the relatively expensive internet cost is also another drawback for blended learning at home which requires students to access the internet and use gadgets.

3.3 Students Recommendation for Blended Learning in Learning Speaking Skill

Based on interviews conducted by the author, some students gave perceptions of blended learning, which determine whether or not they recommend blended learning or vice versa in learning English related to speaking skills.

3.3.1 Students Recommendation for Blended Learning Activity

Recommending a learning method will occur if it has a significant positive impact on learning activities. In the application of blended learning into English learning related to

speaking skills, three of the six participants recommended blended learning to be used in learning to speak. Here are the statements of the participants.

"I recommend it. But it depends on the individual whether they want to use it or not."
- P3.

"Yes, for English teachers. The students can control how they learn according to themselves, so it is easier."- P4.

Three of the six participants recommended blended learning to be used in learning to speak. P3 personally recommended blended learning because it made her more convenient in learning to speak [16]. But she explained that it was only her opinion and her recommendation, and it all depends on the opinions of other students because everyone has a different opinion about the learning method that is suitable for each of them.

P4 recommended it because blended learning makes students tend to learn to speak independently. Learning independently certainly makes it easier for the students to understand learning because they can determine the best and the fastest way to master speaking according to their abilities and what they like.

3.3.2 Students' Criticism of Blended Learning Activity

Not recommending a learning method means that the method is difficult to implement, does not have a significant effect, or there may be other learning methods that are better than that. A total of three out of six participants did not recommend blended learning in learning English related to speaking skills. Following are the statements of the participants:

"I don't recommend it because English, especially pronunciation, is difficult to understand if you learn it online." - P1.

"I don't recommend it. It makes students face difficulty because, for those who lack understanding, the lesson becomes worse than before." - P2.

"I don't really recommend it. It is because conventional learning can make me understand better, and also, a lot of students are already familiar with learning using conventional learning." - P6.

A total of three out of six participants thought they did not recommend blended learning in learning English related to speaking skills. P1 and P2 have the same reasons as to why they do not recommend blended learning. They argued that blended learning is difficult to apply in learning speaking, which can cause students who could be better at speaking to become better than before. They explained that learning to speak is better if the teacher has to explain to the students directly so that if an error occurs, the teacher can immediately correct it. P6 did not recommend blended learning because there are other learning methods that are more familiar than blended learning in learning to speak, namely conventional learning.

4 Conclusion

In analyzing students' experiences, it can be concluded that students think positively about speaking learning activities with blended learning. Most students feel that blended learning makes them more confident when speaking. In addition, blended learning also makes them more independent in studying at home, so they have more time to study. Blended learning offers a more flexible study time so that students feel their speaking and public speaking skills are better than before. One participant felt that the use of blended learning also developed their social interactions on social media.

However, blended learning also has its drawbacks. Most of the students stated that blended learning had problems with poor internet connection and also the price of internet packages and learning devices, which were expensive and burdensome for certain parties. In

addition, as many as two students felt that blended learning was burdensome for them, and as many as two people also stated that blended learning made them unable to interact optimally with teachers and students. Despite the shortcomings, all students feel that blended learning is quite effective in improving their learning abilities, and this method is very helpful in learning during the pandemic.

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