

The Students' Views on Blended Learning Used on Reading Skills: A Case Study in One of Institutes in Jambi

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Abstract

This study aims to explore students' views on blended learning in developing reading skills, identifying perceived pros and cons. The study employed a qualitative research design using a constructivist approach for data collection and coding for analysis. Four students from an Islamic educational institution in Jambi participated, chosen for their diverse backgrounds to gain a comprehensive perspective. Semi-structured interviews focused on how blended learning affected their reading comprehension. The findings show that blended learning, which combines online and face-to-face teaching, offers benefits such as flexibility, access to materials at any time, and increased self-directed learning. However, students also reported limitations, including technical issues, lack of interpersonal interaction, and challenges in maintaining motivation. This study concludes that while blended learning has the potential to improve independent learning and reading skills, effective implementation is needed to overcome existing barriers and improve learning outcomes in higher education.

Keywords

Blended Learning, Qualitative Study, Reading Skills, Students' Views

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INTRODUCTION

Learning systems in the 21st century have altered year after year due to societal demands, and the learning system's focus has shifted from the instructor to the learner (Ichsan et al., 2019). The challenge posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0), which calls for the integration of human and technological creativity, has inspired the concept of "Education 4.0" (Hussin, 2018). This new way of looking at education, says Aziz Hussin (2018), enables students to gain more than general knowledge; they may also learn to pinpoint where information came from by developing specialized competencies.

In line with these educational transformations, language skills have become a critical aspect to be developed, especially one skill that develops while learning a new language, which is the ability to read. Reading is one of the language abilities developed during the language acquisition process (Mattingly, I.G.,1984). It is now considered one of the most basic skills that everyone should possess. The ability to read is crucial in society as it provides diverse information and knowledge that contribute to the advancement of civilization. However, many students still struggle with literacy. Teaching reading should be given top priority; regrettably, not everyone sees its value. Within Indonesia, language learning is often confined to the school context, where students learn languages merely to fulfill curricular requirements. One essential skill for students is reading. According to Zein et al. (2020) Indonesian students should learn English to read literature relevant to their studies or careers. Everyday life involves engaging in English as a second language. Ayu et al. (2017) found that reading aloud to kids positively affects their mental health, as well as their language, experience, and comprehension skills. Their knowledge and inspiration will come from reading and studying (Sasalia & Sari, 2020). Reading is the most prevalent activity among ESL students (McDonough et al.,2013). It is used to derive deep understanding and conceptual insight from texts. Since students continuously update and expand their knowledge through reading, it serves as a gateway to becoming lifelong learners (Dunlap, n.d., 2003)

Given the importance of reading skills, improving these skills is a vital part of learning English, as they directly influence comprehension and academic achievement. Reading skills are crucial for mastering a language because they support the development of cognitive abilities required for processing and synthesizing information (Snow, C. E., 2010). The mastery of reading skills also determines students' overall success in learning activities. As Hutabarat & Yasmine Zaidi (2021) emphasized, "Students who are not able to read well will have difficulty in participating in learning activities for all subjects." This limitation affects their ability to understand information from textbooks and learning resources, which can slow their academic progress significantly. Moreover, reading is not merely about decoding texts but involves complex visual, cognitive, psycholinguistic, and metacognitive processes (Hutabarat & Yasmine Zaidi, 2021). Therefore, strengthening reading skills at all levels of education is essential for supporting student development and lifelong learning.

Moreover, reading involves more than just understanding text literally—it also includes filtering, evaluating, and interpreting information for academic or professional

purposes (Pokharel, 2013). Therefore, reading instruction in higher education should emphasize honing critical thinking abilities to ensure which is students can gain the maximum benefit from texts in both academic and everyday contexts.

In this context, a more flexible and adaptive learning approach, such as blended learning, becomes highly relevant. According to Djiwandono (2018) blended learning is a teaching method that combines online activities utilizing internet-based resources with traditional in-person classroom sessions. There is a win-win situation when instructors and students both make use of ICT to aid in the learning process. By using ICT, students have the freedom to access information online on their own. Students can access learning resources, take online quizzes, and more at a time and place that is convenient for them (Rauf et al., 2023). By providing students with timely, individualized content based on their strengths, limitations, and learning requirements, blended learning enables educators better to meet the demands of their diverse student bodies (Schechter et al., 2017).

Consequently, considering about challenges in teaching reading context in higher education, blended learning emerges as a promising solution. By integrating digital resources such as e-books, online forums, interactive quizzes, and multimedia content, blended learning can increase student engagement with reading materials. Additionally, online platforms can make the students for practice reading in their own time, receive immediate feedback, also collaborate with peers. This combination of traditional and digital learning environments can create a more effective and motivating setting for reading, ultimately enhancing students' comprehension and critical thinking skills.

Based on this potential, the goal of this research is to find out how to employ blended learning to help students become better readers of students at one of Islamic institutes in Jambi. As a higher education institution that prepares students for professional careers in English language education and communication, there aims to equip its students with strong reading abilities that are essential for both academic and professional success. This research aims to explore how blended learning is implemented in reading instruction at the university, analyze students' perceptions of its effectiveness, and identify the challenges in integrating digital tools into the learning process. By investigating this case study, the researcher hopes to provide useful information regarding the best ways to enhance blended learning to aid in the development of reading skills in higher education, especially as it pertains to ESL.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blended learning is a pedagogical strategy that mixes online digital media with traditional classroom approaches, allowing flexibility and student autonomy. This concept has developed with the emergence of Education 4.0, which emphasizes individualized, technology-driven, and student-centered learning (Hussin, 2018). As Gedik et al. (2012) remarked, blended learning blends the best of both worlds by allowing for face-to-face engagement and independent online study. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this approach offers a flexible framework for teaching

reading, a skill that plays a crucial role in language development and academic achievement.

Reading instruction has long been a struggle, especially in traditional classes that rely on linear instruction and printed materials. Bhatti (2016) questioned the limitations of conventional methods in improving reading proficiency, saying that novel solutions such as blended learning are important for progress. Similarly, Humaira et al., (2019) observed that incorporating mixed activities significantly enhanced reading motivation and comprehension among high school students. In higher education, Djwandono (2018) found that blended learning enhanced students' vocabulary acquisition and reading performance, demonstrating its potential as an effective instructional tool.

Other research supports the use of digital resources in language training. For example, Ichsan et al. (2019) suggest that integrating digital platforms can stimulate deeper language engagement when partnered with excellent instructional design. Delfi & Yamat (n.d.) illustrates how a mixed setting encourages meaningful reading through exposure to various materials, interactive content, and immediate feedback. However, Gedik et al. (2012) also agree that despite its benefits, blended learning has problems such as limited digital access and diminished student engagement in asynchronous situations.

In the Indonesian setting Astri et al. (2024) & Fajrul Falah (2022), have discovered that students generally adapt well to the hybrid learning style, becoming more actively involved in reading activities. These findings match those of Sari and Suryani (2019) and Ismail and Yani (2023), who showed that blended learning fosters cooperation, enhances critical thinking, and supports reading fluency through interactive materials and discussion-based learning environments. Next, Bekele and Belihu (2024) underlined the relevance of digital resources in boosting reading competency through self-directed learning, frequent practice, and peer collaboration.

Beyond the mode of delivery, understanding the reading itself is vital. Grabe & Stoller (2020) describe reading as an active and purposeful process where readers generate meaning by using past information, language cues, and cognitive techniques. Catherine Snow (2002) highlights that comprehending is not just about decoding words, but about integrating knowledge with what the reader already knows. Nation (2019) proposes that meaningful reading education should include vocabulary expansion, fluency improvement, and frequent practice with actual texts. Strategic reading, such as skimming, scanning, and summarizing, is critical for understanding. Alharbi (2015) demonstrated that explicit instruction in such tactics greatly enhanced reading outcomes. Additionally, Mokhtari & Reichard (2002) found that metacognitive awareness—the ability to assess one's understanding—plays a vital role in effective reading.

A blended learning environment provides fertile ground for fostering these tactics. With online tools, students can mark material, review tough areas, and utilize multimedia resources such as movies, glossaries, and interactive quizzes. Online discussion forums, group chats, and shared annotations can encourage collaborative reading and deeper

thought. As seen by ÇELİK & KARTAL (2023), these digital aspects not only boost learning but also increase student autonomy and participation.

However, while significant data support the pedagogical advantages of blended learning in language education and reading development, major gaps exist. Most existing research focuses on quantitative outcomes such as test scores or vocabulary growth, with insufficient attention to the learners' own qualitative viewpoints, especially at the higher education level in an EFL context like Indonesia. In other words, there is a paucity of in-depth studies exploring how students comprehend and feel the use of blended learning in strengthening their reading skills, particularly how they apply reading strategies and metacognitive practices in a blended context. For example, while some existing research has addressed how students perceive blended learning in reading, the findings were constrained by a narrow participant base and did not sufficiently explore how learners manage their own learning processes.

This study intends to address the lack of research by investigating the lived experiences of students in a reading class that combines blended learning. This not only focuses on the effectiveness of digital technologies but also on students' strategic involvement with reading, their problems, and their metacognitive habits. Through this method, our research seeks to bring new insights to the field of EFL reading instruction and to inspire future pedagogical designs that are contextually based and learner-centered.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative method utilizing a case research approach to investigate how English majors at one of Jambi's Islamic institutions feel about reading lessons that use blended learning. Yin et al. (2018) explains that the case study design is ideal for situations when the borders between the phenomenon and its setting are blurry, as it permits a thorough examination of real-life educational phenomena within their context. As emphasized by Ishtiaq (2019) qualitative case studies help researchers to explore a finite system through detailed data collection. In this study, the system in question is students' experiences in a reading course that integrates blended learning.

Four undergraduate students from the English Department participated in this research. They were selected using purposive sampling, a method suitable for selecting individuals who have specific experiences relevant to the research focus (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion criteria required participants to have taken at least one blended learning-based reading course and to be willing to share their experiences. The participants came from various semesters and academic backgrounds, and pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality.

By employing semi-structured interviews, which were both open-ended and guided, to gather data. Each interview lasted 5–15 minutes and was carried out in a private, distraction-free environment. For the sake of the participants' comfort, the interviews were conducted in both English and Indonesian. With participants' permission, we videotaped and verbatim transcribed every interview. Blended learning, students' reading habits, online tool use, difficulties during online sessions, learning

preferences, and criticisms and recommendations for improvement were all topics covered in the interview guide.

A verification member was employed by the researcher to guarantee the data's trustworthiness, where participants reviewed their transcripts, as well as peer debriefing to discuss the findings with fellow researchers. Thick descriptions were used to provide a rich context for the findings.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis, which follows the six phases outlined (Braun & Clarke, n.d.). Get to know the data, create some initial codes, identify themes, review them, label them, define them, and finally, prepare a report that includes participant quotes.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

1. Finding

Students' Views on the Use of Blended Learning in Reading Classes

The results of the thematic analysis of the interview data revealed four main topics concerning the views and encounters of the students with blended learning in their textbook classes. In the following table, you can see the various types of behavior and examples of each:

Table 1. Students' Views on Blended Learning in Reading Classes Theme

Theme	Subcategory	Example of Statement
Flexibility and Accessibility	Learning at own pace	"I can study anytime... I can review the materials at home through the online platform." (P1 –Zelsia)
	Not falling behind	"If I'm sick or busy, I won't miss out too much because I can catch up through e-learning." (P1 – Zelsia)
Digital Support Tools	Aiding reading comprehension	"When I read and find difficult words, I immediately check their meaning using an online dictionary." (P1 – Zelsia) "I often watch summary videos on YouTube." (P2 – Ezekiel)
	Access to multiple resources	"I use Google, Grammarly, and sometimes discuss with friends in our WhatsApp group." (P4 – Leon)

Challenges	Technical issues	“The biggest challenge is the internet signal.” (P1 – Zelsia) “Sometimes the files are too large and my phone can’t open them.” (P4 – Leon)
	Low motivation	“When studying alone at home, there are too many distractions.” (P2 – Ezekiel) “Sometimes I lose discipline without a fixed schedule.” (P1 – Zelsia)
Blended Preference	The combination is most effective	“I prefer a combination... In class I can ask questions directly, and online I can replay materials.” (P1 – Zelsia)
	Interaction and flexibility	“Theories should be explained in class, and practice can be done online. That’s most efficient for me.” (P3 – Caca)

A thematic analysis of the interview data yielded four overarching themes in relation to students’ experiences and perceptions of blended learning in reading instruction: **Flexibility and Accessibility**, **Digital Support Tools**, **Challenges**, and **Blended Preference**. These themes are supported by statements drawn directly from participant interviews and further reinforced by scholarly research.

1. Flexibility and Accessibility

Students appreciated the flexibility that blended learning offers, particularly the ability to study at their own pace and catch up on missed lessons. This finding is consistent with (Hrastinski, 2019), who noted that asynchronous learning in blended environments allows students to access materials anytime, accommodating personal situations. (Boelens et al., 2017) also emphasized how flexibility enhances student-centered learning.

Participant Quotes:

“I can study anytime... I can review the materials at home through the online platform.” (P1 – Zelsia)

“If I’m sick or busy, I won’t miss out too much because I can catch up through e-learning.” (P1 – Zelsia)

2. Digital Support Tools

Technology played a key role in assisting reading comprehension. Students used tools like online dictionaries, summary videos, search engines, and communication platforms to support their understanding of texts. This aligns with (Oakley, 2024), who found that multimedia and digital tools enhance reading fluency and comprehension.

Participant Quotes:

“When I read and find difficult words, I immediately check their meaning using an online dictionary.” (P1 – Zelsia)

“I often watch summary videos on YouTube.” (P2 – Ezekiel)

“I use Google, Grammarly, and sometimes discuss with friends in our WhatsApp group.” (P4 – Leon)

3. Challenges

Despite its advantages, students experienced significant challenges, especially technical difficulties and a lack of motivation. These barriers reflect findings from (Adarkwah, 2021), who observed that unstable internet and limited devices hinder online learning, and (Rasheed et al., 2020), who noted that low motivation is common when learners study without structure.

Participant Quotes:

“The biggest challenge is the internet signal.” (P1 – Zelsia)

“Sometimes the files are too large and my phone can’t open them.” (P4 – Leon)

“When studying alone at home, there are too many distractions.” (P2 – Ezekiel)

“Sometimes I lose discipline without a fixed schedule.” (P1 – Zelsia)

4. Blended Preference

Many students favored a combination mix traditional classroom instruction with modern online resources, seeing it as a hybrid that best met their needs. This is in line with the flexibility of the blended learning approach to meet a variety of student requirements (Garrison & Vaughan, 2009). Students valued in-class interaction alongside the flexibility of online review.

Participant Quotes:

“I prefer a combination... In class I can ask questions directly, and online I can replay materials.” (P1 – Zelsia)

“Theories should be explained in class, and practice can be done online. That’s most efficient for me.” (P3 – Caca)

Transcript Excerpts of Student Interviews

Here are selected excerpts from the semi-structured interviews conducted with four participants, highlighting their experiences with blended learning in reading classes:

P1 – Zelsia

“I can study anytime... I can review the materials at home through the online platform.”

“If I’m sick or busy, I won’t miss out too much because I can catch up through e-learning.”

“When I read and find difficult words, I immediately check their meaning using an online dictionary.”

“The biggest challenge is the internet signal.”

“Sometimes I lose discipline without a fixed schedule.”

“I prefer a combination... In class I can ask questions directly, and online I can replay materials.”

P2 – Ezekiel

“I often watch summary videos on YouTube.”

“When studying alone at home, there are too many distractions.”

P3 – Caca

“Theories should be explained in class, and practice can be done online. That’s most efficient for me.”

P4 – Leon

“I use Google, Grammarly, and sometimes discuss with friends in our WhatsApp group.”

“Sometimes the files are too large and my phone can’t open them.”

2. Discussion

The first theme indicates that flexibility and accessibility are strong motivating factors for students. They appreciated the freedom to access materials at any time, which allowed them to manage their learning more independently. This aligns with Dziuban et al. (2018), who state that one benefit of blended learning is its adaptability, which is especially helpful for accommodating students with different schedules and preferred methods of instruction.

The second theme highlights how digital tools enhance comprehension. Students utilized various online resources such as Google Translate, Grammarly, and multimedia content that helped them decode and understand reading materials more effectively. This is by Daulay & Dewi (2025), who emphasized the role of multimodal tools in improving reading comprehension through interactive and engaging learning experiences.

The third theme reveals the technical and motivational challenges students experienced during the online components of blended learning. Many participants reported unstable internet connections and limited access to compatible devices, which hindered their participation in online sessions. Additionally, the lack of direct supervision and structured schedules often led to procrastination and reduced focus. These findings are consistent with Hermanto (2020), who found that Indonesian students frequently encountered technological barriers and reduced motivation, both of which negatively impacted the effectiveness of online learning.

Lastly, the fourth theme reveals a preference for balanced learning, where both online and offline modes complement each other. Students recognized the value of face-

to-face interaction for clarification and immediate feedback, while online components were beneficial for independent practice. This supports Wood et al. (1999), who suggested that the most effective learning outcomes are achieved when both methods are integrated thoughtfully.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate how students at an Islamic institute in Jambi felt about reading lessons that used blended learning, specifically looking at the pros and cons that the students experienced. By conducting five semi-structured interviews with students from the English Department as part of a qualitative case study method, the research uncovered meaningful insights into how blended learning influences students' engagement and development of reading skills.

The findings reveal that students generally hold positive views toward the integration of mixed-mode learning into reading curricula. The model's adaptability was highly valued, notably the opportunity to study at one's own speed and review topics as needed. Online resources, such as e-learning platforms and digital technologies, greatly enhanced students' reading comprehension. These resources included online dictionaries, Google, YouTube, and Grammarly. With the use of these tools, they were able to broaden their knowledge base, better grasp texts with multimedia components, and get definitions for new words.

However, the research also identified several important challenges. Technical difficulties, such as unstable internet connections and limited device capabilities, were frequently cited as barriers that disrupted learning. Moreover, students acknowledged facing motivational issues and distractions when learning from home without structured supervision. These challenges highlight the importance of designing supportive and engaging online environments to maintain student focus and discipline.

Interestingly, all participants expressed a strong preference for a blended approach over fully online or fully offline methods. They emphasized that in-person sessions allow for immediate feedback, interaction, and clarification, with the help of online components, students may learn at their own pace and access a wealth of resources. This reinforces the idea that blended learning, when implemented thoughtfully, can combine the strengths of traditional and digital education to enhance both the cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

In conclusion, this study underscores the potential of blended learning to improve reading skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly in higher education institutions. While it offers greater autonomy and access to diverse resources, its success depends on addressing key challenges such as technological limitations and student self-regulation. Educators and policymakers are encouraged to provide adequate infrastructure, ongoing digital literacy training, and pedagogical support to ensure that blended learning becomes a sustainable and effective instructional model. Future research may expand on these findings by including a larger sample size or exploring how specific blended learning tools impact different aspects of reading proficiency.

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