

Blended learning in the Covid-19 pandemic: Implementation and reflection in the context of teaching assistance to EFL learners

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ABSTRACT

Learning policies in schools have undergone a lot of significant changes during the Covid-19 pandemic, including the implementation of blended learning. Teachers are encouraged to integrate online and offline learning in achieving learning objectives as well as optimizing the learning environment. This study aims to describe the practice of blended learning in English instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic through the implementation and reflection activities during the MBKM program called teaching assistance held at one of the state junior high schools in Wonoayu, Sidoarjo. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. This study was conducted for 5 months by interviewing one of the English teachers at SMPN 1 Wonoayu and using an observation sheet as a data collection instrument. The results of the study indicate that teachers and students can maximize English classes with the implementation of blended learning. According to the results, there are issues that teacher and students have to deal with, including time constraints and school facilities. The application of this blended learning requires creativity in providing an English learning platform so that learning during the pandemic is able to provide optimal benefits for teachers and students.

Keywords: *blended learning; pandemic Covid-19; teaching assistance; English language education*

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus Disease 19 (Covid-19) is an infectious disease or virus that was first detected in Wuhan, China in 2019 and spread to Indonesia on March 2, 2020 (Susilo et al., 2020). The Covid-19 outbreak in Indonesia has led to an increase in confirmed positive cases every day. The incessant coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has serious implications for all aspects of human life, especially in formal education, which is one component of human life affected by the virus attack. The learning process, which had been carried out face-to-face, suddenly had to be done online (Herlina & Suherman, 2020). With a series of preparations and strict health protocols, the government allows face-to-face learning activities for schools in the green and yellow zones. In an effort to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government has implemented a blended learning policy.

The definition of blended learning (Milya, 2019) is a learning pattern with elements of combining one learning pattern with other learning patterns. This method uses two approaches, where teachers and students apply offline and online learning based on e-learning. According to Purnima Valiathan, blended learning is a combination of various event-based activities, including offline classes, e-learning, and independent learning. The application of learning using blended learning is a policy of the government. This is considered efficient because it has many advantages. One of them is interaction and communication between students and teachers, which creates learning consistency in students.

Blended learning is a solution to the shortcomings of learning that previously only used online methods. This method is very effective as a learning attraction in this era because it is simple and easy to apply by both parties. In a study, it was found that blended learning not only improves student achievement but also increases their learning creativity (Kantun & Siswandini ASP, 2016).

According to a study on the effect of blended learning and learning motivation on student learning outcomes, students who use blended learning outperform students who use the offline learning model (Khoiroh, 2017). Student learning outcomes in the cognitive field with high learning motivation will be maximized by using blended learning, while student learning outcomes with low motivation will also be maximized. In addition, a study on the effect of learning using blended learning also showed an increase in student motivation and learning outcomes due to the implementation of blended learning (Sjukur, 2020).

In addition, the Indonesian government introduced students to the Merdeka Learning Campus Merdeka (MBKM) program, which aims to improve the competence of graduates, both in soft skills and hard skills. It aims to make students more prepared and relevant to the needs of the times, preparing graduates as future leaders of the nation with superior personalities (Dirjen Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020). At Merdeka Learning Campus Merdeka (MBKM), there are several types of programs that are implemented. The forms of MBKM are student exchanges, internships or work practices in industry or other workplaces, implementing community service projects in villages, teaching assistance, participating in student exchanges, conducting research, conducting entrepreneurial activities, making independent studies or projects, and participating in programs for humanity (Dirjen Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020).

Teaching assistance is one of the programs in the Independent Learning Campus (MBKM), which was launched by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Nadiem Makarim, in 2020. The teaching assistance program provides opportunities for students who have an interest in education to participate in teaching and deepen their knowledge by becoming educators in schools and helping to improve the quality of education in accordance with the development of science and technology.

The learning carried out by teaching assistant students at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu uses blended learning in English subjects. Therefore, this study aims to examine the implementation of blended learning from the point of view of an English teacher and teaching assistant student.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach. Case studies were chosen to provide an explanation of the situation and practice of providing education based on real conditions that occur in the field. Creswell stated that the case study is a research method that carefully investigates an event, a program, or the activities of a group of people and is limited by time and the activities of informants (Creswell, John W.; Poth, 2016). The use of qualitative methods is needed to examine, understand, analyze, and test in depth a problem topic (Raco, 2018). Qualitative research is strongly influenced by the quality of the research and the completeness of the data produced.

The selection of the descriptive method of the case study type in this study was based on the intention of the researchers, who wanted to examine in depth the implementation and reflection of blended learning in English learning at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu, which was carried out by students of the teaching assistance program.

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu, Sidoarjo Regency. The subjects of this research was the students of the English education study program who are members of the teaching assistance program and a teacher of English subjects at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu. In this study, data collection was carried out by maximizing semi-structured interviews with English teacher. The research design is shown in the figure below.

In the research process, researchers sought and found problems that were challenges in the world of education during the pandemic era. The results found that the implementation of blended learning in learning English is considered to still require a more in-depth study to support the process of carrying out activities in a more structured manner. In this case, the researchers used the context of teaching assistance activities as an opportunity to observe and analyze the application of the learning model.

To support the research, the researchers also used the observation method. Observation is one of the steps to observe how blended learning takes place in the location that is the target of the research. The observation process carried out by the researchers and teacher aimed to determine the stimulus given during the activity using the learning model and assessment system. The study also used observation sheets to support the results of observations that are often found in the field and explore ideas and perspectives from educators.

Furthermore, the researchers conducted an in-depth assessment and analysis based on the data obtained. Then the data was processed and verified to find the results of the reflection that were in accordance with the topic of discussion, so that it can be concluded as a whole.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following is a description of the results of research and discussion based on each focus of the problem related to the implementation and reflection of blended learning-based English learning during the Covid-19 pandemic that has been obtained and analyzed by students teaching assistant for 3 weeks, which is as the researchers at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu, Sidoarjo Regency. The subject of this research is one of the English teachers and students of the teaching assistance program. The blended learning model applied at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu aimed to overcome the shortcomings and problems that exist in online learning.

Implementation of Blended Learning-Based English Learning by Teacher

Blended learning is an alternative teaching method that is applied to support the pedagogic competence and professional competence of teachers. This method was used to accelerate the spread of information and material from teachers to students by combining offline learning (face-to-face) and computer-based online learning (Ramang, 2019).

The percentage of blended learning application in general was 50/50. This means that face-to-face learning had a 50% and computer-based learning had a 50% time allocation. Meanwhile, blended learning-based learning at SMPN 1 Wonoayu provided allocation time with a percentage of 75/25. Which means that offline learning was carried out at a rate of 75% and online learning at only 25%.

Ramang revealed that several elements in blended learning that facilitate communication and interaction between teachers and students are face-to-face activities, independent study, tutorials, applications, collaboration, and evaluation, including the use of e-mail. These elements are important for teachers. In this case, the resource persons, who are English teachers at SMPN 1 Wonoayu have

been able to use these elements in blended learning-based learning. This can be determined from the observation sheet. Offline teaching activities can be effectively maximized.

In online learning, teachers used the application WhatsApp as a teaching media. However, each element has not been used on a large scale, such as in utilizing interactive application media, which is not maximized due to the limited time and facilities owned by teachers and students, including facilities provided by schools.

The following is an observation sheet that is recorded as a reflection of the teacher on the implementation of blended learning-based learning activities.

Lembar Observasi

Nama Sekolah : SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu
Mata Pelajaran : Bahasa Inggris
Tanggal : 8 - 18 November 2021
Guru Pengampu Mata Pelajaran : Siti Fatimah, S.Pd.

No	Aspek yang Diamati	Pengamatan	Penilaian			
			1	2	3	4
1.	Model dan Kegiatan Pembelajaran	Siswa melakukan kegiatan pembelajaran secara daring dan luring				✓
		Kegiatan pembelajaran daring dilakukan dengan waktu maks. 30 menit				✓
		Kegiatan pembelajaran luring dilakukan dengan waktu maks. 30 menit			✓	
		Kegiatan Pembelajaran selalu dilakukan secara synchronous			✓	
		Kegiatan pembelajaran menggunakan media interaktif (video, aplikasi, website,)		✓		
		Kegiatan pembelajaran secara daring menggunakan fasilitas kuota internet baik untuk guru maupun siswa			✓	
		Kegiatan pembelajaran luring menggunakan fasilitas protokol kesehatan				✓
2.	Aktivitas Pembelajaran oleh Guru terhadap Siswa	Guru mendampingi setiap kegiatan yang dilakukan oleh siswa			✓	
		Guru memaksimalkan kegiatan mengajar dan melakukan interaksi pembelajaran luring selama 30 menit			✓	
		Guru memaksimalkan kegiatan mengajar dan melakukan interaksi pembelajaran daring secara selama 30 menit		✓		
		Guru memberikan kesempatan kepada siswa untuk bertanya		✓		

		Guru selalu memberikan tugas kepada siswa pada setiap pertemuan		✓		
		Guru mengintegrasikan permainan (games) dengan materi pembelajaran, baik saat luring maupun daring		✓		
		Guru memantau pemahaman siswa dengan menanyakan sejauh mana mereka mengerti isi materi			✓	
		Guru memberikan instruksi pembelajaran dengan jelas			✓	
		Guru memberikan motivasi kepada siswa selama kegiatan pembelajaran		✓		
		Guru memberikan materi Bahasa Inggris sesuai dengan kurikulum				✓
3.	Aktivitas Siswa Terhadap Guru	Siswa melakukan interaksi secara aktif dalam kegiatan pembelajaran luring			✓	
		Siswa melakukan interaksi secara aktif dalam kegiatan pembelajaran daring		✓		
		Siswa selalu menyimak informasi dan materi yang diberikan oleh guru			✓	
		Siswa memiliki motivasi belajar yang sangat baik		✓		
		Siswa selalu mengumpulkan tugas dengan tepat waktu			✓	
		Siswa dapat memanfaatkan waktu 30 menit secara maksimal untuk memperhatikan penjelasan guru			✓	
		Siswa secara aktif bertanya kepada guru		✓		

Figure 1. Observation sheets for the teacher

Referring to the observation sheet that has been filled out by the English subject teacher, there were several things that can be used as reflection material on the implementation of blended learning-based learning.

First, blended learning application at SMPN 1 Wonoayu with 30 minutes allocation of offline learning can be carried out optimally. Teacher provided material to students intensively and monitor while ensuring student understanding was more flexible. Meanwhile, online learning carried out by students at home required independent learning efforts and required direct assistance from parents. So that the allocation of 30 minutes can be maximized by students to study.

Second, the use of the WhatsApp application as an important element in the application of blended learning was not an interactive medium that can fully support learning activities. The application could only be maximized to share material and information in text chat format. As stated by Ramang, the blended learning system utilizes print, audio, audio-visual, and mobile learning technology media. WhatsApp itself can still be said to be mobile learning technology. It's just that the tools in it were not designed to support learning activities either.

Implementation of Blended Learning-Based English Learning by Teaching Assistant Students

Through the teaching assistance program, students had activities that are responsible for teaching and learning activities and adapting technology using the blended learning method at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu. Based on self-evaluation, the researchers ran the blended learning method by teaching English in class 8. The learning was carried out for 30 minutes, with 15 students were offline in class and 15 students were online. In a fairly short time, the researchers maximized teaching activities and interactions with students so that the material can be delivered properly in accordance with the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) and school curriculum.

The researchers started learning English in class by greeting students, praying together, and checking student attendance. Then the researchers conveyed the material by asking first about the previous material so that students remembered the material that has been delivered. At the end of the lesson, the researchers gave the opportunity for students to ask questions about the material that had been delivered. This is an assessment of students so that they shown their activeness in the learning process in class.

The researchers conducted learning activities using interactive media such as PowerPoint and paper. As one example of the greeting card material, students make greeting cards with buffalo paper that have been designed by previous students themselves. This activity aimed to improve students' creativity and writing skills as outlined in the media.



Figure 2. The Activity of Making Greeting Cards

The rapid development of technology makes the education system in Indonesia better and more advanced so that it can align with that of other countries. This learning strategy using blended learning in junior high school provides opportunities for teachers and students to be able to take full advantage of technological aspects. Teachers and students must be able to adapt to using IT tools in the learning process with a blended learning model during this pandemic. This is a challenge for teachers and students to be able to continue to develop themselves in the era of technology. Several studies have shown that technology has many positive effects on language learning (Gheytsi et al., 2015).

Online learning can be done through Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, WhatsApp group or other online media (Fuady et al., 2021). In English online learning, the researchers delivered the material through the Whatsapp group, which had been carried out during face-to-face learning in class. For example, the researchers conveyed English material in powerpoint about quantifiers to WhatsApp group so that students can access the same material as students in face-to-face learning.

Learning through WhatsApp group was less effective because teacher and students can only interact with text messages or audio. Referring to the researchers' self-evaluation of students, it shown that there were problems from the side of students who did not have a lot of internet quota and some do not have cell phones, laptops, or other devices. This had an impact on learning English and shown a lack of student response to researchers when delivering material through WhatsApp group. Students were more likely to respond only by answering greetings, absent, and collecting assignments than have been given.

Assessment was a way for educators to see student achievement during the learning process. One of them was the form of mid-semester assessment (PTS) and end-of-semester assessment (PAS) (Harisah et al., 2021). In the context of this teaching assistance, the researchers helped in making English subject exam questions for 8th grade students and as a test supervisor. This was a researchers' contribution as a student of the teaching assistance program to contribute to the school.

Reflections based on self-evaluations carried out by researchers shown the implementation of blended learning in English learning was an effective solution for maximum online and offline learning in the current pandemic conditions at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu while still implementing health protocols during offline learning. It is known that in the current technological era, the implementation of blended learning-based English learning can help teachers and students increase their knowledge of media technology for the teaching and learning process. This is also a moment for teachers to be more creative in developing learning media for both online and offline classes.

The implementation of English learning using the blended learning method had shortcomings that need to be considered. This deficiency was more visible from the difficulty of understanding the material only through media such as WhatsApp groups without being explained directly face to face. This caused a lack of student response to questions asked by the teacher during online learning hours. This was a reflection for researchers on the implementation of learning with the blended learning method.

On the other hand, WhatsApp is a media that is commonly used by all circles; both teachers, parents, and students have this application. So the students can easily access it even though they use their parents' communication tools. Therefore, WhatsApp is an application that can be used easily as a learning media in the blended learning model.

CONCLUSION

Through the research that has been carried out from the teaching assistance program, it can be concluded that researchers and teachers have activities that are responsible for teaching and learning activities and technology adaptation using the blended learning method at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu. On the observation sheet, the teacher can implement online and offline English learning well.

Researchers started and carried out English language learning in accordance with the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) and the school. Researchers use interactive PowerPoint and paper media in online and offline learning processes to improve students' creativity and skills. In online learning, the researchers explained the lack of effectiveness of learning through WhatsApp groups because the

students' responses tended to only answer greetings, be absent, and collect assignments without any question and answer responses.

The implementation described raises reflections on learning English based on blended learning by teachers and researchers at SMP Negeri 1 Wonoayu in the current pandemic situation.

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