

The Pros and Cons of English Learning Strategies in the Post Covid-19 Pandemic of Vocational High School: Perception and Attitude by Indonesian EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

During the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, students and teachers had to carry out academic activities via an online learning management system. Recently the threat of Covid-19 has receded, and schools immediately carry out full face-to-face learning. The present study observed high school students' perception of the shifts in English learning from blended to offline learning. The research data was obtained through a questionnaire from 286 students consisting of 118 males and 168 females in Central Java, Indonesia. The results reveal some pros and cons towards offline learning. In general, students accustomed to online learning find offline learning time-consuming and burdensome. However, most of them state that offline learning is fun, more interesting, and more effective. Importantly, they could meet their classmates and teachers in person again. The study concluded that offline learning or traditional classrooms were preferred to online learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, Coronavirus spread around the globe with a horrifying impact on many sectors disrupting the global economy (Thompson, 2020), affecting tremendously on people's well-being (Banks et al., 2020), and education sectors (Haiyudi and Art-In, 2021; Islam and Habib, 2022; Tripathi and Amann, 2020). Considering the high risk of spreading Covid-19, education sectors around the globe were forced to close (Toquero, 2020). The closures of educational institutions in many countries occurred in massive sequences to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus and reduce the number of cases. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Indonesian government, under the command of the Indonesian Ministry of Education, ordered education institutions to close physical schools and campuses nationally effective on

March 23, 2020, and to implement online-learning modes. During the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching and learning at schools and universities had to obey the Indonesian government regulations in which they had to conduct or implement online learning safely.

Of course, the shift from traditional classrooms to online learning disrupted the teaching and learning processes. In the one hand, most Indonesian students were not ready for reliable and affordable internet access. On the other hand, teachers, commonly over 45 years old, struggled to implement online learning systems (Bestiantono, Agustina, and Cheng, 2020). This bewilderment also became parents' apprehension, which required their comprehensive roles in educating their children (Ratih et al., 2021). The application of full online learning raised several problems for students and teachers and this made many schools combine online and offline meetings under strict rules commonly known as blended learning (Pardede, 2012).

Blended learning integrates both conventional instruction and modern educational technologies. Direct classroom engagement between instructors and students is a cornerstone of the classical education model. Meanwhile, technology-based learning approaches focus on using technology to facilitate teaching and learning interactions between teachers and students in the absence of face-to-face encounters. Google Classroom, Zoom Meetings, Open Learning, and many others are just some of the online media and LMSs used. Since students can now access endless sources from the internet while still having teachers' supervision through face-to-face learning, Throne (2003) argues that blended learning may be the optimal learning style for students today. Blended learning is advocated as the appropriate response to today's digital environment since it encourages students to take an active role in their English language development. Teachers using a blended approach must be resourceful in devising lessons that encourage student participation in online courses.

There has been a significant decrease in the number of people affected by the Covid-19 epidemic in recent months. The Task Force for the Acceleration of Covid-19 Handling and the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture spent over eighteen months studying the benefits of immunisation before deciding that it was safe to use offline learning. The president of Indonesia has issued an order to relax mask regulations, but only under careful supervision. Schools must therefore make arrangements for offline instruction and learning. With the end of the Covid-19 epidemic, the new school year represents the pinnacle of offline learning for all students. The most obvious benefit of offline classes is that they facilitate skill acquisition and student collaboration through group projects. Because of the lack of face-to-face connection inherent in online education, these pupils develop an introverted personality trait. Teachers may keep an eye on their kids' reactions and behaviour while they're not online. So, offline learning will continue to play a vital role in students' development regardless of how advanced online education gets.

This research was conducted to strengthen previous studies which also provide an overview of the conditions of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes towards blended learning and the factors affecting their applications of blended learning in teaching English (Huong and Hanh, 2021), to investigate the effects of blended learning on Jordanian EFL learners' grammar performance and their attitudes toward utilizing blended learning (Al Bataineh, Banikalef and Albashtawi, 2019), to explore the autonomy level and use of language learning strategies in a preparatory school of a state university before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Irgatoğlu, A., Sariçoban, A., Özcan, M., & Dağbaşı, G., 2022), to find out students' preferences and perceptions toward online learning that has been carried out during the pandemic and face-to-face learning (Norhasanah, 2021), to determine the perspective of ESP lecturers on the best teaching practices, effective aspects, challenges and suggestions to implement blended learning in ESP instructions (Mulyadi, Wijyantingsih and Budiastuti, 2020)

None of the studies has been conducted in the shift learning English from blended to offline learning. Most of the previous research only examined blended or online and their perceptions. No one has researched the shift from online to offline learning. Therefore, this current study is conducted to fill the gap. The shifting in learning English from blended to offline learning makes many students adapt to new circumstances. Many of them must have been comfortable with either online or blended learning,

however, some others would favour 100% face-to-face learning. Based on the current phenomenon, the research is intended to examine the perception and attitude of students in some vocational schools in Central Java, Indonesia. The present study intends to find out more about possible issues that could arise as students shift from online to offline learning environments and strategies so that teachers and schools could plan some measures to cope with the emerging issues. The study raised two research questions. They are; what is high school students' perception toward the shifting of English learning from blended to offline or face-to-face learning?, and; what is their attitude toward shifting English learning from blended offline or face-to-face learning?

2. METHODS

This study was a qualitative study with a case study type that examined the shifting of English learning from blended to offline or face-to-face learning. A case study was selected as it could provide more comprehensive insights to investigate complex issues that are anchored in real-life situations. The study was conducted from July to September 2022, and it was participated by 286 students studying in 10 Vocational high schools in Central Java, Indonesia. The study explored their perception and attitudes towards the shifts in learning methods from blended to offline learning. The data of the students' perception towards the shifting of English learning from blended to offline or face-to-face learning was collected through an online survey with close-ended questions. There were 34 questions in the questionnaire, 18 elicited their perception towards the shifting of English learning from blended to offline or face-to-face learning, and 16 inquired about their attitude about the shift. The data of the study were analyzed by describing the frequency of the students' responses and calculating them in percentages. Content analysis was employed to analyze the reasons for their preferences towards offline and online learning.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the pandemic, teachers and students employed many different learning management systems (LMS) in which 4 platforms were commonly used as google Classroom (the commonest), Schoology, Whatsapp groups (the second common), and open learning.

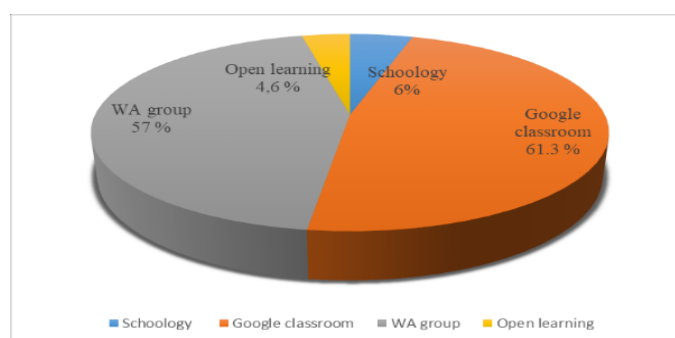


Figure 1. Learning Management System (LMS) used in learning English during the covid 19 pandemic.

Google Classroom was preferred to other LMS as it is amazingly simple and very easy to use. It provides a discussion group in which students and teachers can communicate effectively and efficiently. Moreover, it is a cloud-based system that can be accessed from anywhere as long as they have an internet connection, and hence they have space for collaboration, sharing tasks, and learning materials. WhatsApp (WA) was initially built for social communication. However, during the pandemic, WA groups were set up by teachers and students to share teaching materials, assignments, and many others. In the booming of the technological era, WhatsApp provides students and teachers critically a new way of teaching and learning as well as sharing ideas (Rahmadi, 2020). Our findings

confirmed Durriyah and Zuhdi's (2018) studies about how a WhatsApp group is useful as a learning platform. The next sections discuss the perception and attitude of students regarding offline and online learning obtained through an online survey.

Table 1. Perception toward the shifting of English learning from blended to offline learning.

No	Items of perception	Conventional (%)	Online (%)	Blended (%)
1	Preferences over three learning systems	83	3	14
2	A learning system that gave more understanding	96	4	-
3	A learning system that could improve their English	93	7	-
4	Learning systems that could help complete assignments	82	18	-
5	Learning systems that could help practising English	95	5	-
6	Learning systems that provide better instructional materials	91	9	-
7	Learning systems that provide better media	88	12	-
8	Learning systems that provide a better learning atmosphere	90	10	-

The first question asked students' opinions about whether full online learning, blended (a mixture of offline and online), or conventional learning. The results revealed that most of them favoured conventional learning, and the rest liked to have blended and fully online learning. There were some reasons why they preferred conventional learning to full online and blended learning. First, reason pertained their social relationship with classmates. Second reason was that they could understand the teaching materials more and interacted with the teachers directly. Besides, direct tutorials could ask them questions directly when they did not understand what the teacher taught. This was also confirmed by the responses of the second question that asked whether online learning activities or conventional learning activities can help them understand instructional materials better, although some found that online learning was better than offline. They also perceived that conventional classes could help them improve their English skills better than online classes (Bandara, D., and Wijekularathna DK, 2017). Despite this fact, some students found that online class was better than offline class as they could find online materials easily.

As they were asked whether online or conventional learning classes could help them complete their English assignments, most of them still found that conventional classes were better than online ones. There were some reasons for this. Most of them stated that they could ask teachers when they did not understand the assignments. The second common reason was that they could have a discussion with classmates to finish the assignments. The third common reason was that they had clearer instructions on the assignments. The fourth common reason was that they could focus on doing the assignments or tasks at school. Nonetheless, some students found the online class was convenient with the following reasons (Bestiantono, D.S., Agustina P.Z. R, Cheng T-H, 2020). Most of them stated they had more time to finish the assignments and could learn from online materials to support the assignments.

As a foreign language, English should be practised in daily communication. Concerning this, the students had a different perception about whether online learning activities or conventional learning activities that could help them practise using their English skills better (Eshreth, M. and Siaj, H. A., 2017). The majority of respondents cited the following advantages of a traditional classroom setting

over an online learning environment. The most common response was so that they could assist them to learn English more effectively. The second most popular reason was that they could work with an English tutor one-on-one and ask questions whenever they got stuck. The fact that they could immediately put the language to use and that traditional programmes provided opportunities for interactive practice was a further incentive. The ability to speak English in social situations was the final justification. Nonetheless, some students favoured online learning over traditional classroom settings for various reasons. To begin, they could look for samples on the internet. Secondly, they felt more capable after taking a lesson online.

The next question asked about their perception of obtaining better instructional materials. They expected that online classes would give them good teaching materials. However, most students stated they could use better instructional materials in conventional class (Bestiantono, Agustina, and Cheng, 2020). They provided some reasons for this. For example, in conventional classes, teachers explained the materials in detail, and they could ask their teachers when they had trouble with the materials. Next reason was that they did not need to find it out by themselves. The other perception was that conventional classes provided extensive, interactive, and comprehensive learning materials.

Interestingly, the vast majority of students felt that their teachers explained things better and employed a wider range of strategies in traditional classrooms. When asked whether full online learning classes or traditional classes used more engaging and effective teaching methods, students said the former. Some respondents even said that they were surprised to hear that traditional classroom instruction was rated higher in quality than online instruction (Ja'ashan and Hassan, 2016). Most of them felt that traditional classrooms offered a more conducive learning environment than virtual ones.

Table 2. Attitude toward the shifting of English learning from blended to offline learning

No	Items of attitude	No (%)	Yes (%)	No difference (%)
1	Conventional learning is easy to perform	12	85	3
2	Conventional classrooms provide students with a convenient learning process	3	86	11
3	Conventional classrooms enable students to learn English better	2	89	9
4	Conventional classrooms enable students to learn English independently	6	77	17
5	Conventional classrooms enable students to have higher motivation to learn English	2	88	10
6	Conventional classrooms are useful and provide better results	2	91	7
7	Easy technique and methods to learn English	1	92	7
8	Conventional classrooms enable students to effectively develop English skills	3	88	9
9	Conventional classrooms enable students to interact easily with teachers	2	93	5
10	Conventional classrooms enable students to interact easily with classmates	2	91	7
11	Economical	5	84	11
12	Conventional classrooms enable students to do tests and assignments effectively	5	76	19

13	Conventional classrooms enable students to get better English score	3	70	27
14	Conventional classrooms enable students to have more contraction to learn Enish	16	82	12
15	With conventional classrooms, students do not worry about internet issues	10	76	14
16	Conventional classrooms enable students to have good mental health	27	70	3

The study results showed that the research participants had a good perception towards offline and online learning systems, although they mostly favoured offline or conventional classes over online class. They perceived that conventional classes could help them improve their English skills better than online classes as they could help them complete their English assignments, it could help them practise using their English skills better as they could interact with their classmates, and, more importantly, they could ask teachers when they had troubles with teaching materials. This confirms Bestiantono, Agustina, and Cheng (2020), who found that learning in traditional classes is more motivating as students can engage face-to-face with teachers and classmates. In conventional classes, teachers explained the materials in detail, and they could ask their teachers when they had trouble with the materials. Teachers could explain better and used various teaching techniques in a conventional class. In addition, the conventional class provided better and more interesting learning media, and it provided a comfortable learning atmosphere. The findings did not agree with the one claimed by previous studies that blended or online learning provided advantageous, efficient, and pleasant learning (e.g., Al-Bataineh, Banikalef, and Albashtawi, 2019; Bestiantono, Agustina, and Cheng, 2020; Eshreteh and Siaj, 2017; Istina, 2017; Ja'ashan and Hassan, 2016; Madarina and Rahman, 2018).

There could be some reasons why the research participants in this research mostly favoured conventional learning systems rather than online or blended learning. The first reason could be that the students were not independent learners, in other words, they depended much on the teachers in terms of understanding teaching materials and completing their tasks or assignments. The teachers were the centre of learning and students preferred getting knowledge by spoonfeeding. This is a typical Asian students' learning mode in which teachers are the centre of knowledge (Biggs, 1997; Rao, 2001). The second reason could be that they are not settled in online learning, in which independence, high motivation, and self-discipline are highly required. In addition, unlike traditional classrooms, online learning did not provide them with effective learning patterns or structures. Not well-structured learning could induce boredom, tiredness, and depression (Rahiem, 2021). In fact, children are very comfortable and understand more about face-to-face learning because it turns out that online learning does not really understand and is not effective with the learning system. Therefore, as a teacher, you must further improve online or offline learning so that it is even more effective by evaluating methods, learning strategies and carrying capacity for learning, knowing the intentions or abilities of the students they have studied and the level of difficulty of learning material must be known and owned by the teacher.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that offline or traditional classrooms preferred to online learning. Students with no independent learning habits tend to prefer traditional classrooms to blended or fully online learning systems. This could be because they perceive that conventional class is the centre of learning in which they can access and obtain knowledge directly from their teachers with slight effort. This condition could foster teacher centre learning that nowadays is considered less favourable for developing students' creativity and developing broader knowledge beyond classroom activities.

Further researchers can develop the results of this study related to the perception and attitude of students toward the shift of English learning from blended to offline or face-to-face learning.

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