



Reflecting Experiences on Using Blended Learning: A-Self-Narrative Inquiry Research

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Abstrak

Blended learning (BL) has widely implemented in higher education setting. However, the application of BL presents a wide range of variation. BL is conducted based the consideration of modalities, methods and instruction. As the impact, each instructor has different strategies in applying BL. Therefore, it is important to explore BL practices in order to recognize strength and weakness of BL in different context. In this self-narrative inquiry research, I would like to narrate my personal experience in implementing BL on some theoretical courses in a bachelor program. The stories cover my BL practices from 2015 until 2019 which explain about modalities, methods and instructions selections. In narrating my stories, I highlight benefit and challenges of every BL practice to emphasize personal reflection from past, present and future events. By connecting three life events, I offer a reflection on how to select effective BL practice based on technical considerations, teaching strategies and instructional design. The reflection is expected to provide a reference for educators in designing blended learning for higher education.

Keywords: blended learning; higher education; self-narrative inquiry

INTRODUCTION

Currently, there has been a notable gradual shift from traditional classroom to online or blended learning. This gradual shift involves the process of integrating innovation into onsite course design, developing policy, designing classroom practices, and achieving well-established structure and management of blended learning (Graham et al., 2013). As the result, blended learning (BL) has widely been implemented in higher education. BL is considered as one of popular approaches in education that offers flexibility to accommodate students' diversities in learning pace and time (Stein & Graham, 2014). In addition, BL is also effective to improve students' achievement (Surjono et al., 2017)). However, BL still presents diverse concepts. BL can be considered as: 1) combination of

modalities; 2) combination of method; and 3) combination of instructions (Graham, 2016). Therefore, it creates confusion among faculty members (Hrastinski, 2019). There is no definite guideline toward BL implementation. The application relies on personal profile of institution or instructors. Graham et.al. (2013) categorized BL adoption into three stages: awareness/exploration, adoption/early implementation, and mature implementation/growth. On the first stage, institution has developed positive acceptance toward BL. However, there are still limited infrastructures to support BL practices. On the second stage, institution has experienced a variety of BL practices to explore the effective options. The last stage leads institution to full readiness in applying BL as one of learning strategies. Different levels of readiness on BL

generate a variety of problems when it comes to applying BL for everyday practices.

As the impact, BL is unable to provide full flexibility, interaction, students' learning process and affective development (Boelens et al., 2017). To avoid more puzzle in choosing effective BL practice, it is essential to explore BL implementation through teachers' voices. Faculty members are important agents in the process of integrating BL into university system. University should empower instructors to reflect their role in BL. Reflecting teaching experience empowers teachers to reform their pedagogy, rebuild and reconstruct their competence as adopters of innovation (Ai & Wang, 2017). In this self-narrative inquiry study, I would like to share my experience on how to implement BL for different setting of courses. The setting of this research was courses in English Language Education Department at one of private university in Indonesia. I was assigned to teach pedagogical courses for pre-service English teachers. As student teachers, my students build teaching competencies in many aspects, not only teaching strategies but also ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) competencies. Thus, most of my BL practices took place in theoretical courses. In this study, I narrate my stories in three topics: selecting modalities, formulating teaching method and designing learning instructions.

Selecting Modalities in Blended Learning Setting

When I conducted my first BL course in 2015, I considered myself as an early adopter who had limited knowledge about BL. Thus, I referred my BL concept to the combination of offline and online meetings (Stein & Graham, 2014). I decided to provide more allocation time of classroom interaction than online activities. I employed face-to-face interaction to build students' understanding toward theoretical content. In addition to it, I utilized online activities to enhance their mastery through assignment and projects. In 2016,

there was a huge changing of the curriculum in my department. It took a year process to convert previous curriculum to the new one. It prevented me from conducting BL since I need to wait until the new document was issued by the department in legal form.

It was not until 2017 when I started my second attempt in conducting BL. In my second experience, I challenged myself to try new techniques of BL because I designed balanced allocation time between classroom meeting and online activities in 2017. I provided one offline meeting and one online activity in one week. I applied the techniques for my 4-credit course. Every 4-credit course had two meetings in one week. Therefore, I conducted classroom interaction once a week and I met my students online for the other meeting at the same week. Student demonstrated their work during classroom interaction and accessed materials on Google Classroom for online activities. As the facilitator, I gave feedback to their work during our discussion in face-to-face interaction.

As I built my commitment to conduct BL annually, I had my third BL course in 2018. I conducted face-to-face meetings for a half of the semester. In my 4-credit course, I had 14 classroom interaction before formative test and 14 online activities after formative test. I maximized offline meeting to share theoretical foundation for all contents. I prepared their understanding by demonstrating many examples and guidelines. After finishing all offline meetings, I shifted classroom meetings to online consultation sessions and online practice on Google Classroom platform. They consulted their work through email or WhatsApp.

At the same year, I also conducted another blended learning in another course. In this course, I combined offline and online meeting to provide full assistance for students in finishing their projects. I met my students in the classroom and assigned online activities at the same day. By designing the interwoven activities, my students could connect theories

and practices at the same time. However, I did not anticipate the difference of credit course. I applied this technique to 3-credit course; thus, I did not have many opportunities to provide personal feedbacks. In my department, 3-credit course is only conducted in 14 meetings. Therefore, it was quite challenging to provide balance blended meetings in one semester.

In 2019, I started recognizing the pattern of my BL practices. I adopted my success experiences from my previous experiences such as connecting offline and online activities, presenting personalized feedback, and providing more offline consultation for project-based task. I shared materials in the classroom, and I gave online practice right after the class so the students could relate my explanation and the exercise immediately.

Based on these timelines, I have tried several variations of time allocation in BL. In positive side, managing allocation time in BL gave some benefits such as designing interchangeable activities between offline and online meetings to ensure students' comprehension, providing immediate feedback during classroom discussion, setting sufficient allocation time for student to finish their projects, enhancing students' learning experiences through wide varieties of resources and empowering knowledge during online activities. However, BL is not only about dividing two modalities but also facilitating learning. Due to my limitation in applying BL, I experienced some negative downfalls, for example: lack of connection between offline and online activities, abundant media usage for both offline and online meetings, lack of digital literacy trainings for students and lack of interaction. Students admitted that they had hard time to elaborate information from offline and online activities. They also required personalized feedbacks in one-on-one consultation. Most of them preferred more face-to-face consultation than online consultation. They stated that it was difficult to finish final project without meeting the instructors. They require offline feedbacks

before submitting their projects. They need more interaction and personalized feedbacks.

Formulating Teaching Methods

In most of my BL courses, I adapted project-based learning method. One of my courses, Technology-enhance language learning, was designed to foster students' ability in developing a digital project such as video or power point presentation. Students followed several steps in finishing their projects: 1) arranging a small group, consisted of three students, 2) writing their plan and timeline to finish the project in one semester, 3) developing a digital product and consulting me for further revision of their work, 4) sharing their work to the other groups to obtain peer evaluation, and 5) submitting their project as a summative evaluation.

By conducting project-based learning, students had opportunity to acquire complete learning experience from theories to practices. However, most students were not ready to conduct their project without direct supervision from the instructor. From this experience, I realized that not every task could be conducted online. Teacher should consider more offline meeting for project-based learning since not all student has similar ability in finishing projects independently. Some students need more examples and simulations before doing their projects.

Designing Learning Instruction

Since my students are pre-service English teachers, they are exposed to English language every day. They perceive English as EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Therefore, not all instruction were delivered in target language. Some instruction still used their mother tongue. In my BL practices, I applied bilingual language techniques. I switched my language to Bahasa Indonesia in order to facilitate difficult terminologies or theories. However, most students still sensed space between us, especially during online learning. Interaction always became an issue since they need more real teacher's presence than language switching. From their

perception, I found that technology could not replace warm interaction between teacher and student. BL practices need to explore more creative interaction to reduce interaction gap. I need to build effective communication with my students either in offline or online environment.

Based on these milestones, I realize that blended learning in higher education should be supported by some university or faculty regulations in arranging classroom settings. It is essential to adjust learning environments, for example: creating smaller classes, consist of maximum 25 students to reach full interaction during learning. Another consideration is providing BL trainings for educators to give new insight on how to design BL in 2 or 3 credit courses. Conducting BL in limited time is challenging since there is a transition from offline meeting to online meeting. A study reveals that teachers tend to have less interest in using BL if there are no firm guidelines on how to set learning expectations for teacher and students (Porter W. , Graham, Bodily, & Sanberg, 2016). Thus, university needs to establish BL guidelines for students and faculty members.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed narrative research in a form of personal accounts. Narrative research focuses on telling stories on individual experience in a chronological event (Creswell, 2012). In the development of narrative research in educational field, this form of research is also known as narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry views the ways of human experience events to construct and reconstruct of personal stories (Connely & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, the aim of this study is to share my personal experience on implementing BL from 2015 to 2019 in order to reflect and reconstruct my techniques of applying BL. The setting of this research was BL implementation in English Language Education Department. BL practices were conducted specifically in theoretical courses, aimed for pre-service English teachers. The

stories were narrated in a chronological event construct and reconstruct personal reflection (Connely and Clandinin, 1990); (Creswell, 2012).

There are several ways to collect data for narrative inquiry research, for example: teaching journal, interview, field notes or biography (Clandinin, 1989). In this study, I obtained the data based on observation, interview and students' portfolio.

Observation was conducted by reviewing classroom interaction and online activities on Google Classroom and WhatsApp group. In addition to it, two female students were selected as participant in terms of confirming their perception toward blended learning practices. The last data was collected from various kinds of students' portfolio, for instance: logbook, media description essays and digital products.

The data were analyzed by using statistical descriptive and qualitative analysis. However, not all data are presented in the findings since the main purpose of this research is to evaluate and reflect my blended learning practices. Thus, the data were elaborated to emphasize lesson learnt from the past teaching experience.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The finding of this study is a reflection of four-year personal experiences in conducting blended learning (BL) at English Language Education Department. The reflection presents insightful dimensions in my career paths, such as elevating my knowledge toward blended learning, enhancing my pedagogical decisions and recognizing students' need.

Based on my experience, I learn that blended learning (BL) is a process of redesigning a course which combines learning process, personal guidance and students' need to promote students' engagement, build wisdom and personalize contact (Stein & Graham, 2014); (Thorne, 2003). It means BL is not viewed as the separation between classroom interaction and online activities. BL

is more than just modalities issues because BL involves a large number of activities such as accessing resources, collaborating through online task, maintaining interaction and seamless integration between offline interaction and online activities (Littlejohn & Pegler, 2007). To design effective BL, instructor needs to consider several aspects: 1) build students' readiness before BL course, 2) develop interwoven activities between classroom interaction and online activities and 3) provide interaction to monitor students' progress. This awareness supports my motivation to enhance my competency in technology-enhanced learning fields. I realize that it is essential for educators to view technology as a bridge to human learning.

This reflection is in line with several previous studies which show educators' perspectives in integrating technology into learning. A research finds that several critical success factors for teachers developments includes learning success, teacher's teaching components, motivation, learners' learning, course-related parts and teachers' need (Schweighofer et al., 2019). Moreover, Hartman et. Al (2019) adds that educators perceive on confidence, beliefs and value as three important factors in utilizing technology in the classroom. It shows that educators have positive feelings toward technology. Despite experiencing some challenges in adapting technology, they are able to maintain their beliefs toward technology (Hartman et al., 2019). Finally, a study from Chiu et al (2021) suggest that educators must continue to build their capacity over time. It is critical to meet students' need at all times and provide various opportunity for feedbacks and reflection (Chiu et al., 2021).

In addition to it, several studies also highlight the importance of interaction in technology-enhanced learning, especially BL. Most findings claim that interaction is one of important keys in blended learning. Interaction is a critical issue in supporting students emotional and cognitive engagement (Blaine, 2019); (Manwaring et

al., 2017). Not all student is ready to pursue blended learning due to personal belief and lack of self-efficacy (Alkiş & Temizel, 2018). As the result, some students prefer to have more face-to-face interaction than online activities. They experience incomplete self-regulation in participating on both offline and online activities (Vanslambrouck et al., 2019). Therefore, blended learning activities need to accommodate social aspects in order to increase their performances (Prasad et al., 2018).

The implication of the reflection is instructors need to construct positive environment prior learning. It includes the process of developing an instructional design which represent students' characteristics (Boelens et al., 2018), maintaining students' motivation by providing feedbacks (Taghizadeh & Hajhosseini, 2020) and empowering students' effort in building their learning identities. Instructor as a learning facilitator has multiple roles in course design, learning organization and technical support system (Hung & Chou, 2015). Debattista (2018) proposes 10 components of comprehensive rubrics to design e-learning. It includes instructional design, course opening, assessment of learning, interaction and community, instructional resources, learner support, technology design, course evaluation, course closing and instructional design cycle (Debattista, 2018). This rubric is one of potential guidelines to design blended learning for higher education.

Future Reflection

For further development of blended learning (BL) in future, it is important to support community of learning to explore more learning experiences. Experience leads

us to find our identity and create meaningful learning. In BL, community of learning is referred as community of inquiry (COI). COI is a framework that offers three important aspects of learning experiences: social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Social presence allows students to openly express their thoughts and encourages them to communicate or collaborate with peers. Meanwhile, cognitive presence involves a process of receiving, managing, connecting and creating ideas into concepts. Both social and cognitive presence should be elaborated in teaching presence as a complete element of curriculum, approaches, and methods.

In the context of BL, COI framework is well-known as a foundation of building online learning environment. Several previous studies have implemented COI framework in a diverse online learning setting. A study from Thomas et.al. (2017) finds that teachers' social presence can be maximized using video feedbacks. Students prefer online video feedback than online text feedback because they are able to feel the teacher's presence (Thomas et al., 2017). In line with the findings, Ene & Upton (2018) also finds that electronics feedbacks can reinforce students' understanding. Students perceive online feedbacks as a strategy to seek for a clarification in order to finish their task better (Ene & Upton, 2018). However, research from Goh (2020) indicates that cognitive presence tends to be the strongest aspects in online learning by using MOOC (*Massive Open Online Course*). Students demonstrated their abilities on connecting ideas, applying new ideas, sharing new understanding meanwhile there is a lack of social and teaching presence during learning (Goh, 2020). It implies that teachers need to be careful in designing blended instruction. It is essential to provide balanced domains among cognitive and affective. Despite having some challenges in the implementations, COI is still a potential solution for online learning strategies.

In the setting of covid 19 pandemic,

COI implementation becomes more important since students need supports in completing their study. Research from Bamoallem & Altarteer (2021) finds that online learning requires a good combination of three elements: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. Community of inquiry is a critical factor in determining students' perception toward blended learning during pandemic (Bamoallem & Altarteer, 2021). The results are similar with Patwardharr et. al., (2020) who reveal that COI is a predictor of students' satisfaction in applying blended learning in an emergency remote teaching (Patwardharr et al., 2020). These findings strengthen the existence of COI in empowering online or blended learning. Community learning which promotes communication and interaction, builds a strong foundation to establish a sustainable learning process for educators, students, and institutions. My personal experience and future reflection confirm the concept of BL, proposed by Graham (2016), which views BL as combination of modalities, methods, and instruction. Educators should perceive BL as a holistic pedagogical strategy to foster students' learning.

CONCLUSION

Through my reflection toward BL implementation in my courses, I find my aim in life as a lecturer. Being an educator is not only about getting a degree, delivering content, grading, and trying new technology but also designing instructional design that represents our character and students' need. Building my strong characters as a lecturer helps me to recognize my strength and weakness easily and determine the most effective teaching strategies that I am capable of. Selecting strategies that matches the policy, my capability and my students' need are my effort to find balance for every aspect in learning process. As the result, I do not force myself to pursue BL models that I am not familiar with. It is better to take small steps at a time to

create significance changes to support my students' learning.

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