



## **BLENDED LEARNING IN EFL WRITING CLASSES: VOICES FROM INDONESIAN GRADUATE STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic obligates educators to adapt to the new way of teaching. Blended learning becomes fresh air for teachers, especially in ELT, to combine offline and online learning to maximize learning goals. This study aimed to gauge the graduate students' perceptions concerning the definition, advantages, problems, and suggestions of blended learning. This study used the qualitative approach, especially a case study. Twenty-eight graduate students of the English Education Department from different semesters in one of the universities in Indonesia were selected using the purposive sampling based on their experiences in Blended learning in the EFL writing classes using Blog, Moodle, YouTube, Edmodo, Schoology, Sutori, MOOC, WhatsApp, and Canvas. In collecting the data, the researcher distributed the questionnaire using Google Forms. The data were analyzed qualitatively, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification, and quantitatively using the formula and the scores range from Nazir (2005) to measure the questionnaire scale. The findings showed that graduate students perceived that blended learning is the combination of online and offline learning; they also said some advantages of blended learning, such as improving writing skills, motivation, learning flexibility, autonomous learners, improving 4C abilities, authentic materials and multimodal literacy, peer feedback, and improving ITC skills. Besides, they also perceived some problems, such as students' and lecture engagement, slow connectivity, and plagiarism issue.

**Keywords:** Students' perception, blended learning, online, teaching writing

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## **1. Introduction**

English as an International language has been regarded as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia which students from secondary schools must master up to university levels. Writing is one of the significant skills in English in which students can investigate, share thoughts, information, knowledge, or experiences, and express their feeling and thinking to produce good written work. Thus, teachers ought to give optimal endeavors in aiding the students to master writing because it is considered the most difficult skill in English (Hughey, et al. 1983, p. 318; Murcia, et al. 2000, p. 161).

The COVID-19 pandemic compels teachers to fit with it and transforms the way they teach by using technology for students in this digital era called Generation Z. According to Robinson (2016), generation Z students who are internet generation and digital native people are those who were born between 1995 and 2012. In other words, their life cannot be separated from internet use. Due to this case, integrating technology in teaching writing seems to be good exposure for the teachers to support learning in teaching writing. As suggested by Cook (2015), educators ought to embrace innovation and technology in teaching generation Z to stay connected all the time. One of the methods that are very appropriate in teaching writing to generation Z in this pandemic is Blended Learning.

Some experts define Blended Learning (BL). Graham (2006) states that blended learning is a combination of face-to-face learning using synchronous instruction and online learning using asynchronous instructions by benefitting technology so that students can work independently. Then, Badawi (2009) defines blended learning as a flexible approach combining face-to-face and online teaching in which teachers and students can together give and see feedback synchronously and asynchronously.

Moreover, Hubackova, et al. (2011) define blended learning as a combination of standard face-to-face teaching with e-learning. Meanwhile, Ting and Chao (2013) define blended learning as a mix of traditional and online learning. Besides, Poon (2013) views blended learning as a combination of face-to-face and online delivery methods, intending to complement the other. From those definitions, it can be concluded that BL is a combination of face-to-face learning activities characterized by synchronous interaction that allows students to work independently and allows both teachers and students to exchange collective and individual feedback synchronously with online learning practices which are asynchronous to achieve the optimal goals and cost of program delivery.

Regarding perception, Nanay (2013) states that perception refers to or deals with action. Meanwhile, Borg (2003, p. 81) states that perceptions can be related to individuals' knowledge, beliefs, and thoughts. Woods (1996), as cited in (Golombek, 2009), also says that perception refers to a belief, attitude, and knowledge. Belief is a concept of a person's mind that affects attitude (Skott, 2015). According to Schraw & Olafson (2015), attitude deals with a preference for a specific phenomenon. However, knowledge is related to a concept. Thus,

perception can be defined as an individual's attitude, belief, and knowledge about a specific phenomenon.

A number of studies have been conducted to reveal students' perceptions of blended learning in higher education both around the world and in Indonesia. Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) conducted research on the students at a University in Tokyo, Japan, in an EFL class using blended learning and three media, including a forum, blog, and wikis. The results showed that students had positive perceptions of blended learning and that wikis were the favorite. Furthermore, students had variations in writing style when using blogs and forums. Thus, they enjoyed learning because blended learning was implemented well.

Wright (2017) conducted research on 112 Malaysian undergraduate students in an English grammar course to know their perception regarding the online course and the face-to-face lesson, especially concerning motivation and interest. The results reveal that students in the classroom or face-to-face learning have higher motivation and interest. However, they prefer online learning flexibility and speed and convenience. The implementation of BL can be enhanced by skillful skill without undermining face-to-face instruction value with teachers in the classroom.

Sari and Wahyudin (2019) explored 116 undergraduate students' perceptions of English for Business class using Instagram at the University of Teknorat, Indonesia. The findings showed that most students had positive perceptions because the use of Instagram affects their attitudes, engagement, and motivation. However, some problems arose, including internet connection and miscommunication about the task instruction and the material. Digital literacy in academic content needs to be improved by the lecturers.

Moreover, Rianto (2020) conducted research on university students in Indonesia to know their perceptions, problems, and suggestion about Blended Learning. The results showed that they had positive perceptions of both online and face-to-face modes but negative views on specific technical aspects. The internet connection is the main problem in conducting this Blended learning. This research suggests future research focus on students' preferences of the course format and relate it to their achievement in the Blended learning setting.

Simbolon (2021) also explored students' perception of blended learning in a vocational university in Indonesia, especially using WhatsApp and Google Classroom during the pandemic. The results showed that students had positive perceptions of Blended learning. Moreover, there were some problems, such as internet connection and instruction clarity. This research suggests that lecturers need professional development to help students reach success in Blended learning implementation.

Regarding the research above, this research tried to gauge the graduate students' perceptions of using some applications, including Blog, Moodle, YouTube, Edmodo, Schoology, Sutori, MOOC, WhatsApp, and Canvas, concerning their perception of the definition of blended learning, advantages, problems, and suggestion of BL in the EFL writing class.

## 2. Method

This qualitative study employs the case study design to know the graduate students' perceptions of BL in the EFL writing class. The case study was chosen to dig a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Gall et al., 2003). The participants were 28 graduate students from different classes and semesters at one of the universities in Indonesia. The participants were chosen using the purposive sampling technique because they have been taught using BL in writing class. Closed and open-ended questionnaires were used in this study, covering four types of questions, including their personal information about using BL, their perception of the definition of blended learning, the advantages, problems, and suggestion of BL. For the questions of participants' backgrounds, the researcher used a closed questionnaire with option responses in which there are five questions and one open-ended question. However, for the questionnaire of perception of what blended learning is (1 question), the advantages (20 questions), problems (11 questions), and suggestions (7 questions) were rated using a four-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The questionnaire was spread to the participants using Google Forms. As stated by Ary (2010), the researcher can share the questionnaire on the website, then the participants will answer it online. Thus, that way became efficient and effective both for the participants and the researchers. After collecting the data, it was analyzed using the theory of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Sugiyono, 2015). Then, the results are reconnected to the theory. The researcher also used the formula and the scores range from Nazir (2005) to measure the scale of the questionnaire in which there are five intervals including strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5).

Index formula  $\% = \text{Total score} / y \times 100\%$

$Y = \text{Likert's highest score} \times \text{number of respondents}$

The criteria are as follows:

0% - 19.99% = Very (disagree/bad/poor)

20% - 39.99% = disagree/ not good

40% - 59.99% = slightly agree/sufficient/ neutral

60% - 79.99 % = agree/ good/ like

80% - 100% = very (agree/ good/ like)

## 3. Results and Discussion

To explain the participants' background regarding Blended learning, the researcher provided their information, including length and skill in using BL, the use of smartphones in

BL, and the availability of a laptop or computer and internet connection. Therefore, the result of the participants' background is presented in Table 1.

Table. 1 Personal information about the participants' background in using blended learning

Category	N	%
1. Years of using Blended learning in Writing Class		
0-1	12	42.9
2-4	9	32.1
5-10	6	21.4
>10	1	3.6
2. Skill in Using e-learning		
Weak	3	10.7
Good	16	57.1
Very good	6	21.4
Excellent	3	10.7
3. Benefitting Smartphones in e-learning		
Students who used their smartphones for e-learning	22	78.6
Students who did not use their smartphones for e-learning	6	21.4
4. The Availability of a Laptop or Computer		
Students who have a laptop or computer	27	96.4
Students who do not have a laptop or computer	1	3.6
5. The Availability of Internet Connection at Home		
Students who have an internet connection at home	26	92.9
Students who did not have an internet connection at home	2	7.1
6. Applications they have used in BL: Blog, Moodle, YouTube, Edmodo, Schoology, Sutori, MOOC, WhatsApp, and Canvas		

As can be seen from Table 1, there are 12 (42.9%) of the participants had been using Blended learning for 1 year, 9 (32.1%) for 2-4 years, 6 (21.4%) for 5-10 years, and 1 (3.6%) for more than 10 years. Then, it revealed that 16 (57.1%) participants have good skills in implementing e-learning, 6 (21.4%) have very good skills, 3 (10.7%) have excellent skills, and 3 (10.7%) have weak skills. It was also found that 22 (78.6 %) participants used their smartphones for e-learning, and 6 (21.4%) did not. Furthermore, 27 (96.4%) of the participants have a laptop or computer at home, except 1 (3.6%). It is also revealed that 26 (92.9%) have

an Internet connection at home, while 2 (7.1 %) students did not have an internet connection at home.

As stated by Poon (2013), blended learning is a combination of online and face-to-face learning. Thus, the teaching and learning process needed an online platform. Based on the result of preliminary research, graduate students used Blog, Moodle, Duolingo, YouTube, Edmodo, Schoology, Sutori, MOOC, WhatsApp, and Canvas in learning writing. Moreover, by knowing the fact from Table 1, 16 graduate students used BL for more than one year, 25 students had good to excellent skills in using e-learning, 22 students used their smartphones, and 27 students had a laptop and an internet connection at their home. According to (Pavlova, 2009; Sudira, 2020), one of the instruments to measure the maturity in using digital technology is technological capability involving technical ability and accessibility capabilities. Thus, implementing Blended learning was possible for graduate students in EFL writing classes. Furthermore, based on the purpose of this study, the researcher used the questionnaire to reveal graduate students' perceptions of blended learning in EFL writing classes. Moreover, all categories, perceptions of what blended learning is, advantages, problems, and suggestions of BL were discussed in order.

### 3.1 Students' Perception of the Concept of BL

It is important to ensure that graduate students understand the concept of BL. Table 2 presents the first domain about the concept of BL. Detailed information regarding the questionnaire item is presented below.

Table 2. Students' perception of the concept of BL

The Concept of BL	SDA	DA	NS	A	SA	Total	%	Description
	N	N	N	N	N	Score		
Blended learning is the combination of online and offline class	1	0	0	15	12	121	86	Strongly agree

Table 2 shows that almost all of the participants concluded that BL is the combination of online and offline classes. The participant strongly agreed with this statement. This is consistent with some previous theories such as (Graham, 2006; Badawi, 2009; Hubackova, et al. 2011; Ting and Chao, 2013; and Poon, 2013).

### 3.2. Advantages of BL in EFL Writing Class

The next domain is about students' perception of positive impressions or advantages of BL in EFL writing classes. Detailed information about the questionnaire items (1-20) is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Advantages of BL in EFL writing classes

Advantages of Blended Learning in EFL writing classes	SDA N	DA N	NS N	A N	SA N	Total score	%	Description
1. By publishing my writing, reading my friends' work, and giving comments to them in e-learning, my idea in writing will improve	0	1	2	18	7	115	82	Strongly agree
2. My knowledge of the organization of the text will improve	0	2	2	18	6	112	80	Strongly Agree
3. My grammar will improve	0	3	3	19	3	106	76	Agree
4. My vocabulary will improve	0	2	0	19	7	115	82	Strongly Agree
5. My knowledge of mechanics (capitalization, punctuation, and spelling) will improve	1	0	4	18	5	110	79	Agree
6. Blended learning motivates me to learn	0	2	3	17	6	111	79	Agree
7. Blended learning courses are useful and interesting	1	0	3	18	6	112	80	Strongly Agree
8. Blended learning enhances the communication between teachers and students	0	2	6	17	3	105	75	Agree
9. Blended learning improves my knowledge and skill about current technology in learning	0	1	1	17	9	118	84	Strongly Agree
10. Blended learning can improve my time management in learning	0	2	10	13	3	101	72	Agree
11. Blended learning gives me a chance to collaborate with others	0	1	4	19	4	110	79	Agree
12. I can open the authentic material and resources in e-learning	0	1	3	16	8	115	82	Strongly Agree
13. I prefer blended learning rather than a face-to-face classroom or offline class	2	8	14	4	0	76	54	Neutral
14. I enjoy blended learning because I can work based on my own pace	1	2	9	14	2	98	70	Agree
15. I find blended learning is more effective than a face-to-face classroom because it integrates many media such as documents, videos, pictures, etc.	2	6	10	9	1	85	61	Agree
16. I like blended learning because I can learn anytime I want (it supports life-long learning)	1	1	6	12	8	109	78	Agree
17. I find that I become an active and creative student in the blended learning environment	1	4	10	10	3	94	67	Agree
18. Blended learning helps me to know my progress	1	1	8	17	1	100	71	Agree
19. I like blended learning because I can discuss everything I do not understand through discussion in e-learning, including giving comments on others' works	2	1	7	18	0	97	69	Agree
20. Blended learning encourages me to be an autonomous learner	1	1	3	20	3	107	76	Agree

The results of Table 3 show that the advantages of using Blended Learning in EFL writing classes of graduate students can be categorized into some parts, including:

### *3.2.1. Improving writing skill*

From Table 3, it can be concluded that question 1 until 5, it is all about students' improvement regarding the aspects of writing. Graduate students all strongly agreed that their writing skills improved in all aspects, including organization, ideas, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. It is in line with previous research conducted by Apsari and Parmawati, 2022; Geta and Olango, 2016. This happened because, in a Blended Learning setting, students can read and give comments on their friends' work so they can learn from the mistakes made by friends. Therefore, blended learning can improve students' writing skills.

### *3.2.2. Motivation*

Based on statement no 6, the graduate students agreed that blended learning improves their motivation to learn. The advantages of blended learning, such as learning flexibility, autonomous learning, and improving writing, can be a basis underlying the improvement of motivation in students. This is in line with the research of Pollard (2015), Zainon and Yamat (2021), and Van der Merwe (2007).

### *3.2.3. Learning Flexibility*

Statements number 6 and 10 showed that graduate students agreed that they could access the learning platform whenever and wherever they wanted using the internet access. It is also in line with the statement of (Gedik, Kiran, & Ozden, 2012) that flexibility in learning is the most common advantage of blended learning since students can access online learning platforms anytime.

### *3.2.4. Autonomous Learner*

Statements number 14,18,20 showed that students agreed that blended learning could make them autonomous learners. With the flexibility offered in bl, the students will be more autonomous learners since (Pollard, 2015) that they can manage their speed in learning and have the freedom to decide anything in learning. As stated by Shand & Glassett Farrelly (2017), by using blended learning, students can work at their own pace, and they will learn with a more personalized curriculum. In this blended learning, students can know their progress since their written work is recorded. So that, instead of being autonomous learners, they will be more active students.

### *3.2.5. Improving 4 C abilities*

Statements number 8,11,17,18 can be categorized as the advantages of bl related to 4 C abilities, including communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking skills. In the implementation of Blended learning, graduate students agreed that they could collaborate in writing classes. This can be done by giving comments on friends' works each other and



collaborating to make a written work with friends. Hence the communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking skills between students also improve. It is in line with the statements of Shand and Glassett Farrelly (2018) that the availability of LMS makes students and teachers stay connected and have frequent communication. In addition, it is supported by the statements of Purwasih et al. (2021) that blended learning can enhance students' 4C abilities involving communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking skills.

### *3.2.6. Authentic Materials and Multimodal literacy*

Using the tools in online platforms, teachers can share various media such as documents, pictures, and videos in a learning platform; hence students will not be bored with the material. It was proven with statements no 7, 12, and 15 that they agree that the teaching and learning process is interesting and effective due to the use of multimodal literacy and authentic materials. LMS provides authentic materials or resources that teachers and students can access. While, Yulitasari (2019) says that in multimodal literacy, the teacher can use some modes such as sounds, symbols, visuals, and movements. Hence the use of authentic materials and multimodal literacy are significant in learning.

### *3.2.7. Peer feedback*

Statement number 19 also proves that graduate students can give comments on others' work which means that blended learning possibly peers feedback. Simbolon (2021) says that students get positive attitudes when receiving feedback from their friends in blended learning. Furthermore, Getzalf et al. (2009) state that supportive feedback makes graduate students confident in learning.

### *3.2.8. Improving ITC skills*

Statement number 9 shows that students agree that their IT skills improve in blended learning. Using blended learning in the learning process will improve students' skills regarding IT because they must learn how to use the e-learning platform properly. Pardede (2012) states that ICT can be used in the classroom inputs for teaching, results, and learning methods. Hence the use of ICT is significant in today's world (Schwab, 2015) because with ICT, students get digital learning strategies (Cakrawati, 2017; Kim & Bae, 2019).

Table 3 reveals that the majority of the respondents expressed their positive attitude and belief toward BL in EFL writing classes. Those support the finding of some research about positive attitudes in teaching and learning online conducted by Akkoyunlu and Soylu (2006), Adas and Wafa (2011), Al Zumor et al. (2013), and Ja'ashan (2015). Some of the participants expressed their agreement related to the effectiveness of BL.

## *3.3 Problems of Blended Learning in EFL Writing Classes*

The fourth domain is about problems faced by the participants in BL. The items of the questionnaire (1-11) are presented below.

Table 4. Problems of blended learning in EFL writing classes

Problems of BL	SDA N	DA N	NS N	A N	SA N	Total Score	%	Description
1. E-learning makes me socially isolated	1	16	5	6	0	72	51	Not sure
2. I think using e-learning is wasting my time	5	19	2	2	0	57	41	Not sure
3. Slow connectivity becomes the main problem in implementing Blended learning	1	3	3	13	8	108	77	Agree
4. I think it is very difficult to use e-learning; therefore, it makes me frustrated	4	19	5	0	0	57	41	Not sure
5. I get little knowledge from e-learning. It is better to use face-to-face interaction only	2	12	8	6	0	74	53	Not sure
6. It is a problem for me because I do not have a computer or laptop	13	10	2	1	2	53	38	Disagree
7. The material in e-learning is difficult to understand. I prefer to use the material from the book	4	14	8	2	0	64	46	Not sure
8. My lecturer and friends do not respond to my questions quickly	0	2	13	10	3	98	70	Agree
9. The instruction in e-learning is difficult to follow	3	15	8	2	0	65	46	Not sure
10. E-learning gives a chance for students to do plagiarizing	0	7	11	10	0	87	62	Agree
11. Sometimes, I am shy and afraid of making mistakes when using e-learning	1	13	7	7	0	76	54	Not sure

By taking a closer look at Table 4, it can be concluded that there are three big problems concerning blended learning in EFL writing classes experienced by graduate students

### 3.3.1. Students' and Lecture engagement

Statement number 8 is about the engagement of the lecturer and students in EFL writing classes, where 70 % of the students agreed that the lecturer and students did not respond to their questions quickly. This is in line with the statement of Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, and Rodriquez-Ariza (2011) that one problem concerning blended learning is students' engagement, in which they value face-to-face learning rather than online learning. Moreover, Jeffrey et al. also state that teachers believe that face-to-face learning is more valuable than online learning; hence they favor face-to-face learning.

### 3.3.2. Slow connectivity

Based on the Table, 77 % of students agreed that slow connectivity still becomes a problem in implementing blended learning in EFL writing classes. This is in line with the statement of

Sari and Wahyudin (2019); Rianto (2020) that internet connection is still the main problem in using blended learning in higher education. Thus, the university should widen the connection so it can be accessed in all the classrooms at the university.

### 3.3.3. Plagiarism issue

In this blended learning of EFL writing classes, 62% of the students agreed that using e-learning gave them chances to plagiarize. Marais et al. (2006) state that a current problem of the activity of online submission concerns plagiarism. Hence, educators need to use tools or applications to avoid plagiarism to check the quality and originality of the texts.

### 3.4 Suggestion of BL in EFL Writing Classes

The last domain is about the suggestions of BL. The detailed questionnaire item (1-7) is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Suggestion of BL

Suggestion	SDA N	DA N	SA N	A N	SA N	Total Score	%	Description
1. The internet connection in school must be increased	0	1	1	11	15	124	89	Strongly agree
2. E-learning training or workshop should be provided for teachers and students	0	0	1	22	5	116	83	Strongly agree
3. The technical problem should be solved	0	0	1	14	13	124	89	Strongly agree
4. Giving rewards to the teacher and students who are very active and creative in benefiting e-learning	0	0	5	16	7	114	81	Strongly agree
5. A language lab equipped with a good facility must be provided	0	0	1	14	13	124	89	Strongly agree
6. Avoiding plagiarism when using blended learning by using an application such as Turnitin etc.	0	0	3	15	10	119	85	Strongly agree
7. Penalizing students who plagiarize when using blended learning	0	1	8	11	8	110	79	Agree

Based on the results in Table 5 and the problems of blended learning in EFL writing classes experienced by graduate students so it can be concluded that there are some suggestions proposed, including improving internet connection, conducting a workshop on using learning platforms for lecturers and students, giving rewards to active and creative students, using plagiarism checker such as Turnitin, penalizing students who plagiarize, and equipping language laboratory with the good facility. As a result, implementing blended learning in EFL writing classes can be optimal.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study reveals graduate students' voices toward blended learning in EFL writing classes. They define blended learning as the implementation of face-to-face and online learning. They also perceived positive attitudes towards blended learning in EFL writing classes using some applications such as Blog, Moodle, YouTube, Edmodo, Schoology, Sutori, MOOC, WhatsApp, and Canvas. Their positive attitudes include eight themes, namely improving writing skills, motivation, learning flexibility, being autonomous learners, improving 4 C abilities, authentic materials and multimodal literacy, peer feedback, and improving ITC skills. While they also argue that there are some problems concerning blended learning in EFL writing classes categorized into three big themes, including students' and lecturer's engagement, slow connectivity, and plagiarism issue. Therefore, suggestions of using blended learning in EFL writing classes are proposed, such as improving internet connection, conducting a workshop on using learning platforms to lecturers and students, giving rewards to active and creative students, using plagiarism checkers such as Turnitin, penalizing students who plagiarize, and equipping language laboratory with the good facility. In a nutshell, this study suggests future research to conduct a study focusing on the engagement of Blended learning and plagiarism issues in applying Blended Learning in the writing class.

#### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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