

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The current condition of the learning process in the English Language Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo indicates a transition from conventional teaching methods to the integration of digital technology. Blended learning has begun to be implemented as part of the adaptation to technological advancements in education and the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka policy. This approach combines face-to-face and online learning, offering flexibility and broader access to learning materials, as highlighted by previous studies (Istenič, 2024). In practice, learning activities are conducted not only through classroom meetings but also supported by digital platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), which enable material delivery, structured discussions, and assignment management.

However, the implementation of blended learning has not yet been fully optimized. There are still variations in how lecturers design and manage blended learning, particularly in terms of instructional planning, the integration of digital media, and strategies for student engagement. Some lecturers still rely more on conventional approaches with limited technological integration, which prevents the full potential of blended learning from being achieved. According to (Cronje, 2020) blended learning has been shown to provide a moderate positive effect on learning outcomes,

with an effect size of approximately +0.35, indicating that its optimal implementation is crucial for achieving better results.

From the English students of Muhammadiyah University, the ability to engage in blended learning environments also varies. While some students are able to learn independently and actively access online materials, others still experience difficulties in managing their learning time, understanding course materials autonomously, and adapting to digital learning systems. This condition affects the overall level of students' conceptual understanding. Previous research also indicates that blended learning can improve academic performance, material retention, and student satisfaction when implemented effectively (Cao, 2023)

Moreover, technical problems like lack of Internet connectivity and poor digital literacy among both the learners and instructors pose another barrier. This may affect the effectiveness of interaction within the online environment. The problem of sustaining interaction and social presence in online settings is also not easy, as stated by (Kang & Kim, 2021). Even though LMS platforms allow lecturers to monitor student progress more accurately, the lack of optimal interaction may limit the development of deeper understanding.

Based on these conditions, it can be concluded that although blended learning has been implemented in the English Language Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo, its impact on students' understanding of course materials has not been fully explored. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to examine how blended learning

contributes to students' comprehension in a more comprehensive and applicable manner.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Based on the research context that has been described, the focus of this research is as follows:

1. How is blended learning implemented in the Public Speaking class at the English Education Study Program of Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo?
2. What challenges are faced by lecturers and students in the implementation of blended learning in the Public Speaking class?
3. How do students understand Public Speaking material through blended learning?

1.3 Purpose of Study

Based on the research focus explained above, the research objectives are as follows:

1. To describe the implementation of blended learning in the Public Speaking class at the English Education Study Program of Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo.
2. To identify the challenges faced by lecturers and students in the implementation of blended learning in the Public Speaking class.
3. To describe students' understanding of Public Speaking material through blended learning.

1.4 Significance of Study

Based on the existing research focus and objectives, this research is expected to provide benefits, not only in theoretical terms but also in practical terms.

1. Theoretical Contributions

This research has the potential to contribute to the development of scientific studies in the field of education, especially in technology-based learning innovation. By analyzing the implementation of blended learning in the context of higher education, this research can add theoretical insights regarding the effect of online and offline learning integration on students' understanding of course materials. In addition, the findings of this study are expected to enrich the academic discourse related to the effectiveness of blended learning as a modern learning strategy that is in line with the student-centered learning approach and the development of lifelong learning skills.

2. Practical Contributions

a. For Students

The contributions of this research for students are significant, especially in helping them realize the importance of active involvement in the blended learning process. This research can open students' insights on how they can maximize their learning through the use of technology, such as accessing learning materials anytime and anywhere, participating in online

discussions, and developing self-learning skills. In addition, blended learning also allows students to understand the material more deeply because they have the opportunity to repeat the material, find additional sources, and ask questions through the digital media that has been provided. The results of this study are expected to motivate students to be more responsible for their own learning process and develop critical thinking and problem solving skills more optimally, which are needed in facing the challenges of the world of work and globalization.

b. For Lecturers

This research provides practical benefits for lecturers, especially in helping them understand how blended learning can be effectively implemented in the classroom. Through the results of this study, lecturers can gain insight into the most appropriate teaching strategies in the context of blended learning, both in terms of digital media utilization, time management, and management of online and offline interactions. This research will also show how the blended learning approach can encourage students' deep understanding, so that lecturers can adjust their teaching methods to focus more on reflective activities, interactive discussions, and more targeted feedback. In addition, this research can also be an inspiration for lecturers in designing learning innovations that are adaptive and contextual to student characteristics and modern learning needs.

c. For Educational Institutions

This research can make an important contribution to educational institutions, especially the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, in the context of developing academic policies that are evidence-based practice. By knowing how blended learning affects students' understanding of lecture materials, the institution can evaluate curriculum design, digital platform selection, and pedagogical approaches used by lecturers. In addition, the results of this study can also be the basis for planning training to improve digital competence for educators, developing a Learning Management System (LMS), and establishing an online learning monitoring system. More broadly, this research can support the transformation of learning in accordance with the demands of the digital era and national policies such as Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM).

1.5 Scope and Limititation of the Study

This research is a descriptive qualitative study that focuses on the implementation of blended learning in the Public Speaking class at the English Education Study Program of Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo. The study aims to describe how blended learning is implemented, the challenges faced during the learning process, and students' understanding of Public Speaking material through blended learning activities.

These participants will be second semester students and the teachers of the Public Speaking class only. Furthermore, the study will only focus on the use of blended learning in the Public Speaking class, without taking into account other aspects of the English language such as reading, writing, listening, grammar and spelling. Interviews and observations have been used as the techniques of collecting data.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms



Blended Learning	Blended learning refers to a learning model that combines face-to-face and online learning activities using digital platforms to support the Public Speaking class (Istenič, 2024).
Face-to-Face Learning	Face-to-face learning refers to direct classroom interaction between lecturers and students during Public Speaking activities.
Online Learning	Online learning refers to learning activities conducted through digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom Meeting, and WhatsApp Group.