The Use of Blended Learning Strategy in Teaching Practicum Program: Indonesian Pre-Service Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract
Internet-based technologies have greatly changed the field of education, especially in Indonesian higher education. Some schools have chosen a hybrid approach by integrating online learning, which gradually enhances the adoption of blended learning in the classroom. This study investigates how the EFL pre-service teachers in Indonesia perceive their experience as a teacher who uses a blended learning strategy in their teaching practicum program. The participants were some pre-service teachers from Islamic State Colleges in Indonesia who implemented blended learning strategy in their teaching practicum programs. The research design used in this study is a qualitative study, and the data collection method is a semi-structured interview. The data were analyzed by using thematic analysis in accordance with the TPACK as the theoretical framework by Koehler and Mishra. The findings indicated that the online learning component of blended learning facilitated both pre-service teachers' self-efficacy improvement and their flexibility in choosing the teaching platforms, teaching time and place depending on their needs. However, the pre-service teachers faced challenges such as technical problems, limited resources, and face-to-face teaching preference. Considering the complexity of blended teaching practice, the scope of this study is very limited. Therefore, future research may need to explore how pre-service teachers' technical, pedagogical, and subject expertise interact with their teaching experiences.

Keywords: blended learning, teaching practicum program, pre-service teachers' perspective

Abstrak
Teknologi berbasis internet telah banyak mengubah dunia pendidikan, khususnya di pendidikan tinggi Indonesia. Studi ini meneliti bagaimana para calon guru EFL di Indonesia memandang pengalaman mereka sebagai pengajar yang menggunakan strategi blended learning dalam program praktik mengajar mereka. Peserta penelitian adalah sejumlah calon guru dari Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri di Indonesia yang menerapkan strategi blended learning dalam praktik mengajarnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan metode pengumpulan data berupa wawancara semi-terstruktur. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik berdasarkan kerangka teori TPACK dari Koehler dan Mishra. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komponen pembelajaran daring dalam blended learning membantu meningkatkan efikasi diri para calon guru serta memberikan fleksibilitas dalam memilih platform, waktu, dan tempat mengajar sesuai kebutuhan mereka. Namun, para calon guru juga menghadapi berbagai tantangan, seperti masalah teknis, keterbatasan sumber daya, dan preferensi terhadap pembelajaran tatap muka.

Kata kunci: kesantunan berbahasa, identitas, wacana daring, pragmatik lintas budaya, linguistik komputasional

INTRODUCTION

The exponential development of internet-based technologies has brought about considerable changes in the educational sector, especially in higher education. These technologies have expanded the number of feasible options for enhancing teaching and learning inputs, procedures, and outcomes (Pardede, 2019). Blended learning (BL) is one of the most significant developments in teaching and learning brought about by the deployment of internet-based technology and computer software (Ketsman, 2019). It was created to solve the disadvantages of e-learning, such as the expectation that students need to be independent and self-regulated learners and certain students' lack of motivation (Kaçar, 2020). Further, blended learning was also created by merging the benefits of e-learning and face-to-face methods (Shand & Farrelly, 2017). It is a potential medium for transferring knowledge since it offers the ease of an online format without sacrificing face-to-face contact (Pardede, 2019). This study focuses on blended learning, which is any instructional method that equally distributes online and in-person components (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Le & Pham, 2021; Owston et al., 2008). In other words, "blended learning" is defined as online learning supported by in-person instruction.

In Indonesia, the implementation of a blended learning strategy in the classroom has grown significantly after the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic (Setyaningsih, 2020). To facilitate blended learning, some stakeholders welcome synchronous and asynchronous online platforms (Megawati et al., 2021). The incorporation of online learning, however, has not been thoroughly planned out in advance, which has an impact on some pedagogical characteristics, such as the students' participation in the classroom (Mulyono et al., 2021). Therefore, in response to that issue, the Ministry of Education and Culture, or "Kemendikbud," the Ministry of Health, or "Kemenkes," employ a new rule, No. 5/KB/2021, No. 1347/2021, and No. HK.01.08/MENKES/6678/2021, governing teaching and learning in higher education. Beginning in January 2021, it is mandated that schools operated in a hybrid environment, which progressively enhances the usage of blended learning in the classroom (Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of Health, 2021). Teaching practicum program in higher education has also impacted as the result of the government's new teaching rules.

Regarding the teaching practicum program, the EFL pre-service teachers in Indonesia apply teaching theory through a teaching practicum program, which is an academic activity. Every pre-service teacher, including EFL teachers under the

Teacher Training Faculty, should complete the program as one of curricular requirements (Churiyah et al., 2020). The program is held at the end of the last semester or when all courses have been passed. The program's specific goal is to improve pre-service teachers' teaching knowledge in order for them to succeed in their future teaching (Mulyono et al., 2021). The program usually runs in a face-to-face classroom teaching activity. However, following the joint ministerial decision in 2021, the EFL pre-service teachers who initially received teaching practicum in a traditional classroom should possess the ability to teach the students using blended learning strategy. Further, the standardization of teachers in Indonesia is based on four key values: pedagogical, professional (subject knowledge), personality, and social competence (Kusumawardhani, 2017). In the meantime, technical expertise is a component of professional and educational competence. Therefore, pre-service teachers must identify certain values to define the technological integration in relation to other dimensions, such as attitude, skill, and experience (Farjon et al., 2019).

Implementing a blended learning technique in learning activities has a number of benefits. Kang (2014) noted that the blended learning approach is popular in the context of higher education since it may reduce expenses, disseminate excellent education, and resolve distance issues. Moreover, compared to online learning alone, blended learning can mitigate concerns such as the lack of communication, which can cause students to feel isolated, alone, and alienated, as well as the absence of feedback and responsibility (Le & Pham, 2021). However, in the Indonesian context, integrating blended learning in higher education brings several challenges. First, it is due to the lack of technical literacy among students and teachers. Some instructors use Google Classroom as the learning management systems (LMS) for minimal functions, such as uploading the course syllabus, posting notices, and distributing assignments (Farani, 2019). In addition to that, according to numerous research studies, the majority of students view online involvement in blended learning as a course requirement rather than a meaningful learning experience (Bliuc et al., 2011; Wright, 2017). The inability to put the blended learning technique into practice is the next problem. Despite the prevalence of online learning resources, Atmacasoy and Aksu (2018) noted in their study that teacher preparation programs do not provide aspiring educators with the fundamentals of properly developing and delivering blended learning. Therefore, the adoption of blended learning may fail as a result of these issues, which will also likely have an impact on how pre-service teachers view blended learning in the classroom.

Another aspect that influenced my decision to write on this subject is my personal experience. As an undergraduate student, I was never able to properly investigate the blended learning strategy. I was fascinated and intrigued by using this method in my environment after going to Monash University and learning about Moodle, the LMS (Learning Management System) utilized to support my learning activities. This experience is connected to the finding of the Ubah et al. (2020) study, which showed that blended learning has the ability to improve study results. In addition, the blended learning strategy has already been implicitly accepted by several Indonesian colleges. For instance, Google Classroom and Zoom are two examples of online learning tools that are only used as additional resources (Pardede, 2019).

Recent research studies on how pre-service teachers view BL produced a range of findings. According to study findings by Ketsman (2019), pre-service teachers had positive attitudes on employing a blended learning strategy to teach courses on technology integration. Rather than using a traditional face-to-face format, many pre-service teachers preferred that the technology-integration course use a hybrid style. Another study from Le and Pham (2018) revealed that pre-service teachers favored the method of blended learning. It is because the teachers employing the blended learning strategy used teaching methodologies and technologies appropriately. Shand and Farrelly (2017) validated this by demonstrating that pre-service teachers' views towards technology impact the instructional value of online learning resources and experiences.

However, even though numerous research studies have demonstrated the benefits of adopting a blended learning technique into the classroom, there are obstacles to its implementation in the Indonesian higher education system. For instance, the majority of students view online participation in blended learning as a course requirement as opposed to an effective learning opportunity (Farani, 2019; Pardede, 2019). Numerous research have been also undertaken on the topic of the blended learning technique in the English classroom, both from the students' (Dahmash, 2020; Setyaningsih, 2020) and teachers' viewpoints (Kang, 2014; Kupetz & Ziegenmeyer, 2005; Mulyono et al., 2021). However, few research analyze pre-service teachers' perspectives on the use of blended learning strategy in their teaching practicum program in the Indonesian context. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to investigate pre-service teachers' views on applying a blended learning technique in their teaching practicum program. As future teachers-in-training, it is

essential that they have expertise with a variety of learning modalities. Their perceptions will help them comprehend the blended learning preferences of their future students.

The following questions were investigated in this study:

1. How does the use of blended learning strategy help the EFL pre-service teachers teach English in their teaching practicum program?
2. What are the challenges of employing blended learning strategy in EFL pre-service teaching practicum programs?

METHOD

Theoretical Framework: TPACK by Mishra and Koehler (2006)

In the 21st century, TPACK emerges in technology integration as teacher competency (Anderson et al., 2013; Thohir et al., 2022). Mishra and Koehler (2006) developed the TPACK framework that incorporated Technological Knowledge (TK) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and stressed the knowledge domain. As depicted in Figure 1, this integration replicated seven domains: Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), Content Knowledge (CK), Technological Knowledge (TK), Technological Content Knowledge (TCK), Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK), Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK). However, TPACK has expanded in numerous knowledge, skill, and value dimensions (Baran & Uygun, 2016). To comprehend what, how, and what-value teachers require, it is vital to determine their complete and distinct competencies. In the meantime, taxonomy is one of the different approaches for classifying a single phenomenon into a framework (Anderson et al., 2013). Consequently, this study aimed to identify and categorize the competencies of instructors by combining their TPACK with an original expert judgement.
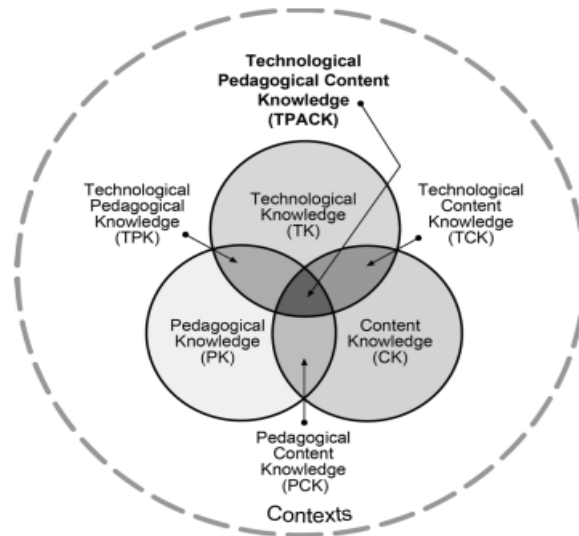
Figure 1. Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) Framework (Mishra and Koehler, 2006)

Knowledge domains of TPACK

TPACK has a significant influence on the development of teacher competencies in a particular topic. Mishra and Koehler (2006) argued that it prioritized competencies when promoting the application for the first time. Shulman (1987) notably examined "... how specific types of content information and pedagogical practices are incorporated in the minds of teachers". This indicates that the abilities are not confined to topic knowledge alone but are also integrated into how they work in a certain domain. In addition, teachers should have a specialized domain in PCK instead of general pedagogies, which must be distinct from those used to teach other topics. In addition, when technological knowledge is incorporated into the PCK idea, it becomes a challenging issue for teachers since they must articulate both the specific technology and pedagogy inside the content knowledge domain. Lin et al. (2013) said that the seven components (CK, PK, TK, PCK, TCK, TPK, and TPACK) were created to adapt to the environment and another theoretical context. The category implies that each educator has a distinct method for determining what they require. In general, each component is characterized as follows.

a. Content knowledge (CK) includes concept, theory, idea, category, illustration, example, comprehension, theoretical framework, and other ways of supporting teachers' content (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Shulman, 1986)
b. Pedagogical Knowledge (PK) is characterized as instructors' understanding of learner characteristics, curriculum creation, learning objectives, theory of learning, models of teaching and learning, lesson preparation, classroom management, evaluation development, and process (Mishra & Koehler, 2006)
c. TK is sometimes defined as knowledge about utilizing, adopting, adapting, exploring, and expanding both traditional (e.g., the book, chalk, and chalkboard) and new (e.g., the computer, software program, and the Internet) technologies in teaching and learning (Koehler et al., 2013)
d. PCK is teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, particularly what is simple or difficult for students, how to convey it, and what subject matter may mislead pupils (Shulman, 1986).
e. TCK is the understanding of using, adopting, adapting, investigating, and expanding technology to appropriately acquire content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006)and how it can be used to create new content knowledge (Koehler et al., 2013).
f. TPK is the understanding of utilizing, adopting, adapting, exploring, and expanding technology in relation to its integration into learning objectives, theory of learning, models of teaching and learning, lesson planning, classroom management, evaluation development, and process (Koehler et al., 2013; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Shulman, 1986).
g. TPACK is the knowledge of adapting technology into a pedagogical method and incorporating it as a subject-specific content choice to enhance students' comprehension (Koehler et al., 2013).

In-depth teacher competencies and TPACK-in-action frequently need to match theory and practice. According to the curriculum pattern for higher education in Indonesia, individual competencies are taught to the first half of the semester before combined forms are taught for the second half. If not, pre-service teachers may cover every integrated competency in a topic area. Deconstructing the TPACK framework is the best option to give teachers experience and convenience, particularly in terms of technological expertise (Koehler et al., 2013).

Research Design

Merriam (1988, p. 27) defines a qualitative case study as "an extensive, holistic description and analysis of a single phenomenon in which the researcher can "fence in" the thing he will analyze." A qualitative case study is appropriate for my research objectives because I was not interested in a huge population but rather in providing rich, in-depth descriptions of people' experiences by asking questions about practices, processes, connections, and surroundings (Hamilton et al., 2012). Likewise,

the 'How' question in the research questions is compatible with the use of a case study, as they provide a thorough explanation of the occurrence from the participants' viewpoints within its natural environment (Yin, 2009). Therefore, my research could not be generalized to populations, but it did extend and generalize existing theories.

Purposive sampling was used to choose a representative sample of the population for this investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By using this recruitment technique, during the data collection, the participants provided various answers relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2016). There were several participants in my research study, however, due to the limitation of data collection for my project, I chose participants who agreed to participate in my project and met the criteria. Additionally, as this small-scale pilot study was a part of thesis completion, it required a short amount of time to collect and analyze the data.

Data Collection: Semi-structured Interview

The data gathered through semi-structured interviews to allow for flexibility in expanding or reframing questions. It seeks to provide the participant some control over the discussion's direction and to facilitate the collection of rich, nuanced descriptions of the spectrum of student experiences (Stake, 1995, p. 64). The researcher arranged the details of the respondents' interview sessions, including the day and time, based on the availability of the participants. Also, to ensure the effectiveness of the interview session, Jacob and Furgerson (2012) proposed selecting a setting that offers the participant the most comfortable place and surroundings. Therefore, the researcher selected zoom as the medium for the interview due to its accessibility, ease of use, and cost-effectiveness (Minhas et al., 2021). In addition, the interview questions were modified and clarified to adjust to the participants' responses. It took between 30 and 40 minutes to complete the entire interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher summarized what was said and asked the interviewees if they had any other questions, suggestions, or ideas

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Regarding data analysis, the researcher employed thematic analysis. This is due to the fact that thematic analysis provides systematic and accessible methods for producing codes and themes from qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In addition, thematic analysis can be used to identify patterns in data that pertain to the lived experience, attitudes, and perspectives of participants, as well as their behavior

and practices (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In other words, the use of theme analysis in this study will allow the researcher to produce an analysis that describes the participants' rich and connected experiences. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that transcription is essential part to qualitative interpretive data interpretation. By examining the data repeatedly, a researcher might become familiar with its breadth and depth (Braun & Clarke, 2019). I had transcribed the data acquired through the semi-structured interviews for the study. I translated the Indonesian transcriptions into English before analyzing the data. In addition, back-translation will be used to the transcribed data to confirm its accuracy (Kaçar, 2020). This indicates that the transcripts will be translated into Indonesian, English, and then back into Indonesian.

Second, I generated initial coding by organizing the themes. Coding can be done manually or using software (Creswell, 2014). This study used manual code. Silverman (2015) stated that software cannot replace researchers' intuition while collecting data. Moreover, the data may not capture the full meaning of what the participants said. Some facts are complex, and coding can be difficult, thus the narrative must be imaginative. Third, I searched the topics and an argument was created using themes as headers and subheadings (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Fourth, I examined the topics, returned to the data, reevaluated and revised the probable themes that were required while obtaining extracts to support the case (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Creswell and Poth (2016) argued that rewriting the arguments sharpens their focus. Fifth, I defined and named themes, specifying their essence, what data they captured, and what themes they were (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this stage of the report-writing process, I did more than just provide data. It means that some extracts were used in an analytical narrative to persuade the reader of the data's flaw and go beyond a straightforward data description to provide a case for the research issue. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that researchers must do more than provide data while making findings. An analytical narrative must incorporate extracts to highlight the data problem and make an argument connected to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To conclude, these five methods were used to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Improving pre-service teachers' self-efficacy

During the pandemic, the participants used online learning in their classrooms instead of the blended learning technique. Consequently, they first experienced confusion over the usage of blended learning in their teaching practicum program;

Jamal stated, 'Honestly, I feel a bit confused at first to mix the teaching online and offline". However, another participant, Budi, stated that the pandemic situation brought advantages for education as people can adjust and learn new learning models such as online and blended learning. Budi mentioned, "Pandemic was a good start for me to use blended learning because it is a good learning approach, especially in today's technological age."

Even though Jamal initially felt confused, he experienced excitement after immersing himself in a blended learning strategy in his teaching practicum program. Moreover, as the two participants were keen on learning technological aspects, they did not need much time to adapt to the use of technological aspects in their teaching. Budi said, "My experience in emerging technology to the teaching activity becomes one of the reasons why I enjoy using blended learning strategy in my classroom." Jamal also added, "Using a blended learning strategy in my teaching back then is astonishing and interesting as I can be more creative in designing the activities". Those statements imply that even though the two participants described their experiences with different starting points, there is a similarity concerning the blended learning strategy they used in teaching English using blended learning strategy. It means that they felt pleased to use a blended learning strategy in their teaching practicum program. Except for the excitement they expressed, the participants also mentioned some benefits of the immersion of blended learning strategy in their teaching practicum program.

One of the benefits discovered by pre-service teachers is that the online learning component of blended learning boosted their self-efficacy in pursuing effective teaching practices. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's personal ideas regarding his or her capacity to learn or accomplish actions at specified levels (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is based not only on the level of skill possessed by an individual but also on evaluations of what may be accomplished with existing talents. In the excerpt, Budi stated that teaching English online make him initiate more to use Google to search the subject of English teaching lessons before the class. It aims to enrich his teaching resources and prepare him to teach in various teaching methods based on the students' needs. Budi said,

> Through the online platform in blended learning, I can explore many teaching resources on YouTube before teaching students. For example, if I want to teach the students some vocabulary about the human body, I usually search videos about them for my references before teaching.

Additionally, Jamal also searched for videos related to the grammar lesson and showed the students in the classroom before he started teaching. Jamal explained: "… I explored more videos about teaching grammar in fun ways enabling me to have more teaching strategies…". The participants' statements imply that a platform accessible via the internet like YouTube could encourage them to explore the potential of other websites to improve their English teaching skills. This finding is supported by Le Roux (2009) who stated that teaching preparation enables pre-service teachers to be more ready in teaching the students in the classroom.

The finding also indicated that the online platform in blended learning also improved the pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching skills. It is because the participants could familiarize themselves with teaching strategies. Prifti (2022) stated that confidence is part of self-efficacy. It means that a pre-service teachers' belief in teaching help them improve their capacity to use a virtual platform in blended learning environment. In other words, the pre-service teachers' anxious feeling turned into enhancing their teaching practice, especially in using the online platforms. This statement is validated by Jamal who stated, "…as the time goes by, the use of blended learning makes me more ready in implementing the teaching knowledge in my teaching practicum program…". The statement indicates that participants' teaching skills have been improved by their confidence to investigate teaching resources. This finding is in accordance with a research study by Al Bataineh et al. (2019) who discovered that blended learning increased pre-service teachers' confidence in using their digital skills to support the learning activities. Moreover, Sandoval-Cruz et al., (2022) also found that pre-service teachers were inspired to search for other online learning websites once they were provided with blended learning options. Other researchers also discovered that pre-service teachers were independently motivated to learn in the blended learning environment as they were able to explore additional learning materials to support their learning through the online platform like Google (Mumford & Dikilitaş, 2020; Satar & Akcan, 2018).

The improvement in pre-service teachers' self-efficacy indicates that the teaching practicum program can provide an opportunity for pre-service teachers to enhance their technology integration capabilities. The current pre-service teacher preparation programs have been criticized for providing disconnected learning experiences between content knowledge and technological knowledge (Farjon et al., 2019; Özkan & Güler, 2018) and for failing to cultivate pre-service teachers in a manner that can reflect context-specific uses of educational methods (Mumford &

Dikilitaş, 2020). However, this study demonstrates that the pre-service teacher teaching practicum program can be a good opportunity for pre-service teachers to observe and practice subject-specific pedagogical approaches and technology uses, which has the potential to change their practice (Ubah et al., 2020; Ubilla Rosales et al., 2020) by enhancing their self-efficacy in their teaching.

In relation to the framework, this finding is related to the knowledge domains of the TPACK. It involves the adaptation of the preferred technology to the design of English learning materials and the adoption of that technology as the preferred means of comprehending the concepts, structures, and applications involved (Al Bataineh et al., 2019). The participants in this study revealed that they used the Technological Content Knowledge (TCK) component in TPACK to maximize their teaching practice. It means that they understand how to use technologies such as Google and YouTube to expand their English knowledge and their teaching skills in the classroom. This finding is also in line with a study by Angeli and Valanides (2009) who claimed that pre-service teachers should be aware of the affordability of technology for transforming specialized content for specific learners and facilitating engagement. Further, Tondeur et al. (2012) suggested that pre-service teachers should prepare themselves by incorporating theory into practice, learning technology by design, and evaluating the technology used. In conclusion, the findings showed that the pre-service teachers demonstrated the initial teaching ability to transfer what they learned in the modeling to classroom teaching using technological assistance.

Providing pre-service teachers with flexibility

Another aspect found from the excerpt of the data is flexibility in blended learning. First, both participants agreed that blended learning provides flexibility in terms of choosing the teaching platforms. Both pre-service teachers used online platforms as a supplement to face-to-face teaching. They also used some online platforms to support the blended learning practice in their classroom. For example, they used Quizzes assessment tool to assess the student's learning outcomes, used google classroom to provide additional materials for the students, and used WhatsApp to share some information related to the classroom activities. Budi explained:

> Now, we have a variety of technological tools. For example, when I want to test the student's understanding, I use Kahoot or Quizizz. I also use Google Classroom or WhatsApp to track the students' discussion or if they have some questions that they need to ask.

This statement indicates that the platform flexibility eases the participants to choose the online teaching platforms in their teaching. Benta et al. (2015) clarified that pre-service teachers who used variety online teaching platforms participated actively in class activities. Moreover, Jamal also demonstrated that blended learning allowed him to access three different online platforms such as Google classrooms, WhatsApp discussion, and Zoom meetings. Jamal said that he could use simultaneous Zoom and Google classrooms and asked students who are unable to join the classes to follow a link to join the Zoom meeting. Jamal stated that zoom and Google classroom are some of the online teaching platforms that he used quite often. It is because those gave him flexibility once he could not come to the class to teach.

Furthermore, Budi also observed that different teaching platforms could be used based on different teaching purposes. For instance, Budi used Kahoot to improve students' engagement in the classroom. Budi stated:

> Kahoot is a typical online platform for English teachers and non-English teachers to compete and post scores on store scoreboards. I use it as it can make the students feel excited, more engaged and cooperative, even when I urge them to work as a team.

This implies that the availability of different platforms used in blended learning provides more flexibility rather than merely online learning or face-to-face learning. Zulfikar (2013) argued that students expressed less excitement when the teachers used only lecturing teaching method in the face-to-face classroom. Therefore, the availability of different online platforms in blended learning might excite the participants more due to its flexibility.

Another reason for platform flexibility is the efficacy in using different teaching platforms enables the pre-service teachers to choose teaching tool based on their needs. Moreover, when the online platform used effectively based on teaching purposes, it can improve the students' engagement in the classroom such the use of Kahoot that Budi explained previously. Further, Jamal also added: "...I also post the lessons that will be taught to Google classroom. So, some students who cannot come to the class still can review the lesson ...". Based on the previous statement, blended learning appears to have benefited the participants in terms of platform flexibility. This finding contradicts with Ubah et al. (2020), who claim that the simultaneous use of technological platforms proven has little influence on learning. However, this study found that the variety of online teaching platforms existed in blended learning eased

the pre-service teachers to be flexible in conducting their teaching activities. This finding is consistent with Kupetz and Ziegenmeyer (2005) who claimed that blended learning was embraced in part of flexibility as it provides a flexible teaching tool.

Second, the pre-service teachers also agreed that blended learning enabled them to be flexible in terms of teaching time and place. They found it especially beneficial to be able to learn in a more flexible atmosphere with less time pressure by utilising the online platform in blended learning. The classes were accessible at any time and could be accessed from any location or platform. Budi explained that blended learning was advantageous for those with family duties, such as childcare, because they could teach from anywhere while also performing his family duty. Budi said, "It is efficient in terms of time. For example, we do not need to spend hours on campus or school anymore. We can do that (learning) from home while doing family duties." In short, these two participants remarked that the class schedule was adaptable and that they were able to adjust the teaching time. These findings indicate that blended learning provides the opportunity to adjust the language-teaching process to each pre-service teacher's specific needs and circumstances. These findings are relatable with those of prior research (Ketsman, 2019; Le & Pham, 2021; Shand & Farrelly, 2017), which asserted that blended learning provides a flexible environment for learning English that is suited to the pre-service teachers' teaching styles.

This finding is also supported by the theory of Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK) framework in TPACK. Koehler and Mishra (2009, p. 5) propose, citing the work of Duncker (1945), that teachers must "go beyond the most popular uses of technologies and reconfigure them for individualized instructional purposes." Understanding the affordances of technology and how they might be utilised differently based on changing contexts and goals is crucial to comprehending TPK (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). It means that the pre-service teachers in this study have implemented their technological knowledge into the teaching pedagogy by considering their teaching purposes. Further, with the development of technology, it was found that a crucial aspect of teaching is to not only use technological devices to teach, but also "to incorporate technological knowledge into pedagogy in order to provide quality student learning" (Szeto, & Cheng, 2017, p. 348).

The technical problem, limited resources and face-to-face teaching preference

Regardless of the effectiveness that the participants gained from the implementation of blended learning strategy in the classroom, they also found some

challenges. First, both pre-service teachers agreed that there is a technical problem faced by senior teachers in their schools. Based on the interview transcript, the participants stated that there was a little indication that some senior teachers were less knowledgeable about the use of a certain technology or tool in the teaching. For instance, Budi explained:

> The problem in my teaching program may be with the teacher. Some senior teachers who have been teaching for years faced with a challenge that the learning activities should be done online. Many of them were also overwhelmed with that change, especially with emerging technology in their teaching…. That was automatically affecting me…

This statement is also supported by another participant, Jamal, who experienced a similar challenge. He said, "Senior teachers in my school still need to adapt themselves to some technological things such as creating zoom link". Based on these statements, it implies that low technological knowledge from the senior teachers could prevent the participants from implementing blended learning. It is because some senior teachers felt overwhelmed to shift their traditional teaching that they have used for a long time to the new teaching strategy which involves technological aspects. This finding shows that the senior teachers' lack in having technological knowledge (TK). According to the TPACK framework by Koehler and Mishra (2006), technological knowledge (TK) is the teacher's capacity to utilize information and communication technology (ICT) skills and knowledge "productively in the workplace and in everyday life… and to continuously adapt to changes in information technology" (Koehler & Mishra, 2009, p. 5). This TK enables a person to perform a different type of work utilizing information technology and to generate alternative methods for performing a given activity (Koehler & Mishra, 2009).

Consequently, the technical issues faced by senior teachers may indirectly prevent pre-service teachers from implementing the blended learning technique in their teaching practicum program. It is because of the different teaching styles employed by teachers in their institution; therefore, the pre-service teachers may be apprehensive that their own methods may confuse the students. Jamal clarified, "Sometimes I am afraid that the way I teach using blended learning will confuse the students since some other teachers do not implement that".

Moreover, he also added that some teachers in his school tended to use teacher-centered teaching style rather than student-centered which favored in

blended learning class. He added, "Some teachers in my school do not want to switch to another teaching method because they have been mastering in their own learning and teaching method already". All those statements implied that the anxious feeling could prevent the pre-service teachers in implementing the blended learning strategy in their teaching classroom. Moreover, they were still completing teaching practicums in schools, which distinguishes them from in-service teachers who have been in the profession for a considerable amount of time. This might lead them to feel that they have an inequal relationship affecting their teaching performance.

Similarly, Budi stated the problem in the same way he mentioned, "For our senior teachers, that is a challenge that also needs to be taken seriously because they need to study again, and some are even stressed having to prepare material." Budi also stated that the senior teacher was reluctant to employ blended learning is due to a lack of experience and expertise in adapting to the new teaching style. As a result, this finding indicated that the disparity in technology understanding between in-service and pre-service teachers will have an indirect effect on how Budi teaches students using a blended learning technique. This finding is supported by Shand and Farrelly (2017) who stated that the teaching method used in the classroom not only affects the pre-service teachers' accomplishment, but also their attitude towards the lesson taught in the classroom.

The next challenge that was found is the limited technological resources. The participants illustrated that their resources for teaching online in blended learning were limited. It is because the school just provided limited technological tools to support the blended learning strategy in the classroom. For example, Jamal explained that the challenging part is when the school did not provide enough facility to assist him teach English. He explained:

> In my school, we only have one or two screen projectors which the teacher can use. If the teacher wants to use it, they must take it in the office. Or if one teacher is using it, I need to wait until the other teachers finish using it. As a result, sometimes I need to switch the blended learning method which I have prepared earlier to traditional teaching method such as lecturing.

The statement indicates that the pre-service teachers limited resources negatively affected their access to blended learning. The finding stating that pre-service teacher limited resources can present a challenge agrees with results reported by Pardede (2019) and Farani (2019) who stated that school limited resources could prevent the

pre-service teachers implementing blended learning strategy in their teaching practicum program. Moreover, this issue is followed by another problem from the students' perspective who do not have insufficient devices to support them in blended learning activities. For example, Budi, who taught English in rural school shared his experience by stating, "…some students in my school also do not have adequate devices enforcing them to go to their friends/neighbors to do the assignment…". As a result, lacking technological devices support could affect the way pre-service teachers implement blended learning in the classroom. The conclusion that the limited resources and lack of technological devices can be a challenge is consistent with Mumford and Dikilitas (2020) observation that students without computers were unable to attend all virtual classes from their homes in blended learning and impacted to their learning outcomes.

The finding indicates that when the pre-service teachers were not supported by adequate technological devices, this will make it difficult to integrate technology into their teaching. Mishra and Koehler (2006) argued that "quality teaching entails acquiring a nuanced understanding of the complex links between technology, material, and pedagogy, and using this understanding to construct suitable, context-specific techniques and representations" (p. 1029). They also added that all three difficulties must be considered for effective technological integration in the classroom, but not separately, but rather within the intricate relationships that exist inside the system outlined by the three central components. In conclusion, for pre-service teachers to fully carry out their teaching program, technical challenges and limited technology resources must be taken into serious consideration.

Moreover, Jamal also explained that he needed more access to technological support and teacher training from the government. Especially for some schools in rural areas which have limited access to technological facilities. He stated.

> The government should provide a training on how the teacher should adapt to newest technology. I concern that some teachers in my village didn't have any further information how to adapt the technological updates or the newest method in learning and teaching. I still can see the gap which is high between the people who live in the village in the city, especially in term of having enough technological knowledge.

This implies that there is a need of technical support and training for teachers in rural schools. It aims to assist them to integrate the technology into their teaching activity.

Further, in relation to the teaching practicum program, Ketsman (2019) argued that preservice training programs that emphasize the development of fundamental technological skills do so because they believe students must first possess the abilities before they can use technology to improve their instruction. In response to this trend, Sandholtz (2001) made a comment, stating that "a lot of the training provided to teachers emphasizes on computer operation rather than preparation on how to use technology as a teaching tool and how to integrate it across the curriculum" (p. 350). Therefore, it is necessary to give pre-service teachers training so they can include technological elements into their teaching and learning activities.

Lastly, even though the two participants agreed that blended learning could provide platform, place and time flexibility, they still appreciated face-to-face training more since it provides more realistic interactions. Further, Jamal stated that teaching the students' characters became the most significant component that pre-service teachers valued. Budi also added that students' character cannot be adequately developed by online platforms. He said that face-to-face meetings were required. This reason is truly in line with one of the aims of national curriculum in Indonesia which emphasize in building the students' character (Gunawan, 2017).

To be detail, all of Indonesia's national curricula were designed based on the same foundation, namely Pancasila (The philosophical foundation of the Indonesian Republic). Therefore, through the teaching practicum program that the pre-service teacher have in the schools, the students are guided to use factual, conceptual, and procedural knowledge, as well as to instil the noble values of the nation's character, in the context of life in the home, school, and community environment (Sofiana et al., 2019). As the goal of English curriculum in Indonesia highlights the importance of building the students' character, therefore, this aim relates to the reason of pre-service teachers prefer the face-to-face interaction. It is to monitor the students' behaviour during the learning activities. These statements were clarified by the qualitative data acquired from the interview, as seen in the following excerpts from one of the participants (Budi):

> In my opinion, I value face-to-face interaction more than online learning. It is because what I experienced myself when we gave lessons to students, it was not enough to only provide the material or to satisfy students' curiosity. We also must guide how students learn to understand their characteristics….

Interestingly, the participants explained that face-to-face activities were rated higher than online activities, indicating that they preferred face-to-face learning in their blended EFL classes. This may be related to their adaptability to a blended learning environment. As this was the first teaching experience, pre-service teachers might need to adjust to this new teaching model. It is possible that the participants' preference for face-to-face training is also a result of their opinion that this mode of instruction helped them teach the material more clearly and in greater depth. This finding clarifies Pardede's (2010) result that pre-service teachers still prefer face-to-face engagement to online platforms for its lesson clarity. It is also consistent with Farani's (2019) conclusion that even if the present generation of university students is familiar with digital ICT tools, they still prefer face-to-face meetings because they emphasized the character development through face-to-face interaction.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored data on pre-service English teachers' perception of blended learning strategy in their teaching practicum program. The study used a qualitative study using TPACK theory as the framework for analyzing the data. The study issues were addressed using the semi-structured interview technique. Some conclusions were drawn based on findings and discussions in the previous section. First, the finding suggests that an internet-accessible platform like YouTube motivated them to investigate the potential of other websites to enhance their English teaching abilities. The increase in pre-service teachers' self-efficacy suggests that the teaching practicum program affords pre-service teachers the opportunity to better their technology integration skills. The finding also discovered that the participants implemented the Technological Content Knowledge (TCK) component of Koehler and Mishra's (2009) TPACK to enhance their teaching practices. It suggests that they can use technology such as Google and YouTube to improve their English proficiency and classroom teaching abilities.

Second, the finding revealed that blended learning provides flexibility. Both participants agreed that blended learning allows for a selection of teaching platforms that is flexible. They demonstrated that blended learning provided them with equal access to many platforms, including Google classrooms, WhatsApp discussions and Zoom meetings, Kahoot and Quizzes. The efficacy of various teaching platforms helps pre-service teachers to select a teaching instrument depending on their needs. Additionally, the pre-service teachers agreed that blended learning permitted them to be flexible in terms of teaching time and location. By utilizing the online platform

for blended learning, they were able to learn in a more flexible environment with less time constraints. This finding is also confirmed by Koehler and Mishra's TPACK framework for the notion of Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK) (2009).

Third, the finding demonstrates that senior teachers in the participants' schools confront a technical issue. Some senior teachers were overwhelmed as they transitioned from their longtime usage of traditional teaching methods to the new technology-based teaching technique. This research demonstrates that senior teachers lack technological knowledge (TK). Indirectly, senior instructors' technological concerns may prevent pre-service teachers from utilizing blended learning in their teaching practicum programs. The finding also demonstrates that the online teaching resources for blended learning were limited. The lack access to adequate technical gear in their classroom made the participants difficult to integrate technology into their teaching. As a result, there is a need for technical assistance and training for rural school instructors.

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