

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF BLENDED-LEARNING IN SMK ISLAM 1 BLITAR: A DESCRIPTIVE QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Blended learning, as one form of online learning, has become the new normal in the education sector worldwide. In this research, the researcher aims to find and explain the implementation of blended learning and its critical success factors in Electrical Power Installation Engineering of the SMK Islam 1 Blitar. Furthermore, this research also focuses on the subject of English for Specific Purposes. This present study is a descriptive qualitative study and applies Miles and Huberman's (2014) data analysis to uncover the observation and interview results. Based on the findings, two main things are found: 1) Blended learning implementation in SMK Islam 1 Blitar has fulfilled the main components of the blended learning process. 2) Blended learning in SMK Islam 1 Blitar possesses all the critical success factors of blended learning. However, some suggestions for the school and future research will be discussed in the article.

Keywords: blended learning; critical success factor; english for specific purposes

1. Introduction

All levels of education in Indonesia have implemented online learning since the emergence of COVID-19 (Kutsiyyah, 2021). This phenomenon comes with the implementation and the increasing number of blended learning practices and studies as one of the online learning types (Wang et al., 2023). However, a study revealed that even though blended learning implementation has increased since 2018 (Wang et al., 2023), it has not been normalized up to the emergence of COVID-19 and post-pandemic (Hill & Smith, 2023). In terms of the trend of blended learning studies, perceptions, learning outcomes, satisfaction, and motivation have been the most analyzed topics (Wang et al., 2023). Previous literature has also revealed that blended learning improves several skills. Such as problem-solving (Anggraini et al., 2022), creativity (Putri et al., 2023), social (R & Arini, 2022; Srimulat et al., 2021), and critical-thinking skills (Putra & Fitrayati, 2021; Putri et al., 2023).

SMK Islam 1 Blitar is one of the schools that apply blended learning as the new normal, especially in teaching English for Specific Purposes. Based on the preliminary observation and interviews with the teachers and students of the school, some technologies used to enhance their learning are Quizizz, Canva, YouTube, and the school's E-Learning website. These technologies are used mainly to share the materials as well as to submit assignments for students. Classroom activities, such as discussion and teacher-centered learning, are also conducted. In contrast with Wiryantama and Prakoso's (2021) study, the application of blended learning in SMK Islam 1 Blitar is proven to be successful based on the teacher's point of view. According



to the interview, it is acknowledged as effective because students' learning outcomes and enthusiasm are gradually improving. Furthermore, it fosters independence and confidence in in-class and/or outside-of-class activities.

Turning back to the previous studies, one would conclude that the research regarding blended learning is comprehensive enough in Indonesia, as each level of education has already been analyzed. Furthermore, each subject has also been thoroughly studied. However, there are little to no studies regarding the teaching of English for Specific Purposes in an Islamic vocational high school. A little study also addresses the critical success factors in blended learning and its components. Hence, this research aims to analyze the components of blended learning in an Islamic vocational high school, specifically in Grammar subjects in the Electrical Power Installation Engineering class in SMK Islam 1 Blitar. This research also intends to discover the critical success factors of blended learning. Finally, the findings are expected to present new insights regarding blended learning and its critical success factors.

Theoretical Framework

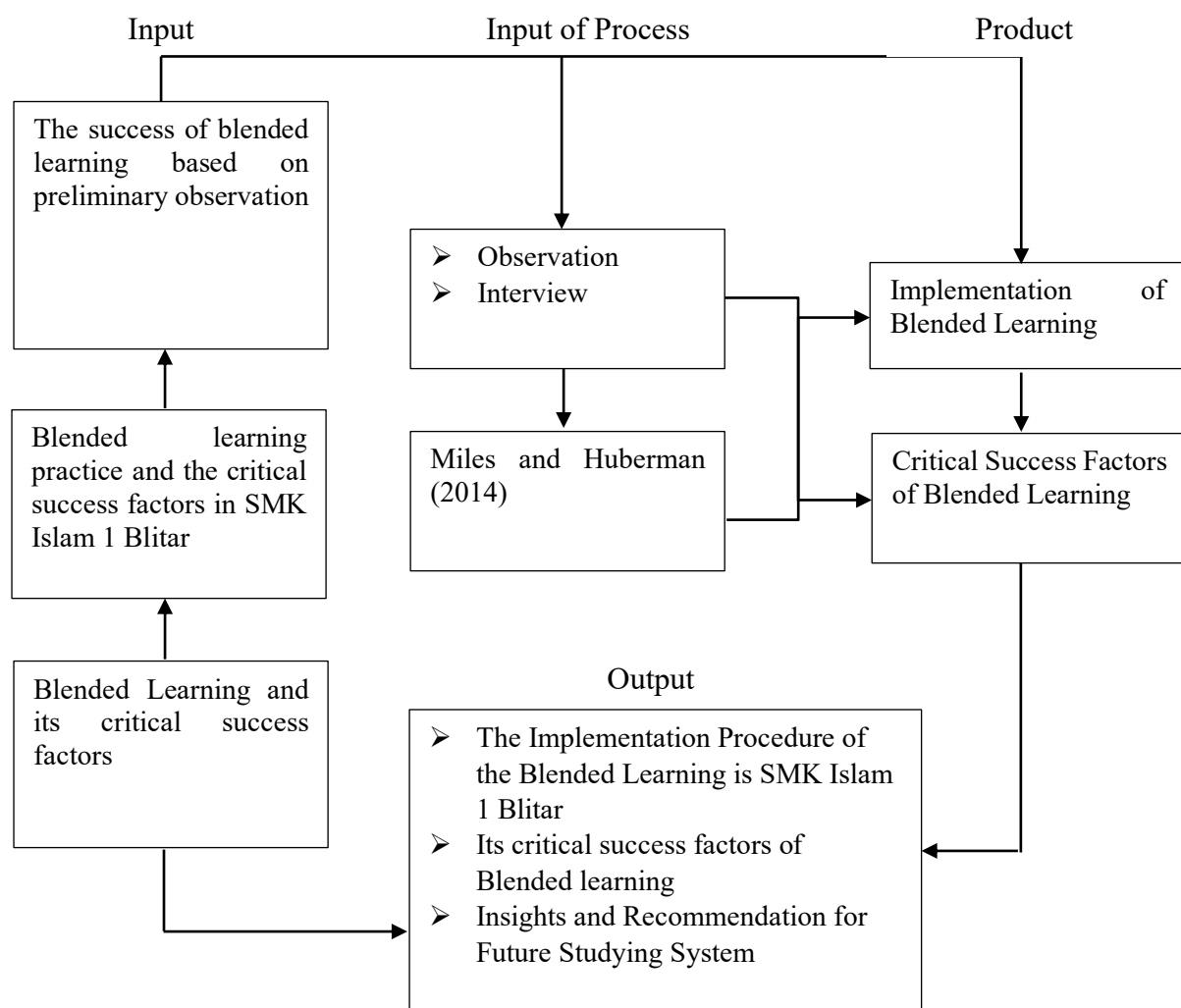


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of the Present Research



Literature Review

Blended learning refers to the type of education that includes face-to-face and online learning (Hrastinski, 2019). Meanwhile, Cronje (2020) concludes that blended learning combines face-to-face, web-based instruction and various pedagogical approaches to gain an impressive achievement in the teaching-learning process. Therefore, blended learning is concluded as a combination of face-to-face and online learning processes and other pedagogical approaches, including context, theory, method, and technology to improve the learning outcome. Furthermore, the main components of implementing blended learning are in-class activities or live events, self-paced learning, collaboration, assessment, and supporting materials (Ambarwati, 2021). These elements are combined to improve students' learning process and optimize the learning outcome. In addition to the components of blended learning implementation, blended learning also includes several critical success factors that determine the success of the learning process. Namely, learner, instructor, course, design, technology, and environment (Min & Yu, 2023). The learner factor focuses mainly on the students' characteristics, such as self-efficacy and confidence in using the technology (Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020; Ghazal et al., 2018). The instructor factor focuses on teaching quality as well as the teacher's effectiveness in implementing a blended learning process (Yun et al., 2023). Teachers' effectiveness is mainly shown by increased learning outcomes and students' attitudes toward learning (Alhabeeb & Rowley, 2018). The course focuses on the material and purpose, while the design focuses on instructional characteristics that align with the institution's objective (Shaya & Mohebi, 2021). The technology factor mainly focuses on the ICT system that presents the learning source and purpose (Min & Yu, 2023). Finally, the environment factor refers to the learning environment aligned with infrastructures and support from management (Shaya & Mohebi, 2021).

2. Methods

This research is a descriptive qualitative study. To discover the implementation components of blended learning, the researcher will divide the result based on the pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching activities and use Ambarwati's (2021) as a reference. Meanwhile, to distinguish the critical success factors of the blended learning applied in SMK Islam 1 Blitar, this researcher uses Min and Yu's (2023) theory of critical success factors. In collecting the data, the researcher used observation and interview. Namely, the researcher observation to observe the English learning process and semi-structured interview of the English teacher and school's principal. While the observation process is conducted to find the components of implementation and the critical success factors, the interview is done to support and strengthen the findings. Finally, Miles and Huberman's (2014) three-step data analysis will be applied to analyze the data. Data condensation, data display, interpretation, and conclusion are the processes.

3. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion will be presented in two parts based on the research's purpose, which is to facilitate an easy understanding of the implementation and critical success factors in teaching grammar through blended learning in SMK Islam 1 Blitar.



3.1. *Implementation of Blended Learning*

At the pre-teaching of the class activity, the teacher opens the class with greetings and prayer and checks the class attendance. She also stimulates students to focus by asking questions about the material discussed. She also gave examples of the material in Indonesian and English. Other than that, examples from real-life events are also included to stimulate students' focus. Whilst-Teaching covers the discussion of the course. Based on the observation, the teacher will first provide students with examples or problems. Then, she would allow students to discuss the problem individually, in pairs, or in groups based on the examples or problems and the materials given through the E-Learning platform a week before the class began. In this activity, the students are given full authority over their learning process until the given time is finished. The teacher, once in a while, will check their discussion results. She is present as a guide or facilitator.

After the given time, the teacher will instruct students to answer the problem or explain the example from their seat. The teacher then corrects and gives students feedback about their results. Moreover, even though students are given full authority over their learning at the beginning of the whilst-teaching activity, the teacher also has the opportunity to explain the material. This is done to instill, confirm, and explain parts that students are yet able to discover. Lastly, in the post-teaching activity, the teacher will open a Q&A session, allowing students to ask or answer questions. The teacher sometimes throws questions to students to confirm their understanding. Before the teacher close the class, she would share a link to a test for students to answer. The teacher uses the Quizizz platform, which can immediately point out whether the students' answers are correct or wrong. Hence, they could immediately review their work and find the correct ones.

Based on the findings, blended learning in SMK Islam 1 Blitar has fulfilled the five main components of blended learning implementation, supporting Ambarwati's (2021) discovery. Self-paced learning is done outside of the class, namely when the teacher shares the day's material through the e-learning website. The materials would later complement English textbooks and other authentic materials. Furthermore, although the material has already been shared, live events or in-class activities are still conducted. On the other hand, collaboration in SMK Islam 1 Blitar is done in in-class activity rather than through an online platform. However, students are allowed to discuss the material outside the class before the class begins. Lastly, the assessment is done both formally and informally. Informal assessment is done by the teacher by observing students' independent discussion mainly in the teaching activity. A formal one is taken from the test given at the end of the class through Quizizz.

3.2. *Critical Success Factors*

3.2.1 Learner

According to the observation result, students exhibited several characteristics. Students who sat at the front tables in the middle were found to be extroverted. They showed active participation in class activities by raising their hands to ask and answer as well as discussing the materials with the teacher and other students. However, the students who sat at the very back of the class tended to be silent to the



point of being shy about borrowing a pen from their friends. They mainly sit and listen to the teacher's explanation. Asking and answering questions were rarely done. The interview results of the teachers confirmed these findings, that most of the students are extroverts while the rest are introverts. According to the teacher, extroverted students are enthusiastic to communicate with teachers and other friends for several reasons. First, they have high motivation and interest in learning. Hence shows a positive attitude toward the learning activities. Second, the students want to enjoy their high school moments. This reason is mainly for grade XII because the recent year was their last semester as high school students. Third, students have previously learned the material online from home and thus have the confidence to ask and contribute to the class discussion.

These characteristics, according to Min and Yu (2023), are the learner critical success factors of blended learning. Students with active participation, positive attitudes, and high motivation are part of students' self-efficacy (Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020; Ghazal et al., 2018). It holds the most vital reason for learning success in terms of the individual or students' point of view. Furthermore, these traits show that students know their role in blended learning and cause active engagement and learning outcomes. However, students who exhibit less active engagement need more stimulation to improve their learning interests. Both teachers and students themselves have the responsibility to motivate themselves and shape their attitudes toward learning in general. Students should use several intentional strategies and acknowledge the responsibility to acquire knowledge. Hence, it will improve their learning interest, motivation, engagement, as well as learning outcomes.

3.2.2 Instructor

The same goes with individual traits as the main reason for learning success in terms of learner, instructor or teacher's characteristics holds the same ground. Some of them are positive attitudes, flexibility, responsiveness, knowledge of the technology, and teaching style (Min & Yu, 2023). These characteristics complement each other to the success of blended learning. Teachers with positive attitudes and enough knowledge of the technology system eventually result in the success of technology adoption and implementation (Yun et al., 2023). Mastery of the teaching style can also motivate students and positively affect their learning interests and responses. Hence, the teacher should possess these characteristics to produce a powerful impact on blended learning success or learning in general. In SMK Islam 1 Blitar, the English teacher showed nearly all of the characteristics. She is responsive to students' actions in class. Sometimes, she cracks up a joke to ease the class tension which provides a calm and comforting classroom. Furthermore, the teacher shows a positive attitude toward the technology. She acknowledged the importance of technology nowadays and explicitly tried to remind students to learn and master them for future competence. She also used some of them as their learning sources, such as Quizizz, the school's E-learning website, Canva, and many more. Moreover, her teaching style included giving students full authority to express themselves as well as giving time for herself to join and give feedback on students' work. In conclusion, blended learning in SMK Islam 1 Blitar possesses the critical success factor of the instructor.



3.2.3 Course

Min and Yu (2023) mentioned that the most valuable feature of the course as a critical success factor of blended learning is flexibility. The others are course design, assessment, evaluation, and content quality. When the course includes these characteristics, it is known as a standardized approach to an e-learning course. Furthermore, it will enhance students' learning outcomes as it provides a flexible and convenient learning course. In addition, the content of the course should meet students' needs. Thus, teachers need to maintain quality and class management practices. Based on the observation and interview results, e-learning courses have been applied since before COVID-19 in SMK Islam 1 Blitar. Nowadays, it has become the new normal for the school to apply blended learning. E-learning in SMK Islam 1 Blitar includes sharing materials and submitting assignments through the school's E-Learning website, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp group. Therefore, the school's course fulfilled the flexibility and convenience of managing space and time in the learning course, which supports Shaya and Mohebi's (2021) findings. In terms of the course quality, the observation and interview results showed two different findings based on two different perspectives. From a General English point of view, the quality of the course has met the needs of the students. However, the course's quality is low based on the English for Specific Purposes viewpoint because it was focused on the theory. Hence, teachers should pay attention to the course quality they should present to the students.

3.2.4 Design

The design factor is closely related to the course factor. It focuses on the objectives of the learning from the school's viewpoint. The question that arises in this dimension is 'Do the instructional characteristics align with the school's objective?'. The characteristics include the clarity of the purpose, teaching methods, learning strategies, and satisfaction (Min & Yu, 2023). These characteristics were found in the practice of blended learning in SMK Islam 1 Blitar. The school applied two curriculum designs. Independence Curriculum for grade X-XI and K-13 Curriculum for grade XII. The curriculum differs because it is best to continue using the previous curriculum for the XII-grade students as they first started school using K-13. Hence, it will avoid confusion in the sudden change of the design. While the latter curriculum is immediately applied to students of X-XI grade. However, even though K-13 is still applied, the school and teachers sometimes combine learning approaches from the Independence Curriculum as a complement. Furthermore, applying both curricula to complement each other for grade XII might be able to increase students' satisfaction with blended learning. Some strategies the teacher has applied in the class activity so far are critical thinking and repetition. Yet, the teacher could also design the learning course using organization, detail, giving feedback, questions and answers, and other strategies. This finding supported previous literature that using several strategies in the blended learning process increased students' interest and ease of use or access (Shaya & Mohebi, 2021).

3.2.5 Technology

Technology, as one of the critical success factors of blended learning, covers easy usage, reliability, efficiency, quality, privacy, information, and the use of the software



(Min & Yu, 2023). These factors are complemented by access to computers, individual competence regarding technology, availability of an online system and environment, and perceived usefulness and convenience. As mentioned before, students and teachers in SMK Islam 1 Blitar exhibit positive attitudes toward blended learning. They have high motivation and interest to improve themselves. It results in enthusiastic actions toward the use of technology (Alhabeeb & Rowley, 2018; Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020; Ghazal et al., 2018; Shaya & Mohebi, 2021). Based on observation and interview results, teachers' technological competence was higher than students. However, students show a high level of interest in learning through technology. They also can keep up with the pace of the learning process. Furthermore, they confess that learning with the help of the ICT system is more fun and stimulating because they can easily access information through the internet and work independently or in groups beyond time and space. In conclusion, even though students' technological competence is still low, they can use the technology provided or used in blended learning activities. Thus, concludes that the technology used in SMK Islam 1 Blitar perceived ease of use and convenience. In addition, the school needs to invest more in how to develop and instill technological competence in students.

3.2.6 Environment

The last critical success factor of blended learning is the environment. In SMK Islam 1 Blitar, the environment is found to be positive. A positive environment in blended learning refers to the learning management system, technological infrastructure, interactivity, variety of assessments, system accessibility, and ease of navigation as supporting tools. Min and Yu (2023) concluded that learning management and conscientiousness are closely aligned to the course factor. So far, SMK Islam 1 Blitar provides students with an E-Learning website, Google Classroom platform, Canva, and other websites for students to access information with and without teachers' superintendence. The school also covers the Wi-Fi connection and provides several computer laboratories. It showed that the school is committed to providing necessary technical support for the students in the blended learning practice (Ghazal et al., 2018). These facilities also indicated the technology factors of the school. In blended learning activities, students are also allowed to work and assess them in groups, pairs, or individually. Hence, the researcher concludes that the school environment has provided the critical success factor of blended learning from the environmental viewpoint.

4. Conclusions

Based on the results and discussion, the researcher concludes that blended learning in SMK Islam 1 Blitar for English for Specific Purposes is a success because it possesses the six critical success factors of blended learning. The success of blended learning results in the improving interest, enthusiasm, motivation, and engagement of students in the learning process. It also eventually improves students' learning outcomes. However, the school still needs to take into account in terms of the course and learner. The learning objective should meet the students' needs to provide them with a complete and an abundance of English knowledge and competence. Meanwhile, teachers should pay more attention to students with low levels of enthusiasm and motivation in learning. To stimulate



students' interest and motivation, they can apply or combine various approaches and strategies as the practice of blended learning suggests to do so (Cronje, 2020). Lastly, this research focuses on the critical success factors of blended learning as a whole. Thus, the knowledge given might be limited. Therefore, the researcher suggests that future studies focus on specific factors to dig deeper into their meaning.

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