

A Critical Review of the Blended Learning Implementation in Indonesia

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Abstract

Blended learning has become a popular approach in many educational settings, including in Indonesia, as it combines traditional classroom instruction with online learning activities. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), blended learning offers flexibility and the potential to enhance student engagement and independent learning. However, its implementation in Indonesia continues to face several challenges. This paper provides a critical review of the current issues encountered by Indonesian teachers in adopting blended learning in ELT classrooms. It highlights persistent challenges such as limited preparation of the teachers, lack of pedagogical support, and curriculum misalignment. In addition, new challenges have emerged, including inadequate internet access, limited availability of digital tools, and insufficient digital literacy among both teachers and students. These issues often result in blended learning being implemented in a shallow way, with limited student interaction and learning outcomes. The review also identifies gaps in teacher training and professional development, which hinder the effective integration of blended learning into classroom practice. To face these challenges, there is a need for more practical guidance, stronger institutional support, and further research that explores context-sensitive strategies for blended learning. This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion by offering insights and recommendations for improving blended learning practices in Indonesian ELT.

Keywords: Blended learning, digital literacy, technology integration, educational challenges

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Introduction

Blended learning is a teaching method that combines face-to-face instruction with online learning activities. In this approach, students attend classes at school while also engaging in digital tasks at home or during flexible hours. This method allows teachers to provide a wider range of learning materials through online platforms, and at the same time, offer direct support during in-person sessions. Stanley (2013) stated that using technology in language learning gives teachers more options to deliver content in and beyond the classroom.

In the Indonesian context, the adoption of blended learning has been influenced by various educational reforms and the rapid development of digital infrastructure in recent years. The government has promoted the integration of technology in schools and higher education institutions, particularly through initiatives such as the Merdeka Belajar policy, which encourages more flexible and student-centered approaches to teaching (Kemdikbud, 2020). This shift has pushed educators to combine online platforms—such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), video conferencing tools, and digital assessment methods—with traditional classroom practices. Research in Indonesia indicates that blended learning not only helps address limitations in classroom time but also supports equitable access to learning resources across diverse geographical regions (Firmansyah & Timmis, 2016; Sari, 2021). However, its implementation also reveals challenges such as unequal internet access, varying levels of digital literacy among teachers and students, and the need for ongoing professional development to ensure effective pedagogical practices. These factors highlight that while blended learning offers significant opportunities, its success depends on how well it is aligned with local educational contexts and infrastructure.

Many countries have started using blended learning because it gives more flexibility for both teachers and students. Students can study at their own pace, repeat lessons, and access digital resources anytime. It also makes learning more inclusive, as teachers can use different types of content such as videos, quizzes, and games to reach students with different learning styles. Sharma and Barrett (2007) explained that blended learning helps language teachers meet the needs of students by combining digital materials with classroom teaching.

However, the implementation of blended learning in Indonesia requires careful consideration of the local educational context. While the flexibility of this model has been widely acknowledged, its success also depends on the availability of supporting infrastructure such as stable internet access, digital devices, and teacher readiness to integrate technology effectively. Studies in Indonesia have shown that while urban schools often benefit from better access to online platforms, many rural areas still struggle with technological limitations (Fitriyani et al., 2020; Handayani, 2022). This digital divide can create inequalities in learning outcomes if not addressed properly. Furthermore, teacher professional development plays a crucial role, as many educators are still adapting to the pedagogical shifts demanded by blended learning. Without adequate training, blended learning risks being reduced to simply uploading materials online without meaningful interaction or pedagogical design (Sari & Wahyudi, 2021). Therefore, the Indonesian experience with blended learning not only highlights its potential but also underlines the importance of infrastructure, teacher competence, and equitable access to ensure its effectiveness.

In language teaching, blended learning provides more opportunities for students to practice skills both inside and outside the classroom. For example, students can complete grammar or vocabulary tasks online, and then use class time to focus on speaking and listening. This balance between input and interaction helps students build confidence and improves their language competence over time. Tomlinson (2011) stated that language learning materials can be designed for blended environments so that they connect digital input with communicative classroom activities.

In addition, blended learning offers a supportive environment for teachers to design activities that gradually shift students from individual learning to collaborative engagement. After completing tasks independently in online settings, students can share their insights and compare perspectives with peers during classroom discussions. This process not only deepens understanding but also creates opportunities for negotiation of meaning, a key aspect in language learning. By alternating between online exploration and in-class collaboration, teachers can foster both autonomy and social interaction, which are equally essential for developing communicative competence. Moreover, the integration of digital and face-to-face modes helps ensure that learning is continuous rather than fragmented, as students are encouraged to connect what they study outside of class with the activities conducted during classroom sessions.

According to Hrastinski (2019), blended learning also changes the way teachers and students communicate. It allows students to take more responsibility for their learning by giving them time to explore topics on their own. This means students are not only memorizing information but also thinking critically about what they learn, which can make their learning deeper and more meaningful. Stanley (2013) explained that this kind of digital-supported reflection can help students become more independent learners.

Furthermore, the flexibility of blended learning enables teachers to design learning pathways that encourage both individual accountability and collaborative engagement. When students are given the chance to work independently online, they often develop a sense of ownership over their progress, which increases motivation and self-confidence. At the same time, teachers can use the online component to monitor students' progress and identify areas that need further support. This preparation benefits the face-to-face classroom, as students arrive with prior knowledge and are ready to participate actively. In this way, the blended format not only supports the development of critical thinking but also ensures that classroom interaction is more meaningful, since discussions and activities are built upon what students have already explored online.

In the Indonesian context, this approach has particular relevance because many classrooms face challenges such as large student numbers, limited instructional time, and varying levels of language proficiency. Through blended learning, teachers can assign online tasks that cater to different student needs, allowing stronger learners to extend their knowledge while providing additional practice for those who require more support. This differentiation not only helps manage classroom diversity but also ensures that instructional time is used more efficiently. By engaging with materials beforehand, students are better prepared for in-class activities, which makes the learning process more balanced and inclusive. Such an arrangement creates opportunities for teachers to maximize their role as facilitators who guide, clarify, and encourage meaningful discussions during face-to-face sessions.

In English language classes, for instance, students can read texts online, take notes, or answer comprehension questions before coming to class. Then, during the face-to-face session, they can discuss the texts or practice speaking with peers. This helps students come prepared, and class time becomes more productive and focused on active use of the language. Sharma and Barrett (2007) stated that using a blended approach allows teachers to focus on speaking practice and interaction during in-person sessions. At a broader level, this illustrates the central argument of this review: blended learning holds strong potential to transform English language education in Indonesia, but its success depends on how effectively the online and offline components are integrated. The availability of multimedia resources such as videos, podcasts, or interactive exercises further enriches students' preparation and exposes them to authentic language input. When these online activities are meaningfully connected to classroom tasks, students not only develop habits of independent learning but also become more confident in applying their knowledge during group discussions, role plays, or debates. This dynamic balance between self-directed learning and guided interaction demonstrates why blended learning, when critically and thoughtfully implemented, can become a powerful strategy for improving language education in the Indonesian context.

Literature Review

Blended learning mixes online and offline learning to support different learning needs. It allows teachers to deliver content in face-to-face sessions while also providing extra practice, exercises, or enrichment activities through online platforms. This approach helps students learn in flexible ways and gives them more control over their study time. In English language classes, this model is particularly useful because it allows varied skill practice in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Stanley (2013) stated that technology-based tasks can extend language learning beyond the classroom and give learners more opportunities to practice independently. In the Indonesian setting, this point is particularly relevant since exposure to English outside the classroom is often limited. Through blended learning, students can interact with English in meaningful contexts beyond their scheduled lessons, helping bridge the gap between classroom instruction and authentic language use.

This approach also benefits learners who may need different paces in learning. Graham (2013) explained that blended learning helps students study at their own pace while still having access to teacher guidance. This is especially valuable in mixed-ability classes, where some students may require more time to review concepts or complete exercises. In Indonesia, this flexibility can support students with varying levels of access, background knowledge, and learning styles. For example, learners from urban schools may already have better English foundations, while those from rural areas might require more gradual exposure to linguistic input. Teachers can then focus more attention on students who need extra support, while advanced students can move forward with digital tasks. However, the digital divide in Indonesia also highlights a challenge: not all students can benefit

equally from self-paced online resources due to issues of internet connectivity, device ownership, and digital literacy.

Blended learning also encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning. Sharma and Barrett (2007) stated that blended learning allows students to choose when and how they engage with materials, which increases their sense of ownership and motivation. In language classes, for example, students can practice pronunciation using apps or complete online grammar exercises at home, then come to class ready to apply what they learned through communication activities. This flexibility is especially useful when class time is limited or when students need additional support outside school hours. In Indonesia, where class sizes in public schools are often large and instructional time is constrained, encouraging learner autonomy through blended learning can reduce the dependency on teacher-centered methods. Yet, fostering this autonomy requires a shift in mindset, as many students are accustomed to teacher-led instruction and may need guidance in developing independent study habits.

In addition, blended learning depends heavily on the quality of learning materials. Tomlinson (2011) stated that materials used in a blended approach must be carefully designed to match students' needs and encourage interaction. Simply uploading PDFs or static files does not fully support learning. Good materials should involve the learners and help them use the target language in meaningful ways. For teachers in Indonesia, this means choosing or adapting materials that align with both curriculum standards and students' real-world experiences. Unfortunately, many available materials are designed for global learners and may not always reflect the cultural and linguistic realities of Indonesian students. As a result, teachers are required to modify or supplement materials so that they remain relevant and engaging.

Shaykina (2015) said that using free online learning materials, or Open Educational Resources (OERs), can help teachers a lot. These resources are widely available and can support classroom instruction without extra cost. However, many teachers still face difficulties in selecting and adapting these materials. Some may not be familiar with how to evaluate the quality or relevance of OERs for their students' level. Therefore, teachers need professional development to learn how to integrate OERs into their blended learning lessons effectively. In Indonesia, this issue is even more pressing because of budget constraints in many schools and the lack of consistent teacher training programs. While OERs offer promise, their impact depends on how well teachers can contextualize them for their students and ensure they are used to promote communicative competence, not just rote practice.

Besides material design and access, teachers also need technical and pedagogical skills. Stanley (2013) explained that using digital tools in the language classroom requires teachers to be confident in both managing technology and designing tasks that support communication. In Indonesia, many English teachers are still developing these skills, especially those in rural areas. Without enough support, they may only use blended learning for basic tasks such as sending assignments or announcements. This highlights a wider systemic issue: successful blended learning implementation requires institutional backing, including reliable infrastructure, ongoing teacher training, and clear pedagogical guidelines. Without these, blended learning risks being implemented superficially, failing to reach its transformative potential in the Indonesian ELT context.

In conclusion, the literature suggests that blended learning offers many advantages in ELT, especially in promoting flexibility, autonomy, and extended practice. However, it also requires careful planning, good materials, and teacher readiness. Teachers need training not only to use the technology but also to design meaningful learning experiences that connect online and offline modes. When well implemented, blended learning can be an effective strategy to support students with diverse needs and improve overall language learning outcomes. In the Indonesian context, this means addressing challenges such as unequal access to technology, limited teacher expertise, and the need for locally relevant materials. Only by tackling these issues can blended learning move from being an ideal framework in theory to a practical and sustainable approach in classrooms across Indonesia.

Discussion

Technology Integration in the Indonesian Curriculum and the Role of Blended Learning

Indonesia's 2013 curriculum (K-13) was designed to bring significant changes to the country's educational system, with a strong emphasis on technology integration and student-centered learning. The curriculum encourages teachers to create learning environments that not only transfer knowledge

but also build students' critical thinking, creativity, and independence. Blended learning naturally aligns with these objectives, as it combines classroom teaching with digital resources and independent learning activities. Through this model, students are expected to engage with materials both during and outside class hours, giving them the opportunity to apply what they learn in different contexts. In theory, this alignment provides a strong foundation for blended learning to support the goals of K-13, especially in fostering active participation and learner autonomy.

However, when these ideas are implemented in actual classrooms, the reality often looks different from what the curriculum envisions. Many Indonesian teachers still struggle to translate the broad aims of K-13 into specific classroom practices that reflect blended learning principles. The problem lies not in the absence of policy direction, but rather in the lack of clear practical guidelines on how to integrate technology meaningfully into lessons. Dewang and Kandi (2021) highlighted this gap by showing that while the curriculum encourages digital learning, it often leaves teachers on their own to interpret and design activities. This creates inconsistencies across schools, with some educators experimenting with innovative blended approaches while others revert to traditional teaching methods that only superficially include technology.

The challenges teachers face are not only about interpretation but also about balancing curriculum requirements with classroom realities. Many teachers report difficulties in designing blended learning tasks that meet both curriculum standards and students' learning needs. For example, in rural schools, students may lack reliable internet access or personal devices, which makes it hard to carry out independent online activities. In these situations, teachers often simplify blended learning into basic online communication, such as sending assignments via messaging platforms. While this technically integrates technology, it does not reflect the deeper pedagogical purpose of blended learning as envisioned in K-13. Dewang and Kandi (2021) emphasized that without practical strategies, the policy remains aspirational rather than transformative.

This is where teacher training and professional support become crucial. Stanley (2013) argued that blended learning can only reach its potential when teachers are equipped with both the technical and pedagogical skills to use digital tools effectively. In Indonesia, however, teacher preparation often focuses more on the theoretical aspects of curriculum rather than hands-on digital pedagogy. As a result, teachers may be aware of blended learning but still lack confidence in applying it to foster real interaction and collaboration among students. Many teachers restrict technology use to distributing materials or posting announcements, which limits the interactive and autonomous learning benefits that blended learning is supposed to provide. Without proper training, the gap between curriculum ideals and classroom realities continues to widen.

Moreover, the issue of resource availability further complicates the situation. While urban schools may have better infrastructure, rural schools often face barriers in terms of internet connectivity, access to devices, and availability of digital resources. This unequal access creates disparities in how blended learning is implemented across Indonesia. Teachers in well-resourced schools may experiment with interactive platforms, while those in less-equipped areas may only manage minimal technology use. Stanley (2013) pointed out that when teachers are not supported with adequate tools and resources, they cannot move beyond surface-level applications of blended learning. This shows that curriculum design alone is insufficient without a parallel commitment to providing infrastructure and professional development.

In summary, while Indonesia's 2013 curriculum creates a favorable policy environment for blended learning, the success of its implementation depends heavily on teacher readiness and systemic support. The findings of Dewang and Kandi (2021) demonstrate that the curriculum lacks practical guidance, leaving teachers to navigate blended learning approaches on their own. Similarly, Stanley (2013) highlighted that without proper training and access to resources, teachers are likely to use technology in limited ways that do not promote student interaction or independence. Therefore, to fully realize the role of blended learning within the Indonesian curriculum, policymakers must provide clearer implementation strategies, continuous professional development, and equitable access to digital resources. Only then can blended learning move beyond theory and become a transformative approach that aligns with the curriculum's vision of student-centered and technology-enhanced education.

Digital Competence and Professional Preparation of ELT Teachers in Indonesia

For blended learning to be successful, teachers must be able to use digital tools confidently and effectively. In the Indonesian ELT context, this means not only having access to platforms or applications but also mastering the pedagogical strategies that transform these tools into effective learning environments. While many teachers are able to perform basic tasks such as uploading documents, managing course schedules, or distributing assignments online, these skills represent only the surface of digital competence. What blended learning truly requires is the ability to design interactive and meaningful activities that invite students to explore, question, and collaborate both inside and outside the classroom. This higher level of digital pedagogy is still underdeveloped among many Indonesian teachers, creating a significant gap between curriculum expectations and classroom realities.

In practice, many teachers continue to depend on static forms of digital content such as PowerPoint presentations, pre-recorded lectures, or scanned worksheets uploaded to platforms. These resources often serve as one-way channels of information rather than as tools to promote student-centered engagement. The issue is not the use of these resources themselves but the lack of interactivity and feedback mechanisms embedded in them. Rachman et al. (2021) highlighted that during the pandemic, such practices became common, as teachers resorted to technology primarily as a delivery medium rather than as a dynamic environment for learning. This pattern reveals that although the infrastructure for digital teaching may be present, the deeper pedagogical integration of technology has not yet been fully realized in many classrooms.

This overreliance on content delivery rather than interaction reflects a broader issue of professional preparation. Many ELT teachers in Indonesia have not been given systematic training in designing digital tasks that can facilitate collaboration, problem-solving, and communicative practice. Instead, digital resources are often used as substitutes for traditional materials, leaving students with limited opportunities for critical engagement. The result is that blended learning becomes more about convenience and accessibility than about transforming teaching and learning processes. This undermines the potential of blended approaches to enhance English language learning, where opportunities for authentic communication and active participation are essential.

Designing effective digital activities requires not only familiarity with technological tools but also an awareness of how these tools align with pedagogical goals. Tomlinson (2011) emphasized that well-constructed learning materials in blended settings should go beyond content delivery and aim to create opportunities for meaningful communication, rich input, and active learner involvement. For ELT teachers in Indonesia, this means rethinking how digital platforms can be used not just for sharing texts but for stimulating discussion, peer feedback, and language production. Without this shift in perspective, digital tools risk being reduced to little more than repositories of information, missing their potential to transform English classrooms into spaces of collaboration and interaction.

Furthermore, teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development initiatives often fall short in equipping teachers with the digital pedagogical skills needed for blended learning. Training workshops, when available, frequently emphasize technical skills such as navigating platforms or using specific applications but rarely address how to design tasks that integrate language learning objectives with technology use. This imbalance contributes to teachers' limited ability to exploit digital tools for communicative or interactive purposes. As a result, even when teachers adopt blended learning, the approach may not significantly differ from traditional methods in terms of promoting student engagement and active learning.

Ultimately, the success of blended learning in Indonesian ELT classrooms depends on how well teachers are supported in bridging the gap between technology use and pedagogy. Professional preparation should move beyond surface-level competence and focus on cultivating the skills required to design and implement digital tasks that align with the principles of communicative language teaching. Without such preparation, teachers may continue to perceive blended learning as a technical challenge rather than as an opportunity to enrich the learning experience. Addressing this issue is essential for ensuring that blended learning can fulfill its promise of fostering creativity, independence, and active participation in the Indonesian educational context.

Mismatch Between Curriculum Goals and National Assessment Practices

One of the central challenges in the implementation of blended learning in Indonesia is the misalignment between the goals of the national curriculum and the nature of national assessments. The curriculum emphasizes innovation, creativity, and the cultivation of independent learners, encouraging students to explore knowledge beyond memorization and engage in collaborative and project-based learning. In theory, blended learning should align seamlessly with these goals because it promotes flexible, student-centered approaches and integrates both online and face-to-face elements. However, in practice, teachers are confronted with a testing system that still prioritizes factual recall and knowledge reproduction over higher-order skills. This disconnect creates a paradox where teachers are expected to nurture creativity but ultimately judged by students' performance on standardized exams.

As a consequence of this tension, teachers often feel trapped between two opposing demands. On the one hand, the curriculum pushes them to innovate through blended learning and other active learning methodologies. On the other hand, high-stakes examinations demand that students master a fixed body of content that can be tested in written form. This dual expectation frequently results in teachers reverting to traditional, teacher-centered methods that emphasize drilling, rote memorization, and repetitive practice rather than critical thinking or authentic communication. Sulistyono (2009) observed that the pressure to achieve high test scores significantly discourages teachers from experimenting with progressive approaches, as they fear such methods may compromise students' exam performance and, by extension, their own professional credibility.

This situation contributes to a cycle of instructional conservatism in Indonesian classrooms. Even when teachers are open to adopting blended learning, they often adapt it in superficial ways that do not fully exploit its potential for deeper learning. For example, teachers may use online platforms merely to upload notes or practice questions, mirroring the structure of traditional exams rather than promoting meaningful engagement or problem-solving activities. This practice highlights the tension between curriculum ideals and assessment realities. As Dewang and Kandi (2021) pointed out, teachers are encouraged to innovate and incorporate technology into their lessons, but the lack of alignment with evaluation standards leaves them in a contradictory position. Innovation becomes risky when student outcomes are measured by outdated metrics.

The persistence of assessment practices that prioritize rote learning also has a profound impact on student motivation and engagement. When students perceive that examinations reward memorization rather than creativity or critical thinking, they are less inclined to value the innovative learning experiences offered through blended approaches. Teachers, in turn, may receive pushback from students and parents who prioritize exam preparation over exploratory learning. This dynamic further reinforces traditional approaches, limiting the transformative potential of blended learning in Indonesia. Thus, while the curriculum promotes learner autonomy and active engagement, assessment practices indirectly undermine these values by conditioning both teachers and students to view exam scores as the ultimate indicator of success.

For blended learning to thrive, there must be coherence between teaching goals, classroom practices, and assessment systems. Sharma and Barrett (2007) stressed that blended learning can only be effective when learning activities, teaching objectives, and evaluation methods are harmonized. In the Indonesian context, this harmony is currently lacking, as assessment practices remain rooted in traditional models that conflict with the more progressive goals outlined in the curriculum. Without reform in the assessment system, blended learning risks being reduced to a surface-level integration of technology, rather than serving as a transformative pedagogical approach.

In light of these challenges, the mismatch between curriculum goals and national assessments should be considered a systemic issue rather than an individual teacher problem. Teachers may be willing to adopt innovative methods, but their professional performance is tied to exam outcomes, creating a structural barrier to meaningful change. Critical examination of this contradiction reveals that sustainable improvement requires alignment at the policy level, where curriculum innovation must be supported by equally progressive assessment frameworks. Unless national examinations are redesigned to measure creativity, problem-solving, and communication skills, the adoption of blended learning in Indonesia will remain constrained, with teachers forced to choose compliance with assessment demands over adherence to curriculum ideals.

Inequality in Access to Digital Tools and Internet Infrastructure

Indonesia has a large digital divide, with urban schools generally having better access to internet and devices than rural ones. This makes it difficult to apply blended learning fairly across different regions. In some areas, students can participate in real-time video classes, while in others, even downloading a PDF is a challenge.

Students in low-resource settings often share devices with family members or have limited internet data. Teachers in these areas need to find alternative ways to ensure learning continues. Noviarini (2024) found that limited access to stable internet prevented many students from joining synchronous sessions, which disrupted the flow of blended instruction.

To address this, some teachers rely on offline materials. Shaykina (2015) suggested using downloadable resources like videos and documents that students can access without needing constant internet. However, Stanley (2013) pointed out that this solution also requires school support in terms of infrastructure, such as access to printers or offline media devices.

Cultural Attitudes and Student Participation in Blended Learning Environments

Student participation in blended learning is also influenced by cultural norms. In many Indonesian classrooms, students are used to a teacher-centered approach where they are expected to listen quietly and follow instructions. This tradition makes it hard for students to adapt to learning environments that require initiative and independent work.

When online learning is introduced, students often hesitate to ask questions or engage in discussions without direct prompts from the teacher. Marcellino (2008) observed that such cultural habits lead to limited interaction and low learner autonomy, both of which are essential for successful blended learning.

To bridge this gap, teachers can start by combining familiar learning styles with digital tools. For instance, vocabulary memorization exercises—common in traditional classrooms—can be transformed into interactive quizzes using platforms like Kahoot or Quizizz. Sharma and Barrett (2007) explained that blending familiar methods with technology helps students adjust more easily to new learning formats

Conclusion

Blended learning has become an increasingly relevant approach in English Language Teaching (ELT), offering a combination of online flexibility and in-person interaction. In the Indonesian context, it aligns with national curriculum goals that promote student-centered learning and digital integration. However, its implementation has shown uneven results, mostly due to lack of readiness among teachers, limited infrastructure, and confusion caused by mismatched assessment systems.

This review has identified several key challenges faced by Indonesian ELT teachers. Many of them struggle with digital competence, inadequate professional development, and insufficient support in designing interactive and meaningful blended learning lessons. Additionally, disparities in internet access and cultural habits of teacher-centered instruction further complicate the successful adoption of blended learning, especially in rural or under-resourced areas.

To move forward, stakeholders in education must address these issues by investing in consistent teacher training, providing infrastructure support, and aligning assessment systems with curriculum goals. Teachers also need practical examples and guidance on how to integrate technology effectively into their lessons. With the right support and planning, blended learning can offer meaningful improvements in ELT, helping students become more independent, engaged, and competent in using English in real-life contexts.

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