Exploring Blended Learning Based-Model of English Learning to enhance Students' Communicative Competence

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Abstract: This study aims to describe how blended learning is implemented and how English communicative competence is improved for university students. The research was conducted at Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic University, Jepara Indonesia. This is descriptive qualitative research with a case study approach. The subjects of research are English instructors and university students. The informants are 20 English language instructors and 10 students. The data were collected by the technique of interview, questionnaire, and observation. The data were analyzed through data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and concluding. Blended learning based-model at the University is implemented through conversation and dialogue in pairs or groups, teacher-student interaction, literature usage, classroom simulation, and role-play, computer-assisted classroom activities, reading English news and watching English TVs, and participating in social media through e-mail, WhatsApp and Facebook and so on. communicative competence attained along with the activities of blended learning implementation are grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. This study recommends employing the activities of the communicative language teaching approach and supporting modern technologies to achieve better English communicative competence.

Keywords: blended-learning, communicative, competence

1. INTRODUCTION

Blended learning (henceforth, BL) is a format rapidly spreading in education worldwide. The idea of it looks attractive as it enables the preservation of traditional forms of learning, shaped by centuries of pedagogical experience and enjoying a lot of human loyalty, despite the temptation of handing over many educational functions to new technologies (Saliba et al., 2013). BL is a learning formula where traditional classroom education is blended with e-learning. It also employs tools like computer-based or network-based lessons in the classroom and sessions of training, which are possibly equipped with internet connection in real classrooms (Okaz, 2015). Besides, BL is a solution that combines some different delivery methods like collaboration software, training courses on the internet, and applies knowledge management courses. As it is understood, the blend could be between any type of educational technology and traditional one led by teachers (Okaz, 2015).

Driscoll (2002) defines BL as the intermixing of any instructional forms to achieve an educational goal. Whereas, Garrison and Kanuka (2004) explain that to blend means to integrate the classroom teaching with online experiences. BL is an effective hybrid of

different learning techniques, technologies, and delivery modes to supply students' needs (Heinze & Procter, 2004; Bateman, 1981; Graham, 2006).

BL is a learning system that includes more than one method and the cost and combines different delivery media to promote meaningful and motivating learning which is used to optimize the learning outcome. The tools such as live chats, instant messaging, social networking, blog and forums, applications, and webinars can be utilized for incorporating online opportunities in their classes (Singh, 2003). BL refers to a strategic and systematic approach to combining times and modes of learning, integrating the best aspects of face-to-face and online interactions for each discipline, using appropriate ICTs (Saliba et al., 2013).

Hubackova et al. (2011) define BL as a combination of different training "media" (technologies, activities, and types of events) to create an optimum training program for a specific audience. BL enables to use of many different forms and methods in foreign language teaching. On-line courses leave room for any inclusion of many listening texts and video files. Blended instruction combines online and face-to-face activities to offer a more effective education (Mihaela & Stoicescu, 2011). BL is developed around the power of face-to-face instruction and e-learning and efforts at synchronizing the two techniques to maximize the benefits of the two native educational models (Thorne, 2003).

To sum up, BL has the purpose of getting "the best" learning by combining the various advantages of each component in which online methods can provide material online without limitation of space and time so that maximum learning can be achieved, whereas conventional methods make it possible to conduct interactive learning.

The term 'communicative competence' was firstly used by Dell Hymes in 1966 in his lecture delivered in a conference on '*Developing the Language of the Disadvantaged Children'*, then it was published as a paper entitled *'On Communicative Competence'* in 1972 and republished in 2001. Hymes (1972) points out that communicative competence doesn't only represent grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic competence. He has stated that "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" Hymes defined communicative competence as "the tacit knowledge" of the language and "the ability to use it for the communication" (Ahmed, 2018). For Chomsky (1985) competence is "the ideal speaker-listener knowledge of his language." He argued that the focus of the linguistic theory is "to characterize the abstract abilities of the speaker-listener, which enable him to produce the grammatically correct sentences.

Canale & Swain (1980) introduced the components of communicative competence in (1) grammatical competence, including knowledge of lexical items, rules of morphology, syntax, grammar, and phonology; (2) Sociolinguistic competence, made up of sociocultural rules of language use and knowledge, is very important in interpreting and producing utterances in a social context, and is essential for producing and understanding utterances that are appropriate to the context in which language is used; (3) Strategic competence, made up of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication and broken down due to insufficient linguistic or sociolinguistic competence; and (4) Discourse competence, added by Canale (1983) for representing the ability to combine language structures and language functions into a coherent and cohesive text.

Light (1997) states that communicative competence must attain four fundamental objectives: expressing wants and needs, developing social closeness, exchanging information, and fulfilling social etiquette routines. Remache (2016b) explains that communicative competence is a further continuation of linguistic competence. It includes, in addition to the

knowledge of language structures, the ability to use these in instances of social interaction appropriately in concrete situations. Language has always functioned and will always continue to function as a means of communication; a means of establishing and maintaining contact, expressing oneself (attitudes, ideas, feelings) in different social situations.

Concerning communicative competence, Ahmed (2018) states that it has become the main aim for second and foreign language learning with the later trends in language teaching approaches and methodology and the rise of CLT in the 1970s. Such competence should be reflected in language syllabi and teachers' training, teaching and learning methodologies, and so on. Communicative competence acts as owning having the ability that allows the person to communicate to fulfill communicative needs. It may imply competence in oral, written, or even nonverbal. It is a special term that refers to possessing the knowledge of the language as well as the skill to use the language in real-life situations for fulfilling communicative needs. Whenever the learner acquires the skills of the language and manages to use them effectively and appropriately according to the context in which the learner is involved, we can say that the learner achieves the required level of communicative competence (Akmajian et al., 2001; Ahmed, 2018). The term competence used by Chomsky (1983) equals to the grammatical or linguistic competence, while Hymes' (1983) model represents only one part of the communicative competence.

As literature reviews, some researchers have conducted research on blended learning in language teaching. The basic concept of BL has been exposed by Dangwal (2017), Nazarenko (2015), Sharma (2010), Okaz (2015); and Istiningsih (2015). Those studies discuss what blended learning is, its benefits and obstacles, and finally provide some hands-on experience and classroom activities to help instructors integrate BL in higher education. BL related to language learning has been explored by Banditvilai (2016), Hubackova et al. (2011), Tosun (2015), Bañados et al. (2006), Felix (2004), and Listiana & Jaharadak (2019). The researchers focus on the facilitation of the BL model in the language study to the student like what to prepare on-line courses of professional English, courses of area studies of English speaking countries, a course for translators, written business English course and others. The study is based on tutors' and students' needs, students' knowledge, on teachers' long-term experience, and of course on the positive attitude of ICT students (and not only of them) to modern technologies. Whereas, communicative competence has been examined by Remache (2016a); Ahmed (2018), Poedjiastutie et al. (2019), and Sutjiati et al. (2018). They explore the term communicative competence in a foreign language. Communication-based activities help the classroom situation more interactive and provide as many opportunities for exposure to English as possible.

This study aims to describe how blended learning is implemented and how English communicative competence is improved for University students at Jepara Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic University (UNISNU) Indonesia in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. It accommodates Ahmed's (2018) and Remache's (2016) recommendation that the researcher ought to employ the communicative language teaching approach and its activities together with modern technologies as means to attain better communicative competence in English as a foreign language. We can raise a claim that the implementation of BL-based-model at the university positively enhances the students' communicative competence.

2. METHODS

This research is a descriptive qualitative with a case-study approach. The research was conducted at UNISNU Jepara Indonesia on learning outcomes of English course class in which e-learning strategies are used in parallel with traditional classroom language and e-

learning teaching methods. The subjects of research are English instructors and university students. The informants are 20 English language instructors and 10 university students. The data are in the form of notes, online data, audio (recorded voice), and audiovisual. The researcher uses instruments such as interview guides implying a list of guide questions, questionnaire forms, observation sheets, and a tract record of academic information system design by the Information Technology Division of the University.

Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, and observation (Yin, 2016). The interview was conducted with some informants such as the English language instructors, the chief of ICT division, and the students to know how BL-learning-based-English learning was implemented at the university. The observation was conducted by examining and investigating all conditions and activities related to some activities along with the implementation of BL-based-model to enhance students' English communicative competence (Cotton et al., 2010). In the context of pedagogic research, observational methods might be used in situations like participant observation of a lecturer's own teaching and interaction (using video or audio recordings of teaching sessions). The observation process was noted in filed notes and documented in the form of photographs to be utilized to help the reflection process (Waxman et al., 2004; Cotton et al., 2010). The collected data were analyzed by the inductive analysis technique and were executed through four steps, data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 2012).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Referred to the above research objectives, the results of the study are elaborated into BL implementation and communicative competence attainment.

3.1 *Implementation of Blended Learning in English Language Teaching*

In BL electronic learning function of the internet-based learning activities in the classroom (classroom instruction) is a compliment. It is said to function as a compliment because electronic learning material is programmed to complement the learning material that students receive in the classroom. As a compliment, it means that electronic learning material is programmed to become material reinforcement (enrichment) or remedial for students in following conventional learning activities. Related to the above challenge of the effectiveness and efficiency of the learning process, a trend of the win-win solution is BL.

Electronic learning materials regarded as enrichment, if the learners can quickly master/understand the subject matter presented teacher face to face (fast learners) are allowed to access the electronic learning material that was specifically developed for them. The goal is to strengthen further the level of mastery of students on the subject matter presented by the instructor in the classroom. Told as a remedial program, the learners who have difficulty in understanding the subject matter presented by the teacher face-to-face in the classroom (slow learners) are allowed to take advantage of electronic learning material that was specifically designed for them. The goal is for students are more easily understand the subject matter presented by instructors in the classroom.

BL is the perfect solution to improve learning because one thing that should be emphasized and understood is that e-learning cannot completely replace conventional learning activities in the classroom. E-Learning can be a partner or complementary with conventional learning in the classroom. E-learning is even a great complement to classroom learning models or as a powerful tool for enrichment programs. This type of learning activity still requires adequate interaction to maintain its quality even though it is known that independent learning is a basic thrust of electronic learning activities.

The implementation of BL comes into the right exit on various criticisms shortage of e-learning which says that in addition to the service area of activities, e-learning is limited (according to the availability of infrastructure). The frequency of direct contacts among fellow learners and learners with the speakers or instructor is very minimal, as well as the opportunities for students who are limited to socializing.

The incorporation of the various advantages of internet-based learning (e-learning online), multimedia-based (e-learning offline), and the use of mobile technology (mobile learning) with face-to-face learning are ultimately expected to increase the creativity of learners. Creativity is very important. Therefore, the mission of educational institutions is to educate generations of people to become creative and innovative human beings. Subsequently, the next section of the paper describes some activities of implementation of BL-based-model in the field of teaching English as a foreign language at UNISNU Jepara Indonesia.

The students of all faculties at the university provide English subject as a compulsory foreign language for the whole time of their studies. The students of all faculties must take an English course as their university course, offered every semester. The English test as a foreign language (TOEFL) and Test of English for International Communication must be taken by the students as requirements for taking a college certificate. The specific emphasis is delivered to foreign language teaching. To provide the language course to the university students, the management has prepared Academic Information System (SIAKAD), University Language Center, e-learning English courses, e-learning of English speaking countries, written business English course, and others. These courses are based on instructors' and students' needs, students' knowledge, instructors' experience, and courses on the positive attitude to modern technologies.
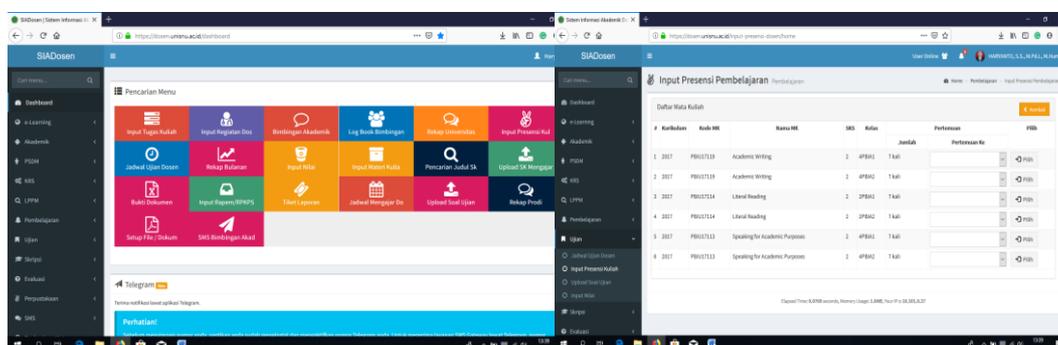

Figure1: Academic Information System (SIAKAD) online course

The above figure 1 is the dashboard model of searching menu comprising uploading questions of midterm and final test, score uploading icon, teachers schedule of the week, syllabus and course uploading, students' score uploading, academic guide, instructor's test schedule, documents uploading, documents setup, input of lectures' activity, course material input, students' presence input, and course assignment input.

The implementation of BLat UNISNU covers the following activities:

3.1.1   *Conversation and dialogue in pairs or groups*

Teachers should understand that the classroom is the only place for EFL learners to practice their English and to get exposure to it. As students usually build their abilities for communication in their native language through their exposure to their native language surrounding them, a foreign language learner doesn't have such opportunities for exposing oneself to the target language in a foreign language context except for classroom hours. So

teachers should encourage students to converse in pairs and groups. These activities proved to be of high value in the cultivation of students' communicative competence as they provide students with more opportunities for exposure and help them in building their confidence in their language and releasing language anxiety. Building up self-confidence and releasing language anxiety will facilitate language acquisition as these two factors are considered to be the main hindrances of language acquisition.

Pair and group work activities encourage students to practice their language and provide opportunities for exposure and use. Such activities are effective in developing various aspects of communicative competence as using language in these activities guarantees the development of language macro and micro-skills and competencies.

3.1.2 Teacher-student interaction

EFL teacher should play the role of a facilitator in his classroom to help language learning to take place. He should create a democratic and enthusiastic atmosphere and interact with his students. Researcher's observations, as well as other studies, have shown that teachers who encourage more interaction in their classroom achieve good results and produce competent speakers. While teachers who spend their time lecturing their students while students passively listening and take notes often fail to cultivate the communicative competence of the students and produce students who are incompetent users of English. So teachers should interact with every student in his classroom and create an atmosphere that motivates students to interact with him.

3.1.3 Using Literature

Literature, whatever the genre like drama, short stories, and novels, is considered to be useful in developing EFL students' communicative competence as it provides students with authentic language inputs as well as equip them with English culture. If movies acted by Native English actors are shown to EFL students, it will help them to understand English pronunciation, manners of interaction, and cultural aspects. Such literary texts serve in developing linguistic competence by offering students a repository of vocabulary and grammatical rules. It also helps the learners to understand English culture and how to use language by the contexts. Storytelling can be used in the classroom as an activity for training students on how to communicate. Teachers here ask their students to read stories, and then to narrate them to their classmates. By doing this, learners will develop their linguistics competence as well as their communication skills.

In the context of the university, the researcher believes that literary texts used in English for education faculty are not sufficient to enhance students' communicative competence for two reasons. The first is that only very few texts are selected to be taught. The second reason is that such selected texts are from old literature that learners feel frustrated to deal with due to their ancient language that is mostly out of date in today's world. Those two reasons lead most students to read only summaries of the literary texts to pass the midterm and final examinations instead of dealing with original texts that are supposed to enrich them with natural inputs and cultural aspects for language acquisition.

3.1.4 Simulation and Role-play Activities

Simulation and role-play activities are so effective for promoting students' communicative competence. The most important condition here is that students should consider themselves as real as possible. Such activities proved to be effective in promoting communicative competence and making the classroom more interesting and interactive. The role of simulation and game activities on communicative competence acquisition of a foreign language revealed that such activities are more effective than formal instruction in enhancing

communicative competence.

Role-play activities are also very important in enhancing students' communicative competence. In these activities, EFL learners are asked to perform some scenes from a play or to create some dramatic work to act. The role-play is an approach for developing students' communicative competence. Their studies revealed that role-play is an effective approach for developing communicative competence and cultural aspects. They added that these activities provide students with opportunities to express themselves, build up their self-confidence to use the language they have learned, and enhanced their communication skills.

3.1.5 Computer-Assisted Classroom Activities

Teachers should benefit from computer and modern technology in English language teaching. Today, there are so many English programs, recordings, videos that help students to learn English and develop their communicative competence. If the teacher employs such technology in his teaching, it will be very effective in enhancing EFL learners' competence and achieving language acquisition. Using oral computer activities in the classroom provide students with opportunities for exposure to native English speakers that learners cannot get in their environment.

The use of computer-assisted classroom discussion in facilitating the acquisition of interactive competence of the first-year foreign language German learners in written discourse. His study revealed that students feel freer in suggesting topics, interacting, and asking questions than in the formal instruction as the role of the instructor is decentralized here. The study can be transferred, according to Chun, to students' spoken competence as well.

3.1.6 Reading English news and watching English TVs

Another way to involve students in real language situations that provide them native language experience inside and outside the classroom in a foreign language context is motivating them to watch English news, films, online lessons on TVs and to read English newspaper and website news. The activities will help a lot in developing learners' communicative competence as it will expose them to various types of texts and vocabulary and keep them in touch with English outside the class as well. Such a type of free-choice learning activity is so effective in achieving language acquisition.

3.1.7 Investing in social media like e-mail, what's up, and Facebook

Social media tools are so important in developing communicative competence as they provide learners opportunities to use language and learn from each other in free group-discussions. Students may feel shy to speak in face to face discussion, but it is easier for them to share voice records or a piece of writing via social media devices. It provides them opportunities to learn from their mistakes through their discussions as being far from their colleagues reduce their stress in making mistakes and losing face. Such activities increase the linguistic competence of students as well as the other competencies like Ted-talk, Ed-ex, youtube, LibriVox, tab-tale, and so on. These tools help students to befriend English people and to get opportunities for natural exposure to native English speakers.

3.2 Communicative Competence Attainment

Developing communicative competence in English as a foreign language at the UNISNU Jepara Indonesia in which English is taught as a foreign language is a goal that the students should achieve and struggle for, like in many other Universities. Achieving such an aim depends on many factors related to instructors, syllabi, teaching situation, environment, and learners themselves as well. There are many learning strategies or activities that are usually

selected for enhancing language learning. These activities that enhance language learning are usually communication-based activities and task-based activities. These activities usually play a big role in developing communicative competence and enabling communication skills in comparison to those strategies of imitations, memorization, and repetition drills that mainly concern about language and its structures rather than the use of that language.

The activities on implementation of BL at the UNISNU enhance the communicative competence and are similar to what mentioned by Canale and Swain model (1980) and Canale's (1983) model as follows:

a.   Grammatical competence is attained through investing in social media like e-mail, what's up, and Facebook, as well as reading literature. The researcher believes that the knowledge of grammatical and sociolinguistic rules is useless if the students do not have the skills to use such knowledge for communication.

b.   Sociolinguistic competence is attained through the activities on conversation, dialogue in pairs or groups, simulation and role-play activities, and instructor-student interaction.

c.   Strategic competence is attained through investing in social media like e-mail, what's up, and Facebook, as well as Computer-Assisted Classroom Activities.

d.   Discourse competence is attained by using literature and reading English news and watching English TV.

The language macro skills refer to the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Those skills stand at the heart of communicative competence and form a major part of it. Some students, for instance, may know how to apply grammatical rules in their writing and at the same time. Due to their reading socio-cultural rules or their awareness of such rules for their mother tongue similarity, the students may know how to use social and cultural rules according to the context. However, the students find themselves unable to express ideas fluently unless they have speaking skill.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion can be drawn based on the above findings and analysis. BL enables us to use many different forms and methods in foreign language teaching. BL used in a foreign language teaching is an example of a very progressive and useful way. The students like online courses very much so the possibility to choose a place and time for study is appreciated very highly. The implementation of BL-based-model in teaching English as a foreign language by the instructors at UNISNU positively enhances the students' communicative competence. Some activities along with the implementation deal with conversation and dialogue in pairs or groups, teacher-student interaction, literature usage, classroom simulation, and role-play, computer-assisted classroom activities, reading English news and watching English TVs, and participating in social media through e-mail, what's app and Facebook and so on. In short, the implementation of BL based-model of teaching English is beneficial to enhance students' English communicative competence. Communicative competences attained along with the activities of BL implementation are grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. This study recommends employing the activities of the communicative language teaching approach and supporting modern technologies to achieve better English communicative competence. This study recommends employing the activities of the communicative language teaching approach and supporting modern technologies to achieve better English communicative competence.

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