

Blended Learning Method in Enhancing Students' Critical Thinking Skills: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to determine the challenges and opportunities of the blended learning method in improving students' critical thinking skills at Junior High Schools in South Sulawesi. This type of research is a case study research with a qualitative approach. This research was conducted in 2022 at Senior High School in South Sulawesi in English subjects with two principals, 2 English teachers, and 45 students as respondents. Data collection techniques using observation to see the condition of this school, both the facilities and the infrastructure, interviews for students and teachers to get information and data about blended learning, and documentation is students' scores from some subjects. The result of this study is the blended learning method can improve students' critical thinking skills. The conclusion is that teachers must be able to develop innovative and creative teaching materials.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Current technological developments have an impact on various aspects, such as the progress of national economic growth and knowledge that causes changes that are very fast and difficult to predict in all aspects of life, including the world of education. Changes that take place in education provide challenges and opportunities if they can be used properly and have the ability to master, but it can also be a problem for those who are unable to cope with these changes. Changes in education and learning should be carried out thoroughly, both formal and non-formal.

Universities today have to compete hard to turn out high-quality graduates who can get jobs that are in demand in today's competitive job market. Careful planning is a must if you want to improve the quality of education and get high-quality results (Budiarti et al., 2017). Students at all levels should learn the skills and knowledge they need to do well in the modern economy. One example of a trend with far-reaching effects on the education and training system is the growth of information and communication technologies. However, increasingly sophisticated technology provides challenges and opportunities for educational institutions to be able to apply technology-based learning media so that learning activities can be carried out anywhere and anytime without being constrained by distance, time, number,

capacity, speed, and face-to-face. However, in reality, there are still many teachers who do not take advantage of technology-based learning media.

In Permendikbud 2020, learning is a process of student interaction with lecturers and learning resources in a particular learning environment. With the current government policy to implement online learning, lecturers need to innovate using an effective, interactive, collaborative, and student-centred learning strategy, method, or model that can be used both during this pandemic and after to be able to build students' critical thinking skills (Marito and Riani, 2022). Teachers can carry out learning that combines conventional learning with online or ordinary learning, known as blended learning. Through blended learning, teachers can share and store material so that it can be accessed anywhere. This creates opportunities for teachers and students to apply various information and communication technology tools and applications.

The teacher can design strategies and teaching materials to help students improve their critical thinking skills in learning English. Teachers can take advantage of these learning methods to help students achieve critical thinking skills. In line with the results of research by Marito and Riani (2022), students can improve their skills and develop critical thinking skills in solving problems through blended learning. The ability to think critically requires analyzing and collecting information that is needed for every decision, formulating concepts, reasoning, and problem-solving. This can affect the work environment, such as being easy to solve problems, knowing one's abilities, being open-minded, and being able to communicate well. Therefore, it is important to know how to improve critical thinking skills.

The Blended Learning learning model has a composition of 30% face-to-face and 70% for displaying material online (Kenney & Newcombe, 2011). The initial concept of the Blended Learning learning model was first developed in the 1960s, until the late 1990s, and the term appeared in a press release in 1999 when the Center for Interactive Learning changed its name to EPIC Learning which is an education business in Atlanta that operates 220 online skinny uses mixed methods in its course activities (Marito and Riani, 2022)

The network is a problem for students to support the learning process, such as downloading learning materials shared by the teacher, which has hampered the implementation of blended learning in junior high schools in Pinrang. This is in addition to the school facilities and students' facilities, the financial backgrounds of the students, and the lack of good signal availability in various regions. However, pupils may not be interested in the current teaching materials offered by the teacher via the online platform. Students that engage in blended learning develop the capacity to think analytically and logically (critical thinking). Independently, logically, sensibly, and logically, critical thinking can also be understood as a method of analysis, reconstruction, and analysis. The essence of critical thinking is determining what to believe or do based on careful reflection and analysis (Hendriana, and Soemarmo, 2014). The ability to perceive difficulties is a prerequisite for critical thinking, which is the process of examining and evaluating knowledge and information (Halil Ibrahim, 2009).

Characteristics that must exist in a person to think critically are curiosity, creativity, perseverance, and objectivity. Critical thinking has nothing to do with denial. On the other hand, critical thinking can handle problems by trying to find relevant information, asking meaningful questions, considering alternative views, using logic and reason, avoiding assumptions, and considering all opportunities. There are twelve critical thinking indicators which are grouped into five thinking skills, namely (1) Providing simple explanations (2) Building basic skills; (3) drawing conclusions; (4) Making further explanations; (5) Set strategies and tactics (Prabawati, 2011).

Because of the importance of developing students' critical thinking skills in light of both present and future needs (Valiathan, 2022), this study intends to investigate the pros and cons of employing a blended learning strategy at a junior high school in South Sulawesi. Learning delivered through many channels (such as a web-based course, collaboration software, and a knowledge management system) is referred to as "blended learning." Blended learning can also refer to the process of merging different learning environments, such as classroom study and work experience.

2. METHODS

This type of research is a case study research with a qualitative approach. This research is an effort to solve problems by describing the current state of the object of research based on the facts that appear in the field (Nasution, 2007). This research was conducted in 2022 at SMP Negeri 1 and SMP Negeri 3 Pinrang, South Sulawesi, in English subjects with six principals, six English teachers, and 140 students from six schools, but the researcher took two schools consisting of 45 students as respondents. Data collection techniques using observation, interviews, and documentation. In qualitative research, interviews are used, namely independent, controlled interviews, which means that interviews are conducted freely so that extensive and in-depth data are obtained but still focus on the research problem being studied (Bachtiar, 2021). In contrast, observation is used to observe the subject, object, or activity concerned at the focus of research to obtain information or data that happened. Furthermore, documentation can be in the form of documents either from pictures, rules, or policies and texts related to blended learning at SMP Negeri1 Patampanua Pinrang and secondary data sources from articles to support existing problems. To determine the validity of the data using source triangulation. The data analysis technique uses data reduction, data presentation, and concluding with verification.

Table 1. Data of Respondents

No	Schools	Principals	English Teacher	Students
1	SMP 1	1	1	22
2	SMP 2	1	1	25
3	SMP 3	1	1	23
4	SMP 4	1	1	24
5	SMP 5	1	1	23
6	SMP 6	1	1	23
Total				140

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Teacher's Role in Improving Critical Thinking Skills

Educational institutions try to plan well so that they can give good education and produce good graduates. Students at all levels must learn skills to compete in life and go on to a higher level or find work. One thing that is changing in the world of education and learning is how information and communication technology is improving. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 22 of 2016 concerning "Standards of Primary and Secondary Education Processes" stipulates that the learning process in educational units must be carried out interactively, inspiring, fun, challenging, motivating students to actively participate in the teaching and learning process as well as providing ample opportunities for initiatives, creativity, critical attitude, and independence in accordance with students' talents, interests, and physical and psychological development.

Thus the learning process no longer relies on memorizing and retransmitting the information that has been obtained (drilling) but on processing and transforming the knowledge and experience that has been owned so that, in the end, you can think critically and creatively to solve a problem in a certain situation (Rozimela and Anwar, 2022). In addition, to support the 2013 curriculum perspective, the teacher's role shifts from being the main source to being one of the learning resources from informants to trigger children to find out. Teachers must be one step ahead of students in mastering skills in communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity and innovation (Leen, Hong, 2014: 254). According to Wagner (2008) in Ramdhani, Usodo, and Subanti (2017: 2245) explaining skills for students require seven skills to survive, namely a) critical thinking and problem solving, b) collaboration and leadership, c) agility and adaptability, d) initiative and entrepreneurship, e) effective oral and written communication, f) accessing and analyzing information, g) curiosity and imagination.

Based on interviews with teachers at SMP Negeri 1 and SMP 3 Pinrang, teachers must be able to develop innovative and creative teaching materials that can help students to encourage curiosity in learning the material presented in Google Classroom and encourage students to solve existing problems. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for teachers. Teachers can develop skills in making teaching materials and updating technology. While based on the interview with the students, blended learning can improve the students' creativity and motivation in the learning process even though students have some problems, such as limited internet access. So the use of the blended learning method provides challenges and opportunities for teachers and students in the use of the method. Teachers and students must be able to develop skills in using google classroom, google meet, zoom, and other applications.

The categories of skills needed today are a) Ways of thinking that include creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and learning to learn (metacognition), b) Working methods related to communication and teamwork, c) Tools for work in the form of general knowledge, information and communication technology (ICT) and literacy, d) Living in a world that includes state life, life, and career, personal and social responsibilities, including cultural awareness and competence (Uno, 2011: 70 -74).

In dealing with these unpredictable changes, student skills are needed. The ability to receive material that students have is different from each other because this ability is determined by the thinking ability of each student (Budiarti, et al., 2017). Critical thinking is one thing that is considered a very important ability in the learning process (Huber and Kuncel, 2015). Currently, students have difficulty developing their critical thinking skills because the learning provided by the teacher is still carried out using conventional methods or lectures (Fatmawati, et al., 2014). In addition, the learning that is carried out is more emphasized on rote memorization and only reading material (Hong, et al., 2014). et al., 2012).

3.2 Blended Learning in Improving Critical Thinking Skills

A person's critical thinking ability can be seen from how he confidently gives opinions and how he acts by giving reasons. In the world of learning, students' critical thinking skills need to be developed so that students use their thinking critically to solve a given problem (Mabrurroh&Suhandi, 2017). Learning by combining face-to-face learning and online learning can affect students' critical thinking skills. Students who are taught using blended learning techniques get more information than students who are only taught using conventional models. Students who study with blended learning techniques get additional information in the form of deepening material, learning videos, and pictures provided by the teacher. Students get the deepening material after face-to-face learning ends so that students can study independently wherever and whenever.

This is different from students who do not use blended learning techniques; students do not receive the deepening material provided by the teacher. Students only receive homework assignments and are collected at the next meeting. The class that received the blended learning treatment had a better level of critical thinking ability than using the conventional method. The results of the study prove that with the application of the Blended Learning model, students' critical thinking skills increase (Marito and Riani, 2022). So blended learning techniques can affect students' critical thinking skills (Anggraeni, Supriana, and Hidayat, 2019)

It is also supported by previous research that blended learning can affect students' critical thinking skills in physics (Ardianti et al., 2019; Ningsih et al., 2018; Zarei&Abdi, 2016). So it can be concluded that learning using blended learning techniques can improve students' critical thinking skills compared to students who only learn using conventional methods. According to Majir (2019), blended learning can motivate students to learn more openly and in two directions, students and teachers gain skills in a more disciplined time, and students and teachers are facilitated to store and open learning anytime and anywhere. So that it can improve student skills in cognitive (self-directed and face-to-face learning), affective (time discipline, respect for friends, more harmonious parent,

student, and teacher relationships), Psychomotor (able to recognize computer hardware), ability to search and find learning materials, able to solve problems independently and critically.

The implementation of blended learning in English subjects at SMP Negeri 1 and SMP Negeri 3 Pinrang was recognized by teachers and new students who routinely started during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering that this learning method was very helpful for distance learning without being required to meet face-to-face. This blended learning method combines face-to-face learning and learning based on information and communication technology such as using Google Classroom. Some of the material is delivered face-to-face and partly through google classroom. Through Google Classroom, students can independently and purposefully understand English learning materials and have discussions with each other, both with teachers and with other students. By using Google Classroom the teacher can provide instructions for studying the subject matter and is well organized.

The blended learning model can create a student-centred learning process. In the implementation process, with involvement and participation in the learning process, blended learning can increase students' sense of responsibility. In addition, the interaction in the blended learning model creates a motive for students to compete in learning (Ningsih et al., 2017). The blended learning model has a composition of 30% for face-to-face and 70% for online presentation of material (Kenney & Newcombe, 2011). Thus helping students to develop better in the learning process, according to learning styles and preferences in learning. Provide practical, realistic opportunities for teachers and students for independent, rewarding, and continuous learning.

At all levels of education, from elementary school to college, the focus is on active learning, creative learning, and learning that works. Learning how to use computers to store and find information is a very important part of education and learning. The Internet is a great way to connect students to different learning resources they may need. This means that teachers must update their knowledge and skills about planning, implementing plans, testing tools, and learning strategies. (Majir, 2019). When using the blended learning method to improve students' critical thinking skills, some challenges must be dealt with. These include self-awareness, literacy, and technology skills, self-isolation, technology that doesn't work well, network problems, and the fact that some students don't even have information technology tools. and the way people talk. But in the end, technology has become an important part of education, as shown by the fact that blended learning exists.

Blended learning can be used as an opportunity an effort to expand the reach of schools to achieve distance between students when face-to-face learning is considered less effective, such as learning during the COVID-19 pandemic so that it exceeds what it should be. Not every student can (or wants to) attend in-person at school therefore, educational institutions seek to support their needs. The absence was due to mandatory closures following the COVID-19 pandemic, travel restrictions, and personal health issues.

For example, in 2020, the implementation of learning at SMP Negeri 1 Patampanua Pinrang faced mandated closures or capacity limitations. Without blended learning in several formats, these closures and limitations will be more of a threat to implementing learning in these educational institutions. Blended learning is the ideal solution when class attendance is limited or unavailable. This model allows education to continue when otherwise would have been discontinued. So blended learning significantly influences students' critical skills, so it is hoped that teachers can use the blended learning method (Simbolon, Simanjuntak, and Peragin, 2019). Although this learning method still faces a number of challenges, all interested parties can benefit from it. It remains to be realized through collaboration to advance education and learning.

Table.2. Respondents' Statements

	Virtual Learning	Face to Face Learning
Strengths	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students can comfortable and contribute to the discussion at time and place. 2. Teaching Time is Flexible 3. Teachers' material is easy to access any time. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher can control and manage Students' activities. 2. The students can focus in the learning process. 3. The students can give feedback directly.
Weaknes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Limiting internet access 2. Financial Background 3. The teacher can not the students character 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Need high coast. 2. The students difficult to get the teacher Material. 3. Limited time to discuss the material

The data from respondents of two schools in junior high schools about blended learning both of virtual learning and face-to-face learning, have strengths and weaknesses. In this case the teachers have an important role in increasing the learning process in the class. The teachers have to listen the students opinion because they can evaluate the learning process and they have also good method for their students. In face-to-face learning teachers and students' communication is limeted time and place. But in virtual classes teachers and students' communication is easy. So that, blended learning try to overcome the weaknesses of learning process in junior high school in Pinrang. This challenge and opportunity for the teachers and students to created interesting material. By intersting material the students can think critically.

Based on the description above, student learning activities in schools must be varied, not monotonous, and use technology in a balanced way to acquire skills each student should acquire through learning at every level of education. First communication: teachers are required to be able to develop an atmosphere that can provide the widest opportunities for students each student communicates and questions various matters relating to the development of his potential. This becomes very important because educators are also leaders who must accommodate the various questions and needs of students. Teachers and students must try to respect and respect each other's opinions and views. An atmosphere of equality needs to be developed by being oriented toward encouraging students to be able to.

4. CONCLUSION

Changes in schools can be both a challenge and an opportunity if they are used well and mastered, but they can also be a problem for people who can't handle them. One thing that is changing in the world of education and learning is how information and communication technology is getting better and better. The results of this study show that the blended learning method can help students improve their critical thinking skills. Teachers must be able to come up with new and creative ways to teach students so that they are more interested in the material presented in the Google Classroom and are more likely to help solve existing problems. Some problems need to be solved, such as lack of self-awareness, lack of technological literacy and competence, issues with the network, and some people not having the tools for information and communication technology. Blended learning can also be used to reach more students when face-to-face learning is thought to be less effective.

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