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## BLENDED LEARNING INTEGRATION AT SABAH'S TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS, MALAYSIA

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### Abstract:

21<sup>st</sup> Century era marks where internet and technology become a necessity throughout every aspects of life; added with current Covid-19 pandemic situation which hinders physical contact between humans to prevent the virus keep spreading. Eventually, traditional teaching approach requires to shift towards new norm that integrates technology in all courses, including English Language Courses, as well as to adhere the Standard Health procedure. This paper enlightened the benefits and challenges when implementing Blended Learning in the classroom efficiently among ESL educators and learners. This review paper was administered through appropriate vicarious data in previous studies form conducted by various researchers in English as Second Language (ESL). The findings revealed that Blended Learning incorporation brought advantages for both ESL educators and students when this 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching strategies being incorporated in ESL classrooms. In addition, this paper may help students improve their learning achievement, as well as increase ESL educators' self-efficacy to fully employ Blended Learning that leads to their advancement of their teaching quality skills, especially during Covid-19 pandemic era.

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Keywords:**21<sup>st</sup> Century Education, Blended Learning, Covid-19, ESL, Tertiary Institutions**Introduction**

21<sup>st</sup> Century era marks where rapid advancement of internet and technology becomes necessity for every aspects of life among communities (Fatimah & Santiana, 2017). Technology not only influence transportation, agriculture, economy, but it also affects education in all level, including tertiary education (Fatimah & Santiana, 2017). Yet, the surge of Covid-19 pandemic that leads educational institutions cease face-to-face lectures and switching to virtual education magnifies the importance of technology incorporation in education, thus, a transformation in teaching and learning at 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers still make an effort to facilitate learning. Furthermore, most researchers advocate for students to take up blended or hybrid learning rather than classroom sessions. Moreover, Blended Learning has been seen as greatly beneficial, especially for students undertaking English language courses. Likewise, with the rise of technologies faced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is evident that Blended Learning may be the way to go for providing education to students. According to Dziuban et al. (2018), most students have adapted to Blended Learning hence widening the scope of learning in general. The education sector has rapidly embraced Blended Learning, and it has become the new normal. In addition, Blended Learning has dominated the primary and secondary stages of learning and the tertiary level (Hockly, 2018). Therefore, Blended Learning positively impacts the education sector by radically transforming the education system, hence improving students' learning experience. Furthermore, Blended Learning is vital because it breaks the conventional ways of teaching, and not effective for all students (Hockly, 2018). Additionally, it has been seen to be favourable to both teachers and students. For teachers, Blended Learning offers flexibility and saves time. On the other hand, students have increased their interest and kept focused for longer hence satisfactory results. However, despite the multitude benefits of Blended Learning, there are also some inherent challenges to be faced (Rasheed, 2020). This paper will enlighten the benefits and challenges when implementing Blended Learning in the classroom efficiently among ESL educators and learners. This review paper will be administered through appropriate vicarious data in previous studies form conducted by various researchers in ESL. The findings found that Blended Learning incorporation brought advantages for both ESL educators and students when this 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching strategies being incorporated in ESL classrooms. In addition, this paper may help students improve their learning achievement, as well as increase ESL educators' self-efficacy to fully employ Blended Learning that leads to their advancement of their teaching quality skills, especially during Covid-19 pandemic era.

**Blended Learning Models**

Models of Blended Learning focuses on numerous of teaching and learning. These models could supply guidance and understanding in developing teaching and learning experiences with consideration to the design, delivery, incorporation and assessment during virtual learning. Krismadinata et al. (2020) employed Khan's Octagonal Framework for Blended

Learning study. This model established for Blended Learning programs which could be integrate into all levels of education, including tertiary educations. Khan's Octagonal Framework construct into eight proportions; Pedagogical, Technological, Interface Design, Evaluation, Management, Resource Support, Ethical as well as Institutional. According to Krismadinata et al. (2020), Pedagogical could be described as elements of learning, Technological consists of technology incorporation in classroom such as projectors, laptops, internet connection, Learning Management System and others. Meanwhile, Interface Design comprises the advent of appearance in Blended Learning that adjusts each educational institutions' needs. Furthermore, Evaluation could simplify as assessment in Blended Learning program, while Management is a part in Blended Learning that compulsory to be managed as it involves numerous components in education institution. Moreover, Resource Support regarded as human resources department and others, as well as Ethical associated with principals of learning culture and attitude. On the other hand, Barlow et al. (2021) reviewed about Staker and Horn's (2012) which comprises four types of Blended Learning Model namely Rotation Model, Flex Model, Self-Blend Model and Enrich Virtual Model. Rotation model intricates rotation between learning modes within a given course or theme, at specified timeframe, at least one of which is online learning. Meanwhile, Flex Model built on flexible environment, at the same time learning content being delivered substantially online. Moreover, Self-Blend Model compelled online educational topic content, which could be dispatch into plethora of digital devices. Additionally, Enriched Virtual Model is a course in which learners' schedule are divided into necessary face-to-face learning sessions with their teacher of record, then consolidate their remaining assignments remotely.

### ***Benefits of Blended Learning at Sabah's Tertiary Institutions, Malaysia***

Blended Learning, also known as hybrid learning, is widely regarded as one of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching tactics that combines virtual educational tools with conventional place-based classroom methods; which attracts massive attention among educational organisations and contributed various research avenues throughout the years (Rasheed et al., 2019). During Covid-19 pandemic worldwide incursion, students as well as educators were encouraged to incorporate technology such as laptop, smartphone along with internet connection to recommence all subjects, including English language courses. Through Blended Learning, education system managed to abide the consequences of the pandemic, thus benefits afforded by partial face-to-face and online learning components (Plancher et al., 2020).

### ***Benefits of Blended Learning among ESL educators***

Technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century becomes prodigious when method of communication developed with various electronic communication tools, such as Google Meet, Skype, Zoom, WebEx and others (Lin & Chen, 2017). Such rise in communication technology removes barriers of time and space between educators and their students when computers as well as synchronous and asynchronous network learning were applied (Lin & Chen, 2017). This is also supported by Ahmadi (2018) whereby technology enriches more vivid, visual and authentic teaching content in English language learning, thus retrenching class time while amplifying class information. This indirectly unravel 'teacher-centred' pattern and fundamentally polishes the efficiency of English learning courses (Ahmadi, 2018). In

addition, technology capable to accommodate where educators able to stay connected, engaged and updated about their learner's learning progress from time to time, as well as able to give more explanation when students imploring questions through online platforms. Anas and Musdariah (2018) opined that technology helps support the inclusive digital society by connecting more people to an online interaction for the exchange of English language discussion between educators and students; at the same time, educators could explore online resources faster for their use in their teaching and English language discussion. Furthermore, through Blended Learning strategies, online educational platforms could help educators compensate the loss of educational learning hours as well as continuing teaching and learning via virtual platforms, at the same time assisting each other to adhere the standard health procedure during Covid-19 pandemic, and prevent the virus from keep spreading. Hu (2020) reinforced that technology extends collaborative, learning space beyond physical classroom that enables to engage on both students and teachers' flexible schedule. It is understandable that changing norm of traditional teaching approach to modern teaching strategies could be challenging for most educators; yet Blended Learning experience provide an eye opener for educators to be aware about the importance of incorporating technology as well as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Framework into their pedagogical approach for 21<sup>st</sup> Century students; hence moving towards achieving the objective of replacing traditional teaching (Hensley, 2020). When educators aware of the importance, they will be driven to improve their teaching quality more, and willing to enhance their competencies by participating professional development training programs, thus improving their self-efficacy to implement technology in their classroom setting in the long run, including during emergency situation of Covid-19 (Mahalakshmi & Radha, 2020).

### ***Benefits of Blended Learning among ESL students***

Through prior traditional teaching strategies, learners could only learn about their new topics at their language courses during lecture hours, although they may possess physical textbooks or workbooks with them, yet they do not have other options to expand more knowledge about their subjects (Tran, 2016). However, nowadays with the advancement of technologies, more learning applications and software are being developed, hence enable students to spend their time and space to access their academic from home, especially during current Covid-19 pandemic. This accessibility could translate to much greater interest in their language learning and successful outcomes (Tamah et al., 2020). Mukhtar et al. (2020) also supple that technology had encouraged student-centredness during lockdown through online learning situation; hence transforming into self-directed learners and enable them to asynchronously comprehend at any time in a day. Furthermore, through the implementation of Blended Learning, learners are able to set their own pace where they unable to achieve this with conventional teaching strategies. This is because students have to set their own pace with lecture hours, thus making them register about the subject slower in traditional classroom. Tawil (2018) supported that Blended Learning strategies would initiate independent learning of English language among students when they are given space and time to learn the language, thus leads to language skills achievement. In addition, with current, various learning applications such as Kahoot, Padlet, EdPuzzle, Moodle and others, this allows students to practice at home, while tackling new material

with appropriate timing for each of the students, meanwhile students could still arrange their face-to-face meeting with their educators for more direct discussion (Yates et al., 2021). Virtual education materials allow students to pause and rewind all chapters in the language subject (Chellathurai, 2020). Moreover, when learners employ Blended Learning which they can set their own pace anywhere and anytime, this indirectly promotes deeper learning, at the same time reducing stress as well as boosting students' satisfaction of their language learning. Kaharuddin (2020) supported online technologies were identified as proliferation of self-esteem, as well as self-disclosure booster; since they are able to interact with each other even far from each other physically. Indirectly, using technology during Covid-19 outbreak and continuing hybrid learning during post pandemic shields and extricates students, academic and non-academic staffs from this lethal virus (Yates et al., 2021).

**Table 1: Benefits Of Blended Learning**

ESL Educators	ESL students
Removes barriers of time and space between educators and students when technology in forms of synchronous and asynchronous network learning applied.	Enable to spend time and space to access academic from home.
Technology accommodated educators to stay connected, engaged and updated about student learning progress.	Technology encourage student to be student-centredness.
Educators able to give more explanation when students implore questions through online platforms.	Able to set their own pace, initiate independent learning.
Help educators compensate the loss of educational training hours.	Various learning materials enable students tackle new materials with appropriate timing.
Provide an eye opener for educators to be aware of the importance of 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Education Framework associated with technology incorporation in their pedagogical approach.	Promotes deeper learning, reducing stress, boosting learners' satisfaction of language learning.
	Learn from home with technology incorporation helps prevent Covid-19 from spreading.

### ***Challenges when implementing Blended Learning at Sabah's Tertiary Institutions, Malaysia***

With a world and society accompanied by a widespread of tablets and smartphones access to the internet, Blended Learning is seen to be one of the effective 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching and learning approach to be implemented in the long term. Although technology is advancing frequently, every benefit that provide educators and students comes with challenges as well. Although technology is upgrading frequently, dissension of conjecture among educators and students regarding Blended Learning strategies are inevitable. Some

professionals are hesitating to change their pedagogical practices to more 21<sup>st</sup> Century education framework style since traditional teaching are still utilised as well as the pandemic are only temporary. This statement supported by Jacobs et al. (2018) whereby some adept educators may be unenthusiastic in changing their teaching techniques and patterns; thus, less willing to embrace more principled nature of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Framework. Additionally, Blended Learning tactics may not be suitable for all participants, as some educators and students prefer having direct communications in campus site to foster their learning to optimum level (Heilporn et al., 2021). Continuous loss of direct contact from educators may lead students to several psychological health problems such as anxiety, depression and others (Zhai & Du, 2020).

### ***Challenges of Blended Learning among ESL educators***

Over the past decade, countless technology tools have exploded in education scene, competing to accord new ways to deliver, improve and access content (Chellathurai, 2020). Yet, the real challenge found is when trying to blur the line between technology and human when lack of support in technology integration occurs among English language educators. This is because to implement Blended Learning in the long run requires redesign in their pedagogical practices, which gives a daunting task for them. Chellathurai (2020) opine educators are missing the true sense of physical and social interaction between their students, thus trying to integrating this approach of employing technology in hope to replicate the energy of face-to-face classroom setting. The researcher further added that some professionals perceive that Covid-19 pandemic is just temporary and online learning approach is not something needed to be implemented in a long-term, thus forming a cynical speculation about transposing their pedagogical practices towards implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching framework (Abilleira et al., 2021). What's more, a key principle of Blended Learning strategy which is self-pacing; built on notion that some students require more time than other to learn something. Self-direction commonly difficult for students and educators have to assist them through scaffolding to ensure their learning achievement; and in order to achieve this, educators themselves needed training program to help mitigate the impact of rapid technology incorporation caused by Covid-19 (Pozo-Rico et al., 2020). Without educators' help, students may lose focus, hence unveil inconsistency, careless or click-through responses without having critical thinking of the topic given on the language course (McQuirter, 2020). Otherwise, students who are already good in self-management would flourish, while others may fall behind more. This challenge leads to unequal classroom where successful students could learn fast and independently through an online portal, on the other hand unsuccessful students could fall behind quickly and lost in their motivation to learn more about their English language courses (McQuirter, 2020).

### ***Challenges of Blended Learning among ESL students***

Covid-19 pandemic had coerced all educational institutions to be put on hold, and required everyone to stay while studying or working from home. Yet, some families who came from average family, added with lack of technology tools at home such as laptops and strong internet connection will have trouble to access their lectures online. Chandasiri (2020) opined that the insufficiency of internet connection cause problems of logging into

the online system, difficulties in downloading tasks and activity materials, and issues of answering questions until the end of the online tests or examinations, hence hindered the process of smooth online learning. Furthermore, learners whom located at rural area of Sabah, Malaysia experiencing slow internet connections and mostly depend on a cell phone to access their project assignments contribute to students falling behind academically. This statement supported by Adnan and Anwar (2020) whereby internet difficulties would diminish motivation to complete whole university courses. Furthermore, during Covid-19 pandemic, when it comes to it comes to studying away from campus rather than being in a traditional classroom setting, the issue of isolation could become prominent for students who have problem accessing their lecture assignments due to lack of internet connectivity and technology tools. Singh et al. (2021) propound that Blended Learning approach may not be appropriate for some learners, as they may be struggling when searching the solutions of their project tasks and assignment solutions by themselves. Therefore, students are prone to become lonely with their academic journey when lack of direct contact between their educators as well as their peers exist. This could cause mental and psychology health issues such as loss of motivation to learn more about their language courses, then lead to dropout from their study programs. Zhai and Du (2020) advocates learners who found universities as welcoming may retain vigorous sentiments such as frustration, anxiety, loneliness due to the disconnection between them and their peers and teachers. The researcher further added that the uncertainty of reopening of the semester in campus site would magnify their psychological symptoms and amplify students' risk to substance abuse and even suicide.

**Table 2: Challenges of Blended Learning**

ESL Educators	ESL students
Requires redesign in their pedagogical practices, which gives daunting task for them.	Lack of technology tools from low-average income family.
Hesitant in transforming their pedagogical approach to full online learning.	Limited internet connection diminish communication between their fellow peers and educators.
Challenge in educators' fostering leads to unequal classroom achievement, where successful student flourish more, while struggle students may fall behind even more.	Problem accessing assignments from home create issue of isolation and contact with their educators and fellow coursemates, which could lead to dropouts from study programs or having psychology health issues.

### ***Solution of Blended Learning***

Harahap et al. (2019) administered Blended Learning strategy in quasi-experimental research on learning achievement and science process skills of students in plant tissue culture course. The findings indicated significant impact on the Biology sciences process skill test score, compared to conventional approach. It means that Blended Learning empower learners to review subject as an individual before analysing together with fellow students and teachers in classroom. Subsequently, Blended Learning assisted students in

constructing their material content understanding by observation, classification and prediction. In addition, technology in the form of videos, animations, audio helped learners achieve more in their Science learning course. At the same time, Blended Learning developed students' communication and collaboration skills as the students acquired opportunity to discuss with other online communities in Science website forum. On the other hand, another empirical research conducted by Wintarti et al. (2019) employed Blended Learning techniques on Mathematic courses. Results found that more than 80% student participants positively involved in the teaching and learning process, and obtained new ideas into prior knowledge. Moreover, students acknowledged that Blended Learning enables them to actively cooperate in sharing views and opinions, that lead to acquiring the topic objectives. On the other hand, Resien et al. (2020) conducted a quasi-experimental employing Blended Learning Strategy in experimental group and expository learning strategies on the other group. The results revealed that blended learning strategies demonstrated better learning outcomes towards student participants in experimental group compared to those were taught using expository learning approach. In addition, students in blended learning group indicated positive tendency for achieving high creative thinking abilities due to the exposure to media formats that contains audio, animation, which attracted students to focus on the content, while still receiving face-to-face learning from their teachers from time to time. It shows that blended learning that integrates technology has helped learners to and eventually increases their motivation and less stress to study due to their freedom to learn at their own speed, eventually improving their achievement and also developed high, creative thinking skills.

### Conclusion

Blended Learning implies teaching and learning administered through a blend of both face-to-face and online learning strategies. Furthermore, the combination has extended studying opportunities and made it possible for students to access classes beyond the physical classroom. Moreover, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to partial school closure, Blended Learning design has been ideal as it ensures the challenges brought about by the pandemic limiting social gathering are mitigated. With the advancement in technology such as Google, zoom, and chat, students have the opportunity to access their language courses online and offline. Moreover, the Blended Learning model has presented an opportunity for students to continue learning in places of their choice. Essentially, learners can access the language courses anytime and participate by interacting with their fellow students and instructors hence covering the required workload. Participation grants students a chance to process what they have learned and reflected broadly on it. With many challenges in existence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, enrolment of students is bound to be higher among those that undertake Blended Learning compared to offline and full-time online studying. Likewise, in Blended Learning, instructors also improved their delivery techniques hence an enhanced quality education. Despite the benefits of Blended Learning, several disadvantages are also of great concern. For example, not everyone has access to the internet; hence, many students will find it difficult to study their language courses online. Moreover, when left out in learning their language courses, students will lose focus and disassociate with their colleagues and teachers. Such an experience might lead to mental and psychological issues such as anxiety, depression and others. Furthermore, it is crucial to develop a learning model

that is convenient to students and one that offers quality education. Additionally, provide a learning experience that will contribute to students' success and acquire technical skills to advance their education. Understandably, every learning strategy has its advantages and disadvantages. It is vital when introducing Blended Learning to measure requirements over options that exist and consider all aspects so that it can be fair to everyone. Furthermore, there is a need for all stakeholders to work closely to support Blended Learning to make it the best teaching model. Blended Learning is crucial as it enables students to acquire skills that help them adapt to their professional environment better with the emerging technology centred trends.

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