

Blended Learning In English For Journalism

Abdul Syahid

Tadris Bahasa Inggris, FTIK IAIN Palangka Raya

Email: abdul.syahid@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id

ABSTRACT: *This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Blended Learning in a community service of English for Journalism. To find out whether the journalists' level of English proficiency after the training was better than that before the training, a single group of 15 female and 9 male journalists from 17 local and national media was given the blended learning of English for Journalism program four times a week in a total of 16 meetings of 120 minutes each. After such journalists' needs as their level of English proficiency and having no fixed routine had been analyzed, community service was performed to help improve their English proficiency. Result shows that at the end of the training the 9 female and 15 male journalists achieved the Independent User B2 level which was higher than the Basic User A2 level at the beginning of the training. The result suggests that blended learning of English for Journalism community service was effective in improving the journalists' English proficiency. It could also be adopted in the other branches of English for Specific Purposes, especially for busy working learners. The finding possibly provides useful direction for human resource managers, community service performers, and English language teachers.*

Keywords: *blended learning, community development, English for Journalisms*

Introduction

Nowadays English is a global language because it is used by many people for many purposes. Spoken as a first language by more than 370 million people and as a second language by more than 750 million people in 137 countries in all continents ¹, English is the main language in many fields including in journalism. Being the most dominant language in the global journalism, English has also been adopted by the Qatar-based Aljazeera Media Network, one of the biggest news organizations, by launching Al Jazeera English since 2006 ². As mentioned by Verma and Anand ³, the

¹ David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simon, and Charles D. Fennig, eds., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 22nd ed. (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2019).

² John C. Carpenter, "Creating English as a Language of Global News Contraflow: Al Jazeera at the Intersection of Language, Globalization and Journalism," *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 10, no. 1 (April 1, 2017): 65–83.

supremacy of English in the arena of global news is unrivalled because of being the most prevalent in terms of the number of web pages, information stored in the global computers, and internet users. To journalists, having a command of English means greater access to and wider distribution of news. English is thus a necessity for all of professional journalists in the world including the Indonesian ones.

The portrait of English proficiency in Indonesia is, however, quite far from satisfactory. The Indonesia's English proficiency index was ranked 51-st out of 88 countries and categorized as low proficiency due to scoring 52.91 point ⁴. Based on the index, it might be speculated that the Indonesian journalists' English proficiency is at the same level. The Indonesia index elaborated EF Education First ⁵ in which Central Kalimantan was not included as one of 11 regions scoring from 43.51 (South Sulawesi) to 54.46 (Bali) and neither was Palangka Raya as one of the Indonesian cities scoring from cities 49.56 (Tangerang) to 54.26 (Bali). It might also be speculated that the journalists joining the Indonesian Journalist Association of Central Kalimantan (IJA-CK) in Palangka Raya have the same low English proficiency on average.

The facts that English proficiency is a must for the journalism career and professional development has led IJA-CK to provide training in English for its members. The training itself was one of its human resource development agendas ⁶. In addition, it was implemented in partnership with the Department of English Language Teaching of a state Islamic institute in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. The partnership was built to ensure that the training could be done as effective as possible.

As a community service, the department then sent one of its teachers of

³ *Common Errors in English* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 2016).

⁴ EF Education First, *EF English Proficiency Index*, 8th ed. (Zürich: EF Education First, 2018).

⁵ *EF EPI 2018 – Indonesia* (Zürich: EF Education First, 2018).

⁶ PWI Kalteng, *Buku Putih PWI Kalteng* (Palangka Raya: Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia Provinsi Kalimantan Tengah, 2016).

English to help the journalists improve the English proficiency. The service was, therefore, entitled English for Journalisms (EJ). EJ could be said as a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Despite some competing discourses since its birth, ESP is always mainly aimed at fulfilling the learners' needs in terms of professional or vocational demands ⁷. EJ is thus to fulfill the journalists' needs to satisfy their journalistic demands. In other words, the EJ was mainly aimed at improving the journalists' English proficiency defined in this study as the level achieved by the journalists based on their scores of written and spoken English tests.

By highlighting the journalistic needs, from this viewpoint, the learning service should begin by doing the need analysis, the most crucial phase for an effective ESP ⁸, to help decide the most suitable what and how EJ is. The next steps are designing the EJ curriculum, selecting the training materials, methods, assessing, and evaluating ⁹.

In the need analysis phase, it was found out that the English proficiency level of the journalists were classified at Basic User A2 on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages/CEFR ¹⁰ or Elementary based on according to Cambridge English Unlimited ¹¹. Another thing to consider is the fact that the field of journalism is very dynamic. In their daily professional lives, the journalists are under increasing pressure from such contrasting issues as control versus speed and challenges versus

⁷ Carolina González Ramírez, "English for Specific Purposes: Brief History and Definitions," *Revista de Lenguas Modernas*, no. 23 (December 7, 2015), accessed March 7, 2019, <http://revistas.ucr.ac.cr/index.php/rlm/article/view/22359>.

⁸ Li Li, "Integrating Technology in ESP: Pedagogical Principles and Practice," in *Integrating Information and Communication Technologies in English for Specific Purposes*, ed. Rosa Muñoz-Luna and Lidia Taillefer, vol. 10, English Language Education (Cham: Springer, 2018), 7–25.

⁹ Lynne Flowerdew, "Needs Analysis and Curriculum Development in ESP," in *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes*, ed. Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield, Blackwell handbooks in linguistics (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 325–346.

¹⁰ Brian North, Tim Goodier, and Enrica Piccardo, "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (Companion Volume with New Descriptors)" (Cedex: Council of Europe, 2018).

¹¹ Theresa Clementson, Leanne Gray, and Howard Smith, *English Unlimited. B1+ Intermediate: Teacher's Pack* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

are twins because both of them were born of hands-on training programs. Carried out by blending the physical and virtual classrooms, the EJ program could be more effective because it offers learning flexibility and intensity in helping the journalists improve their English proficiency. Flexibility means that a proportion of the training, in the present study 50% based on Owston and York²⁰, could be accessed anywhere 24/7 by using their smartphones. In terms of intensity, in the Moodle-based virtual class developed for this service, i.e. syahid.gnomio.com, the training was intensified with authentic professional content-based materials and activities such as online discussion.

BL has been gaining much attention because of its effectiveness in ESP classrooms. In a study comparing purely English for Business offline and BL classrooms, Banditvilai²¹ shows that those whose learning was enriched with online activities achieved better than those whose learning was given in F2F method only. BL also brought such benefits to the students of English for Educational Technology as more learning opportunities leading to students' reduced anxiety, improved motivation, and better achievement²². Based on the vast literatures on BL effectiveness in ESP, it could be assumed that the EJ training delivered in the BL method could affect the participants' English proficiency. It could be hypothesized that the journalists achieve higher level of English proficiency after the BL of EJ training than their level before the BL of EJ training.

There has been a considerable amount of literature on how the BL is effective in ESP classrooms. Despite this growing interest, there has been

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²⁰ "The Nagging Question When Designing Blended Courses: Does the Proportion of Time Devoted to Online Activities Matter?," *The Internet and Higher Education* 36 (January 2018): 22–32.

²¹ "Enhancing Students' Language Skills through Blended Learning," *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning* 14, no. 3 (2016): 223–232.

²² Qiusha Min and Guanghui Wu, "A Blended Learning Strategy for Professional English Course in a Cloud Learning Environment," *International Journal of Information and Education Technology* 7, no. 8 (2017): 608–611.

little discussion on the effectiveness of BL in EJ instructions. Seen in this way, this study would contribute towards a more complete vision of BL adoption in ESP classrooms. Likewise, this study would enhance previous studies on the community development, especially English-language-teaching related programs.

Methods

The participants were 9 female and 15 male journalist from 17 local or national media in Palangka Raya. All of them had higher education. Most of them (12.5%) were 32 years old. With their ages ranging from 22 to 52 years ($M = 31.67$, $SD = 6.93$), their working journalist experience ranged from 1 to 25 years ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 5.63$). They also reported having learnt English of an average of 7.72 years ($M = 1.28$) in the formal education covering from elementary to higher education as well as an English non-formal education. Even though they rated their knowledge in English “nonexistent” (50%) and “poor” (41.7%), based on the pretest ($M = 34.59$, $SD = 8.81$), their English proficiency was at the level of Elementary according to the criteria set in the English Unlimited course books²³ or that of Basic User A2 in line with CEFR²⁴.

During their work, they rarely (87.5%) use and never (91.7%) communicate in English. All of them nevertheless thought that they had to improve their English language proficiency (ELF) to broaden their journalistic horizons. In terms of language need, Table 1 shows that almost of the participants considered speaking the mostly needed to learn whereas pronunciation was the least one. Therefore, the activities in the EJ training in this community service mainly consisted of speaking activities.

²³ Clementson, Gray, and Smith, *English Unlimited. B1+ [...]*.

²⁴ North, Goodier, and Piccardo, “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (Companion Volume with New Descriptors).”

Tabel 2.1 Participants' Linguistic Needs

Need	Sum	Mean
Speaking	112	4.67
Reading	91	3.80
Vocabulary	84	3.50
Grammar	76	3.17
Writing	64	2.67
Listening	45	1.88
Pronunciation	42	1.75

The 8 F2F learning activities were held at the House of IJA-CK in Palangka Raya twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays. Each meeting consisted of 120 minutes. The 8 F2S ones were conducted but not limited to twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays on a free Moodle-based hosting <https://syahid.gnomio.com/>. Moodle ²⁵ is one of the most employed learning management service including in the realm of ESP, for instance Kogan, Gavrilova, and Nesterov ²⁶.

As stated previously, the community service of EJ was carried out in the BL method, i.e. by blending physical and virtual teaching learning process of 50% each. As shown previously, speaking was the mostly needed skills. The F2F activities then contained role playing and simulating journalistic situations or activities in the forms of discussions, interviews, presentations, and editorial meetings. Such activities were to stimulate the participants to be active speakers.

In addition, the F2S ones consisted of four Moodle-based types of online learning activities ²⁷. The activities were specially set to improve the journalists' other linguistic needs such as reading and vocabulary as the

²⁵ Moodle Community, "About Moodle - MoodleDocs," *Moodle*, last modified 2018, accessed March 11, 2019, https://docs.moodle.org/36/en/About_Moodle.

²⁶ *Flipped Instruction Methods and Digital Technologies in the Language Learning Classroom*; Advances in Educational Technologies and Instructional Design (IGI Global, 2017), accessed March 12, 2019, <http://services.igi-global.com/resolvedoi/resolve.aspx?doi=10.4018/978-1-5225-0824-3>.

²⁷ Moodle Community, "Activities - MoodleDocs," *Moodle*, last modified 2018, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://docs.moodle.org/36/en/Activities>.

second and third mostly needed. The first online activity was Chat as the medium of a real-time synchronous discussion. In this forum the participants could upload their own videos related to the EJ training. The second one was Forum used by the participants to discuss asynchronously. The other online learning activities were Glossary by which the participants created and maintained a collaborative dictionary related to the journalistic terminologies. The Quiz activity was also created for designing and setting quiz tests automatically marked and feedback. In this type of activity, the pre- and posttests were set up.

This study used two instruments. The first one was a need analysis questionnaire adapted from Borovac ²⁸ because of being specifically developed for working journalists. After the questionnaire had been translated by applying the method suggested by Sumathipala and Murray ²⁹, the questionnaire consisting of Likert-type ratings and open questions was tried out to five freshmen of an state Islamic institution in Palangka Raya. The try-out was carried out to ensure the questionnaire's readability. The prospective participants were then invited to fill in the online questionnaire on <https://s.id/angketEJ>.

The second instrument was English Unlimited Placement Test ³⁰. The test consisted of written and spoken tests. The first type contained 20 multiple-choice items of 6 levels from CEFR A1 to C2 with a total of 120 items. The written test also went online on <https://s.id/testEJ>. Additionally, the second type were used to validate the results obtained in the written test by overviewing the speaking ability. In the spoken test, the examinees were

²⁸ "English for Specific Purposes in Journalism: Needs Analysis" (University of Zagreb, 2013), accessed March 7, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/34633856/English_for_Specific_Purposes_in_Journalism_Needs_Analysis.

²⁹ "New Approach to Translating Instruments for Cross-Cultural Research: A Combined Qualitative and Quantitative Approach for Translation and Consensus Generation," *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research* 9, no. 2 (June 2000): 87-95.

³⁰ Clementson, Gray, and Smith, *English Unlimited. B1+ [...]*.

asked to answer at least 4 questions corresponding to the level they got in the written test. Their scores in the oral test were used to place the examinees at one level below, above or at the same level they reached at the written test. The same written and spoken tests was administered in the post-test. Both of the tests were administered on the same free Moodle-based website.

In terms of analysis, this study applies descriptive statistics. Due to the fact that no sample has been taken and no generalization is needed either, descriptive statistics was considered for the purpose of this study. IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22³¹ was run to analyze all of the data from the need analysis questionnaire along with pre- and posttests.

Results And Discussion

The community service of EJ training by blending off- and online teaching learning process was aimed at improving the journalists' English proficiency (EP). This study was then carried out to investigate the effectiveness of EJ training in BL for the members of IJA-CK. Based on the need analysis, the training was carried out by blending physical and virtual classrooms. The learning activities was also mainly aimed at stimulating the participants to active speakers.

To answer the question of whether the level of their EP after the training was higher than that before training, the mean scores of post- and pre-test were compared. It could be seen that the journalist achieved better after the training ($M = 56.18, SD = 9.4$) than before the training ($M = 34.58, SD = 8.81$). In line with the criteria set in the English Unlimited course books, they achieved a higher level of EP after the training, i.e. Intermediate than that before training, i.e. Elementary. Using CEFR standard, their level of their EP have increased from Basic User A2 to Independent User B2.

³¹ IBM Corp, *IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows* (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp, 2013).

The result suggests that the EJ training in BL could improve the participants' EP. This confirms substantiates previous findings in the literature. In a Communicative Business English classroom, the supplementary e-learning program enabled the students to achieve better EP because of expanding the physical activities and offering opportunities to revisit the learning activities ³². In a study adopting a one-group pretest-posttest design, Min and Wu ³³ found that more learning opportunities and access to learning resources supplemented by a web-based learning environment improved the students' achievements in a Professional English course. Therefore, that the BL adopted in this community service of EJ was effective in improving the participants' EP is in good agreement with other studies on the adoption of BL in ESP pedagogy.

The adoption of BL in the community service of EJ training was driven by the fact that all of the participants had and used smartphones at work. In the big enterprise of journalism, being skilled in the web is now necessary for the journalists to venture into the journalistic arena. Even without the teacher's intervention, 25 students in an online journalism course were able to explore and make effective use of social media to accelerate their learning ³⁴. The initiative reflects how the prospective journalists adapt to the dynamics of journalistic world. The EJ training in BL mode could possibly meet the journalists' needs related to the journalistic challenges

Showing that the web resources could be used in the training would lead the participants to be autonomous learners of English. Being autonomous in ESP for the professional career development is necessary for learners because they cannot depend on the limited number of teachers ³⁵.

³² Banditvilai, "Enhancing Students' Language Skills through Blended Learning."

³³ "A Blended Learning Strategy for Professional English Course in a Cloud Learning Environment."

³⁴ Yang Song, "Student-Initiated Use of Facebook for Learning Online Journalism," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 72, no. 4 (December 2017): 425-441.

³⁵ Tarnopolsky, *Constructivist Blended Learning Approach*.

Moreover, the fact that ESP teachers are limited in terms of quantity is also worsened by another fact that because they are outsiders in the discipline-related areas ³⁶, their insider knowledge is limited. In their next learning journeys, the richness of the web could empower the participants in this community development to improve their EP on their own.

As reported earlier, the participants' EP was improved after the BL of EJ training. Nevertheless, given that the finding is based on a one-group pretest-posttest design, the result from such research design should be treated with considerable caution. The threats to its internal validity such as testing and threats to external one such as interaction of testing ³⁷ must be treated with care.

Although there are limitations because of the one group pretest-posttest design, some careful considerations would help minimize them. History, one of the threats to internal validity, was not found because the treatment took place in such a short period of time. No other training at the same time could be the cause of the improvement in their EP. To minimize the threat of testing, the pre- and posttests went online with all of the 120 questions and options were scrambled, making it harder for the practice effect to occur. The threat of maturation might not influence the EP because the training was given in not more than 2 months. In terms of instrumentation, the written pre- and posttest were automatically marked in the Moodle-based learning environment. In addition, the spoken pre- and posttests were evaluated by the same English native speakers specially recruited for this purpose. As the findings might and was intended not to be generalized, the threats to external validity did not occur.

Further studies with such less criticized designs as a pretest-posttest

³⁶ Jean Parkinson, "English for Science and Technology," in *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes*, ed. Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield, Blackwell handbooks in linguistics (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 155–174.

³⁷ Thomas R. Knapp, "Why Is the One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design Still Used?," *Clinical Nursing Research* 25, no. 5 (October 2016): 467–472.

control group design would provide more valid and reliable findings on the effectiveness of BL in EJ classrooms. On a wider level, research is also needed to uncover exactly the effectiveness of BL in the EJ, for example, for working journalists and students learning journalism. It is also recommended that further research should be qualitatively approached to understand how the EJ learners interact with the virtual learning environment.

The present study was based on the community service in the form of EJ training. Because the very nature of such activity was pragmatically driven, the present study has only examined the training target, i.e. better EP as indicated by the higher mean score of pretest or by the level of their EP according the two standards. In fact, how the participants' perceived the BL, among others, was not a primary goal in this study and the community service. In other words, the picture of effectiveness of BL in the EJ class is thus still incomplete.

Despite the fact that there are some limitations, the finding would seem to suggest that the adoption of BL in the EJ training could improve the journalists' EP. The BL approach could also be usefully employed in formal EJ classrooms and corporate training courses. Furthermore, the evidence points towards the idea that the BL may be useful for other community service programs because of its flexibility and intensity. Underlining just how the BL is relatively effective for teaching learning process of EJ, this study provides considerable insight into the ESP arena, particularly in the relatively neglected EJ, and the increasing interest in BL for English language teaching and community service in the internet era.

Conclusion

Taken together, the evidence from this study suggests that BL in EJ training could improve the participants' EP as indicated by their average score of posttest which was higher than that of pretest. In other words, after the community service of EJ training the participants achieved a higher level

of EP, i.e. from Basic User A2 or Elementary to Independent User B2/Intermediate.

This work would add to a growing body of literature on BL in the ESP relatively neglected branch, i.e. EJ. The limitation in this work serves as a continuous spur to future research with more rigorous designs. The finding possibly provides useful direction for human resource managers, community service performers, and English language in teachers both theoretical and practical domains.

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