TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BLENDED LEARNING IN INCREASING ENGLISH LEARNING INDEPENDENCE AT ISLAMIC HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract	This study aims to explore the reflections of an English teacher and the perceptions of eleventh-grade students regarding the implementation of blended learning, with a specific focus on its impact on learner autonomy. It seeks to understand how this approach fosters independent learning and to identify the challenges encountered during its application in a secondary school context. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, involving the researcher as the English teacher and thirty purposively selected students from MAN 2 Ponorogo. Data were collected through the teacher's written reflections, open-ended student questionnaires, and informal interviews to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving systematic coding, categorizing, and interpreting emerging themes. Findings indicate that blended learning positively contributes to the development of learner autonomy. Students demonstrated enhanced time management, increased initiative in accessing learning resources, and a greater sense of responsibility for their learning progress. Nevertheless, several challenges were identified, particularly related to technological readiness, internet reliability, and time constraints faced by both students and the teacher. The study concludes that the successful implementation of blended learning requires carefully designed instructional strategies, sufficient technological infrastructure, and consistent institutional support to maximize its potential in promoting autonomous learning in the English classroom.
Keywords	Blended learning; English language teaching; learner autonomy; student perception; teacher reflection.

INTRODUCTION

Learning independence is one of the key competencies essential for facing the complex challenges of 21st century education, where rapid technological advancements and information overload demand learners who can adapt and self-manage effectively. In this digital era, the ability of students to learn actively, independently, and continuously is not only desirable but an inevitable necessity to thrive in an ever-changing world (Little, 2016)(Morris, 2019). Learning independence encompasses not only students' skills in managing their time and learning resources but also their personal initiative, self-discipline, and responsibility throughout the learning process (Wang & Zhang, 2022)(Pulatovna, 2024). Therefore, fostering learning independence must be a central focus in today's educational practices to prepare learners capable of lifelong learning and problem-solving in diverse contexts (Gondwe, 2021)(Suwahyu et al., 2023).

One of the learning approaches that is considered effective in supporting the development of learning independence is blended learning (Muhammad Ansarullah S. Tabbu et al., 2023). This approach combines face-to-face instruction and online learning in a systematic design to complement each other (Pool & Byatt, 1996). In this model, learning extends beyond the conventional classroom into a digital space where students can access teaching materials flexibly, adapting to their individual needs and learning pace (Christensen et al., 2013). This flexibility empowers students to take greater control over their learning process, fostering self-regulation and motivation (Arsy & Dermawan, 2022). Moreover, blended learning enables teachers to personalize instruction and provide timely feedback, enhancing the overall learning experience(Alamri et al., 2020) (Amiruddin et al., 2022).

The advantage of blended learning lies in its ability to integrate direct interaction between teachers and students with the use of technology as a means of fostering independent learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) . Through face-to-face sessions, students receive guidance, clarification of concepts, and direct feedback from teachers (Baso et al., 2023). Meanwhile, online learning provides opportunities for students to review materials, explore additional resources, and manage their study time autonomously(Ellis & Bliuc, 2019) (Alammary, 2019; Widodo et al., 2020). However, despite these advantages, the implementation of blended learning faces challenges such as technological readiness and varying levels of learner autonomy, which call for further in-depth research to evaluate its effectiveness in truly fostering independent learning skills (Istiqomah et al., 2023); (Pejuan & Antonijuan, 2019).

Thus, blended learning facilitates the transfer of knowledge and encourages the development of attitudes and independent learning skills, such as time management, goal setting, and self-evaluation (Zulkflee et al., 2023). In the context of English language learning, blended learning enables students to be exposed to various authentic digital resources that enrich their learning experiences (Vaughan, 2014). Despite these advantages, research specifically focusing on how blended learning affects learner autonomy in English classrooms, especially from the perspectives of both teachers and students, remains limited. Understanding these perspectives is essential to optimize the implementation of blended learning as a relevant and strategic approach to foster active, independent, and adaptive learners in the digital era.

As an education practitioner and English teacher at MAN 2 Ponorogo, the researcher has implemented a blended learning approach in classroom instruction. This approach was chosen as a response to the need for more flexible learning, as well as a strategy to encourage students to be more active and independent in their learning process (Minhas et al., 2021)(Mykytyn et al., 2024). Learning is conducted through a combination of face-to-face sessions and online instruction using various digital platforms. However, there is a need for a deeper exploration of the teacher's reflective process and students' perceptions to understand better the effectiveness and challenges of blended learning in this specific educational context (Aritantia et al., 2021).

Several previous studies have investigated the implementation of blended learning and its impact on learner autonomy. For instance, Sinaga (2024) and Shurygin (2024) found that blended learning significantly improves students' self-regulation and ability to manage learning time effectively. Indah Sari et al (2023) highlighted that blended learning environments enhance students' engagement and provide flexibility that supports independent study habits. Firdaus and Astutik (2021) demonstrated that authentic digital resources in blended learning can enrich English language learners' motivation and exposure to real-world language use. Wang and Zang (2022) revealed that blended learning fosters students' responsibility in learning through increased online and offline interaction.

While these studies collectively show the positive impact of blended learning on various aspects of learner autonomy, they mostly focus on quantitative measures or general engagement indicators (Atika et al., 2020). Few studies have explored the reflective experiences of teachers as facilitators or deeply examined students' perceptions regarding blended learning in the specific context of English language education at the secondary level (Firdaus & Astutik, 2021). Moreover,

limited research addresses the challenges, such as technological readiness and time management, faced during the implementation, especially in schools with diverse student readiness and resources (Indah Sari et al., 2023)(Mohammed et al., 2023)(Liu et al., 2024). This gap calls for a more nuanced, qualitative exploration that captures both teacher reflections and student voices to understand better how blended learning fosters autonomy in real classroom settings (Islam & Palopo, 2023).

This study aims to fill these gaps by providing an in-depth qualitative description of a teacher's reflective practice and students' perceptions toward the blended learning model in an English learning context at MAN 2 Ponorogo. The novelty of this research lies in its dual focus on cognitive and attitudinal dimensions of learner autonomy, as well as the contextual challenges encountered in a real-world Indonesian secondary school. The findings are expected to contribute valuable insights into how blended learning can be optimized to enhance learner independence and support teacher professional development in technology-integrated education. This study also explores how these insights can inform the design of more effective blended learning models tailored to Indonesian learners' specific needs and cultural context.

In promoting learner autonomy, blended learning becomes a strategic and relevant choice. Learner autonomy, as defined by Little (2016)Refers to students' ability to take responsibility for their learning process, including managing time, selecting appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating their progress independently (Sudirtha et al., 2022). The blended learning approach, which combines flexibility, access to digital resources, and teacher guidance, creates an environment that positively stimulates the development of learner autonomy (Christensen et al., 2013). Therefore, learning approaches that encourage students to take initiative, reflect, and self-assess are essential for fostering autonomous learners (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

Teacher reflection is another critical aspect in developing effective blended learning environments (Sudirtha et al., 2022). It conceptualizes reflection as a means for teachers to analyze their teaching practices, identify challenges, and innovate strategies for improvement (Awalin et al., 2022). In blended learning, reflective practice becomes even more complex, as teachers must evaluate not only student learning outcomes, but also the effectiveness of digital tools, the balance between synchronous and asynchronous components, and student engagement in both modes (Aritantia et al., 2021). Puspitasari and Handayani (2023) found that teacher reflection on

technology use helps create a more responsive and adaptive learning environment that aligns with student needs and technological realities.

Despite its promising potential, implementing blended learning faces several challenges (Brown, 2002). One major issue is technological readiness. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) underline that teachers and students need adequate digital literacy and access to infrastructure for blended learning to work effectively. Awalin (2022) also emphasizes the need for ongoing technical support and professional development for teachers. Another challenge is time management(Hernández & Ramírez, 2016). While blended learning allows for flexibility, it simultaneously demands high self-discipline and responsibility from students to manage their study time effectively (Muvid, 2022). Without proper support and training, these challenges may hinder the development of learner autonomy (Christensen et al., 2013).

Although numerous studies have highlighted the benefits and challenges of blended learning, few have examined in depth how teacher reflection and student perception can be systematically analyzed to inform the development of a more effective and autonomy-supportive blended learning model, particularly in the context of English language instruction at the secondary level. This study seeks to address that gap by providing qualitative insights into the reflective experiences of an English teacher and the perceptions of students at MAN 2 Ponorogo. By doing so, this research aims to contribute to the refinement of blended learning strategies that are responsive to classroom realities and support the cultivation of learner autonomy in meaningful and sustainable ways.

This study aims to explore implementing a blended learning model in English language teaching at MAN 2 Ponorogo, with a particular focus on its impact on the development of learner autonomy. Specifically, the research aims to describe the teacher's reflection in designing, implementing, and evaluating blended learning; to investigate students' perceptions of the blended learning approach, especially about fostering learning independence; and to identify the challenges and supporting factors that influence the success of blended learning in enhancing learner autonomy. The findings of this study are expected to provide recommendations for improving the practice of blended learning to support better the development of autonomous learners, particularly in the context of secondary-level English education.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the teacher's experience, students' perceptions regarding the implementation of blended learning in English language instruction, and its impact on learner autonomy. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore phenomena contextually and holistically, particularly about teaching practices and student responses within the school environment. The subjects of this study consist of the researcher herself as the English teacher implementing blended learning, and 30 eleventh-grade students who participated in the learning process at MAN 2 Ponorogo. The participants were selected purposively, considering their direct involvement in blended learning-based instruction over one semester.

Data collection instruments included the teacher's written reflections, which were composed periodically throughout the teaching process, and open-ended questionnaires distributed to students to explore their perceptions. In addition, informal interviews were selectively conducted with several students to deepen and clarify the responses gathered from the questionnaires. The teacher's reflections contained notes on experiences, observations, and critical thoughts about the teaching and learning process. At the same time, the questionnaires were designed to capture students' perceptions of the effectiveness of blended learning and its influence on their learner autonomy. This multi-method data collection ensured a comprehensive understanding of teacher and student perspectives within the blended learning environment.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, categorizing, and interpreting key themes that emerged from the teacher's reflections and student responses. This process included repeated reading, initial coding, category grouping, and drawing meaning from the emerging patterns. The analysis was conducted inductively to ensure that the findings genuinely reflect the participants' experiences and perspectives within the naturalistic context of blended learning. Member checking was conducted to enhance the study's trustworthiness by sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation. Additionally, triangulation of data sources was employed to corroborate the results and provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study aims to explore teachers' reflections and students' perceptions of the application of blended learning in English instruction at MAN 2 Ponorogo, focusing on its impact on promoting learner autonomy. The blended learning model implemented in this study combines Google Classroom and face-to-face classroom activities through a series of structured steps. Data were collected through teacher reflections and open-ended student questionnaires, capturing both perspectives on how technology-enhanced instruction contributes to independent learning. This approach is rooted in the belief that effective learning requires flexibility and meaningful engagement. Integrating digital and in-person elements allows the model to accommodate diverse learning preferences and promote student-centered learning.

The implementation began with creating a digital classroom using Google Classroom as the primary platform for managing online learning activities. Teachers uploaded learning materials in advance, enabling students to study them independently before classroom sessions. In face-to-face meetings, teachers guided students on accessing the materials and completing assignments while encouraging the use of digital devices in class. This integration of online and offline learning provided students autonomy and support, fostering more active engagement in the learning process. Such a blended setup also helped students develop better time management and self-regulation skills as part of their learning habits.

As an initial engagement activity, students were asked to write responses to the materials they had read by posting in the comment section on Google Classroom. Although only one comment was required, several students submitted multiple responses, demonstrating enthusiasm in engaging with the content. Following this stage, the teacher allocated time for students to ask direct questions about any aspects of the materials they found unclear. This process continued with group and class discussions to deepen understanding and foster meaningful academic interaction. These activities encouraged students to take ownership of their learning and collaborate more effectively with their peers.

The teacher assigned reasoning- and critical thinking-based tasks related to the materials covered to reinforce comprehension. Clearly stated deadlines accompanied these assignments, and students were required to submit their work via Google Classroom. The platform's scheduling and reminder features encouraged students to take responsibility and develop independence in

managing their study time, including those absent from class. The teacher then reviewed and provided feedback on the assignments submitted online. Learning outcomes were subsequently reviewed in class to provide students with clarification and further reinforcement of their understanding. This approach effectively integrates online and offline learning modes, working synergistically to foster greater learner autonomy.

Students' responses to the blended learning scheme were overwhelmingly positive, as reflected in their eagerness to engage with the materials. However, only one comment was requested; some students submitted three to four or more, indicating they felt intellectually stimulated and involved in the learning process. Additionally, assignment deadlines encouraged a stronger sense of responsibility and study discipline. Even students who were absent for legitimate reasons remained actively involved and submitted their work on time. This demonstrates that blended learning offers a level of flexibility not present in conventional learning systems, while simultaneously strengthening students' autonomy in managing their time and completing assignments independently.

Overall, the blended learning approach implemented in this study positively impacted students' learner autonomy. Students became more active in understanding the material, developing habits of exploring information independently, and showing greater initiative and responsibility in their learning process (Fakhri et al., 2022). Integrating technology through Google Classroom and face-to-face interactions allowed students to engage with the material in various ways, catering to different learning styles. Teacher reflections confirmed that this method fostered students' autonomy and strengthened the interactive relationship between the teacher, students, and learning materials. As a result, students were better equipped to manage their learning independently, an important skill in today's digital era.

From my perspective as the teacher, reflections on implementing blended learning revealed that students exhibited a higher level of engagement when the teaching method combined online platforms with face-to-face sessions. Assignments requiring critical reasoning and personal opinion encouraged students to think more deeply and relate the tasks to their experiences. This relevance helped maintain their interest and motivation throughout the learning process. The students' enthusiasm was evident, as many went beyond the minimum requirements, completing tasks ahead of schedule and showing improved quality. This fostered a healthy sense of competition among students, driving them to excel in speed and the depth of their work. Such

active involvement also allowed me to identify individual student strengths and areas needing further support more effectively.

The outcomes pleasantly surprised me, particularly how they contributed to creating a more dynamic and positively competitive learning environment. Students were not merely focused on completing tasks, but also paid closer attention to the quality of their work and the timeliness of their submissions. This behavior suggests the presence of stronger intrinsic motivation, an essential element in the development of learner autonomy. The blended learning model seemed to tap into this motivation by offering autonomy balanced with clear expectations and support. It also encouraged students to be more reflective about their learning strategies and to take ownership of their progress in English language skills. This reflective practice is crucial for long-term academic success and self-directed learning.

The results of the questionnaire distributed to students indicated that the majority responded positively to implementing blended learning in English language instruction. Many students recognized several benefits and advantages of this approach compared to the traditional methods they had previously experienced. One of the key reasons for this preference was the variety and lack of monotony in the learning process. The combination of online and face-to-face learning introduced a fresh dynamic, making lessons more engaging and less tedious. This variation also accommodated different learning paces and preferences, contributing to better overall satisfaction with the learning experience. Such positive feedback reinforces the value of incorporating blended learning as a standard approach in language education.

Furthermore, students felt that blended learning allowed them to become more independent. Having digital access to learning materials and clearly defined deadlines helped them gain greater control over their study schedules and learning progress. Many students noted that the tasks were challenging, especially since they were designed to involve personal opinions and critical thinking rather than rote memorization. This approach encouraged deeper cognitive engagement and prevented superficial learning. Students reported feeling more confident expressing their thoughts and appreciated the opportunity to develop skills beyond language proficiency. This empowerment to think critically and self-manage learning is an important step toward lifelong learning skills.

In addition, the transparent digital system for tracking assignment submissions sparked healthy competition among students. They felt motivated to complete their assignments faster and

with better quality than their peers. This competitive yet supportive atmosphere enhanced peer learning and accountability. Equally important, students expressed that blended learning offered a novel and different educational experience. They enjoyed the active engagement this model facilitated through face-to-face interactions and digital contributions on Google Classroom. Overall, this learning model made the process feel more relevant and personalized to their needs as modern learners in a digital era. These positive experiences suggest promising potential for expanding blended learning practices in similar educational contexts.

Table 1. Students' Perception of the Application of Blended Learning in English Language Learning: Results of Data Analysis from the Open-Ended Questionnaire

No.	Aspects Assessed	General Student Statements	Number of Students (n = 30)	Percentage (%)
1	Engagement in learning	Students felt more engaged as they actively gave comments and completed assignments	26	86.7%
2	Variety in learning methods	Learning felt more interesting and less monotonous	25	83.3%
3	Independence in learning	Felt more responsible for their assignments and learning time	24	80.0%
4	Time management skills	Helped by the presence of due dates and freedom to manage time	23	76.7%
5	Enthusiasm for completing assignments	Assignments encouraged personal thinking, and students felt challenged to finish early	22	73.3%
6	Access to learning materials independently	Easy access to materials and the ability to review lessons outside the classroom	27	90.0%
7	Technical challenges (internet/device access)	Experienced device or internet issues when accessing Google Classroom	8	26.7%

The data analysis from the open-ended questionnaire distributed to 30 eleventh-grade students revealed that most students had a positive perception of implementing blended learning. 86.7% of students felt more engaged in the learning process. This was reflected in their enthusiasm for providing comments on Google Classroom—often exceeding the minimum required—and their eagerness to submit assignments on time. Additionally, 83.3% of students indicated that blended learning made learning more engaging and less monotonous, ultimately increasing their interest and motivation. The combination of face-to-face and digital learning was also seen as effective in fostering learner autonomy, with 80% of students feeling more responsible for their learning process and outcomes.

Moreover, 76.7% of students noted that the due date feature in Google Classroom helped them manage their time more effectively and reduced their tendency to procrastinate. They felt challenged to complete their assignments earlier and compete healthily. Regarding the nature of the assignments, 73.3% of students mentioned that open-ended tasks requiring personal opinions encouraged them to think more actively and made them feel intellectually valued. Regarding accessibility, 90% of students appreciated the ability to access and review materials at any time, demonstrating that blended learning offers flexibility and supports continuous learning outside the classroom. These findings highlight the importance of a clear structure and flexible access to materials in fostering student motivation and autonomy.

However, around 26.7% of students experienced technical difficulties, such as limited device availability or unstable internet connections when accessing Google Classroom. This is an important note that, while blended learning holds great potential, infrastructure support and technological readiness remain key factors for successful implementation. Some students may face barriers that limit their full participation and learning outcomes without adequate access to technology. Overall, blended learning in this context has proven effective in enhancing student engagement, promoting learner autonomy, and offering a more flexible and meaningful learning experience. With continued improvements in infrastructure and support, this model could become even more impactful and inclusive for all learners.

Discussion

The findings reinforce the idea that blended learning holds great potential in fostering learner autonomy, as theorized by Little (2016)(Slavuj et al., 2017), where students learn to take responsibility for their learning processes (Mivehchi & Rajabion, 2020). Although the results were generally positive, some challenges remain, particularly regarding technological access (Istiqomah et al., 2023). Not all students had adequate devices or stable internet connections outside of school. However, in this context, face-to-face classes served as an essential support. Additionally, the teacher's role in guiding, motivating, and providing feedback remained a critical factor in the success of blended learning . This highlights the need for a balanced approach that integrates technological tools and human support to ensure all students benefit equally (Hardiansyah et al., 2021)(Hidayat et al., 2020). Therefore, successful implementation of blended learning requires not only digital readiness but also pedagogical preparedness from the educators (Nelliraharti & Murnia Suri, 2021).

My reflection shows that learning success does not depend solely on the method used, but on how that method engages students emotionally, intellectually, and socially. The students' active participation in assignments, digital platform interactions, and demonstrated sense of responsibility indicate that blended learning can be an effective approach to developing learner autonomy, provided that the design is adaptive and aligned with students' needs and context (Riedmann-Streitz et al., 2024). It becomes clear that meaningful learning experiences require pedagogical innovation and sensitivity to learners' real-life conditions (Burhanuddin, 2021). In this sense, the teacher's ability to connect instructional content with students' lived experiences becomes increasingly important (Astari & Putro, 2023). This connection helps bridge the gap between abstract knowledge and its practical relevance, deepening students' understanding and motivation (Devaki, 2025).

This study shows that implementing blended learning in English language instruction at MAN 2 Ponorogo has positively contributed to enhancing students' learner autonomy. The learning model, which combines face-to-face interaction and digital platforms such as Google Classroom, has successfully encouraged students to be more active, responsible, and reflective in their learning process. Students demonstrated high enthusiasm, both in responding to materials and completing tasks independently and on time. Participation that exceeded expectations, particularly in online discussions, strongly indicates that this approach effectively fosters intrinsic motivation to learn. This motivation is crucial for sustaining long-term engagement and building self-directed learning habits.

From the teacher's perspective, blended learning has also opened up broader opportunities to build meaningful student engagement. Assignments that require reasoning and personal opinions have proven effective in enhancing critical thinking and encouraging healthy competition among students. Although some technical challenges remain, such as limited access to devices and the internet for some students, blended learning generally provides a more flexible, contextual, and adaptive learning experience tailored to the needs of students in the digital age. Teachers noted that students became more expressive and confident when allowed to voice their perspectives through online discussions. This combination of cognitive challenge and emotional investment contributed significantly to learners' overall academic growth.

Based on the findings and reflections from this study on implementing blended learning in English instruction, several suggestions are offered to various stakeholders involved in the

educational process. Teachers should continually develop their skills in designing blended learning-based materials and assignments that encourage active student participation and critical thinking. For schools, it is essential to ensure the availability of adequate technological infrastructure, including devices and internet access, to support the smooth and equitable implementation of blended learning. Future research studies using quantitative or mixed-method approaches are suggested to explore the impact of blended learning on learning outcomes and student motivation. For students, building awareness of the value of independent learning and using technology productively will be key to achieving their learning goals.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that implementing blended learning in English language instruction at MAN 2 Ponorogo positively contributes to the development of learner autonomy. Integrating Google Classroom and face-to-face sessions encouraged students to engage more actively, take greater responsibility for their learning, and manage their study time independently. Most students responded positively to the learning model, citing its engaging format, increased flexibility, and the intellectual challenge of open-ended, critical thinking-based tasks. These results suggest that blended learning can effectively address diverse learner needs in the digital age. Such outcomes affirm the relevance of technology-integrated instruction in promoting 21st-century learning skills. Teacher reflections also affirmed that blended learning fosters a dynamic and supportive learning environment, strengthening cognitive engagement and student motivation. While some technical barriers remain, particularly related to internet access and device availability, these do not significantly hinder the overall effectiveness of the model when proper in-class support is provided. The findings highlight the importance of thoughtful instructional design and the teacher's active role in facilitating and guiding the blended learning process to maximize its impact on learner autonomy. Continued professional development and infrastructure improvements are recommended to enhance the success of blended learning implementations further. Equally important is fostering a culture of adaptability among educators and students to ensure long-term sustainability

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