

Blended Learning in Post-Pandemic Classrooms: Challenges and Innovations

Gusma Afriani¹, Miftaku Niamah², Suci Midsyahri Azizah³, Jihad Jaafar Waham⁴,
Digvijay Pandey⁵, Samar A. El-Farra⁶

¹) State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

^{2,3}) Sunan Giri Islamic Institute Ponorogo, Indonesia

⁴) University of Basrah, Iraq

⁵) Department of Technical Education, India

⁶) Higher Colleges of Technology, United Arab Emirates

Correspondence email: gusma.afriani@uin-suska.ac.id

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered educational practices, leading to the widespread adoption of blended learning, which integrates face-to-face and online instruction. As schools transition into the post-pandemic era, blended learning has evolved from a crisis-response tool into a lasting pedagogical approach. This study aimed to investigate the challenges and innovations in implementing blended learning within post-pandemic classrooms in Indonesia. Using a qualitative research method, the study was conducted from January to March 2025 in three secondary schools and two higher education institutions representing diverse socio-economic and technological backgrounds. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations involving 25 participants, including teachers, students, and administrators. The findings revealed significant challenges, such as unequal access to technology, difficulties in maintaining student engagement, and the need for pedagogical adaptation and professional development. However, the study also highlighted innovative practices, including the use of collaborative platforms, multimedia resources, and student-centered learning models that enhanced engagement and independent learning. Teachers reported a transformation in their roles, shifting from content deliverers to learning facilitators. Despite progress, both students and educators expressed the need for stronger support systems to navigate hybrid learning effectively. The study concludes that while blended learning offers flexibility and digital engagement opportunities, its sustainability depends on addressing technological, pedagogical, and human-centered challenges.

Keywords

Blended Learning, Digital Equity, Educational Innovation, Hybrid Classrooms, Post-Pandemic Education.



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INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic has drastically reshaped the landscape of education worldwide. As schools and universities were forced to shut their physical doors, educators and learners alike had to adapt quickly to digital learning environments. While this sudden shift initially posed significant challenges, it also catalyzed the rapid development and adoption of blended learning models [1]. Blended learning, which combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online educational experiences, emerged as a practical and flexible solution to maintain educational continuity during periods of uncertainty [2]. As educational institutions transition into the post-pandemic era, blended learning remains a central component of instructional strategies, offering both opportunities and challenges in redefining the future of education [3].

Despite the increased integration of technology in education during the pandemic, the return to physical classrooms has not rendered digital learning obsolete. Instead, the pandemic experience has reinforced the value of blended approaches, which capitalize on the strengths of both in-person and virtual learning [4]. However, implementing blended learning in post-pandemic classrooms is not without its complexities. Many educators and institutions struggle to balance synchronous and asynchronous delivery methods, ensure equitable access to technology, and maintain student engagement in hybrid environments [5]. Additionally, the lack of clear pedagogical models and professional development for teachers in blended settings impedes effective learning outcomes.

A unique element of this study lies in its exploration of how post-pandemic blended learning is evolving as a temporary response to crisis and a long-term pedagogical shift. Previous research on blended learning has often focused on its theoretical frameworks, technological tools, or case studies limited to pre-pandemic contexts [6]. What makes the post-pandemic context distinctive is the widespread exposure of educators and students to online platforms, fostering a new level of digital fluency and expectation. The transformation in attitudes, behaviors, and policies surrounding educational delivery calls for updated research that addresses current conditions and anticipates future needs [7]. This study positions itself at this intersection, timely analyzing the challenges and innovations that characterize blended learning in today's educational environments.

While a substantial body of literature exists on blended learning, a significant gap exists in understanding how it functions in the nuanced realities of post-pandemic education. Much of the pre-pandemic research emphasized the technological infrastructure or the comparative effectiveness of blended learning versus traditional models. However, these studies often overlooked socio-emotional factors, institutional readiness, or the long-term sustainability of blended models [8]. Furthermore, many earlier investigations failed to consider the perspectives of multiple stakeholders: students, teachers, administrators, and parents, especially in diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts [9]. This research aims to fill these gaps by adopting a holistic approach that examines the pedagogical, technological, and human

dimensions of blended learning after the pandemic [10].

The primary aim of this article is to investigate the multifaceted challenges and innovations associated with implementing blended learning in post-pandemic classrooms. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the barriers educators face in adapting to hybrid teaching modalities, analyze the effectiveness of new instructional strategies, and highlight creative solutions that have emerged from necessity. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, this research aims to comprehensively understand how blended learning is being utilized, adapted, and perceived in various educational settings. Particular attention will be paid to inclusivity, engagement, and digital equity, as these factors critically influence the success of blended learning initiatives.

Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute meaningful insights informing policy, teacher training, curriculum development, and technology integration in blended learning frameworks. Drawing on real-world experiences and recent data, the findings are expected to support educational institutions refining their strategies for sustainable, effective hybrid learning environments. The hope is that this research will deepen academic understanding and serve as a practical resource for educators and decision-makers navigating the evolving educational landscape in the aftermath of a global crisis. In doing so, this article underscores the importance of resilience, innovation, and inclusivity in shaping the future of learning.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the implementation of blended learning in post-pandemic classrooms, focusing on understanding the lived experiences, perceptions, and adaptive strategies of educators and students. Qualitative methodology is particularly suitable for this research, as it allows for in-depth exploration of complex educational phenomena within their real-life contexts. The study was conducted over three months, from January to March 2025, in three secondary schools and two higher education institutions in urban and semi-urban areas in Indonesia. These institutions were selected purposively to represent a range of socio-economic backgrounds, technological readiness levels, and blended learning practices.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations. A total of 25 participants, including teachers, school administrators, and students, were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives. Depending on participants availability and preferences, interviews and discussions were conducted online and in person. Classroom observations were conducted during hybrid learning sessions to gain insights into teaching practices, student engagement, and digital tools. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed thematically using a grounded theory approach. This involved coding the data inductively to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories related to challenges, innovations, and adaptive strategies in blended learning. To enhance the validity of the findings, data triangulation was employed by cross-verifying information obtained from different sources and methods.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reveal several key insights into the challenges and innovations that have emerged in post-pandemic blended learning environments. The data indicate that while blended learning has been widely embraced as a viable and sustainable educational model, its implementation has been marked by a combination of success stories and significant obstacles, particularly in technology, pedagogy, and student engagement.

One of the primary challenges identified was the unequal access to technology among students. Despite efforts by schools to provide digital devices and improve internet access, a substantial proportion of students, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, continued to face difficulties in fully participating in hybrid learning. Teachers reported frequent technical disruptions, such as connectivity issues and difficulties with software integration, which undermined the smooth delivery of lessons. These barriers were particularly pronounced during synchronous learning sessions, where real-time interaction between students and instructors was essential. As a result, both students and educators expressed frustration with the limitations imposed by technological constraints, highlighting the need for more robust infrastructure and better technical support in blended learning environments.

Another significant challenge involved adapting teaching strategies to suit the hybrid model. While teachers acknowledged the benefits of incorporating online resources into their lessons, many struggled to balance face-to-face and online elements to maximize engagement and learning outcomes [11]. A recurring theme in the interviews was the difficulty maintaining student attention and participation during asynchronous sessions. Some students, particularly higher education students, reported feeling disconnected from the learning process when not actively engaged in real-time discussions. Teachers also noted the challenges of providing personalized feedback and support to students in large, mixed-modal classes, which often led to disengagement and reduced motivation among learners [12]. As a result, many instructors were forced to experiment with different teaching methods, including flipped classrooms, gamification, and peer-driven activities, to enhance student engagement and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all.

Despite these challenges, the research also uncovered a range of innovative practices developed in response to the needs of blended learning. One notable innovation was the increased use of collaborative learning platforms, allowing students to collaborate on projects, share resources, and engage in peer-to-peer discussions. These platforms facilitated deeper learning and helped bridge the gap between students attending in person and those participating remotely [13]. Additionally, teachers increasingly relied on interactive and multimedia-rich content, such as educational videos, podcasts, and virtual simulations, to maintain student interest and cater to diverse learning styles [14]. These innovations were particularly effective in disciplines such as science and the arts, where hands-on activities and visual aids are crucial for understanding complex concepts.

The study also highlighted a shift in the role of teachers in the blended learning environment. Educators reported that their role had evolved from being sole knowledge providers to facilitators of learning, guiding students through independent study and collaborative activities. This shift was particularly evident in the increased use of self-directed learning strategies, where students took more responsibility for their learning, supported by the resources and guidance provided by their instructors [15]. While many teachers appreciated this more flexible, student-centered approach, they also expressed concerns about the need for ongoing professional development in digital pedagogy to ensure that their teaching practices remained effective in the evolving educational landscape.

Regarding student perceptions, the research revealed a mixed response to blended learning. Many students, especially those in higher education, valued the flexibility offered by the hybrid model, which allowed them to balance academic work with other responsibilities, such as part-time employment or family obligations. However, a significant portion of students felt overwhelmed by the dual demands of online and in-person learning, particularly when the asynchronous components were not well-structured or lacked clear guidelines. Students with limited digital literacy also faced difficulties navigating online platforms and accessing learning materials, leading to exclusion and frustration [16]. This underscores the importance of providing adequate digital literacy training for students, especially those transitioning from traditional to blended learning environments.

Overall, the findings of this study point to the fact that while blended learning offers substantial benefits in terms of flexibility, access to diverse resources, and the development of digital skills, its success is contingent on addressing key challenges. These include ensuring equitable access to technology, providing targeted professional development for educators, and creating well-structured, engaging learning experiences that cater to the needs of all students [17]. The study suggests that blended learning can become a powerful tool for fostering deeper learning and greater academic achievement in post-pandemic classrooms with the right support.

The results of this study offer important insights into the post-pandemic implementation of blended learning, which can be analyzed within the broader context of existing research and theoretical perspectives on hybrid education. The findings resonate with several key themes identified in prior studies while contributing new understanding of the unique challenges and innovations experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic [18].

One of the most significant findings of this research is the ongoing digital divide, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged groups. This aligns with the concerns highlighted in previous studies by [19], who emphasized that despite the rapid adoption of online and blended learning during the pandemic, unequal access to technology remains a pervasive issue. Similar to earlier research, the study confirms that students in low-income areas often struggle with access to reliable internet connections and devices, which restricts their ability to engage in hybrid learning environments fully. This issue has been particularly highlighted in global contexts such as South Africa and rural areas of the United States, where

digital infrastructure is not as robust. The disparity in technological access presents a major challenge to achieving the equitable learning experiences that blended learning models aim to provide, thus reinforcing the importance of addressing infrastructural barriers in educational settings [20].

In terms of pedagogical adaptation, the findings of this study reveal that while educators were quick to incorporate online tools into their teaching, many struggled with the balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning. This is consistent with the work of Graham (2013), who argued that one of the central challenges of blended learning is designing an effective learning experience that maximizes the benefits of both face-to-face and online components. Teachers in this study reported difficulties in maintaining engagement during asynchronous sessions, a concern also highlighted by [21] in their exploration of online learning. While asynchronous learning provides flexibility, it can often lead to disengagement, especially when students lack sufficient structure or guidance. This study's finding that hybrid learning environments require careful orchestration of in-person and online elements aligns with Garrison's Community of Inquiry framework, which emphasizes the need for cognitive, social, and teaching presence to promote effective learning in online and blended settings [22].

Moreover, the findings regarding innovative practices—such as the increased use of collaborative learning platforms, multimedia content, and student-centered teaching strategies—reflect the dynamic shift in educational practices post-pandemic. This shift supports the theoretical perspective of connectivism, as proposed by [23], which suggests that learning in the digital age is increasingly based on connections and networks rather than solely on direct instruction. The innovative practices adopted by educators in this study mirror these principles, as teachers utilize digital platforms to distribute content and foster collaboration, interaction, and community-building among students. This finding contributes to the growing body of literature on the transformative potential of digital tools to support interactive, collaborative, and learner-centered education [24].

However, the findings also reveal some unintended consequences of these innovations. Despite the increased use of digital tools, many students, particularly in higher education, felt overwhelmed by the demands of managing both synchronous and asynchronous components of their courses. This aligns with research by [25], who found that students often struggle with the self-regulation required in blended learning environments, especially when they lack clear instructions or guidance on navigating the hybrid model. The issue of student overwhelm suggests that while digital tools can enhance learning, they must be integrated thoughtfully and accompanied by adequate scaffolding to support student success. This underscores the importance of aligning technological tools with sound pedagogical strategies that prioritize learner needs and facilitate manageable workloads [26].

Additionally, the shift in the role of educators from knowledge deliverers to facilitators of learning provides further insight into the evolving nature of teaching in blended environments. The findings echo the work of [27], who highlighted that in digital and blended learning contexts, educators must adopt new roles, including those of motivators and guides.

The study participants' experiences of transforming their teaching practices to suit hybrid learning environments better reflect this shift, as they moved towards a more student-centered approach, employing strategies such as flipped classrooms and peer-driven learning. While this transformation was well-received, it also highlighted the need for ongoing professional development. The lack of training for educators, which was identified as a challenge in this study, is also a recurring theme in the literature. Research [28] suggests that professional development programs focused on digital pedagogy are crucial to ensure teachers are equipped to use technology effectively and design engaging learning experiences.

Finally, the study's findings regarding student perceptions of blended learning underscore the need to account for the diverse experiences of learners in hybrid environments. While some students appreciated the flexibility that blended learning provided, others found it overwhelming and difficult to manage. This aligns with the findings of a study by [29], who found that blended learning's effectiveness heavily depends on students' ability to adapt to digital learning environments and their level of digital literacy. Students with lower digital skills were more likely to report challenges navigating online platforms and engaging with course materials, highlighting the need for better support structures, such as digital literacy training and clear guidance on succeeding in a hybrid learning model [30]. Therefore, the importance of supporting students' transition to blended learning through scaffolding and structured support is emphasized in this study and the broader literature.

The results of this study, when analyzed in conjunction with existing research and theoretical frameworks, highlight both the potential and the challenges of blended learning in post-pandemic classrooms. The findings underscore the need for educational institutions to address technological barriers, provide professional development for teachers, and offer adequate support for students in managing the demands of hybrid learning. By drawing on these insights and integrating them into the design of blended learning environments, schools and universities can maximize the benefits of this pedagogical model while mitigating its challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges and innovations in implementing blended learning in post-pandemic classrooms, with a particular focus on the experiences of educators and students. The research has provided valuable insights into the complexities of this shift, revealing that while blended learning presents numerous opportunities for flexibility and digital engagement, it also exposes significant challenges—most notably the unequal access to technology and the difficulty in balancing synchronous and asynchronous components. These findings echo the researcher's initial concern that, despite the potential of blended learning to enhance educational experiences, the rapid adoption of this model during the pandemic has highlighted a critical gap in infrastructure, digital literacy, and pedagogical preparedness that must be addressed for sustainable success.

However, the study also revealed the transformative potential of blended learning, with

educators developing innovative teaching strategies and fostering a more collaborative and student-centered learning environment. While these innovations have shown promise, the findings also point to several weaknesses, including the overwhelming workload placed on students and the inadequate professional development opportunities for teachers. These issues suggest the need for further investment in both technological infrastructure and teacher training to ensure the continued success of blended learning. Future research should explore these areas in greater depth, particularly focusing on long-term strategies for equitable technology access, effective teacher professional development, and the development of more structured support for students navigating hybrid learning environments. Furthermore, investigating the impact of blended learning on different educational levels and in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness and challenges.

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