

# Investigating cognitive presence in the enactment of Blended Learning for learning English Speaking: The perspective from the higher education in Indonesian Context

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**Abstract:** Blended learning is experienced by many educators widespread all over the world, especially during this pandemic time. Even so, not many of them can ensure the effectiveness of the classroom process in providing meaningful learning and achieving learning aims. Even though a number of studies of blended learning in teaching English in the EFL context have been conducted, there is a scarcity of research that explores the students' cognitive presence in attending the course with the learning mode of delivery. Understanding the elements of blended learning, such as cognitive presence, is crucial in creating interactive learning that contributes to the success of both learning modes, either face-to-face or online learning. Furthermore, the need of exploring cognitive presence in the implementation of blended learning is to encourage students' critical thinking and depth of knowledge. To fill the void, this qualitative study aims at investigating the students' perspective on their cognitive presence in learning English speaking by involving 6 preservice teachers in their sophomore years of study using interviews to dig into the phenomenon and collect the needed data. The data were analyzed by using an interactive model in which the researchers carry on the data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions. This study envisages recommendations regarding the plethora of ways shown by students in constructing and confirming meaning in shaping meaningful learning while doing blended learning. Furthermore, this study contributes to educators, language learners, and language policymakers in providing and paving the working principles in carrying out blended learning to get a successful instructional process.

**Keywords:** Blended learning; cognitive presence; preservice teachers' perspective

## INTRODUCTION

Blended learning carries a new look in EFL learning instruction not only for educators but it also affects the language learners (Nasrullah et al., 2021; Depalina Siregar et al., 2021; Pasaribu & Dewi, 2021). In the past, learning skills of English particularly through face-to-face interaction was a common way, however, since the inception of the pandemic in 2019, everything needs to be adapted including learning English speaking through the combination of online and face-to-face learning (Kearns, 2012; Dullien, 2016; Catalano et al., 2016). Through this way, a number of challenges need to be faced such as in the phase of online learning, learners need to encounter insufficient feedback (Rusmanayanti et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2020; Kelly & Antonio, 2016), online connection [10], unclear instructions [11], and overloaded tasks [12] which render them to be demotivated. A number of studies have been conducted on the upholding of learning English speaking via blended learning [13]–[15]. Of those studies, only few explored about the result and way of learning English but not the specific aims in the progress whatever ways that can depict the effective learning of English speaking. To fill the void, therefore, this study aims at investigating the cognitive presents that can contribute to English-speaking learning.

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## METHOD

This study employed qualitative design in which 6 preservice teachers were recruited. This design, as stated by Creswell (2009), looking at the real phenomena of how language learners especially preservice language learners learn speaking in the mode of blended learning delivery, this study was investigating the steps lied in the cognitive presence theory which involve triggering event, exploration, integration, resolution phase. The participants being involved were the 6 preservice teachers in their sophomore years who learn in the course English speaking for general purposes course in English Language Education Program at the Teacher Training and Education Faculty in one of the State University in South Kalimantan.

Prior to the collecting the data, the researchers presented the inform consent [17] so the participants were available to be involved in the research project. The moment of collecting the data was chosen when the participants were in the final term of speaking test. By so doing, the participants would not be aware that the information given was used for research purpose to ensure the natural setting conducted by researchers. The data were collected by using guided interview with 12 questions items in the phases available in cognitive presence. Upon the completion of the data, the thematic analysis was adopted in which the condensed themes had been curated from the selected coding and afterwards determined by the researchers during and after the data collection and reduction carried out.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The finding of this study presented the result of structured interviews with the students that reflect the cognitive presence of the learning process throughout the course. Cognitive present describes the progressive phases of the practical inquiry model such as triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution.

### *Triggering event*

The first phase of cognitive presence is triggering event that is associated as an indicator of recognizing a problem or a sense of puzzlement [1]. This is an important phase where students are actively involved in obtaining knowledge from a given problem independently [2]. At this phase, students are required to be fully involved in the inquiry process. Furthermore, the role of the teacher as facilitator [3] stimulates the students by giving them problem and setting up the learning environment so that they are able to explore the information deeply.

Based on the interview result, it was found that almost all of the students thought that the raised problems provoked them to seek further information. In addition, all the course issues and activities attracted their interest and curiosity. Moreover, students argue that interest and curiosity are aspects needed to motivate them to investigate new things made them were challenged to explore the content. The thoughts of what will be learned and done throughout the course motivated them to investigate the issues raised.

The following students' comments related to indicators of the triggering event phase, such as students' interest and curiosity increased after knowing the topics they will learn and the activities they will do as well as their motivation in investigating something new.

**Student 1:** Indeed, the problems given increased my interest. I experience it and want to know more about it. That's why the problems given in the class increased my interest to learn more. Then, I search it on the internet and know what it is and what I'm going to learn in the class. The learning activities also really make me curious because, just like any other people, before

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we come to the class, we are curious about what we are going to do in the class or what kind of activities we have to do in the class. It challenges me! And since the cases given were new for me, yeah of course I felt curious which motivated me to want to know more about it. Besides it's a must thing to learn, it's also new for me, so I feel like it's necessary to learn about it by exploring the information first.

**Student 2:** I totally agree. The problems given were interesting to be learned. Of course, we do not have a choice to have no interest in what we are going to learn, moreover it's our choice to learn this course. But the problems that were delivered in the course were interesting and made me curious about them. The curiosity in learning is necessary which helps us to want to learn more about something new. The feeling of curiosity also can help us to do the assignment or practice given. And if we don't have this feeling it would be hard to learn.

**Student 3:** Yes, I think every problem given increased my interest and curiosity to know about it, and as the result, I want to search for it more. Since I'm curious about the new material, learning activities that will be done in the class also took my curiosity. Every case/activity given trained us to increase our speaking skills and critical thinking skills. Because I want to improve my speaking skills, yeah, I am motivated to explore everything we should know.

### ***Exploration***

The second phase is exploration that associated to indicators such as divergence-among group members in the online community, divergence-within a single message, information exchange, suggestions for consideration, brainstorming, and leaps to conclusions [4]. The main focus of this phase is how students are able to understand the raised course issues and explore relevant information from various sources and possible explanations.

Students indicated that exploring new things developed the in-depth approach needed in learning activities. In addition, various relevant learning resources obtained from different resources are also very important in developing cognitive abilities [5] throughout speaking courses. Brainstorming activities, such as presenting videos or asking raised questions to the students, also stimulate students to interact with their classmates through discussions both face-to-face and online. Different perspectives students met during discussion assisted them to construct meaning and provided problem solutions to the raised problem as well as developed their language skills. A group discussion is an effective way for students to respect others' opinions. The following comments are students' thoughts related to indicators in the exploration phase:

**Student 4:** I usually used to learn through YouTube since it comes with a video which made me easy to understand the material by listening and watching it. In addition, relevant information from friends and their ideas helps me a lot to understand the material. We also had online discussions and it really helped me to know about my friends' opinions. Even though we have different opinions, their opinions are agreeable and make me also agree with them.

**Student 5:** My learning resources are 30% from the lecturer and 70% from other resources such as the internet, watching movies, listening to some English apps or English songs every day, and also textbook. Gaining information from reading the textbook also helps me to maintain what I learned from the class or before the class. Brainstorming helps me to recall what I had learned before coming to the class so I can follow the flow. I also used it to re-check what I understood about the material. Listening to my friends' opinions also broaden my insight.

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Sometimes I thought “am I wrong?” when I explore the material by myself (if we have different opinions). But after I heard others’ opinions which were totally different from mine, I think “oh, okay, we don’t need always to agree with others but accept it because we have different perspectives because the right things (truth) are not only one”.

**Student 6:** I usually learn through the internet, watching from YouTube, books, or any social media, for example, Instagram, Tik Tok, or the like. On some occasion, the lecturer showed us videos that related to our material and it was useful. It trains our mind to think critically, be more active, not only in speaking but also is useful for our writing, and enhances my vocabulary mastery. I often use it for my writing. I really appreciate my friends’ opinions when they delivered their perspectives in both online and offline discussions. We shared our ideas there and once when I delivered my thoughts (what I had learned) they responded to my ideas and it helped me to broaden my insight.

As for resolving the problem aspect in the exploration phase (Wang et al., 2013; Hopkins, 2010), one student said that if she resolved the raised problems individually by seeking information from the internet, capturing material displayed by the lecturer during a zoom meeting or visiting the link provided by the lecturer, and re-study it or asking classmate.

**Student 2:** I usually captured the material shown by the lecturer on zoom meeting and then I will re-learn it again if I don’t really understand the material or I want to know more about it. Sometimes I copy the link given by the lecturer and re-read it again by myself, or I ask some information from my classmates.

### ***Integration***

The third phase is integration associated to convergence-among group members, convergence-within a single message [8], connecting ideas, synthesis, and creating solutions (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008). This phase focuses on students’ process of constructing meaning (Ferri et al., 2020; Harper & Widodo, 2020; Clandinin & Huber, 2010) by integrating knowledge they obtained in phases 1 and 2 with others’ ideas through online discussion.

Almost all students indicated information they obtained independently (self-learning) and new information obtained from peer teaching activities (involving teachers and classmates) such as brainstorming and online discussions could help them in answering questions related to the course and construct meaningful knowledge. Students also found some relevant information from social media (Tik Tok and Instagram) and utilized them as learning references, especially when they had an assignment.

**Student 2:** I combined what I learned and what is given in the class. I also used references I found from social media like Tik Tok or the like for the assignment. Almost the material I got from social media is from native speakers and I like to use that too (for learning resources).

**Student 3:** I actually combine what I learned (from a book or YouTube) and what the lecturer gave to us. If I don’t really understand the material, I search it on the internet or ask directly to the lecturer.

However, some students prefer to use the information provided by the lecturer because they think that the information provided is valid and can be trusted.

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**Student 4:** I usually found different materials from what I learned and what the lecturer gave, but I prefer to use the information given by the lecturer because it's valid and trustworthy material (since he is the lecturer).

Learning activities carried out in the classroom also helped students understand the content (Yeh, 2018; Carrillo, 2019). The lecturer designed the course accompanied with practices that can be applied in real situations, for example, group discussions and role play. Thus, not only students' understanding of the content would increase, but their ability to speak in English also increased.

**Student 5:** Yes, learning activities help me a lot, especially with the simplest topic (simplest explanation or short material). They can help me to understand the material with real practice, for example how to give a compliment to others. By practicing it, I know how to use the expression in a real situation.

**Student 6:** Learning activities help me improve my English-speaking skills through practice with my friends

**Student 1:** They (learning activities) help me a lot! We sometimes did a role-play or other activities. These activities really helped us to practice our speaking skills so we can use the language in real-situation not only understand the material.

Another aspect of integration [14], reflection (lecturer's question or self-reflection), also supported students in answering course issues and developing a solution to the issues. In fact, when the students want to know more about the content, they explore it further to fulfil their curiosity.

**Student 1:** The teacher's questions help me recall what I learned. Sometimes I forget what I had learned before the class so when the teacher asked us about the material help me to recall it and make me more concerned about the material.

**Student 2:** I was thinking every after the class session there were materials/ contents that I really don't understand. And when I have more time, I re-learn again because one meeting is not enough so I need more time to understand it. I usually write the problems that I don't face during learning then I watch an explanation video. I've never been so hard about studying, when I have free time to re-learn I learn it so I can enjoy the process (without force).

**Student 3:** Reflection (either from the teacher or from myself) does help me to understand the material more. And when I'm still curious/don't understand the material, I will search it more to fulfil my curiosity.

### ***Resolution***

The last phase, which is the highest phase of cognitive presence, is resolution. In this phase, students try to solve the problems [15] and find out a contextually specific solution [16] by applying knowledge and ideas they have been constructed in the initial three phases to the real situation (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008). Some students remarkably mentioned they would or do apply the knowledge they obtained from the course. Due to the current condition (Covid-19), they did not have many opportunities to apply their knowledge and the fear to be told by others also caused them to not apply what they obtained from the course. However, they come up with their solutions and were able to apply their insight throughout the course in many ways.

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**Student 2:** Actually, there is one problem for me (or maybe others too) that I don't have many opportunities to practice my English or what I learned from the class in the real world or even in the English zone. Almost our speaking practices are based on the lecturer's instruction. But in this era, we are provided with some apps that can help us to practice our English. And to practice my speaking, I speak alone to myself using English. I practice in my room and try to correct my pronunciation by myself.

**Student 3:** Since it's difficult to speak English outside the English zone or with friends who can speak English, others will say "Sok inggris, so I practice what I learned in daily activities in the simplest way. For example, expressions such as thank you, can you help me. Those simplest expressions help me to practice my speaking and my English.

**Student 6:** I haven't had the opportunity to use what I learn with others (my friends). But if I have a situation in which I can use what I learned (either from class or from my self-learning), I will use it. For example, by giving an offering to others who need my help in that situation I use the expression of giving an offering to them (especially to someone who can speak English). I think I can apply what I learned to my friends in the English department or with someone who understands or can speak English, but I don't really think I can apply it outside the English zone. But I can use some of the expression for others in Bahasa which also useful for communication.

Some students admitted that what they learned through blended learning is useful [17], both in the learning environment or non-class-related environment. For non-class related environments, they mentioned the knowledge can be used for job application, business, or helping others. They even could improve their language skill outside the class activities.

**Student 4:** For myself, yes, I'm sure the insight I obtained from the course will be very useful and beneficial for me. For example, before I become an English student, I can barely understand what I read in English, and now I can understand English articles. Sometimes, when my family members don't understand English, they would ask me to help them, but for further activities (outside the class), I've never done anything yet.

**Student 5:** I can apply my knowledge with my friends in the English department or with people who can speak English. And for a non-class environment, I can use it for job applications, scholarship, or business

## CONCLUSION

It can be highlighted that despite its new way of learning for many language learners, blended learning still apparently gives meaningful experiences in which preservice language teachers go through the process of gaining skills, not to mention the four English skills, in English speaking rigorously. Moreover, interactive skills that are supposed to be obtained in the advanced level of speaking course still can be envisaged during the ongoing process of this current instructional mode of delivery. It can be manifested because digital resources pleased the access of learners to bridge whatever they will learn in the future in the speaking course. Hence, the existence in the emphasis on cognitive presence enables learners to monitor the learning process and do self-reflection as the special cue to a lifelong learning.

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