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Blended Learning for Quality Education (SDG 4) in an EFL Critical Reading Course: Lecturer's and Students' Perceptions

S. Sumihatul Ummah MS*, Syafi'ul Anam, Slamet Setiawan

State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *The study explored the lecturer's and students' perceptions of blended learning implementation in an EFL critical reading course, its perceived benefits and challenges, and its potential contribution to quality education under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).* ***Method:*** *A qualitative case study design was employed in a university context. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and course documentation and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Trustworthiness was addressed through methodological triangulation, contextual description, an audit trail, and researcher reflexivity.* ***Results:*** *Participants perceived blended learning as a connected sequence of online preparation, classroom discussion, and reconsideration of textual interpretations. Perceived benefits included repeated access to materials, opportunities to prepare responses, engagement with alternative perspectives, and guidance in supporting interpretations with textual evidence. Challenges involved uneven preparation, difficulty evaluating arguments and expressing interpretations in English, additional instructional workload, unstable connectivity, and dependence on mobile devices. The potential contribution to SDG 4 was interpreted through opportunities for guided analytical participation and flexible engagement, while equitable participation remained conditional on accessible resources and appropriate support. These perceptions did not establish causal improvements in critical reading or SDG 4 attainment.* ***Novelty:*** *The study connected lecturer and student perspectives on instructional integration with a contextual interpretation of quality, inclusion, and equity in blended critical reading. It highlighted how pedagogical coherence and practical access conditions jointly shaped perceived opportunities for quality education, offering an account of SDG 4 that extended beyond technology provision to the conditions supporting meaningful participation in university EFL critical reading.*

INTRODUCTION

Quality education is central to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which calls for inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. In higher education, this commitment requires attention to whether students can access learning resources, participate meaningfully in academic activities, and receive support responsive to their diverse needs. UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021) situates educational renewal within a commitment to social justice, cooperation, and education as a common good. In this case, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education should provide opportunities for students to engage actively with texts, exchange perspectives, and develop critical thinking alongside linguistic competence. Liang's (2023) research synthesis supports this pedagogical direction by identifying independent study, critical thinking practice, interaction, collaboration, and reflection as principles for technology-supported English language education. Similarly, Bates (2022) emphasizes the importance of designing digital learning around learners' needs, appropriate teaching methods, and accessible learning environments. However,

technology integration requires careful consideration because digital inequalities and inadequate educational support can constrain its contribution to equity and inclusion (UNESCO, 2023). Consequently, examining lecturers' and students' perceptions of access, participation, and instructional support in blended EFL critical reading courses offers a contextually grounded way to understand how their learning experiences align with the aspirations of SDG 4.

Within the broader pursuit of quality education, critical reading is an essential component of EFL university learning because it requires students to identify arguments, evaluate supporting evidence, recognize bias, and interpret authors' underlying assumptions and perspectives. Wallace and Wray (2021) emphasize that critical engagement with academic texts involves assessing the credibility of claims and the adequacy of their justification. For EFL students, these evaluative processes intersect with linguistic demands, as understanding vocabulary and textual relationships provides an important foundation for interpreting and questioning meaning.

Eriksson (2023), for example, identified difficulties with subject-specific vocabulary, insufficient preparation for academic reading, and the considerable time required to read English texts among university students in Sweden. These findings provide a relevant point of departure for examining classroom practices in the present study, particularly whether students prioritize translation over interpretation, participate unevenly in discussions, or experience difficulty evaluating arguments. In a blended learning environment, differences in access to digital materials and instructional support also warrant attention, given the importance of accessibility and learner support in digital course design (Bates, 2022). Examining how these issues are experienced in the research setting therefore requires an exploration of both the lecturer's and students' perceptions of the opportunities, difficulties, and support associated with critical reading across face-to-face and online activities.

To address these pedagogical demands, blended learning offers an approach that deliberately integrates face-to-face instruction and online activities within a coherent learning sequence. McCarthy and Palmer (2023) emphasize that effective implementation requires conceptual clarity and an educational framework that connects technological provision with teaching and learning priorities. In an EFL critical reading course, this integration can involve independent reading before class, digital annotations identifying claims and evidence, online discussions comparing interpretations, and subsequent classroom dialogue in which students evaluate arguments with lecturer guidance. Such activities can connect individual preparation with collaborative inquiry while providing opportunities to revisit texts and receive feedback. Although Rahimzadeh and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2022) reported improvements in EFL reading comprehension through blended instruction, the implications for critical reading require attention to how activities support evaluation and reasoned interpretation.

Moreover, Palikat and Gruba (2022) situate sustainable blended language learning within the broader demands of curriculum development, professional learning, and technological resources. Accordingly, its relevance to SDG 4 should be examined through students' actual opportunities to access materials, obtain instructional support, and participate meaningfully across learning environments. Exploring the lecturer's and students' perceptions is therefore important for understanding how these opportunities and constraints are experienced within a particular institutional context.

Building on this pedagogical rationale, previous research has examined blended learning through complementary perspectives on EFL learning experiences and reading development. In Chinese higher education, Wu and Luo (2022) investigated perceptions of a MOOC-supported undergraduate English course through a survey of 122 students

and interviews with five students and three lecturers. Participants reported greater flexibility, interaction, and understanding of course content, although lecturers experienced increased workloads and some students encountered connectivity and self-management difficulties. Whereas this study emphasized participants' perceptions, Rahimzadeh and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2022) examined reading proficiency through an experimental–control-group study involving 60 intermediate EFL learners in Iran. Their findings indicated stronger post-test reading comprehension performance in the blended learning group than in the traditionally taught group. However, these comprehension gains do not establish equivalent improvements in evaluating evidence or identifying bias. Addressing higher-order learning more directly, Liang (2023) synthesized 33 studies of technology-assisted critical thinking in English language education and proposed design principles emphasizing independent study, critical thinking practice, interaction, collaboration, reflection, and problem-solving. Together, these studies suggest that blended approaches can support language learning and reading development, while highlighting the need to distinguish favorable perceptions and comprehension outcomes from students' actual engagement in critical interpretation and argument evaluation.

A further strand of research shifts attention from learning outcomes to the social, institutional, and equity conditions shaping blended learning experiences. Using observations, document analysis, and interviews with three teachers and 18 students across three university courses, Pei et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative case study of community formation in blended education. They found that collaborative learning and opportunities for social connection supported a sense of community, while problematic group dynamics, dependence on teacher authority, and doubts about digital tools' capacity to facilitate in-depth conversation complicated participation.

Extending the analysis beyond individual courses, Palikat and Gruba's (2022) research-based book draws on an 18-month longitudinal investigation of a university-pathway English for Academic Purposes program to examine the sustainability of technology integration, emphasizing its relationship with curriculum change, professional development, and technological resources. At a broader policy level, UNESCO's (2023) global evidence report examines educational technology through access, equity, inclusion, and quality, demonstrating why technological availability alone is insufficient to ensure equitable educational opportunities. Although these sources differ in scope and method, their combined implications suggest that educational quality depends on how learning arrangements accommodate learners and sustain meaningful participation. Within this reviewed literature, the relationship between lecturer and student perceptions, critical reading practices, and SDG 4 remains insufficiently explained, providing a rationale for a contextual qualitative case study.

In response to the identified research gap, this qualitative case study aims to explore how the lecturer and students perceive the implementation of blended learning in a university EFL critical reading course, identify the benefits and challenges they experience, and examine how their perceptions illuminate its potential contribution to SDG 4 in higher education. Specifically, the study considers access to learning materials, inclusivity, meaningful participation, and instructional support as dimensions through which participants' experiences can be interpreted. This emphasis on both participant perspectives and learning processes is informed by research highlighting the importance of social relationships in blended education (Pei et al., 2024), accessible and inclusive digital learning opportunities (Lomellini et al., 2025), and pedagogical frameworks responsive to the roles of students and academics (McCarthy & Palmer, 2023). By examining participant accounts alongside observations and course documentation, the study seeks to provide a contextual understanding of how online and face-to-face

activities support or constrain engagement with critical reading tasks. Its expected contribution is empirical insight that can inform the design of reading activities, feedback practices, and learning support responsive to students' needs and local teaching conditions. Consistent with its qualitative case study design, the study prioritizes an in-depth understanding of experiences and processes, offering context-sensitive implications for educational quality rather than estimating causal effects or measuring overall progress toward SDG 4.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to explore the lecturer's and students' perceptions of blended learning in a university EFL critical reading course and its perceived relevance to quality education under SDG 4. Creswell and Poth (2024) describe case study research as an approach to developing an in-depth understanding of a bounded case within its real-life context through multiple sources of information. Accordingly, the case is defined as the implementation of blended learning within the selected course, with attention to the relationship between face-to-face and online learning activities. This design also reflects Tisdell et al.'s (2025) emphasis on understanding how participants interpret their experiences and construct meaning within particular social settings. Consistent with Sugiyono's (2023) discussion of qualitative inquiry, the study examines the phenomenon in its natural setting and prioritizes contextual meaning. Observations, interviews, and course documentation provide complementary perspectives on the implementation of blended learning, its perceived benefits and challenges, and the conditions shaping access, inclusivity, participation, and learning support. The design therefore enables a contextual exploration of participants' experiences and instructional processes, generating insights into the course's potential alignment with SDG 4.

Research setting and participants

This study is situated in the English Language Education Study Program at UIN Madura during the odd semester of the 2026/2027 academic year. The research focused on third-semester students attending an EFL critical reading course in two intact classes namely Class 3A, consisting of 35 students, and Class 3B, consisting of 35 students. The study therefore encompasses 70 students and one lecturer responsible for teaching both classes. These classes constitute a single case situated within a shared institutional and curricular context. The selection of this setting reflects the emphasis in qualitative research on understanding participants' experiences within their natural social environment (Moleong, 2022).

Data collection

Data collection involved observations, semi-structured interviews, and document review to develop a contextual understanding of blended learning in the EFL critical reading course. These complementary sources are consistent with the contextual focus of case study inquiry discussed by Hamzah (2020). Observations will cover face-to-face lessons and, with permission, relevant online learning activities in Classes 3A and 3B. An observation guide will direct attention to the integration of learning activities, lecturer–students and peer interaction, instructional support, and students' engagement in identifying claims, evaluating evidence, recognizing bias, and discussing alternative interpretations. Field notes will distinguish descriptions of observed events from the

researcher's preliminary reflections, reflecting Saldaña and Omasta's (2022) emphasis on the relationship between data generation and ongoing analytical thinking.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the lecturer and a purposively selected subset of students from both classes to explore their perceptions of implementation, perceived benefits and challenges, and experiences of learning support. Students selection seek variation in participation and access to digital resources, allowing different experiences to be represented. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to describe specific learning episodes rather than provide only general evaluations. Interviews was conducted in participants' preferred language, recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis. Document review examined available and authorized course materials, including the syllabus, lesson plans, reading tasks, assessment rubrics, students' annotations, and relevant online discussion records. Following Sugiyono's (2020) discussion of observation, interviewing, and documentation in qualitative research, these sources will be compared to identify convergence, complementarity, and differences between reported experiences and documented practices. Together, they supported an interpretation of access, inclusivity, participation, and learning support as dimensions relevant to SDG 4.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to develop a contextual understanding of the lecturer's and students' perceptions of blended learning in the EFL critical reading course. Following the six-phase approach illustrated by Byrne (2022), the analysis involved familiarization with the dataset, initial coding, generation of candidate themes, development and review of themes, refinement of theme definitions and names, and production of the analytical report. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and relevant course documents were read repeatedly, with preliminary interpretations recorded in reflexive memos. Coding initially remained open to participants' accounts of instructional practices, perceived benefits, challenges, and learning experiences. Consistent with Flick's (2022) attention to researcher subjectivity in qualitative inquiry, the researcher documented how prior assumptions and involvement in the research setting shaped analytical decisions. Themes were developed through recursive engagement with coded extracts and the complete dataset, rather than treated as predetermined categories.

The analysis subsequently examined similarities and differences between the lecturer's account and students' accounts, including variation within and across Classes 3A and 3B. Interview interpretations were considered alongside observations and documents to explore convergence, complementarity, and contradiction between reported experiences and instructional practices. Drawing on Silverman's (2024) guidance on interpreting qualitative data, analytical claims were supported by contextualized evidence, with attention to accounts that challenged emerging interpretations. Cao et al. (2024), who employed thematic analysis to investigate EFL students' perceptions of blended learning, provided a relevant empirical precedent; however, their findings were not adopted as a coding framework. Once themes had been developed, their implications were interpreted in relation to access, inclusivity, participation, and learning support as dimensions relevant to SDG 4. The final report integrated illustrative quotations, observational evidence, and documentary extracts to explain participants' experiences without inferring causal effects or claiming to measure overall SDG 4 attainment.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, with procedures aligned with the study's qualitative case study design and reflexive thematic analysis. Following Novak and Jen's (2024) discussion of transparent reporting, detailed field notes and contextual descriptions documented the research setting, participant groups, and instructional activities. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation of interviews, observations, and course documents, alongside comparison of the lecturer's and students' accounts. These comparisons examined convergence, complementarity, and contradiction rather than assuming that agreement alone established credibility, consistent with Donkoh and Mensah's (2023) discussion of triangulation. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the institutional context, the two classes, and the integration of online and face-to-face learning, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other settings. Dependability was addressed through an audit trail documenting data preparation, coding decisions, theme development, and revisions to interpretations. Confirmability was supported through reflexive memos that examined how the researcher's assumptions and relationship with the setting influenced the analysis. Informed by Lochmiller et al. (2026), these practices were treated as interconnected methodological commitments rather than a procedural checklist. Interpretations were grounded in contextualized quotations, observational records, and documentary evidence, including accounts that challenged developing themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents and discusses the findings in relation to the three research questions. These are the lecturer's and students' perceptions of blended learning implementation in the EFL critical reading course, its perceived benefits and challenges, and its potential contribution to SDG 4. Drawing on interviews, observations, and course documents, the discussion interprets the themes within the research context and relates them to previous studies, with particular attention to access, inclusivity, participation, and learning support.

The lecturer's and students' perceptions of blended learning implementation in the EFL critical reading course

Based on the result of research finding, it showed that the lecturer perceived blended learning as a coordinated instructional arrangement that integrated online and face-to-face activities around common critical reading objectives. The lecturer stated:

> *"I understand blended learning as a planned integration of face-to-face and online activities within one instructional sequence. In my course, both components address the same critical reading objectives, including identifying claims, examining evidence, and interpreting the author's perspective. I regard the online component as an integral part of the course rather than an additional activity separate from classroom instruction."*

This account indicated that the lecturer's understanding emphasized instructional coherence rather than the separate provision of classroom teaching and digital tasks. Both components were described as addressing textual claims, evidence, and authorial perspectives. This emphasis on purposeful integration was consistent with the characterization of blended teaching as a coordinated combination of instructional modalities, resources, and strategies presented by Tao et al. (2024). However, the

interview established the lecturer's perception of implementation rather than independently demonstrating the alignment of all course activities.

Moreover, the lecturer described online and face-to-face activities as connected stages of preparation, collective examination, and reconsideration. The lecturer explained below:

> *"I view the two components as connected stages of the reading process. Before a classroom session, students read the assigned text and post annotations or initial interpretations online. During the face-to-face session, we examine those interpretations and discuss the arguments presented in the text. Students subsequently revisit their responses online and explain whether their interpretations have changed following the classroom discussion."*

According to this description, preliminary online responses provided material for classroom discussion, while subsequent online activities required students to reconsider their earlier interpretations. The account therefore presented an instructional sequence that extended beyond a single classroom meeting. Its preparatory component shared a feature of the flipped learning arrangements examined in higher education EFL research by Fisher et al. (2024). Nevertheless, the lecturer described a broader sequence that also included returning to online responses after classroom discussion.

The lecturer identified differentiated responsibilities for instructional organization and student engagement across both learning environments. The lecturer reported as follow:

> *"I perceive my role as designing the learning sequence, selecting texts, framing analytical questions, and guiding discussions. Students are expected to prepare their readings, formulate interpretations, and justify their responses using textual evidence. These roles apply across both components, although their expression differs: online activities involve written responses and annotations, while classroom sessions involve oral discussion and collective examination of the text."*

This statement positioned the lecturer as responsible for structuring and guiding instruction, while students were expected to prepare, interpret, and substantiate their responses. The distinction between the two environments concerned the forms through which these responsibilities were expressed. This attention to instructional guidance and interaction corresponded with Pei et al.'s (2024) examination of teaching presence, independent study, and collaborative activities in blended education. The interview, however, described expected responsibilities and did not establish that every student consistently fulfilled them.

Additionally, the lecturer characterized meaningful participation as analytical engagement demonstrated through textual justification and consideration of different interpretations. The lecturer stated as below:

> *"To me, meaningful participation involves presenting an interpretation and explaining its basis in the text. I expect students to distinguish the author's claims from supporting evidence, identify underlying assumptions, and consider alternative perspectives. In online discussions and classroom exchanges, I look for reasoned responses that engage with the text and with other students' interpretations. I therefore understand participation as analytical engagement rather than attendance or task completion alone."*

The account indicated that the lecturer's expectations concerned the substance of students' contributions, including their reasoning, use of evidence, and engagement with peers' viewpoints. This distinction between completing activities and undertaking higher-order interpretation was relevant to Le et al.'s (2024) finding that EFL students

frequently relied on lower-order strategies in critical reading. In the present interview, these expectations represented the lecturer's criteria for participation rather than evidence that students had attained the specified abilities.

The result of interviewed with the students, it showed that they account presented blended learning as a connected arrangement of classroom and online activities organized around the same reading topic. The response stated,

> *"For me, the course involved activities in class and online, but they were connected to the same reading topic. We usually read a text and submitted our responses online, then discussed it when we met in class. So, I understood the online activities as part of our regular lessons."*

This statement indicated that they understood online tasks as an established component of the course rather than as separate assignments. Reading, submitting responses, and discussing texts were described as related activities within the same instructional process. This account shared a contextual similarity with Wu and Luo's (2022) investigation of an undergraduate English course in which online materials and classroom activities formed part of a blended learning arrangement. The response, however, primarily documented their understanding of course organization rather than an evaluation of its effectiveness.

On the other hand, the students account described a sequence that linked preparation before class, explanation during classroom meetings, and reconsideration after discussion. The response explained,

> *"Before class, we read the assigned text and wrote our initial responses online. During the meeting, the lecturer referred to those responses and asked us to explain our interpretations. After the discussion, we sometimes returned to our answers and explained whether we still agreed with what we had written."*

The lecturer's reference to previously submitted responses connected online preparation with classroom interaction. The word "sometimes" also indicated that reconsideration of earlier answers occurred on some occasions rather than after every lesson. The preparatory stage resembled an instructional feature examined in Fisher et al.'s (2024) review of flipped learning in higher education EFL settings, although the account additionally described follow-up activities after classroom discussion. It therefore portrayed implementation as a sequence in which earlier responses remained relevant to subsequent reading activities.

The respondents understood participation in the course as involving preparation, written contributions, oral explanation, and attention to classmates' interpretations. The response stated,

> *"I understood that I needed to read the text before the meeting and prepare my own response. Online, I wrote comments or answered questions about the reading. In class, I was expected to explain my answer and show which part of the text supported it. I also needed to listen to my classmates' interpretations and respond when the lecturer asked us to discuss them."*

This account identified different forms of responsibility across the two learning environments while maintaining a common expectation of engagement with the text. Written online responses were accompanied by classroom expectations concerning explanation and textual justification. The reference to classmates' interpretations also situated participation within an interactive learning process. This aspect corresponded with Pei et al.'s (2024) examination of independents study, collaborative activities, and

instructional guidance in blended education, while the present response remained an account of perceived responsibilities.

The students characterized critical reading participation as presenting interpretations, providing textual reasons, examining evidence, and considering other viewpoints. The response stated,

> *"To me, participating meant giving my interpretation and explaining why I understood the text that way. Just submitting an answer was only one part of it. When we discussed a text, I understood that I should refer to the author's words, look at the evidence, and consider other interpretations. My response could be a written comment online or something I explained during the classroom discussion."*

The statement above distinguished the submission of an answer from the reasoning expected to accompany it. Meaningful participation was therefore understood in terms of the content and justification of a response, whether expressed online or orally. This emphasis was relevant to Le et al.'s (2024) investigation of EFL critical reading strategies, which distinguished lower-order processing from higher-order engagement. Nevertheless, the interview response documented their understanding of analytical participation rather than independently demonstrating mastery of those reading practices.

The lecturer's and students' perceptions regarding benefits and challenges of blended learning implementation in the EFL critical reading course.

This section examined the lecturer's and students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of implementing blended learning in the EFL critical reading course. Their accounts highlighted perceived opportunities for reading preparation, classroom interaction, and analytical engagement, alongside difficulties related to instructional continuity, learning readiness, and access to online activities. These perspectives provided a contextual understanding of how participants experienced the integration of online and face-to-face learning.

The lecturer perceived advance reading and access to students' preliminary interpretations as benefits of blended learning implementation in the EFL critical reading course. The lecturer stated,

> *"One benefit I noticed was that students had time to read the text and prepare their interpretations before coming to class. Their online responses gave me an idea of what they understood and which arguments needed further examination. During classroom discussions, we could refer to those responses and ask students to explain their reasoning using evidence from the text. However, I would not say that every student demonstrated the same level of critical engagement."*

It indicated that online responses informed the lecturer's preparation by identifying students' interpretations and arguments requiring further attention. Classroom discussion subsequently involved asking students to substantiate their reasoning with textual evidence. Nevertheless, the lecturer explicitly acknowledged differences in critical engagement, qualifying any interpretation that the approach benefited all students equally. These perceived opportunities for preparation and interaction were consistent with aspects of the blended English learning experience reported by Wu and Luo (2022), although the present account did not establish measurable improvements in critical reading performance. Besides, the lecturer also identified the continuity between online preparation and classroom discussion as a central instructional challenge. The lecturer explained as follow:

> *"The main challenge was making sure that the online work actually carried into the classroom discussion. Some students submitted short answers that summarized the text without examining the author's arguments. Others came to class without completing the reading, so they were not ready to explain their interpretations. I needed to check their responses beforehand and prepare follow-up questions. That required additional preparation time, especially when I wanted to give individual feedback."*

It distinguished task submission from analytical preparation: some responses reproduced textual content without examining argumentation, while incomplete reading left other students unprepared to explain their interpretations. The lecturer consequently described additional responsibilities involving response review, follow-up questioning, and individualized feedback. These experiences situated workload and instructional preparation within the implementation process, corresponding with the broader barriers and drawbacks examined among university English language lecturers by Le et al. (2022). However, the reported difficulties remained specific to the lecturer's account of this course.

Next, the lecturer perceived students' learning circumstances as a source of variation in their experiences of blended critical reading instruction. The lecturer reported below:

> *"Students experienced the course differently. Some appreciated being able to revisit the materials and prepare a written response before speaking in class. Others had unstable internet connections or depended on their phones, which made reading longer texts and writing annotations less straightforward. Their ability to manage independent study also varied. These differences reminded me that providing the same online activities did not necessarily mean that everyone had the same opportunity to participate."*

This statement described both opportunities for revisiting materials and constraints associated with connectivity, device dependence, and independent study. The lecturer therefore distinguished the provision of identical activities from equitable opportunities to undertake them. This concern corresponded with Lomellini et al.'s (2025) examination of accessible and inclusive online learning, particularly the need to consider whether digital arrangements accommodated learners' different circumstances. Nevertheless, the interview represented the lecturer's interpretation of students' experiences and required comparison with student accounts to establish how those circumstances were experienced directly.

On the other hand, the result of research findings also showed that the students account identified advance access to reading materials and opportunities to compare interpretations as perceived benefits of blended learning in the EFL critical reading course. The response stated,

> *"According to me, having the text before class gave me time to read it more than once and prepare my answers. When we discussed it in class, I could compare my interpretation with my classmates' ideas. Sometimes, someone pointed out something in the author's argument that I had missed. I could then go back to the text and reconsider my answer, although I did not always change my opinion".*

It indicated that access before class provided opportunities for repeated reading and initial preparation, while classroom exchanges exposed the respondent to aspects of the argument that had previously been overlooked. Reconsideration did not necessarily involve changing an opinion; instead, the students described returning to the text to review an interpretation after hearing alternative perspectives. This emphasis on preparation and peer interaction shared features with Pei et al.'s (2024) findings

concerning students' appreciation of self-study opportunities and collaborative learning in blended education. Nevertheless, it documented a perceived benefit rather than a measured improvement in critical reading ability.

The students account revealed difficulties in progressing from textual comprehension to argument evaluation and in expressing interpretations orally in English. The response explained,

> *"One difficulty was knowing how to move beyond summarizing the text. Sometimes, I understood what the author said, but I was unsure how to question the argument or judge the evidence. I also found it difficult to explain my interpretation in English during class, even when I had written an answer online. When that happened, I needed more time or a follow-up question from the lecturer before I could explain my point."*

This statement distinguished understanding critically examining the reasoning and evidence supporting it. It also indicated that preparing a written response did not always translate into an immediate oral explanation during classroom discussion. Additional time and follow-up questions were described as forms of support that helped them articulate an interpretation. The reported uncertainty about evaluating arguments corresponded with Le et al.'s (2024) findings concerning students' reliance on knowledge-based reading strategies and difficulties undertaking higher-order critical reading. The account therefore described both analytical and linguistic challenges within the blended course.

Finally, the students account portrayed repeated access to materials as useful while identifying device limitations, unstable connectivity, and study timing as constraints on participation. The response stated,

> *"I liked being able to open the materials again when I needed to check something. However, I mostly used my phone, so reading a long text while typing a response was sometimes awkward. My internet connection was also unstable on some evenings. I had to plan when to download the text and complete the task. When I left the reading until just before class, I usually had less to contribute to the discussion."*

It indicated that the availability of digital materials did not remove practical difficulties in using them. Reading and composing responses on a phone required managing competing activities on a limited screen, while intermittent connectivity required advance planning. The students also associated delayed preparation with having fewer contributions to classroom discussion. These experiences illustrated how access conditions and independent study routines shaped the perceived usefulness of blended learning. As a broader contextual comparison, Lomellini et al. (2025) identified accessibility and self-directed learning as important considerations in inclusive online higher education, although their review primarily concerned disabled students.

The potential contribution of blended learning in the EFL critical reading course to quality education (SDG 4) in higher education

Based the result of research finding, it showed that the lecturer perceived blended learning's potential contribution to quality education through opportunities for preparation, evidence-based interpretation, and instructional guidance. The lecturer stated below:

> *"I think its contribution was in how students prepared for reading and discussed their interpretations. They could read the materials before class and write an initial response online. I then used those responses to identify points that needed further discussion. During class, I asked them to explain their reasoning and support their interpretations with evidence. For me, quality education involved giving students opportunities to*

> *question ideas and receive guidance, rather than simply complete assignments. However, I could not conclude from these activities alone that every student improved their critical reading."*

It indicated that online preparation informed subsequent classroom discussion, allowing the lecturer to identify interpretations requiring further examination. The perceived contribution concerned students' opportunities to question ideas, justify responses, and receive guidance throughout the reading process. A related emphasis appeared in Pei et al.'s (2024) findings, which highlighted students' appreciation of self-study opportunities and collaborative learning in blended education. Nevertheless, the lecturer's qualification indicated that these instructional opportunities did not establish improvement in every student's critical reading. The account therefore described a potential contribution to quality education rather than demonstrated attainment of SDG 4.

Besides, the lecturer perceived equitable and inclusive participation as dependent on both varied participation formats and attention to students' learning circumstances. The lecturer explained as follow:

> *"The online and classroom activities gave students different ways to contribute. Some expressed their ideas more fully in writing, while others preferred explaining them during classroom discussions. Having both formats gave me more opportunities to hear their interpretations. Still, the opportunities were not equal for everyone. Some students had unreliable internet connections or relied on their phones to read long texts. Others needed more guidance to prepare independently. I felt that contributing to SDG 4 required attention to these differences, including accessible materials, sufficient preparation time, and support for students who needed it."*

This statement indicated that written and oral activities accommodated different ways of expressing interpretations, while connectivity problems, device dependence, and differing preparation needs constrained participation. The lecturer consequently distinguished the availability of activities from equitable opportunities to undertake them. Accessible materials, preparation time, and additional guidance were identified as conditions requiring attention. As a broader comparison, Lomellini et al.'s (2025) review identified barriers to accessible online learning and emphasized attention to learner variability, although its primary focus concerned disabled students. The interview account thus positioned blended learning's potential contribution to SDG 4 as conditional on addressing differences in access and support.

On the other hand, the students statement described blended learning's potential contribution to quality education through opportunities for reading preparation, textual justification, and reconsideration of interpretations. The respondent statedas below:

> *"For me, having the reading materials online meant I could read them before class and check parts I did not understand. I usually wrote an initial answer, and during class, the lecturer asked us to explain our ideas using evidence from the text. Hearing other interpretations sometimes made me notice something I had missed. I felt that the course gave me opportunities to question what I read instead of only looking for the correct answer. However, I still needed guidance when the author's argument was difficult to evaluate."*

It indicated that online materials supported preparation before classroom meetings, while subsequent discussions required the respondent to explain interpretations with textual evidence. Exposure to other interpretations also prompted attention to previously overlooked aspects of the text. These experiences suggested opportunities relevant to quality education, particularly through questioning and guided analytical participation,

although the continuing need for assistance qualified any claim of independent mastery. A related emphasis appeared in Pei et al.'s (2024) findings, which highlighted students' appreciation of self-study opportunities and collaborative learning in blended education. The present account therefore suggested a potential contribution to SDG 4 through the quality of learning opportunities rather than demonstrated improvement in critical reading performance.

Finally, they also portrayed equitable participation as dependent on accessible materials, sufficient preparation time, and instructional support. The respondent explained as follow:

> *"I felt more comfortable writing my ideas online before explaining them in class. It gave me another way to contribute when I was not ready to speak immediately. However, I mostly used my phone, and reading a long text while typing an answer was sometimes difficult. My internet connection was not always reliable either. Downloadable materials and enough preparation time were important to me. I also needed clear instructions and a chance to ask questions. For me, having online activities was useful, but being able to access and complete them properly mattered just as much."*

This statement indicated that written online participation provided an additional route for expressing ideas before oral discussion. However, device limitations and unreliable connectivity constrained the respondent's ability to use that opportunity. The account consequently distinguished the availability of online activities from the practical conditions required to participate meaningfully. As a broader contextual comparison, Lomellini et al.'s (2025) review identified accessibility barriers and the importance of accommodating learner variability in online higher education, although its primary focus concerned disabled students. The respondent's description thus suggested that blended learning's potential contribution to inclusive and equitable quality education remained conditional on usable resources and appropriate learning support.

Discussion

The lecturer's and students' perceptions of blended learning implementation in the EFL critical reading course

This discussion interpreted the lecturer's and students' perceptions of blended learning implementation in the EFL critical reading course in higher education. These perceptions were considered alongside relevant theoretical perspectives and previous research to contextualize the findings.

The lecturer's and students accounts suggested a shared understanding of blended learning implementation as a connected instructional sequence organized around common critical reading objectives. The lecturer emphasized deliberate coordination between online preparation, classroom examination, and subsequent reconsideration, while the student account described online responses as an established component of regular lessons. These perceptions suggested that instructional continuity shaped how participants understood the relationship between the two learning environments. Theoretically, this interpretation was consistent with Vaughan et al.'s (2023) discussion of the Community of Inquiry framework, which emphasized purposeful design, facilitation, and the relationship between individual reflection and collaborative meaning construction. The preparatory stage also resembled an instructional feature examined in Fisher et al.'s (2024) review of flipped learning in higher education EFL settings, although the present accounts additionally described returning to interpretations after classroom discussion. Wu and Luo's (2022) investigation provided a further comparison through its

integration of online resources into an undergraduate English course. However, the student's statement that responses were revisited "sometimes" qualified the lecturer's more systematic description. The accounts therefore indicated convergence in participants' understanding of course organization, alongside a possible difference between the intended sequence and the frequency with which its final stage was experienced.

Additionally, the accounts further suggested that participants perceived meaningful participation through preparation, textual justification, and engagement with alternative interpretations. The lecturer described responsibilities for selecting texts, framing analytical questions, and guiding discussion, whereas the student account emphasized preparing responses, explaining their textual basis, and considering classmates' viewpoints. Within the Community of Inquiry perspective presented by Vaughan et al. (2023), these complementary responsibilities were interpreted through teaching presence and cognitive presence: instructional organization provided direction, while reflection and dialogue created opportunities to examine meaning. Pei et al.'s (2024) findings offered a relevant empirical comparison by highlighting collaborative learning and the relationship between teachers' efforts to encourage autonomy and students' continuing reliance on instructional authority. In the present accounts, student responsibility similarly coexisted with continuing lecturer guidance. Nevertheless, participants' emphasis on analytical contributions did not establish that students consistently demonstrated higher-order reading abilities. This distinction was supported by Le et al.'s (2024) findings concerning EFL students' reliance on lower-order strategies and difficulties undertaking critical evaluation. Consequently, the findings were interpreted as convergence in participants' understanding of expected critical reading practices, rather than evidence of improved proficiency. Implementation was thus perceived through the coordination of instructional guidance, student responsibility, and reasoned contributions across online and classroom activities.

The lecturer's and students' perceptions regarding benefits and challenges of blended learning implementation in the EFL critical reading course.

The findings showed the lecturer's and students' statements suggested that the perceived benefits of blended learning arose from the connection between advance preparation, classroom interaction, and reconsideration of textual interpretations. The lecturer valued preliminary online responses as a basis for identifying arguments requiring further examination, whereas the student account emphasized repeated reading and exposure to classmates' alternative interpretations. These perspectives were complementary: the lecturer foregrounded opportunities for responsive instruction, while the student foregrounded opportunities to prepare and reconsider meaning. The Community of Inquiry framework, as elaborated by Vaughan et al. (2023), provided a theoretical explanation through the relationship between teaching presence, individual reflection, and collaborative inquiry. Within this interpretation, online preparation and classroom discussion formed connected opportunities for analytical engagement rather than separate learning experiences. Wu and Luo's (2022) findings provided an empirical comparison through participants' perceptions of increased interaction and richer learning experiences in blended undergraduate English instruction. Similarly, Pei et al. (2024) highlighted students' appreciation of self-study and collaborative learning in blended education. Nevertheless, the lecturer acknowledged uneven critical engagement, and the student described reconsideration without necessarily changing an opinion. The perceived benefits therefore concerned opportunities for preparation, dialogue, and

textual re-examination; they did not establish uniform improvement in critical reading proficiency.

Furthermore, the perceived challenges revealed that continuity between online preparation and classroom discussion depended on analytical readiness, instructional support, and practical access conditions. The lecturer described incomplete preparation, descriptive responses, and additional time spent reviewing work and developing follow-up questions. The student account complemented this perspective by explaining uncertainty about evaluating arguments and difficulty expressing interpretations orally in English. This comparison suggested that limited classroom contributions could reflect several overlapping conditions, including insufficient preparation, analytical uncertainty, and linguistic demands. Le et al.'s (2022) findings provided a relevant comparison concerning the barriers and instructional demands experienced by university EFL lecturers implementing blended learning. The difficulty moving beyond summary also corresponded with Le et al.'s (2024) findings concerning reliance on lower-order reading strategies. At the same time, both accounts identified unstable connectivity and dependence on mobile phones as constraints on participation. Universal Design for Learning, discussed in Lomellini et al.'s (2025) review of accessible online higher education, provided a supporting lens through its attention to learner variability, flexible resources, and the reduction of participation barriers, although that review primarily concerned disabled students. Taken together, the accounts suggested that meaningful participation required coordination between pedagogical guidance and usable access arrangements. The challenges were therefore interpreted as interconnected instructional and contextual conditions that shaped how the opportunities of blended critical reading were experienced.

The potential contribution of blended learning in the EFL critical reading course to quality education (SDG 4) in higher education

In this discussion, it indicated that blended learning's potential contribution to quality education in higher education depended on the relationship between purposeful instructional integration and equitable opportunities for participation. Both accounts described online preparation, evidence-based classroom discussion, and reconsideration of interpretations as opportunities for substantive engagement with reading materials. The Community of Inquiry framework, as elaborated by Vaughan et al. (2023), provided a theoretical explanation through the interdependence of teaching, social, and cognitive presence: lecturer guidance connected individual preparation with collaborative examination of meaning. Pei et al.'s (2024) findings offered a relevant empirical comparison by highlighting students' appreciation of self-study and collaborative learning in blended education. Similarly, Wu and Luo (2022) reported perceived opportunities for interaction, accessibility, and richer learning experiences in undergraduate English instruction. However, the present accounts qualified these opportunities through references to unreliable connectivity, device limitations, and continuing needs for analytical guidance. Universal Design for Learning, discussed in Lomellini et al.'s (2025) review, provided a complementary perspective by emphasizing learner variability and the reduction of barriers through flexible learning arrangements, although that review primarily concerned disabled students. Accordingly, the availability of written and oral participation formats was interpreted as a potential contribution to inclusion, while their practical usability remained essential to equitable participation. The findings therefore suggested that blended critical reading offered opportunities relevant to SDG 4 through guided analytical engagement and attention to

differing learning circumstances; they did not demonstrate improved proficiency, equal outcomes, or attainment of SDG 4.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This qualitative case study suggested that the lecturer and students perceived blended learning as a connected sequence of online preparation, face-to-face discussion, and reconsideration of textual interpretations. Its perceived benefits included opportunities for preparation and analytical participation, while challenges involved uneven readiness, difficulty evaluating arguments, instructional workload, and unequal digital access. Its potential contribution to SDG 4 therefore depended on purposeful integration, accessible resources, and sustained guidance. **Implication:** In addition, higher education institutions should support coherent course design, evidence-based discussion, and flexible participation arrangements that accommodate students' differing circumstances. **Limitation:** The context-specific accounts supported interpretations of participants' perceptions but did not establish causal improvements in critical reading, equitable learning outcomes, or attainment of SDG 4. **Future Research:** Finally, longitudinal and comparative studies across institutions should combine participant accounts with classroom observations, learning artifacts, and assessments to examine how instructional support and access conditions relate to critical reading development and inclusive participation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

S. Sumihatul Ummah MS: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Data Curation, and Writing – Original Draft; **Syafi'ul Anam**: Methodology, Supervision, and Writing – Review & Editing; **Slamet Setiawan**: Supervision, Validation, and Writing – Review & Editing. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of this manuscript.

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The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial or personal, that may have influenced the content or outcome of this study.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

This manuscript complies with research and publication ethics. The authors affirm that the work is original, conducted with academic integrity, and free from any unethical practices, including plagiarism.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

The authors disclose the use of ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, to support academic language refinement, grammatical correction, and improvements in the clarity, coherence, and readability of this manuscript. These AI-generated materials required verification against authentic research data and could not independently constitute empirical evidence. The authors remain responsible for verifying all AI-assisted content, ensuring the accuracy and originality of the manuscript, and upholding ethical standards in research and scholarly publication. They assume full responsibility for the reported findings, interpretations, and conclusions.

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***S. Sumihatul Ummah MS, M.Pd. (Corresponding Author)**
Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Surabaya
Jl. Lidah Wetan, Lidah Wetan Village, Lakarsantri District, Surabaya City, East Java 60213
Email: ssumihatul.20020@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Syafi'ul Anam, Ph.D.
Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Surabaya
Jl. Lidah Wetan, Lidah Wetan Village, Lakarsantri District, Surabaya City, East Java 60213
Email: syafiul.anam@unesa.ac.id

Slamet Setiawan, M.A., Ph.D.
Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Surabaya
Jl. Lidah Wetan, Lidah Wetan Village, Lakarsantri District, Surabaya City, East Java 60213
Email: slametsetiawan@unesa.ac.id