Blended Learning for EPS-TOPIK: Enhancing Language Skills through Integrated Learning Models

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the blended learning model in the Employment Permit System (EPS) instruction for Korean language learners preparing for the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK). Using a mixed-method approach, this research combines a quantitative experimental design with control and treatment groups, along with qualitative analysis through questionnaires and interviews. The treatment group engaged in blended learning, combining synchronous (live sessions) and asynchronous (digital modules) formats, while the control group participated in asynchronous-only learning. The results show that blended learning significantly enhances content comprehension, learning motivation, teacher interaction, and flexibility compared to fully asynchronous online learning. Synchronous interaction proves to be a key element in supporting learners' engagement and understanding. However, the main challenges in implementing blended learning include unequal internet access and a lack of self-discipline in independent study. These findings reinforce constructivist and social learning theories, positioning blended learning as an effective medium for integrating individual experiences and social interaction. This study provides practical contributions to the development of more adaptive and responsive language learning methods in the digital era.

Keywords: *Blended Learning, EPS-TOPIK, Korean Language Learning, Constructivism, Social Learning, Test of Proficiency*

I. Introduction

Employment Permit System (EPS) learning is an important part in supporting the readiness of Korean language learners who will take the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK). This program is designed to equip learners with language skills that are in accordance with work needs in South Korea, especially in the aspects of reading, writing, listening, and speaking that are tested in TOPIK. However, in practice, fully online EPS-TOPIK learning often faces various obstacles, such as low interaction between teachers and students, lack of variety in learning methods, and limitations in mentoring and direct practice (Choi, 2021; Kim & Lee, 2020; Park, 2019; Ko et al., 2025).

In responding to these challenges, the blended learning model has emerged as a potential alternative. This model combines synchronous learning (such as live sessions with teachers) and asynchronous (digital modules or learning videos), so that it can create a more interactive and flexible learning experience. Blended learning not only allows learners to access materials independently, but also strengthens their understanding through direct interactions that support the process of social knowledge construction (Graham, 2013; Hrastinski,

2019; Tayebinik & Puteh, 2013).

In addition, the integration of synchronous sessions in the blended learning model addresses the lack of immediate feedback and social presence often experienced in fully asynchronous learning environments. By enabling real-time interaction between learners and instructors, blended learning fosters a more engaging and collaborative atmosphere, which is crucial for language acquisition. This balanced approach encourages learners to actively participate, ask questions, and receive timely clarification—elements that are essential for deepening comprehension and sustaining motivation, especially in exam-oriented contexts like EPS-TOPIK preparation.

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the blended learning model in the context of EPS-TOPIK learning. Using a mixed-method approach, this study combines quantitative experimental design through a comparison of learning outcomes between the control group (fully asynchronous) and the treatment group (blended learning), as well as qualitative analysis through questionnaires and interviews. The main focus of this study includes improving material understanding, learning motivation, quality of interaction with teachers, and learning flexibility. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical contributions in developing more adaptive language learning strategies in the digital era, as well as being a reference for educational institutions, teachers, and policy makers in designing learning methods that are more responsive to the needs of Korean language learners, especially in the context of preparing for the TOPIK exam.

II.   Literature Review

Constructivist Learning Theory in the Context of Blended Learning

Constructivist Learning Theory, developed by Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes that learning occurs through direct experience and social interaction. In the context of blended learning, constructivism can explain how learners construct their knowledge through a combination of online (asynchronous) and offline (synchronous) experiences. Asynchronous learning allows learners to work independently with digital or video modules, giving them the freedom to process the material at their own pace and rhythm. Meanwhile, synchronous learning provides opportunities for learners to interact with instructors or classmates in live sessions, where they can clarify understanding, discuss, and learn collaboratively (Horn & Staker, 2015). The combination of these two elements allows learners to integrate knowledge gained independently with insights gained from direct interaction, ultimately enriching their understanding more deeply.

Social Learning Theory in the Context of Blended Learning by Albert Bandura (1977)

Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura (1977), emphasizes the importance of observation and social interaction in the learning process. In the context of blended learning, this theory explains how learning occurs through observation and interaction with others. In asynchronous learning, learners may learn through self-paced materials, but they can imitate or adopt techniques and strategies learned in synchronous sessions. Meanwhile, synchronous learning provides opportunities for learners to interact directly with instructors or classmates, allowing them to see how knowledge is applied in practical contexts (Kim & Lee, 2008; Murphy et al., 2011. This supports learning through observation and social experiences, where learners not only receive information, but also observe and imitate the behaviors being demonstrated. This social learning occurs both through direct interaction (synchronous) and through self-reflection during independent learning (asynchronous), allowing learners to internalize knowledge more deeply.

Previous Studies

In recent years, several studies have explored the effectiveness of blended learning in various educational contexts, which can provide valuable insights for your research on EPS TOPIK preparation. One study, titled "Blended Learning: Studi Efektivitas Pengembangan Konten E-Learning Tipe Blended Learning sebagai Respons Pembelajaran 4.0" (2020) by Daryanto, investigated the effectiveness of blended learning in the context of education 4.0. Although it did not specifically focus on EPS TOPIK, the findings on the application of blended

learning in higher education can be adapted to language learning environments, such as preparing for the TOPIK exam. Another study, "Implementasi Model Blended Learning pada Mahasiswa PGSD di Universitas Bina Nusantara" (2022) by Rini and Sudiar, examined the implementation of blended learning in the context of elementary education. Although its focus was on PGSD students, the study provides valuable insights into the broader application of blended learning in education, which can also be relevant for language learning settings. Additionally, the study "Blended Learning Strategy: Alternatif Pembelajaran TOEFL bagi Guru Bahasa Inggris" (2020) by Supriyanto and Widiastuti, discussed how blended learning strategies can serve as an alternative method for teaching TOEFL preparation to English language teachers. While this study specifically focused on TOEFL, the methodology and strategies it outlines can be adapted for EPS TOPIK preparation, especially given the similarities between language proficiency exams like TOEFL and TOPIK. These studies, though not directly related to EPS TOPIK, provide a strong foundation for understanding how blended learning can be applied to language acquisition and exam preparation.

III. Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-method approach, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, to analyze the effectiveness of the blended learning model in Employment Permit System (EPS) learning for Korean language learners who are preparing for the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK). This approach was chosen to obtain a comprehensive understanding, both in terms of learning outcomes and subjective experiences of students.

Research Design

The design of this study is an experiment with two groups, namely the control group and the treatment group. The treatment group followed a blended learning model that combines synchronous (live/online sessions) and asynchronous (digital/independent modules) learning, while the control group only followed asynchronous learning without live sessions. The purpose of this design is to compare the effectiveness of the two approaches in improving students' understanding of the material, learning motivation, and Korean language skills in the context of TOPIK preparation.

Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

Data collection was carried out through questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were distributed to students from both groups to measure their perceptions regarding learning effectiveness, interaction with teachers, motivation, and flexibility in the learning process. To strengthen the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a number of participants from both groups. These interviews aimed to explore their learning experiences, obstacles faced, and their views on the use of blended learning models in EPS-TOPIK learning. Quantitative data were analyzed statistically to assess significant differences between the two groups, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to capture the dynamics of learning experiences in greater depth. This approach allows for data triangulation that enriches the interpretation of the research results.

IV. Results

The following data presentation is divided into four main sections, namely the description of the research group, the results of the pre-test and post-test, the results of the questionnaire, and the findings of the interviews, which overall describe the impact of the implementation of blended learning compared to asynchronous online learning.

Description of the Research Group

Table 1.
Research group

Group	Number of participants	Types of Learning
Control Group	15 people	Asynchronous Online (no synchronous sessions)
Treatment Group	15 people	Blended Learning (synchronous + asynchronous)

　　　This data explains the division of research participants into two groups with an equal number, each consisting of 15 people. The control group followed learning with an asynchronous online method, meaning that they only studied independently using modules or materials provided online without any direct (synchronous) meeting sessions with the teacher. Meanwhile, the treatment group followed learning with a blended learning model, which is a combination of synchronous learning (for example, direct sessions via Zoom) and asynchronous (online modules for independent learning).

Results of the Pre-test and Post-test of Language Ability

Table 2.
Pre-test and Post-test

Group	Pre-test Average	Post-test Average	Improvement
Control	60	68	+8
Treatment	62	78	+16

　　　The pre-test and post-test data showed a significant difference in the improvement of Korean language skills between the control group and the treatment group. The control group that took asynchronous online learning recorded an average pre-test score of 60 and increased to 68 in the post-test, increasing by 8 points. Meanwhile, the treatment group that took the blended learning model—a combination of synchronous and asynchronous sessions—had an average pre-test score of 62 and increased to 78 in the post-test, increasing by 16 points. This difference in improvement indicates that the blended learning model is more effective in supporting the achievement of participants' learning outcomes, especially in the context of EPS-TOPIK learning. The presence of synchronous sessions seems to play an important role in strengthening participants' understanding of the material, increasing engagement, and providing space for direct clarification with the teacher.

Results of the Learner Perception Questionnaire
(Likert Scale Score 1–5)

Table 3.
Results of the Learner Perception Questionnaire

Questions	Control	Treatment
The material is easy to understand	3.4	4.2
I feel motivated to learn	3.6	4.5
Interaction with the instructor helps my understanding	2.8	4.6
The learning is flexible and efficient	3.5	4.3
I find it difficult to access the materials	2.7	2.9

　　　The questionnaire results showed that students in the treatment group who participated in blended learning had more positive perceptions than the control group in almost all aspects. The highest difference score was seen in the statement "Interaction with the teacher helps understanding", where the treatment group scored 4.6, much higher than the control group which was only 2.8. This indicates that the presence of synchronous sessions greatly contributed to clarifying the material and building understanding. In addition, learning motivation

was also higher in the treatment group (4.5) than in the control (3.6), indicating that the blended learning model is better able to maintain participant engagement.

Average for Control Group

$$\frac{3.4 + 3.6 + 2.8 + 3.5 + 2.7}{5} = \frac{16.0}{5} = 3.2$$

Average for Treatment Group

$$\frac{4.2 + 4.5 + 4.6 + 4.3 + 2.9}{5} = \frac{20.5}{5} = 4.1$$

Total Average Difference

$$4.1 - 3.2 = \boxed{+0.9}$$

The calculation of the average perception score from the questionnaire results showed that the treatment group (which followed the blended learning model) had an average score of 4.1, while the control group (which followed asynchronous online learning without synchronous sessions) had an average score of 3.2. Thus, there is a difference of 0.9 points between the two groups.

This difference shows that learners in the blended learning group have an overall more positive perception of the learning process. They feel more helped in understanding the material, are more motivated, and feel better efficiency and flexibility in learning. The most striking difference occurs in the aspect of interaction with the teacher, which is a key element in blended learning, significantly improving the quality of the learning experience.

Thus, this average difference strengthens the finding that the synchronous component in blended learning contributes greatly to students' positive perceptions of EPS TOPIK learning.
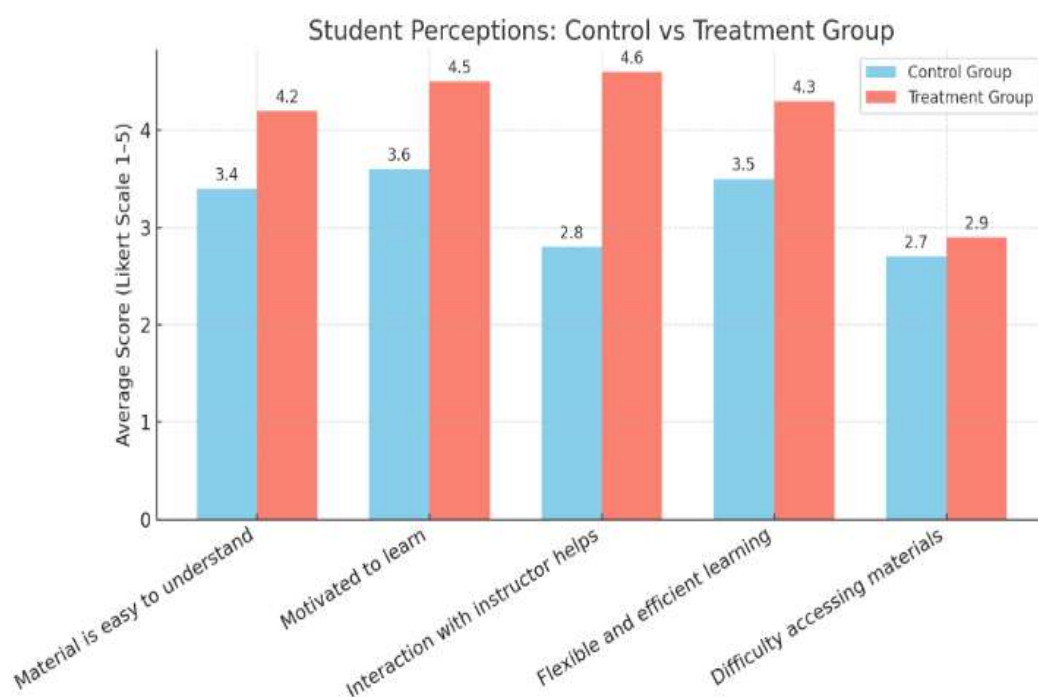

Chart 1.
Student Perception about Control vs Treatment Group

The bar chart shows the comparison of the average scores of students' perceptions from two learning

groups: the control group (asynchronous online without live sessions) and the treatment group (blended learning that includes synchronous and asynchronous sessions). The five main aspects measured include: ease of understanding the material, learning motivation, interaction with the instructor, learning flexibility, and difficulty in accessing the material.

The results show that the treatment group consistently scored higher than the control group. The highest score was in the aspect "Interaction with the instructor helps understanding" with a striking difference of +1.8 points (4.6 in the treatment group vs. 2.8 in the control group). This shows that the presence of synchronous sessions in the blended learning model greatly helps students understand the material because they can ask questions directly and get real-time feedback from the instructor.

In addition, the treatment group also showed a higher level of motivation (4.5 vs. 3.6) and felt that learning was more flexible and efficient (4.3 vs. 3.5). Although both groups experienced slight difficulty in accessing the material, the difference in scores in this aspect was not too large (2.9 vs. 2.7), indicating that technical challenges such as internet connection were felt almost evenly. Overall, this diagram reinforces the finding that blended learning not only improves academic learning outcomes, but also has a positive impact on participants' overall learning experience, particularly in terms of engagement, motivation, and quality of interaction.

Interview Results

Key themes from participants' narratives:

1. Interaction Helps Understanding

> "Saya lebih paham karena bisa tanya langsung saat Zoom. Kalau hanya baca modul, kadang bingung sendiri."
> (Informan P1 – Kelompok Perlakuan)
> "I understand better because I can ask questions directly during Zoom. If I only read the module, sometimes I get confused."
> (Informant P1 - Treatment Group)

2. Learning Independence is Still Low in the Control Group

> "Kalau tidak ada jadwal live, saya suka lupa buka materi. Tidak ada yang kontrol."
> (Informan K2 – Kelompok Kontrol)
> "If there is no live schedule, I often forget to open the material. There is no one to control it."
> (Informant K2 - Control Group)

3. Technical Challenges (common in both groups)

> "Kadang sinyal hilang pas Zoom, jadi saya tertinggal."
> (Informan P3 – Kelompok Perlakuan)
> "Sometimes the signal is lost when Zooming, so I get left behind." (Informant P3 – Treatment Group)

> "Sometimes the signal is lost when Zooming, so I get left behind." (Informant P3 – Treatment Group)

Based on the research results, the blended learning model proved to be more effective than the pure asynchronous online model in improving students' understanding and skills in EPS-TOPIK learning. This can be seen from the more significant increase in post-test scores in the treatment group compared to the control group. One of the key factors driving this effectiveness is the presence of synchronous interaction, which provides space for participants to communicate directly with the teacher, ask questions, and receive real-time feedback. This interaction plays an important role in building motivation, engagement, and understanding of the material being studied. However, the study also found major challenges, namely limited stable internet access and low self-study

discipline, especially in groups that only rely on online learning without direct interaction. These two challenges are important concerns in the development and implementation of the integrated learning model in the future.

V.   Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the significant advantages of blended learning in the context of EPS-TOPIK instruction for Korean language learners. Through a combination of synchronous (live interaction) and asynchronous (self-paced modules) learning, participants in the treatment group demonstrated greater gains in language comprehension and learning motivation compared to those in the control group, who experienced purely asynchronous instruction. This aligns with previous research by Daryanto (2020), who emphasized the potential of blended learning to respond to the demands of Education 4.0, especially in enhancing learner engagement and flexibility.

Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests show that learners in the blended learning group experienced an average score improvement of 16 points, double the gain observed in the control group. This supports the notion that real-time interaction, as offered in synchronous sessions, plays a crucial role in reinforcing understanding and maintaining learner motivation. Furthermore, perception questionnaire results revealed that learners in the treatment group found the material easier to understand, felt more motivated, and considered the learning more efficient. The most significant difference was observed in the statement regarding "interaction with instructors enhancing understanding," where the blended learning group scored 1.8 points higher. This supports the social constructivist view that knowledge is best constructed through interaction and dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978).

Qualitative insights from interviews reinforced these quantitative findings. Learners in the blended group expressed appreciation for the opportunity to ask questions directly and clarify confusion during synchronous sessions. In contrast, participants in the control group struggled with maintaining learning discipline and often lacked accountability, citing the absence of real-time interaction as a demotivating factor. This reflects the challenges noted by Rini and Sudiar (2022), who found that while digital modules offer flexibility, the absence of live guidance may hinder learner autonomy and progress, especially for those with low self-regulation.

However, this study also identified key challenges in implementing blended learning, such as inconsistent internet access and technical issues during live sessions. These findings are consistent with Supriyanto and Widiastuti's (2020) research on TOEFL preparation, which highlighted the necessity of stable technological infrastructure and careful instructional design in ensuring the success of blended programs.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical support for the integration of blended learning in language instruction, especially for skill-based exams such as EPS-TOPIK. It emphasizes the importance of interaction, motivation, and flexibility in supporting learners' success. While technological and learner-readiness challenges persist, they can be mitigated through structured guidance, teacher training, and supportive learning environments. Therefore, institutions preparing students for EPS-TOPIK or similar exams should consider adopting blended learning as a viable and effective instructional model.

Moreover, the effectiveness of blended learning observed in this study also underscores the need to align instructional design with learners' needs and contextual realities. In the case of EPS-TOPIK learners, who are often preparing for employment opportunities abroad, the ability to manage time, access materials flexibly, and receive immediate clarification becomes critical. Blended learning accommodates these needs by offering both autonomy and structured support. The approach also fosters active learning and continuous engagement, particularly important in mastering practical language skills such as listening and speaking. Therefore, integrating task-based activities, interactive assessments, and culturally contextualized content within blended platforms can further enhance learner outcomes. These insights support the adaptation of blended learning beyond formal academic settings, extending its relevance to vocational and language training programs that emphasize both competence and readiness for real-world applications.

VI.   Conclusion

This study proves that the implementation of the blended learning model in EPS-TOPIK learning is

significantly more effective than pure asynchronous online learning. Findings from quantitative data through pre-test and post-test results show that the treatment group experienced a greater increase in mastery of Korean language skills, especially those related to the TOPIK exam. In addition, the results of the questionnaire and interviews showed that students in the blended learning model had higher levels of learning motivation, understanding of the material, and interaction with the teacher. Synchronous interactions that are part of the blended learning approach have been shown to make an important contribution to clarifying the material, building active involvement, and improving the overall learning experience. However, this study also noted challenges in its implementation, such as limited internet access and low self-study discipline in some participants. Conceptually, these results support the constructivism approach and social learning theory, where the learning process takes place optimally through a combination of individual experience and social interaction. Therefore, blended learning is worthy of consideration as an adaptive and effective learning strategy in the context of preparing for skills-based exams such as TOPIK, as well as being a relevant model for language curriculum development in the digital era.

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