

Blended Learning in EFL Classroom: Perceptions, Challenges, and Pedagogical Innovations

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Abstract

As digital technologies increasingly permeate educational settings, blended learning models are becoming integral for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This study explores the transformative potential of blended learning role in enhancing language acquisition, engagement, and flexibility in EFL classrooms by combining online resources with traditional face-to-face teaching. A questionnaire was administered to (15) master one students of English at Khenchela University to check their perceptions towards the issue. The questionnaire focused on aspects such as language proficiency, engagement, and challenges faced in this instructional model. The findings revealed that students appreciate the interactive nature of blended learning and perceive it as beneficial for language practice, particularly through online activities. However, they express concerns regarding motivation and access to technology. These insights highlight the need for teachers to implement supportive measures to optimize blended learning environments. The study concludes by discussing future trends in blended learning, including the integration of AI-driven tools to further enhance language acquisition.

Keywords: *blended learning, transformative, technology, digital*

1. Introduction

Digital technology's quick development has had a significant impact on the education system, changing pedagogical approaches in many fields particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Blended learning, a modal that combines face-to-face instruction with online resources, has emerged as a transformative approach in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). This approach provides flexibility while also promoting improved language acquisition and increased student engagement.

Blended learning provides a dynamic and adaptable framework that meets the demands of a wide range of learners by fusing traditional in-person instruction with digital tools and online resources. This hybrid approach is becoming more and more common in language education because it not only improves accessibility but also encourages self-directed learning, participation, and individualized training.

Blended learning reflects current trends that focus on fostering learners' autonomy, engaging content, and prioritizing technology integration in education. Nonetheless, its adoption in Algerian higher education is still in its early stages, necessitating an investigation into student perceptions and the challenges it presents. Hence, Understanding learners' perceptions regarding blended learning is crucial in assessing its effectiveness. Therefore, this study aims to explore how blended learning can improve EFL instruction at Khenchela University by examining its advantages, addressing its

challenges, and proposing innovations to enhance its effectiveness. Through a comprehensive analysis, it seeks to offer insights into how blended learning can be optimized to enhance language acquisition and create a more effective and inclusive learning experience.

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2. Literature Review

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, blended learning has emerged as a transformative approach, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Blended learning, which integrates both traditional face-to-face teaching with online learning elements, has gained significant popularity in higher education, especially in the field of language learning. It is defined as a “thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). It is also referred to as hybrid or mixed-mode learning. Blended learning combines the strengths of online content delivery with the advantages of in-person classroom interaction and live instruction. This approach personalizes learning, encourages thoughtful reflection, and allows for differentiated instruction tailored to individual students within a diverse learning group (Watson, 2012). Both Horn and Staker (2015) claimed that “blended learning is any formal education program in which a

student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace”.

Numerous studies have examined its impact on language acquisition, student engagement, and the promotion of learner autonomy, highlighting how blended learning facilitates meaningful interaction, enhances digital literacy, and encourages self-directed learning through personalized instruction and adaptive learning technologies. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) argue that blended learning can enhance both independent and collaborative study, leading to improved learning outcomes. Although blended learning differs from traditional classroom teaching methods, it offers several advantages, such as reduced in-class time, greater flexibility in achieving learning outcomes, and enhanced learner control over their educational environment (Horn & Fisher, 2017).

Blended learning offers a significant advantage in enhancing language skills by incorporating a variety of digital tools and resources. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) highlight that blended learning environments promote learner autonomy by allowing students to control the pace of their learning.

In addition, Research has demonstrated that this approach is particularly effective in improving speaking and listening skills, as students can participate in real-world communicative tasks that mirror authentic language use (Doughty & Long, 2003). Valiathan (2002) suggests that incorporating multimedia resources, online discussions, and collaborative activities into

language teaching helps create a more interactive and dynamic learning environment.

This was confirmed by (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) who indicated that online tools like podcasts, discussion boards, and collaborative projects can supplement traditional teaching methods by offering students diverse and meaningful ways to interact with the language.

However, despite these benefits, blended learning presents several challenges. One major obstacle is the technological barriers many students face; This can include issues regarding motivation and poor internet connectivity and limited access to digital devices Graham (2013).

3. Methodology

This section outlines the research design and data collection methods used in this study to explore the perceptions of Master One students of English at Khenchela University regarding the use of blended learning.

This study employs a quantitative approach to assess Master One students' viewpoints of English at Khenchela University regarding the use of blended learning. Hence, A questionnaire was administered fifteen (15) students selected randomly to check their attitudes concerning into their experiences with blended learning.

The questionnaire was administered to explore their views on:

1. **Language proficiency:** regarding the four skills
2. **Engagement:** regarding the degree of their interest and interaction stimulated by blended learning tasks.

3. **Challenges:** regarding the barriers such as access to technology and other motivational issues.

Fifteen students were chosen by convenience sampling to respond to the questionnaire. Their responses were examined in order to find trends and gain a better understanding of their experiences with blended learning.

4. **Findings**

The results indicated that students have shown positive attitudes towards the use of blended learning. A sizable majority of students (80%) considered blended learning effective in improving their English language skills, especially in speaking and listening. They appreciated the language practice opportunities provided by online activities, such as discussion boards and multimedia materials, which they believed helped them get better knowledge for the language and technology as well.

Furthermore, 70% of students emphasized blended learning's adaptability and accessibility, stressing the ease of self-paced learning and the capacity to review content. However, only 40% felt that their writing skills had significantly improved through this approach. Additionally, 70 % of respondents stressed the importance of this modal in increasing engagements level while four of them added that including games, films, and online assignments made the classroom more dynamic and interesting.

Notwithstanding these advantages, the study also identified several significant drawbacks. Approximately 20% of students

said they had trouble staying motivated, especially while taking part in online courses. Furthermore, 60% of them encountered technical difficulties that prevented them from participating completely in the blended learning contexts, such as internet connections problems and limited device access.

As a result, these findings highlight the importance of developing techniques that address both infrastructural limits and psychological factors in order to provide students with a more successful and inclusive blended learning experience.

5. Discussion

According to the study's findings, students generally approve of blended learning, with a significant majority (80%) acknowledging that it helps improve their speaking and listening skills in English. This supports the growing body of research highlighting the benefits of blended learning in language acquisition, where engaging online activities, such as discussion boards and multimedia resources, help students enhance both their language proficiency and technological skills.

Additionally, 70% of students emphasized the flexibility and accessibility of the blended learning model, particularly valuing the ability to learn at their own pace and revisit materials as needed. These aspects align with research indicating that exposing students to blended learning contexts fosters greater learner autonomy. Many students also reported that the integration of engaging activities, such as games, films, and online assignments, made the classroom more dynamic and interactive, enhancing student engagement.

Notwithstanding the benefits of blended learning, the study also identified some problems that must be addressed to improve its efficacy. Certain students encountered difficulties in sustaining motivation, particularly during virtual tasks. A significant obstacle was the presence of technological barriers. Several students indicated challenges due to inconsistent internet connectivity and restricted access to devices, which impeded their complete engagement in blended learning activities. This highlights the necessity of tackling infrastructure issues, since insufficient access to technology might hinder the effectiveness of blended learning. Guaranteeing equitable access to essential technology resources is crucial for the successful execution of blended learning.

Additionally, even though blended learning offers an adaptable and dynamic setting, the success of this approach largely depends on teachers' capacity to provide coherent and captivating digital content. It is essential to put into practice solutions that accommodate different learning styles and take into account students' access and knowledge of technological literacy. The effectiveness of blended learning models can be greatly increased by implementing pedagogical innovations like gamified language activities, personalized learning paths, and AI-driven language learning tools.

Consequently, future research ought to examine the enduring impacts of blended learning on language proficiency and identify optimal strategies for alleviating technological and motivational obstacles. Educators must also contemplate

establishing institutional frameworks that provide sufficient technological support and training for both students and educators. Consequently, policymakers and educators should contemplate the establishment of institutional frameworks that ensure adequate technological infrastructure and training for both educators and learners. By consistently enhancing and optimizing blended learning models, educational institutions may augment their effectiveness and more adequately equip students for academic and professional achievement.

6. Conclusion

This survey underscores the favorable acceptance of blended learning among students at Khenchela University, with a substantial percentage indicating enhancements in their English language proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening. The model's flexibility and accessibility, along with interactive online activities, have demonstrated an enhancement in student engagement and the promotion of learner autonomy. The study identifies significant hurdles, including motivational issues and technological barriers, that may impede the full potential and efficacy of blended learning.

In conclusion, while blended learning offers substantial advantages regarding engagement, flexibility, and language acquisition, its entire efficacy can only be realized by addressing the infrastructural and motivational challenges encountered by certain students. By surmounting these barriers, instructors can foster a more inclusive and enriching educational experience for all learners.

Hence, future research should focus on exploring innovative strategies to mitigate these challenges, such as providing targeted support for students struggling with motivation, ensuring equal access to technological resources, and integrating adaptive learning technologies to personalize instruction. By continuously refining and optimizing blended learning models, educational institutions can maximize their effectiveness and better equip students with the necessary skills for academic and professional success.

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8. Appendices

The questionnaire

Section 1: Language Proficiency

- How effective do you find blended learning in improving your English language skills (e.g., speaking, writing, reading, listening)?
 - Very effective
 - Moderately effective
 - Not effective at all
- Which language skill do you believe benefits the most from blended learning activities?
 - Speaking
 - Writing
 - Reading
 - Listening
- Do you feel that online activities provide sufficient practice opportunities to enhance your language skills?
 - Yes, absolutely
 - To some extent
 - Not much
 - Not at all

Section 2: Engagement

- How engaging do you find the online activities used in blended learning compared to traditional classroom activities?

- More engaging
- Equally engaging
- Less engaging
- Which type of activity do you feel motivates you the most in a blended learning setting?
 - Interactive quizzes
 - Multimedia content (videos, audio)
 - Discussion forums
 - Other

Section 3: Challenges

- Do you face any technological barriers (e.g., lack of devices, poor internet connection) when engaging in blended learning?
 - Yes, often
 - Occasionally
 - Rarely
 - Never
- What do you think is the biggest challenge in blended learning?
 - Access to technology
 - Lack of motivation
 - Difficulty understanding content
 - Othe