



# A Review on Effectiveness of Blended Learning in EFL University Contexts

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**Abstract:** *Blended learning which embraces the merits of both traditional and technological instructions to create a hybrid teaching approach has been widely employed in teaching foreign languages nowadays. Especially, during COVID-19 lockdown, blended learning has proved its significant application in different educational contexts. In fact, this method can maximize the merits of online and face-to-face instruction. However, the successful implementation of blended learning demands huge efforts, determination, decent budget, and favorable perceptions among involvers ranging from institution leaders, administrative staffs, EFL instructors to learners. Various studies have showed benefits and effectiveness of blended learning in teaching and learning processes in various teaching contexts. This paper particularly reviews strengths and effectiveness of blended learning in the implementation process in different educational environments and contexts. Suggestions and recommendations for institutions are followed to help to maximize the advantages of blended learning during the application.*

**Key words:** *blended learning, effectiveness, benefits, face-to-face, online instructions.*

## I. Introduction

The popularity of ICT has brought about impacts on many areas, especially educational fields. There are now new teaching and learning approaches to adopt and take advantages of this. The appearance of online, e-learning, m-learning, or blended learning are demonstrations and consequences of these approaches. Especially, with the hard hit of Covid-19 pandemic, education has reformed significantly, in which online learning has witnessed a distinctive growth and has played an important role during the period. Particularly, in the combat with the COVID-19 pandemic, the education and training industry has applied blended learning by means of face-to-face teaching via television and online teaching via the internet. During this period, some widely used applications ranging from Microsoft Teams, Google Meet to Zoom allow educators to combine authentic videos and recordings into lessons in which teachers can communicate and manage learning progress of numerous students simultaneously (Sun et al., 2020). Moreover, currently, there are challenges and intense competitions among educational institutions, which requires them to adapt, change and employ innovative approaches to ensure educational quality and opportunities for all learners. In the end, in EFL university contexts, many educational institutions are initiating diverse models, namely on-campus, distance-learning, online or even a blend of different modes to meet the changes in educational trends as well as learners' needs. A typical example of blended learning is a combination of classroom teaching with interactive possibilities of learning management systems (LMS) for communication, knowledge monitoring, and publishing of materials. Eventually, blended learning is now becoming more popular and favored by learners and

educators due to its massive benefits. Consequently, online teaching during covid-19 has changed people's common habits and belief toward traditional teaching approaches. Many studies have indicated that blended learning is an innovative approach which can offer many benefits and effectiveness for involvers. With a greater shift towards blended learning, scholars referred this approach as the new traditional model or the new normal in education course delivery since it could ensure the normal functioning of schools and universities, while still applying technology to accomplish quality enhancements and cost-savings. As perceived by researchers that there is much needed to improve regarding the way it should be understood and implemented in practice. This paper is an endeavor to review effectiveness of blended learning in different EFL contexts in the implementation process. Accordingly, suggestions for institutional leaders and educators are given in an effort to encourage and facilitate the adoption process.

## II. Literature review

### Definition of blended learning

Blended learning has manifold definitions and has been presented in a lot of modern research and practice. In research literature, blended learning can be replaced by hybrid learning, technology-mediated instruction, web-enhanced instruction and mixed-mode instructions. Generally, blended learning is recognized as the combination of virtual and physical environments. Particularly, blended learning is a combination of face-to-face and online learning and teaching depending on the percentage of course contents delivered online (Picciano, 2013). In the same vein, blended learning is a mix of traditional classroom teaching with online activities combined with technology-mediated instruction (Graham, 2006). In other words, blended learning is a mixture of conventional face-to-face instruction and computer assisted instruction. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) then came with a clearer definition, in which blended learning is simply defined as the integration of face-to-face and online approaches in a thoughtfully selected and complementary ways with greater foci on pedagogical aspects and implementation contexts.

### The significance of blended learning

The significant role of blended learning in developing knowledge, skills and competences in English teaching and learning has been confirmed in many studies and articles. The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has been a plus for blended learning (Kalmamatova, et al., 2022). One of the mechanisms for blended learning transition is the integration of traditional full-time education and distance learning using various technologies (Yakovleva, 2017)

Given that, blended learning is a combination of benefits of traditional teaching and online learning in the ways of enhancing face-to-face teaching and learning environment with various kinds of technology-based instruction, the core purpose of blended learning is to allow teachers to have interactive and engaging lessons in which learners will feel more motivated to study (Tong, et al., 2022). In that way, blended learning allows educators and students to benefit the strengths of face-to-face and distance learning (Kalmamatova, et al., 2022). With diverse online tools serving for various instructional materials including videos, blogs, online forums and other digital tools, blended learning provides students with many chances to practice language skills outside the classroom contexts (Tosun, 2015). According to Bielawski and Metcalf (2003), blended learning optimizes the accomplishment of learning objectives by applying appropriate learning technological tools to the proper learning styles to teach the right skills to the right person at the right time. The merits of blended learning are various ranging from showing students' abilities to making strategies to work independently, which will help students to form autonomous learning skills as well as independent decision-making in their professional fields (Zhavner & Takhaveeva, 2015).

### Effectiveness in the implementation process in EFL university contexts

Given that, the general goal of hybrid learning is to provide efficient and effective instruction experience as well as realistic practical opportunities for both instructors and learners to make learning autonomous, meaningful and sustainable by in cooperating online and face-to-face learning. Besides, with blended learning

approach, learners could be partially independent to access the learning process with supported technologies. A research by Liu (2013) investigating the effects of blended learning in undergraduate English writing at a major university in Beijing, China showed that blended learning helps in motivating autonomy learning, boosting classroom experiences, reducing communication anxieties, and enhancing students' academic writing skills. Students found blended learning beneficial, inspiring, and engaging (Kalmamatova, et al., 2022). The application of blended learning leads to a higher outcomes of students' writing skills (Kalmamatova, et al., 2022).

In a study by Keith (2022) investigating the effectiveness of blended learning in learning vocabulary, it is found out that blended learning helped students to learn vocabulary more effectively, thus highlighting the significant role of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in the teaching of new vocabulary items. With the same research issue, when comparing the effects of traditional and blended learning on EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition, Khazaei and Dastjerdi (2011) indicated that the students who received learning contents through blended learning were recorded with better outcomes than those who received the same learning contents in the traditional way. In that way, it can be concluded that blended learning mode can optimize teaching and learning outcomes of learners when it comes to vocabulary acquisition. However, in a research with the same issue, Tosun (2015) indicated that there were no positive influences on the vocabulary test performance of students in Turkey EFL context. The reasons were the disinterest in digital tools and classroom activities prepared by the teacher although the students were well aware of the importance of ICT tools in classrooms, but it was the way teacher blended that dissatisfied them. The participants did not find motivation to study with blended learning approach. They did not have the self-discipline to work independently on their own. Although according to Tosun (2015), blended learning is potential in teaching and learning vocabulary since studying time is boosted outside classroom compared with only class time. Also, in a study by Keith, et al., (2022), some teachers report that blended learning helped to increase students' ability to self-study and solve problems independently as well as create a greater sense of responsibility. Given the merits of helping learners to be independent in their learning, blended learning will promote their motivation and interests, which in the end will turn blended learning to an effective learning trend for future (Baris, 2015). Additionally, blended learning enhanced teachers and students' interaction, academic outcomes, and learning autonomy of students (Tong, et al., 2022). In line with this, a research by Dziuban, Hartman, Moskal, Sorg and Truman (2004) found that blended learning was effective in helping to boost undergraduate students' scores. The positive effects of applying asynchronous learning network in improving learners' learning have been proved in studies of Hiltz and Turoff (2005). Additionally, Wu and Hiltz (2004) indicated that in blended learning, online discussions among participants were meaningful. Interestingly, PowerPoint is critical in teaching and learning process of blended learning. Particularly, PowerPoint helps the students in exercises and reducing handout printing costs. In a study by Wai and Seng (2013), most of the students downloaded PowerPoint slides uploaded by their lecturers.

Given that blended learning can optimize advantages of face-to-face and online teaching, a research by Akbarov (2018) finding students' perception of students towards blended learning in the English as a foreign Language (EFL) context compared to the traditional classroom in EFL classes indicated that the majority of students favor blended learning over traditional learning. In other words, blended learning had a positive effect on students' learning in the way of increasing their language proficiency. Therefore, it is suggested that blended learning is encouraged in EFL teaching contexts to enhance the teaching and learning process.

However, blended learning is not always proved to be effective in all educational contexts. Some studies showed ineffectiveness of blended learning instruction on students' academic outcomes. In a research conducted by Alshwiah (2009) about the effects and students' attitudes of blended learning, the findings showed no significant difference regarding the two investigated issues. Similarly, in a study by Chang (2014) comparing the test score performance of students when applying blended learning, there were no significant differences.

### III. Conclusion and Recommendations

As blended learning has a lot of merits which is recoded in diverse aspects. According to practitioners and administrators, blended learning is the best model for education when it comes to meeting institutional goals because it can provide more privileges over other approaches.

As previous studies have demonstrated the advantages of blended learning in promoting language acquisition and increasing learners' motivation, interests, and interaction. Looking at the benefits as well as the abilities to overcome limitations and challenges, institutions are encouraged to adopt blended learning strategy incorporation. To maximize the benefits of blended learning, educational institutions should design a clear framework and policy for application for the sake of successful academic achievements. Online teaching platforms should be better invested to possess collaborative features, push notifications and enhance interactivity between students, along with providing parents with better observation in learning activities (Keith, et al., 2022). In that way, students, teachers, and families can have better, open, and frequent communication.

As for teachers, they need training on how to employ blended learning instruction model effectively because the way that teachers apply will determine the effectiveness of the applied technology. Given that, they should be equipped with pedagogical and professional development as well as technical knowledge. According to Wilson (2008), there are five pedagogical principles teachers should employ to secure the successful implementation of blended learning, namely enhancing leaning engagement, giving timely feedback, creating learners' control of their own leaning space, offering chances for dialogue and communication, and motivating leaners in diverse methods. Teacher should also encourage learners to self-study to develop their language skills outside classroom contexts. In other words, learner autonomy should be teachers' top priority for the success of learner learning (Tosun, 2015). Teachers should also motivate learners via interesting classroom activities. One of the ways to do so is to implement need analysis to opt to the best and most suitable online tools to match learners' interests. Teachers should also be concerned about learners' feedback about the application of blended learning and well as ask their interests in TV series, short clips, films, newspapers, and social networks to find more appropriate contents for lessons.

In terms of ICT tools in blended learning application, these not only help to enhance students' campus learning experiences by to provide quality and friendly learning environments, therefore, computer systems need to be upgraded so that students can access and download teaching materials quickly (Wai & Seng, 2013). In order to increase engagement and interaction among learners, teachers should design interactive and interesting activities.

In terms of institutions, there should be shareable and reusable digital resources for teachers, which could also ensure the sustainability of blended learning. institution leaders should clearly state how blended learning satisfies their organization' needs, goals and missions. Institution leaders also are people who evaluate whether the approach matches with the goals, structures, and culture of the institutions, which determines initial success of the approach. In other words, leaders should take the strengths as well as weaknesses of institutions' environment into consideration in the implementation of hybrid learning. These supports will assist faculty leaders and teachers in deciding which pedagogical decisions are best done either by online and face-to-face approach. In that way, teachers will be more confident, comfortable and competent in blended learning implementation. There also needs to have reflections on traditional approaches and re-designed teaching and learning programs in this new terrain. Given that, institutions should deliver prototype projects of faculties with successful blended learning approach.

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