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The impact of blended learning on undergraduate english language learners: a case study at Ha'il University, Saudi Arabia

أثر التعلم المدمج على متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الجامعيين: دراسة حالة في جامعة حائل بالمملكة العربية السعودية

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Abstract

In current times, blended learning has emerged as one of the most noteworthy trends in the educational sector. Blended learning approach is a group of various learning approaches and elements that may be integrated to assist learners in fulfilling their instructional goals more efficaciously than learning in traditional learning environments and combines the best aspects of online and instructor-led learning and is delivered in a 'small-group' or 'one-on-one' format. The present study was designed to explore, how blended learning may be utilized in an effective manner for developing the English language expertise of undergrad students at the University of Ha'il, Saudi Arabia. Blended learning by incorporating adaptive learning platforms that tailor content based on individual student achievements. The outcomes report that the blended learning approach can be exploited for enhancing the environment of English learning for motivating the students toward the learning English language. The study at Ha'il University concluded that the integration of technology provides access to diverse digital resources, such as online lectures and interactive simulations, enhancing the overall educational experience. Thus, the teaching English at the undergraduate level through a mixed learning approach will be sufficient to support all facets of learning and teaching.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Computer Assisted Learning, Educational System, Information and Communication Technology, Online Learning, Students.

ملخص: في العصور الحالية، ظهر التعلم المدمج كواحد من أبرز الاتجاهات في القطاع التعليمي. البحث في نهج التعلم المدمج نسبياً جديد ويمكن ربطه بعدة مجالات أكاديمية، مثل أساليب تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، وتقنيات التعليم المتنوعة، وتعلم اللغة بمساعدة الحاسوب وغيرها الكثير. بشكل عام، يعد نهج التعلم المدمج مجموعة من النهج والعناصر التعليمية المتنوعة التي يمكن دمجها لمساعدة المتعلمين في تحقيق أهدافهم التعليمية بكفاءة أكبر من التعلم في البيئات التعليمية التقليدية. إنه يجمع بين أفضل جوانب التعلم عبر الإنترنت والتعلم بأشرف المدرس ويتم تقديمه في تنسيق "مجموعة صغيرة" أو "فردية". يؤكد نهج التعلم المدمج أنه نظراً للحالة الحالية لأنظمة التعليم الحديثة يمكن مزج النهج التعليمي التقليدي مع المزايا الرئيسية للتقنيات. بناءً على الاتجاه الحالي لنهج التعليم القائم على التكنولوجيا، تم تصميم الدراسة الحالية لاستكشاف كيفية استخدام التعلم المدمج بفعالية لتطوير خبرة الطلاب الجامعيين في اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة حائل بالمملكة العربية السعودية. تشير النتائج إلى أن نهج التعلم المدمج يمكن استغلاله لتحسين بيئة تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية وتحفيز الطلاب على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كما سيمهد هذا النهج الطريق لاختباره وتطبيقه في تدريس وتعلم لغات ومواد أخرى

التعلم والاتصالات المعلومات تكنولوجيا، التعليم النظام، الحاسوب بمساعدة التعلم، المدمج التعلم، الرئيسية الكلمات الطلاب، الإنترنت عبر

Introduction

The English language occupies an indispensable role in the global arena. Its influence permeates almost every facet of human activity, encompassing areas such as academia, business, administration, information technology, and

more. In Saudi Arabia, English is a key component of the educational curriculum, being a mandatory subject from the 6th grade through to university level. Currently, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education is considering introducing

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English language instruction starting from the 4th grade to achieve more effective outcomes.

English is the most widely used language worldwide, driven by its global demand. It is not only a key language in technology but is also employed extensively in various fields, including commerce and international business, as noted by McCarthy and Murphy (2010). Moreover, the ambitious Saudi Vision 2030 includes significant reform proposals for the nation's education system and policies, to be implemented in stages (Al-Seghayer, 2021). Key strategic objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 for the education sector include bridging the gap between post-secondary educational outcomes and labor market needs, enhancing the quality of higher education in the kingdom, positioning at least five Saudi universities among the world's top 200, and improving the academic performance of Saudi students (Al-Seghayer, 2021).

Given the English language's status as a repository of global information and practical communication, it is a primary medium of instruction in higher education worldwide, including in other Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia. Despite its widespread acceptance, there remains a need to enhance the proficiency of learners to meet the requirements of various professional sectors.

Blended learning is an educational approach that combines face-to-face teaching with online teaching. This approach has become a growing trend in higher education, as it offers students greater flexibility and control over their own learning. Blended learning, a mix of diverse instructional methods, supports students in achieving their educational objectives more effectively compared to traditional settings (Hartman et al., 2007; Teeter, 1997). This approach combines online and in-person instruction, tailored to individual or small group settings (Dziuban et al., 2004). Blended learning's strength lies in its personalized content design, enabling learners to engage with the material at their preferred pace and time. It allows students to focus intensively on new or challenging content and proceed at their own speed. In face-to-face sessions, instructors can directly address students' questions and guide them towards their goals. This method enhances learning by allocating more effective and authentic time for student engagement in both online and offline environments. Learners are more motivated as they can track their progress and receive immediate feedback. Blended learning employs strategies that integrate online

learning techniques with traditional methods focused on group activities. The utilization of blended learning in studying English and practice-based learning significantly enhances students' performance and skills.

Saudi Arabia's educational system is currently undergoing significant transformation, striving to meet new challenges and fulfill students' educational needs. This transition involves embracing innovative technological tools and exploring fresh approaches to ensure quality education for all. Factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, socio-economic constraints, limited budgets, and lack of facilities have hindered a full transition away from traditional educational methods.

A report revealed that when undergraduate students were asked about their preferred mode of instruction, they were almost evenly split between favoring traditional classroom teaching and ICT (Information and Communication Technology)-based methods (Nuzhat et al., 2013). Traditional teaching methods, despite their limitations, provide essential human interaction in the learning process. The personality and behavior of teachers greatly influence the development of students' characters. However, this approach alone may not fully prepare students for the demands of the modern job market and professional requirements, as face-to-face interaction alone may not impart sufficient knowledge and skills.

Conversely, ICT-based teaching is emerging as a powerful alternative, aligning education with technological advancements and globalization. It minimizes errors in instruction, enhances quality, and broadens students' exposure. ICT-assisted teaching introduces a new dimension to learning, granting access to a vast array of knowledge and offering diverse learning opportunities. This method is inclusive, benefiting all types of learners, including undergraduates, postgraduates, and even in-service employees, particularly those who are physically challenged. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted its effectiveness in reaching a wide range of students.

Considering these facts and identified research gaps, the current study aims to evaluate the feasibility of adopting 'blended learning' in teaching and learning the English language at the undergraduate level at Ha'il University. The present study explores the impact of blended learning on undergraduate English students at Ha'il University, Saudi Arabia. The major

objective of the present study was to evaluate students' perceptions of blended learning in the context of the English learning and identify the benefits and challenges of blended learning for undergraduate English learners of Saudi Arabia. The study was based on a survey of undergraduate students who had participated in at least one English course with a blended approach. This investigation is particularly relevant in the current context, as blended learning aligns with learners' expectations of integrating technology into their language studies. It offers the flexibility needed for learners to manage their busy schedules and aligns with the Saudi government's policies promoting technologically aided learning. Overall, the findings of the current study prove that blended learning can be an effective tool in improving English learning in higher education. However, it is important to address the challenges associated with blended learning to ensure its success.

Literature Review

In a recent action research by Zhang (2023) reported enhanced oral production in integrated English blended teaching through a production-oriented approach. This study highlights the effectiveness of a production-oriented approach in blended learning environments for improving students' oral English skills. Zhang's research aligns with current educational trends that emphasize active learning and student-centered approaches, providing empirical support for incorporating such methods in language teaching (Zhang, 2023). Likewise, Xueshan's (2023) work on blended learning approach in English teaching addresses both the effectiveness and challenges of this method. His study underscored the benefits of blended learning, such as increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes, while also acknowledged the technological and infrastructural challenges that can impede its implementation. The dual focus work offers a balanced view of blended learning, highlighting the need for careful planning and resource allocation to overcome potential obstacles (Xueshan, 2023).

In another study, the effect of small private online course and Flipped-Classroom"-based blended teaching strategy on first-year English-major students' achievements was studied by Zheng & Lee (2023). Their research demonstrates how blended teaching strategies can enhance academic performance, particularly in language learning. This approach combined online self-learning with classroom interactions

and offered a promising avenue for language educators looking to optimize learning experiences for students (Zheng & Lee, 2023).

Lillian et al., (2023) explored teachers' perceptions of blended learning and its impact on language skills acquisition in Kenya. Their research reveals that teachers' view of blended learning is as a vital tool for improving language education, although they also note challenges related to resources and training. This study highlights the importance of teacher perspectives in the successful implementation of blended learning strategies (Lillian et al., 2023). The recent study of Melnyk (2023) discussed the formal, non-formal, and informal content domains of blended learning for prospective English university teachers. Melnyk study provides insights into how blended learning can be structured to cater to the diverse needs of future educators, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach that includes various forms of content and interaction (Melnyk, 2023). Whereas Xiangze & Abdullah (2023) investigated the use of station rotation with a gamification approach to increase student engagement in learning English online. Their research suggests that gamification can significantly enhance student motivation and engagement in blended learning environments, providing a novel approach to making online learning more dynamic and interactive (Xiangze & Abdullah, 2023). Lately, a report published on students' perceptions of blended learning application in enhancing English oral competence at Ton Duc Thang University and emphasizes the positive views of students towards blended learning, particularly its impact on improving oral language skills, thereby highlighting the learner's perspective in evaluating the effectiveness of blended learning methods (Thy & Nhân, 2022).

Earlier, Millimouno et al., (2021) explored scanty evidence suggesting that digital education is comparably effective to traditional learning for enhancing communication skills in medical students and reported blended digital education appears to be at least as effective, if not more so, than traditional learning in fostering communication skills and knowledge. Also, they observed no discernable difference in post-intervention skills between more and less interactive forms of digital education (Millimouno et al., 2021). Likewise, Nong et al., (2023) summarized his findings on blended learning as positive effects were observed between academic self-efficacy and learning engagement, but a negative association was

noted with cognitive load; Cognitive load did not show a significant influence on learning engagement; Learning engagement positively contributed to increased academic self-confidence; and Cognitive load exhibited a negative effect on the enhancement of academic self-confidence.

Similarly, while working on learning techniques, Ng & Yip (2019) found that the flipped classroom strategy positively impacts learning by diminishing cognitive load, increasing engagement, improving accuracy, boosting motivation, enhancing attitudes, and increasing satisfaction with both the course and self-efficacy in higher education. However, a notable challenge of the flipped classroom is students' unfamiliarity and the need for proper adaptation. The inversion method also results in an elevated workload for teachers. Despite these challenges, the analysis of the research findings suggests that higher education can effectively employ the flipped classroom approach.

The findings of Li & Yu (2022) suggest that environments with higher immersion levels result in increased presence and improved learning outcomes. While working on metaverse, they report that metaverse-based education can play crucial roles in blended learning contexts. Metaverse platforms not only offer more than just online games but also facilitate self-directed learning experiences. Additionally, the metaverse opens avenues for expanding the scope of English education, with the potential to enhance academic performance and grant learners' more freedom to explore inquiries (Li & Yu, 2022).

Considering the progress of learning process, introducing innovation and making the process more effective by including novel pedagogical techniques, resources, and ICT techniques are welcomed and based on published research, it is proven that these innovation in teaching techniques are completely adjustable and are getting wider acceptance. Based on research gaps identified, the present research offers a theoretical implication and practical recommendation for educators and researchers aiming to enhance the development of blended English learning.

Methodology

The present study employed a cross-sectional descriptive analytic method and utilized a quantitative approach by employing a scale as a means of gathering data. The objective of the

study was to investigate the learning strategies utilized by students, irrespective of their familiarity or intentional use of these strategies.

Participants & Study Design

In this study, there is designed a set of questionnaires based on a self-administered web-rooted Google form for dataset collection for the cross-sectional investigations. The participants were undergraduate students of the Department of English, College of Arts, University of Ha'il, Saudi Arabia. The participating students are studying at the university for more than a year and come from various social, educational, economic, and geographic backgrounds. All of the participant's students were made attentive regarding the objective of the study well. This study has been carried out between February 2022- July 2022. The subjects' involvement in the present research investigation has been entirely voluntary, as well as participant identities were kept confidential throughout the study.

Data collection tools

There has been prepared a set of distinct questionnaires containing overall 10 questions for this study. These prepared questions were distributed to 100 people and then updated to match the needs of the people who took part. The reliability and Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) tests were performed to validate further the questionnaire. The KMO test is a type of statistical assessment to check, if the data is adequate for factor analysis. Thus, KMO test calculates 'sampling adequacy for each variable in the model and the complete model.

The survey was divided into two parts, with the first component containing questions about the participants' demographic features. The second component of the survey included questions about the many characteristics of traditional and virtual learning modes and teaching and their ramifications. The research questionnaire was carefully constructed with the study's objectives in mind.

Statistical analysis

The data received from the questionnaire was processed and arranged in the MS excel file as needed. The findings were also displayed using a range of pie charts and graphs to offer a clear image of the facts for a better and more comprehensive understanding. The study utilized descriptive and inferential statistics, to examine the survey responses quantitatively. Also,

thematic analysis performed to qualitatively explore patterns and themes. This qualitative aspect seeks to capture the nuanced aspects of participants' experiences and perceptions.

Study limitations

It is essential to transparently acknowledge potential limitations, such as the challenge of generalizing findings beyond Ha'il University, Saudi Arabia ensuring the study's context-specific nature is recognized. Furthermore, potential biases in the data collection or participant responses acknowledged and discussed to maintain the research's integrity and reliability.

Ethical consideration

This study has been permitted through the University of Ha'il Research Ethics Committee in Saudi Arabia under approval letter no. H-2022-134. Moreover, this study's research procedures followed the university's official norms and rules.

Results

The concept of blended learning initially emerged in the business and corporate training sectors (Somers & Sikorova, 2002) before being adopted in the educational field (Hoy et al., 2000) and eventually in the specific context of teaching and learning (Brown, 1993). Earlier, Chan & Koh (2008) pointed out that in the English Language Teaching (ELT) context, the understanding of blended learning differs from its usage in corporate and general educational settings. The focus in ELT is not just on what blended learning is, but why it is beneficial for language learners and how it can best support and enhance learning outcomes, must be addressed.

In the past, Eleonora Villegas-Reimers (2003) defined blended learning as the combination of different media (such as print, audio, and video) with classroom interaction to maximize authentic

input, thereby promoting learners' output and skill development. This approach has been evaluated in various studies. For instance, Sands (2002) assessed the impact of mobile technologies on reading comprehension skills and found that most participants in the experimental group used mobile devices for English language learning.

Later, Alnoori et al., (2017), who applied a blended learning strategy for teaching English reading skills to secondary school students in Iraq, reporting significant improvements in keyword confidence, pronunciation, and meaning comprehension. Gamage et al., (2022) investigated the effects of Moodle-enhanced education on students learning English as a foreign language, targeting skills such as skimming, scanning, and vocabulary building. The study showed that the experimental group made significant progress in reading comprehension.

Amare et al., (2006) explored the impact of blended learning on the reading skills of Ethiopian EFL learners, noting a statistical improvement in the experimental group compared to those receiving traditional classroom teaching. Similarly, Anderson (2002) studied the effects of hypermedia on ESL learners' reading comprehension, finding that incorporating various multimedia elements like graphics, audio, and hyperlinks was beneficial.

According to Krieg et al., (2019), an effective blend of online and in-person learning can enrich the learning environment, making the process more effective and enjoyable. The optimal mix should cater to the learners' needs and enhance the effectiveness of teaching methods. The concept of blended learning, as Whittaker (2014) discusses, referring to Smith and Kurthen (2007) and Hinkelman (2013), encompasses a range of interpretations and definitions, indicating its evolving nature and application in different educational contexts.

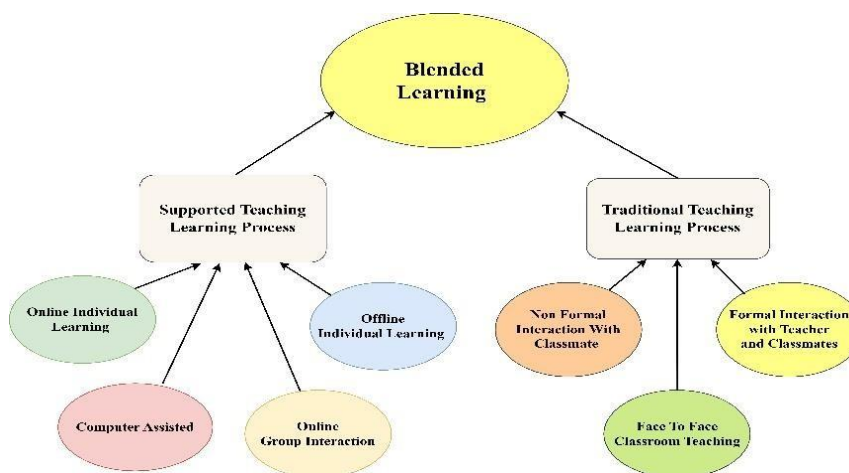


Figure 1. Blended learning approach comprising various tools and techniques of teaching and learning (Author self-created diagram)

Blended learning is a concept that entails defining the overall teaching as well as learning procedure involving both face-to-face (in person) as well as ICT-based instructions. Direct instruction, various indirect instruction, collaborative teaching, as well as personalized computing-based learning involving blended learning (Sukirman et al., 2022) and (Whitlock & Jefts, 2003). Figure 1 depicts a blended learning approach comprising various tools and techniques of teaching as well as learning.

- a) *Face-to-face teaching:* Blended learning allows students to connect with their teachers in a regular classroom setting, allowing them to be influenced by their personalities, behaviors, and value systems. In-person face-to-face contact aids in more synchronous communication. Both the teachers as well as students can receive quick feedback, which benefits the teaching-learning process. Face-to-face interaction motivates faculty and learners and offers human involvement in the adopted procedure.
- b) *Interaction of students with course content:* ICT-mediated learning engages students with their course topic in a variable and interesting, diversified method. In contrast, the traditional teaching model as well as the school environment offer them time for interaction directly along with corresponding course subjects using printed materials. However, informative videos provide the content with the needed believability, and sharing it over blogs as well as visiting diverse e-books gives it novel and updated viewpoints.
- c) *Peer group interaction:* Students learn formally and informally at the school

campus while interacting with respective peer groups. Numerous essential life skills as well as social values can be learned through informal interactions with peers. The school campus offers numerous playground activities and social exchange options during their leisure time.

- d) Classroom teaching allows students to connect with teachers. Still, well-designed tactics also enable students to get connected in discussions with their classmates about various areas of the course as well as exchange views. It assists pupils to gain self-confidence, overcome their fears, and develop the ability to communicate effectively including active listening skills.
- e) Using an e-library is a part of blended learning's ICT-assisted teaching as well as learning. Typical school libraries restrict access for students, whereas digital libraries give access to them to a wide range of literature on a variety of subjects. It increases their knowledge and horizons, which helps them in achieving their cognitive objectives.
- f) The virtual classroom allows students to study from anybody, anywhere. Students can participate in virtual classroom meetings with their classmates and teacher in cyberspace, regardless of their geographic location. The school may also make provisions for it such that the overall system becomes more flexible as well as pupils, those who cannot attend their respective classes regularly may be benefitted from it. In addition, students can connect with other specialists and expand their expertise. As today's world is becoming a globalized village, pupils who use this style would be at par with their groups in various other

countries and can easily obtain experience of diverse cultures.

- g) Online assessment: Instant response is one of the critical components of the learning process since this encourages students and is rooted in readiness concepts. Online evaluation makes the evaluation process more formative, transparent, and efficient. It has become more reliable too.
- h) Students require numerous types of e-tuitions. Some students failed to get optimal benefits from classroom instructions and they opt for personal coaching and undivided attention. Such students may opt for e-tuition, which entails meeting a private instructor and receiving personalized advice via video conferencing in cyberspace.
- i) Students have less opportunity to nurture their creativity in traditional classrooms due to rigid timetables and pressure from classwork, assignments, and coping with the stress of regular exams. Still, educational blogs give pupils a good platform for demonstrating their creativity as well as receiving feedback. Furthermore, educational blogs provide an excellent forum for discussing essential themes not covered in schools, such as social concerns, political issues, and other issues affecting youngsters, such as drug addiction, delinquency, and population education.
- j) Webinars are another component of blended learning that uses an ICT-based structure. Students participate in lectures on many topics that are important to them over the Internet. All participants are generally connected via various programs such as Skype, Zoom, or GoogleTalk and then use video conferencing to present their work and participate in educational conversations.
- k) To view lectures on YouTube: Blended learning-based model allows students to benefit from the expertise of experts in the entire course subject pupils are studying by allowing them to quickly access lectures from recognized experts in various fields available on YouTube. Furthermore, the institution can post a video of its instructors' lectures such that pupils who failed to join college may take benefit of this as well as get the benefit of it.
- l) Videos and audio use in online learning: Educational video recordings as well as various animated films are accessible to explain multiple scientific/non-scientific ideas and engage. They are founded on the principles of reality and live connection. Consequently, students can experience real

life while studying, making complex concepts and phenomena concrete.

Observational findings

The current study focuses on evaluating the impact of blended learning on the knowledge, skills, and competency in English language learning among undergraduate students at Ha'il University, comparing it with traditional learning methods. This research also aims to assess and compare students' attitudes towards blended learning and to explore the relationship between their knowledge, skills, competence, and attitudes in both blended and traditional learning contexts.

For this study, the data were collected from 100 voluntary participants who shared their insights through a structured survey questionnaire. The questionnaire targeted undergraduate English language students at the University of Ha'il in Saudi Arabia, seeking their opinions on the blended learning approach. The study also aimed to understand the students' interest and suitability regarding English language learning, especially focusing on online versus traditional learning modes.

The findings were based on the perceptions of the respondents, reflecting their views and experiences. Demographic analysis of the respondents revealed that out of the 100 participants who completed the questionnaire, 76% were male and 24% were female. Age-wise, 24% of the respondents were between 15 to 20 years old, 56% fell into the 20 to 25 age group, and approximately 20% were aged between 25 to 30 years.

This demographic breakdown is significant as it provides a context for interpreting the data, helping to understand how different age groups and genders perceive and interact with blended learning environments. The responses from this diverse group offer valuable insights into the effectiveness and reception of blended learning in higher education, specifically in the context of English language learning at Ha'il University.

Findings from the survey questionnaire

The following graphical representation depicts the results obtained via this study (Figure 2-11). Each question item's response has been discussed below:

1. *Which mode of learning do you feel better, online or face-to-face?*

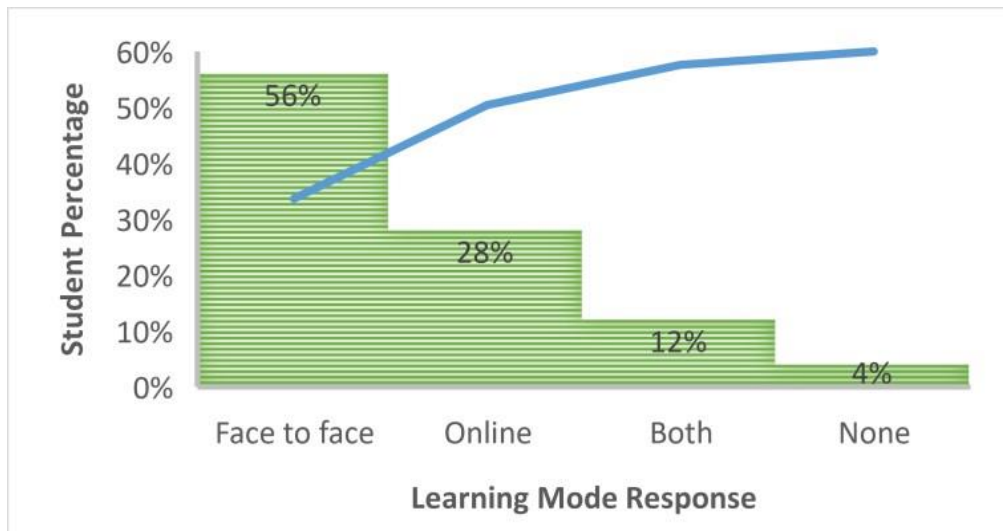


Figure 2. This graph shows students' views over learning styles as they responded to the above-said specific questions. The graph representing Student Response on X-axis and Percentage of Students on Y-axis. As per their responses, 56% of students believe that face-to-face learning is much better, and 28% opined that online education is acceptable. In the same instance, 12% of the pupils found both modes of learning okay. Only 4% of the respondents viewed face-to-face and online learning negatively. (Author self-created graph).

2. *Where do you find more interest in online or offline classes?*

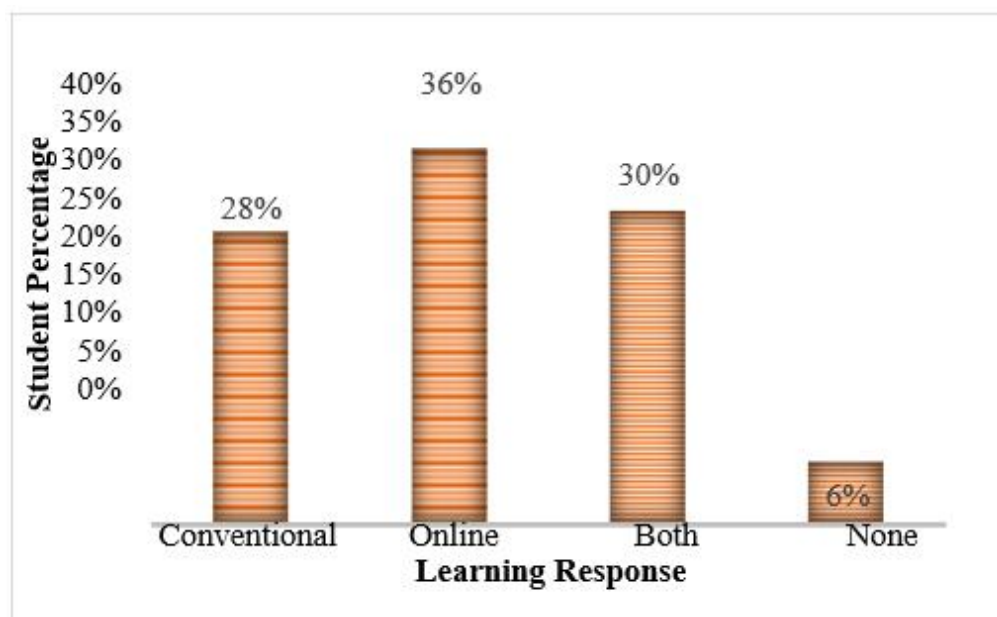


Figure 3. Only 28% of students find conventional classes interesting, whereas 36% of respondents believe online learning is quite interesting. Whereas the remaining 30% opined both offline classes and online classes are equally interesting. Around 6% of the students disagreed with any one mode of learning. (Author self-created graph)

3. *Which mode of learning improves your English language skills, Traditional or Online?*

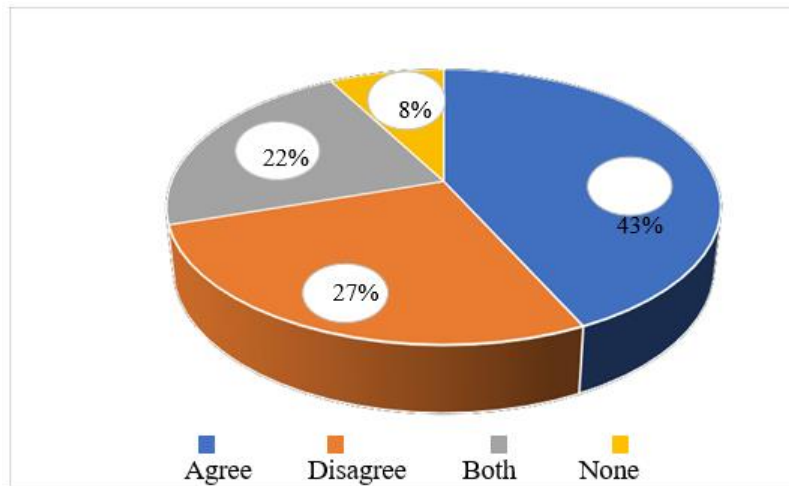


Figure 4. It shows that 43% of students agreed that the traditional mode of learning helps them to improve their English language skills which is an appealing result to grab the attention of prospective teachers of the English language. However, 27% disagreed with the traditional mode and believe that online classes help in improving their English language skills. On the contrary, 22% of students think both systems help in enriching their English skills, while 8% consented to none. (Author self-created graph).

4. Do you think Information Communication and Technology (ICT) assists your learning?

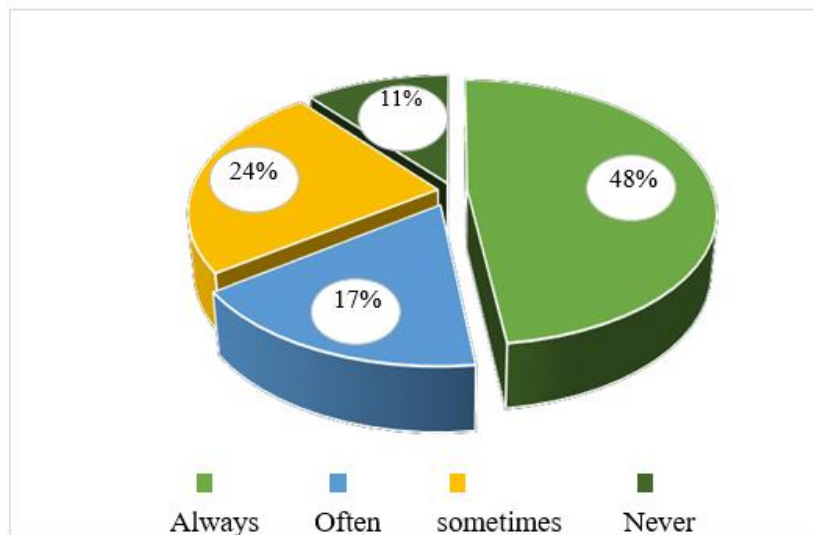


Figure 5. It shows that 48% of students agreed that ICT always assist in their learning, and 17% feel ICT often helps in understanding. The rest, 24%, sometimes believes ICT assists their respective education, and only 11% of the students never find such assistance through ICT. (Author self-created graph)

5. Which mode of learning makes you increase your knowledge?

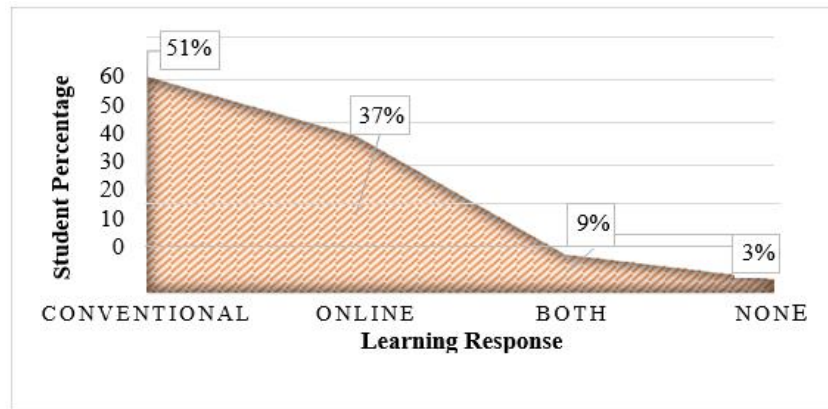


Figure 6. It shows, 51% of the students reveal that the conventional mode of learning increases their knowledge, while 37% of respondents feel online mode help in expanding their knowledge. 9% agreed that both modes will enhance their knowledge. While only 3% of them opined none of these options. (Author self-created graph)

6. Do you have adequate infrastructure to study in blended learning mode?

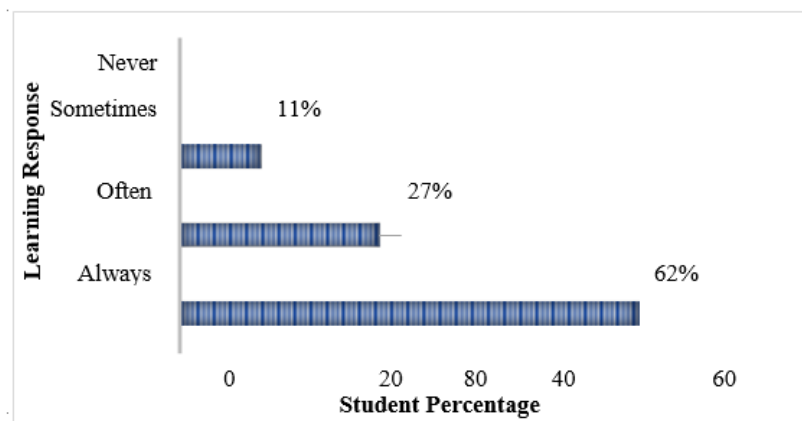


Figure 7. This shows that 62% of undergraduate students believe they have adequate infrastructure to study in a mixed-learning environment. Whereas 27% of respondents often feel that they have proper infrastructural facilities. (Author self-created graph)

7. Do you have a computer laboratory in your institution?

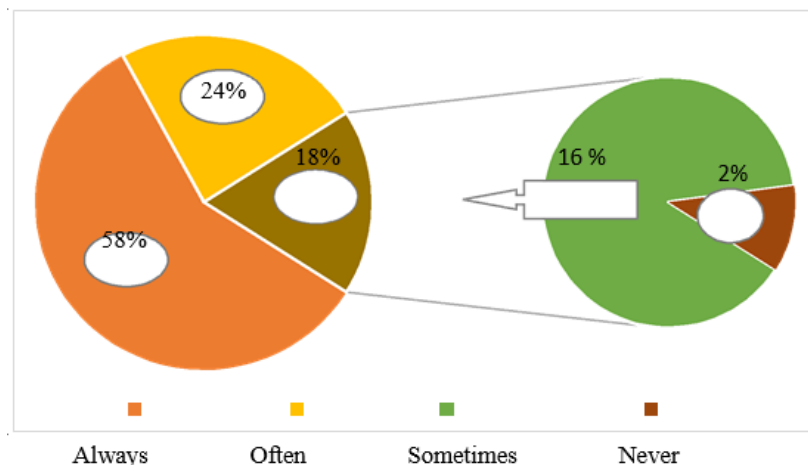


Figure 8. According to this, 58% of students believe that they always have a computer laboratory in their organization. Moreover, 24% of respondents agreed that they often feel that they have such facilities. And

16% of them sometimes find computer laboratories, and the remaining 2% gave unfavorable views about the same. (Author self-created graph)

8. *Is the blended mode of learning easy and flexible for students?*

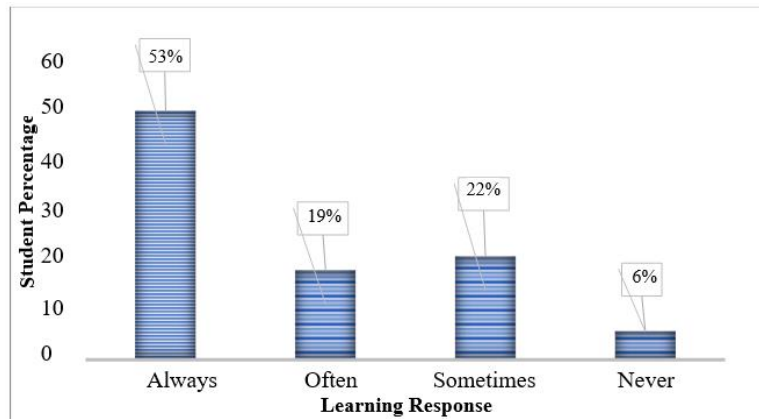


Figure 9. According to this, 53% of respondents believe that the blended learning mode is always easy as well as flexible because they can attend classes anywhere. Further, 19% of the students often find blended learning accessible and comfortable. On the contrary, 22% sometimes believe that it's an easy and flexible mode of knowledge, and the rest of the 6% viewed it negatively. (Author self-created graph).

9. *Are you ready to accept e-learning for teaching and learning activities?*

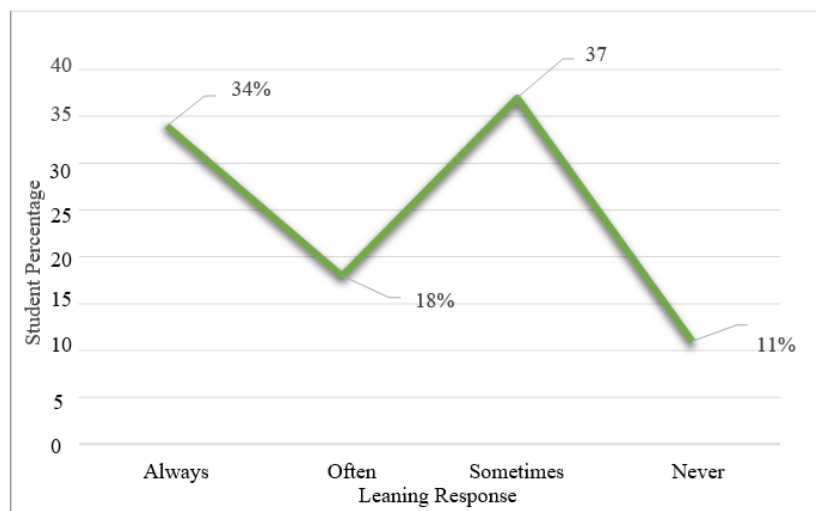


Figure 10. It illustrates that only 34% of undergraduates have given their opinion in favor of e-learning activities, as they are always ready to accept and learn through e-learning and teaching activities. Unexpectedly, 18% of the respondents often get prepared for e-learning activities. Surprisingly, 37% sometimes accept e-learning for teaching and learning activities, while 11% are never ready for such activities. (Author self-created graph)

10. *Will ICT enhance learning outcomes using a blended learning design compared to a traditional teaching stance?*

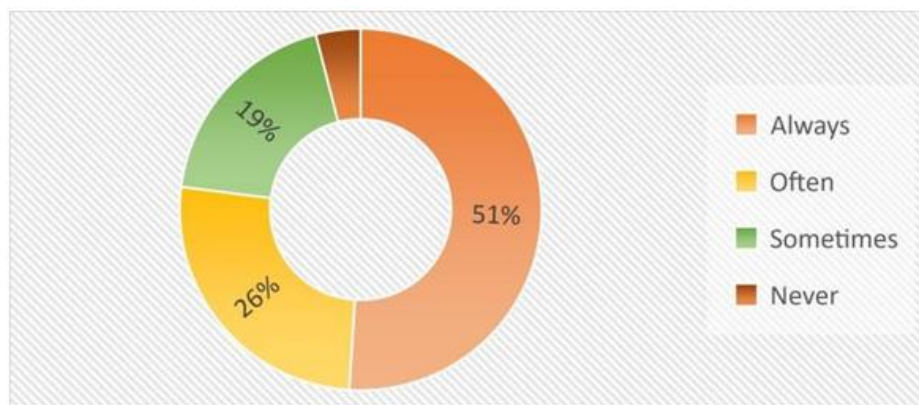


Figure 11. As per this, 51% of students agreed that ICT always enhances learning outcomes using a blended learning design. 26% of them often believe that ICT makes learning more comfortable and entertaining. While 19% of the respondents sometimes find ICT to enhance learning outcomes through the use of blended design and the remaining 4% consented quite negatively about it. (Author self-created graph)

The study indicates that students appreciate blended learning for several reasons. Primarily, it enhances their English language competence and transforms learning into a more collaborative, engaging, and enjoyable experience. Blended learning fosters interaction between instructors and students, giving them adequate time to complete tasks and encouraging students to take responsibility for their education, deciding when and how to utilize available resources. This approach is seen as more effective than limiting learning to solely online or traditional methods. However, the study also acknowledges challenges, such as difficulties faced by students with slow internet connections, which can make the learning experience disruptive and isolating.

Students' perspectives highlight that blended learning aids in understanding subject matter, especially in English classes, through the use of online videos featuring various speakers and the integration of personal devices and social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram. Blended learning environments, enriched with various computer applications, are attractive to students, though they require training to adapt to new modes of teaching. The students perceive blended learning as more suitable than traditional face-to-face learning and find it motivating in achieving their educational goals. It also allows for greater interaction and exchange of ideas among peers through forums or online platforms like Blackboard.

The benefits of blended learning at the undergraduate level are numerous. A significant advantage, as Blazar & Pollard (2023) and Kavanagh et al., (2022) suggest, is that the online component allows for a broader dissemination of learning than possible with face-to-face instruction alone. Teachers can devote more time

to developing and integrating study content and experimenting with different approaches in classrooms, gaining valuable first-hand experiences. Additionally, the use of social networking and community-building tools in online phases fosters a sense of familiarity among students even before they meet face-to-face.

Discussion

The findings of the current study at Ha'il University, explore the impact of blended learning on undergraduate English language students, and offer valuable insights into the evolving landscape of education. These insights resonate with the growing body of research advocating for the integration of technology in learning environments to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

Enhancing Language Competence and Engagement

The students' preference for blended learning due to its role in enhancing English language competence aligns with the assertions of Graham (2019), who emphasizes the effectiveness of blended environments in fostering language acquisition. As the study reveals, students find blended learning more collaborative and engaging. This observation echoes the findings of Means et al., (2013), who argue that blended learning environments can significantly improve student engagement and learning outcomes compared to traditional methods. The interactive nature of blended learning, which combines online and face-to-face interactions, arguably enriches the learning experience, making it more dynamic and responsive to student needs.

To provide a more holistic understanding of the implications of this study, it is imperative to delve into the challenges identified in the research. Notably, the lack of internet access and the inherent difficulties in building relationships online emerged as prominent barriers during the course of our investigation. These challenges were crucial to consider as they shape the landscape within which the mixed approach was implemented. Furthermore, to enhance the comprehensiveness of this study, I acknowledge the need for a more detailed discussion on the specific study conducted at Ha'il University. The intricacies of the results obtained from this study hold significant weight in contributing to the overall findings.

Student Accountability and Resource Utilization

The study highlights the importance of student accountability in blended learning environments. This aspect is crucial, as pointed out by Garrison and Kanuka (2004), who argue that blended learning encourages learners to take charge of their learning process, thereby fostering a deeper level of engagement and understanding. The flexibility to choose when and how to use available tools, as indicated by the students, reflects a self-directed approach to learning that is central to the philosophy of blended learning (Hofmann, 2006).

Challenges of Blended Learning

Despite the advantages, the study acknowledges the challenges faced by students, particularly those with slow internet connections. This finding is consistent with the concerns raised by Zhao et al. (2005), who note that technological barriers can hinder the effectiveness of blended learning. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring equitable access to education and the benefits of blended learning.

Blended Learning in Comprehending English

The use of various media and social networking sites as part of the blended learning approach is particularly effective in language learning. Warschauer (2004) highlights the potential of digital media in enhancing language comprehension and acquisition. The integration of personal gadgets and social networking platforms, as observed in this study, aligns with the perspectives of Greenhow et al. (2009), who underscore the role of social media in creating engaging and interactive learning experiences.

Teacher Role and Content Development

The increased time for teachers to develop and assimilate study content in blended learning environments is another significant benefit. This aspect is in line with the views of Graham (2006), who notes that blended learning allows educators more flexibility and creativity in curriculum design and delivery. The opportunity for teachers to experiment and reflect on their teaching practices is essential for continuous improvement and innovation in education, as suggested by Koehler and Mishra (2009).

Social Networking and Community Building

The use of social networking and community-building tools in online phases of blended learning, as reported in the study, enhances the sense of community among learners. Rovai and Jordan (2004) assert that the development of a strong learning community is critical for student success in online environments. The face-to-face component of blended learning, therefore becomes more meaningful when students already have established connections through online interactions.

Conclusion

Overall, this study explicates the impact of blended learning on undergraduate English students at Ha'il University, Saudi Arabia with major to assess students' perceptions of blended learning in the context of English learning and explore the benefits and challenges. It was found that students generally have a positive opinion about blended learning as it is more collaborative and engaging. The results also show that students identify a number of benefits it as improves proficiency, greater participation, responsibility, flexibility and control. Students also shared some major challenges of blended learning as infrastructure, tech barriers, difficulties in establishing relationships between students etc. Teaching English language at the undergraduate level utilizing a blended learning technique might be beneficial in all aspects of learning and teaching. As a result, using a blended learning strategy to teach English at the undergraduate level shall be adequate in assisting all aspects of learning and teaching. Blended learning is still in the developmental stage globally including at Ha'il University, Saudi Arabia. However, more research and developmental activities are needed to address other dimensions of blended learning namely proper infrastructure as well as training of both pupils and instructors with effective teaching as well as learning skills. Furthermore,

research studies in the area of blended learning as a modern or novel method of teaching as well as learning in the context of EFL/ESL/ or other degree courses of various Saudi universities are warranted. Our findings underscore the significant impact of integrating both traditional and online methods in our research methodology. The amalgamation of these approaches not only facilitated a more comprehensive data collection process but also contributed to a nuanced understanding of the subject matter. The mixed approach allowed us to triangulate information, cross-verify results, and capture a broader spectrum of perspectives. The effectiveness of this mixed methodology is particularly evident in the current research. This hybrid model not only enhanced the reliability of our results but also provided a more holistic view of the research context.

Conflict of interest:

None

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