

## Blended Learning Programme: The Updated Normal and Emerging Platform

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### Abstract

Blended learning refers to the combination of multimedia elements on a computer with classroom instruction with a teacher and peers . The aim of the present study is to describe a blended learning programme to be used in Iraqi schools in teaching English as a foreign language. Moreover , this study intends to be as one of the studies that involves the application of the Blended Learning Programme in teaching reading skills. The Programme has been applied to third year university level students at the Department of English/ College of Education for Human sciences/University of Wasit. The Blended Learning Programme has been done using google classroom web that directed by the teachers themselves. Results have shown that such a programme supports university teachers to prepare and announce the readiness of their lectures to be read and visited by students at any time. Blended learning Programme highly fits the new semester policy to be adopted by the college soon. This is because in case there is more than one teacher at the same department who teaches the same subject, students will choose the best based on the announced teaching materials. Accordingly, the early announcement about a given teaching material functions as an act or an invitation for students to attend a teacher's classes. Further, such a Programme highly suits the situations whereby students cannot access the classes face-to-face due to lack of security issues, or natural disasters, etc.

**Keywords:** Keywords: Blended Learning, Virtual Learning, Traditional Learning, E- Learning , Reading Skills .

### Introduction

In the last couple of years, the educational processes have been witnessed a huge increase in the implying of different technologies to support the system of learning and training programmes. In this rapidly developing field, the terms blended learning and virtual learning are often used interchangeably.

However, since several studies have proved that blended learning is usually more useful of the two. Blended learning defines as an approach that combines virtual learning with traditional in-person learning (training sessions , think of lectures and workshops) and self-study.

A blended learning programme may consist of weekly assignments , monthly in-person training days and frequent peer-to-peer interaction on a digital facilitation cite . Blended learning is maybe also referred to a hybrid learning.

The fundamental differences between virtual learning and blended learning are the type of the learning experience and the environment in which learning occurs .

Although technologies play a supporting role in blended learning, virtual learning processes take place only online. The technologies are considered as the star of virtual learning programmes, whereas in blended learning they are only one of the mediums that supports facilitating of the learning experience.

### **Aims of the Study**

This study aims at

- 1.Shedding light on the notion of virtual learning and blended learning.
- 2.Surveying the similarities and differences between traditional learning and blended learning .
- 3.Presenting the advantages and disadvantages of both virtual learning and blended learning .
- 4.Designing and surveying blended learning programme.
- 5.Implementing blended learning programme on third level university students to measure their proficiency on reading skills.
- 6.Identyfying the Iraqi EFL teachers and learners attitude and opinions about blended learning .
7. Analysing the results and driving conclusion.

### **The Questions of the Study**

This study tries to answer the following questions:

- 1.What is the blended learning?
- 2.Is the blended learning effective in supporting Iraqi EFL university learners in their educational progress?
- 3.Is the blended learning programme effective in solving problems in English language learning and teaching?
- 4.Are the Iraqi EFL university learners accept learning in blended learning programme?
5. Is the implementation of blended learning programme increase the motivation and autonomy of learners in learning English language?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is represented by providing students with a new learning platform and technology that delivers the prerequisite knowledge required to undertake more advanced programming courses.

The use of blended learning programme will increase student motivation and promote prerequisite knowledge, which consequently improves the learning experience of using educational technology.

The use of blended learning programme will provide opportunities to facilitate learning through the chance of saving and replaying the lectures and keeping them available for any time.

### Definitions of Blended Learning

Driscoll(2002, p.1) defined Blended learning as “the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences”. Whereas , Garrison and Kanuka ( 2004, p.96) defined Blended learning as “the strengths of synchronous (face-to-face) and asynchronous (text-based Internet) learning activities”. Another definition of blended learning is by Procter (2003, (Procter, 2003, cited in Heinze & Procter, 2004) as they stated that it is “the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning”.

### The Differences between Traditional Learning and Blended Learning

Blending learning with face-to-face teaching promotes learners empowerment, which means that learners actively engage with the class. This engagement with interactive tasks could decrease the negative connections with language learning because learners do more than only passively receive knowledge (Sagarra and Zapata, 2008). However, blending learning with face-to-face teaching could help learners to feel more comfortable with the foreign language and technology and so improve learners’ positive attitudes and motivation toward the foreign language (Sagarra and Zapata, 2008). Moreover, blended learning is an effective and efficient method of conveying teaching material (Singh, 2003).

The differences between the traditional learning and blended learning are shown in Table. 1

(Reidsema et al. ,2017).

**Table (1): Comparison between Traditional and Blended Learning**

No.	Traditional Learning	Blended Learning
1	Learner is passive.	Learner is active.
2	Attending lecture is compulsory.	Attending lecture is optional.
3	There is no structural alignment between the preparation done during the lecture and after the lecture.	There is a sort of structural alignment between the efforts presented before lesson and the activities done during the lesson.
4	There is no previous knowledge about the topic before attending class	Students have pre- knowledge about the topic through visiting a pre-determined website or platform.
5	Theory is emphasized than practice.	Theory and practice are emphasized.
6	There is no need to advanced preparation.	The preparation is crucial to achieve any in- class tasks .
7	Teacher-centered learning.	Learners-centered learning.
8	Students follow the teacher own	Students follow their own pace.

	pace.	
9	Students do the lower thinking tasks.	Students do the higher thinking tasks.

**Factors Influencing Acceptance of Blended Learning Among Educational Staff and Students.**

The use of Blended Learning requires staff to modify their knowledge and skills, in addition to develop new competences which incorporate knowledge and proficiency in technical, educational and organizational sense and which are presented regarding the academic context and the degree of Blended Learning (BL ) technology implemented. Due to the difficulty of Blended Learning system usage in class, a problem of small acceptance of the technology by staff emerges, and for this reason it is important to fix the factors that affect the teachers' acceptance of the Blended Learning system. Teacher's motivation for using and accepting Blended Learning in his/her educational process is an important factor which is also directly connected to institutional and contextual factors, in addition to personal factors of each educator.

Teachers with little or no experience in dealing with computers can be intimidated by the notion of using them as type of their teaching practice and probably form strong attitudes toward their experiences in the classroom helps teachers to enhance relevant skills (Keller, 2009).

Babic (2012) stated that prior experience of adopting computer equip knowledge, which in turn present a positive attitude about technology-rich learning contexts.

Rabardel, and Bourmaud (2003) claimed that the more experience a tutor has at using technology, the easier she or he is likely to determine it to incorporate into lessons.

Teachers' attitudes toward implementing technologies in their instruction are particularly important to the process of student learning, and can influence how effective these technologies should be.

Teachers with positive reactions toward adopting new Blended Learning technological innovation are basically more motivated to learn how to implement it (Babic 2012). However, higher levels of implementing in the classroom are not guaranteed even if instructors do possess an idea that is conducive to the adopting or accepting of new technologies (Osika, et al., 2009). Prior experience of using Blended Learning equipment in the classroom can result in a positive attitude toward technology-rich educational environments (Babic 2012).

Teachers' competencies in computer literacy work with Blended Learning, using the teaching design model, online mentoring , quality literacy and online moderating motivate them to use Blended Learning as easily as their learners.

Berry ( 2005 ) pointed out that the critical extrinsic motivational factors as institutional factors influencing teacher's acceptance of Blended Learning technology. capacity and reliability of the ICT infrastructure as institutional factors perceived adequacy of funding (e.g., personnel , pedagogical ,technical), level of organizational learning , availability of information, policies and organizational culture, , teachers' academic freedom, recognition of accomplishment ,changes in structure ,time, required resources, organizational culture of teaching, question of

property, management reward and professional growth and encouragement system motivate learners to use Blended Learning .

A positive attitude towards using Blended Learning makes lecturers and students use the system, values and attitudes of the teachers are a significant motivating factors in creating and implementing Blended Learning competence; skills and knowledge in Blended Learning are one of the factors that motivate lecturers and students.

In computer literacy , teachers' competencies, working with Blended Learning systems, , online moderating, online mentoring and quality literacy , applying the instructional design example motivate teachers to use Blended Learning

In the classroom , teachers occasionally used technology without really the implication to engage learners in utilizing problem-solving strategies. Because of negative perceptions against the ease of use of virtual-instruction, the shift of teachers towards technology acceptance is too slow.

Technical infrastructure access to the computer classroom, number of computers in classrooms, Internet access, broadband speed and technical support, school institution's management, the organisational culture and Blended Learning implementation strategies have all a great role in technology acceptance.

Finally, lack of confidence and time and lack of competences in technology are significant .

In studying Blended Learning acceptance in particular, authors emphasize the same duality. Whereas some support the role of technical infrastructure like access to the computer classroom, number of computers in classroom, internet access and high speed internet access and institution management (Babic, 2012).

The connection between the external factors and the internal that matters: external factor (like training , institutional support) will subsequently determine the attitudes and beliefs toward the technologies and the intention to use them (Cheng, (2012).

Numerous authors have implemented various models of technology adoption and theories and innovation diffusion to find out the factors that influence teachers' adoption of Blended Learning. These factors can be classified into the following broad categories: personality , teacher competence, acquiring knowledge and skills, attitude and values and institutional and situational factors.

Babic (2012) focused on the importance of factors such as finance , infrastructure, and policies may influence Blended Learning acceptance. The usability and quality of a Blended Learning are the key features for its success by affecting user acceptance and satisfaction (Babić, 2012). Usability is the extent to which users can use a service or a product or to achieve specified aims efficiently and effectively while enhancing feelings of satisfaction in a certain context of use .

In the context of Blended Learning integration therefore, quality consciousness refers to the perception of inherent values associated with Blended Learning integration. Quality of an academic process is one of the reasons responsible for student success (Babić 2012).

The contextual factor of culture is powerful in affecting acceptance of Blended Learning environments negatively and positively. High amount of performance

expectancy, results demonstrability and the acceptance of Blended Learning environments affected positively by social influence. The degree of social effect is mediated by the contextual factor of culture. The factor of learners' learning styles do not have any effect on acceptance of Blended Learning environments.

Online courses provide students with some flexibility regarding to the place, pace and time. However, the anonymous nature of the Blended Learning may lead to disengagement and demotivation and subsequent minimal incorporation or even withdrawal. While in only face-to-face study, students' levels of motivation can be observed to a specific extent, even with little or no online courses present challenges, physical cues and concerns in relation to students' motivation and active enrollment.

The challenge of engaging online students seems ordinary across levels, subject matter and institutions. Hence, in order for the students to have a positive learning experience, it is essential to figure out the factors that influence students' motivation and participation in online courses.

Self-efficacy plays an important role in the learning outcome. The strategies need to be devised to keep the learning interest of the students in these platforms and they lead to include live interaction modules in the process for improving efficiency in learning and teaching.

The combining the visual outcome of a teacher along with the listening of narration motivates learners to process information deeper in a multimedia educational environment and improves learning (Osika, et al., 2009). Being able to tackle and interact with the teacher in exact time is an important educational aspect in engaging and creating learning environment. Moreover, the gestural and other visual cues, the instructor's positioning in the classroom are also important in creating a positive learning environment where the learners are engaged and motivated. In fact, the visual emergence of an animated educational agent has proved to cognitively assist the learners in assimilating material in a deeper way as compared to a blended learning.

There are several motivational factors, extrinsic and intrinsic factors dominate most of the discourse in research, extrinsic motivation is defined as a distinguishable behaviours about a activity or task such as grading systems, good grades, instructional strategies, high payment, educational technologies and learning conditions (Cheng, 2012).

Osika, et al. (2009) stated that success and hard-work such as persistence and task choice are determined motives, values and expectancies for constructivist students.

Facilities through a Learning Management System influence and students' engagement and motivation such as rapid responses to situations faced by students, the presence of audio, visual and text in the features of discussion forums.

One that can improve participation of students is the establishment of a high interaction between teachers and students, because with high interaction between students and teachers can create learners interested to actively communicate and having a sense of ownership in the community (Berry, 2005).

## **The Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Learning**

It is essential to disclose in more detail the Virtual Learning meaning. While the set of characteristics differs from one Virtual Learning solution to another, the functionality generally allows the following:

1. Management and planning of lessons and other tasks;
2. Dealing successfully with the digital learning materials: podcasts, texts, images, videos etc.;
3. Allow one-on-one chats with a teacher and group discussions;
4. Submitting tasks and homework;
5. Providing feedback, tracking, grading students' performance,;
6. Holding live lectures. (Salovaara, and Tamminen, 2009).

Virtual Learning is one of the E-learning or Virtual learning since it shares the main features with them in addition to the use of in-person method, hence, it is important to highlight the usefulness of knowing the characteristics of virtual learning.

### **The Advantages**

#### **Accessibility**

Learning can be done online, there is no need for being in the classrooms. This makes high-quality learning available for disabled students as well as for those living in remote places or even on other continents. Blended Learning system also facilitates the ongoing educational system as one can continue learning even on business trip, lying in bed with a cold or vacation.

In addition to the benefits of in-person learning and teaching incorporated in Blended Learning class, this type of class makes the material accessible to any student who has a smartphone, computer or tablet. It doesn't matter about where each student is being geographically or whether they are suffering from mobility or health issues. Every student will be able to log in at any time.

#### **Flexibility**

With the use of Virtual Learning, the academic process will be more flexible, especially in time. Having free access and permanent to all the learning materials, learners can easily align their learning with other plans and tasks. Therefore, it gets simpler to continue academically although having a full-time job or a child demanding much attention and time.

In addition to that learners are free to enroll at their own pace. Every learner can watch the videos and read the texts as many times as they prefer to understand the topic, while fast students do not have to wait for the rest of the team to move further.

#### **Affordability**

The significant benefit of implementation of Virtual Learning is that getting a degree even at high universities becomes cheaper than there is no need for giving campus fees. It is also the situation is better for foreigners since they do not need to spend large sums of money on traveling to another country.

The costs contained virtual classroom and setting up teaching and learning management technique and compare highly with the cost of expanding into an ordinary physical classrooms. These savings can generally be passed onto learners, which may increase course uptake.

Virtual Learning environments supports teachers to manage administrative work , plan lessons , track students' performance, level of engagement and tasks as well as provide additional information and support for those who prefer to deal with that. With Virtual Learning it is beneficial to analyze the effectiveness of the current curriculum and to update it if required.

### **Engagement**

The Virtual Learning environment is familiar to teachers with formats of content and new methods. It empowers academic roadmap with videos and podcasts , online tests and quizzes. Mixing different tasks allows better learners' engagement in the learning activities.

### **Effectiveness**

The resources and tools that can be given from within a Virtual Learning class have been proven to be for any time effective. Presenting teaching and learning materials in this way allows learners to have greater control on the way and the time of accessing in the Blended Learning class, increase their likelihood of success and the meaning that the learners can take high control on their own learning performance.

### **Popularity**

There are many educational tools that students are excited about using them in their learning. Learning management systems with inbuilt Virtual Learning environment are popular with learners for all the above reasons. This popularity means that learners are much more likely to spend a lot time in revising and studying important course materials, and implies that course dropout rates should be reduced(Salovaara, and Tamminen, 2009).

### **The Disadvantages**

**Isolation** : The classroom discussions that can lead to understanding of the subject do not found because there are no other learners with whom to discuss the content.

**Self-Discipline** : Having the motivation necessary to do the course. Virtual learning is more difficult for those who are tending to procrastination.

**Solo Learning** :In the case when students need clarification on a course, it's not available if a student ask question out the class or the teacher didn't available online. students can still asking for clarification in a VL situation, but the answer will be delayed due to online availability of the teacher who can answer the question.

**Impersonal** : The VL environment can feel a little lonely because there is no actual human interaction involved,.

**Technology Issues** : The problems of technology are always frustrating, in the case when the teacher in the middle of attending a VL class, they will be extremely disruptive. A VL classroom is as good as the technology used in it. If the teaching software doesn't go well with the teacher computer, or the Internet connection fails to



accomplish the lecture , the teacher may end up wasting more time working with the internet or repairing his connection than teaching or learning.

### **The Blended Learning Programme**

The Blended Learning Programme works as a cycle by starting with the class (face-to-face) moving to online homework, and to end with the classroom again, the following steps are regarded the components of Blended Learning Programme.

#### **1. Reading a Text in the lecture**

The starting point of the Programme is reading in the class. Learners will start the blended learning Programme by reading a text in the class from the text book. This will help students in managing the other steps. Besides, it will motivate learners in doing the online homework task about the given topic they are reading in the class about and can make them more interested in their reading (Sagarra & Zapata, 2008).

#### **2. Doing Homework Online**

This is the first step in connecting online and face-to-face learning. Learners will start doing their homework online at home as homework for many reasons. Sagarra and Zapata (2008) claimed that doing homework online enhances learners' positive attitudes to the foreign language . Second, it gives learners the opportunity to enhance their autonomous skills that this activity allows them to try over and over through the instant feedback without fear of embarrassment that there will no-one watching them. Moreover, giving students the opportunity to work with the materials outside the classroom will save time and increase learners' motivation and learning (Sagarra & Zapata, 2008).

#### **3. Posting and Chatting**

After completing the home work tasks learners are required to copy what they have achieved and paste it in a forum space and mention their own reflections on the similarities and differences between the assignments they just constructed and the text they before read in the class. The teacher may divide learners into groups for discussion , in other words, learners will do the task individually and go to the forum to paste the text they have just made and to meet their group to do the forum task.

#### **4. Returning Back to the Class for Completing the Tasks**

The last phase in this cycle is when students return back to the class. The teacher may dedicate the first 10 minutes in the lesson to offer feedback based on what he saw in the forum and start a discussion about the similarities and differences between the text they read in the class and the reconstructed text online or the vocabularies.

Sutton (2004) suggested some practical steps used with any blended learning programme.

#### **1. Clearly Identifying Desired Learning Outcomes**

To design qualified blended learning programme, the desired learning outcomes should be determined. Hewer (1997) pointed out that the desired learning outcomes of this programme are:

- Increasing learners' motivation and positive attitudes to learn English .
- Increasing learners – learners and learners- text interaction
- Introducing technological applications to the Iraqi context gradually.
- Enhancing learners' autonomy through doing the online homework tasks individually.
- Fostering cooperative online group discussion by using forum and chat

- Increasing learners' knowledge of form, collocation and structure and refining vocabulary.

## **2. The Awareness of the Learning Culture**

The culture of the organization has been taken in consideration about the necessity of achieving reading in the class, choosing the online homework texts related to the course book.

## **3. Select the Medium for the Delivery**

Blogs are the preferred sites for doing online homework activities.

## **4. Adopt a Holistic Method to Development and Design**

Connections between coaching, classroom training and virtual learning material will lead to a strong solution (Sutton, 2004).

This connection may be found in the learners posting and discussing the task online, and then start the discussion face-to-face with the teacher and with the whole class in the classroom.

## **5. Designing Programme Assessment**

The blended learning blog can be assessed through learners' posts in the comment box and by regarding to what extent learners are participated as well as through the discussion in the classroom.

## **Methodology**

The blended learning programme, which involves new trend, has been applied on third year college students in teaching reading skills. The participants are students at the Department of English/ College of Education for human sciences/ University of Wasit during the academic year 2018/2019. The total number is (112) students arranged into two classes; (56) students for each. The lectures were given at the new English Language Lab, which is equipped with sound and voice amplifier, desktop computer device, speakers, microphones, data show projector and modern system control.

The learners are asked to look on the materials sent in advance, read them carefully, and prepare questions and points to be discussed and practiced inside the class. After the class, the learners are required to do more high and analytical thinking work.

To apply the programme, the researcher has prepared the following:

1. Determine the teaching materials;
2. Upload the lectures via the chosen platform such as google classroom;
3. Ask learners to do an in advance reading for the given text;
4. Practise the rules do the activities, , discuss learners mistakes or questions and/or;
5. Give learners difficult assignments, or quiz them online;
6. Giving learners feedback as soon as possible;
7. Implementing reflection attitudinal questionnaire for the purpose of evaluating the feasibility of this programme in teaching reading skills;
8. Evaluating learners' answers; and
9. Deriving the conclusions.

## **1. Results, Discussion, and Conclusions**

Results of this study have shown the following:

This study has shown the following results from the teachers perspectives:

1. Teachers need to be qualified enough to tackle with this technology;
2. The preparation time of the materials will be much more than in traditional classrooms;
3. Work span will not be limited to certain day, but to the whole course;
4. Teachers need to know about reflection and evaluation techniques to be used in refining their performance. For example the number of files, their sizes, varieties or types of files uploaded;
5. The more lectures and information being uploaded, the better reputation and the higher opportunities to get strength points in teachers' annual performance evaluation and assessment;
6. The bad or the absence totally of the internet services at home and work affect tackling with such type of learning, or the continual power failure also represent the major drawbacks to the use of technology in academic fields. It need to wait much time and efforts for the materials and files to be uploaded;
  1. Joining google classroom or any another cite and prepare the equipment took almost a lot of time .
  2. (96) learners (ie.,86.32%) had internet service and were able to access technological devices;
  3. Out of these (96) learners, only (24) (ie., 25%) learners were creative and challenge to do the pre-reading and understand it alone. After two months of applying this programme, the number of learners who prepared themselves before the lesson increased, reaching to (64) (ie., 67. %) learners out of (96). The rest of the learners, ie., (32) (ie., 33%) preferred to study in the class through the group – large group or pair work.
  4. The (7) learners (ie.,6.35%) out of (112) have no smart phones or computer devices and have no access to the internet service, therefore, they use the traditional way of learning;
  5. With the passage of time, the majority of students of the students (ie., 92 %) have developed to be creative and have the autonomy to deal with technological devices . The increase is clearly noticed through their active interaction during the class and when achieving the online tasks;
  6. Out of these (112) learners, (66) of them preferred to deal with such method of teaching because it involves several times of reading and reviewing. Moreover, (57) of them interested with it as all teaching materials are accessible and available at any time. Further, (19) of them liked this method of teaching as it have much participation and practising at class. Whereas, (10) learners liked it because they interested in learning with games, role play and the authentic tasks. As for those (10) learners who could get a full benefit from this type of teaching, results have shown that (6) of them liked the teaching games being practised in the class and (4) of them interested in the group and pair work.

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