

TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS UPON THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF BLENDED LEARNING

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Abstract

Although blended learning (BL) is quite popular in education, and developments in technology encourage teacher educators to apply blended learning in their classrooms, one of the most important debates is: compared to a traditional classroom environment, whether students can learn better at the online learning environment or not. There are many studies conducted on the usefulness of blended learning but the effectiveness of blended learning is still controversial. This paper focuses on the negative impacts of blended learning on students observed by teachers. The research aims to investigate the issues and challenges of blended learning and the role of institutions that adopt blended learning as a modern educational strategy in higher education. This research bases itself on the analysis, observations of teachers, and their experiences. The participants were 50 university teachers. The instruments used were questionnaires seeking the answers to research questions based on teachers' observations and experiences of using blended learning during the normal situation or the unpredictable situation. After the data collection, descriptive analysis was made using the software, SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions). The results advocated that teachers found blended learning useful but at the same time, it has negative sides too. This study reported these negative impacts of blended learning such as technical problems including poor internet connectivity, high maintenance cost/lower-income students, challenging for teachers as it needs time for preparation, some students prefer to ask questions to teachers face-to-face instead of asking in online sessions, for some students, the learning process may become doubtful through blended learning and some instructors' ineffective communication. In the end, this research attempted to contribute some recommendations to cope up with the negative impact of blended learning.

Keywords: Blended learning, eLearning, hybrid learning, negative impact, reflection, teaching, technology

INTRODUCTION

The term Blended Learning (BL) is not new nowadays and it is used frequently by both teachers and researchers. Before the term was used widely, the term hybrid learning was often used. According to Powell et al. (2015), hybrid learning is a mixture of conventional face-to-face schooling and online teaching, but the online component has to provide a customized, diverse community of learners with instruction. The concept of Blended Learning emerged at the beginning of 2000 and now the term is widely adopted across higher education. However, some researchers believe that blended learning has many meanings because it is ambiguous. According to Graham (2006), "Blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction (p.5)." Garrison and Kanuka (2004) define blended learning as "the thoughtful integration of

classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences (p.96).” To elaborate the term BL, it can be defined as one of the most popular supplementary teaching means for teachers as it offers twin classroom settings that rightfully blend face-to-face classroom and virtual classroom techniques (Hrastinski, 2019). Although traditional classroom teaching provides better face-to-face interaction with students, the introduction of new technologies in classrooms boosts the chances to grasp the skills better than a traditional classroom environment.

Although blended learning is quite popular in education, and developments in technology encourage teacher educators to apply blended learning in their classrooms, one of the most important debates is: compared to the traditional classroom environment, whether students can learn better in the online learning environment or not. There are many studies conducted on the benefits of blended learning but the effectiveness of BL is still controversial. Researchers such as Seage and Tiregiin (2020) opine that blended learning is not a simple learning method combining virtual and physical learning. It should mix hybrid factors such as learning environments, brain acquisition mechanism, learning affective factors, learners, teachers, and different affective factors in learning.

In the current era, blended instruction emerged as the most prominent method of instruction in education, especially in higher education. Lots of advantages of blended learning have been pointed out by students all over the world. The advantages are as follows:

- The web-based learning environment is convenient and accessible.
- It promotes learner autonomy and life-long learning.
- It promotes positive interactions between peers during web-based lessons.
- It enhances enjoyment.
- It is clear, easy to follow and understandable.
- It encourages online collaborative learning. It improves the analytical skills of students.
- Blended learning reduced drop-out rates and raised examination pass rates (Lopez-Perez et.al, 2011)
- It is supportive, flexible and motivating for students.
- Computers, local and global networks of information are made available for learners.
- Learners are enabled to use multimedia, email, virtual libraries, etc.
- Based on the learning preferences and requirements of learners, in blended learning, there is more freedom for the learners to develop at their own speed.
- With more and more technological innovations new types of blends will occur and education will be blended with different technologies, but the crucial point to be reflected is that can blended learning assist students to improve their performance in all aspects of their education?

1.1 Rationale of the Study

The universities in Saudi Arabia where this research was conducted, started employing

blended learning back in 2006 and 2007, but in the second semester of the academic year -2019-20, teachers used full online teaching to cope-up the pandemic situation. When Covid-19 spread, all universities were closed and as a result, teachers had to carry on the rest of the semester via remote online teaching. In this context, the traditional face-to-face class changed to online teaching/learning. As we know that blended learning is a mixture of traditional face-to-face and online learning, so blended instructions occurred in the classroom before the outbreak of the pandemic and full online instructions during the Pandemic. For many years, the researchers had been applying Blackboard, other learning management systems (CLMS), Zoom, YouTube, Podcast, WhatsApp, and other online platforms for blended learning mode. During the practice of blended learning and fully online teaching, the researchers came across the negative impacts of BL on students and their learning. Additionally, their colleagues also shared their problems with handling blended and online teaching.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The researchers, here, are trying to explore the negative impacts of blended learning. The research aims to investigate these research objectives:

1. What are the issues and challenges of Blended Learning?
2. How can teachers and students overcome these issues and challenges?
3. What should be the role of institutions which adopt BL as a modern educational strategy in higher education?

1.3 Significance of the Study

Blended learning is the sign of a notable change in education, but the researchers experienced various types of challenges while switching over to blended learning from the purely traditional face-to-face classroom instructions. They came across more negative impacts of blended learning on students and found it very challenging.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

There are numerous studies on the positive and negative effects of Blended Learning in the EFL context. In their study, Hara and Kling (1999) highlighted that successful skills and strategies for face-to-face learning will not be enough for online learning as a result of the learners' lack of competence in handling technology. Pillay, Irving and Tones (2007) listed some factors affecting the poor outcomes of the achievements of students in an online environment pointing out dissatisfaction and negative online learner qualities affecting the learning outcomes. However, most of the research has shown various benefits of implementing Blended Learning or technology-based teaching for successful learning outcomes or achieving accuracy and proficiency in a foreign language (Schmidt and Hegelheimer, 2004; Khazaei and Dastjerdi, 2011). Similar studies (Albrect, 2006; Ariza, 2004; Banados, 2006; Bersin, 2004; Bender, 2003; Brudermann, 2010; and Oweis,

2018) have also found the positive effects of Blended Learning on EFL learning. Bender (2003) and Vernadakis et al., (2012) have further added that Blended Learning and technology provides extra support for weak students. In short, there are numerous investigations claiming and proving the positive effects of Blended Learning on EFL teaching and learning.

Garrison and Kanuka's (2004) study on blended learning showed that BL facilitates the higher learning experience and it can be learner-centered. It grants opportunities for deep learning as well. In a study conducted by Hughes (2007), she measured the effectiveness of blended learning on learner support and retention. Her results indicated that the mixture of well-prepared blended learning with help and encouragement for 'at-risk' learners improves coursework submission and module retention without extra effort that can be regarded as very effective in helping lecturers to manage their time better. On the other hand, Wang and Ip (2008) have found online communication tools like interaction through emails frustrating. Further, Al-Jarf (2009) also advocates that using technology as a supplement with classroom activities motivates students participating in the activities. Moreover, Alpapla and Florez (2011) and Guzer and Caner (2014) have explained how Blended Learning can be applied and presented in teaching. They have suggestions and considerations to keep in mind for teachers while implementing it in the classroom. According to Albiladi and Alshareef (2019) and Driuban et al. (2018), the use of blended learning does improve students' performance in general. In the opinion of Seage and Tiregiin (2020), the benefits of the blended learning conceptions are that it offers advantages for the classroom environment, as well as the trends to apply the blended learning application.

Most of the studies on blended learning show its positive sides, but in the present study, the researchers have focused on the negative sides of it so that, before the implementation of blended learning in higher education, educational institutions would be aware of its demerits and try to overcome the challenges that come with blended learning.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Subjects

The study intends to investigate the effects of Blended Learning on learning and teaching. This research bases itself on analysis and observation (teachers' experience). For this purpose, 50 subjects were randomly selected. These participants were 50 university teachers from various faculties i.e., Arts, Language and Translation, Medicine, Science, Life Science, Computer Science and Social Science. They teach undergraduate and graduate students and have 5 to 35 years of teaching experience. Moreover, these random respondents were from different universities of Saudi Arabia and they were from various countries like Saudi Arabia, Canada, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Yemen, and Sudan teaching in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, all these participant teachers had 5-10

years of experience in blended instruction.

3.2 Research Design and Instruments

This research has been designed on a quantitative method. The instruments used were questionnaires seeking the answers to research questions based on teachers' observations and experiences of using blended learning in regular mode and distance mode. To get teachers' responses, a questionnaire for teachers was made on Google Forms comprising 10 items (variables) on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=Very Little Extent, 2=Little Extent, 3=Some Extent, 4=Great Extent to 5=Very Great Extent except for item no. 3 that ranged from 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Very Often to 5=Always The questionnaire was divided into two parts, part 1 collected demographic data such as age and teaching experience and part 2 asked teachers' agreement or disagreement on the negative impacts of blended learning on a five-point Likert scale.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Google Form was used as a tool to formulate a questionnaire and collect the data. It was forwarded to the colleagues and acquaintances via emails or WhatsApp. Some colleagues also extended their helping hand in sending the questionnaire to their friends from other universities. In this way, the researchers could gather 50 teachers' responses. Then the collected data were coded for the statistical analysis employing SPSS (version 26.0). The descriptive statistics were made to get accurate results and to tabulate the mean scores, standard deviations and descriptive frequencies.

3.4 Hypothesis of the Research

The current research implies to validate the negative impacts of blended learning that teachers have faced in online classes and the application of online tools. They also take into account other teachers' observations. Therefore, based on their colleagues and their observations, the researchers have formulated this hypothesis- blended learning carries so many negative impacts with its positive sides. If these negative impacts are not resolved, the whole learning process gets affected and learning becomes doubtful. In other words, we can say students do not perform well and do not get internal and external reinforcement to attend both types of classes-online and face-to-face. As a result, the whole pedagogy loses its aims and faces many challenges to achieve its goals.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

The entire study revolves around the negative impacts of blended learning without focusing on any positive side of BL. Further research can attempt to consider both the sides of BL- positive and negative. Other researchers can also compare the positive and negative impacts of blended learning. Additionally, further research can investigate its effects in longitudinal research and can explore them in the long-term application of blended learning by comparing a traditional learning group with a blended learning group. In short, this study has many limitations that can be covered up in further research.

4 RESULT ANALYSIS

Table 1 reveals the mean scores, standard deviations, and descriptive frequencies regarding teachers' reflections upon the negative impacts of blended learning. These reflections come from their experiences and observations while dealing with blended learning.

TABLE 1
TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS UPON THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF BLENDED LEARNING

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Descriptive Frequency
1. I think that blended teaching is very challenging and time-consuming for teachers.	3.42	1.180	Some Extent
2. I was familiar with blended learning and I could manage the blended instructions before the pandemic.	3.38	1.141	Some Extent
3. I experience technical problems in blended teaching.	3.14	1.107	Sometimes
4. I observe that students do not feel motivated in virtual sessions compared to traditional sessions.	4.30	.763	Great Extent
5. I experience that students do not learn/perform better in the online learning environment.	4.04	.925	Great Extent
6. I find that majority of the students do not participate actively in online classroom activities.	4.36	.942	Great Extent
7. I think that university administrators need to be strict about the student attendance policy in online teaching.	4.62	.805	Great Extent
8. I observe that effective communication is hindered in online instruction.	4.28	.927	Great Extent
9. I believe that all students do not prefer to ask questions through online modes like course messages or emails.	4.02	1.152	Great Extent
10. As a teacher, I feel that learning becomes doubtful for some students in web-based learning.	4.06	.818	Great Extent

*(1= Very Little Extent to 5= Very Great Extent) (*Item no 3: 1= Never to 5= Always)*

Table 1 above presents only two degrees of agreement and disagreement scale and those are great extent and some extent. Great extent occurs seven times and some extent/sometimes appears thrice. Item 1 and item 2 results show that some teachers agreed to some extent with the hypothesis that applying blended learning in a regular

mode or distance mode is challenging, and difficult to manage blended instructions. The descriptive frequencies of these two variables are as follows: the mean scores were 3.42 and 3.38, and the standard deviations were 1.180 and 1.141 respectively. For variable numbered 3, the time-frequency scale was applied and the participants responded that they sometimes encounter technical problems as the mean score was 3.14 with 1.107 standard deviation. From variable 4 to 10, teacher participants agreed to a great extent with some negative impacts of blended instructions because the descriptive frequencies were shown in the above table as variables 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 presented the mean scores 4.30, 4.04, 4.36, 4.62, 4.28, 4.02, and 4.06 with .763, .925, .942, .805, .927, 1.152 and .818 standard deviations respectively.

After analyzing the data, it was found that blended learning is a very challenging option for student-teacher-administration and it fails in many ways or, we can say that it brings many negative impacts with its positive side. Table 1 illustrates the mean scores of every variable that is above 4 except three variables numbered 1, 2 and 3. It means all teachers agreed with the point to a great extent that blended learning comes with issues and challenges. For the variable numbered 1, 2, and 3, teachers varied in their agreement revealing that some teachers were already using digital platforms with the face-to-face setting and some started during the pandemic for remote learning when it was a very necessary inclusion to cope up with the situation. Because of some negative factors, the quality of blended learning becomes questionable. We know that blended learning is the new face of learning in the post-pandemic situation, therefore, teacher-student-administration should work together and make some strict policies to overcome the challenges that blended learning brings with itself.

5 DISCUSSION

It was observed that blended instruction is the need for modern education and without its inclusion, learning is going to be unimaginable in the future (Schmidt and Hegelheimer, 2004, and Guzer and Caner, 2014). To get their benefits, many measures are required. First of all, knowledge of digital and media literacy is the prerequisite of blended learning. Teachers and students should know very well different types of digital tools and platforms to enhance the optimal applications of blended instruction. Second, the administrators need to provide digital literacy training to their teachers and students. Third, the governments can put some extra efforts into fast speed and free/low-cost Internet availability to avail the advantages of blended learning. All of us know that the importance of blended learning can never be ignored, but at the same time, it brings so many challenges for teachers, students, and administrations (Pillay, Irving and Tones, 2007; Vernadakis et al., 2012; and Seage and Tiregiin, 2020). Also, the obtained findings of this study proved that the application of blended instruction is not easy because average or weak students find it not very clear or, are dubious about it, so their learning gets affected. It was also found that students feel less motivated or not motivated at all in virtual classes

as attendance is not required, so they do not get motivated to attend online sessions in comparison to face-to-face sessions or, it can be said that due to less motivation and lack of strict regulation, students do not attend online sessions. As a result, this affects their overall learning even face-to-face sessions. If they attend, they face other kinds of problems like their communication is hindered and weak students' learning becomes doubtful or sometimes learning becomes doubtful in general for every student. It happens so because there is a lack of effective communication and less interaction between teacher and students, and some students do not feel comfortable or they are shy to ask through course messages or emails. They find online interaction frustrating (Wang and Ip, 2008). All these negative impacts affect students' performance badly and this notion contradicts with many researchers (Al-Jarf, 2009; Albiladi and Alshareef, 2019; Bersin, 2004; Bender, 2003; and Brudermann, 2010) who advocate web-based learning.

While elaborating on the negative sides of blended instruction, the first factor to be considered is the insufficient technical accessibility. According to Al Tale (2014), computers are widely used throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for entertainment, work and learning, and a house is rarely found without a computer. However, during the virtual sessions, the researchers have found that some teachers reported that their students gave the excuse that they did not have their laptops, so they failed to attach their submission on time. Those students preferred to use their smartphones and that created a lot of technical problems for both the teachers and the students.

- Technical problems including poor internet connectivity: Technology is very unpredictable. Technical disturbance can occur at any time. In some countries, internet connectivity is very unstable and poor.
- Blended learning involves high maintenance cost of Internet facilities and it becomes difficult for lower-income students.
- BL is challenging for teachers as it needs time for preparation. Hughes (2007) considers these extra efforts can be minimized with the help and coordination of students and administration.
- Some students prefer to ask questions to teachers face-to-face instead of asking through email.
- For some students in BL, the learning process may become doubtful.
- Some instructors' ineffective communication affects the learning of students in BL.
- When students are given the choice of attending online sessions, then there is a low percentage of students' attendance.
- Students' attendance cannot be optional.
- Mostly online assessments are confined to objective questions.
- The researchers are not against the view of using blended learning, but they want teachers and administrators to pay attention to its negative sides, so they can overcome the negative impacts of BL and it can be applied as a facilitative and useful technique to have its benefits to a larger extent.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS

Understanding the essentials of what is the ideal mix for a successful blended course can provide great management insights into developing effective strategies that will allow institutions to create new opportunities for their students and instructors.

- To have good online learners, teachers can guide the learners to acquire skills and apply strategies for becoming successful online learners.
- Electronic/computer literacy is a must for the learners to understand blended instructions.
- Appropriate learning strategies should be used according to students.
- For the smooth functioning of BL, institutions need to ensure that all staff members and students are trained in digital literacy.
- Teachers should encourage students for more participation in the online environment and should find ways of creating social interaction through more collaboration.
- Students' attendance needs to be mandatory.
- Blended learning needs to be planned precisely.
- Educational institutions need to be strict about the policies of conducting online exams.

CONCLUSION

Today the term blended learning has become a mainstream term that describes modern education that takes advantage of online technologies, but the strengths and weaknesses of BL activities need to be analyzed in more detail. By formulating frameworks for successful learning, all educational institutions need to emphasize blended learning approaches. When used as an instructional tool in the improvement of the learning outcomes, blended learning is potentially useful. The challenge for the educators and institutions is to integrate the benefits of the chosen learning activities to identify a desirable blend. Quality education is a challenge therefore, blended learning is the indicator of considerable change in education, but the degree to which blended learning provides an effective learning environment needs to be ensured by all administrators of institutions. This paper has shown that with the merits of blended learning, the pitfalls of blended learning need to be taken into consideration, and the administration, institutions and teachers can work together to overcome the challenges that come with blended learning.

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