



The Advantages of Using Blended Learning in Studying English as a Foreign Language at the University of Tabuk

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research was to investigate the advantages of using blended learning in teaching English as a foreign language at the English Language Center (Females Section) / the Medical Faculty – the University of Tabuk for the academic year 2018/ 2019. The sample of the study consisted of 60 Medical Faculty female students (1st PYP –Second Semester) at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. The researcher used questionnaire survey was divided into four parts. This qualitative research used SPSS program to analyze the elicited data. The findings of the study showed that using blended learning in teaching EFL at the University of Tabuk is very advantageous. 84% of the respondents stated that their language proficiency skills improved a lot compared to the use of the conventional teaching methods. This study recommends that future research should be conducted to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of the use of blended learning in teaching EFL in different universities and academic institutions in Saudi Arabia.

1. Introduction

Blended learning is progressively becoming a prospect for higher education students. It permits for the improvement of face-to-face interface between teachers and learners, using internet or computer based techniques (Morris, 2010).

Blended learning courses have become very popular nowadays in every sphere of academia. They related to those courses in which a substantial amount of seat time, that is, time disbursed in the classroom, is replaced with online activities that include learners in meeting course objectives (Bock.et al., 2018). Blended learning courses have been classified between 30% and 79% of the learning materials are online activities and 29% are face-to-face courses (Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007). According to Garrison and Vaughan (2008, p.5) blended learning as "*the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences . . . such that the strengths of each are blended into a unique learning experience. It is a fundamental redesign that transforms the structure of, and approach to, teaching and learning*".

Blended learning is considered a significant part of the activities that take place over two different areas: in person and online. Several other pedagogies - lecture, problem-based learning, Just-in-Time Teaching, cooperative learning, and others — can then be covered within the blended framework (Garrison and Vaughan, 2007). The difficulty that shapes blended learning is to connect, or blend, what occurs in each medium so that face-to-face and online activities strengthen each other to produce a single, unified, course. A large body of

literature, frequently characterized as the no significant difference literature, is regularly quoted in provision of the argument that there is no apparent advantage in the learning outcomes of students taught online compared to students taught in a face-to-face setting (Boelens .et al., 2018).

Blended learning courses use effective learning strategies through the implementation of different pedagogical approaches. The asynchronous nature of the blended module of the courses possesses constructive impact of increasing the time learners spend on course material (Allen et.al. 2007). Thoughts showed online inspire reflection and usually reach 100% participation. As a result, the face-to-face time can be used more effectively, with learners extending the material beyond what might be achieved in a conventional face-to-face course. The learners in a blended course create more and comfortable networks between what they are learning and what they already know, generating a robust scaffold to establish evidence (Zhao, 2005).

2. Literature Review

Over the past few decades, research on blended learning has significantly advanced (Neville et al., 2005). This type of e-learning possesses a great effect on the teaching and learning cycle. Past research and literature agrees that the basic interest of blended learning is its ability to provide a novel learning pattern that appears capable and useful of giving knowledge beyond limits of classroom-based courses. However, the use of blended learning approach has provided teachers and learners with the opportunity to focus the fact that it identified the disadvantages in the socialization field. Specialists in the field have attempted very often to handle such problem by providing an e-learning that considers blended learning more into account (Mantyla, 2001).

According to Mantyla (2001) blended learning is the use of two or more presentation and distribution procedures for improving both the content and the learners' experience. Blended learning uses different approaches, comprising print-based materials, instructor-led training and web-based training for example. In a positive mode, it can be assumed that blended learning has always occurred, since the appearance of the first learning technologies, teachers and learners have always attempted to find an active compromise between sessions necessitating these skills and more classical face-to-face teaching sittings.

Similarly, Fallery (2004) proposes that blended learning should be analyzed in detail to recognize to what extent it is able to encounter the amplified socialization requirements that seemed to be essential when e-learning was used.

Also, Rovai and Jordan (2004) compared three education graduate courses—traditional, blended, and fully online—and found that students in the blended course measured highest in a sense of community, similar to those students in the face-to-face section, but higher than those in fully online section. They stated “since students in the blended course exhibited similar sense of community and variability as students in the traditional course, offering the convenience of fully online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact may be adequate to nurture a strong sense of community in students who would feel isolated in a fully online course” (p. 13). Students in the blended courses touted the benefits of the online portion of the course which allowed them the freedom to perform some of the course instruction at their own flexibility, a feature important for these students, many of whom needed to work. However, many of them also mentioned the value of the face-to-face component which they felt helped them both academically and in building professional relationships and a strong sense of community. In addition, some students in the fully online course misread the instructor's comments as being “sharp and frank” while students in the blended and fully online courses did not convey such impressions, possibly because of the opportunity for face-to-face discussions which allowed everyone to become acquainted.

Having introduced blended learning and viewed relevant past research, this paper is an attempt to

investigate the advantages of using blended learning in studying English as a foreign language from female PYP students' perspective at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia.

3. Statement of the Problem

Blended learning is very effective teaching approach that has developed rapidly during the past few decades. English language teachers complain that EFL learners face difficulty learning English language at university level. In Saudi Arabia, English language students (females) show low achievement in English language due to the use of conventional teaching methods (Al-Madani, 2011). Thus, this study aims at investigating the advantages of using blended learning in teaching EFL at university level for the academic year 2018/2019.

4. Research Objectives

This study intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the advantages of using blended learning in teaching English as a foreign language.
2. To investigate the extent in which the use of blended learning in teaching English as a foreign language can help develop female EFL students' language proficiency level at the University of Tabuk.

5. Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, this research addresses the following questions:

1. What is the advantage of using blended learning in teaching English as a foreign language?
2. To what extent the use of blended learning in teaching English as a foreign language can help develop female EFL students' language proficiency level at the University of Tabuk?

6. Research Methods

The researcher used a questionnaire survey to elicit data from the participants for the academic year 2018/2019. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first part consisted of a list of 10 items that may have a negative or positive influence on female EFL students at the English Language Center at the Medical Faculty at the University of Tabuk. The items of the questionnaires comprised 6 Likert Scale items related to female EFL students' perception on the advantages of using blended learning in teaching EFL for 1st Preparatory Year Program (PYP) students at the University of Tabuk.

6.1. Sample Selection

The respondents involved in this survey were 1st PYP female students at ELC / University in Saudi Arabia. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect primary data. The researcher was responsible for distributing the questionnaires to the participants. To ensure confidentiality, respondents were given self-addressed, stamped envelopes in which to return their completed questionnaires to the researcher. Controls were used to eliminate duplication of the responses.

6.2. Statistical Methods

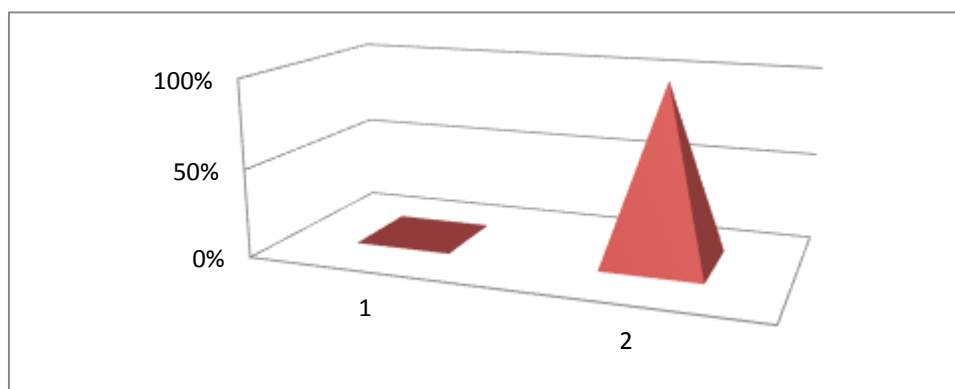
Simple statistical techniques were used to tabulate the results of this study. The primary data were analyzed using a percent of response. To compute the percent of response, the number of responses to each choice was divided by the total number of respondents who answered the question. In question one, the percent of responses for EFL female students' perceptions of using blended learning in teaching EFL at the University of Tabuk. Then, the EFL female students' perceptions were reported. The results of the questionnaire items were tabulated by totaling the number of respondents who chose an area they strongly disagree or strongly agree. Following, the

researcher reported the percent of respondents.

7. Discussions and Findings

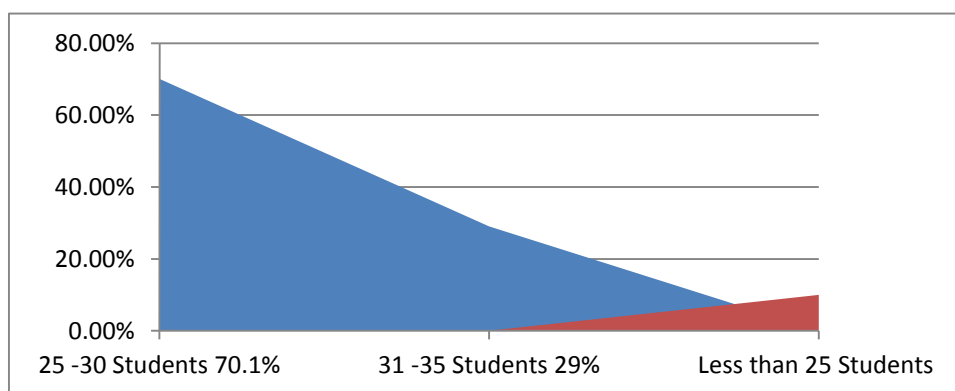
This study was designed to investigate the advantage of using blended learning in teaching EFL for female students at the English Language Center at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia for the academic year 2018/2019. A set of questionnaires was distributed to EFL female students at the English Language Center (ELC), and the responses rate was 84%. This section of the study provides a discussion on the findings, conclusions and recommendations. In this regard, the female students were asked about the EFL subjects and level or year of their study. All of the participants (100%) 60 female students answered that they study only English language skills as shown in Chart.1.

Chart.1: The Percentage of the Participants Who Study EFL Skills at the ELC / the University of Tabuk



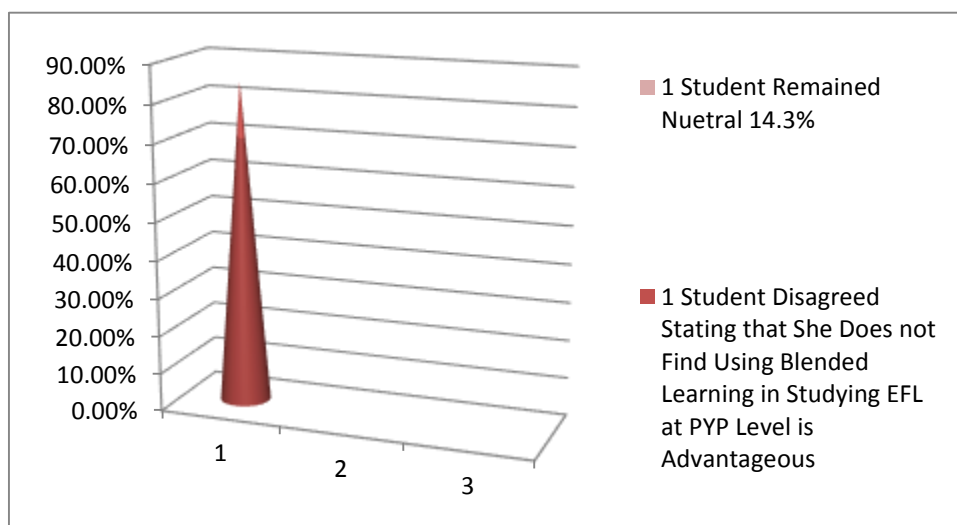
But concerning the size of the class female EFL Preparatory Year Students, 70.1% of the participants showed that the class size they study in ranges between 25-30 students, whilst 19 % of them showed that their class size ranges from 31- 35 students. Relevantly, 10% of the EFL female PYP students showed that their class size accommodated less than 25 students as depicted in Chart.2.

Chart.2: The Current Size of the Classroom at the PYP at the ELC Female Section at UT



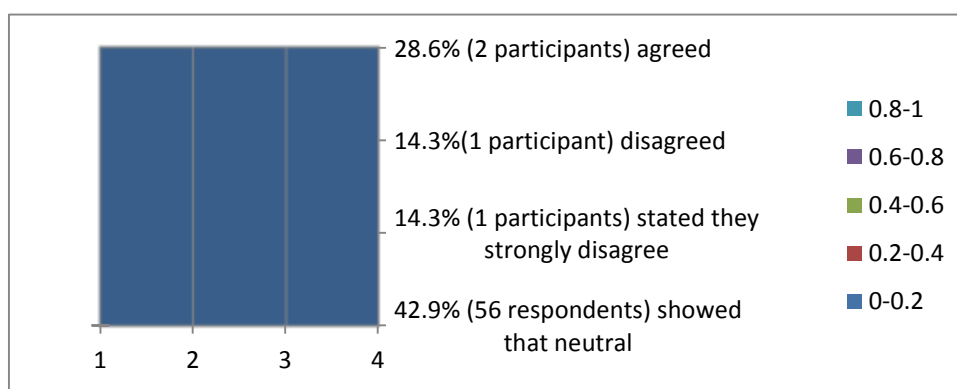
In this sense, PYP female EFL students at the University of Tabuk who have undergone a course of using blended learning, were encouraged to respond whether they find using blended learning in teaching EFL to university level students advantageous and beneficial or not. 58 participants making about 71.4% (neutral) stated that they find using blended learning in studying EFL at PYP – University level very advantageous and beneficial compared to using the conventional methods in the first semester. 14.3% (1 respondent) said that they agree and 14.3% (1 respondent) stated that they disagree as shown in Fig.6.

Fig.1: The Responses of the Female Participants on the Advantages of Using Blended Learning in Studying EFL at PYP Level at the University of Tabuk



The other section of the questionnaire requested 1st PYP female students who have undergone the use of blended learning in studying EFL at the University of Tabuk. The participants were asked whether the use of blended learning provided them with a better working vocabulary of English language skills that help them in their understanding of the subject matter they study compared with the use of relevant conventional teaching methods in the first semester of the same year as demonstrated in Fig.2.

Fig.2: The Use of Blended Learning to Provide a Better Working Vocabulary of EFL Skills



As displayed in Fig.2 in the previous section shows that 42.9% (56 respondents) showed that neutral; 14.3% (1 participants) stated they strongly disagree; 14.3%(1 participant) disagreed with that and 28.6% (2 participants) agreed that 2nd year students have a better working vocabulary of medical terms that help in their understanding of the subject matter they studied compared to the use of conventional teaching methods.

8. Conclusions

In relation with the discussions and findings, the results of the study showed that the using blended learning is very advantageous in studying English language skills by 1st Year PYP female students at the English Language Skills at the University of Tabuk for the academic year 2018/2018. Also, the study indicated that 84% of the respondents stated that their language proficiency skills improved a lot compared to the use of the

conventional teaching methods. That is, the participants showed that the use of blended learning in studying EFL skills helped female PYP students show greater confidence when using English language skills in the classroom. This concludes that the use of blended learning for studying English language skills by 1st PYP students is very useful and effective based on the results of the findings of this study. Based on the findings and conclusions in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. 1ST Year PYP teachers at university level should provide more attention to the use of blended learning in teaching and learning English language skills by conducting future research and investigations.
2. EFL teachers at university level should conduct more investigations on the advantages and use of blended learning to find out the effectiveness such approach to their students' learning problems.
3. EFL teachers at PYP level should share their ideas for assessing EFL students' achievement using blended in order to help their students obtain the best of their English language skills' course throughout the whole PYP year.
4. EFL syllabus designers and planners should incorporate into their teaching course the use of blended learning activities to help EFL learners at university level improve their language skills.

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