Approaching a Reading Course via Moodle-based Blended Learning: EFL Learners' Insights

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ABSTRACT

Blended learning where the traditional and the virtual instruction are harmoniously combined offers consecutively a learning style that is mostly preferred by students, and assists language teachers. This study purports to investigate students' attitude towards the main characteristics of a Blended learning method. To achieve this objective, a quantitative data based study design was carried at the Teacher Training School of Constantine in Algeria on thirty second year university students who enrolled in Blended learning reading instruction course. As they could take advantage of both Moodle e-learning platform and in-class Face-to-Face reading instruction, participants responded to a post evaluation program questionnaire. Getting through students' learning experience, practitioners may gain a thorough understanding of the main characteristics of this innovative approach to course design. The participants manifested a positive attitude towards Blended learning because they experienced an improvement in their reading skills and an increase in their learning motivation. More importantly, their testimonies revealed that this new learning environment enables them to escape from the boundaries of traditional classroom and to become more responsible about their own learning thanks to the online easy access to information.

1.Introduction

The 21st century is marked by a significant shift of attention from traditional teaching/learning methods to more innovative ones. Due to the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in education, the transition in teaching/learning approaches was facilitated. Aiming at bringing the digital world in the teaching/learning environment, a new education program combining Internet-based training with traditional classroom method, Blended Learning (BL) starts to gain popularity in the educational settings. Hence, the desire to make use of new technology trends in educational context leads to the rapid rise of BL as an approach to course design (Krasnova and Vanushin, 2016).

The need for effective teaching approaches able to boost reading skills progress urged researchers to explore the possibility of BL as an instructional model for teaching and learning reading skills in EFL contexts (Yang, 2012; Behjat et al., 2012; Zehedi and Tabatabaei, 2015). Yet, when blending traditional classroom instruction with technology, EFL learners' reading comprehension was enhanced (Behjat et al., 2012). Adding to the efficiency of BL in enhancing EFL skills, learners displayed positive attitude towards this innovative approach. They appreciated the convenience of online access with the support of face-to-face instructors when needed (Rovai and Jordan, 2004). In short, mixing the online delivery of educational context with the best features of face-to-face (F2F) interaction becomes a new mode of instruction delivery that fits the wants of both teachers and learners.

Prior to this investigation, the participants enrolled in a BL reading course instruction for a period of six weeks during which their post reading skills (summarizing and writing a response) were under the teacher's control. As students manifested significant gains in post reading skills (summarizing and writing responses to narrative texts) which was not the case of their peers who were under traditional condition, the researcher was stimulated to make an evaluation of this promoting instructional approach. By getting through the participants' experience during the BL training to explore their attitude towards this innovative learning method, one could make decisions about the possibility to generalize BL

approach to course design to other situations. The study, then, aims to identify the most important elements in designing a consistent BL reading course that meets both students' aspirations and requirements. To reach this target, the following research questions are posited:

1. What is the students' attitude towards the benefits of F2F instruction in a BL reading course?

2. What is the students' attitude towards the benefits of Moodle e- learning instruction in a BL reading course?

3. What is the students' reaction about the impact of BL in developing their reading skills?

4. What is the mode of course delivery students prefer in their future learning as a result of the gained Skills?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Blended Learning

Blending refers to the process of mixing. In education, it is the process of merging effectively different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning in an effective manner that is exercised in an interactively meaningful learning environment (Kaur, 2013). BL that "centers on the integration of different types of resources and activities within a range of learning environments where learners can interact and build ideas" (Littlejohn and Pegler, 2007, p.1) is almost used to describe an approach to education where online learning instruction is combined with traditional classroom instructional methods to create a new innovative teaching/learning procedure. In introducing Blended Learning, Wittaker (2013, p.11) presumes that the term became commonplace in ELT with the publication of Sharma and Barrett's book "*Blended Learning*" in 2007. Even though, BL is a widespread educational approach; researchers do not agree on one single term while referring to the same course characteristics (ibid).Yet, many terms like "blended", "**hybrid", "mixed",** or **"integrative"** are interchangeably employed to describe the same approach.

To provide a fitful description to this concept, one has to approach it from four different perspectives (Kaur, 2013). For this scholar, BL is to be accessed from four distinct scopes including: "the Holistic", "the Educational", "the Pragmatic", and "the Corporate Training". From "a *Holistic Perspective*", BL is achieved when multiple media is utilized in instruction delivery via the integration of instructional media into a traditional classroom, or into a distance learning environment. Moreover, when approaching BL from "*an Educational Perspective*", we are assigning to a course where online instruction is integrated with traditional classroom activities in that a portion of F2F time is replaced by online activity. Indeed from a "*Pragmatic Perspective*" perspective, in BL courses are taught both in the classroom and at a distance where a combination of different pedagogic strategies are utilized via combining "any form of instructional technology such as CDs, films, web-based training with face-to-face instructor-led programming", explains Kaur (ibid). From "Corporate *Training Perspective*", in BL "when using a multiple instructional media to deliver one course or curriculum such as a sales training course this would involve pre-reading, lectures and role play practices", explains Wexler (2008, cited in Kaur, 2013, p. 613). These four perspectives offer a complete description to what is really attributed to BL approach.

Despite the fact that there is no consensus among researchers on what exactly BL refers to; however, it can be understood that this approach to course design tends to combine online-instruction delivery and face-to-face interaction. In a way that through BL brings new accommodation to the learner's learning environment where students are offered both learning flexibility and convenience (Rovai and Jordan, 2004).

2.2. Why Merging two Different Teaching/Learning Environment

The widespread of the 21st century technological progress affected the educational setting in a way or in another. When interactive whiteboards, students' mobile phones, electronic dictionaries and different apps have been integrated in the educational system (Buran and Evseeva, 2015), new instructional pedagogies begin to emerge. Online learning becomes a refugee for learners to escape from F2F learning environment which is teacher centered based on person-to-person interaction in a live synchronous, high fidelity environment (Graham, 2004). Because all students are exposed to the same learning experience during F2F instruction delivery, the digital learning comes to accommodate students who

have different expertise levels, prefer different learning strategies, or who are self-directed learners. Caner (2012) regards that "learners' primary reasons of selecting the online instruction depends on the issues of convenience and access, yet such instruction requires the learners to go through self-paced learning approaches" (p.22).

Since the introduction of ICTs in educational setting, the two teaching learning environments, traditional F2F learning and online learning, have remained largely separate. Graham (2004) relates this partition to the different media/method combinations they have utilized and the different audiences' needs they have addressed. Though online mode of delivery could satisfy learners learning needs where different type of learners like auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners become more engaged; however, it has some shortcomings. For Caner (2012), the online learning environments main drawbacks are related to two aspects: the ignorance to learners' motivation which is a direct consequence of learners feeling of isolation during an online learning. Different from the kind of interaction that occurs during a F2F learning which is almost natural and spontaneous; yet, "in an online setting when it does occur, it tends to be less spontaneous because online learning programs generally do not take into account the human interaction that is usually seen in a face to face learning environment" (Ibid, p. 20). Additionally, being isolated from others during an online learning process may negatively affect learners' motivation. A need to feed the learning environment with the best characteristics of both F2F and online learning seems a necessity.

This new methodology that combines the properties and possibilities of both F2F and e-learning to go beyond the capabilities of each separately (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008) provides a new look for the teaching/learning environment answering by then the 21st century generation learners' requirements and exigencies. Hence, the inclusion of e-learning components in the teaching/learning methods that are based on the computer-mediated learning environment is quite inevitable for a proper 21st century skills preparation (Larkin, 2010). Taking into account the facility offered by net services as far as information flexibility, convenience where time and pace are under the control of the learner, BL course design started to emerge. This new approach flourishes when studies revealed that implementing technology in the courses; especially making use of computer or Internet mediated platforms enhances the quality of instructions and enriches critical thinking skills of the learners (Caner, 2012). Through its reliance on the utilization of multiple methods, BL approach to course design provides an improved pedagogy that could satisfy the learning needs of wide audience due to the easiness in the learning access and the flexibility.

2.3. *Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication in BL Course*

When two modes of instruction delivery (F2F and online) are adequately merged in a BL course design, important is to understand the nature of the communication modalities to be adopted. In a BL educational context, "classroom-based communicative activities tend to be synchronous, focusing around free-flowing face-to-face discussion; while, technology-supported communicative activities are often based around the use of asynchronous online forums" postulate Littlejohn and Pegler (2007, p.102). This implies that BL varies for students and teachers ways of interacting, sharing, collaborating and asking questions either in real-time via Synchronous modality; or allowing more time for student reflection via Asynchronous technologies support (Bonk and Zhang, 2006). Adding to the online synchronous interaction where learners could get in a direct touch with their teacher and other students at a real time via online chat, the asynchronous services such as e-mail, discussion forums, and file exchange could be manipulated at any time by the learner after the needed time for reflection expired (Fenouillet and Kaplan, 2009).

The Asynchronous modality offers more opportunities for students' interaction far from any kind of pressure that is due to time or place. Additionally, the asynchronous technologies give students time for reflection in that this specific feature can mean that students are more likely to receive better-considered feedback from tutors and peers (Littlejohn and Pegler, 2007, p.91). When students do not need to give immediate response as it is common during classroom discussions; the asynchronous services permits for students to have time to think and reflect on their answers and other students' comments and then respond back in due time. "In this case students construct their ideas more carefully and analyze the whole situation more thoroughly, therefore their utterances become longer", postulate Krasnova and Ananjev (2015, p. 203). However, despite the numerous benefits learners may gain from online discussions as being engaged in an active leaning environment; many times teachers felt that these discussions are in fact pointless. This is mainly due to factors

such as limited student contribution, and low-level grammar constructions and improper vocabulary use (ibid, p. 204).

The synchronous and asynchronous connectivity and collaboration that are made possible via BL designs portend a transformation in higher education teaching and learning methods, (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008). For an effective implementation of a BL teaching/learning approach, higher education environment should be adapted for the integration of these modes of communication activities.

2.4. Moodle -Based BL Reading Course

Moodle, **M**odular **O**bject-**O**riented **D**ynamic **L**earning **E**nvironment, is a free and open-source e-learning software platform developed by Marin Dougiamas, a WebCT administrator, in 2004 (Sánchez and Hueros, 2010). For them, Moodle design is based on collaborative learning where a student-focused environment is created by the teacher to help students build up their knowledge based on their skills and their own knowledge. Holding these characteristics advances Moodle to fit the virtual component in a blended learning design. This kind of Learning Management Systems (LMS) guaranties the effective content delivery (Krasnova and Vanushin, 2016; Tang, 2013). Moodle or similar kinds of LMS are the mostly recommended assignment instructions because they allow students better access to course materials, resources, and lecture notes at all times (Hoare and Hu, 2015). This facility in the access is due to the 24/7/365 principle based training where students can learn 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days (Krasnova and Vanushin, 2016). Facilitating students' easy access to materials, instructions and all the necessary learning conditions advances Moodle and puts it at the forefront of e-learning platforms.

Besides availability and accessibility, this new technology boosts learners' learning autonomy. According to Littlejohn and Pegler (2007), Moodle allows students better control over their learning, and offers them greater freedom in deciding which groups or activities they would like to participate in and how that participation will occur. Since learners are permitted to study at their personal pace and use time more effectively when receiving instruction via Moodle, students' motivation to learn is enhanced. Additionally, online courses on Moodle platform, postulate Krasnova and Ananjev (2015), offers engaging and highly motivating activities that positively affect students' performance and promote their progress because they can work not only with course materials but also access any web resource.

2.5. Advantages of BL Environment on EFL Teaching/Learning

Blended Learning approach, a new teaching/learning paradigm that varies for students and teachers ways of interacting, sharing, collaborating and asking questions either in real-time via Synchronous modality; or allowing more time for student reflection via asynchronous technologies support (Bonk and Zhang, 2006) has a number of benefits when compared with traditional approaches. When breaking the walls of the traditional teaching/learning environment and incorporating the ICT's tools to complement F2F sessions, both teachers and learners could benefit from the characteristics of this new environment. The latter reduces from the teachers' heavy workloads by enabling them to devote more time on tasks such as selecting appropriate materials that satisfy learners' needs (Buran and Eseeva, 2015). As the teacher's role changes to that of an educational facilitator, students take full responsibility about their own learning.

Studies (Krasnova and Ananjev, 2015; Norberg et al., 2011; Yang, 2012) indicated that student satisfaction levels were high for BL courses format, and that most often they chose to learn through these latter when given the choice between enrolling in face-to-face or blended sections. The flexibility in manipulating their own learning according to their pace of learning where time and place are under the learners' control increases from their motivation to adopt this new learning environment. Norberg and his associates (2011), list below the main reasons that stimulate students to select a BL educational setting.

 ➤ Students had access to a seemingly limitless source of informational assets through the Internet;
 ➤ They could flexibly communicate with the instructor, each other, and others around the world
 ➤ BL vaporizes the boundaries of traditional classrooms (p. 208).

A multiple researches revealed significant findings recommending BL approach in EFL teaching/learning settings. In a study undergone at the Polytechnic University in Russia, Krasnova and Vanushin (2016) proved that BL course design

has an overwhelming potential in teaching foreign languages because it offers the possibility to integrate innovative and technological advances of online learning with interaction and participation of the best traditional practices. In another EFL setting, Yang (2012) reported that the blended learning was effective in enhancing students' reading proficiency, and more than that it facilitated social interaction because during their training students were provided more opportunities to discuss their reading difficulties during group discussions and obtain individual feedback from their peers. Within the same line of thought, Behjat et al., (2012) proved that reading comprehension can be positively influenced by since learners enjoy the advantages of technology and online texts along with their reading instructions in the classroom.

The need for innovative teaching methods that offer EFL students more opportunities to be exposed to English so that to enhance their EFL skills makes from BL model the target. Since the success of BL courses is strongly dependent upon the students' perception (Krasnova and Ananjev, 2015); investigating about EFL students' attitude towards this innovative approach to course design would determine the possibility to generalize it to other EFL settings.

3. The Research Methodology

As an extension to a previous experimental design (2017-2018) where BL is proved to be an effective approach in enhancing students' post reading skills as demonstrated by summary improvement, and written responses achievements as well; the focal aim of the current study is to examine students' attitude towards BL reading course. Throughout this investigation and in order to check how far students are regarding the gained benefits when Face-to-Face and online instruction are mixed in an effective course design , the following questions were asked:

1. What is the students' attitude towards the benefits of Face-to-Face instruction in a Blended learning reading course?

2. What is the students' attitude towards the benefits of Moodle e- learning instruction in a Blended learning reading course?

3. What is the students' reaction about the impact of blended learning in developing their reading skills?

4. What is the mode of course delivery students prefer in their future learning?

Students' attitude in the current study refers to the students' beliefs towards the effectiveness of a thoughtful combination between Moodle e-learning platform and in-class reading instruction in improving their post reading skills. Blended learning, however, specifies a new education program combining Internet-based training with traditional classroom methods. Writing responses is examining, explaining, and defending the reader's personal reaction to the reading text.

3.1.   Participants

To explore the above questions, a survey study was undergone thirty (30) 2nd year university students majoring in English at the department of English in the ENS of Constantine- Algeria. The rationale behind selecting this sampling was that all 30 participants who responded to this questionnaire enrolled in BL reading instruction courses in the second term of the academic year 2017/2018. For collecting reliable data, the questionnaire was carried out immediately after the training got over and the informants answered it in the classroom. To reach our main objective, check the effectiveness of this program, the items of the questionnaire were read and explained before students started answering.

3.2.   Overview about Students' BL training

Before responding to the questionnaire, the participants were involved in a BL reading course design for a period of five (05) weeks. During this period, they were exposed to two modes of instruction delivery: traditional F2F interactive learning and e-learning activities via Moodle platform blog (http://www.elearning.ensc.dz/course/view). They were asked to visit the weblog after the class to do their homework. During e-learning instructions, users of the blog benefitted from two modes of communication: live via synchronous technologies, and delayed via asynchronous technologies. The weekly reading assignments were assumed to be posted by the participants on the blog. As far as the teacher's feedback, the participants received it online.

3.3. Research Procedure

The questionnaire as a data collection tool was utilized to investigate about this innovative approach to course design relying on a program evaluation process. "Because the program the students enter has certain characteristics which provide them with educational experiences; it is these characteristics that are to be evaluated" (Moss. Jr, 1970, p. 19). According to this scholar, the program features are mainly related to the selected content to which students are exposed, that is organized and presented in specific ways, and to which the students are encouraged to respond in a particular ways under the supervision of a qualified instructor. Evaluating these last aids not only in knowing about the current training; but it will help in improving the plans for future trainings (Phillips, 1991) by determining whether the implemented program requires modification, needs to be retained, or needs to be introduced widely or generalized to other settings (Alkin, 1970).

The questionnaire that started with an introduction explaining to the participants the purpose of the questionnaire included fifteen (15) items that vary between Likert scale items and open ended question items. In the Likert scale questions, informants were invited to express their degree of agreement or disagreement to a proposition; in the open-ended question each respondent had the freedom to answer in his or her own way rather than in terms of the researcher's predefined answer categories (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006).

Three main sections covering a broad range of topics towards which informants expressed their attitude represent the body of the questionnaire. The first six **(06)** items in section one focus on learners' perception of F2F Course objectives, F2F classroom organization, efficiency of F2F instruction, and the importance of student-to-student interaction and teacher-student interaction for their learning during a BL program. As the second section focusses on the virtual aspect in BL course, the five (05) questions investigate students' experience in dealing with Moodle- based online activities and their impression towards online learning. The purpose is checking how students react towards online activities, their organization, significance and relevancy for their learning as 2nd year students. The last item in this same section pertains to check how easy or difficult the manipulation of e-activities was during a BL program. The three (03) items in the third section which is about students' impression about the BL program success purports to inquire about whether this program helped them to fulfill all their learning goals: reading, understanding and writing in English. More importantly, the key items in this section investigates about how students' approach the main components of a BL course design including F2F course content, e-activities, synchronous and asynchronous communication with their peers and tutor, and how these factors contributed in enhancing their reading skills.

The last query in the questionnaire intends to make a clear cut between the modes of course delivery students prefer to have in the future. Whether they want courses that are totally traditional, totally online, or a mixture of the two (blended learning) represent the essence of the last item. To avoid getting artificial results, they were asked to elaborate the main argument to justify their choice. The respondents' feedback might help researchers, instructors, and educators to plan future BL programs.

4.Data Analysis

The study results are categorized into four major headings turning around (a) students' perception towards the benefits of F2F instruction in BL reading course, (b) their understanding of the perceived advantages of online activities and instruction, (c) their overall reaction to the program success and the gained skills, and (d) their future intention for a BL course design as a result of the gained benefits.

4.1. Students' Perception towards F2F Instruction in BL Reading Course

When asked to express their reaction to F2F course objectives, content, design, and mode of classroom interaction; the participants display a positive attitude as it is summarized in **Table 1**. For the majority of the students (97%), attending face-to-face classes during BL reading program was important for their learning because the content and the organization of F2F reading instruction satisfied their learning needs (80%). Consequently, they expressed their willingness for more F2F instruction in a BL reading program (67%). This finding is backed by a similar percentage of the population (67%) who asserted that "*in-class instructions enable them to learn more effectively*". Yet one of the participants (3%) held a

neutral attitude. However, few of them preferred a middle stand when expressing their opinions to the first statement (3%), second (20%), third (23%), and fourth (26%). Still, a negligible portion of learners (7%) found that F2F instruction did not help them to learn more effectively.

Table 1: How Students' Perceive F2F Instruction in a BL Reading Course

F2F Learning Benefits	Agree %	N-agree N-disagree %	Disagree %	Total
1. Attending face-to-face classes was important for my learning as a 2nd year student in this program	97%	3%	0%	100%
2. The organization of face-to-face classes met my learning needs in this program	80%	20%	0%	100%
3. I would like to have more face-to-face instruction in this program	67%	33%	0%	100%
4. I can learn more effectively through face-to-face instruction	67%	26%	7%	100%
5. Communication with other students in class was important for my learning in this program.	73%	20%	7%	100%
6. Communication with my instructors in class was important for my learning in this program	86%	14%	0%	100%

Inspecting about students' impression towards the modes of communication in F2F classroom design whether peer-to-peer or teacher- students' interaction is a focal point in the success or failure in BL program. Results show that there is a general agreement among learners that both modes of interactions either with their peers (73%), or with their instructor (86%) were beneficial and contributed in improving their reading skills. On the other side, some of them preferred holding a neutral stand towards statement five (20%) and statement six (14%). A negligible portion (7%), however, considered that their communication with their peers had no influence on their learning progress. Remarkably, none of the students (0%) expressed a negative attitude towards F2F teacher-students' interactions benefits in a BL reading course.

4.2. Students' Perception towards Online Instruction in BL Reading Course

After checking the informants' reaction towards the F2F learning benefits which was judged satisfactory, investigating about their attitude towards the benefits of online instruction in a BL reading course is found in their responses to questions (7, 8, 9, 10 and 11). Table 2 displays the informants' level of satisfaction towards e-learning activities. When glancing at the results, we can see that a noticeable number of informants (67%) reacts positively towards the importance of online activities in their learning. For this category of students, both the organization and content of e-activities satisfied their learning needs (57%); consequently they preferred to have more online instruction in a BL program (67%). Holding this wish is the result of the facility students found in manipulating e-activities (54%), and in the positive effects of online instruction on their learning outcome (57%).

Table 2: How Students' Perceive Online Instruction in a BL Reading Course

Online Learning Benefits	Agree %	N-agree N-disagree %	Disagree %	Total
1. Participation in online activities was important for my learning as a 2nd year student in this program	64%	30%	6%	100%
2. The organization and content of online activities met my learning needs in this program	57%	30%	13%	100%
3. I would like to have more online instruction in this program	67%	23%	10%	100%

	Agree %	N-agree %	Disagree %	Total
4. **I can learn more effectively through online instruction**	57%	30%	13%	100%
5. **The online activities were easy to use**	54%	23%	23%	100%

On the other hand, a small portion of the informants (30%) preferred the neutral position when responding to the five statements. Being unable to express an attitude either positive or negative reflects that students are discovering a new environment of learning, Moodle-based online learning. Between two to six students (6% ≈ 23%), however, responded negatively to e-instruction. Due to the difficulty in dealing with e-activities (23%), few users of Moodle-based online platform (13%) perceived that e-learning environment was almost ineffective.

4.3.   *Students' Overall Reaction to the BL Success and Impact in Developing their Reading Skills*

Table 3: *Students' Attitude towards the Impact of BL on their Learning*

BL Program Success	Agree %	N-agree N-disagree %	Disagree %	Total
1. **I completed all of my learning goals in this program**	44%	26%	30%	100%
2. **I achieved success in this program**	57%	43%	0%	100%
3. **Both course content and online learning components, and the interactions with the teacher and other students help in developing my reading skills**	90%	10%	0%	100%

Students display a positive attitude towards the program success as presented in the above table. 44% of the respondents felt that "*BL course enables them to fulfill their learning goals*". Whereas, a portion of the remaining students (26%) abstain to hold an attitude, the left portion expressed a negative attitude. When asked whether or not they achieved success in BL course, with the exception of 43% of the informants who were neutral; 57% held a total satisfaction. This latter finding is supported by students' certification that all the components in BL course helped them in achieving success and developing their reading skills (90%).

4.4.   *Students' Future Intention for a BL Course Design*

Students' intent towards the mode of delivery they prefer learning through it is expressed via their response to Q15. The informants' responses are reported in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Students' Future Intention

Future Intention	N°	%
Fully Traditional	3	10%
Fully Online	1	3%
Mixture	26	87%
Total	30	100%

With the exception of four participants where one of them (3%) wanted to follow entirely online courses, and three of them (10%) preferred attending an entirely face-to-face course; the majority of students (87%) welcome the combination of these two: favored a BL course design.

The utility of BL environment in students' future learning is supported by a set of reasons such as: the ease, the flexibility, and convenience of online instruction. Learning through Moodle-based platform is the most adored component in blended learning environment. "*Technology is very important in today's learning as it saves our time and gives us the opportunity to do more activities without time pressure; yet, it needs to complete F2F design*" argues one respondent. "*Sometimes there are things that need to be discussed F2F with the teacher; accordingly, e-learning could complement the lacks of F2F one session week contact*" clarifies another student. Despite the numerous benefits online learning could

bring to the learners' environment; still, learners do not lessen from the importance of F2F, and prefer a mixture of the two in their future learning. "*Learning through this mixed modes of delivery is effective, beneficial, and enjoyable*" explains one student. One of the study participants realized that BL program enlarges her learning environment beyond the classroom walls when affirming: "*BL extends my learning beyond the classroom. I could understand from my experience that the class isn't the only source of learning.*" "*Since this program helps me in developing my post reading skills; so that I can read, summarize, and respond to my readings. It will help me in developing my language skills in the future*", postulates one of them.

Even the few learners who favored a fully traditional mode of delivery provide convincing arguments to describe their fear from approaching this new environment. For them online learning is difficult due to the lack of internet connection at the campus, not all students have the necessary tools to engage in an online learning, and most importantly learners' constant need for teacher direct instruction and class discussion.

5. Discussion

Focusing on students' experiences, the research findings suggested that the integration of face-to-face and online instruction is of a great utility for 2nd year university students' learning achievements. The study main conclusions are summarized below.

5.1.   F2F Instruction Necessity in a BL Course Design

Students exhibit a raised awareness towards the importance of F2F direct instruction, teacher-students and student-to-student interaction in their learning achievements. This finding is validated by multiple studies. When Larkin (2010) attempts to explore students' use of online lectures and to measure their impact on student attendance to lectures, findings revealed that "generation Y students" do not aspire to replace lectures with downloadable, online versions; yet, noticeable number of students valued the opportunity for interactive learning provided by face to face teaching. The lack of F2F spontaneous interaction in an online learning may create a feeling of isolation within the learner which diminishes from his learning motivation (Caner, 2012). The absence of live interaction either with the teacher or with peers may contribute in reducing from learners' learning engagement and motivation which may lead to unforeseen results such as educational failure.

5.2.   Online Instruction Indispensability in BL Course Design

Results revealed that students welcomed online instruction. The participants realized that online learning satisfies their learning needs; accordingly, they wish having more and more online activities in the future. Students' positive attitude towards online instruction correlates with existing literature. Several studies (Rovai and Jordan, 2004; Dziuban et al., 2005; Yuen, 2010) insisted on the importance of integrating e-learning web systems in higher education because the online instruction is proved effective in facilitating students' learning. Rovai and his associates (2004) affirmed that text-based computer-mediated communication that characterizes Internet-based e-learning system is a powerful leaning tool that boosts reflective cooperative interaction which is often absent in F2F classroom. To support this conclusion, Yuen (2010) discovered that the online learning platform provides an interactive environment for communication among students and teachers, and equips teachers to provide scaffoldings for students to engage in collaborative and cooperative activities even beyond classrooms. In another research context, Krasnova and Ananjev's findings (2015, p. 206) certified that "Online courses on Moodle platform offer engaging and highly motivating activities that positively affect students' performance and promote their progress". Within the same scope, Dziuban et al., (2005) concluded that Web resources, and course management systems offer learners easier access. Being engaged and potentially learning more, a major characteristic in online learning, is related to the information easy access for both students and faculty through discussion groups and email on one side, and to allow access to material and experts who might not be available otherwise, on the other hand.

5.3.   ***Meeting the Aspiration of 21st Century EFL Learners via BL Course Design***

Despite favoring an online learning mode of learning, 2nd year EFL university students did not lessen from the importance of their F2F interaction with their teacher, or their peers in their learning achievements. Interest, learning facility, modes of interaction, learning autonomy, gained benefits and other reasons represent the main factors behind students' choice of both modes of learning. Since then, a call of merging these two modes in one design labeled as "Blended Learning" is made.

Studies affirm that BL promotes highly engaged and motivated learners. Norberg and his associates (2011) found that these new classes where F2F traditional instruction is mixed with online-based instruction required learners' motivation for continuous and active learning engagement. The need for such level of motivation is the result of the feedback that learner receives from their peers about their works, in addition to their instructor's consistent feedback via synchronous and asynchronous interaction.

Previous researches proved that BL enhances EFL learners' language skills. Zehedi and Tabatabaei's study (2015) investigated the effect of blended online and face-to-face instruction on the use of reading strategies by Iranian EFL learners. The researchers concluded that when traditional and modern technologies are blended, EFL learners improve their reading strategies which lead a more fruitful learning. In another study undergone at the University of Taiwan, Lin (2003, cited in Whittaker, 2013, p. 18) found that the majority of EFL learners hold a positive attitude towards the use of multimedia resources in their language program; additionally, they appreciate the opportunities to practice and extend their language abilities by surfing the internet. This thought is backed by Goldenberg and Romeo' s (2015) conclusion confirming that the BL increases from learners' fewer face-to-face opportunities to interact with native speakers via limitless Internet interactions.

It has also been certified that BL drops the feeling of isolation. In an EFL setting, Zhu's findings (2013) revealed that despite the fact that online learning offered Australian university students flexibility in the access to course components and facilitated their learning to a great extent; however, they disliked the feeling of isolation during online learning. Additionally, they insisted on the need to face-to-face interactions with teachers and other students during this online learning.

6.Conclusion

Within BL where there is a thoughtful combination between the best components of F2F instruction and online learning, it has been asserted that the objectives, content, and organization of this teaching/learning course design contribute to a certain degree in satisfying learners' learning needs. This research that seeks to determine Algerian students' perceptions and attitudes towards blended learning environment provides strong evidence certifying that blended learning reading program affects positively students' reading attitude and motivation, and contributes in enhancing their reading skills. Since this new learning environment empowered university students with more learning autonomy and freedom, more and more BL courses where the learning conditions characterizing F2F learning and e-learning are effectively combined to satisfy learners' needs is becoming a necessity. Setting the ground for this innovative learning environment will meet the aspiration and exigencies of the 21st generation university students.

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