

Blended Learning in English Language Teaching and Learning: A Focused Study on a Reading and Vocabulary Building Course

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Abstract

Blended Learning is a teaching approach that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with technology-mediated activities. It allows students to access course materials and interact with their peers and instructors in physical and virtual learning environments. By incorporating digital tools and resources, blended learning can provide students with more flexible and personalised learning experiences that will impact their English language learning, especially the skills of vocabulary building and reading. It also allows instructors to use a variety of teaching methods and to assess student progress in real-time. While blended learning can offer many benefits, it also requires careful planning and coordination to ensure that it is implemented effectively and meets the needs of all students.

Keywords: blended learning, ESL, EFL, BL, vocabulary and reading skills, student Peer & teacher interactions

1. Introduction

Technology has invaded almost all aspects of our lives and turned things ‘upside down’. Klopfer et al. (2009) argue that current uses of technology have expanded to include our recreational and business lives at all levels. Teaching and learning, including that of ESL/EFL, are no exceptions. Historically, the teaching and learning environment was deeply affected when computers, as the medium for technology, were introduced to schools and universities. This helped students have access to knowledge in different formats. The integration of computers and technology has brought powerful changes to the education system and dramatically developed the digital skills of teachers and students. Additionally, teachers at every level of education have been driven to consider the importance of changing their behaviour and mindset, to help learners achieve their learning goals. Herawati (2011), therefore suggests that 21st-century teachers’ & lecturers’ key technological, pedagogical competencies related to learning content and content knowledge must also be developed.

Blended Learning (BL), also known as mixed or hybrid learning, has resulted from the widespread use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in schools, universities, and other learning institutions as a helpful and supplementary educational resource. This has become a popular teaching paradigm in most higher institutions and universities worldwide (Tham, et al.2011). Blended Learning intentionally integrates face-to-face teaching with tasks and instructions facilitated through ICT resources to enhance the learning process (Mohamad et al., 2015; Boelens et al., 2017).

The increasing popularity of blended learning and its introduction into the world of education originates from its ability to improve teaching methodology and create an optimal learning environment for learners. The idea of blended learning is to mix the best features of online and face-to-face (traditional classroom style) teaching and learning into one mode. Learners attend traditional face-to-face classes and access further information through an online platform. Students can access extra resources for homework, research and assignments, quizzes, and tests. Based on the above, BL is a significant delivery mode as it considers learning an ongoing process rather than a single event. It encourages students to be independent learners inside and outside the classroom. BL provides learners with a learning experience that is flexible, student-centred, and self-paced (Zhang & Zhu, 2018).

The 21st-century educator, as Herath and Azman et al. (2014) argue, can create learning and educational tasks which feature the ability to produce active, innovative, engaging, and functional learning in schools, universities, and institutions. This kind of educator should be prepared through a quality education system. The educational process of prospective educators should be based on active learning principles in higher education to support autonomous, active learning for students. When guided by this type of educator, the learning process will be directed toward equipping students with pedagogical and technological skills, not only in the physical sense but in relation to overall behaviour. This can be realised by providing learners with opportunities to express ideas, search for information from various sources, and carry out tasks that apply the studied concept.

To face these challenges, universities, colleges, and teaching institutions must equip their students with pedagogical skills and mastery of technology and materials inherent in this learning process. This is of particular importance when the conventional learning system is overloaded with instructional content and needs to cope with the developing dynamics in science and technology (Skulmowski, et.al, 2021).

2. Pros and Cons of Blended Learning

Rusman (2011) argues several advantages of implementing BL in schools, universities, and other learning institutions. Firstly, BL improves students' access to learning, provides flexibility, enhances active learning skills, and enhances students' learning experiences and outcomes (ILOS). In other words, BL helps students learn in optimal time. They can choose the best time as per their schedules and can perform the activities at their chosen time. Secondly, learning can be carried out in any place. This means that education is no longer restricted to school or university campuses. Thirdly, students are encouraged to be autonomous and pick a suitable pace. They can opt for the speed at which they like to learn. This is because the materials are at their disposal, and they can repeat any lesson or lecture as often as they wish or accelerate their learning if appropriate. Therefore, learners are no longer limited to classroom learning and teacher instruction. Instead, they can utilise interactive and adaptive software, which allows them to use learning methods according to their needs. Fourthly, the supervision of students' development becomes more efficient as teachers, lecturers, and other stakeholders can easily view student progress by seeing the number of activities or tasks achieved. Finally, learning materials can be updated more easily. Curriculum designers, authors, schools & university officials are waiving the burdens of traditional printing problems. In an online environment, the most updated knowledge and data can be made readily accessible.

The preceding points become essential when we, as educators, realise that students in the 21st century do not just need more access to knowledge and information available everywhere and around the clock. Students today need to think about the data critically, decide how to invest it best, how it can be dealt with, and how it can be improved or applied to their contexts.

Conversely, BL has some drawbacks. Most importantly, BL greatly depends on students' learning abilities and motivations. Lack of motivation and/or students with specific disabilities may prevent students engaging with this kind of learning. Instead, they may prefer to maintain the traditional way of teaching and learning (Bouillet et al., 2015). The second drawback is related to the learning infrastructure using the web and online platforms. This includes, but is not limited to, servers being down, poorly designed materials, insufficient support or guidance accompanying activities, limited internet, and username and password problems (Wong, et al. 2014). The third drawback is that students and learners quickly feel bored if they cannot access the required information or details quickly and easily. This will surely tempt them to check their emails or look at mass media channels. While surfing the internet, it is easy to be attracted by different non-educational topics. Lastly, the most significant drawback of BL is the lack of high-quality interactions between tutor-students and student-student (Dewey, 1938). Comey (2009) argues that these two kinds of interactions are essential elements in creating a practical learning experience and are crucial in the learning process.

2.1 Blended Learning Helps in Learning Vocabulary

Learning new vocabulary is essential in mastering English. It is the backbone of any language-learning process. It helps students to start learning nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, interjections, etc., used in written and spoken forms of the language. The reason behind this concept is that vocabulary is considered foundational to language learning. In other words, vocabularies, for a language, are like bricks for a house or villa. The more words or bricks you have, the more sentences and more lines by which you can raise your walls (Tsaturova et al., 2007). However, the question of how many words you need to learn is still open, and no clear-cut answers have been proposed.

The scope of this research will not explore how many words an English language learner needs to be proficient in the language. Different users of English require different kinds and levels of vocabulary. Instead, the scope of this research remains focused on the idea that learning vocabulary in English is considered the first steppingstone in building a meaningful learning process.

It is believed that vocabulary acquisition can only be achieved if teaching strategies accommodate students' different learning styles. Recent studies have confirmed many benefits of teaching materials based on technology, including developing learners' practical verbal and communicative skills (Grishaeva, 2015). Hence, most universities and higher training institutions have started implementing BL as a supplementary tool for increasing learners' vocabularies. This is because teaching new words and vocabulary using BL tools and techniques is more interesting and compelling for teachers and learners. The underlying assumption is that when a word or a phrase is linked to a digital visual stimulus, it helps learners to retain the information for longer, and will be much easier to recall when needed.

Research exploring the effects of Blended Learning strategies in teaching vocabulary might discover individual variations among students. It is, therefore, crucial that teachers and lecturers are motivated and prepared to use a variety of instructional methods and materials. The integration of interactive software can be used to present word lists and vocabularies in more fun and interesting ways. Software programs such as Quizlet, Kahoot and Wordwall will stimulate student engagement, building extensive, memorised word lists.

2.2 Blended Learning Helps the Student to Develop Their Reading Skills

The development of reading skills will directly result from the students' enhanced knowledge and assimilation of formal and informal vocabulary. The underlying belief for this concept is that texts are composed of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Hence, it is argued that vocabulary development is the primary determinant of reading comprehension (Alderson, 2000). This means that in L2 settings, the correlation between receptive vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension ranged between 0.40 and 0.85 (Henriksen et al., p. 139). In addition, vocabulary ($r=79$) was found to be one of the most decisive factors in the development of L2 reading comprehension (Jeon, et al., 2014).

Other higher cognitive and critical skills such as: identifying the intended meaning (reading 'between the lines'); guessing the meaning; prediction; agreeing with or disagreeing with content are further benefits of BL. The research approach acknowledges that supportive

practice may need specific training and development to achieve the proposed objectives. So, to reiterate, this research will limit its scope to showing how basic reading skills can be boosted by BL depending on the breadth of vocabulary known to students and learners.

To demonstrate the basic idea that BL helps improve reading skills, two researchers conducted a quasi-experimental study to explore whether BL can be used to develop the reading proficiency of EFL (English as Foreign Language) learners in the Iranian context (Ghazizadeh, et al., 2019). The participants were sixty intermediate-level students randomly chosen and divided into experimental and controlling groups. The first group received classroom instructions and BL, which focused on reading skills. The second group received a more traditional approach to English teaching. The two groups were tested before and after the experiment to determine how far their reading skills developed. The study's results revealed that the use of BL caused a statistically significant positive effect on the reading proficiency of EFL learners. Based on that, the researchers concluded that BL facilitated the learning process and can be successfully implemented in English reading classes.

What needs to be noted here is the fact that the above study was conducted in the context of Iran. Yet, the aim of this research is directed toward EFL students who are studying in one of the universities in Saudi Arabia. This is because we don't want to jump to conclusions and prove something that still needs verification.

3. Literature Review

A plethora of research has sought to explore the benefits of introducing BL into the educational system in most universities and teaching institutions worldwide. However, the scope of this paper will choose those that highly match and align with its objectives. These objectives are to explore the effects of the integration of BL on developing English vocabulary-building and reading comprehension skills. Existing research clearly attests to the positive impact of BL on student vocabulary learning.

Ono, et al. (2012) explored the incorporation of the BL model into a learning platform that is used in one Japanese school that still uses the traditional style. Participants of the study were provided with wi-fi connected mobile tools (iPad touch 2nd generation) to utilise in their studies of English. The study's outcomes proved that the BL method significantly improved the learners' vocabulary acquisition rate. Not only that, but the study suggested that the use of mobile tools in the classroom stimulated students' awareness of the English language and enhanced learners' motivation (Ono, et al. 2012).

Similarly, another study was conducted at King Khalid University (Zumor, et al. 2013). The study explored the views of 160 EFL male students concerning the pros and cons of face-to-face language instruction and online language learning via the Blackboard learning management system. The participants completed a 33-item questionnaire. The findings reported that there are benefits to adopting the BL method in expanding the English vocabulary of students.

The same concept was advantageous in a study at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia (AlKhaleel, 2019). Findings showed that using BL developed the English language skills of female medical faculty students (1st PYP) at the university. It was reported by 84% of the study participants that their language proficiency skills were dramatically boosted as a result of using BL methods, compared to the use of conventional ways of teaching. In addition, BL helped female PYP students to show greater confidence when using English language skills inside classrooms.

Indeed, very few studies indicate no positive impact of BL on students' academic achievement. AlShwiah (2010) examined the effects of BL in teaching vocabulary on premedical students' achievement, satisfaction and attitude toward the English language at an Arabian Gulf University (AGU). The study results revealed no significant statistical differences between the experimental and the control group regarding the achievements of students studying English. It was opined that participants were satisfied with the online unit. Nevertheless, the lack of vocabulary improvement was concluded to be the result of a lack of administrative support.

4. Statement of the Problem

Researchers have a consensus (Levy, 2009; Nedeva, et al., 2010) that BL has several effects on EFL students' language capabilities. However, most researchers dealt with a specific topic or focused on their context of delivering and/ or examined cognitive factors related to using BL.

Thus, this study adds further understanding to the collective evidence by investigating the advantages of integrating BL as a supplementary instructional tool. It sought to determine how BL can help Saudi university students improve their English language proficiency, as a consequence of developing their vocabulary and reading skills. The study, therefore, is descriptive. This means that it depended on gathering, combining, and analysing quantitative and qualitative data to obtain as much rich data as possible from multiple sources. This will surely help the researcher better understand the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

5. Research Questions

The study intends to answer the following two questions:

Are there any statistically significant differences between the students' reading comprehension and vocabulary skills in the experimental and control groups?

To what extent does the integration of Blended Learning into the current (traditional) teaching method, help first-year Saudi students develop their English language proficiency as a direct consequence of both vocabulary building and reading comprehension skills?

6. Research Instruments

The researcher used two kinds of instruments to collect quantitative data. The first was pre-/post-test (Cohen, et al., 2006). This instrument intended to measure potential improvements in reading and vocabulary. Thus, the researcher chose a reading text related to one of the reading passages in the students' textbooks, with slight modifications. Students were tested before and after taking the test. As for vocabulary-building skills, the vocabulary section of the mid-term test was used, and a pre-/post-test was again administered. The two pre-/post-tests were carried out to answer the first question of the research.

The second instrument used to answer the study's second question was a pre-designed survey. This instrument was utilised to assess the participants' responses to survey questions. It is believed that this tool, which uses fixed response formats such as multiple choice, rating or Likert scales, helps collect numerical data that can be analysed using statistical methods. The survey used a 5-point Likert scale with "5" for totally agree, "4" for agree, "3" for neither agree nor disagree, "2" disagree, and "1" for totally disagree.

There were 15 questions in this survey to explore the participants' experience of being taught using a technology-based method – see Appendix A. This study was conducted in 2021.

Two points are worthy of being considered in the survey. Firstly, 9 out of the 15 questions were developed based on the questions in the blended course student survey by UCF and AASCU (2017). In other words, the survey's objective was to measure four aspects of the student's online learning experience. The first aspect was the convenience and flexibility of online and in-classroom learning (questions 9 & 10). The second aspect was the clarity requirements of the online materials (question 15). The third aspect was the quality and quantity of students' interaction with their teachers, peers, and with learning materials (questions 2, 11, 12, 13, and 14). The fourth aspect was the students' attitude and involvement with the learning (question 5).

The second point about the survey was that the remaining six questions were developed to examine information and details about the students' approach to learning with the help of the BL model (Biggs, 1987). This means that questions (1, 4, and 7) are concerned about the content consistency between online and in-class learning. Questions 3, 6, and 8 asked whether online learning motivated students to dig deeper into topics and apply the learned content in classes. These questions were given slightly more weight to reflect the learning environment at the university better. The underlying assumption is that the original survey didn't reference the use of the internet as a medium of instruction simply because it dates back to the time before the advent of the internet in the teaching and learning realm. Keeping in mind that using previously tested questionnaires, albite a little bit modified, ensures the validity of the questionnaire (Biemer, et al., 2003). In other words, modifying existing questionnaires is common if the modifications don't compromise their validity.

7. Method

Carrying out research using pre and post-test and surveys is a common method for studying changes in behaviour or knowledge over time (Cohen et al., 2006). The pre-test measures the initial levels of the variables of interest before an intervention, while the post-test measures the same variables after the intervention. Surveys collect data on demographics and other background information, as well as attitudes, beliefs and behaviours related to the research topic.

7.1 Vocabulary

To use the first instrument, pre/post-test, to effectively and efficiently assess students' vocabulary the researcher chose the Productive Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) quoted in (Sharakhimov, et al., 2021). This step was crucial to identify the relationship (the first variable) between the pre-test and the post-test scores. Based on the value of 1st variable, the extent to which the use of the BL model was effective or not can be predicted or estimated.

The productive vocabulary level test (VLT) was used because this kind of test is recommended for teachers who wish to learn how many words learners recognise in each frequency level. In other words, this test measures how many words are known from 1000, 2000, and 3000 frequency levels.

In the productive vocabulary test, learners are presented with a sentence in which one word is purposely left incomplete, and they must complete it. Only the first two or three letters of short words are provided. Learners are asked to read the sentence and give the rest of the letters of the incomplete word. This kind of test is thought to be especially useful because learners are not just producing random words but are prompted to supply letters that generate a word that is semantically appropriate in a meaningful sentence context. Scoring the 25 items of the test may range from 0 (wrong) to 4 (correct). Spelling errors may be penalised, depending on the research policy. This is because spelling mistakes are of two kinds. The first is the one which doesn't change the word's meaning and still can be understood in the context. The second is the one which changes the meaning of the word and confuses the reader. So, a human rater is needed to decide which kind of mistake a student makes and how many marks it deserves.

To ensure the test was reliable, ten tests were carried out on ten randomly chosen students. However, the results of those ten tests were excluded from the sample later. This is because the researcher will have a better chance to add, modify, and/or change any question that didn't produce valuable information. The reliability coefficient amounted to 0.83. The pre-tests were carried out before the start of the study, and the post-tests were administered immediately after the completion of the study.

Twenty-two students, members of the experimental groups, were chosen to receive their teaching via BL. Before the start of their first semester in 2021, students' vocabulary levels were tested, and they were tested again at the end of that semester. Table (2) presents the

pre-test and post-test results:

Test results		
	Pre-test	Post-test
St. 1	20	45
St. 2	34	90
St. 3	75	95
St. 4	81	99
St. 5	17	65
St. 6	19	98
St. 7	45	70
St. 8	11	51
St. 9	5	71
St. 10	22	60
St. 11	95	98
St.12	99	100
St.13	95	100
St.14	70	95
St.15	61	70
St.16	11	64
St.17	41	85
St.18	30	79
St.19	25	80
St.20	64	90
St.21	46	85
St.22	12	50

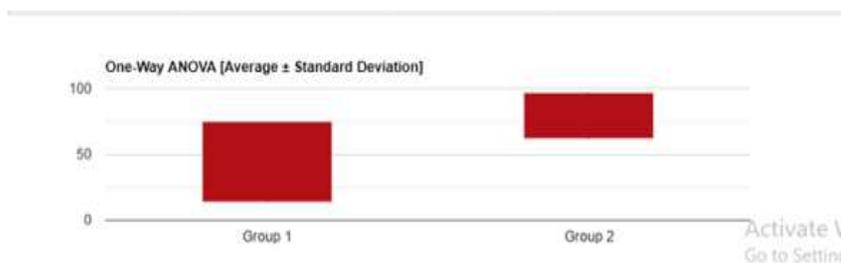
A quick look at the table shows that all the post-test results were more significant than their pre-test counterpart.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Group1 F-2-F teaching	22	44.454	30.65	6.534
Group2 Online teaching	22	79.23	17.641	3.761

Analysis of variant results in F. statistical value= 21.271 p-value= 0.0004

By feeding those figures to the statistical package for social science (SPSS), the following results were yielded:

ANOVA SUMMARY					
Source	Degree of freedom DF	Sum of squares SS	Mean Square MS	F-State	P-Value
Between groups	1	13300.6238	13300.6238	21.2718	0
Within group	42	2626.322	625.2696		
Total	43	39561.9458			



The ANOVA summary provides information about the sources of variation in the data and the statistical significance of any differences between the groups. It shows a significant difference between the groups based on the P-value being less than 0.05 and the F-statistic being more significant than the critical value. This implies that there is an effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. In other words, we don't think the observed difference is due to chance. The greater the number of standard deviations, the less likely we are to believe the difference is due to possibility or probability. Those figures estimate the amount by which the experimental intervention (BL) changes the outcome on average. The average increase in the post-test scores indicated that the BL had helped students to learn and remember more vocabulary as a direct consequence of its integration. Learning and remembering more words, in turn, helped learners and students to get more positive results on their reading skills assessment.

7.2 Reading

The same instrument, pre-/post-test, was utilised to assess the students' reading skills. However, the focus was to determine how the integration of BL developed student's basic reading techniques to comprehend a text. Those techniques include but are not limited to reading for the main ideas; reading for details; skimming; scanning; reading between the lines; and reading comprehension overall.

The researcher chose a reading text from the students’ coursebook and made some changes to include almost all the reading skills intended to be measured. In the pre-test stage, students received in-class instructions and were taught using traditional ways. The reliability of the test was established by carrying out the test on ten students, who, later on, were excluded from the sample. By excluding the initial results, the researcher can be more confident in concluding that any changes observed in the post-test are a result of the intervention being tested rather than a result of measurement error or other extraneous factors. The reliability the coefficient amounted to 0.83. The pre-tests were delivered to the sample group before the treatment started, and the post-tests were carried out immediately after the completion of the study.

To make sure that the exact in-class instructions were delivered to both the experimental and the control group, the same instructor (researcher) did the teaching. He covered 4-units over four weeks, per the guidelines of the teacher’s handbook. Over this period, the instructor first taught the control group by helping them to read the texts and answer questions in the activity book (e.g., learning about the new vocabulary, reading for comprehension, answering questions about the main ideas, answering questions about general and specific details...etc.). Each reading text and its exercises were taught over a 120- minute session. The traditional way of teaching (by the instructor) and answering (by students) was adopted.

However, students in the experimental group received the same in-class teaching. Yet, extra materials were either designed, and/ or presented, and/or illustrated with the help of digital content uploaded to a platform (www.learnworld.learnworlds.com). Students were reminded that the digital materials that could be found were supplementary to the in-class reading materials. This means that they were designed to help them do more practice and to give those who had not yet mastered the skills more chances to repeat items, ideas, and exercises as needed to ensure proficiency. Students’ logins and all their attempts were kept in separate records.

Table (4) shows the results (means, standard deviation) of the pre/post-test.

Skill	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Scanning	4.26	1.03	4.53	0.91
Looking for the main idea	2.86	1.30	3.33	1.29
Building powerful vocabulary	2.80	1.42	3.66	1.34
Skimming	3.70	1.03	3.69	0.74
Reading overall	3.53	1.09	4.20	1.40

The table shows that the mean scores for all the reading skills have increased from the pre-test to the post-test, indicating that the intervention positively affected participant’s reading skills. The increase in mean scores for building robust vocabulary, looking for the main idea and reading overall is the highest among all the skills tested. Furthermore, the standard deviation for all the skills has decreased from pre-test to post-test, which indicates that the scores are more consistent after the intervention.

By providing those figures to the SPSS, the following results were generated in the table (5)

Groups	N	Mean	SD	T
Group 1 f-2-f	20	9.1	1.9974	0.4466
Group 2 Online	20	21.6	4.6158	1.0321

ANOVA was used to analyse students’ marks to determine if the variance between the adjusted means on the reading post-test was statistically significant.

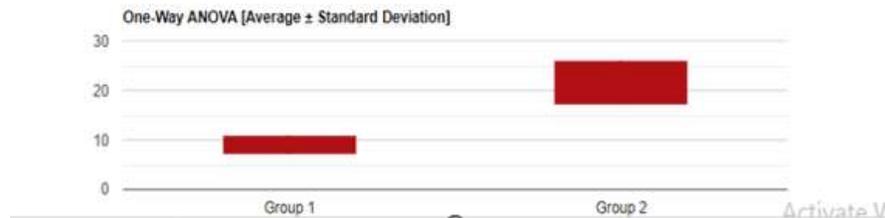
Analysis of Variance results:

f-statistics value = 123.54115

p- value= 0

ANOVA summary in table (6)

ANOVA Summary					
Source	Degrees of freedom DF	Sum of squares SS	Mean square MS	F-Stat	P-Value
Between groups	1	1562.5	1562.5	123.5411	0
Within groups	38	480.6091	12.6476		
Total	39	2043.1091			



This ANOVA summary table provides information about the statistical significance of the differences between the means of reading skills before and after the intervention. The table shows that the source of the variation is "Between groups" (pre-test and post-test). The F-Stat is the ratio of the mean square for "Between groups" to the mean square for "Within groups", which is 123.5411. The P-value is less than 0.05, which indicates that the difference in means between the two groups is statistically significant. This implies that the participant's reading skills improved significantly after the intervention, and the improvement is statistically significant.

7.3 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was carried out as the final step of this study. There were three underlying assumptions for this step. The first was that participants were required to provide feedback and reflections about their experiences of being taught by a combination of face-2-face and digital instructional content after the experiment ended. The second assumption is that the questions covered two main themes: students' experience dealing with the materials; and students' interaction with their peers and lecturers. The third assumption is that participants needed to be given freedom and privacy to express their ideas and thoughts while they were off campus. That is why each participant was sent the questionnaire in a sealed envelope. They were instructed not to disclose any personal details.

Nevertheless, the students needed to read the questions and add x marks accordingly. Sixteen responses were received. However, two questionnaires were excluded because they were not fully completed. This made the response rate 70%, which is an acceptable rate for maintaining credibility and reliability (Perry, 2005).

The findings produced by the survey were analysed by looking for descriptive and frequency analysis. This provides a more thorough picture of the student's perception of the integrated teaching and overall learning experience (Cohen, et al., 2006). The questions of the survey were grouped into three main themes. The first one concerned students' experience dealing with digital materials and how that may have positively affected their learning. This theme was covered by questions 1,2,3,4,5,6,8, 9 and 10. More than 78% of respondents chose "totally agree", while 22% chose "agree" on this theme. Neither "totally disagree" nor "disagree" were chosen. This shows that students felt they benefited from studying the digital materials uploaded on the platform. The extra materials helped them to expand their vocabulary and their English language skills in general. This was demonstrated by students' overall satisfaction while dealing with different topics inside the classrooms.

The second theme (questions 11 & 12), which was about the student's interaction with their peers and the quality of that interaction, revealed that 82% of the responses tendered to "agree", while 18% tendered to "totally agree". Two facts might explain this; First, none of the tasks and activities was required to be carried out collaboratively; instead, they were self-based. The second is that students, being online, are more tempted to respond to pop-up messages (answering a question and/or responding to an inquiry) than in real-life scenarios. This means that quality interaction and cooperation between students was developed. Responses to the questions (13 & 14) about students' interactions with their teachers, the third theme, revealed that 69% of them chose "totally agree" while 31% chose "agree". The best interpretation for this is that students, by having an online platform, might feel more encouraged to engage with their teachers in asking questions and getting feedback on the tasks they have done and the exercise they have submitted. It seems that students getting more personalised feedback from their teachers helped them feel more engaged and involved.

8. Discussion & Reflection

Learning languages, like any other type of learning, is not a linear process and, therefore, cannot be deemed predictable, as some teaching and learning theories have hypothesised (Bot, 2008). Minimal differences in initial conditions can cause quite different results. Online teaching and learning have appeared as a result of significant advancements in internet accessibility and technology, which, in turn, have catalysed a pedagogical shift in how languages are taught and learned. The shift has been away from top-down lecturing and passive students to a more interactive, collaborative approach in which students and teachers co-create the learning process (Dhillon, 2014).

Within this new milieu, both students' and teachers' roles have changed. A student's role has changed from being a passive receiver of knowledge to being an active participant in knowledge construction, within a more student-centred curriculum. This approach empowers students to be active learners instead of producing passive recipients absorbing information and reproducing it for standardised tests. This is because students today are intensely immersed in the current digital age. They not only need their knowledge of the subject matter. They also need learning technology to facilitate advanced learning experiences, creativity, and innovation in face-to-face and virtual situations (Eggen & Kauchak, 2012). Furthermore, teachers' roles have changed from traditional knowledge transmitters and primary source of information to a facilitator of learning (Harden et al., 1984). Teachers are required to enhance students' desire to learn and express themselves and implement successful strategies to jump-start and sustain learning over time (Riggs & Ghalor, 2009).

Clearly, pedagogy that integrates digital materials, positively impacts building students' EFL vocabulary. In relation to how students best

learn the English language, several theories have been proposed to explain this phenomenon over the past decades (Scrivener, 2005). However, none of those theories could conclusively provide a clear-cut answer. Recent researchers and linguists predicated that the best way to learn English is to imitate and replicate the language the way children do when they learn their mother tongue. They spend about 12000-15000 hours actively listening to their mother tongue (Scrivener, 2005). This natural first step is the cornerstone of learning any language. The underlying assumption is that the human brain needs an audio file for every sound, utterance, word, phrase, and sentence. Once a learner has enough audio files, speech will automatically be produced.

Teaching the English language with Internet-based content is the best method to provide students with audio and video learning materials that are levelled, suitable –to-age, well-designed, and carefully controlled. This will ensure that English language learners will have ample chances to practise active learning. Active learning means that they can interact with the materials by repeating an item as many times as needed and speaking and recording their voices to ensure that their pronunciation is correct, at their own pace. Using the internet to learn English vocabulary can also be a valuable and convenient way to improve students' language skills. This is mainly because many online resources such as dictionaries, vocabulary lists, and language learning websites and apps can help them learn new words and expand their vocabularies. In addition to these resources, students of English can try reading articles, books, and other texts in English in controlled and supervised platforms. Using this method, students encounter new words in context and learn their meanings through context clues.

Using the internet to access teaching materials can be a helpful way for students to develop their reading skills. Many online resources, such as articles, news stories, and books, can provide reading practice and instruction. These materials help students improve their comprehension skills through becoming more familiar with the structure and conventions of the English language. Additionally, many websites and apps offer interactive reading activities and exercises to help students learn new words and concepts and provide feedback on their progress. It is important to find reputable and reliable sources of teaching materials and to use a variety of texts to ensure that students are exposed to varied styles and genres of writing.

9. Conclusion

BL is an approach to education that combines online and offline elements and can be a very effective way to teach and learn English as a second language. Some of the advantages of integrating Blended Learning into English language teaching and learning include the following:

- 1) Flexibility: Blended Learning allows students to learn at their own pace and schedule, which can be especially helpful for busy learners or those with other commitments.
- 2) Customisation: Blended Learning approaches often allow for a greater degree of customisation and personalisation, so students can focus on the skills and areas they need to work on the most.
- 3) Engagement: Online activities and exercises can be interactive and engaging, which can help to keep students motivated and interested in learning.
- 4) Collaboration: Blended Learning approaches often include opportunities for students to collaborate and communicate, which can help improve their language skills and build community.
- 5) Access to resources: Online resources such as videos, games, and interactive exercises can provide students with a wealth of learning materials that can help to supplement and enrich their language learning experience.
- 6) Autonomous and student-centred learning: Provides contexts for students to progress at their own pace and to access learning materials online with their interests.

Overall, using BL in English language teaching and learning can provide many benefits and be a very effective way to help students improve their language skills.

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Appendix A

Table 1. The questionnaire

		Totally disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Totally agree 5
1	The activities completed on the digital platform helped me prepare for the activities in the classroom.					
2	The digital materials really helped me to get a better understanding of the topics that I am studying.					
3	Comprehending and understanding online materials helped me to move further in the topics inside the class.					
4	Studying some digital topics online gave me more confidence and in-depth knowledge before coming to the class.					
5	The online experience improved my active engagement in class discussions and activities.					
6	The online experience helped me to participate by asking questions and participating in class discussions.					
7	The online materials on the platform were well integrated with the materials studied in the classroom with the teacher's help.					
8	The online materials developed my abilities and helped me apply and practice what was learnt.					
9	The online materials on the platform are available 24/7, helping me study anytime and anywhere.					
10	The fact that the online materials on the platform are available 24/7 helped me to study at my own pace.					
11	Interactions with friends inside and outside the classroom were greatly improved because of the blended learning approach.					
12	The quality of interactions with my peers and classmates was greatly improved due to the blended learning approach.					
13	Interactions with my teachers and lecturers were greatly improved inside and outside the classroom due to the blended learning approach.					
14	The quality of interactions with my teachers and lecturers was improved as well.					
15	The expectations of adopting the blended learning approach were clear to the lecturers regarding the participation of students and learners.					

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