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Blended Learning Approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Context: A Qualitative Analysis of Student Learning Experiences and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of technology into English language training exploring various experiences and benefits. This research delineates the challenges that must be overcome to integrate technology into language learning. Data is collected using the interview approach from 6 participants using purposive sampling technique. This qualitative study aims to gather data about the advantages, disadvantages, and experiences associated with the use of technology in English as a foreign language. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which resulted in 4 main themes. Four main themes were (1) Perceptions of Effectiveness; (2) Involvement and Adaptability; (3) Challenges with Technology (Blended mode); (4) Recommendations for Addressing Challenges. The primary/Main themes were categorized according to 12 sub-themes. The results indicate that integrating technology into English language instruction has several benefits. Students may elevate their scores on English proficiency assessments, acquire a second foreign language, work autonomously, refine their writing, speaking, and reading skills in English, access online learning resources, utilize various applications, remain informed with current information, employ multimedia presentations, and demonstrate innovative pedagogical techniques. Potential obstacles to technology integration include the variety of problems that have arisen as a result of technical constraints and the inability to keep up with technological developments. Potential solutions are discussed in the study later.

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1. Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) has been a major focus[1]. Moving becomes momentum because of it, to call what it's called a spade. The language was also designated as an official one. Because being able to understand the material in different fields required us to have first-hand experience with this foreign language. Furthermore, it continued to be a barrier to comprehension. There are a lot of factors at play, but one of the most important is that pedagogical methods for teaching languages were not followed. A frequent gripe among language instructors is that their pupils lack the vocabulary necessary to discuss the most fundamental concepts of grammar. Less time is spent on communication practice and more time is spent on making students comfortable with fundamental grammar. Instead of clarifying the fundamental ideas, this language has made them vaguer[2].

- **Modifying Approaches to Education**

Throughout the phases of instruction and student development, teachers play a key role. positive and professional educators should not only provide a positive example for their students, but also act as facilitators, organizers, evaluators, prompters, participants, resources, observers, and tutors in the classroom[3]. A teacher of English, however, has to be able to do more than just cover the material; they must also captivate their students. According to Zahroh M. et al.[4], instructors should have a passion for teaching, a wealth of information, and the ability to amuse students. It is important for English instructors working with younger students to be aware of the many pathways that students use to absorb new material. There are three ways in which people learn: visually, aurally, and tactilely. Teachers should tailor their class delivery to the learning styles of their students to ensure that they fully grasp the material. It is important for educators to be able to distinguish between demanding and supportive environments while designing classroom environments that foster learning. They need a variety of tools and approaches to help students of all ages succeed in the classroom. The importance of teaching students to appreciate and enjoy English cannot be overstated[5].

- **Blended learning in education**

The world we inhabit is dynamic and ever-evolving. The lightning-fast development of computing and the internet has revolutionized education in the last few decades; "new knowledge is being created and established at an astonishing rate"[6]. This has completely transformed the way education is delivered, particularly via distant learning. Concepts like online learning and e-learning emerged as a consequence of the growing demand for remote learning brought about by the development of the World Wide Web (WWW). There has been a lot of study on the pros and cons of online learning systems, which are popular in universities[7]. Some pupils have reservations about the more conventional approach to education, which involves lecturing from a blackboard. Consequently, e-learning—or online learning—has grown in popularity, with public institutions being early adopters. Online courses may not be sufficient for successful learning unless they are supplemented by in-person instruction. Blended learning is the best method for education since it combines many types of instruction.

Blended learning is defined by Hrastinski, S.[8] as combining online and in-person instruction. In addition, according to Alammary,A. et al.[9], blended learning combines online and in-person instruction by combining elements of both types of learning environments. According to some academics, blended learning systems combine traditional classroom teaching with online resources[10]. Based on Bouilheres et al.'s[11] concept of blended learning, this research implements it. A hybrid model of education that makes use of both online resources and more conventional classroom teaching; under this model, students and teachers engage in both types of learning environments. Teachers are increasingly participating in what Ulla, M.B. and Perales, W.F.[12] called a "hybrid classroom"—a mix of conventional and online learning—because they see the value in it. He went on to say that hybrid classes are also taken by the majority of EFL/ESL students.

The importance of blended learning in education is its capacity to augment the breadth and depth of students' knowledge. In a technologically evolved world, exclusive reliance

on in-person instruction is inadequate for students who prefer online learning. Conversely, participating in solitary online learning has drawbacks such as delayed feedback, difficulties in student engagement, social isolation, and reduced motivation. It is crucial to recognise that by effectively organising a blended course and integrating the benefits of online and in-person education, one may attain mastery of the subject matter. The use of technology in education and blended learning is beneficial in academics; however, it necessitates additional investigation and the creation of innovative concepts [13].

Blended learning, based on theoretical underpinnings, should integrate face-to-face and online learning in a tightly coordinated and seamless manner, taking into account both shared attributes and unique characteristics of students. Proposed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky, the learning hypothesis is evident in every environment—including classrooms—where someone could pick up new abilities. Often referred to as the zone of proximal development, this approach is widely utilised in classrooms to help children acquire skills. The ZPD's basic tenet is that a more experienced individual may improve pupils' learning by mentoring them through activities somewhat beyond their present degree of ability. The Zone of Proximal Development emphasises the need of focused help in education, which matches the way blended learning enables both independent online learning and structured interactions with instructors and peers [14].

- **Advantages of Blended Learning**

In order to provide students with a flexible, efficient, and cost-effective education, blended learning integrates the greatest features of self-paced, teacher-led, distance, and classroom delivery. This method has several advantages for both educators and their students, and it was developed to address the shortcomings of online and conventional learning. Among the many benefits of blended learning are the ones listed below.

- **Maximizing Development Time and Resources**

Blended learning is a strategy for education that integrates many delivery techniques to maximize program development while minimizing time and money spent on it. Online education, made possible by the Internet, is a cost-effective option that accommodates a variety of learning methods and individual variances in learning. The goal of creating this

online space was to bring people together in a community of practice. Due to the requirement for different resources and abilities, web-based training material that is interactive, self-paced, and media-rich might be costly to educate. On the other hand, it may be more beneficial to combine virtual coaching and collaboration sessions with self-paced, easy-to-use resources like pre-made WBT, papers, case studies, recorded elearning events, text assignments, and PowerPoint presentations. Benefits to the HEI community from blended learning include an effective and efficient approach, more learning resources and experiences, more learning options for students, and the promotion of independence and conviviality [15].

- **Increase Portability and Coverage**

Learning has been radically altered by the advent of information and communication technologies. Learning is now possible at any time and in any location because to the proliferation of mobile and wireless technology. Learning that is both personalized and collaborative and interactive, tailored to meet a particular need at any given moment, and an integral part of an individual's path toward lifelong learning will be made possible via the gradual maturation of new delivery methods, instructional techniques, technology, and learning contexts. These technological advancements may pave the way for more accessible education by facilitating more dynamic and participatory classroom experiences that are both pervasive and intricate [16].

- **Improved teamwork, dialogue, and interpersonal relationships**

Blended learning is a way of instruction that mixes online resources with more conventional classroom techniques. Because it links people, places, and things, it's a great way to foster cross-cultural understanding on a worldwide basis. In addition, online communities and learning practices may be formed via interactions between students and instructors, as well as students amongst themselves, which can result in the free and highly valued sharing of information, ideas, experiences, and learning products [17].

- **Provides Versatility and Efficiency**

Blended learning is a method of instruction that mixes online and offline components for greater efficiency and adaptability. In contrast to offline learning, which takes place

in more conventional classrooms, online learning makes use of the Internet to facilitate educational pursuits. Students may participate in virtual classrooms using video and tele-conferencing, and the website provides easy access to course materials and research tools. Applications like e-books, e-libraries, and e-resources are available on the Internet, giving educators and students a new virtual space to research and study. According to Kamil, I. et al.[18], blended learning provides an affordable solution to expand course materials and enhance the experience of both instructors and students.

- **Disadvantages of Blended Learning**

Several concerns have been highlighted about the use of blended learning. The drawbacks of blended learning have been extensively covered in both older and more current research. Five issues with mixed learning were highlighted by Mukhtaramkhon, K. et al.[19]. The digital gap, adaptation to culture of course materials, teachers' and students' need for assistance and training, the need of self-regulation in autonomous learning, and the dissolution of classroom communities are all factors to consider. Blended learning also has certain technological challenges with its online component that must be resolved.

- **Lack of Interaction Among Students**

The opposite is true in a hybrid setting, when some students struggle to establish a feeling of community. Students could have trouble relating to teachers who don't answer quickly enough and might feel cut off from engaging group activities[20].

Research questions

- What experiences and benefits do English language learners possess, if any, in acquiring English via blended learning?
- What are the obstacles associated with using blended learning in the acquisition of English as a foreign language?
- How may obstacles in the integration of technology in English language instruction and acquisition be overcame?

Aims and Objectives of the study

- To explore the advantages and experiences that English learners have when learning the language through blended learning.
- To identify the obstacles associated with utilizing technol-ogy to acquire English as a foreign language.
- To study strategies for overcoming the obstacles associated with the use of technology in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The material was gathered using a qualitative research methodology that included semi-structured interviews. The researcher explored student learning experiences and obstacles associated with blended learning using data obtained from the interviews.

2.2. Sample and Sampling Strategy

The data was collected via six interviews with third-year students (N = 6) from the Faculty of Management Sciences (**Table 1**). Prior to the start of the course, students were made aware of this research and asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview. Purposive sampling was used for the sampling approach. Their course used Google Classroom and WhatsApp to execute blended learning. There were a few reasons why WhatsApp was selected. To begin with, its low level of technology made it easier to operate. Among college students, this is the preferred social networking platform. Second, since it combines written and spoken letters, which may be used for language learning, WhatsApp was anticipated to solve the problem of the restricted progress in communication skills in online learning.

2.3. Participant Selection Criteria

The participants were recruited according to following inclusion criteria.

- Enrolled in third year
- Both male and female students.
- Had taken part in blended learning course.

2.4. Research Instrument

The interview protocol, with open-ended questions, was developed based on a study of pertinent literature about

the deployment of online learning, including its advantages and drawbacks. The open-ended questions examine the elements that have facilitated or impeded the students' effective learning in a mixed format.

Table 1. Summary of the key participant's characteristics in the qualitative study.

Participant	Age	Academic/Major	Gender
A	20	Business Administration	Female
B	21	Public Administration	Female
C	20	Business Administration	Male
D	20	Banking and Finance	Female
E	20	Banking and Finance	Male
F	20	Public Administration	Male

2.5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. Themes that were associated with engagement, educational outcomes, flexibility, and challenges were identified through the use of open coding. This enabled a more intricate understanding of the experiences that students underwent.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

- Participants gave their informed permission after being thoroughly informed about the study's adherence to all ethical standards pertaining to confidentiality and voluntary participation.
- Ethical clearance for the research was given by the appropriate institutional review board.
- At any time, participants have the right to stop being a part of the research.
- There were no biases in the data transcription or analysis.
- At any time, participants might choose to stop participating in the research. All data was maintained in a safe and accurate way.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the interview provide information on the respondents' experiences and thoughts on using technology to learn English. Respondents reported a variety of possible ways that technology could be used in a language classroom (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Master table of themes.

Themes	Sub-Themes	Description
Perceptions of Effectiveness	Vocabulary Improvement	• Using an online dictionary to search for new terms. • More usage of new terms.
	Reinforcement of oral Skills	• Having a conversation with others using English. • Chatting with friends online.
	Improved Writing Skills	• Sending emails. • Improved scores on English test.
	Skilled Digital usage	• Reading about something else while using a computer tool to learn English. • Being familiar with how technology is changing • Being able to use technology well
Involvement and Adaptability	Better Motivation	• Active Involvement with new methods. • Showed keen interest for English study.
	Autonomous Time Management	• Efficient use of time for online education. • Can focus on other areas too.
	Independent Learning	• Easier to study on their own with technology. • Personal space increased critical thinking. • Freedom to process information on their own.
Challenges with Technology (Blended mode)	Limited face-to face interaction	• Unable to engage with teacher. • Unable to receive feedback from teacher personally.
	Technical Accessibility Issues	• Hardware Limitations
	Rapid development with technology	• Teachers and students can't keep up with how quickly technology changes.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Themes	Sub-Themes	Description
Recommendations for Addressing Challenges	Technological Trainings	• Training helps keep our skills and information up to date.
	Improved Blended learning design	• Using technology along with traditional in the classroom is a way to keep learning throughout your life. • Technology is need of time.

Theme 1. Perceptions of Effectiveness

There are four sub-themes to the primary topic. First on the list was vocabulary improvement. Students' answers to the open-ended question particularly highlighted their vocabulary development has improved.

One of the participant responded,

"I can deepen my understanding of correct vocabulary,"
and the other also said that, "My vocabulary improves."

One might enhance the vocabulary by means of technologies. Three respondents said they looked for the meaning of challenging English terms using internet dictionaries. English students searched the internet for new terms to try to expand their vocabularies. Moreover, perusing certain papers online gave students the chance to expand their vocabularies and apply new terminology. One of the respondents said I searched for a challenging term in an online dictionary. This sentence suggests the use of technology as an online dictionary.

The second one was Reinforcement of Oral Skills.

Four respondents said students may have a little group conversation in English about what they had seen with their friends. The respondents said they communicated online in English. "Movies that we viewed in a class gave us chance to speak in English," one responder said. Usually, my instructor invited learners to talk on the themes of movies. This says that technology gives students chances to listen in English alongside the opportunity to speak.

The third theme emerged was improved writing skills. Students have acquired not only oral skills but also their writing skills also efficiently increased.

Three respondent reported that

"I am able to send emails officially in a more formal tone".
"My writing has drastically improved due to

use of technology as I was habitual to see my educational stuff with sub-titles on"

Three respondents said the most visible way they used e-mail for English instruction was turning in an assignment to a professor. Email gave students a chance to interact with their professors. One responder said that utilizing e-mail helped them learn English via technology. I emailed in my homework. I got a chance to write an email to my professor in English. This remark suggests that an English student has chances to apply English via email writing in English. Two students said that,

"My scores on English quizzes has increased".

The fourth sub-theme was Skilled Digital use. One respondent indicated that computer technology provided students and lecturers with opportunities to use PowerPoint and other media presentation software. This statement indicates the use of technology for knowledge transmission and as a multimedia presentation for learning. Two respondents said that other from learning English, technology may also be used to assist those who are educated with technology itself. People are able to assist one another and more knowledgeable with the application of technologies. English literacy and technological literacy are two things one may acquire simultaneously. One responder said that because the computer application's instructions were written in English, the English learners may choose the language using some of the programs. The computer programs teach people automatically English.

Theme 2. Engagement and flexibility

The first sub-theme was Better Motivation. Students were found very enthusiastic about giving interview. Four students responded that,

"We as students were very involved in learning because of technology, as we were bored of traditional methods".

"This was something very new and we showed our full attention in learning English."

The second sub-theme was Autonomous Time Management. Interview findings revealed that digital learning was a quick and efficient approach of learning English. E-learning let students study without needing to see professors in front of them. One responder said that in terms of time, digital learning was far more effective for certain individuals. Materials might be uploaded by lecturers without their needing to visit the class. Students could learn on their own as they have access to rapidly downloadable resources. This remark suggests that, in some circumstances, technology is a useful tool for education.

The third sub-theme emerged was, Independent Learning. Students found it Easier to study on their own with technology. Personal space increased critical thinking. They was having full Freedom to process information on their own. It was recorded that,

"Due to online class, I am able to process my thoughts on my own"

"I can solve my problems myself"

"I am no more dependent on my Friend (with laugh)"

Three respondents said that technology motivates English language learners to perform their homework on their own. Some online educational tools may draw English-speaking students to study on their own initiative. Starting with audio-visual, including texts, videos in a range of settings including a movie, discussion, a talk, some quizzes to audio in terms of listening. Since everyone may access these tools anywhere, this chance will inspire pupils to study on their own initiative.

Theme 3. Challenges with Technology (Blended mode)

Challenges impeding the use of technology as the English learning tool. Drawing on the interviews, Theme 3 notes various difficulties utilizing technology for English learning. Three sub-themes help to organize the findings.

These themes indicate the strong views of students. The first sub-theme was Limited face to face Interaction. Students were Unable to engage with teacher. They reported that they were also unable not being able to directly get comments from the teachers.

Five out of six respondents said that technology is still very expensive and not all people are able to afford it. Moreover, there is limited access provided and it is difficult to access. Because the teaching load is heavy, there is not enough time to use the technology in class. Technology's limitations was the second subtheme that was discussed. Both hardware limitations and unstable internet connections or bandwidth limits were key technical issues that needed to be addressed simultaneously.

The third sub-theme was Rapid development with technology. It was connected to the need for technological advancement. Teachers and students alike are unable to keep up with the rapid pace of technological advancement. The incorporation of technology into the methodology of teaching and learning is a must; else, educators would fall behind.

Theme 4. Recommendations for Addressing Challenges

Students articulated a need for well-designed learning tasks. Technology integration training helps instructors stay current, develop their careers, increase knowledge and abilities, and boost confidence. Some ways may help integrate technology into English teaching and learning. Technology in everyday life is part of lifelong education. Teachers must always learn, particularly new skills. Finally, productive technology is said to promote new learning in society. People are becoming used to promoting new ideas. These examples show how to overcome technical issues. Seven of seven respondents claimed they need training to utilize technology in the classroom and learn. A respondent said that, "Training is needed to use a new technology while teaching and learning. How can we utilize classroom technology without instruction?"

This statement underlines the necessity for training to appropriately implement modern English teaching and learning technology. One participant remarked that learning new technology takes time and effort, thus some people don't use it. This shows that one way to overcome technology adoption barriers is to educate people about technological values that benefit their institution, organization, and career.

The results show that students have a favorable outlook on mixed learning due to a number of variables. A study by Alaidarous, K. et al. [21] and Annamalai, N. et al. [22] shows that students' familiarity with the learning tool might impact their desire to actively engage in the learning process. For example, one research suggests that WhatsApp

might be useful as it caters to students' interests. Plus, it's not too complicated to utilize this program. The article's described study on the function of social media differs from the studies conducted by Annamalai, N.[22] and Šebo and Haškova[23], which should be noted. The advantages that students are aware of also play a role in shaping their views on blended learning. These findings are consistent with those of other studies that found similar things: Klimova, B. and Polakova, P.[24] found that students' vocabulary learning improved when they used the mobile app, and Gamlo, N.H.[25] found that students thought that digital devices helped them improve their English language skills. It seems that their enthusiasm for studying was also influenced by this. This study's results do have some bearing on the topic at hand. To begin, the data presented here suggests that blended learning is the best way to ease students into online courses. Students may be better prepared to use online learning resources if they are introduced to them gradually. Consistent with earlier research[26], students benefit from scheduled in-person classroom sessions, which provide them easier access to instructors' guidance while they work to complete assignments. Students may keep their essential humanity by interacting with others within a certain time frame[27]. Moreover, it follows that ELT educators should have access to continuing education opportunities. They should begin by receiving instruction on how to best assist their pupils with technological issues. Before you start utilizing Google Classroom, there are a few things you need know about the technical aspects of dealing with the service. Blended learning may be effectively implemented in methods that allow students to get sufficient assistance. One option is to have students meet in person halfway through a course to go over some ground rules and get a quick rundown of what they will be covering. As a second point, before implementing a new online learning style, it is possible to arrange for regular classroom sessions. Students need enough time to get acquainted with the online learning resources[22]. Blended learning, which makes use of both online and in-person components, may supplement traditional classroom instruction[6]. Another benefit of blended learning is that it gives students more control over their learning resources and gives instructors more time to work with students individually or in small groups[28]. In addition, according to Jou and Wu[29], blended learning may change the way students learn and the results they get.

According to Hennessy, S., et al.[30], students benefit from more resources, feel more confident and competent, and have a better learning experience when technology is used in the physical classroom. Among the many advantages of blended learning that[31] list is the opportunity for students to fully grasp a subject via the integration of online resources and their own active engagement in class discussions. In addition to facilitating in-class communication and outside-of-class collaboration, online learning engagement provides a framework for such interactions[32]. The primary advantages of blended learning have been outlined above. To enhance learning results and student happiness while addressing the drawbacks of online education via the use of alternative instructional procedures and delivery systems. Instruction and student development are dynamic and ever-changing processes. It has gone a long way from relying only on classroom instruction and instructors to a mostly digital setting. Teaching and learning have become much more dynamic activities with the advent of computers and other technology. According to this survey's results, blended learning has several advantages over pure e-learning, which incorporates both online and in-person components, outperforms more conventional methods of training.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how students in mixed learning environments felt about their time spent studying English. A student's Google Classroom work, as well as their answers to a survey and history of WhatsApp group chats, were part of the dataset. The data was analyzed using a mixed-method technique. Blended learning including social media like WhatsApp and professor comments on student work has some positive effects on students, according to the research. Additionally, it noted that students' vocabulary acquisition improved, which might indicate that social media could be a key component of blended learning. Students' worries about blended learning were also highlighted by the study. The article delves into the practical consequences of blended learning, covering topics such as helping students choose the online learning tool for their requirements and making sure they have enough assistance in each mode of learning, particularly when it comes to dealing with technological difficulties. Furthermore, this study's re-

sults show that ELT educators are the key players in need of professional development, particularly with regard to the creation of online learning activities. They may be able to use these abilities to further facilitate their students' educational journey.

Since technology may help students become autonomous learners both in and out of the classroom, it is advised that both students and instructors of English constantly promote its usage in their lessons and lessons themselves. In addition, students of English may be better prepared to stay current and become fluent users of the language by being exposed to a number of new technologies that can be used to enhance their English skills. If we want to lessen the impact of some problems, we need to encourage the most effective use of technology in ESL classrooms. On top of that, there has to be more professional development opportunities for educators so that they may actively participate in creative pedagogy.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, K.R.A.; methodology, R.M.A.-R.; software, R.M.A.-R.; validation, R.R.A.-H.; investigation, R.R.A.-H.; resources, T.H.A.; data curation, R.R.A.-H.; writing—original draft preparation, T.H.A.; writing—review and editing, K.R.A.; visualization, K.R.A.; supervision, K.R.A.; funding acquisition, R.M.A.-R., K.R.A., R.R.A.-H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to the small number of the sample and their being belonging to various institutions.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

Data can be found including links to publicly archived datasets analyzed or generated during the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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