



International Conference on Teaching and Learning English as an Additional Language,
GlobELT 2016, 14-17 April 2016, Antalya, Turkey

A Study of EFL Instructors' Perceptions of Blended Learning

Gülten Koşar^{a,*}

^a*Social Sciences University of Ankara, Hükümet Meydanı, Ankara 06030, Turkey*

Abstract

Tremendous advancements in technology, which have also penetrated into our everyday lives, have been taking place at an unprecedented pace in recent years. While there stands the obvious reality that it is highly unimaginable for a person to continue her life without technology, attempting to keep education away from it does sound unreasonable. English language teaching necessitates the incorporation of technology into curriculum as well. Given the significance of ongoing interaction in English language learning, the crucial place occupied by technology could be better figured out. This can also illuminate why blended learning is defined as intertwining long-standing face-to-face instruction with online learning. The purpose of this descriptive study is to uncover EFL instructors' perceptions of blended learning. 32 EFL instructors (22 female and 10 male) working at two state universities in Turkey participated in this study. A questionnaire comprised of one multiple choice question and three open-ended questions, and a semi-structured interview is used for collecting data. The analysis of the gathered data was conducted by SPSS 22 and content analysis. The findings indicate that the participants have positive perceptions of blended learning approach although they put forth a number of challenges regarding its implementation.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of GlobELT 2016

Keywords: Blended learning, face-to-face instruction, English language learning, online learning

1. Introduction

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: gencoglugulten@gmail.com

What outcomes are expected from the 21st century education entails learning and innovation skills such as critical thinking and collaboration, information, media and technology skills, and life and career skills encapsulating self-direction, adaptability, responsibility, social skills and leadership (www.21stcenturyskills.org). Keeping up with the demands of this era is a task that cannot be fulfilled by constraining education to physical spaces and limited times allocated to class hours. For this reason, the constraints of classroom space and time have led teachers and learners to find ways and methods to abolish the mentioned limitations.

In Turkey one of the criticisms directed towards English language teaching is that learners are not inclined to continue studying after they complete their class schedules, which could be associated with the tendency among Turkish learners of English towards traditional language learning and with adherence to teachers' authority. Since traditional language learning is characterized by a classroom environment where the all-knowing teacher transmits information to learners, it contradicts with blended learning in that blended learning has been favoured and popularized by virtue of flexible learning it enables.

Blended learning which has been referred to over the past few decades as one of the approaches to improve the quality of education does not have a single definition researchers agree on like several other terms in the literature. Nonetheless, the prevalent definition of the concept of blended learning approach centres on the incorporation of online learning into face-to-face teaching and learning methods (Guangying, 2014; Holmes & Gardner, 2006; Littlejohn & Pegler, 2007; Masson & Rennie, 2006; Williams, 2002).

The growing interest in blended learning is explicated by Bonk & Graham (2006) through addressing the change in the role occupied by learners in the learning process. This transformation takes place as the status of learners does display a change from passive receivers of knowledge to active knowledge constructors. Guangying (2014) construes the increasing degree of attention paid to blended learning in the sphere of education via the contribution of blended learning approach to learning thanks to its flexibility, rapidity and accelerated power. Besides the gains provided by blended learning, addressing to the issue of what it encapsulates could make the comprehension of blended learning easier.

Blended learning is a combination of instructional modalities (i.e. onsite, self-paced learning and web-based), delivery media (i.e. internet, lectures, PowerPoint presentations, textbooks); instructional methods (face-to-face or technology-based sessions) and web-based technologies (e.g. wikis, chat rooms, blogs, textbooks, online courses). In what way/s the combination is done depends on such criteria as learning goals, course content, teacher experience and teaching style, learner characteristics etc. (Dziuban, Hartman & Moskal, 2005). Klimova & Poulouva (2014) maintain that implementation of blended learning necessitates the principles itemised below:

a thoughtful integration of face-to-face and fully online instructional components;

- innovative use of technology;
- reconceptualization of the learning paradigm; and
- sustained assessment and evaluation of blended learning.

Likewise, Barnum & Paarmann (2002) put forth four strategies to be encompassed in a blended learning model. These strategies are as follows:

- web-based delivery, which promotes independence and self-reliance in learning;
- face-to-face processing, in which human interaction is necessary to build a deeper understanding;
- creation of deliverables, expecting learners to create products; and
- collaborative extension of learning – groups meet once a month to share and build upon.

The four strategies introduced by Barnum & Paarmann (2002) emphasise the integration of online learning into face-to-face interaction in order for reinforcing learner autonomy, promoting learners to produce outputs, and stimulating collaboration amongst learners in order to help each other learn. These strategies bring to the forefront the reasons for employing blended learning approach. The fundamental contribution of blended learning approach to education appears to be stimulating collaborative learning (Bruffee, 1993) because promoting collaborative learning through incorporating online learning into face-to-face instruction having dominated teaching for long occupies a significant place in language teaching. In addition to collaborative learning, the learner-centeredness that can be enabled by online learning environments is proposed by Arıkan (2008a; 2008b) as a medium of increasing learning in all fields. A large body of research has been conducted to explore the impact of blended learning on improving student learning, and to uncover learners' and teachers' perceptions of blended learning.

A number of studies in the literature have been carried out with a view to revealing teachers' perceptions of integrating internet into teaching. One of these studies the purpose of which was unveiling EFL teachers'

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