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The Impact of Blending Learning on EFL College Students' Writing Abilities

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Abstract

Blended learning is an instructional approach that gathers digital educational knowledge and chances for connection electronically with traditional classroom strategies and techniques. It focuses on the foundation of physical foundation of both instructor and learner, with many requirements of learners control over place, setting ,and time. The purpose of this study is to reveal the effectiveness of blending learning on EFL college students' writing abilities .

To achieve the aim of the present study, a sample of (139)Iraqi EFL college students randomly chosen from college of Education/ University of Babylon . The total number of second-year students is 139, which has already been divided into two sections: A (60 students) and B (43 students), which are chosen at random to represent the experimental and control groups, respectively.After that, a posttest is created. The test is given to both the experimental and control groups. During the test, students must pay attention to five components of writing that are evaluated in the assessment: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

The main findings show that employing a blended learning technique in the classroom can assist college students enhance three out of five components of their writing; content, structures and grammar , and vocabulary. This could be due to the fact that blending learning strategy is integrative and connected face to face and online learning.

keywords: Blending learning , college students' writing abilities.

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أثر التعلم المدمج على قدرات الكتابة لدى طلبة الكلية متعلمواللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية

م. نسرين كاظم خضير

تدريسية في وزارة التربية العراقية

الملخص : التعلم المدمج هو نهج تعليمي يجمع المعرفة التعليمية عبر الإنترنت وفرص الاتصال عبر الإنترنت مع استراتيجيات وأساليب الفصل الدراسي التقليدية الذي يركز على أساس الوجود المادي لكل من المعلم والمتعلم ، مع العديد من متطلبات تحكم الطالب في المكان والزمان
الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو الكشف عن فعالية التعلم المدمج بين التعلم على القدرات الكتابية لطلاب كلية اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة الحالية تم اختيار عينة من (139) طالب بشكل عشوائي من كلية التربية / جامعة بابل دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.
بلغ إجمالي عدد طلاب المرحلة الثانية (139) طالبًا والذين تم تقسيمهم بالفعل إلى قسمين ؛ تم اختيار قسم أ (60 طالبًا) وقسم ب (43 طالبًا) بشكل عشوائي لتمثيل المجموعتين التجريبية والضابطة. تم إنشاء اختبار لاحق من خلاله يتعرض كل من المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة للاختبار. أثناء الاختبار ، يجب على الطلاب الانتباه إلى خمسة جوانب للكتابة وهي المحتوى والتنظيم والقواعد والمفردات والآليات التي يتم تقييمها في التقييم.
لقد اثبتت النتائج الرئيسية أن استخدام استراتيجية التعلم المدمج في تدريس الكتابة يساعد طلاب الجامعات على تحسين ثلاثة من خمسة جوانب من كتاباتهم ؛ المحتوى والتراكيب والقواعد والمفردات. قد يكون هذا بسبب حقيقة أن دمج استراتيجية التعلم هو تكامل واتصال التعلم وجهاً لوجه عبر الإنترنت.

الكلمات الدالة : التعلم المدمج ، قدرات وقابليات الكتابة لدى طلاب الجامعات.

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem of the study

“Essentials for Blended Learning provides a practical, streamlined approach for creating effective learning experiences by blending online activities and the best of face-to-face teaching. Effective blended learning requires rethinking of teaching practices and a redesign of course structure” (Stein, & Graham, 2019,p.24)

“Education and training have been transformed in the 21st century as a result of changing patterns of work and culture, and learners increasingly expect technology-

rich and flexible learning opportunities. Nowadays, learning takes place in a wide range of physical spaces, for example in educational or training organizations, in the workplace or at home, as well as in both public and private virtual spaces" (Allan,2007,p.53).

Tucker ,and et al state that When technology is used to engage and expose students both inside the classroom and online, Blended Learning in Action highlights the benefits of a blended model above traditional instruction. (2012,p.62)

Blended learning allows for the flexibility to meet the diverse needs of pedagogies, disciplines, and course levels, as well as the needs of a wide range of learners. Anyone concerned about the integration of online tutoring to provide suitable help to pupils, on the other hand, may need to reconsider present practice(MacDonald ,2012,p.34).

"Teaching in Blended Leaning Environments provides a coherent framework in which to explore the transformative concept of blended learning. Blended learning is the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies. A direct result of the transformative innovation of virtual communication and online learning communities, blended learning environments have created new ways for teachers and students to engage, interact, and collaborate"(Vaughan ,et al .2013,p:61)

The potential for this blended learning method is to promote the effectiveness of students' language skills and their writing abilities. Therefore, the problem of the current study can be crystallized into the question:

What is the impact of blended learning of the EFL college students' writing abilities?

1.2 The Hypothesis

The use of blending learning technique has no impact on improving of Iraqi EFL college students' writing abilities.

Literature Review

2.1 Writing skills

Writing is an ability to express oneself on a specific subject. It is the most hard skill for a language leaner to acquire. Writing effectively cannot be acquired automatically like other language skills .This needs special efforts on the part of a language learner by pursuing the writing process in all of its stages before he or she can think of acquiring a proficiency in writing (Gangal ,2011,p.3).

The nature of the composing process of writing is writing. Written goods are frequently the result of specialized thinking, composing, and revising methods that necessitate specialized skills that not every speaker is born with (Brown, 2003,p.335).

Byrne (1988,p.183) argues that writing skill is "a process of encoding (putting messages into words) with a reader in mind". While Chakarverty & Gautum (2000,p.38) define writing as "reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topic and to analyze and classify any background knowledge".

Brown (2001:336) mentions that "writing is indeed a thinking process". People's thoughts are frozen and made visible and permanent through writing, allowing them to study and test their quality.

Furthermore, in the English for Academic Purposes tradition, the emphasis is placed on the development of discourse that will be accepted in an English-medium institution of higher education; learning to write is part of socialization into the academic society. Moreover, Hamzah et al. (2010, p.36) argue that a degree of organization in the development and sequencing of ideas and data; a degree of accuracy, avoiding ambiguity of meaning, the use of strong and appropriate grammatical devices for focus on specific ideas, and careful vocabulary choice are all useful skills for effective writing.

2.2 Technology

Technology integration has played a crucial role in the evolution of teaching skills such as reading and writing in a second and foreign language. This type of interaction in second language learning and instruction necessitates a transition in educational approaches from behavioral (habit formation) to constructivist (mentalist) learning (Kasapaglu - akyol, 2010,p.25).

These quick changes demonstrate that the use of computers, as well as the development of other software and new technologies in teaching and education, has resulted in shifts in literacy.

As a result, instructors are constantly under pressure to keep up with new developments and raise standards in their courses (Feiler & Logan, 2007,p.14). It not only inspires and encourages ESL students to read and write, but the various approaches used also aid in the development of writing skills in this set of students (Lee, 2012,p.63).

Moreover, Ghandoura (2012,p.82) suggests that English language learners believed that computers made learning to write skills easier and faster. The potential drawback of these tools is that typing on a computer immediately alerts you to grammar and spelling issues, which can either be a learning experience .

While using technological tools in learning systems, language learners can be exposed to many forms of interaction and exposure (Chapelle, and Plakans,2013,p.30). Networking in online contexts is becoming a more popular way of social contact. It allows users to express themselves, create profiles, join online communities of like-minded people, and socialize with others. Teachers can use technology to enhance active and collaborative learning activities. Learners can leverage their digital competence and use their particular digital knowledge and expertise in order to complete tasks.

Technologies, Twitter, LinkedIn , and Facebook for example, can help our students improve their social relationships. In fact, online social networking has practically become a need in their social life as a means of enacting individual and/or group identities as well as forming important relationships. Written online chatting with local peers in the language class can be used to communicate with speakers of the students' target language (Chun, 2008,p.27).

Blending Learning

Language, according to Vygotsky (1978, p.51), is a cultural tool. It is, in his opinion, a critical tool for translating personal experiences into cultural knowledge and understanding. Language is the medium via which human's culture and experiences are passed down from generation to generation. In the context of teaching and teacher education, this is the case. Teachers can use project work to improve critical habits of mind in their content areas, such as curiosity, adaptability, tenacity, responsibility, creativity, and commitment to excellence. With the advancement of "scaffolding" research, an increasing number of empirical studies suggest that "scaffolding" among learners has a favorable influence on second language acquisition (Dong & Liu,2020,p.648).

Colis and Moonen define blended learning as the method of on-line teaching and face-to-face learning, throughout instruction is transfer for learners in two ways , on-line and face to face learning(2001,p.29) .

Bonk, and Graham (2012,p,40) argue that " blending learning is more than the delivery of technologies, it is certainly not a plug and play proposition. Instead, it is a shift in our profession. It is also time and effort to be successful at blending learning".

An analysis of the learners' target circumstance is the first step in a language-centered strategy. It considers current perspectives on language learning and tries to choose the one that is best relevant for the target context. The target situation's language characteristics are identified. The curriculum is then created by the course designer(Mohammed, 2022,p.26)

Smythe (2011,p.62) states that blended learning as a useful strategies that consist of a huge of effective and useful techniques of teaching and learning processes. It improves the use of digital software in order to facilitate teaching and learning process and use of different methods to enhance learners for promote exposure and interaction at all language skills.

2.4 Features of Blended Learning

Huang and Wang (2006,p.32) suggest that blended learning has three features.
The first one is flexibility of giving many learning resources. Blended learning is regarded as an instructional pedagogical strategy, which is evolved and expanded in a networked learning environment. The second is promote of learning diversity. As learners are different in terms of learning styles, individual differences, learning abilities, blended learning can become the rescue by making it possible for language learning and self-regulated to occur. The third is increasing of elearning experience. Blended learning can support them to improve as well as develop language learners existing knowledge and practices.
Graham (2004, p.10-12) stated that blended learning can occur at various levels, including the language learner's activity level, tasks level, program level, and course level. At various stages of their university studies, language students require a teacher to direct and guide their learning tasks; yet, at all levels, the language instructor should direct and highlight students' autonomy and self-regulation.

Bath and Bourke, (2010,p.41) suggest many phases for designing blended learning as a pedagogical instructional approach, starting with:

1. Thinking and careful Planning for integrating blended learning into a particular course,

2. Putting the components of blended learning;

3. application and applying the blended learning form design;

4. Trying to figure out how successful blended learning is, and;

5. Reflecting and updating design

2.5 Effectiveness of Blended Learning

Stein, & Graham (2019,p.51) state that "essentials for Blended Learning provides a practical, streamlined approach for creating effective learning experiences by blending online activities and the best of face-to-face teaching. Effective blended learning requires rethinking of teaching practices and a redesign of course structure. Suitable for instructors in any content area".

Focusing the quality of blended learning, Marsh (2012,p.14) pointed to some elements that make it useful . He explained that it promotes individualized learning styles, experience as language teachers can provide learners by many authentic tasks based on their potentials . It also encourages personalized learning support; where language learners can be given notes related to their particular exercises other than those that are presented for the whole class. He also argues that blended learning promote motivation for identity , autonomy and cooperative learning, promote student's exposure and engagement in learning systems , provides a relaxing learning environment for effective and fruitful learning, and encourages flexible learning and instruction .

Language Learners are supposed to learn more effectively through reading than through listening to their teachers. Moreover, learning to read is supposed to be achieved more easily than the other (listening, speaking ,and writing)three language skills. The skill of reading goes beyond the ability of simply recognizing, analyzing letters, words and sounding them (Yahya and Kareem,2021,p.11).

At least, blended learning can provide self-paced teaching and learning settings that are sensitive to individual characteristics and goals. Advanced language learners and college students can move rapidly through assignments that provide little difficulty, while others can take the time they need to master basic skills and behaviors (Ranalli, 2013,p.71).

3- Method

3.1 Method subsection

The researcher will gather and evaluate data using the methodologies listed below:

1. randomly, a number of Iraqi EFL college students choose to be the study sample.

2. designing a post test for EFL Iraqi EFL college students under the supervision of a number of specialists who examine its validity and given some suggestions and modifications if necessary.

3. the results will be interpret in the light of the hypothesis by using the proper statistical means .

3.2 Participants

The sample of this study consists of (139)Iraqi EFL college students randomly chosen from college of Education/ University of Babylon . The total number of second-year students is 139, which has already been divided into two sections: A (60 students) and B (43 students), which are chosen at random to represent the experimental and control groups, respectively.

3. 3 Instrument

After that, a posttest is created. The test is given to both the experimental and control groups. During the test, students must pay attention to five components of writing that are evaluated in the assessment: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The posttest is used to examine the effect of the independent variable on students' writing abilities after the experiment has been completed.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Results

The aim of this study reads finding out " The impact of Blending learning on Iraqi EFL college students' writing abilities". To achieve this aim, t- test for two independent samples is applied.

The mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the overall writing abilities posttest are (11.900) and (10.372), respectively, as shown in Table (4.1). Under (101) degrees of freedom and at (0.05) level of significance, the computed t-value (3.044) is larger than the crucial one (1.980).

This means that in the post-test of writing ability, there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The experimental group, which is taught utilizing blended learning methodologies, benefits from the difference.

Table (4.1)

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-Value of Two Independent Sample in the Writing Performance Post Test for the Experimental and the Control Groups

Components	Group	No.	M.	S. D	t–Value		D.F	Results
					Computed t-Values	Critical t-Value		
Content	EG	60	2.100	0.681	4.529			Significant For the EG
	CG	43	1.488	0.668				
Organization	EG	60	2.366	0.688	1.928			Not significant
	CG	43	2.139	0.412				
Grammar	EG	60	2.383	0.691	3.333			Significant For the EG
	CG	43	1.953	0.575				

Vocabulary	EG	60	2.416	0.829	2.535	1.980	0.05	Significant for the EG
	CG	43	2.069	0.402				
Mechanics	EG	60	2.633	0.938	0.566			Not significant
	CG	43	2.720	0.453				
Overall Performance	EG	60	11.900	2.955	3.044			Significant for the EG
	CG	43	10.372	1.704				

4.2 Discussion of the Results

After investigate the data analysis for the two groups ,experimental and control about the impact of Blending learning on Iraqi EFL college students' writing abilities, the results were as the following

The experimental group's participants who are taught using blending learning methodologies have a high degree of involvement and response inside electronic groups employing tactics that improve their writing skills. They use blending learning strategies to build successful connections between their past knowledge and new information and ideas, resulting in cognitive structures, word organization, and improved writing abilities.

It was also discovered that combining learning methodologies increases the effectiveness of providing many opportunities for the experimental group's members to explore and retain language through a continuous process of repeating and connecting vocabulary items.

Students benefit from the blended learning technique because they are able to practice reading, speaking, listening, and communication while interacting with one another to complete writing projects and develop their writing talents.

The main findings show that utilizing a blending learning technique in the classroom when teaching writing helps college students improve three out of five areas of their writing: content, structures and grammar, and vocabulary. This could be because blending learning is an integrative method that connects face-to-face and online learning. It does not concentrate solely on organization and mechanics, but rather on them in conjunction with other writing procedures. This finding could also be explained by the fact that the blending learning technique focuses primarily on assisting students in becoming aware of and promoting their creativity and writing abilities.

Recently, through the (COVID -19) pandemic era, educational technological devices have played a major role in electronic teaching and online learning over the world. The application of technology in learning at this pandemic era has a positive value. In the digital era, online learning and blended learning have become huge breakthroughs, and will soon become a post-pandemic new normal necessity.

Finally, the change in the instructional domains, from the teacher centered to learner centered systems ,which illustrate the importance role of learners in communication and building links for their previous and new knowledge. So, this shift is one of the most important issues that policy-makers, curriculum designers, language teachers should focus on and apply it in the field of pedagogy and education because of its usefulness and advantages to student in all stages of learning .

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