



A Systematic Review of Research on Blended Learning in Teaching EFL: Student and Teacher's Perception, Implementation, Interaction, Benefits, and Challenges

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Submitted: 30 Dec 2023

Revised : 3 April 2024

Accepted : 31 May 2024

Abstract

This study examines the existing research on blended learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, focusing on the views and experiences of both students and teachers. An analysis of 30 published articles reveals that researchers have employed a range of methods, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches, to collect data through questionnaires, interviews, and literature reviews. The findings suggest that both students and teachers have a positive outlook on blended learning, which is used to teach various English skills and involves the use of online platforms to assign different types of tasks. Effective interaction between students, teachers, and peers is crucial to the success of blended learning. The benefits of blended learning include improved English proficiency, enhanced learning behaviors, and developed digital skills. However, challenges such as technical difficulties, inadequate training, time management issues, and learner preparedness can hinder its implementation.

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Keywords: *Blended Learning; English for Foreign Learners; Systematic Review; Student and Teacher's Perception; English Skills.*

INTRODUCTION

With the growing popularity of integrating technology into the classroom and institutions' embracement of these new technologies, conducting online learning physically at a distance has started to gain attention in language classes (Altay & Altay, 2019). In this increasing demand for integrating new technologies, blended learning has also grasped the attention of researchers for years. Blended learning has become a reality in contemporary education as more and more educational institutions race to adopt and implement it to provide an attractive and stimulating learning environment (Al Bataineh, 2019). Blended learning is a transformational concept that intends to sustain collaborative learning; constructive learning, and computer-assisted learning, both offline learning and online learning (Lalima & Dangwal, 2017)



Blended learning is a learning approach that generally combines two learning styles, i.e., direct or face-to-face learning and online learning that uses all types of social media or modern technology considered a medium in learning (Maulina, M., Sri Andriyani, A., Amin, S., Nasrullah, R., Asdar, A., & Hamsiah, A. (2022)). According to Sakina et al. (2020), blended learning represents a modern instructional approach that combines multiple tools and methods, leveraging technology to enhance the teaching and learning process. Graham (2006) identified blended learning definitions as three prevalent themes: (1) blending online and face-to-face instruction, (2) blending instructional modalities (or delivery media), and (3) blending instructional methods. For Mantera-Gutierrez (2006), blended learning is the combination of web-based courses or computer-mediated communication practices and face-to-face instructions, which combines delivery methods. Similarly, Tucker (2012) defines blended learning as any combination of face-to-face and online instruction. Consequently, contrary to different interpretations of blended learning, the common points of the definitions include the combination of any kind of e-learning element and face-to-face learning, although the portion of time that should be spent online changes depending on the aims.

Blended learning has captured the attention of second-language researchers and second-language educators over the past decade, especially with a focus on teaching English as a Foreign Language (Erdem & Kibar, 2014; Liu, 2013; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Shahrokni & Talaeizadeh, 2013; Siew-Eng & Muuk, 2015; Tuncay & Uzunboylu, 2012; Yang, Chuang, & Tseng, 2013). Thus, this literature review reviews studies of blended learning conducted in the EFL context. The main aim of this study is to improve knowledge about the ins and outs of blended learning, especially in teaching EFL. The subtopics are chosen to consider whether blended learning is necessary to teach EFL learners.

This study is guided by five key research goals that seek to explore various aspects of blended learning in EFL classrooms. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the attitudes and opinions of EFL students and teachers towards blended learning, as well as how it is actually implemented in practice. Additionally, the study examines the nature of student-teacher interaction in blended learning environments, the benefits it offers to EFL learners, and the challenges or difficulties that educators and learners may encounter when implementing this approach.

RESEARCH METHOD

This literature review investigates the common findings and implications of studies of blended learning conducted in an EFL environment. This analysis is conducted in two basic steps: (a) literature search and (b) selection of eligible studies.

Literature Search

Firstly, the main keywords were identified as relevant to this study, blended learning and English as a Foreign Language or EFL, and used interchangeably to guide and limit the search. For this search, the primary search engine used to find the relevant studies is Google Scholar. The prioritized types of journals are language and education journals that are published in the English language.



Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To be included in this review, each study had to meet the following criteria:

- Being published between 2018 and 2023,
- Investigated blended learning in EFL environments,
- Involving participants who were EFL learners or teachers,
- Employed qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method design,
- Including pedagogical implementations and recommendations.

After a review of potential studies, the following criteria were used to exclude the unqualified studies:

- Being published earlier than 2018
- Involving participants who were L1 English learners or teachers

As a result of this search, 30 articles were found suitable according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria and included in this study. The article is distributed by publication year, journal type, data collection, number of participants, educational level, and location. The distribution is shown in Table 1.

| Category | Subcategory | Number of articles | Percentage | Total |
|------------------------|---|--------------------|------------|--------------|
| Publication year | 2023 | 1 | 3% | 30 (100%) |
| | 2022 | 12 | 40% | |
| | 2021 | 7 | 23% | |
| | 2020 | 3 | 10% | |
| | 2019 | 5 | 17% | |
| | 2018 | 2 | 7% | |
| Journal type | Language and Education | 26 | 87% | 30 (100%) |
| | Social Science and Humanity | 2 | 7% | |
| | Environmental and Public Health | 1 | 3% | |
| | Psychology Research and behavior | 1 | 3% | |
| Data collection | Questionnaire/interview (with participants) | 27 | 90% | 30 (100%) |
| | Literature search (without participants) | 3 | 10% | |
| Number of participants | <100 | 19 | 63% | 30 (100%) |
| | >100 | 8 | 27% | |
| | Not involving participants | 3 | 10% | |
| Level of Education | University | 25 | 84% | 30 (100%) |
| | Senior high | 1 | 3% | |
| | Junior high | 1 | 3% | |
| | Unknown | 3 | 10% | |



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|--------------------|--------------|----|-----|--------------|
| Location (country) | Indonesia | 11 | 38% | 30 (100%) |
| | Malaysia | 5 | 17% | |
| | China | 2 | 7% | |
| | Pakistan | 2 | 7% | |
| | Iran | 1 | 3% | |
| | Saudi Arabia | 1 | 3% | |
| | Ukraine | 1 | 3% | |
| | Algeria | 1 | 3% | |
| | Thailand | 1 | 3% | |
| | UK | 1 | 3% | |
| | USA | 1 | 3% | |
| | Unknown | 3 | 10% | |

Table 1. Article distribution

According to the publication year, there is 1 article published in 2023, 12 articles published in 2022, 7 articles published in 2021, 3 articles published in 2020, 5 articles published in 2019, and 2 articles published in 2018. According to the journal category, 26 articles are categorized in language and education, two in social science and humanity, one in environmental and public health, and 1 in psychology research and behavior management. The data collection process revealed that 27 of the articles relied on primary data gathered through interviews or questionnaires, which involved direct participation from respondents. In contrast, three articles employed a literature-based approach, gathering data through a comprehensive review of existing research. Based on the number of participants, 19 articles have less than 100 participants in the study, and eight articles have more than 100 participants. According to the educational level, 25 articles conducted the study at the University level, one in senior high school, and one in junior high school. According to the location, 11 articles conducted the study in Indonesia, five articles in Malaysia, two articles in China, two articles in Pakistan, and one article each in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine, Algeria, Thailand, the UK, and the USA.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Students and Teachers' Perceptions of Blended Learning

Students' Perceptions

There are several aspects to be considered in determining students' perception of blended learning, including the learning process (7 articles), behavioral aspects (2 articles), emotional aspects (3 articles), and cognitive aspects (4 articles). A study from Istiqomah, I. (2021) found that most of the students agree that blended learning is effective and efficient. The study stated that the majority of the students were satisfied with the implementation of blended learning. A study from Indah S & Aruan R. (2023) found in the behavioral aspect that students can actively express their opinions to the teachers. Also, they always participated actively, did their English assignments, and were always present. In addition, they can discuss and collaborate with their friends as well as manage their time effectively.



With the positive response about all of the items on the behavioral aspect, it can be assumed that students have a more positive attitude towards blended learning. Maulina et al. (2022) found in their article that students gave positive opinions about their emotional feelings toward the learning process using the blended learning approach, especially in learning English. Most students agree that they are enthusiastic, comfortable, satisfied, and never feel bored when learning English through blended learning. This implies that blended learning motivates students to learn in class. Maulina et al. (2022) mentioned that in the cognitive aspect, students as participants show a good perception so that motivation appears on themselves when participating in the process of teaching and learning activities. Most of the students agree that they are more diligent and favorable in learning English through blended learning.

Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers' perceptions of blended learning were mentioned in four articles. Teachers viewed the implementation of blended learning as an opportunity for professional advancement, emphasizing the need for enhanced ICT skills to effectively integrate technology into teaching. According to a study by Wu, H., & Luo, S. (2022), teachers observed that most students were motivated and highly engaged in the blended learning environment. Teachers noted that some students were more active in discussing with their classmates in online forums compared to face-to-face classes, indicating a positive impact on student interaction and participation. However, some teachers expressed anxiety about operating instructional technologies online, highlighting the need for further training to integrate new technology into the curriculum and assessment. Zulkflee et al. (2022) mentioned that the teachers showed a positive attitude towards blended learning and agreed that it was important, supportive, convenient, and effective for the primary ESL classroom. They also expressed their interest, preference, and improvement in their perceptions towards blended learning.

The Implementation of Blended Learning

Online Platforms Used in Blended Learning

Various online platforms are used in blended learning. Four main types of online platforms are often used in blended learning: Four primary types of online platforms are commonly utilized in blended learning environments. These include learning management systems such as Moodle, Edmodo, and Abysak, each mentioned in one article. Additionally, photo and video sharing apps like Instagram, messaging apps like Telegram and WhatsApp, and online tools like Kahoot, Padlet, and YouTube are also used, with each mentioned in one article respectively.

Fields of the implementation

The Blended Learning method is implemented to teach essential English skills, i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, vocabulary, and presentation. Among those skills, reading was the most mentioned in nine articles. The other skills are also mentioned in some articles, either combined or separated, but there is no specific information about how they implement blended learning for those skills.



Learning task/instruction

Learning instructions vary based on the target skills to develop and online platform types. For instance, in an article by Sari & Wahyudin (2019) Using Instagram, students were instructed to upload their videos to their accounts and tag the official Instagram account set up by the lecturer. The video content covered topics such as telephoning in an office setting and customer service interactions. The materials were telephoning in the office and customer service. The lecturer played the role of an observer and a facilitator. The students were given time to interact by giving comments on all videos of performances done by the other pairs. Through this assigned task, students are expected to improve their speaking skills and grammar usage in English. Another study by Maulina et al. (2022) utilized the group chat feature in WhatsApp to deliver and attach learning material, conduct discussions, share learning sources, ask and answer questions, and submit tasks. Some articles didn't clearly explain what task the teacher assigned to students. Another article by Al Bataineh (2019), cited from Horn & Staker (2015), states that different models represent blended learning implementation, such as an online driver, self-blended, labs, flex, rotation, and face-to-face driver.

Interaction that occurs in Blended Learning

Student and teacher interaction

Quoting the observations of Taghizadeh, M., & Hajhosseini, F. (2020), the dynamics of student and teacher interaction in an online setting was characterized by the teacher's proactive engagement with students, aiming to encourage and optimize the student's learning experience, fostering an environment conducive to extracting the maximum educational benefits. Conversely, the findings gleaned from the research conducted by Radia, B. (2019) underscore a prevailing consensus among learners regarding the positive impact of interactions with their instructors, with a notable 86% of participants acknowledging the beneficial nature of such interactions, attributing them to the enhancement of their reading skills. Building upon these insights, the study by Jerry, M., & Yunus, M. M. (2021) accentuates the multifaceted nature of blended learning. It emphasizes a notable augmentation in interaction and collaboration, not only between students but also between students and teachers. This underscores the efficacy of blended learning methodologies in fostering discussions and cultivating collaborative tasks within the educational milieu. Furthermore, a recurring theme in these scholarly works, as elucidated by Falah, I. F., & Chairuddin, C. (2022), is the assertion that blended learning catalyzes heightened student interaction with both instructors and peers. According to the study, this heightened interaction goes beyond the perfunctory exchange of information, extending into the realms of motivation, feedback reception, and the cultivation of a robust sense of community among learners.

Fellow students' interaction

In this particular mode of learning, which involves a blend of online and traditional elements, learners actively interact and communicate with their peers through social networks. This collaborative exchange serves as a platform for resolving educational queries and the mutual sharing of pertinent and beneficial materials, as elucidated in the article authored by Taghizadeh, M., & Hajhosseini, F. (2020). Moreover, insights gleaned from another scholarly work, specifically the one authored by Wu, H., & Luo, S. (2022), indicate that educators observed a heightened level of



participation and interaction among students in the digital realm, particularly through online forums, surpassing the levels observed in conventional face-to-face classroom settings. This observation underscores the dynamic nature of virtual interactions and their significance in fostering student engagement and collaborative discourse. Adding to the discourse on blended learning, the study conducted by Mohd Amin, M. H., Md Ramlan, S. F., & Wahi, W. (2022) delves into the qualitative data, revealing that reciprocal facilitation, facilitated through peer-to-peer interactions, emerged as an efficacious mechanism for enhancing the presentation skills of students. This underscores the intrinsic value of collaborative engagements within a blended learning environment, shedding light on its positive impact on acquiring and refining essential academic competencies.

Benefits of blended learning

Academic benefits

Most articles implicitly mentioned blended learning's academic benefits. The academic benefit is explicitly mentioned, especially in articles that used the pretest and posttest assessment for experimental and control groups to investigate the effectiveness of blended learning. For instance, in a study by Al Batanieh et al. (2019) and Menggo et al. (2022). These studies show students' academic performance in English learning is increasing, as shown by a significant result in the pretest and posttest that occurred within the experimental group who used blended learning mode in their learning. The experimental group outperformed the control group. In some articles, it is also mentioned that teachers can see and feel the improvement in their students' English skills, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, that they taught.

Non-academic benefits

Most articles highlight that blended learning primarily boosts non-academic benefits such as student motivation, engagement, autonomy, collaboration, and satisfaction. Motivation is noted in ten articles, while engagement is covered in five. Two studies by Maulina et al. (2022) and Indah Sari et al. (2023) discuss three aspects of student engagement—behavioral, emotional, and cognitive—as defined by Trowler (2010). Behavioral engagement benefits include consistent attendance, discipline, active participation, and effective time management. Emotional engagement benefits reveal that students feel enthusiastic, comfortable, and satisfied, without boredom. Cognitive engagement shows increased diligence and preference for learning English through blended methods. Additionally, increased student autonomy allows for free expression, idea exchange, and flexible participation in online discussions. Collaboration benefits, mentioned in four articles including Mohamed (2021), show that blended learning enhances project collaboration, reduces geographical barriers, and reaches students across various locations. Lastly, student satisfaction is noted to improve.

Wu et al. (2022) found that students reported increased satisfaction with blended learning due to its flexibility, which encourages deeper learning and greater engagement. This finding aligns with Istiqomah (2021), which noted that students appreciated the ability to access class content anytime and anywhere, reducing the need for regular physical attendance. Additionally, students felt that blended learning supported independent learning, facilitated easy sharing of materials, and saved both time and costs.



Challenges/Problems encountered in blended learning

Technical challenges

Blended learning has faced numerous challenges, including technical and non-technical issues. The article acknowledges some challenges that may arise in using blended learning. Yang (2014) found that some problems perceived by the teachers are the changing role of the teachers and students, little sense of community building, lack of training in blended learning courses, and unfamiliarity with the new systems or technologies. Blended learning faces several challenges, including difficulties in assessing student comprehension, especially in online classes. Technical issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to laptops, poor internet connections, and the need for device sharing hinder lesson delivery and student engagement. Teachers also struggle with technology experience, lack of support, and insufficient training for new systems. Students report problems with operating Google Classroom, uploading videos, and accessing the internet. These issues contribute to challenges in time management for students learning in two different blended learning modes. Moreover, teachers expressed uncertainty about the cost-effectiveness, time-effectiveness, and efficiency of blended learning. These concerns could be related to the investment required for technological infrastructure and training.

Non-technical challenges

The evolving roles of teachers and students and a limited sense of community building pose non-technical challenges. Teachers often grapple with changing instructional methods and adapting to the demands of blended learning; students may need to adjust to different learning environments. The article mentions a "little sense of community building" as a challenge. This non-technical issue reflects the importance of fostering community and collaboration among students and teachers, which may be challenging in a blended learning environment. Lack of training in blended learning courses and unfamiliarity with new systems or technologies exacerbate these challenges. Apart from technical training, there is also the lack of training in blended learning courses. Teachers may struggle to integrate online and offline components into their teaching methods effectively. In traditional classroom environments, non-technical issues such as large class sizes can impact the quality of interaction, and students may face motivational difficulties if they find blended learning formats less engaging. Addressing these non-technical challenges requires a holistic approach that considers pedagogical strategies, community building, and motivational factors to ensure the effective integration of blended learning in educational settings.

Discussion

Results of the review

The first inquiry examined students' and teachers' perceptions of blended learning, with 12 articles focusing on students' perceptions. The study on students' perceptions of blended learning revealed that students generally had positive experiences and attitudes toward this teaching method. They actively participated, perceived themselves as skillful in blended learning, and found it effective and efficient. Factors such as ease of use, computer literacy, face-to-face interaction, pre-built learning mechanisms, and resistance to change were significantly related to the efficacy of blended learning. Additionally, students perceived mobile learning as a mode that improved their use of digital



tools for learning purposes. Most students favored increased interaction, flexibility, a better understanding of learning content, and a richer learning experience with Blended Learning. Overall, the positive perception of students suggests that blended learning can be an effective method of teaching English.

The study revealed that students significantly improved their language skills and found blended learning beneficial, appreciating the integration of technology for accessing resources and face-to-face interactions for discussions. Teachers, mentioned in four articles, viewed blended learning as necessary, supportive, and effective, noting its cost-effectiveness and ability to enhance engagement through tools like YouTube and online quizzes. They observed increased student motivation but also some challenges with student participation and the need for additional training to manage instructional technologies.

Three main aspects of implementing blended learning in EFL classrooms were identified: online platforms, areas of use, and learning tasks. Learning management system websites are the most frequently mentioned platforms, followed by online quizzes and media-sharing apps. Blended learning is often applied in English classes, particularly for reading, and is found to positively impact students' English language skills, especially reading, with students viewing it as a beneficial learning environment. The final aspect is the use of learning tasks and instruction. Based on the results, it can be concluded that teachers utilize the existing online platform to provide materials, hold discussions, and submit tasks. The tasks or instructions given can be very diverse, ranging from uploading videos to Instagram and doing quizzes on the website to making presentations through Ifolio.

For research question three on interaction in blended learning, two categories were analyzed: student-teacher interaction and student-student interaction. Findings highlight that blended learning enhances interactions with teachers and peers, boosting motivation, feedback, and a sense of community. A moderate positive correlation was found between learner-learner and learner-instructor interactions, while a high positive correlation was observed between learner-learner and learner-content interactions. The research also shows that blended learning facilitates communication and collaboration, effectively supporting discussions and collaborative tasks. Both interaction modes contribute to improving skills and a sense of belonging. Teachers observed that students were more active in online forums compared to face-to-face classes, indicating enhanced interaction and participation.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of increased interaction and collaboration among students and teachers in the context of blended learning. The research findings indicate that students engage in various forms of interaction in blended learning environments. They communicate with their classmates through social networks to solve educational problems and share useful materials. The study also reveals that the level of interaction among students varies based on personality types, with some students being active in groups while others are more passive. Additionally, some students exhibit a cooperative attitude, sharing summaries and explanations with other group members, thus improving the learning quality in online classes. However, due to time constraints, some students prefer to work on assignments individually, resulting in lower interaction with their classmates. The study underscores the importance of peer-to-peer interactions in facilitating discussions, collaborative tasks, and the development of a sense of belonging and mutual rapport among students. Overall, the



research highlights the diverse nature of student-student interactions in blended learning environments and their impact on collaborative learning experiences.

Regarding the fourth research question on the benefits of blended learning, findings indicate that it positively impacts students' academic performance. Studies showed that integrating technology through blended learning enhanced students' English engagement and proficiency. The post-test results revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in English competence, indicating a significant improvement in the student's language proficiency following the intervention. The findings also highlighted the effectiveness of blended learning in enhancing English competence, supported by normality and homogeneity tests indicating class equivalence and normal distribution for both groups. Additionally, the paired sample t-test results showed a significant difference between the pretest and post-test means, further supporting the positive impact of the blended learning program on language proficiency. The studies also showed that blended learning had a positive impact on students' grammar performance. The posttest mean of the experimental group was higher than the pretest mean of the control group, indicating that students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group. The adjusted means also showed a difference in favor of the experimental group, reflecting the positive impact of blended learning on students' grammar performance. The findings highlighted the effectiveness of integrating technology as a main part of the learning and teaching process, allowing students to learn in a motivating and inspiring way in accordance with their individual abilities.

The studies suggest further research to analyze program content, conduct action research on classroom practices, and address educators' resistance to change, highlighting opportunities for improving English engagement through blended learning. Blended learning offers non-academic benefits, such as easier access to materials, increased flexibility, better understanding through online activities, instant feedback and grading, improved productivity and time management, and enhanced student motivation. It facilitates active opinion expression, effective collaboration, and efficient time management. Students can access learning materials anytime and anywhere via downloadable platforms, allowing flexibility and reducing location constraints. This flexibility also aids in managing time effectively, enabling students to balance academic responsibilities with other commitments and improve productivity.

The fifth research question addresses the challenges in blended learning. Technical challenges include issues such as inadequate facilities, limited laptops, poor internet connections, and insufficient access to online materials, which affect lesson delivery. Teachers face difficulties due to a lack of technology experience, technical support, and training, while students struggle with slow internet and insufficient skills in using learning tools. Non-technical challenges involve changing roles, weak community building, insufficient training, unfamiliarity with new technologies, and time-consuming tasks like adapting content and managing instructional quality. Both teachers and students encounter obstacles related to technology use and adaptation, impacting the effectiveness and enjoyment of blended learning.

How the present study compares with the research by Altay & Altay. (2019)

This section compares the research with the review by Altay & Altay (2019). Both studies systematically reviewed recent articles on blended learning for EFL classes and reached similar



conclusions, noting that blended learning benefits teachers and students by facilitating material delivery and enhancing language proficiency. Both studies also identified challenges such as lack of training and unfamiliarity with new technologies. However, Altay & Altay focused solely on benefits, challenges, and implications, while this study examined perceptions, implementation, interaction, and a broader range of articles (30 from 2018-2023 vs. 10 from 2010-2015), offering a more comprehensive overview of blended learning for EFL classes.

Implications for future research

This systematic review suggests several areas for future research on blended learning in EFL classrooms: exploring the effectiveness of various blended learning models for different English skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking); investigating the impact on student motivation, engagement, and satisfaction; examining the role of teachers in facilitating student interaction and collaboration; addressing challenges such as technical issues, inadequate training, and resistance to change; and exploring blended learning's potential in enhancing intercultural communication among diverse EFL learners.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Blended learning is a teaching method that combines online and face-to-face instruction, which has been widely adopted in the EFL environment. This paper conducted a systematic review of 30 articles on blended learning in EFL classrooms, focusing on students' and teachers' perceptions, implementations, interactions, benefits, and challenges. The findings revealed that both students and teachers had positive attitudes and experiences with blended learning, as it enhanced their motivation, engagement, autonomy, collaboration, and satisfaction in learning English. Various online platforms, such as learning management systems, social media, online quizzes, and online video platforms, were used to support blended learning activities. Interaction was an important factor that influenced the effectiveness and quality of blended learning, as it facilitated communication, feedback, and social presence among learners and instructors. Blended learning also brought some benefits for EFL learners, such as improving their language proficiency, academic performance, and digital skills. However, some challenges and problems were also encountered in blended learning, such as technical issues, lack of training, time management, and learner readiness. Therefore, some practical suggestions for blended learning implementation in the EFL environment need to provide adequate technical support, training, infrastructure, and devices for teachers and students to effectively adopt blended learning. Moreover, the article emphasizes the need for ongoing research to explore innovative approaches, investigate the effectiveness of different online platforms, and provide evidence-based solutions. By fostering a supportive and adaptive environment, the educational community can maximize the benefits of blended learning, ensuring that it remains a dynamic and effective pedagogical approach in the ever-changing landscape of language education.



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