استكشاف خبرة مدرسي اللغة الانكليزية بوصفها لغة اجنبية في الجامعة في استخدام التعلم المدمج

Investigating University EFL Teachers' Experience in Using Blended Learning

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المستخلص

يستخدم التعلم المدمج في العديد من مجالات التعليم ، بما في ذلك تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية. ونظرًا لأن التعلم المدمج جديد إلى حد ما بالنسبة للمدرسين ، فقد واجه هؤلاء المدرسون بعض الصعوبات. تبحث الدراسة الحالية في تجربة مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية في الجامعة في استخدام التعلم المدمج في التدريس. يتم اتباع النهج النوعي في هذه الدراسة ، حيث يتم استخدام طريقة المقابلة كإجراء لجمع البيانات. تم إجراء مقابلات مع عشرة من مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية للتركيز على مزايا وعيوب ومشاكل التعلم المدمج، بالإضافة إلى اقتراحات المدرسيين المتعلقة بتحسين التعلم المدمج. تشير نتيجة الدراسة إلى أن المدرسين تأقلموا مع استخدام التعلم المدمج في تدريسهم بصورة جيدة وأن اقتراحاتهم تظهر ميلهم لمواصلة دعم استخدام هذا النوع من التعلم في المستقبل.

Abstract

Blended learning has been used in many fields of education, including teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Since Blended Learning is rather new for teachers, some difficulties have been faced by these teachers. The present research investigates university EFL teachers' experience in using Blended Learning in teaching. The qualitative approach is followed in this research where the interview method is used as a data collection procedure. Ten university EFL teachers have been interviewed focusing on the advantages, disadvantages, and problems of Blended Learning, in addition to teachers' suggestions concerning improving Blended Learning. The result of the research indicates that the teachers have coped with using Blended Learning in their teaching and their suggestions show their inclination to continue supporting the use of Blended Learning in future.

1. Introduction

Blended Learning (BL) refers to a mixed type of education where traditional learning, or face-to-face (F2F), is mixed with online learning. The quick advancements in Information Technology in all fields of life, and especially in language learning and teaching, have imposed an important role on the incorporation of online learning into F2F learning to make use of the various advantages that Information Technology offers in the field of language learning and teaching.

Teachers play a very important role in the process of learning. Their feedback can highly contribute to the development of any syllabus in the field of education, especially in BL. Of particular interest to the present study is the mixing between online and F2F education in the field of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning and teaching. The focus of the present research is to explore EFL teachers' experience in using BL in teaching at the university level.

2. Defining Blended Learning

Different terms have been used for BL, though all of them refer, more or less to the same thing. BL has been called "mixed mode learning", "hybrid learning", "combined learning" and "integrated learning" (Mackinven, 2015:5). Although the most common terms that exit in the literature are "blended" and "hybrid", the former has gained more popularity among educationalists (Stein & Graham, 2014:14).

BL is also defined as learning that contains both distance learning and traditional F2F teaching (Kern, 2011:206). BL also includes the introduction of online media with F2F learning (Macdonald, 2008:2). For others, BL is the combination of different learning forms using technology resources with traditional F2F learning (Richards & Schmidt, 2010:58). Another view of BL focuses on the role of computers in supplementing learning (Graham, 2012:5). Finally, the

web has been referred to as an aid to BL that assists both learning and teaching, creating new chances of interactions between teachers and students (Vaughan, 2015:159). It is worth mentioning that the distance learning component includes the utilization of some sort of online meeting tools like Google Meet, Zoom, and Skype.

3. Statement of the Problem

The application of BL is rather new for teachers in the field of EFL. EFL teachers have faced different difficulties in implementing BL in their teaching. Thus, the present research attempts to address these difficulties through examining the teachers' experience in using BL, especially in using online teaching and incorporating it with traditional F2F.

4. Research Aim

The present research aims to explore university EFL teachers' experience in using BL for teaching at university level. More specifically, it tries to shed some light on how EFL teachers view BL as a tool for teaching.

5. Research Questions

The present research attempts to discover the experience that EFL teachers have gained through using BL. More specifically, this research raises the following questions:

1. What are the advantages of BL?

2. What are the disadvantages of BL?

3. What are the problems of BL?

4. What are the EFL teachers' suggestions to improve BL?

6. Research Design

In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative model of research is adopted. A semi-structured interview has been constructed addressing university EFL teachers. The following subsections present details of the methodology followed in this research.

6.1 The Interview

The interview is a type of data collection procedure. It is defined as a method of data collection where the researcher/interviewer asks the subjects/interviewees some questions related to the research being investigated. The researcher can conduct the interview face-to-face, or using the phone or by the internet (Christensen et al., 2020:35). The present research utilizes the semi-structured type of interview which is considered the most common type of interview. In this type of interview, some pre-prepared questions are constructed by the researcher; these questions are open ended. The main advantage of this type is that the interviewee is not limited to any specific answer and can add details to the topic of the interview (see Dörnyei, 2007:135).

6.2 Interview Construction

Constructing an interview involves three steps. The first step is to determine the interviewees. The second step is to prepare the interview. The third step is to conduct the interview (see Frey, 2022:728).

6.2.1 Determining the Interviewees

The first step in the construction of an interview is to determine the interviewees. The present semi-structured interview targets university EFL teachers who have used online and BL teaching in the academic year 2020-2021 (due to COVID-19 Pandemic). Ten university EFL teachers are interviewed. Their ages range between 33-56 years. All of them work at departments of English.

6.2.2 Preparing the Interview

Step two deals with the aims of the interview. These aims include identifying the main tendencies of the EFL teachers in their use of BL in teaching. These comprise identifying the advantages and disadvantages of BL; discovering any problems faced by the EFL teachers when they have implemented BL; and eliciting any suggestions that these EFL teachers may have to improve the use of BL in the future (see Appendix A).

6.2.3 Conducting the Interview

Step three is related to conducting the interview. A one-to-one interview method is used in which the researcher interviews each interviewee alone. An appointment has been set with each interviewee. The interviewees have been given a chance to read the questions in advance. The following information has been collected: name, age, gender, academic title, place of work and number of teaching experience years. Each interviewee has been interviewed in their place of work. The average duration of the interviews is about 15 minutes.

7. Analysis and Results

The analysis of the interview is categorized into the following: 1. Advantages of BL, 2. Disadvantages of BL, 3. Problems Encountered in using BL, 4. Suggestions for improving BL.

7.1 Advantages of BL

The interviewees agree upon the following advantages of BL:

1. Economy of time (no need to go to college in online lecture), and economy of effort on the part of the student (no need to take notes), and financial economy (for both teacher and student).

2. More comfortable setting for both teacher and student and the availability of a variety of platforms.

3. Useful for the teacher (no need to repeat the lecture).

4. Availability of many useful resources (like contact with native speakers, videos, audio, etc.).

5. Improving students' comprehension; students can listen to a variety of resources when online.

6. Flexibility of the online lecture time; it can be allocated at a convenient time for both the teacher and the students.

7.2 Disadvantages of BL

As for the disadvantages of BL, the interviewees believe that BL has the following disadvantages:

1. Ease of cheating in exams (in the online lecture).

2. Poor internet service.

3. Location inconvenience for some students.

4. Writing skill cannot be developed in the online lecture.

5. Students drop out in the online lecture.

6. Insufficient control of the teacher over the students, no direct contact, and lack of individual support.

7.3 Problems Encountered in Using BL

Most of the interviewees have faced one or more of the following problems when they used BL:

1. Electricity failure and lack of proper internet connection signal.

2. Some assignments are not delivered to some students due to problems in their devices.

3. Lack of Information Technology knowledge concerning the use of devices and software (both on the part of teachers and students).

4. Time consuming on the part of the teachers in preparing the online lecture.

5. Some students hesitate to participate in the online lecture.

7.4 Suggestions for Improving BL

Having used BL for a while, the interviewees think that the following suggestions may improve BL:

1. Preplanning for each component of BL (i.e. the online and the F2F components).

2. Taking special courses on computers and software related to online education.

3. Setting a person responsible for e-learning in the corresponding department.

4. Exams need to be exclusively F2F.

5. Conducting some further research on BL to assess its usefulness.

6. Varying instructional material and assessment.

7. Oral skills are better given online.

8. BL is recommended for higher education.

8. Discussion

The analysis of the interviewees' responses reveals that EFL teachers have got enough experience to deal with the subject of using BL. As far as research question One (see section 5 above), all EFL teachers are aware of the advantages that BL has offered them in their teaching, especially in regard to economy of time, effort and financial economy. Most of the teachers agreed upon the benefits of the online component where the use of the Internet resources facilitates access to unlimited resources like audio and video files. This last point has also been related to improving the students' comprehension skill since the students get to listen more when they are online or when they use the Internet.

As for question number Two, i.e. the disadvantages of BL, the teachers are aware that there are certain areas within BL that need to be dealt with carefully. This includes dealing with examinations. All teachers agreed that examinations need to be F2F rather than online to avoid cheating. Another point that is referred to by teachers is related to the writing skill which cannot be developed when using the online lecture. Finally, a major disadvantage referred to by the teachers is the lack of direct contact in the online lecture which may cause insufficient control of the teacher over the students.

Research question Three is related to the problems encountered during the teachers' use of BL. The teachers agreed upon the urgent need of proper infra-structure in order for BL to be successful. They highlighted some problems related to poor internet service and lack of IT knowledge. In addition, the teachers complained about preparing for the online lecture which takes much of their time and effort.

Finally, in relation to research question Four, the teachers suggest that a successful BL results from a good planning for the components of BL, i.e. online and F2F. They feel that most of the problems that they have

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encountered in BL can be addressed by conducting further research to examine teachers' and students' needs as far as BL is concerned. The teachers' interesting suggestions to improve the use of BL indicate their willingness to continue support using BL in future.

9. Conclusion

The present research has focused on investigating university EFL teachers' experience in using BL in teaching. The qualitative approach is adopted by using the semi-structured type of interview as a data collection method. The results of the interview analysis show that the university EFL teachers have found that using BL in teaching the subject is useful with many advantages. The suggestions of the interviewees indicate their willingness to advance the use of BL and to further support it in the future. This is especially true when we view the last suggestion related to using BL in higher education, which is something that has been suggested by many educationalists in the field advocating the idea that BL may very well suits adults since it supports autonomous learning.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview

Teachers' Experience in Using Blended Learning (BL)

Q1. Which features of BL do you consider as advantageous?

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Q2. Which features of BL do you consider as disadvantageous?

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Q3. Have you encountered any problems in teaching in a BL environment? If yes, what are they?

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Q4. Do you have any suggestions?

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