# A Study of Attitudes of Students towards Blended Learning, Iraqi Case

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**Abstract:** It has been searched for years which system or method in foreign language teaching may contribute to enhance students' language acquisition. Most of these systems or methods have based on performing with an instructor in a classroom. Even though many disciplines have been acted just in classroom for ages, new methods have emerged that consolidate traditional methods by means of the evolvement in technologic areas. One of these models is "blended learning", also known as "hybrid learning", which is the combination of face to face learning and online learning in a formal program. The purpose of this study is to find out the attitudes of students that use blended learning in private secondary schools. The researcher composed a survey questionnaire and the results were analyzed based on quantitative method.

**Keywords:** Attitudes of Students, Blended Learning, Hybrid Learning, Face to Face Learning, Online Learning

*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."*

*-Nelson Mandela*

## 1. Introduction

Human beings have gradually evolved the methods in education system according as the requirements of the present time. The rapid changes in technology have divulged the deficiencies in traditional education system; therefore, this has manipulated the educators to discover new ways to meet new necessities that have emerged in education, or not to fall beyond technologic innovations. Mostly developed countries have made quite effort to adapt their systems to the evolutions in technology and implement contemporary techniques to fulfill the needs of different types of learners. Regarding the current methods used in education offered by technology, "blended learning" is one of the remarkable modus in language teaching.

Elliot Masie claims that "people are not single-method learners!" and "we are, as a species, blended learners" (Carman, 2005, p.1). Since lack of various learning/teaching systems in past, learners likely used to tend to feel less motivated or supported in a class atmosphere or just single-type learning modus might not be sufficient to activate the students necessarily to practice what they learnt in the classroom. Due to the improvement of the learning technology year by year, instructors have embarked on new systems/methods to diversify the learning/teaching methods.

**1.1 What is Blended Learning**

Blended learning generally alludes to "a combination of online and face-to-face teaching" (Sharp, Benfield, Roberts, & Francis 2006 cited in Mason & Rennie, 2007, p.8). It was described as "one of the top trends to emerge in the knowledge delivery industry" by the American Society for training and Development (Graham, 2006, p.1). There are different types of definitions about "blended learning"; however, the most common three definitions were remarked by Graham, Allen, and Ure (2003). These are:

a) "combining instructional modalities (or delivery media)"
b) "combining instructional methods"
c) "combining online and face-to-face instruction" (Graham, 2006, p.4)

Graham (2006) advocates the first two definitions are very broad because of the fact that they do not include virtually all learning systems and also they do not reflect the essence of blended learning properly. The last definition seems more proper since it mirrors the periods of the development of blended learning systems.

Distributed learning mostly indicates the divergence of time and space between the instructor and the learner (Mason & Rennie, 2006). When analyzing the historical development of blended learning in Graham's study (2006), it can be apparently seen that face-to-face learning and distributed learning were entirely separate from each other since they had different means and the needs of different learners in past. Whereas face to face learning based on person-to-person interaction, distributed learning asserted "self-paced learning and learning-materials interactions" (p.5).

Whilst it was impossible to have "synchronous or high fidelity " communication in the distributed learning because of the limitations in digital learning technologies, the rapid innovations in technology in the last half century enable the face-to-face learning elements converge distributed learning elements (Graham, 2006, p.5). It is possible to state that the level of integration of these typical learning methods will increase in future with the advancement of learning technologies.

Kim (2007) describes blended learning as "a combination of two or more of all possible learning types" and he proceeds in his study with the following:

> At least one of the learning types must be a physical class-based type (regardless of whether there is a course-schedule; or whether it is formal; or whether there is face-to-face interaction outside the physical classroom), and at least one other learning type must be e-learning type (regardless of whether there is a class schedule or a course-schedule; or whether it is formal; or whether there is face-to-face interaction outside the physical classroom).This is to make sure blended learning remains a combination of some form of traditional learning and some form of eLearning (p.4).

In blended learning system, there should be classroom learning and computer-mediated learning synchronously and this type of learning includes a variety of learning kits. It is possible to state that

blended learning system integrates the high facilities of traditional learning method and the positive contributes of computer-mediated learning method.

## 1.2 Why Blended Learning

Reed and Singh (2001) explain blended learning as 'linking traditional classroom training to eLearning activities', and indicate 'Dimensions of the Blended' in their study. They assert that the term 'blended' has embodied different learning strategy aspects and blended learning may join more than one 'dimensions' such as 'blended offline and online learning, blended self-paced and live, collaborative learning, blended structured and unstructured learning' etc. Furthermore, they claim that there are more advantages of blended learning than single-type learning can supply. Some of the significant ones (p.2):

a) 'Improved Learning Effectiveness': Some studies at the University of Tennessee and Stanford prove that blended learning method enhances learning outcomes because it offers the learner a better combination of the learner's learning style and the selected learning program.
b) 'Extending the Reach': While traditional learning system (face-to-face) put some constraints for the learners to reach the knowledge because of the fixed time and location, computer-based classroom enables the access to reach the knowledge for the ones who could not participate the classroom physically at a fixed time.
c) 'Optimizing Development Cost and Time': Convergence of various delivery modes may enhance the learning program development and be more effective in terms of cost and time.

Different types of learners may find opportunity to attain the material in different modes with a blended delivery system and also blended learning acts as an alteration from passive to active learning (Hancock &Wong, 2012, cited in Kaur, 2013). One of the most crucial role of the instructors shall be the diversification in his/her teaching methods and avoid the students from the monotony of single-type system. Therefore, the signifigance of blending the different delivery modes emerges at this point.

## 1. 3 Purpose of the Study

In this study, K12 learners were evaulated and it was chosen a private school that apply blended learning as demo this year. In this school, students and teachers can communicate with each other in forum page. Students can find more classroom activities, ask about homework, report on projects, and take part in English discussions. Teachers to students or students to students can message within their Online Practice class. Thus, they can find opportunities to use their language skills. Their achievements are graded automatically in the online system and the instructors check their students' progress regularly.

This study sought to find out the answers for the followings:

1. The level of students' satisfaction with blended learning;
2. To evaulate the sufficiency of technological equipment.

## 2. Methodology

## 2.1 Design of the Study

The researcher developed a number of survey questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly Agree-5 to Strongly Disagree-1'. The items on the questionnaire were based on the attitudes of the students towards blended learning (from specific to general), and the sufficiency of technological equipment that they have at their home.

## 2.2 Participants

The questionnaire was distributed to 75 students from a private secondary school randomly and 71 of the participants completed the questionnaire.
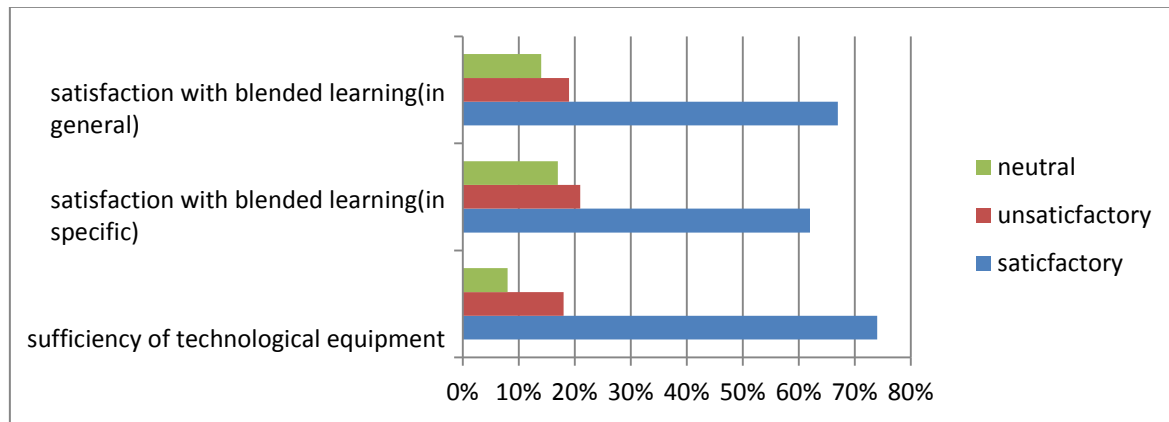
## 2.3 Findings and Results



Figure 1: Percentage of the students' satisfaction with blended learning system

While % 74 of the participants indicated that they have no Internet access problem for the online courses, % 18 has revealed they have problem with Internet access, and % 8 has no idea.  % 80 of them has sufficient equipment such as laptop, desktop, speaker, headphone, etc.; however, % 8 stated they have no necessary equipment, and % 12 rated neutral for this item. For online sessions, students should not have any drawbacks that hinder to access learning material; otherwise blended learning system may not perform effectively.

% 63 participants have the idea that they improved four skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking) in English after blended system, but % 23 has neutral; % 14 is in negative side.

% 64 students claim their access and usage of information has increased due to the blended learning while % 9 is neutral and % 27 is in negative side. The numbers of students who have negative response for this item are considerable to analyze the underlying causes.

While approximately % 60 explained that they have more opportunities to reflect on what they've learned in blended courses, understand course requirements better in an blended course, and their understanding of classroom course material has increased, almost % 19 of them are hesitant, and nearly %21 indicated negative idea. The numbers of the students who believe that they have no benefit from blended system in terms of practice what they have learnt, and comprehending the course material effectively are not inconsiderable to recheck the system's weaknesses.

Almost % 67 respondents are generally satisfied with blended learning, and they indicated they are more motivated to succeed whereas %14 is negative, and % 19 is undecided. The resulting data shows that the majority of the learners are positive to blended learning in terms of motivation and general satisfactory.

The last but not least point is the majority of the participants (%73) who are not satisfied with blended learning system consist of the students who have technological deficiencies required for this type of learning. It is possibly to indicate that if they are provided with the technological equipment necessarily, the level of satisfaction may increase.

## 3. Discussion and Conclusion

Satisfaction of the students in course design with blended learning may be a key factor to operate the system effectively. Therefore, the learners should accept and internalize the method that they practice. If they feel that they are supported and encouraged with a suitable course design to stimulate them to continue learning process, the majority of the learners' motivation may increase to attain the learning outcomes and they may make more efforts to get a degree. It is probably to state that the proceeding of learning process is mostly based on the learners' demand; hence, in order to provide the necessities of all learner types, the designed course with blended system should be planned in detail and checked regularly to fix the possible problems on time that may be drawbacks to perform the system efficiently. Instructors to learners/learners to instructors' inefficient interaction, instructors' poor guidance, or technological deficiencies should not be the obstacles to operate the system accurately. Referred to the students' satisfaction percentage, blended learning modus gives the learners opportunities to practice the course material in more flexible and relaxed atmosphere out of the formal class.

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