Online and Face-to-Face Instructions Interplay and Language Learning: Instructors' and Learners' Perspective

Parisa Abazari (iD)

Department of English Language and Literature, University of Tehran, Iran.
parisa.abazari@ut.ac.ir

Abbas Ali Rezaee (iD) (Corresponding Author)

Department of English Language and Literature, University of Tehran, Iran
aarezaee@ut.ac.ir

Nasrin Bahraini (iD)

Department of English Language and Literature, University of Tehran, Iran
nbahrainy@ut.ac.ir
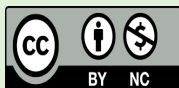
Abstract

Blended learning (BL) is being increasingly utilized in teaching and learning languages, therefore, carrying out this study in view of the lack of studies on BL within the Iranian EFL context is very significant. The study conducted at the English Department of Karaj Islamic Azad University provides valuable insights into how instructors and learners perceive the interplay between blended, online, and face-to-face (F2F) instructions. A mixed methods design has been applied to the study. 410 learners, studying English translation, and 46 university instructors responded to a Likert-type questionnaire and an open-ended one and 10 of them were interviewed. The findings revealed that, by incorporating both traditional classroom instruction and online learning tools, students can benefit from a more personalized and interactive learning experience. This approach can also help educators adapt their teaching methods to better meet the needs of diverse learners. In terms of educational policies, there may be a need for increased support and resources for implementing BL modules in language education. Additionally, language teaching programs may need to be revised to include more digital resources and tools to enhance language learning outcomes. Overall, the integration of BL in language classes can lead to more effective and engaging language education practices.

Introduction

In recent decades, higher education teaching and learning methods have evolved significantly due to advancements in information technology, such as Web applications, mobile phones, and telecommunications (Tang & Chaw, 2013). The use of mobile-connected tools allows learners to connect with others instantly and access information continuously. This enables teachers to blend onsite and online instructional activities to enhance the learning experience (Stein & Graham, 2014). According to Tang and Chaw (2013), BL meets the needs of modern learners by providing a suitable platform that caters to diverse learning styles. By combining traditional classroom instruction with online activities, BL can improve student engagement, motivation, and reflective abilities, creating a personalized and interactive learning environment (Pardede, 2019). BL has indeed been shown to be a valuable and effective method of teaching in various studies. These studies highlight the benefits of BL in providing additional learning opportunities, improving learner motivation, and fostering independence among students. The findings suggest that BL can offer a more engaging and community-oriented learning experience compared to traditional face-to-face or fully online methods (Tayebinik & Puteh, 2013).

According to Albiladi and Alshareef (2019), English language learners generally have favorable attitudes towards the use of blended learning in English teaching. In Iran, language teachers have made efforts to incorporate technology into their face-to-face teaching. For example, a study by Ghahari and Ameri-Golestan (2014) found that participants in a blended learning group, who received traditional writing instruction along with web-based learning, showed improved writing performance. Another study indicated that blended learning instruction positively affected linguistic diversity and density in both speech and writing. Therefore, when attention was given to productive skills, the advantages of BL instruction over F2F were revealed in the results obtained (Shooshtari & Hosseinimehr, 2020) The gap in addressing BL within the Iranian context adequately, particularly in the realm of English as a foreign language highlighted the need for further research and exploration to better understand how BL can be effectively implemented and optimized in EFL education in Iran. This awareness can lead to valuable insights and improvements in language teaching practices, ultimately benefiting both instructors and learners in the Iranian educational landscape.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Definitions of BL

The phrase blended learning (BL) has different definitions, as different scholars associate various contents with it. According to Bonk and Graham (2012), BL combines traditional F2F instruction with computer-based instruction. According to Thorne (2003), BL is the logical and natural progression of our learning agenda. It allows combining online instruction with the interaction and participation that traditional instruction provides. Rovai and Jordan (2004) similarly describe BL as a combination of online and F2F instructions, combining some features of online instruction with F2F communication.

1.2. Critical Components of Designing BL

Several important concepts should be considered when designing a BL class, including how to combine synchronous and asynchronous interactions, how to schedule learning time, and how to utilize the right technologies (Stein & Graham, 2014). According to Kim (2007), for designing a BL program the goals and scope of the program should be defined first, then all relevant issues should be analyzed to identify potential problems, and finally, the outcomes of the program should be evaluated. Designing an effective BL course is not easy because it requires new skills and more preparation time, according to Graham, et al., (2005). Also, as Garrison and Kanuka (2004) noted, it requires administrators and instructors to rethink, redesign, and think differently about their instructional approaches to support BL. Moreover, to get the best results from BL, a high level of enthusiasm, energy, and commitment is needed to move from the theory to the reality of implementing real learning solutions tailored to individual needs (Thorne, 2003).

1.3. BL in EFL Classes

The educational system and environment for English language learning and teaching, whether EFL or ESL, have changed and need to follow modern developments in education and technology (Akbarov, 2018). Therefore, BL has been the focus of many research studies that investigate the use and the effectiveness of BL in the ESL/EFL context (Adas & Bakir, 2013;)Several academic and social benefits of using this teaching approach have been identified. For instance, Marsh (2012) mentions that the use of BL can provide many benefits to language learners over traditional teaching approaches, including developing language learners' autonomy, providing more individualized language support, promoting collaborative learning, increasing students' interaction and engagement, providing opportunities to practice the language beyond the class settings, and improving the language skills of language learners. English language learning through BL can provide learners with a variety of instructional activities and enhance their learning experience through the use of social media (Simbolon, 2021). Moreover, BL can enable language learners to practice language outside the classroom by providing them with access to online resources and tools that they can use at their own pace and convenience. Learners in addition can engage in interactive language exercises, watch instructional videos, participate in online language forums, and even have virtual conversations with native speakers. This flexibility allows learners to continue practicing and improving their language skills outside of traditional classroom hours (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019; Ghazi Zadeh & Fatemipour, 2017; Tosun, 2015). Finally, BL can provide instant feedback and personalized learning experiences, which can help learners track their progress and focus on areas that need improvement in real-world contexts beyond the classroom.

1.4. Perceptions towards BL

An analysis of students' perceptions and attitudes toward a blended learning course for learning English revealed that students are generally satisfied with blended learning (Jaashan, 2015). In another study, 120 EFL learners at a Saudi Arabian college were surveyed about their perceptions of integrating blended learning into their English classes. It was found that blended learning is a stimulating, interactive, and independent learning environment. In addition,

blended learning was seen as an effective method for promoting learner interaction, autonomy, and interest. The majority of participants in another study believed that blended learning can provide an alternative to long classroom sessions, but it requires some prerequisites such as a good plan and a good internet connection (Bukhari & Basaffar, 2019). In a study pre-service EFL teachers' perception of BL was investigated. The findings revealed the participants had generally positive attitudes towards BL. Online learning was also appreciated by participants, not only because it offers convenience, flexibility, and immediate access, but also because their engagement and independence, as well as their technical development, are increased (Pardede, 2019).

The current study is an attempt to investigate EFL university instructors' and learners' perceptions towards F2F, online, and blended instructions in EFL classes. Moreover, it seeks to see how online and F2F instructions can interplay with each other to bring about more effective language learning. To be more exact, the present study intends to investigate the following research questions.

1. What are EFL university professors' perceptions towards face-to-face, online, and blended learning/teaching in EFL classes?

2. What are EFL university learners' perceptions towards face-to-face, online, and blended learning/teaching in EFL classes?

3. How online and face-to-face learning can interplay with each other to bring about more effective blended learning?

2. Method

A mixed methods design has been utilized in this study, as it allows for the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data to offer a more comprehensive analysis of the research problem at hand. It also involves the concurrent collection of qualitative and quantitative data and then merging them. By combining the strengths of both research methods, the study can provide a deeper understanding and richer insights into how blended learning is perceived and experienced within the Iranian EFL context. This approach enhances the validity and reliability of the findings, ultimately contributing to a more robust and nuanced exploration of the topic.

2.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 410 males and females EFL students of Karaj Azad University and 46 EFL university instructors from the same university. The total number of participants in the study was 456. The sample was selected using purposive sampling because it is based on personal judgment and the purpose of the study. All participants were informed about the study's objectives and provided their consent before taking part in it. Further information about the participants is provided in the following table.

Table 1. *Demographic Information of the Students Taking Part in the Study*

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
N		410	
Gender	Male	85	20.7
	Female	325	79.3
Age	>20	16	3.9
	20-25	353	86.1
	26-30	26	6.3
	30<	15	3.7
Years of English Learning	>5	158	38.5
	5-10	183	44.6
	10<	64	15.6
Proficiency Level	Elementary (A1)	16	3.9
	Pre-intermediate (A2)	38	9.3
	Intermediate (B1)	143	34.9
	Upper-intermediate (B2)	138	33.7
	Advanced (C1)	75	18.3

Table 2. *Demographic Information of the Instructors Taking Part in the Study*

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
N		46	
Gender	Male	11	23.9
	Female	35	76.1
Age	20-26	3	6.5
	26-30	4	8.7
	31-35	10	21.7
	36-40	17	37.0
	41-45	7	15.2
	46-50	3	6.5
	50<	2	4.3
Major	TEFL	37	80.4
	English Translation	2	4.3
	English Literature	5	10.9
	Others	2	4.3
Degree	Ph.D. Candidate	32	69.6
	Ph.D.	14	30.4
Years of Teaching Experience	5-10	17	37.0
	11-15	15	32.6
	16-20	9	19.6
	More than 20	5	10.9

2.2. Instruments

In this study, all the research instruments were developed by the researchers to generate data relevant to the guiding research questions.

- *Likert-type questionnaire* as a quantitative instrument
- *Open-ended questionnaire* as a qualitative instrument
- *Interviewing* as a contributor to complement the questionnaires

The use of a triangulation method in this study, which involves multiple methods to validate data collection instruments, is a sound approach to minimize bias that may arise from relying solely on one methodology. The questionnaires, developed by the researchers and tested through piloting, were self-administered to the 456 participants. The open-ended questionnaire consisted of four items, including an open-ended statement and three WH questions that prompted respondents to share their thoughts and insights in their own words and with as much detail as they desired.

The Likert scale, a five-point scale used to gauge participants' level of agreement or disagreement with each statement, was employed in the questionnaire answered by 410 learners. The questionnaire comprised four sections: the first section gathered general information about the respondents, such as gender, age, English learning experience, and proficiency level. The subsequent sections focused on F2F learning, eight statements, blended learning, twelve statements, and online learning, fifteen statement.

The qualitative interviews conducted with 10 EFL instructors provided a deeper understanding of their perceptions towards online, F2F, and BL and their interplay. These interviews complemented the findings from the questionnaire and offered valuable insights into the topic under investigation. The semi-structured nature of the interviews, with a few predetermined general questions, allowed the instructors to elaborate on their thoughts and experiences, shedding light on the nuances of their perspectives.

The qualitative validity of semi-structured interview questions and open-ended questions was assessed by evaluating their trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility (Creswell, 2014). As part of qualitative validation, coding data, interpreting themes, conducting all data transcripts, and organizing data for analysis were also performed in this study (Creswell, 2014).

The quantitative validity of the data gathered from the Likert-type questionnaire was checked through an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in which the psychometric features of the inventory were checked for both internal consistency and construct validity. In the case of the qualitative part of the analysis where NVivo software was used, the inter-coder technique of coding was implemented to ensure the researchers of the reliability and validity issues. The questionnaires were administered to a small sample of participants to identify any potential issues with wording, response options, or overall design.

2.3. Procedures

The researchers began by selecting the study topic and identifying the appropriate population and samples for their study. They then developed the study dimensions based on a review of existing literature. Questionnaires, including Likert-type and open-ended questions, were designed, and piloted, and after verifying the validity and reliability of the designed questionnaires and obtaining the participants' permission, they were administered to the participants. Data collection occurred in three phases, involving answering 35 Likert-type questions by 410 learners, taking about 20 minutes, and 4 open-ended questions by all the participants, taking about 10 minutes. Finally, one of the researchers interviewed 10 of the instructors, asking semi-structured questions for about 30 minutes in different sessions, and recorded the interviews for further analysis. Quantitative data was collected through the Likert-

type questionnaire, while qualitative data was gathered through open-ended questions and interviews with instructors. The gathered data was analyzed, and the results were reported.

3. Results

To analyze the data, quantitatively and qualitatively, both SPSS, version 21, and NVivo software were used. To analyze the data, EFA, descriptive statistics, and one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) in SPSS were used, within which both reliability and validity issues were taken into account and reported. All research questions were thematically analyzed and coded according to EFL university instructors' and learners' perceptions towards F2F, online, and BL instructions in EFL classes.

3.1. Investigation of the First Research Question

To answer the first research question investigating EFL university instructors' perceptions towards F2F, online, and BL instructions in EFL classes, the responses from the interviews and open-ended questionnaire were submitted to NVivo software to be thematically analyzed, and the themes as well as the subthemes derived are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. *EFL Instructors' Perceptions Towards Face-to-Face Instruction*

The themes and sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Face-to-Face		
Positive Perceptions		
Direct interaction	16	47.05
The most effective	4	11.76
The best	4	11.76
Direct feedback	2	5.88
Better transferring the ideas	2	5.88
The most practical	1	2.94
More motivating	1	2.94
More reliable learning	1	2.94
More active students	1	2.94
Better classroom management	1	2.94
Negative Perceptions		
Traditional	1	2.94
Total	34	100

As shown in Table 3, the university instructors mostly had a positive perception regarding the direct interaction an F2F class causes (16 references; i.e. 47.05%). The effectiveness of the F2F instruction as the most efficient module (4 references; 11.76%), and also the best module to be used (4 references 11.76%), were the next most mentioned ideas. Moreover, there were two references made to the direct feedback it involves (2 references; i.e. 5.88%) and also better transferring the ideas (2 references; i.e. 5.88%). Opinions like being the most practical and more motivating as well as leading to more reliable learning, more active students, and better classroom management are the ones referred to only once (1 reference; i.e. 2.94%). Being traditional, however, was the only negative perception towards F2F instruction referred to only once (1 reference; i.e. 2.94%).

Table 4. *EFL Instructors' Perceptions Towards Online Instruction*

The themes and sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Online		
Positive Perceptions		
Solving the problem of time and distance	4	13.33
Efficient in special situations	3	10
More advantageous	1	3.33
More beneficial	1	3.33
Easier running of the classes	1	3.33
More information provided	1	3.33
Negative Perceptions		
Lack of facilities	8	26.66
Not sure of the learners' presence	3	10
Not a good digital literacy	1	3.33
Not a natural learning process	1	3.33
Hard to motivate students	1	3.33
Only a complementary tool	1	3.33
More teacher contribution	1	3.33
Difficult or impossible to establish rapport	1	3.33
Difficult classroom management	1	3.33
Lack of real understanding	1	3.33
Total	30	100

EFL instructors' perceptions of online instruction were also coded and the outcomes are reported in Table 4. As shown in this table, they most referred to positive aspect of the online instructional module because the module can solve the problem of time and distance (4 references; i.e. 13.33%) followed by being efficient in special situations (3 references; i.e. 10%). Other perceptions, such as being more advantageous and more beneficial, making easier running of the classes possible as well as providing the opportunity to provide more information were the ideas each one referred to only once (i.e. 3.33%).

The most negative aspects of online instruction from the EFL instructors' viewpoints are the lack of facilities mentioned eight times (i.e. 26.66%) and not being sure of the learners' presence referred to three times (i.e. 10%). Other disadvantages raised only once (i.e. 3.33%) were lack of good digital literacy, lack of a natural learning process, lack of real understanding, being hard to motivate students, being only a complementary tool, difficulty in managing the classroom, and being difficult or impossible to establish rapport, and involving more teacher contribution.

Table 5. *EFL Instructors' Perceptions Towards Blended Instruction*

The themes and sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Blended Learning		
Positive Perceptions		
The most beneficial	7	26.92
The most preferred	5	19.23
A comprehensive type of learning	4	15.38
The best in the modern world	1	3.84
Practical	1	3.84
More reliable learning	1	3.84
More manageable	1	3.84
More effective than online	1	3.84
Meeting the needs of all types of students	1	3.84
Good for schools with no facilities	1	3.84
Negative Perceptions		
Lack of appropriate facilities	2	7.69
Lack of digital literacy	1	3.84
Total	26	100

BL instruction merits from the EFL instructors' perceptions were that the module is the most beneficial (7 references; i.e. 26.92%), the most preferred (5 references; i.e. 19.23%), and a comprehensive type of instruction (4 references; i.e. 15.38%). Being the best in the modern world, being practical, more manageable, and more effective than online instruction, good for schools with no facilities, providing a more reliable way of learning, and meeting the needs of all types of students were the other good points of BL instruction each one cited once (i.e. 3.84%).

According to the findings regarding the negative aspects of BL classes, on the other hand, only a lack of appropriate facilities (referred to twice; i.e. 7.69%) and a lack of digital literacy (referred to once; i.e. 3.84%) were pointed out by three participants.

As a result, to provide a comprehensive conclusion for the research question regarding EFL university instructors' perceptions towards F2F, online, and BL instructions in EFL classes, it can be said that in EFL instructors' opinion, the most problematic instructional module is that of online followed by BL, and the best module is that of F2F for only one reference was made to only one disadvantage of the module, while the online instructional module received many negative viewpoints.

3.2. Investigation of the Second Research Question (Learners' Perceptions)

Investigating EFL university learners' perceptions towards F2F, online and BL instructions in EFL classes was another concern of the current study. To collect the required data, 410 university learners were asked to complete the following three sentence completion tasks of the open-ended questionnaire:

1. Face-to-face learning is …
2. Online learning is …
3. Blended learning is …

The results of coding the responses through the NVivo software are reported in Tables 6, 7, and 8.

Table 6. *EFL Learners' Perceptions Towards Face-to-Face Instruction*

The themes and sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Face-to-Face		
Positive Perceptions		
Better than online classes	65	15.77
Good	50	12.13
Better learning	41	9.95
More effective	37	8.98
The best	33	8.00
More interaction	25	6.06
More interesting	20	4.85
More Useful	19	4.61
Good for special courses	4	.97
More improvement	4	.97
Perfect	4	.97
Better teaching instructions	3	.72
Easier to ask questions	3	.72
More motivating for students	3	.72
Better collaboration	2	.48
Preferable	2	.48
Less distracting	1	.24
More active participation of students	1	.24
More convenient	1	.24
More practical	1	.24
Negative Perceptions		
More stressful	22	5.33
Not good	19	4.61
Time-consuming	17	4.12
Too traditional	17	4.12
Boring	11	2.66
Not flexible	3	.72
Less productive	2	.48
Demotivating	1	.24
Not effective	1	.24
Total	412	100

Table 6 displays those 65 references (i.e. 15.77%) were made to the fact that F2F instruction is a better instructional module than the online form. In addition, participants referred to the module as being good (50 references; i.e. 12.13%), a better way of learning (41 references; i.e. 9.95%), more effective (37 references; i.e. 8.98%), the best method (33 references; i.e. 8.00%), containing more interaction (25 references; i.e. 6.06%), more interesting (20 references; i.e. 4.85%), and more useful (19 references; i.e. 4.61%). According to a few references (4 references; i.e. .97%), the F2F module is only good for some special courses, leading to more improvement, and is a perfect way of learning. Participants also mentioned that in the F2F classes, better teaching instructions are provided, it is easier for them to ask their questions, and they are more motivated to learn (each one 3 references; i.e. .72%). Two other references (2 references; i.e. .48%) were made to the point that better collaboration happens in such classes and therefore, they prefer this kind of class. The least positive references were made to the points that the classes are less distracting, more convenient and practical as well as causing more active participation of students (each one once; i.e. .24%).

In contrast, 22 (i.e. 5.33%) participants raised the issue that F2F classes are more stressful, 19 (i.e. 4.61%) said that they are not good, 17 (i.e. 4.12%) believed in the classes as being time-consuming and too traditional, and 11 (i.e. 2.66%) cited them as being boring. Moreover, not being flexible (mentioned 3 times; i.e. .72%), less productive (raised twice; i.e. .48%), demotivating, and not effective were the other participants' viewpoints each one referred to only once (i.e. .24%).

Table 7. *EFL Learners' Perceptions Towards Online Instruction*

The themes and sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Online		
Positive Perceptions		
Easy	57	12.28
Good	55	11.85
Time & energy saving	55	11.85
Very good	33	7.11
Better than face-to-face classes	20	4.31
Flexible time and location	20	4.31
Less stressful	17	3.66
Useful	10	2.15
Interesting	8	1.72
More effective	8	1.72
Benefitting from a wider range of sources	4	.86
More active students	4	.86
More interaction	3	.64
Better learning	2	.43
A chance to educate	1	.21
A good replacement for face-to-face classes	1	.21
Good for introverted people	1	.21
Good for people having physical disabilities	1	.21
More concentration	1	.21
More helpful	1	.21
Negative Perceptions		
Boring	65	14.00
Not very good	19	4.09
Less learning	15	3.23
Not very effective	14	3.01
Useless	13	2.80
Internet problems	8	1.72
More distracting	8	1.72
Confusing	4	.86
Less interaction	4	.86
No way to evaluate the knowledge	3	.64
Not good for everyone	3	.64
A little stress	1	.21
Demotivating	1	.21
Difficult to concentrate	1	.21
Lack of technological knowledge	1	.21
Not interesting	1	.21
Sometimes stressful	1	.21
Total	464	100

Being easy to take part in (57 references; i.e. 12.28%), good and also time and energy saving (55 references; i.e. 11.85%), very good (33 references; i.e. 7.11%), better than F2F classes and having flexible time and location (20 references; i.e. 4.31%), being less stressful (17 references; i.e. 3.66%), useful (10 references; i.e. 2.15%), and interesting and more effective (8 references; i.e. 1.72%) were the most mentioned issues by the participants considering the online module positively. Other positive aspects of online instruction such as benefitting from a wider range of sources, causing students to be more active (each referred to four times; i.e. .86%), including more interaction (three references; i.e. .64%), and leading to better learning (twice; i.e. .43%) (25 references; i.e. 6.06%) were further mentioned. Besides, good points such as providing a chance for education, being a good replacement for F2F classes, being good for introverted people and those having physical disabilities, causing more concentration, and being more helpful were the other issues each one mentioned once (i.e. .21%).

On the other hand, referring to online instruction as boring (65 references; i.e. 14%), not very good (19 references; i.e. 4.09%), leading to less learning (15 times; i.e. 3.23%), not very effective (14 references; i.e. 3.01%), useless (13 references; i.e. 2.80%), including internet problems and more distracting than F2F instruction (eight references; i.e. 1.72%) were the negative points the learners proposed. Online instruction was also considered confusing and contained less interaction (each one referred to four times; i.e. .86%), including no appropriate way of evaluating the knowledge and not good for everyone (each one referred to three times; i.e. .64%). The least mentioned negative points (each one referred to only once; i.e. .21%) were that the module leads to a little stress, is demotivating, causes difficulty in concentration, has learners' and teachers' lack of technological knowledge, is not interesting, and is sometimes stressful.

Table 8. *EFL Learners' Perceptions Towards Blended Instruction*

The themes and sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Blended		
Positive Perceptions		
Good	84	22.45
Very good	29	7.75
A good mix of tradition & modernity	22	5.88
Better learning	19	5.08
Better than an online class	19	5.08
Useful	13	3.47
Attractive	12	3.20
Better than face-to-face classes	12	3.20
Time & energy saving	11	2.94
More effective	10	2.67
The best	8	2.13
Helpful	6	1.60
Flexible	5	1.33
Appropriate for different people	4	1.06
Easy	4	1.06
Motivating	3	.80
Having the support of face-to-face classes	1	.26
Less stressful	1	.26
More interaction	1	.26

Negative Perceptions		
Not good	45	12.03
Confusing	19	5.08
Not always good	9	2.40
Boring	8	2.13
Not effective	5	1.33
Time wasting	5	1.33
Hard	3	.80
Horrible	2	.53
Annoying	1	.26
Difficult	1	.26
Disrupting daily planning	1	.26
Worse than online classes	1	.26
No idea	10	2.67
Total	374	100

Regarding the learners' positive opinions towards BL, as indicated in Table 8, the module is good (referred to 84 times; i.e. 22.45 %), very good (29 references; i.e. 7.75 %), a good mix of tradition and modernity (22 references; i.e. 5.88 %), causes better learning and being better than online classes (19 references; i.e. 5.08 %), is useful (13 references; i.e. 3.47 %), attractive and better than F2F classes (12 references; i.e. 3.20 %), time and energy saving (11 references; i.e. 2.94 %), more effective (10 times; i.e. 2.67 %), the best instructional module (eight references; i.e. 2.13 %), helpful (six references; i.e. 1.60 %), and flexible (five references; i.e. 1.33 %). It is also proposed as being appropriate for different people and also easy to use (as mentioned four times; i.e. 1.06%) as well as being motivating (three references; i.e. .80%). BL is further believed to have the support of F2F classes, being less stressful, and including more interaction (each one referred to once; .26%).

Those against BL believed the module was not good (45 references; i.e. 12.03 %) and/or always good (nine references; i.e. 2.40 %), as being confusing (19 references; i.e. 5.08 %), boring (eight references; i.e. 2.13 %), not effective and time-wasting (five references; i.e. 1.33 %), a hard module to use (three references; i.e. .80 %), horrible (two references; i.e. .53 %), annoying, difficult to use, disrupting daily planning, and worse than online classes (each one referred to once; i.e. .26 %).

To wrap up, the second research question proposes content analysis of the task completion done by the learners led the researchers to conclude that EFL learners' viewpoints, each of the three modules of F2F, online, and BL has its pros and cons to take part in since they provided plenty of positive and also negative points for each. The online side, however, could be said to have more advocates. The outcomes of the descriptive analysis of the learners' responses to the Students' Perceptions of the BL Scale also confirmed the idea.

3.3. Investigation of the Interplay between Online and F2F Instructions

The next research question of the current study explored how online and F2F instructions can interplay with each other to bring about more effective BL from both the instructors' and learners' viewpoints. To do so, instructors responded to the following first question, and the second was answered by the students.

1. How can blended learning improve students' English language learning?

2. How can blended learning improve your English learning?

Their responses were subsequently analyzed qualitatively and the results are demonstrated in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. *EFL University Instructors' Perceptions Towards the Interplay between the Online and Face-to-face Instructions to Bring About Effective Blended Learning*

The themes and sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Class Issues		
Expanding the borders of the classroom	9	12.5
Using different devices & applications	3	4.16
Comfortable	1	1.38
Decreasing the limitations of individual module	1	1.38
High capability of applications used	1	1.38
No time and location constraint	1	1.38
Providing a better atmosphere	1	1.38
Learner Issues		
Increasing motivation	8	11.11
Increasing learner autonomy	8	11.11
Saving time	7	9.72
Leading to better learning	6	8.33
Being useful for all types of learners	4	5.55
Exposure to authentic language	4	5.55
Reducing anxiety	3	4.16
Recording the classes for further review	3	4.16
Extension of attention span	1	1.38
Increasing interaction	1	1.38
Increasing learners' class participation	1	1.38
Increasing learners' confidence	1	1.38
Less distraction	1	1.38
A longer time of contact	1	1.38
Presenting more comprehensible input or output	1	1.38
Promoting collaboration	1	1.38
Providing more opportunities for discovery learning	1	1.38
Reducing the expenses	1	1.38
Task variety	1	1.38
Using a variety of assessment methods	1	1.38
Total	72	**100**

As displayed in Table 9, under the category of class issues, university instructors explained that using the two modules of F2F and online can expand the borders of the classroom as mentioned nine times (i.e. 12.5%) and make it possible to utilize a range of different devices as applications (three references; i.e. 4.16%). Other classroom issues such as being comfortable, decreasing the limitations of each module, benefitting from the high capability of applications used, having no time and location constraints, and providing a better atmosphere were all the points raised once (i.e. 1.38%).

Moreover, there were a number of effective concerns related to the learners. University instructors expressed that using the two modules of instructions can increase the learners' motivation and autonomy (each one mentioned eight times; i.e. 11.11%), save their time

(mentioned seven times; i.e. 9.72%), lead to better learning (mentioned six times; i.e. 8.33%), useful for all types of learners and expose them to authentic language (each one mentioned four times; i.e. 5.55%), reduce their anxiety and they can record the classes for further review (each one mentioned three times; i.e. 4.16%). The use of two modules simultaneously can extend the attention span, increase interaction, increase learners' class participation and confidence, cause less distraction and longer time of contact, let more comprehensible input or output be presented, promote collaboration, provide more opportunities for discovery learning, reduce the expenses, include task variety, and use a variety of assessment methods (each one mentioned once; i.e. 1.38%).

Table 10. *EFL University Learners' Perceptions Towards the Interplay between the Online and Face-to-face Instructions to Bring About Effective Blended Learning*

The themes and sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
Class Issues		
Flexible time & location	13	5.85
Learner Issues		
Providing & enhancing learning opportunities using different techniques	64	28.82
Saving time	28	12.61
Using updated learning methods	15	6.75
Easier sharing of information	14	6.30
Increasing motivation	10	4.50
Including more sources	7	3.15
Enhancing interaction	6	2.70
Increasing autonomy	6	2.70
Good for different kinds of learners	5	2.25
Reducing stress	5	2.25
Increasing attention	2	.90
Engaging creativity	1	.45
No help	46	20.72
Total	222	**100**

On the other hand, the only classroom issue related to the interplay between online and F2F instructions mentioned by the university learners is that of flexible time and location referred to 13 times (i.e. 5.85%).

Learners also refer to issues concerning the learners themselves such as the two modules together can provide and enhance learning opportunities using different techniques (raised 64 times; i.e. 28.82%), save time (mentioned 28 times; 12.61%), make it possible to use updated instructional methods (referred to 15 times; 6.75%), share the information easier (proposed 14 times; i.e. 6.30%), increase motivation (mentioned 10 times; 4.50%), include more sources (raised seven times; 3.15%), enhance the amount of interaction and autonomy (each one referred to six times; 2.70%), being good for different kinds of learners and reduce the stress level (each one mentioned five times; 2.25%), increase attention (raised twice; i.e. .90%) and finally engage creativity (referred to once; i.e. .45%).

Therefore, the conclusion would be that both EFL university instructors and learners believed that by utilizing the two modules of F2F and online together, more effective BL could be obtained.

4. Discussions and Conclusions

The investigation into EFL university instructors' and learners' perceptions towards F2F, online, and blended instructions in EFL classes revealed interesting insights. Most instructors view F2F learning as effective due to direct interaction, while online instruction is seen as problematic due to issues like lack of facilities and monitoring students' presence. BL is favored for its comprehensive approach, despite challenges with facilities and digital skills that it involves. Existing literature supports the idea that BL can enhance student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes by providing a mix of traditional and modern instructional methods (Marsh, 2012 & Simbolon, 2021). On the other hand, learners prefer F2F instruction for its effectiveness and interactivity but acknowledge its drawbacks like stress and traditional methods. Research in the field of education has shown that F2F instruction is often valued for its ability to facilitate direct interaction, immediate feedback, and a sense of community among learners and instructors (Shand and Farrelly, 2018). Online courses are valued for their convenience and flexibility by most learners, while BL is seen as the best mix of traditional and modern methods, although it can be confusing for some of them at times. Overall, the study highlights the varied perspectives on different instructional modes in EFL education. The findings from the investigation on EFL university instructors' and learners' perceptions towards F2F, online, and blended instructions in EFL classes align with existing literature on language learning modalities (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019; Banditvilai, 2016; Ghazizadeh & Fatemipour, 2017; Liu, 2013; Marsh, 2012; Tosun, 2015).

University instructors are recognizing the benefits of blending F2F and online instructions in English learning. Believing that by combining these two modules, the boundaries of the classroom can be expanded, allowing for a more dynamic and interactive learning experience. This approach can address the limitations of each module and leverage the capabilities of various applications, without being constrained by time or location. The use of BL can enhance motivation and autonomy among learners, save time, improve learning outcomes, cater to different learning styles, and expose students to authentic language according to most of the instructors. Additionally, it can lead to increased attention span, interaction, class participation, and confidence, while reducing distractions and providing more opportunities for collaboration and discovery learning. Overall, the integration of F2F and online instruction seems to offer a comprehensive and effective approach to English language learning. Generally, the findings from this investigation contribute to the existing body of literature on language learning modalities, highlighting the complex interplay between F2F, online, and blended instructions in EFL education.

Technology will continue to play an increasingly central role in our lives, making the teaching and learning process more dynamic, and productive, and rewarding. According to the findings of the study conducted by James (2016), integrating information and communication technologies (ICTs) and innovative experiments within BL could be useful as a means for achieving intended learning outcomes and making teaching and learning more meaningful,

relevant, learner-focused, productive, interesting, and stimulating. This approach allows for a balance between personal interaction and the flexibility of online resources, leading to a more comprehensive and engaging learning experience.

5. Limitations and Delimitations

This study faced certain limitations, as is common in research endeavors. One limitation was the exclusion of language institutes and schools where English is taught. Additionally, the researchers did not have access to all universities across various cities and regions in Iran, leading to the inclusion of only one university in the study. Moreover, due to constraints, it was not possible to include EFL learners at the Ph.D. and MA levels in this research.

The study was delimited to include only junior and senior students in the survey. This decision was made to ensure that participants had experience with face-to-face, online, and blended learning classes. Additionally, the study focused on expert instructors rather than those with limited or no online teaching experience, as this was deemed more beneficial for the research.

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