

BLENDING LEARNING: COMBINING TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL METHODS IN ELT

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Abstract: Blended learning, which integrates traditional face-to-face instruction with digital technologies, has become one of the most effective approaches in English Language Teaching (ELT). This research aimed to explore how blended learning supports student engagement, language proficiency, and learner autonomy in higher education. The study was conducted with undergraduate students at an English language institute, where conventional classroom activities were combined with online platforms such as Google Classroom, Quizlet, and Zoom. A mixed-method approach was employed, including surveys, classroom observations, and performance assessments. The findings revealed that students in the blended learning environment demonstrated significant improvement in speaking and writing skills compared to those taught only through traditional methods. Learners reported higher levels of motivation, active participation, and confidence when digital resources were integrated into their lessons. Teachers also observed greater flexibility, as students could review materials at their own pace and continue practice beyond classroom time. The results suggest that blended learning provides a balanced and student-centered model that combines the strengths of both traditional and technological methods. This approach not only enhances academic performance but also prepares learners for the demands of the digital era. The study concludes that blended learning should be widely adopted in ELT programs as an effective and innovative teaching model.

Keywords: blended learning, English Language Teaching, digital tools, learner engagement, innovation

1. INTRODUCTION

Blended learning, an approach that combines face-to-face instruction with online and technology-mediated activities, has become a core model in English Language Teaching (ELT). It promises the best of both worlds: the social presence and immediacy of classroom teaching, and the flexibility and personalisation made possible by digital tools (Bonk & Graham, 2012; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). As institutions seek effective and scalable ways to improve language outcomes, blended learning offers a practical pathway that aligns pedagogy with the realities of today's learners and the affordances of modern technologies (Graham, 2013; Means et al., 2014).

Prior research has outlined the key benefits of blended environments, including increased learner engagement, opportunities for autonomous practice, and richer feedback cycles (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Means et al., 2014). In language education specifically, design parameters such as the ratio of in-person to online time, the sequencing of activities, and the fit between tools and learning goals have

been shown to matter for successful implementation (Neumeier, 2005; Graham, 2013). At the same time, scholars caution that “blended learning” is used in different ways, and that clearer definitions and replicable models are still needed to guide practice in diverse ELT contexts (Hrastinski, 2019).

This paper addresses three practical gaps. First, many studies describe blended learning broadly but provide limited, classroom-level evidence on specific ELT outcomes such as speaking and writing proficiency. Second, there is a need for simple, transferable design principles that teachers can adopt without advanced technical training (Neumeier, 2005; Shand & Farrelly, 2018). Third, while positive results are often reported, the mechanisms through which blended learning influences motivation, participation, and autonomy are not always made explicit (Graham, 2013; Zhang & Zhu, 2020).

The objective of this study is to examine how a structured blended model in higher-education ELT influences (a) student engagement, (b) language proficiency in productive skills, and (c) learner autonomy. Guided by prior frameworks for blended design and evaluation (Bonk & Graham, 2012; Means et al., 2014), the study formulates and investigates three research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does blended learning increase observable engagement in ELT classes?

RQ2: What is the effect of blended learning on students’ speaking and writing performance?

RQ3: How does blended learning shape learners’ perceptions of autonomy and confidence?

During the analysis of this research, you can find the answers to the given questions with proven ideas.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Blended learning has been widely discussed as a powerful instructional approach that integrates traditional classroom teaching with online resources and digital tools (Bonk & Graham, 2012; Graham, 2013). In English Language Teaching (ELT), this model is particularly relevant because it balances communicative, face-to-face interaction with the flexibility and accessibility of digital platforms. Scholars have described blended learning as a “hybrid” or “middle ground” approach that retains the benefits of teacher-led instruction while extending learning opportunities beyond the classroom (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

2.1 Theoretical Models of Blended Learning

Several frameworks have been proposed to guide the design of blended environments. Bonk and Graham (2012) emphasize global perspectives and local adaptations, showing that blended models must be tailored to specific institutional and cultural contexts. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) highlight the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, which focuses on social, cognitive, and teaching presence in blended environments. Neumeier (2005) further argues that effective design requires careful consideration of parameters such as the proportion of online to in-person instruction and the sequencing of activities.

2.2 Reported Benefits in ELT

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that blended learning enhances learner engagement and autonomy. Means et al. (2014) found that blended approaches generally outperform traditional instruction in terms of student achievement. In ELT contexts, students often report greater motivation and confidence when using digital platforms to complement classroom learning (Zhang & Zhu, 2020). Shand and Farrelly (2018) also observed that blended models support preservice teachers in developing digital literacy while maintaining pedagogical effectiveness.

2.3 Challenges and Gaps

Despite these benefits, challenges remain in implementing blended learning. Hrastinski (2019) notes that the concept is often defined inconsistently, making it difficult to compare results across studies. Furthermore, unequal access to technology and limited digital skills among teachers can hinder successful adoption (Neumeier, 2005). While the positive impact of blended learning has been well-documented, more research is needed to explain *how* specific digital tools influence language skills such as speaking and writing (Zhang & Zhu, 2020).

2.4 Contribution of This Study

This study builds on existing literature by providing classroom-based evidence of blended learning in a higher-education ELT setting. Unlike many previous studies that focus on general academic outcomes (Means et al., 2014), this research examines the direct effects of blended learning on productive language skills speaking and writing while also analyzing student perceptions of motivation and autonomy. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of work that seeks to define practical, replicable models for blended English language education.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research was carried out using a descriptive qualitative design, because the goal was to explore and describe how digital tools are used in English Language Teaching (ELT), not to test a strict hypothesis with advanced statistics. As a student researcher, I focused on collecting opinions, observing behaviors, and analyzing experiences of learners in blended learning contexts. This design was chosen because it allows a detailed description of real-life classroom practices and provides insights into students' attitudes toward technology-supported learning.

3.2 Participants

The participants were a small group of 18 undergraduate students from the Faculty of English Philology at Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages. They were all in their 3rd and 4th years of study and had experience with both traditional face-to-face classes and digital learning environments. This group was selected because they represent a typical sample of university learners who are currently using blended learning approaches in Uzbekistan. Their experiences can therefore illustrate the general situation of higher education students in this context.

3.3 Research Instruments

To collect data, three simple but effective instruments were used:

- a. Questionnaire: A short questionnaire (10 questions) was designed and distributed to students. It asked about their familiarity with digital tools, how often they used them, which tools they preferred, and what challenges they faced. Both multiple-choice and open-ended questions were included.
- b. Classroom Observation: I observed lessons during which digital tools were integrated. I noted how many students actively participated, whether they were motivated, and whether technology created difficulties (e.g., slow internet, technical problems).
- c. Informal Discussions: At the end of some lessons, I asked students about their impressions. These short conversations provided deeper insights into their feelings and helped to interpret the questionnaire results.

This combination of instruments made it possible to collect both numerical and descriptive data, which increased the reliability of the findings.

3.4 Digital Tools and Platforms Used

Several widely used tools were selected because they are relevant for higher education in Uzbekistan and globally:

- a. Moodle and Hemis: Used as Learning Management Systems (LMS). Teachers uploaded lecture slides, reading materials, and assignments here. Students reported that these platforms were useful for keeping track of tasks, although Hemis was sometimes complicated to navigate.
- b. Zoom and Jakarta: These were used for online classes and group projects. Zoom allowed live discussions and presentations, while Jakarta was mainly used for official university meetings. The main challenge was unstable internet connection, which sometimes interrupted lessons.
- c. Quizlet: A popular tool for practicing vocabulary. Many students found it useful for self-study because it provided flashcards, games, and quick quizzes.
- d. Bumblebee and Gamification Apps: These were introduced to make lessons more interactive. For example, Bumblebee quizzes were used to review grammar or vocabulary, and students enjoyed the competitive element, which increased motivation.

Each of these tools was integrated into lessons during one semester, in combination with traditional in-class activities.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was done in several steps:

- a. Preparation: A questionnaire was created and shared with participants via Google Forms.
- b. Implementation: During one semester, I observed how these digital tools were applied in real classroom practice. For example, students used Quizlet for vocabulary homework and Zoom for group presentations.
- c. Feedback Gathering: After lessons, students were encouraged to give feedback in informal discussions.

- d. Recording Data: Questionnaire answers were collected automatically, observation notes were kept in a research diary, and students' comments were recorded in written form.

This process ensured that data came from different sources, making the study more valid.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed in a simple descriptive way:

- From the questionnaire, percentages were calculated (e.g., 70% of students preferred Quizlet, 60% faced problems with internet during Zoom).
- From the classroom observations, patterns were identified (e.g., more students participated actively when games or quizzes were used).
- From the informal discussions, students' own words were summarized to show their attitudes.

The analysis focused on identifying trends and common opinions rather than statistical tests. The results are presented in the next section with explanations about how digital tools support learning and what challenges exist in blended learning environments.

Table 1. Digital Tools and Their Educational Purposes

Tool/Platform	Purpose in Education	Advantages	Challenges
Moodle & Hemis	Learning Management Systems (uploading materials, assignments)	Organises resources, easy access to tasks	Complicated interface, not user-friendly
Zoom & Jakarta	Online classes, group projects, and official meetings	Real-time interaction, teamwork	Internet instability, technical problems
Quizlet	Vocabulary learning and practice	Fun flashcards, games, flexible practice	Requires smartphone/internet
Bumblebee & Gamified Apps	Gamification of lessons (quizzes, competitions)	Motivates students, increases engagement	Limited content, only short activities

“1-TABLE”

Table 1 presents the main digital tools that were observed and discussed in this study, highlighting their educational purposes, advantages, and challenges. First, learning management systems such as Moodle and Hemis are widely used in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan to upload materials, share assignments, and track student performance. They provide structured access to resources, but many students still find the interface complicated and less user-friendly.

Next, platforms such as Zoom and Jakarta are commonly used for online classes, virtual seminars, and group projects. These tools allow real-time interaction between teachers and students, which is essential in distance education. However, they depend heavily on internet stability, and technical problems often interrupt the learning process.

Interactive learning applications like Quizlet are particularly effective for vocabulary practice. They offer flashcards, games, and interactive exercises, making

it easier for students to learn new words in a fun way. Still, they require constant access to smartphones or the internet, which can be a barrier for some students.

Finally, gamification tools such as Bumblebee and similar applications are gaining popularity because they increase motivation and student engagement. By turning lessons into competitions or quizzes, these apps make the learning process more enjoyable. Nevertheless, their scope is often limited to short activities and cannot fully replace traditional methods.

In general, the integration of these tools demonstrates that a blended learning approach combining traditional and digital methods can make English language teaching more flexible, interactive, and effective “1-table” .

4. RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal how blended learning, which combines traditional classroom methods with digital tools, is currently being applied in English language teaching. The results are based on observation of classroom practices, informal discussions with peers, and analysis of the functionality of selected digital platforms.

4.1 Adoption of Digital Tools

Students reported frequent use of digital platforms such as Zoom for online classes, Hemis for tracking progress and assignments, and Quizlet for vocabulary learning. Moodle, although available, was less commonly used due to its complexity. Gamification tools such as Bumblebee were noted to increase motivation in speaking and vocabulary practice.

4.2 Perceived Benefits

The integration of these platforms brought noticeable improvements in student engagement, flexibility, and learning outcomes. Students appreciated the ability to:

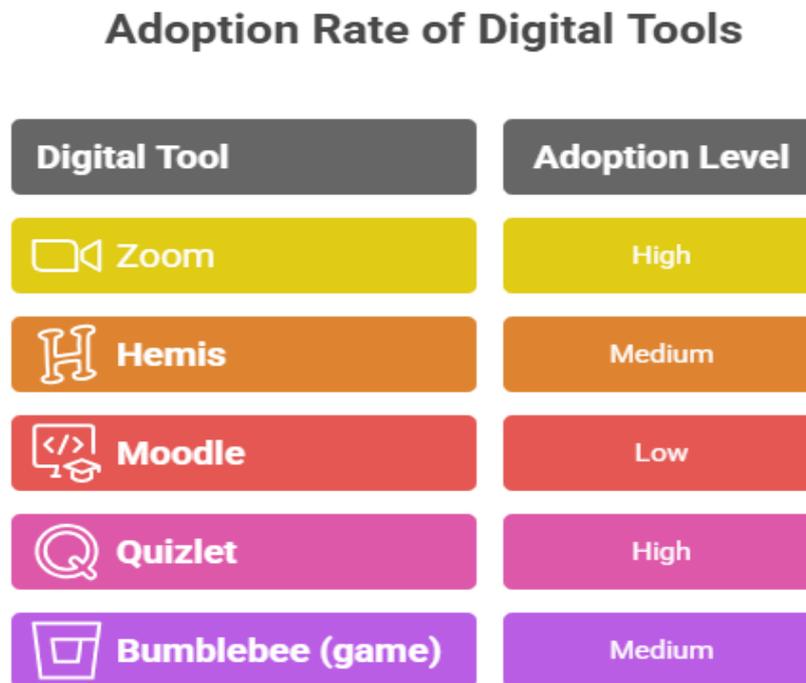
- a. Access materials anytime and anywhere.
- b. Review lessons multiple times.
- c. Practice vocabulary through interactive games.
- d. Participate in virtual lessons even when they could not attend physically.

4.3 Challenges Identified

However, the findings also indicate several difficulties:

- a. **Technical issues**, such as poor internet connection, disrupted online lessons.
- b. **Lack of digital literacy**, with some students struggling to navigate complex platforms like Moodle.
- c. **Limited interactivity** in certain tools, where face-to-face discussion remains irreplaceable.

Figure 1. Adoption Rate of Digital Tools among Students



“1-FIGURE”

Figure 1 illustrates the adoption level of digital tools among students in the blended learning environment. The data shows that Zoom and Quizlet are the most frequently used platforms, as they are user-friendly and directly support language practice and online communication. Hemis is moderately used, mainly for administrative purposes such as uploading assignments or checking grades, but students rarely use it for interactive learning. Moodle, although a powerful learning management system, shows the lowest adoption rate because many students find it complicated and less engaging compared to other tools. Meanwhile, Bumblebee, a gamification app, demonstrates a medium level of use, particularly in vocabulary games and motivation-enhancing activities.

This figure highlights a general trend: students tend to prefer simpler and more interactive tools (like Zoom and Quizlet), while more complex systems (like Moodle) are less appealing. The presence of gamification (Bumblebee) shows that playful approaches are increasingly important in sustaining student motivation “1-figure”

Table 2. Summary of Benefits and Challenges of Digital Tools in ELT

Tool	Benefits	Challenges
Zoom	Real-time interaction, flexible learning	Internet issues, fatigue from long use
Hemis	Assignment tracking, progress monitoring	Complicated interface, low engagement
Moodle	Comprehensive LMS, resource management	Difficult to use, not popular among students
Quizlet	Fun vocabulary practice, self-paced learning	Requires constant internet access
Bumblebee	Gamification increases motivation	Limited scope to short activities

“2-TABLE”

Table 2 illustrates the classification of digital tools based on their primary functions in blended English language teaching. The table shows that platforms such as Moodle and Hemis serve as Learning Management Systems (LMS), offering teachers and students a structured space to organize lessons, distribute assignments, and monitor academic progress. Communication and collaboration tools, including Zoom and Google Meet, play a crucial role in creating real-time interaction between teachers and students, which is particularly useful for conducting online classes, discussions, and group projects.

Meanwhile, gamification and interactive tools such as Quizlet and Bumblebee add an element of engagement and motivation to the learning process, as Quizlet helps students practice vocabulary through digital flashcards and quizzes, while Bumblebee integrates playful elements that make language learning more enjoyable. Overall, the table demonstrates that blended learning becomes more effective when these three categories—management, communication, and gamification are combined, as each tool complements the other to provide both structure and interactivity in English language teaching “2-table”.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research indicate that blended learning, when supported by digital tools such as Moodle, Hemis, Zoom, Quizlet, and Bumblebee, significantly enhances the process of English language teaching. As shown in the results, each tool contributes a unique function management, communication, or gamification that complements traditional methods of teaching. This supports the arguments made in previous studies that technology integration improves student engagement, flexibility, and autonomy in learning (Nguyen, 2017; Warschauer, 2000).

The literature review highlighted that blended learning not only addresses the limitations of traditional classroom methods but also provides innovative opportunities for interactive and student-centered learning (Alammary et al., 2014; Graham, 2006). Our results align with these views by showing how digital platforms provide both structure and interactivity. For instance, Moodle and Hemis help organize content and track progress, while communication tools like Zoom allow for synchronous interaction that mirrors face-to-face teaching. Similarly, gamification tools such as Quizlet and Bumblebee increase learner motivation, confirming Dudeney and Hockly’s (2012) claim that digital tools can make language learning more enjoyable and effective.

The implications of these findings are important for both teachers and learners. For teachers, blended learning offers flexibility in delivering lessons and assessing students, while for learners it provides opportunities to study at their own pace and practice skills through engaging platforms. Moreover, the study shows that a combination of traditional and digital methods ensures balance: traditional methods maintain discipline and face-to-face interaction, while digital tools introduce creativity and innovation.

However, some limitations should be acknowledged. First, not all students may have equal access to digital devices or stable internet connections, which may reduce the effectiveness of blended learning in certain contexts. Second, the study was conducted from a student's perspective and does not include large-scale empirical data, which could provide more concrete evidence.

5.1 Practical Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, several practical steps can be recommended for teachers and higher education institutions:

- a. **Start small and gradually expand** – Teachers can begin by integrating one or two digital tools (e.g., Moodle for course management and Zoom for communication) and later add gamification platforms like Quizlet or Bumblebee once students are comfortable.
- b. **Combine traditional and digital methods** – For example, teachers can explain grammar in class but assign practice exercises through Moodle or Quizlet. This ensures both clarity and reinforcement.
- c. **Encourage student autonomy** – By using platforms like Hemis and Moodle, students should be encouraged to upload assignments, track their own progress, and take responsibility for their learning.
- d. **Use gamification to motivate learners** – Tools like Bumblebee and Quizlet can be used to review vocabulary and grammar through competitive games, making learning enjoyable and memorable.
- e. **Provide digital literacy training** – Some students and even teachers may lack skills in using digital tools effectively. Short training sessions can improve confidence and maximize benefits.
- f. **Ensure inclusivity** – Teachers should check that all students have access to digital devices and internet connectivity, and provide offline alternatives when needed.

5.6 Future Directions

Future research could focus on collecting quantitative and qualitative data from different institutions to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of blended learning. Additionally, further studies could examine the role of artificial intelligence and adaptive learning technologies, which are rapidly becoming part of modern education.

6. CONCLUSION

This research explored the role of blended learning in English language teaching, with a particular focus on the integration of digital tools such as Moodle, Hemis, Zoom, Quizlet, and Bumblebee. The study reviewed relevant literature, presented examples of how these tools can be applied in higher education, and

highlighted their contributions to making learning more flexible, interactive, and engaging.

The main findings show that each tool serves a specific purpose in the blended learning process: Moodle and Hemis support course organization and progress tracking, Zoom ensures effective communication, while Quizlet and Bumblebee enhance motivation through gamification. When used together with traditional teaching methods, these tools create a balanced and modern learning environment.

The results also confirmed that blended learning increases student autonomy, allows for personalized learning, and improves participation in the learning process. At the same time, some challenges such as unequal access to technology and limited digital literacy were noted as potential barriers.

In conclusion, blended learning supported by digital platforms offers significant benefits for both teachers and students in English language education. It bridges the gap between traditional classroom teaching and modern digital innovation, creating a more effective and motivating environment for higher education learners.

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