Blended Learning in EFL Programs in Yemen: Learners' Perceptions

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Abstract

Blended learning (BL) has gained popularity in English instruction due to its ability to improve students' learning outcomes and motivation. This study investigated Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of learning English and the impact of using BL on their attitudes toward English learning. The sample comprised 51 Yemeni EFL students who received instructions at Resalty Academy, and data was collected from them using a questionnaire. Findings highlighted the effectiveness of BL in improving English language learning. The outcome of the study support EFL teachers in Yemen in developing tailored programs to meet the specific needs of their students. Based on the findings, it is safe to argue that implementing BL strategy in English language instruction enhances EFL students' perceptions of BL usefulness and ease of use, potentially leading to increased engagement and motivation in learning. Teachers and institutions are encouraged to prioritize integrating the BL approach into English language curricula to improve the overall learning experience for EFL students.

Keywords: blended learning, English language learning, EFL students, perspectives

Introduction

In recent years, blended learning (BL) has acquired popularity as an approach to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), thanks to modern technology, which has modernized teaching and learning (Sharma & Barrett, 2018). Under the influence of such technology, students now have more dynamic and exciting possibilities to learn and practice English actively and remotely (Clandfield & Hadfield, 2021). Savara (2015) stated that "the blended learning environment provides the best mix of different learning strategies, which makes it more effective and successful than other learning environments" (p. 51). Traditional teaching techniques, such as textbooks and teacher-centered classrooms, have historically been a significant component of the Yemeni educational system. Nevertheless, in the Yemeni scenario, EFL educators have begun to show more interest in BL as digital technology advances.

The BL mode is a mixture of in-person education in the classroom and online learning tools, e.g. virtual classrooms, online quizzes, and interactive learning resources (Friesen, 2012). As such, BL makes learning more flexible and individualized (Oweis, 2018; Stockwell et al., 2015). Such a relatively new mode of learning and teaching is rapidly being used in educational institutions worldwide (Clandfield & Hadfield, 2021), including Yemen, to improve learning outcomes and boost the quality of foreign language education. According to Friesen (2012), BL has a range of possibilities resulting from combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms. However, it has had persistent ambiguity-related challenges since its inception. Various technologies, pedagogies, and even job tasks, ranging from old mechanical media to new learning theories, are discussed under the BL. The idea of BL has gradually expanded to a far more comprehensive range of learning characteristics beyond the traditional teaching methods (Al-Kadi, 2020).

Research Problem

In Yemen, like in many other contexts where English is not a first language, EFL students face many learning challenges, and the prevailing conventional methods in the EFL curriculum might not fully address their needs (Al-Kadi, 2020). In response to this, BL, which has been widely recognized in EFL contexts, is theorized as a redeeming approach that mitigates major changes EFL learners face in EFL settings (Karavas, 2014; Liu, 2013; Mekhlafi, 2014; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010). Based on positive findings on the potential of BL, it is tempting to explore how face-to-face blended with components of online learning (Clandfield & Hadfield, 2021; Sharma & Barrett, 2018) could address the challenges of EFL learning in the Yemeni situation. This is particularly important because much BL research has been conducted in Western contexts. A lack of understanding regarding how BL would affect students in Yemen gives ground to conduct this study. The aim is to bridge this knowledge gap by investigating Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of BL and its effects on English language education. Specifically, the study seeks to explore BL's usefulness and ease of use in improving English language skills among Yemeni EFL students. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for informing educational practices and ensuring the effectiveness of initiatives in the Yemeni EFL context.

Objectives and Questions

This study investigates how EFL students perceive English instruction through the BL mode in Yemen. It strives to explore the perceived usefulness (PU) of BL and its perceived ease of use (PEU) among Yemeni EFL Students. With these objectives, this study addressed the following research questions.
1. What are the perceptions of Yemeni EFL students regarding the BL's usefulness in the context of English language learning?
2. What are Yemeni EFL students' perceptions regarding the ease of using BL in the context of English language learning?

Literature Review

The study draws on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which Davis (1993) proposed as a theoretical framework to explain the factors influencing individuals' technology acceptance. While not classified as technology, it involves incorporating technology into instructional and learning procedures. The current study utilized the TAM to examine how Yemeni EFL students' perspectives on English learning changed due to the adoption of blended learning.

Blended Learning

Recent studies have examined the use of in many situations and explored its advantages and disadvantages, considering evaluation and instructional design issues. Research showed that it surpasses traditional face-to-face or online instruction in diverse settings (Bernard et al., 2014; Stockwell et al., 2015). Students also tend to perform better than those in traditional courses (Smith & Hill, 2019). Additionally, it allows students to study at their own pace and be independent and responsible for their learning, as supported by research conducted by Linder (2023).

BL has gained recognition for its potential effectiveness (Sharma & Barrett, 2018). It encourages active student participation through diverse approaches, such as active peer communication, self-reflection, and connecting with prior knowledge. Moreover, it can potentially transform pedagogical approaches and restore the fundamental principles of higher education, as Garrison and Vaughan (2008) indicated. The key elements of pedagogy include interaction, adaptability, and suitable assessment modalities, as highlighted by Smith and Hill (2019).

BL can occur at various levels and categories, including institutions, program courses, or specific activities (Sharma & Barrett, 2018). Designs may involve the integration of both face-to-face and online learning components, re-imagining course designs to optimize student engagement, and restructuring or substituting traditional in-person class sessions, as outlined by Garrison and Vaughan (2008). The design of the online learning environment (Clandfield & Hadfield, 2021) significantly impacts student engagement with the course and satisfaction (Deng & Tavers, 2013). In addition, it offers the advantage of accommodating a more significant number of students without requiring additional physical classroom space (Dziuban et al., 2017). This enhances flexibility for both faculty and students while also being cost-effective. Finally, according to Martinez-Caro and Campuzano-Bolarin (2011), students reported greater overall satisfaction in courses than in traditional lecture-based ones.

Blended Learning in EFL Education

In the past ten years, the subject of English as a foreign language has seen a considerable increase in researchers' and teachers' interest in blended learning. Several studies have examined students' learning of EFL. According to Ju and Mei (2018), it is an approach to effective teaching and learning –a module for EFL education as it enables anytime/anywhere learning and facilitates life-long learning, which corresponds to the demands of 21st-century education. By incorporating blended learning, EFL educators can effectively promote language practice in classroom and non-classroom settings, enhancing language learning outcomes. This approach aligns with the current global educational demands and is considered an indispensable method for foreign language pedagogy (Al-Kadi, 2020). In a qualitative investigation of 22 teachers' perspectives and functions in courses, Ellis, Steed, and Applebee (2006) discovered that technology media effectively aided students in meeting learning objectives. In addition to creating a program with good pedagogical and instructional concepts, Karavas (2014) provided an online training course for elementary EFL school instructors.

Several studies have examined how it impacts students' academic achievement and drive in different parts of the world. In recent years, an instructional strategy has gained

significant popularity, with numerous studies examining its impact on students' academic performance and motivation worldwide. Oweis (2018) examined the impact on 34 English language students enrolled at the German Jordanian University. The experimental group, subjected to both traditional instructions, showed significant differences in achievement and motivation compared to the control group, which was taught through traditional instruction only. These findings suggest that it might improve students' motivation and academic performance.

Erdem and Kibar (2014) conducted a study that involved integrating Facebook into an environment to investigate the perceptions of Turkish undergraduate English learners towards blended learning. The findings showed that the students' attitudes were positive, suggesting that Facebook could be a helpful communication and interaction and that it could be an appropriate environment for sharing homework and projects. Similarly, Liu (2013) investigated the impact and effectiveness of an academic writing course in a hybrid learning setting; this resulted in increased contact among students and between students and teachers. Furthermore, it was beneficial in reducing students' anxiety levels, increasing their autonomy and independence, and enhancing their writing abilities.

Shahrokni and Talaeizadeh (2013) explored and identified students' preferences for forums, messages, and chats in online learning, leading to increased interaction. Similarly, Anderson and Miyazoe (2010) investigated discussion forums, blogs, and Wikipedia in blended learning. They observed that the course was engaging and resulted in enhanced writing skills among Japanese EFL students. Collectively, these studies demonstrate the possibilities of teaching foreign languages. They suggest enhancing interaction, reducing anxiety, increasing autonomy, improving English language skills, and benefiting EFL students; teachers' training and support are essential for creating effective environments.

Blended Learning in Yemeni EFL Context

Studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of improving Yemeni EFL students' English language proficiency. Al-Mekhlafi et al. (2022) focused on exploring the attitudes and perceptions of Yemeni student teachers regarding the utilization of technology in the context of blended learning. The study addressed the participants' viewpoints on technology integration in a blended classroom and whether there were any differences in perceptions based on gender. The data for this study were collected using a questionnaire, and the results indicated that the student teachers had positive perceptions of the traditional face-to-face classroom. At the same time, their attitudes toward the Web-based course were less positive. The study found no significant differences in attitudes between male and female students. The authors emphasize the pedagogical implications of these findings and offer recommendations for future research in this area.

Earlier, in 2014, Al-Mekhlafi examined the impact of an EFL online program on the oral proficiency of first-year English students in the English Department at Sana'a University, College of Education. The study included 50 students who were divided into two groups: Experimental and Control. The experimental group received the approach's instructions, while the Control group received traditional face-to-face learning. The findings revealed significant differences in the average scores between the two groups, with the Experimental group achieving higher scores in the three oral sub-skills: fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Al-Mekhlafi's study is similar to Nuno's (2005) study, in which a software program was used to teach English phonetics to 60 kindergarteners. The study's findings demonstrated that computer-aided teaching was effective in modern classrooms.

In summary, is evidently effective in enhancing student's learning outcomes and attitudes toward English learning. The studies reviewed in this section indicate they can improve students' motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, autonomy, and language proficiency. The findings suggest that this could be a promising approach to improving the quality of English language education in Yemen. Nevertheless, more research with data collected in Yemen would substantiate the theoretical underpinning of the approach and

contribute to the growing body of research on the effectiveness of BL in enhancing English learning nationwide and beyond.

Method

The ultimate objective of this study is to increase Yemeni EFL students' overall language ability by encouraging effective and enjoyable English language learning experiences. Towards this purpose, the research design crafted to assess the impact of enhancing the perceptions of Yemeni EFL students in the context of English language learning employs a quantitative research design to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of Yemeni EFL students toward English language instruction. The choice of a quantitative paradigm was deliberate, considering the study's objective to quantify variables and analyze numerical data to understand the effectiveness of blended learning. By adopting a quantitative approach, this study aims to provide systematic and measurable insights into the perceived usefulness and ease of use among Yemeni EFL students.

Participants

The participants were selected using convenience sampling, where the sample was chosen based on availability and willingness to participate in the study. The sample consisted of 51 Yemeni EFL students pursuing an English program for a diploma at the Resalty Academy in Marib-Yemen. They participated in the study and were given a questionnaire to complete. The study was conducted between March and April 2023. Out of the 55 questionnaires, 51 valid responses were received—a response rate of 92.7%.

Instrument

This study used a cross-sectional survey approach to collect data at a specific time to investigate the participants' perceptions of blended learning. A structured questionnaire was designed to assess Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of English language learning through a BL mode. The survey, based on TAM, consisted of 12 close-ended questions, categorized into two main dimensions: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU). The PU dimension aimed to investigate students' beliefs regarding the usefulness of improving various aspects of their English language skills, including speaking, motivation, progress tracking, overall satisfaction, interest in language and culture, and cost-effectiveness. On the other hand, the PEU dimension focused on students' perceptions of the ease of use for English language learning. Each question was designed to capture specific aspects of students' experiences with blended learning, such as its impact on skill improvement, motivation, access to resources, confidence building, and recommendations to peers.

Data Analysis

Using a structured questionnaire provided a systematic and efficient means of gathering data to fulfil the research objectives. The quantitative data collection allowed (a) statistical analysis to measure each question's mean scores and standard deviations, and (b) a comprehensive assessment of Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of BL in English language learning. The data gathered from the structured questionnaire were processed using SPSS. Responses were coded and converted into numeric values to facilitate quantitative analysis.

The responses were categorized based on the Likert scale into five different levels of agreement: strongly agree, agree, do not know, disagree, and strongly disagree. Statistical measures, including frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to obtain numeric values. The descriptive analysis was conducted to provide insights into the PU and PEU among Yemeni EFL students. The mean scores for each question in the PU and PEU were calculated to assess students' overall perceptions regarding the BL. Additionally, the frequencies were obtained to understand the distribution of responses across different categories.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion derived from the analysis of data obtained from the questionnaire administered to Yemeni EFL students regarding their perceptions of English language education. The results are organized to address two main research objectives: (1) students' perceptions of the usefulness (PU) of BL and (2) students' perceptions of the ease of use of BL. The results are presented in tables and figures, providing an overview of the participants' responses to different dimensions of effectiveness of BL.

Perception of usefulness

The first research objective involves students' perceptions of the PU of English language learning via the BL mode. The frequency and percentage of each item were calculated and presented in Table 1 and Figure 1. Table 1 outlines the perceived usefulness (PU) among Yemeni EFL students. A variety of responses shows regarding the PU of improving English language skills, increasing motivation to learn English, facilitating English speaking practice, tracking progress in learning English, improving overall satisfaction with learning English, increasing interest in learning more about the English language and culture and being a cost-effective method for learning English. Most respondents (74.5%) either strongly agreed or agreed that it improved their English language skills and increased motivation. This indicates a positive impact on language acquisition and learner engagement. This positive trend extended to the overall satisfaction with the learning process, with 63.8% expressing strong agreement or agreement. Furthermore, over 60% of respondents believed that was a cost-effective method, indicating potential financial benefits for both learners and institutions.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Perceived Usefulness (PU) of BL

	Item 1		Item 2		Item 3		Item 4		Item 5		Item 6		Item 7	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
SA	11	21.6	5	9.8	4	7.8	4	7.8	21	41.2	1	2	5	9.8
A	27	52.9	29	56.9	15	29.4	17	33.3	11	21.6	7	13.7	26	51
IDK	7	13.7	11	21.6	14	27.5	7	13.7	7	13.7	6	11.8	9	17.6
D	3	5.9	4	7.8	17	33.3	15	29.4	10	19.6	33	64.7	9	17.6
SD	3	5.9	2	3.9	1	2	8	15.7	2	3.9	4	7.8	2	3.9
Total	51	100	51	100	51	100	51	100	51	100	51	100	51	100

While these positive perceptions dominate, particular areas for improvement also emerged. Notably, 72.5% of participants disagreed with the statement about increased interest in learning about the English language and culture. This suggests that the approach may be ineffective in increasing interest in language and culture learning among the respondents. However, it is important to note that there were a significant number of respondents who indicated uncertainty about the statement (11.8%) responded with "Don't know," which may indicate that some students need more time or experience with the approach before making a definitive assessment of its impact on their interest in English language and culture.

Additionally, nearly half of the respondents (45.1%) found it challenging to track their progress, signaling the need for enhanced tools or mechanisms for effective progress

monitoring. Furthermore, approximately 60% expressed concerns or neutrality regarding the ease of practicing English-speaking skills; overall, opinions seem divided, and further investigation might be needed to determine the reasons behind the different responses and highlight an area where the approach may benefit from elaboration.

The results of the first research objective and question involve providing descriptive statistics, represented by computing the means and standard deviations for each item that measures students' perceptions of its PU in the context ELT. These are presented in Table 3 and Figure 1.

Table 3. The means and standard deviations of Perceived Usefulness (PU)

I believe that using BL has:		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Improved my English language skills	51	2.2157	1.04525
2	Increased my motivation to learn English	51	2.3922	.91823
3	Made it easier for me to practice my English-speaking skills.	51	2.9216	1.01672
4	Made it easier for me to track my progress in learning English.	51	3.1176	1.25932
5	Improved my overall satisfaction with learning English.	51	2.2353	1.28978
6	increased my interest in learning more about English and culture.	51	3.6275	.89355
7	Been a cost-effective method for learning English.	51	2.5490	1.02594

The results in Table 3 and Figure 1 provide a comprehensive overview of responses from 51 participants about their perceptions of in English language learning, focusing on its perceived usefulness in various dimensions. The mean value for each question ranges from 1.00 to 5.00. The mean values offer insights into the average level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. At the same time, the standard deviations indicate the degree of variability or dispersion in students' responses, shedding light on their diverse experiences.
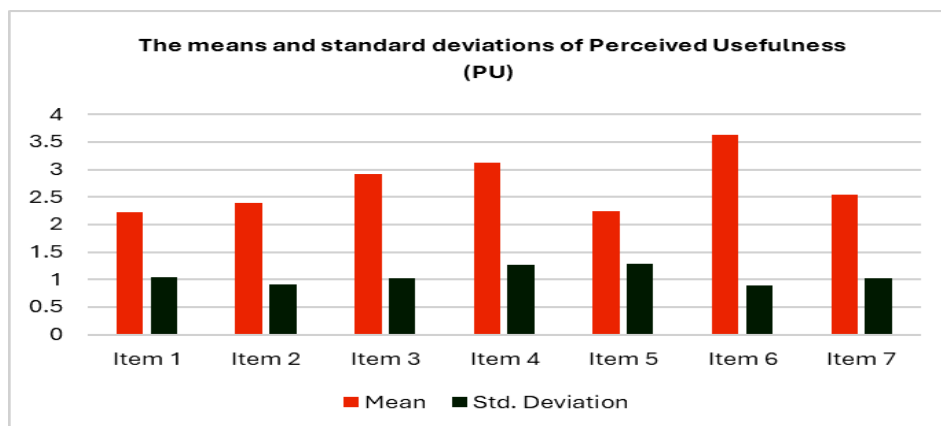

Figure 1 The means and standard deviations of Perceived Usefulness (PU) of BL

Regarding improving English language skills, the moderate mean of 2.2157 suggests a general acknowledgement of blended learning's positive impact. However, the sizable standard deviation (1.04525) reveals a considerable spread in opinions, indicating that while some strongly agree with the improvement, others might not perceive a substantial positive change. Moving to motivation, the mean of 2.3922 indicates a moderate level of agreement that positively influences students' drive to learn English. Nevertheless, the standard deviation (0.91823) underlines the existence of varying degrees of consensus

among students, highlighting individual differences in how they perceive the motivational aspects of this learning approach. Regarding the practical aspects, the mean of 2.9216 for ease of English-speaking practice suggests a general agreement on its effectiveness.

However, the moderate standard deviation (1.01672) implies diversity in opinions. While many find it beneficial to practice spoken English, others may harbor reservations or exhibit varied preferences. The fourth aspect, tracking progress, presents a mean of 3.1176, indicating moderate to high agreement. However, the substantial standard deviation (1.25932) underscores diverse opinions, suggesting that some students find it beneficial while others may not perceive the same level of effectiveness. Moving to overall satisfaction, the mean of 2.2353 suggests moderate agreement. However, the considerable standard deviation (1.289) reflects diverse student satisfaction levels, with varying degrees of contentment or dissatisfaction. The aspect of interest in the English language and culture exhibits a mean of 3.6275, signaling a relatively high level of disagreement. The low standard deviation (0.89355) suggests a more consistent disagreement among students, indicating a shared perception that may not significantly enhance interest in these aspects. Finally, the mean of 2.5490 for cost-effectiveness suggests a moderate level of agreement. The standard deviation (1.02594) indicates diverse opinions, with some students agreeing on its cost-effectiveness while others disagree.

The seven items in Table 3 paint a nuanced picture of Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of blended learning. The varied mean values and standard deviations underscore the necessity for a comprehensive approach to accommodate individual preferences and concerns. This detailed understanding aligns seamlessly with the study's overarching objective of investigating the perceived usefulness in the ELT context.

Perceptions of Ease of Use

The second research objective involves students' perceptions of the ease of use (PEU) in English language learning. The frequency and percentage for each item are calculated and presented in Table 2 and Figure 2. Table 2 and Figure 2 highlight a generally positive perception of the ease of use and utility among Yemeni EFL students. The survey data shows various responses regarding the perceived ease of use for learning English, its usefulness, effectiveness in accessing English learning resources, increasing confidence in English language abilities, and whether it would be recommended to other students learning English.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of the Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) of blended learning*

	Item 1		Item 2		Item 3		Item 4		Item 5	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
SA	7	13.7	23	45.1	5	9.8	4	7.8	6	11.8
A	24	47.1	14	27.5	36	70.6	6	11.8	22	43.1
IDK	5	9.8	11	21.6	8	15.7	22	43.1	11	21.6
D	12	23.5	1	2	1	2	18	35.3	11	21.6
SD	3	5.9	2	3.9	1	2	1	2	1	2
Total	51	100	51	100	51	100	51	100	51	100

A majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is easy to use for learning English (60.8%), a valuable method for learning English (72.6%), and effective in making it easier for them to access English learning resources (80.4%). However, the responses were more varied for the other statements. For instance, while 15.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is effective in increasing their confidence in their English language abilities, 37.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
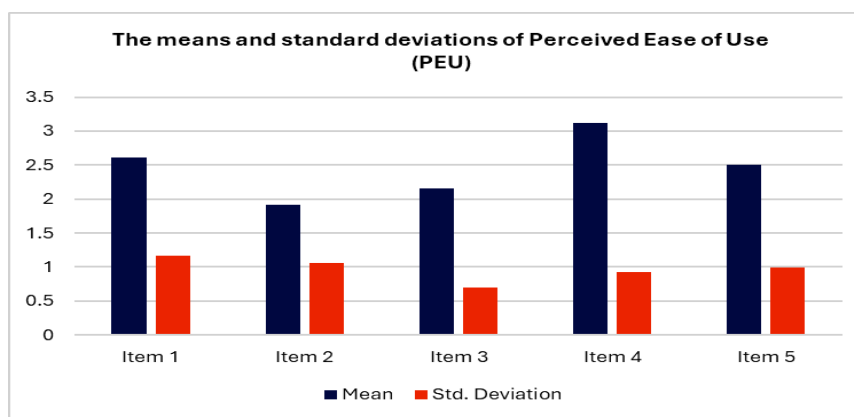
Figure 2. The means and standard deviations of Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)

The high percentage of agreement on the effectiveness of accessing English learning resources indicates that this could be a practical approach to providing accessible resources for language learning. However, the varied responses to the statements about increasing confidence in English language abilities and recommending them to other students suggest that these aspects may not be as universally effective. This could be due to various factors, such as individual learning styles, the specific blend of online and face-to-face learning used, or the quality of the learning materials and activities.

Table 4 and Figure 2 show the results of the second research objective, and the question involves students' perceptions of the PEU of English language learning. The mean and standard deviations for each item are calculated and presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *The means and standard deviations of Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)*

I believe that using BL has:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Easy to use for learning English	51	2.6078	1.16753
2. A useful method for learning English.	51	1.9216	1.05533
3. Effective in making it easier for me to access English learning resources	51	2.1569	.70349
4. Effective in increasing my confidence in my English language abilities	51	3.1176	.93053
5. Something I would recommend to other students learning English	51	2.5098	.98737

Table 4 and Figure 2 present an insightful exploration of the responses from 51 participants about their perceptions of Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) in the context of English language learning in examining perceptions. Each dimension, captured through specific questions, unveils distinct facets of their experiences, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of their engagement with blended learning.

The first dimension, focusing on the Ease of Use for Learning English, yields a moderate mean score of 2.6078. This indicates a consensus that it is user-friendly for language acquisition. However, the sizable standard deviation (1.16753) underlines a considerable diversity in opinions. While some find it accessible, others may encounter challenges, showcasing the varied spectrum of experiences within the student cohort. In the second dimension of Usefulness for Learning English, the mean score of 1.9216 suggests that, on average, participants consider a valuable method for English language learning. However, the standard deviation of 1.0553 indicates a broad range of opinions.

There is a general agreement on its utility. However, individual perspectives vary, highlighting the need to recognize differing attitudes toward effectiveness. Examining the Effectiveness of Accessing Learning Resources in item 3, the mean score of 2.1569 reflects a

moderate agreement that makes it easier to access English learning resources. The low standard deviation (0.7034) suggests a more uniform perception among participants, indicating a potential strength in this aspect of blended learning. The fourth dimension focuses on Confidence Building, which participants, on average, perceive as effective in increasing their confidence in English language abilities (mean score: 3.1176). The low standard deviation (0.93053) suggests a consistent agreement among participants, showcasing a shared sentiment regarding its positive impact on confidence-building.

Lastly, considering Recommendation to Other Students in dimension five, the mean score of 2.5098 suggests a moderate inclination among participants to recommend blended learning. However, the standard deviation of 0.98737 underlines a diverse range of opinions. Some students are likely to recommend it, while others may approach this with more reservation, indicating varied enthusiasm for advocating blended learning.

Table 4 explains Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of the ease of use of BL. The diverse mean scores and standard deviations emphasize the need for an individualized approach, recognizing the varied experiences and preferences within the student cohort. These insights contribute to a holistic view of the challenges and strengths of incorporating English language education for Yemeni EFL students.

Conclusion

The study investigated the impact of BL experiences on Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of English language learning. The findings demonstrate a positive attitude towards BL, highlighting its potential to enhance language learning outcomes and inform teaching practices in Yemen and beyond. The study generally emphasizes the need for further exploration of factors influencing the implementation and effectiveness of BL, underscoring the importance of ongoing research in this area to better meet the needs of EFL learners. Additionally, acknowledging the study's limitations, such as its reliance on self-reported data and the need for larger sample sizes, continued investigation is recommended to deepen understanding of BL in EFL programs and optimize the integration of BL in English language learning contexts.

Disclosure Statement:

We (Yasir Hassan Ahmed Al-Qudimi and Shabana Hameed) hereby declare that research ethics and citing principles have been considered in all stages of this paper. We take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of a dispute. We confirm that the manuscript was created by the authors and not an AI tool/large language model (LLM).

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