



A Review of Studies on Blended Learning in EFL Environment

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Abstract

Blended learning has played an important role both in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning field around the world for years. However, no systematic review of literature has been conducted on blended learning in EFL environment. Thus the aim of this study is to review blended learning studies conducted in EFL context to draw a general picture of blended learning studies in EFL environment, to evaluate the current literature as well as to guide future research studies. A systematic review of 10 research articles published between January 2010 and March 2015 and investigated blended learning and EFL were analyzed. To understand the common themes, main results and implications/suggestions parts of the articles were analyzed using the content analysis. Three common themes generated are benefits of blended Learning in EFL environment, problems/challenges encountered in blended learning environment, and implications and suggestions for blended learning in EFL environment.

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Keywords: Blended learning; literature review; English as a Foreign Language

1. Introduction

With the growing popularity of integrating technology into the classroom, therefore with the embracement of institutions these new technologies, conducting learning through internet physically at a distance has started to gain attention in language classes. Of relevance to this increase in demand of integrating new technologies, blended learning has also grasped the attention of researchers for years.

Though it is so popular in the literature, blended learning does not have any clear definition and thus may have different interpretations for different people as stated by Clark and Mayer (2007). The definitions of blended learning are identified by Graham

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(2006) into three prevalent themes: (1) blending online and face-to-face instruction, (2) blending instructional modalities (or delivery media), and (3) blending instructional methods. According to Leakey and Ranchoux (2006):

Blended learning in CALL is the adaptation in a local context of previous CALL and non - CALL pedagogies into an integrated program of language teaching and learning drawing on different mixes of media and delivery to produce an optimum mix that addresses the unique needs and demands of that context. (p.385)

For Mantera - Gutierrez (2006), blended learning is the combination of web - based courses or computer mediated communication practices and face - to - face instructions which is actually the combination of delivery methods. Similarly, Tucker (2012) also defines the blended learning as any combination of face - to - face and online instruction. Consequently, contrary to different interpretations of blended learning, the common points of the definitions include: the combination of any kind of e - learning element and face - to - face learning despite the portion of time should be spent online changes depending on the aims (Figure 1).

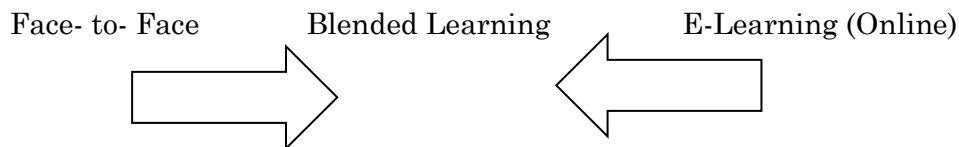


Figure 1. Blended learning environment (İşigüzel, 2014, p. 109)

Blended learning has captured the attention of second language researchers and second language educators over the past decade, especially with a focus on teaching English as a Foreign Language (Erdem & Kibar, 2014; Liu, 2013; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Shahrokni & Talaeizadeh, 2013; Siew-Eng & Muuk, 2015; Tuncay & Uzunboylu, 2012; Yang, Chuang, & Tseng, 2013)

Erdem and Kibar (2014) carried out a combination of qualitative and quantitative study to better understand the perceptions of students on blended learning which is conducted integrating Facebook on blended learning environment. A scale called “Students' Views on the Use and Implementation of Blended Learning” and open ended questions were administered by the researchers on 40 undergraduate Turkish learners of English who participated in this study without any prior experience in blended learning, in contrast had prior knowledge on distance education. The results showed the students’ positive attitudes towards implementation of blended learning, which in turn implied that for communication and interaction, Facebook can be a good means, and blended learning environment may be an appropriate place to share homework and projects.

In a similar vein, Liu (2013) conducted a study on blended learning in an EFL context to describe and to explore the effectiveness and impact of an Academic English Writing course in blended learning environment concerning course design, material development

and presentation, assignment submission and grading, student involvement, teacher reflection, and student evaluation. Results indicated that blended learning has increased the interaction between students and between students and teachers similar to the study of Erdem and Kibar (2014). Blended learning is also beneficial because it reduced students anxiety level during communicating, motivated them to be autonomous and more independent as well as increasing their English writing abilities.

In another study, learning processes in blended learning were under investigation (Shahroki & Talaeizadeh, 2013). Assessing the sources of information which are obtained through logs, chat and forum scripts, and semi structured interviews from 115 EFL learners aimed to investigate learning processes in blended learning environment, the results showed that forum, messages and chat are the most popular tasks that students want to use in online learning, which let them share ideas both synchronously and asynchronously increasing the interaction between them. Also, results showed that student favor the integration of blended learning courses since it helped them to compensate for the limitations of face - to - face courses with the help of blended learning courses. Together with the implication that institutions should add online courses to their face - to - face traditional curricula, it is necessary to support this change with plausible theoretical and practical ideas (Voos, 2003). Similarly, Anderson and Miyazoe (2010) conducted an exploratory study on 61 upper intermediate level Japanese learners of EFL's use of forums, blogs, and wikis in a blended learning setting. To gather the data, mixed method approach was used with the implementation of survey, interview and text analysis, which in turn is to ensure validity of the study triangulating the data collection tools. The blended learning course was found not only to be enjoyable for the learners, but also to make qualitative changes in their writing abilities. Besides, results showed that students' abilities to see the differences between different writing styles have progressed.

Although several studies have been conducted on the students learning English as a Foreign Language, there have been few studies investigating the teachers' role in blended learning context (Ellis, Steed, & Applebee, 2006; Karavas, 2014; Larsen, 2014). One of the few studies conducted on teachers' perceptions and role in blended learning courses is the study of Ellis, Steed, and Applebee (2006). They conducted a qualitative study on the conceptions of twenty two teachers from two Australian universities of blended learning and teaching. The participants were interviewed and the data were categorized qualitatively according to the conceptions of teachers, and they were used to understand what teachers think students learned, how they think they teach, and what they do to prepare students through the blended learning design. It was found that technological media helped students to achieve the aimed learning outcome of the blended learning course.

Though Karavas (2014) studied EFL teachers in blended learning environment, it is a kind of project presenting an online training course for primary EFL school teachers with the underlying principles and the development of this blended course. In the first part of the project teachers profile in the second grade of all - day primary schools were investigated, and a blended learning training program for them with an online distance education course was developed, which has sound pedagogical and instructional principles behind. Therefore, it provides an example distance education program for EFL teachers of primary education which can be applied in blended learning environments.

In his dissertation Larsen (2012) looked at the perspectives of both students and teachers on a blended learning English writing course. The main aim is to explore how teachers can be prepared and best trained to create a better blended learning context for English language learners and to investigate how students perceive this blended learning course with respect to its productivity. This mixed method study employed 41 English learners and 5 teachers, who were trained in blended learning and supported technically and pedagogically. A questionnaire was administrated and both students and teachers were interviewed to understand their previous experiences with blended learning. The results showed that teachers are not in much need of blended learning training, and collaborative planning as well as technical and pedagogical support given during the term were beneficial. Similar to Liu (2013)'s results, it was also found in this study that students became more autonomous and started to take more responsibility for their own learning. In addition, students indicated that they liked blended learning course and prefer this to face - to - face classes. Considering the results he suggested that teachers' previous knowledge and experience in blended learning environment may be a predictor of students' satisfaction with both blended learning course and their teachers.

The purpose of this literature review is thus to review studies of blended learning conducted on EFL context. The main aim of this study is to improve knowledge about the effectiveness of blended learning studies in EFL environment and to provide pedagogical implications for researchers and teachers in order to better explore the common trends in terms of findings and implications for language teaching (Garrett, 2009). The following research questions therefore asked:

1. What are the main findings of blended learning studies conducted in EFL context?
2. What are the implications of blended learning studies conducted in EFL context?

2. Method

This literature review is conducted to investigate the common findings and implications of studies of blended learning conducted in EFL environment. This analysis is conducted in two basic steps: (a) literature search, (b) selection of eligible studies.

2.1. Literature Search

Firstly, main key words were identified relevant to this study, which are blended learning and English as a Foreign Language or EFL, and used interchangeably to guide and limit the search. For this search, three basic data bases included: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), and EBSCOhost. I believe that these are the databases providing enough coverage of representative journals in applied linguistics and instructional technology. After database search, 6 peer - reviewed journals that have focus on applied linguistics and instructional technology were also manually checked in order to ensure a maximum coverage of eligible studies. These journals were manually searched issue by issue and included Computer Assisted Language Learning, ReCALL, Language Learning & Technology, CALICO, International Journal of Computer Assisted Language Learning, and the JALT CALL Journal, which are Type A journals in language learning and technology field.

2.2. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

In order to be included in this review, each study had to meet the following criteria:

- Being published between 2010 and 2015,
- Investigated blended learning environments,
- Recruited participants who were English as a Foreign Language learners or teachers,
- Employed qualitative, quantitative or mixed method design,
- Including pedagogical implications/recommendations.

After review of potential studies, the following criteria were used to exclude the unqualified studies:

- Qualitative/Quantitative synthesis/reviews,
- Special issues of journals,
- Blended learning studies in ESL environment.

As a result of this search, 10 articles from six peer - reviewed journals searched manually were found to be suitable according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and included in this study.

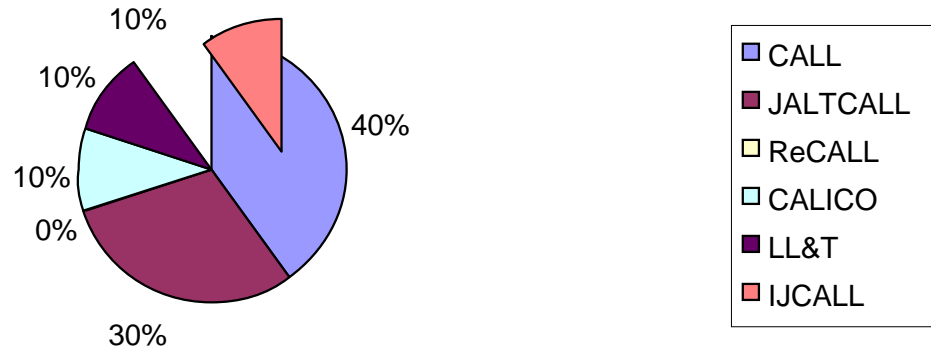
Distribution of Articles by Journals

Figure 2. Distributions of articles by journals

3. Results

Looking at the articles included in this study, four used quantitative methods; two were qualitative, while the remaining four employed mixed method. Table 1 summarizes the methods used in the articles reviewed in this study and the percentages of the methods used.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Studies Reviewed

Studies Reviewed	Methods Used	<i>f</i>	%
Ferreira, Salinas, & Morales (2014); Hong & Samimy (2010); Kobayashi & Little (2011); Şahin - Kızıl (2014)	Quantitative	4	40
Hinkelman & Gruba (2012); Nissen & Tea (2012)	Qualitative	2	20
Chan (2014); Mackenzie, Promnitz - Hayashi, Geluso, Delgado, Castellano & Hinkelman (2011); Yang (2012) ; Yang (2014)	Mixed	4	40
	Total	10	100

After the analysis of the main findings and implications parts of the articles reviewed (Appendix A), three common themes were identified: (1) Benefits of blended learning in EFL environment, (2) problems/challenges encountered in blended learning in EFL environment, (3) implications and suggestions for blended learning in EFL

environment. The themes generated from the findings of all studies reviewed are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Common themes generated form the studies reviewed

Themes	Studies	<i>f</i>	%
Benefits of Blended Learning in EFL Environment	(Chan, 2014); (Ferreria, Salinas, & Morales, 2014); (Kobayashi and Little, 2011); (Mackenzie, Promnitz - Hayashi, Geluso, Delgado, Castellano & Hinkelman, 2011); (Şahin-Kızıl, 2014); (Yang, 2012); (Yang, 2014)	7	70
Problems/Challenges Encountered in Blended Learning in EFL Environment	(Nissen & Tea, 2012); (Yang, 2014)	2	20
Implications and Suggestions for Blended Learning In ELF Environment	(Chan, 2014); (Ferreria, Salinas, & Morales, 2014); Hinkelman & Gruba, 2012); (Hong & Samimy, 2010); (Kobayashi & Little, 2011); (Mackenzie, Promnitz - Hayashi, Geluso, Delgado, Castellano & Hinkelman, 2011); (Şahin – Kızıl, 2014); (Nissen & Tae, 2012); (Yang, 2012); (Yang, 2014)	10	100

3.1. Benefits of blended learning in EFL environment

The studies reviewed reported that students and teachers views on blended learning were usually positive and results generally showed that benefits of the blended learning outnumber the challenges faced. Kobayashi and Little (2011) found that students learned more about the contents of the online component through the exercises, and students with higher completion levels found that they acquired English language skills. Şahin - Kızıl (2014) concluded that using Moodle promoted effective learning and provided learners with a valuable learning experience, especially in grammar and vocabulary. Similarly, online library was found to enable learners to acquire language and interpreting skills, and to expand their general knowledge (Chan, 2014).

Other studies put emphasis on the benefits of blended learning as it leads to the development of students. Ferreria, Salinas, and Morales (2014) stated that experimental group exposed to blended learning model improved their language proficiency when compared to the control group. To put it differently, blended learning design that included online tasks and cooperative instruction was beneficial for the development of language skills. In a similar vein, students in the experimental group of blended remedial reading program improved and performed better on the reading test after participating in the blended learning program in Yang (2012)’s study. In another study of Yang (2014),

students, in blended learning instruction, made a significant progress in reading comprehension through writing, and also in writing summaries.

As an inseparable part of language classes, interaction and participation also took part in the process and results of some studies. Şahin - Kızıl (2014) highlighted that use of Moodle increased the students' level of participation since they found it interesting and challenging thus engaged them. In another study, Yang (2012) stressed that social interaction was facilitated in blended learning as students had more opportunities to discuss their reading difficulties during group discussions and obtain individual feedback from different peers.

Another important consideration in blended learning studies is the motivation. Since blended learning course provides students many opportunities to practice interpreting, online library could promote students' motivation and enthusiasm during interpreting (Chan, 2014). Mackenzie, Promnitz - Hayashi, Geluso, Delgado, Castellano and Hinkelman (2011) stressed that blended learning lessons also showed signs of increased learner autonomy and motivation as blended learning lessons had different lesson goals, different patterns of interaction, different types of homework, more variety of media, and more variety of output.

Apart from benefits of blended learning like better acquisition, language development, increased participation and motivation, it has some other benefits. Yang (2012) found that the online reading activities in blended learning course enabled students to extensively practice what they had learned in the onsite instruction without the limitations of time and location. In his study, Chan (2014) concluded that the online library provided students with persistent home study chances that strengthened in class instruction and also provided them with many opportunities to practice at home without any limitation.

3.2. Problems/Challenges encountered in blended learning in EFL environment

Although most of the studies have stated positive results of blended learning, some of them also included some problems perceived by the teachers. Yang (2014) found that there are some problems perceived by the teachers, which are the changing role of the teachers and students, little sense of community building, lack of training in blended learning course, and unfamiliarity with the new systems or technologies.

Similarly, Nissen and Tea (2012) stressed that most of the teachers had difficulties in understanding the blended learning course design, and as in the traditional language learning courses, they thought the face - to - face classes as the central one; therefore, they rarely behaved in blended learning environment as it was expected from them. Changing role of the teachers seems to be a big challenge as also found in the study of Yang (2014).

3.3. Implications and suggestions for blended learning in EFL environment

These studies on blended learning in EFL environment provided some implications and suggestions for language teachers and administrators. Kobayashi and Little (2011) suggested that instructors should provide training and support in the blended learning environment in the beginning of the course especially for lower level students since it would be beneficial initially to spend some face - to - face time to train the students. Hong and Samimy (2010) recommended that second language teachers should support students taking the initiative in using incorporated CALL modes in order to enable students to have positive experiences of blended learning in order to achieve the aimed efficacy of blended learning of second language teachers and learning. Yang (2012) also made some suggestions about the training of the students. He stated that the online learning should be first designed to allow learners to practice what they have learned from face - to - face instruction anytime anywhere by informing the students first.

Instructors also have an important role in training the students because of their coordinating and harmonizing role both in the preparation for and in the late use of online language exercises as implied by Chan (2014). In relation to the teachers role in blended learning, Kobayashi and Little (2011) recommended that instructors should be aware that many variables such as the proficiency level of the students, the length of time they have spent on the program, the limitations of the program they have used and the learners own level of computer literacy can affect the learners' perception of the blended learning as well as their satisfaction.

Yang (2014) implied that teacher training workshops should be organized to prepare language teachers with the blended learning context. He also suggested that the teachers should have more interactions and negotiations with their students and share their knowledge on blended learning in a blended learning community. Similarly, Nissen and Tae (2012) suggested that tutors should be trained and be given the chance of meeting and sharing their reflections with their colleagues, thus allowing them to constitute a learning community. They also suggested that this training should be in the form of blended and face - to - face and allow the teachers to use their own experiences with these two types of classes and to improve their perceptions of the blended learning courses.

As well as training teachers, school support plays a significant role in blended learning environment as recommended by Hong and Samimy (2010). Second language teachers' use of CALL modes should be promoted with the sufficient support of school administrators and second language teacher educators regarding CALL modes before the teachers start teaching in blended learning context. Also, second language teacher educators need to pay more attention to helping second language teachers understand merits and limitations of any kind of technology, what the technology can achieve in

relation to the language skills; therefore, teachers can make informed choices about CALL implementation into the face - to - face modality courses. On the other hand, Chan (2014) pointed out that teachers who design computer mediated blended learning courses should make full use of technical support from the institutions in order to raise the user friendliness of the blended learning systems getting technical solutions.

Most of the studies reviewed highlighted that blended learning should be a part of the programs. Şahin - Kızıl (2014) stated that language teachers functioning in instructional settings with limited class time make use of blended language instruction through such tools as Moodle to improve engagement and satisfaction in their students. Yang (2012) underline that students receive multiple answers or perspectives from blended learning courses by discussing with their peer rather than relying on the teacher as an authoritative figure to receive answers and feedback, thus interaction outside the class increases. Also, Yang (2014) recommended that problems, such as learning motivation of students, low language proficiency level of students, and training them insufficiently in using the online system, could be resolved in the blended course. Ferreira, Salinas and Morales (2014) claimed that the incorporation of technology was crucial in the design of the blended learning model because of the fact that when using technological resources, it is possible to create tasks to improve every skill; therefore, the importance and necessity of the blended learning models in foreign language learning is pointed out and strongly recommended researchers and practitioners to include them when designing courses. Mackenzie et al (2011) suggested that blended learning promote learner autonomy in an orally communicative environment, and it balances individualization, interaction, and interdependence; therefore, blended learning should be implemented into the face - to - face courses and be part of the programs. Apart from integrating blended learning into the programs, Hinkelman and Gruba (2012) asserted that the concept of technology in blended environments needs to be changed and developed from a focus on integrating electronic tools to creating face - to - face and online activities by creating locally produced multimedia materials instead of relying on mass market products.

4. Conclusions

After the analysis of 10 studies, the findings were clustered into three common themes such as benefits of blended learning in EFL environment, problems / challenges encountered in blended learning in EFL environment, and implications and suggestions for blended learning in EFL environment. The most striking finding of the studies reviewed was that 70 % of the studies found beneficial results in terms of blended learning. As for the benefits, results showed that blended learning not only causes better acquisition, language development, increased participation and motivation but also blended learning course enable students to extensively practice what they had learned in the onsite instruction without the limitations of time and location.

Although benefits outnumber the challenges in blended learning studies, the studies reviewed on this topic are not without drawbacks. The main challenges encountered in the studies reviewed are perceived by the teachers. Because teachers and to some extent students had difficulties in understanding the blended learning course design and they still perceive blended learning course as face - to - face classes, and do not behave as expected from them, which may be because of little sense of community building, lack of training in blended learning course, and unfamiliarity with the new systems or technologies as stated by Yang (2014), the changing roles of the teachers are the basic problems of blended learning courses. These challenges can be taken into consideration by future researchers and practitioners in designing blended learning courses.

The last theme that emerged from the data was the implications of the studies. The finding under the implications category fall into some sub categories: training the students, training teachers, school and technical support, and integrating blended learning into programs. Teachers play an important role in training students because of their coordinating and harmonizing role. Considering proficiency level of the students, the length of time they have spend on the program, the limitations of the program they have used and the learners own level of computer literacy, teachers should provide necessary information to the learners before exposing them to blended learning courses. On the other hand, to train students, first teachers should be trained organizing workshops on blended learning. School support is another concern for blended learning courses as well as technical support from the institutions in order to get technical support and raise the user friendliness of the blended learning systems. Finally, after putting all the aforementioned implications and suggestions into practice, the last but not the least recommendation to be implemented is integrating blended learning into programs because it promotes autonomy, motivation, and interaction.

All in all, this review is limited to 10 studies conducted on blended learning and EFL context; therefore, the number of the studies reviewed should be increased to arrive at more satisfactory generalizations.

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* indicates the research articles reviewed in this study.

Appendix A. Table for analysis of articles

Study	Main Findings	Implications for IT
Chan (2014)	The online library provided students with constant home drilling that strengthened in class instruction and provided them with many opportunities to practice interpreting at home promoting students’ motivation and enthusiasm.	<p>Instructors should take a coordinating and harmonizing role both in the preparation for and in the aftermath of the use of online language and interpreting exercises</p> <p>Teachers who design computer-mediated courses should make full use of technical support from the institutions to raise the level of user-friendliness.</p> <p>Face to face courses should be supported with online course hours.</p>
Ferreira, Garcia, & Morales (2014)	<p>Experimental group improved their language proficiency when compared to the control group</p> <p>Blended learning design that included online tasks and cooperative instruction was beneficial for the development of language skills</p>	The incorporation of technology was crucial in the design of blended learning model due to the fact that when using technological resources, it is possible to create tasks to improve every skill, and strongly recommend researchers and practitioners to include them when designing CALL materials.

	<p>The use of learner training strategies for the blended learning model was highly beneficial for the students' language learning experience</p>	
Hinkelman & Gruba (2012)	<p>The construction of classrooms shifted from single-purpose CALL laboratories to blended face-to-face/online spaces</p> <p>The production of teaching materials emphasized locally authored multimedia materials with a decreasing reliance on mass-market course books, and</p>	<p>Blended environments needs to be changed and developed from a focus on integrating electronic tools to creating face - to - face and online activities by producing locally produced multimedia materials instead of relying on mass market products.</p>
Hong & Samimy (2010)	<p>Learners' attitudes toward the CALL modes were positively correlated with students' general computer skills and negatively correlated with students' age.</p> <p>Students with more language learning experience in the BL environment were more likely to have positive attitudes toward CALL modes.</p>	<p>L2 teachers take the initiative in using incorporated CALL modes in order to enable their students to positively experience BL along the way, resulting in achieving the intended efficacy of BL for L2 teaching and learning.</p> <p>L2 teachers' use of CALL modes could be promoted if school administrators and L2 teacher educators attended to sufficient support to language teachers regarding CALL modes before the teachers begin teaching in a multimodal instructional context.</p> <p>L2 teacher educators need to pay more attention to helping L2 teachers understand the limitations and merits of any technology, and what the technology can achieve in relation to the language skills so that L2 teachers can make informed choices about CALL implementation</p>

Kobayashi & Little (2011)	<p>More first year students benefited from using the online component.</p> <p>Weak correlations observed between the students' final exam scores and their perceptions of online English learning programs. This indicates that students with higher English levels perceive online learning programs as being more useful than students with lower final exam scores.</p>	<p>Instructors should provide training and support in blended learning environment in the beginning.</p> <p>Especially for lower level students.</p> <p>Instructors should be aware that many variables can affect learner perceptions of and satisfaction with blended learning such as the proficiency level of students, the length of time they have spent using the program, the limitations of the program's interface as well as the learner's own level of computer literacy.</p>
Mackenzie, Promnitz - Hayashi, Geluso, Delgado, Castellano & Hinkelman (2011)	<p>Compared to non-BLS lessons, BLS lessons had different lesson goals, different patterns of interaction, different types of homework, more variety of media, and more variety of input and output. BLS lessons also showed signs of increased learner autonomy and motivation.</p>	<p>Blended learning promotes learner autonomy in an orally communicative environment – balancing individualization, interaction and interdependence, therefore should be a part of the programs.</p>
Nissen & Tea (2012)	<p>Most tutors had difficulties gaining a deeper insight into the course design: they considered the face-to-face modality to be the central one</p>	<p>To better understand the blended learning, tutors should be trained and be let to meet regularly and to share their reflection, allowing them at the same time to constitute a learning Community. This training should be in the form of both blended and face- to- face then allow the tutors to use their own experience with face- to- face classes and improve their understanding of blended learning courses.</p>
Şahin - Kızıl (2014)	<p>Student reflected a positive level of course satisfaction in course where they used Moodle compared to the other courses where they had not used Moodle.</p> <p>Use of Moodle increased students level of participation in this course, engaged them and promoted effective learning and provided them with a valuable learning experience.</p>	<p>Language teachers functioning in instructional settings with limited class time make use of blended language instruction through such tools as Moodle to improve engagement and satisfaction in their students</p>

Yang (2012)	Students in the experimental group improved and performed better on the reading test after participating in the blended learning remedial reading program.	The online learning should be first designed to allow students to practice what they learned from the on-site instruction anytime and anywhere.
Yang (2014)	<p>In blended instruction, the students made a significant progress in reading comprehension through summary writing, and also in summary writings.</p> <p>The four main problems that teachers perceive include the following: (1) the changing roles of the teachers and students, (2) little sense of community building, (3) lack of training in blended teaching of summary writing, and (4) an unfamiliarity with the new systems or technologies</p>	Preparing language teachers with a series of teacher training workshops to form a leaning community on blended teaching of summary writing seems essential.

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