A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: STUDENTS' FEEDBACK ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

Eda KAHYALAR, PhD
Çukurova University School of Foreign Languages Adana, Turkey
ekahyalar@cu.edu.tr

Abstract: It is undeniable that advancements in computer and networking technologies have made a great impact on the education system. As a result of this, several terms such as e-learning, online learning and blended learning (BL) have appeared. In recent years, the use of web-based technology with face-to-face education has increased greatly, particularly in the field of language teaching. This method, which is called blended instruction, can be defined as combining classical in-class instruction with online learning components. Students' attitudes and experiences related to BL should be investigated in order to create a more effective learning environment. The current study aims to investigate students' feedback about the effectiveness of the BL environment in learning English at the School of Foreign Languages at Çukurova University. It also aims to find out the problems, if any, the students came across related to the BL environment and to present their suggestions to make it more beneficial. The data were obtained from 65 participants through a questionnaire whose reliability was measured in a pilot study by applying Cronbach's Alpha analysis (.778).
Keywords: Computer technology, language teaching, blended learning

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the use of computer technology has gained great popularity in the field of education, including language teaching. The term which is widely used to refer to the integration of computers into English Language Teaching (ELT) context is Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and it is still used as an umbrella term to cover all various use of the computer in language learning. Rilling (2000) states that computers can be helpful to ELT students and teachers in many ways. Learners may use multimedia opportunities and Internet connections for searching and communicating with others. Teachers can use computers to present their lessons more professionally, to prepare lesson materials and to keep grades. In a similar vein, Okan & İnözü (2001) point out that computer technology provides students and teachers with unprecedented opportunities to make language learning and teaching effective and enjoyable.

Okan (2001) emphasizes the importance of the proper use of computer technology by stating that "there is no doubt that, when properly used, computer technology can supplement instruction and facilitate learning".

We can easily observe that the use of computer technology in education has increased significantly in recent years, and advancements in computer and networking technologies over the past decades have created new instructional possibilities for educators. According to Askun, (2007), one of the major developments that has had a positive impact on education system has been the Internet, especially the World Wide Web. Since computer technologies established their use in teaching and learning contexts, terms such as web-based education, e-learning and BL have come to the fore and they have been defined in the literature.

Traditional face-to-face courses refer to those in which the teacher and the student meet in a traditional classroom setting for instructional activities. The primary mode of instructional delivery between teacher and student is face-to-face in a classroom (Comey, 2009). E-learning, on the other hand, is described as a way of teaching where computer is used to achieve individual learning or institutional performance objectives (Clark & Mayer, 2003).

E-learning is also explained as any learning, training or instruction where network technologies, such as networks connecting to the Internet, are used (Fallon & Brown, 2003).

However, traditional face-to-face learning and e-learning have some disadvantages. In an e-learning context, the learner may feel isolated or unmotivated without any real-time human interaction. On the other hand, in a face-to-face setting, the teacher "may lead the learning process and do all the "teaching"- leaving only a small portion of the class time to student discussion (Conn, 2008).

BL environment as a different type of distance education amalgamates the advantages of distance education with the effective aspects of traditional face-to-face education (Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2006). BL is used to describe learning which "mixes various event-based activities, including face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning and self-paced learning" (Valiathan, 2002). Osguthorpe & Graham (2003) define a blended course as one which is taught by combining traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning components and online course management tools. Since the underlying assumption of blended courses or classes is that there are inherent benefits in both face-to-face interaction and online methods, the aim of using BL approaches is to find a harmonious balance between online access to knowledge and face-to-face human interaction. Thus, the blend should involve the strengths of each type of learning environment, but none of the weaknesses.

2. BL ENVIRONMENTS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Several studies (Chiu, 2004, Lee, 2007, Edirisingha et al., 2007, Kopkallı-Yavuz & Mutlu, 2009, Özdener & Satar, 2008, Larsen, 2012) demonstrated the potential benefits of BL approach in language teaching.

In an experimental study, Chiu (2004) investigated the effectiveness of a flight academy's Aviation English training program that implemented online learning CALL technology blended with an instructor in the classroom environment and found that participants generally had positive attitudes toward learning English with CALL before and after the intervention. They had significant improvement on their test scores after the intervention, and they had positive perceptions of CALL technology in facilitating interactions in the classroom both in the pre-test and post-test.

In another experimental study, Lee (2007) tried to find out whether a BL approach that incorporated web-based CALL activities with traditional classroom had a significant effect on the learners' listening and reading achievement in a standardized test and what differences, if any, existed in the test scores between the group that received web-based CALL activities as a supplement and the group that received regular instruction only. There wasn't any statistically significant difference in overall scores between the two groups, but the experimental group made a better improvement on the listening section than the control group. Another aim of this study was to find out the learners' and the instructor's perceptions about the BL environment. According to the results, most learners perceived that web-based CALL activities were helpful and effective, and the instructor had a positive attitude toward the approach of blending the web-based CALL activities with the classroom teaching.

Larsen (2012) investigated the use of BL with ESL writing students in an intensive English program. It was found that students worked more autonomously and focused while becoming more responsible for their own learning. The students in the study commented that they liked learning in the BL environment and would prefer it to more conventional classes.

However, the study in which Neves Seesink (2007) investigated the effects of blended instruction on the writing development of six students and how these learners perceived

blended instruction did not demonstrate similar results. The results showed a certain lack of commitment with online exercises, especially when the exercises were not directly affecting learners' grades. Concerning the blended instruction, the learners perceived the online component as a review/practice tool rather than an integral part of the course. This study shows that the success of BL environments is strongly linked to students' understanding of the rationale behind the blend and in some contexts; learners may be satisfied with face-to-face instruction only.

Based on a research and development project at Munich University, Neumeier (2005) puts forward a framework of parameters for designing a BL environment for language learning and teaching purposes. He states that BL courses can foster successful language learning provided that they are carefully designed on the bases of an analysis of the participants' needs and abilities. In connection with this, Warschauer & Healey (1998) state that it is necessary for teachers to take into consideration the needs of the students and design the teaching situations according to these needs.

Considering the studies mentioned above and several other studies which found that a key variable related to the success of a BL environment was student satisfaction, the aim of the present study is to investigate students' feedback about the effectiveness of the new BL environment at the School of Foreign Languages at Çukurova University, which was implemented to promote students' retention and learning. Another aim of the study is to find out the problems, if any, which the students encountered related to the BL environment and to present their suggestions to make it more beneficial.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. Participants

Participants of the study consisted of 41 undergraduate (UG) and 24 graduate (G) randomly-selected learners who were taking an English preparation class at the School of Foreign Languages at Çukurova University. In addition to attending the face-to-face courses during the academic year, they were required to register the virtual classrooms of their instructors on a website and do the weekly-assigned tasks for 16 weeks. The tasks included listening, speaking, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, writing activities and tests. The tasks the students completed were graded in the system and the grades were saved in the online gradebook. All of the participants were at pre-intermediate level during the data collection process, and they were introduced with a BL environment for the first time. The reason for dividing the participants into two groups as UG and G students was to find out whether there were any significant differences between their feedbacks about the BL environment.

3.2. Instruments

A questionnaire, which was composed of 23 Likert-scale items (Sections A, B1 and B2), 2 items with dichotomous variables (Section C), 4 open-ended questions, and a section for further comments, was developed by the researcher to assess the participants' views.

Before conducting the main study, the questionnaire was piloted with a randomly-selected group of 22 students and the reliability of Likert-scale items was calculated. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the reliability and the analysis revealed that 23-item Likert-scale's reliability was .778. Thus, the questionnaire was considered to be suitable to use in the main study. The same reliability analysis was applied to the main data in the study for each section and the values reflected a high degree of reliability for the questionnaire (.814 for Section A, .916 for Section B1, and .922 for Section B2). The questionnaires the students responded to in

the pilot and the main study were in Turkish, the participants' native language. The rationale behind this was to prevent any possible misunderstanding and to obtain reliable data.

3.3. Data Analysis and Results

Quantitative data in the questionnaires were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The qualitative data from the open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis technique, by coding similar points mentioned by the participants. Below are the results about each section in the questionnaire, illustrated in tables and discussed for each item.

3.3.1. Section A: Students' Feedback about General Features and Technical Aspects

Section A of the questionnaire aimed to explore the participants' feedback about the general features and technical aspects. Below are the items in this section of the questionnaire.

1. I could use the website without getting any help.
2. The overall presentation of the website was interesting.
3. I could connect to the website easily whenever I wanted.
4. The presentation of the activities was interesting.
5. The instructions of the activities were clear.
6. The language used in the activities was suitable to our language level.
7. The weekly assignments were parallel to the content of the face-to-face education.

In Table 1 below, the results related to the items in Section A are demonstrated.

Table 1. Frequencies, Percentages, Mean, Standard Deviation and T-test Values for the Items in Section A

Item		1		2		3		4		5		Total		X	sd	t
No		never		seldom		sometimes		often		always						
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%			
1	UG	0	0	5	12,5	5	12,5	15	37,5	15	37,5	40	100	4,00	1,01	
	G	2	9,5	3	14,3	4	19,0	7	33,3	5	23,8	21	100	3,48	1,29	1,745
	Total	2	3,3	8	13,1	9	14,8	22	36,1	20	32,8	61	100			
2	UG	10	24,4	20	48,8	6	14,6	4	9,8	1	2,4	41	100	2,17	,99	
	G	5	22,7	5	22,7	5	22,7	6	27,3	1	4,5	22	100	2,68	1,25	-
	Total	15	23,8	25	39,7	11	17,5	10	15,9	2	3,2	63	100			1,773
3	UG	3	7,5	6	15,0	9	22,5	15	37,5	7	17,5	40	100	3,42	1,17	
	G	4	18,2	2	9,1	1	4,5	10	45,5	5	22,7	22	100	3,45	1,43	-,087
	Total	7	11,3	8	12,9	10	16,1	25	40,3	12	19,4	62	100			
4	UG	6	14,6	13	31,7	14	34,1	7	17,1	1	2,4	41	100	2,60	1,02	
	G	4	18,2	6	27,3	5	22,7	5	22,7	2	9,1	22	100	2,77	1,26	-,554
	Total	10	15,9	19	30,2	19	30,2	12	19,0	3	4,8	63	100			
5	UG	3	7,7	6	15,4	13	33,3	12	30,8	5	12,8	39	100	3,25	1,11	
	G	1	5,0	1	5,0	7	35,0	8	40,0	3	15,0	20	100	3,55	,99	-,989
	Total	4	6,8	7	11,9	20	33,9	20	33,9	8	13,6	59	100			
6	UG	1	2,5	1	2,5	15	37,5	17	42,5	6	15,0	40	100	3,65	,863	
	G	1	4,5	1	4,5	7	31,8	10	45,5	3	13,6	22	100	3,59	,959	,248
	Total	2	3,2	2	3,2	22	35,5	27	43,5	9	14,5	62	100			
7	UG	8	20,5	8	20,5	13	33,3	9	23,1	1	2,6	39	100	2,66	1,13	
	G	4	18,2	4	18,2	7	31,8	2	9,1	5	22,7	22	100	3,00	1,41	-
	Total	12	19,7	12	19,7	20	32,8	11	18,0	6	9,8	61	100			1,008

As can be seen in Table 1, in terms of their feedback about general features and technical aspects, there is no statistically significant difference between the UG and G students. Below are the discussions of the results for each item in this section.

The participants' responses regarding Item 1 show that most of them could use the website without getting any help. Concerning the presentation of the website (Item 2), the results indicate that a large number of participants did not find the presentation of the website very interesting because 15 students responded as "never" and 25 students responded as "seldom". According to the mean scores, the presentation of the website was more interesting for the G students, but there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of their responses to this item.

With the responses related to the connection to the website (Item 3), it can be said that the students did not usually have connection problems because the most frequent responses vary between "sometimes" and "always". The mean scores for both groups are very close, 3, 42 for UG and 3, 45 for G students. Considering their answers to this item, there is no significant difference between the two groups.

Consistent with their responses to Item 2, responses to Item 4 indicate that the students did not find the presentation of the activities on the website very interesting. The mean scores (2, 60 and 2, 77) mean that the most frequent responses vary between "seldom" and "sometimes" for both groups. With these results, we can conclude that neither the overall presentation of the website nor the presentation of the activities was very interesting for the participants.

Regarding the instructions of the activities, the results presented in Table 1 (Item 5) clearly show that they were not always clear or comprehensible for the students. 6, 8 % of the participants responded as "never" and 11, 9 % of them responded as "seldom" to this item. Comprehension problems with the instructions may have affected these students' performance and satisfaction in a negative way. These results indicate that some students, especially the low level ones, may need their teacher's guidance to be able to understand the instructions on the website.

One can see from Table 1 that nearly half of the participants (43, 5 %) responded as "often" and 14, 5 % responded as "always" to Item 6; thus, it can be concluded that the language used in the activities was suitable to the students' language level most of the time.

According to the results related to Item 7, for 32, 8 % of the participants, the weekly assignments were "sometimes" parallel to the content of the face-to-face education. Mean values (2, 66 and 3, 00) indicate that most of the responses were between "seldom" and "sometimes". However; in the previous item, nearly half of the participants stated the language used in the activities was suitable to their language level, which implies that there is a parallelism between the content of the activities in the virtual classroom and the content of the face-to-face education. The reason for the responses to Item 7 may be the fact that the assignments in the virtual classroom were given as revision or practice activities related to the content of the face-to-face education, thus they were generally about the previously learned items.

The participants mentioned some problems they had encountered related to general features and technical aspects, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Problems Mentioned Related to General Features and Technical Aspects

Problem Mentioned	f
Connection problem	3
Scores not saved in the grade book	4
Not understanding the feedback on writing assignments	1
Problems in the listening activities	1
Uninteresting presentation of the activities	2
Problems with using the dictionary on the website	1

As can be seen in Table 2, the most frequently mentioned problem was that the students' scores were not saved in the grade book. Another problem was about connection to the website. Three students stated that they had connection problems and waited a long time for pages to load. Two students pointed out that the presentation of the activities was not interesting, and one student had problems in understanding his/her instructor's feedback on writing assignments. Problems in the listening activities and using the dictionary on the website were also mentioned by one participant each.

3.3.2. Section B1: Students' Feedback about the Benefits of Doing the Activities in the Virtual Classroom on Revision

The items in Section B1 assessed participants' views about the benefits of doing the activities in the virtual classroom on revising what they have learnt in face-to-face education. Each item in this section aimed to get the students' feedback on a different section in the virtual class: Item 8 (Listening), Item 9 (Speaking), Item 10 (Grammar), Item 11 (Vocabulary), Item 12 (Pronunciation), Item 13 (Reading), Item 14 (Writing), and Item 15 (Tests). In Table 3, results about the items in Section B1 are provided.

Table 3. Frequencies, Percentages, Mean, Standard Deviation and T-test Values for the Items in Section B1

Item		1		2		3		4		5		Total		X	sd	t
No		not beneficial at all		barely beneficial		somewhat beneficial		beneficial		very beneficial						
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%			
8	UG	6	14,6	9	22,0	16	39,0	9	22,0	1	2,4	41	100	2,75	1,04	
	G	4	17,4	6	26,1	3	13,0	8	34,8	2	8,7	23	100	2,91	1,31	-,526
	Total	10	15,6	15	23,4	19	29,7	17	26,6	3	4,7	64	100			
9	UG	21	51,2	7	17,1	9	22,0	4	9,8	0	0	41	100	1,90	1,06	
	G	5	21,7	8	34,8	6	26,1	3	13,0	1	4,3	23	100	2,43	1,12	-1,880
	Total	26	40,6	15	23,4	15	23,4	7	10,9	1	1,6	64	100			
10	UG	4	9,8	2	4,9	16	39,0	13	31,7	6	14,6	41	100	3,36	1,11	
	G	2	8,7	3	13,7	6	26,1	10	43,5	2	8,7	23	100	3,30	1,10	,213
	Total	6	9,4	5	7,8	22	34,4	23	35,9	8	12,5	64	100			
11	UG	10	25,0	13	32,5	5	12,5	12	30,0	0	0	40	100	2,47	1,17	
	G	3	13,0	7	30,4	6	26,1	7	30,4	0	0	23	100	2,73	1,05	-,890
	Total	13	20,6	20	31,7	11	17,5	19	30,2	0	0	63	100			
12	UG	16	39,0	12	29,3	6	14,6	7	17,1	0	0	41	100	2,09	1,11	
	G	2	9,5	7	33,3	5	23,8	6	28,6	1	4,8	21	100	2,85	1,10	-2,546*
	Total	18	29,9	19	30,6	11	17,7	13	21,0	1	1,6	62	100			
13	UG	10	24,4	5	12,2	10	24,4	14	34,1	2	4,9	41	100	2,82	1,28	
	G	3	13,6	1	4,5	12	54,5	3	13,6	3	13,6	22	100	3,09	1,15	-,799
	Total	13	20,6	6	9,5	22	34,9	17	27,0	5	7,9	63	100			
14	UG	19	48,7	7	17,9	7	17,9	6	15,4	0	0	39	100	2,00	1,14	
	G	8	36,4	2	9,1	7	31,8	3	13,6	2	9,1	22	100	2,50	1,37	-1,523
	Total	27	44,3	9	14,8	14	23,0	9	14,8	2	3,3	61	100			
15	UG	3	7,3	10	24,4	8	19,5	15	36,6	5	12,2	41	100	3,21	1,17	
	G	4	17,4	3	13,0	6	26,1	6	26,1	4	17,4	23	100	3,13	1,35	,275
	Total	7	10,9	13	20,3	14	21,9	21	32,8	9	14,1	64	100			

As illustrated in Table 3, there is no statistically significant difference between the UG and G students' responses in this section except for Item 12, which was about pronunciation activities. The t-test value for Item 12 shows that there is a significant difference between the UG and G students' responses ($p<.05$). Examination of the mean values for Item 12 indicates that pronunciation activities were more beneficial for the G students than for the UG students. Below are the discussions of results for each item in this section.

The results demonstrated in Table 3 show that only 3 participants (4, 7 %) found the listening activities "very beneficial" but for 10 participants (15, 6 %), they were "not beneficial at all". Most frequent responses vary between "rarely beneficial" and "somewhat beneficial". The mean values show that G students found the listening activities more beneficial when compared to UG students.

As for the speaking activities, the percentage of the participants who stated that the speaking activities were "not beneficial at all" is quite high (40, 6 %). Only one participant found the speaking activities "very beneficial" and only 7 students ranked these activities as "beneficial". Because the speaking activities required a microphone and some technical knowledge, most of the students might have found them too difficult to do. Also, for the students who did not have a computer at home, it may have been impossible to do these activities in the computer lab or Internet cafes.

It is notable that the highest mean scores for both UG (3, 36) and G students (3, 30) in Section B1 of the questionnaire are for Item 10, which is about the grammar activities. 35, 9 % of all the participants found the grammar activities "beneficial", and 12, 5 % of them found them "very beneficial". The results show that the grammar activities in the virtual classroom were more beneficial than the other activities on revising what the students have learnt in face-to-face education.

However, none of the participants found the vocabulary activities "very beneficial". As can be clearly seen in Table 3 (Item 11), for 30, 2 % of the participants, the vocabulary activities were "beneficial" and for 31, 7 % of them they were "barely beneficial". Mean values indicate that G students found these activities more beneficial than the UG students did but this difference is not statistically significant.

Regarding the pronunciation activities (Item 12), the difference between the UG and the G students' responses is statistically significant. The mean value for the G group is 2, 85 while it is 2, 09 for the UG group, which shows that for the G students, pronunciation activities were more beneficial. The low mean values may result from the fact that since students are not tested on pronunciation in the exams, they might not have considered it as a core subject and thus not done the pronunciation activities in the virtual classroom.

The percentage of participants who responded to Item 13, which is about the reading activities, as "somewhat beneficial" is 34, 9. Mean value for the G students is 3, 09 while it is 2, 82 for the UG students. When the responses about the four language skills are considered, it is observed that the participants found the reading activities in the virtual classroom the most beneficial among the others.

We should note that the results related to Item 14 indicate that almost half of the participants (44, 3 %) found the writing activities "not beneficial at all". Mean value for the UG students is 2, 00 but it is 2, 50 for the G students, which is not a statistically significant difference. Participants' feedback about the writing activities in the virtual classroom may be because of the intensive writing syllabus in face-to-face education. Since they are usually busy with the writing activities in the real classroom course, which is an important component of the evaluation system, and some of the writing tasks in the virtual classroom were not parallel to the content of the writing syllabus in face-to-face education, they may have ignored them.

The last item in this section, Item 15, aimed to get the students' feedback on the tests. The results show that the second most beneficial activities were the review quizzes and module tests. 32, 8 % of the participants rated tests as "beneficial". Mean values for this item (3, 21 for UG and 3, 13 for G students) are very close to the ones about the grammar activities. It

can be observed that for the participants, the most beneficial activities in the virtual classroom were the grammar activities and tests.

By looking at the results in Section B1, we can conclude that even the highest means are below 4, 00, which implies that the participants did not find the activities in the virtual classroom very beneficial. Another conclusion we can draw from the analysis of the results is that the G students' feedback about the activities was more positive than that of the UG students. This may be explained by the fact that a large number of G students cannot attend face-to-face classes regularly because they work and study at the same time. It is possible that the activities in the virtual classroom helped them to overcome the problems related to skipping classes, and thus they found these activities more beneficial than the UG students did.

3.3.3. Section B2: Views about the Benefits of Doing the Activities in the Virtual Classroom on Catching up on the Content of Face-to-face Education

The items in Section B2 aimed to find out the participants' views about the benefits of doing the activities in the virtual classroom on catching up on the content of face-to-face education. Like the items in Section B1, each item in Section B2 was related to a different section: Item 16 (Listening), Item 17 (Speaking), Item 18 (Grammar), Item 19 (Vocabulary), Item 20 (Pronunciation), Item 21(Reading), Item 22 (Writing), and Item 23 (Tests). Table 4 below presents the results related to the items in Section B2.

Table 4. Frequencies, Percentages, Mean, Standard Deviation and T-test Values for the Items in Section B2

Item		1		2		3		4		5		Total		X	sd	t
No		not beneficial at all		barely beneficial		somewhat beneficial		beneficial		very beneficial						
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%			
16	UG	4	10,0	16	40,0	7	17,5	12	30,0	1	2,5	40	100	2,75	1,08	
	G	4	17,4	6	26,1	7	30,4	5	21,7	1	4,3	23	100	2,69	1,14	,188
	Total	8	12,7	22	34,9	14	22,2	17	27,0	2	3,2	63	100			
17	UG	21	52,5	10	25,0	5	12,5	4	10,8	0	0	40	100	1,80	1,01	
	G	6	26,1	8	34,8	4	17,4	4	17,4	1	4,3	23	100	2,39	1,19	-
	Total	27	42,9	18	28,6	9	14,3	8	12,7	1	1,6	63	100			2,082*
18	UG	7	17,1	5	12,2	15	36,6	11	26,8	3	7,3	41	100	2,95	1,18	
	G	4	17,4	4	17,4	3	13,0	8	34,8	4	17,4	23	100	3,17	1,40	-,676
	Total	11	17,2	9	14,1	18	28,1	19	29,7	7	10,9	64	100			
19	UG	13	31,7	8	19,5	12	29,3	8	19,5	0	0	41	100	2,36	1,13	
	G	3	13,0	4	17,4	9	39,1	6	26,1	1	4,3	23	100	2,91	1,08	-1,881
	Total	16	25,0	12	18,8	21	32,8	14	21,9	1	1,6	64	100			
20	UG	19	46,3	10	24,4	6	14,6	6	14,6	0	0	41	100	1,97	1,10	
	G	3	13,0	8	34,8	7	30,4	4	17,4	1	4,3	23	100	2,65	1,07	-
	Total	22	34,4	18	28,1	13	20,3	10	15,6	1	1,6	64	100			2,374*
21	UG	10	25,0	8	20,0	15	37,5	5	12,5	2	5.0	40	100	2,52	1,15	
	G	4	17,4	4	17,4	5	21,7	9	39,1	1	4,3	23	100	2,95	1,22	-1,398
	Total	14	22,2	12	19,0	20	31,7	14	22,2	3	4,8	63	100			
22	UG	20	51,3	11	28,2	4	10,3	3	7,7	1	2,6	39	100	1,82	1,07	
	G	7	30,4	6	26,1	7	30,4	1	4,3	2	8,7	23	100	2,34	1,22	-1,771
	Total	27	43,5	17	27,4	11	17,7	4	6,5	3	4,8	62	100			
23	UG	9	22,0	5	12,2	13	31,7	9	22,0	5	12,2	41	100	2,90	1,31	
	G	3	13,0	5	21,7	7	30,4	5	21,7	3	13,0	23	100	3,00	1,24	-,290
	Total	12	18,8	10	15,6	20	31,3	14	21,9	8	12,5	64	100			

Examination of the results in Table 4 shows that the difference between the UG and the G students' responses to items 17 and 20 is statistically significant ($p<.05$). Mean scores indicate that both the speaking and the pronunciation activities were more beneficial for the G students on catching up on the content of face-to-face education. Below are the discussions of results for each item in this section.

When we look at the mean values for Item 16, we can observe that despite not being statistically significant, there is a difference between the UG and the G students. The UG students found the listening activities more beneficial on catching up on the content of face-to-face education than the G students did. The mean values for the responses indicate that the participants' responses to this item vary between "barely beneficial" and "somewhat beneficial".

The participants' responses to Item 17, which is about the speaking activities, are consistent with the responses to Item 9 in that the speaking activities in the virtual classroom were more beneficial for the G students both on revising what they have learnt in face-to-face education

and on catching up the content of face-to-face education. According to their responses to Item 17, there is a significant difference between the UG and G students ($p<.05$). The low means in the responses to this item (1, 80 and 2, 39) may have stemmed from the participants' unwillingness to do the speaking activities because of having to speak into a microphone, which they might have considered as "unnatural".

When the responses to all the other items in Section B2 are examined, it can be seen that the grammar activities (Item 18) have been the most beneficial for the participants on catching up on the content of face-to-face education. Mean values show that the grammar activities were more beneficial for the G students although the difference is not statistically significant.

As for the vocabulary activities (Item 19), mean values indicate that most of the responses vary between "barely beneficial" and "somewhat beneficial", but one fourth of the participants responded as "not beneficial at all" to this item. Consistent with the responses to Item 11, which also assessed views about the vocabulary activities; mean value for the G students is higher for Item 19, but there is no significant difference between the UG and G students in terms of their responses to Item 19.

However, there is a significant difference between the UG and G students in their responses to Item 20 (($p<.05$), which is about the pronunciation activities. This result is consistent with the result in Section B1 about Item 12. In Item 12, which was also about the pronunciation activities in the virtual classroom, there is also a significant difference between the UG and G students. It can be concluded that the pronunciation activities were more beneficial for the G students not only on revising what they have learnt in face-to-face education but also on catching up on the content.

A high percentage of the participants stated that the reading activities (Item 21) were "somewhat beneficial". When mean values are examined (2, 52 and 2, 95), it can be seen that, as in most of the activities, reading activities were more beneficial for the G students but the difference is not statistically significant.

Similar to the responses to Item 14 in Section B1, almost half of the participants (43, 5 %) responded as "not beneficial at all" to Item 22, which assessed their views about the writing activities. Although it is not significant, there is a difference between the mean values for UG and G students (1, 82 and 2, 34) and it is notable that there are only few participants who found the writing activities "beneficial" or "very beneficial". This may result from the fact that there is an intensive writing syllabus in face-to-face education and the students are tested on the items in that syllabus. Thus, they may have considered the writing activities in the virtual classroom as unimportant or unnecessary.

The participants' responses to the item related to the tests (Item 23) are in line with the ones in Section B1 in that after the grammar activities, tests were rated as the second most beneficial activities for the students on catching up on the content of face-to-face education. The mean values (2, 90 and 3, 00) show that most of the responses are "barely beneficial" and "somewhat beneficial". It can be concluded from the overall results that for the participants, the most beneficial activities in the virtual class were the grammar activities and tests on revising what they have learnt in real classes and catching up on the content of face-to-face education.

No problems were mentioned by the participants related to the content of the activities in the virtual classroom.

3.3.4. Section C: Views about the implementation of the BL environment

In Section C, there were two items (16 and 17) to assess the participants' views about the implementation of the BL environment. They were:

24. Do you think that the activities you do in the virtual classroom should be graded by your instructors?
25. Do you think that it should be compulsory for the students to register the virtual classroom?

Table 5 below shows the responses to Item 24.

Table 5. All Participants' Responses to Item 24 and the X^2 Value

Response	f	X^2	df	p
Yes	14			
No	50	20,250	1	,000
Total	64			

As can be observed in Table 5, only 14 students think that the activities they do in the virtual classroom should be graded while 50 of them believe that they should not be graded. The X^2 value shows that there is a statistically significant difference between "Yes" and "No" responses to Item 24 ($p<.001$). It can be concluded that most of the students do not want to be graded according to their performance in the virtual classroom.

X^2 value was also computed in order to find out whether there is a significant difference between the responses of UG and G students to Item 24 and results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. UG and G Students Responses to Item 24 and the X^2 Value

Response	UG		G		Total		X^2	df	p
	f	%	f	%	f	%			
Yes	10	24,4	4	17,4	14	21,9	,422	1	,516
No	31	75,6	19	82,6	50	78,1			
Total	41	100	23	100	64	100			

Examination of the X^2 value in Table 6 does not indicate any statistically significant difference between UG and G students ($p<.05$). Most of the participants believe their instructors should not grade the activities they do in the virtual classroom. As in Neves Seesink (2007), the participants in this study might have perceived the activities in the virtual classroom as a review/practice tool rather than an integral part of the course and this may have caused them to respond in that way. Another reason for this might be the problem that four students mentioned about the general features and technical aspects. As mentioned earlier, four students reported that although they had completed the tasks, sometimes their scores were not saved in the gradebook.

Item 25 was asked to find out the participants' opinions about making the registration to the virtual classroom compulsory. Table 7 displays the responses to Item 25.

Table 7. All Participants' Responses to Item 25 and the X^2 Value

Response	f	X^2	df	p
Yes	18			
No	46	12,250	1	,000
Total	64			

It can be seen in Table 7 that 46 participants in the study believe registration to the virtual classroom should not be compulsory, and only 18 of them think it should be compulsory. The X^2 value indicates a significant difference between two responses ($p<.001$). In order to compare the responses of UG and G students, X^2 value was computed and the results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. UG and G Students Responses to Item 25 and the X^2 Value

Response	UG		G		Total		X^2	df	p
	f	%	f	%	f	%			
Yes	14	34,1	4	17,4	18	28,1	2,046	1	,153
No	27	65,9	19	82,6	46	71,9			
Total	41	100	23	100	64	100			

As illustrated in Table 8, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups of learners in terms of their responses to Item 25 ($p<.05$). The majority of the participants think that registration to the virtual classroom should not be compulsory. This may be due to the fact that learners can easily find supplementary materials online and do not need to register the virtual classroom for self-study. Also, they may be satisfied with face-to-face instruction only.

3.3.5. Suggestions and Further Comments from the Participants about the BL Environment

As mentioned earlier, the last section of the questionnaire aimed to get the participants' suggestions and further comments about the BL environment. The results are demonstrated in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Suggestions to Make the BL Environment More Beneficial

Suggestion	f
Registration to the virtual classroom should not be compulsory	4
The content should be parallel to the content of face-to-face education	2
There must be a regular scheduled lab hour to do the activities in the virtual classroom with the guidance of the instructors	13
The virtual classroom should encourage group work	1
In the virtual classroom, it should be possible for the online students to communicate	2

As it is illustrated in Table 9, five suggestions were made to make the BL environment more beneficial. The most frequent one made by 13 participants is that there must be a regular scheduled lab hour to do the activities in the virtual classroom with their instructor's guidance. This might indicate that some students did not find the instructions on the website clear, and they needed guidance to complete the activities.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main aim of the current study was to explore students' feedback about the effectiveness of the BL environment in learning English at the School of Foreign Languages at Çukurova University. It also aimed to find out the problems, if any, the students came across related to the BL environment and to present their suggestions to make it more beneficial. According to the results of the study, the activities which the participants found the most beneficial in the virtual classroom were the grammar activities and tests. However, the means for all of the activities are below 4, 00, which shows that even the most beneficial activities for the learners were "somewhat beneficial". With these results, it seems plausible to conclude that the BL environment might have been unnatural for the students who were accustomed to a traditional lecture format. Another possible reason for these results might have been students' low computer literacy skills. The ones who were not familiar with computers or who were fearful of using technology might have been unprepared to benefit from such a learning environment, which might have caused their dissatisfaction.

When we compare the UG and G students, we can observe that the G students found the skill activities more useful than the UG students did on revising what they have learnt and on catching up on the content of face-to-face education. When all of the participants' responses are considered, it can be seen that the most beneficial skill activities were the reading activities and the least beneficial ones were the speaking activities on revising what they have learnt in face-to-face education. On catching up on the content of face-to-face education, the reading activities were the best beneficial ones, however, the least beneficial ones were the writing activities. This may stem from the differences between the writing syllabus of the face-to-face education and the writing activities in the virtual classroom. Also, some participants mentioned about the lack of feedback on their works in writing activities, which shows a lack of interaction between the students and the instructors. This may have caused the students' rating the writing activities as not beneficial.

Another conclusion we may draw from the findings is that although most of the participants could use the website without getting any help, the most frequent suggestion that was made about how to make the BL environment more beneficial was to arrange a regular scheduled lab hour to do the activities with their instructors. This may be attributed to the fact that they were introduced with a BL environment for the first time. Their recommendation indicates that some of them were are not ready for such a self-study environment and they needed the guidance of their teachers. Douglis (2009) suggests a number of factors to be considered while designing a blended course, one of which is audience analysis. Hence, moving on from the results of the present study, one suggestion is that students' needs, attitudes and perspectives with respect to a BL environment should be examined and taken into consideration while designing and redesigning the courses. Another suggestion could be that teachers and administrators should interact with the students and explore their feedback at intervals during the course rather than doing this at the end of the course. This can give them the opportunity to help the students with the problems they encounter and to improve the learning outcomes.

In conclusion, this study shows that how much students benefit from a BL environment is strongly related to the characteristics of the learners. Some students may be satisfied with face-to-face education only and they may refuse to believe that a BL environment would be beneficial in any context. When the participants' responses to the Items in Section C are considered, it can be seen that most of them think their work in the virtual classroom should not be graded by their instructors and they believe registration to the virtual classroom should not be compulsory. This implies that they perceive the tasks in the virtual classroom as a review tool rather than an integral part of the course. Thus, we suggest that students' attitudes, abilities and preferences should be examined carefully and taken into consideration so as to increase their satisfaction and to make a BL environment work more effectively for them.

REFERENCES

Akkoyunlu, B. & Soylu, M.Y. (2006). "A study on students' views on blended learning environment", *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education* 7/3, 43-56.

Askun, C. (2007). "Relationship between Students' Level of Effort and Course Perceptions in a Blended Learning Environment", *Ph.D. Dissertation*, Indiana University.

Chiu, C. (2004). "Effectiveness of implementing computer-assisted language learning technology in the English for specific purposes training program", *Ph.D. Dissertation*, Lynn University.

Clark, R. T. & Mayer, R. E. (2003). *E-Learning and the Science of Instruction*. San Francisco: Preiffer.

Comey, W. L. (2009). "Blended Learning and the Classroom Environment: A Comparative Analysis of Students' Perception of Classroom Environment across Community College Courses Taught in Traditional Face-to-Face, Online and Blended Methods", *Ph.D. Dissertation*, George Washington University.

Conn, S. S. (2008). "A Methodology for Design and Development of an Electronic Learning (E- Learning) Network at the Regis University for Professional Studies", *Ph.D. Dissertation*, Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences, Nova Southeastern University.

Douglis, F. (2009). Blended learning: Choosing the right blend. *The Encyclopedia of Educational Technology*. San Diego University. Available from http://edweb.sdsu.edu/eet.

Edirisingha, P, Rizzi, C. & Rothwell, L. (2007). "Podcasting to provide a teaching and learning support for an undergraduate model on English language and communication", *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 8/3.

Fallon, C & Brown, S. (2003). *E-Learning Standards: A Guide to Purchasing, Developing, and Deploying Standards-Conformant E-Learning*. Boca Raton: St. Lucie Press.

Kopkallı-Yavuz, H. & Mutlu, M.E. (2009). "Does frequency of online support use have an effect on overall grades?, *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 10/2.*

Larsen, L. J. E. (2012). Teacher and student perspectives on a blended learning intensive English program writing course. Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.

Lee, T. (2007). "Using Web-based CALL to Improve English Language Mastery of the Republic of China Air Force Academy", *Ph.D. Dissertation*, Nova Southeastern University.

Neumeier, P. (2005). "A closer look at blended learning-parameters for designing a blended learning environment for language teaching and learning", *ReCALL, 17* /2:163-78

Neves Seesink, M. T. (2007)."Using blended instruction to teach academic vocabulary collocations: A case study", *Ed.D. Dissertation*, West Virginia University.

Okan, Z. (2001). "Technology: A tool or tutor?", *Modern English Teacher* 10/3: 46-9.

Okan, Z. & İnözü, J. (2001). *Guidelines for Teachers in Selecting/Evaluating Language Learning Software*. Available from http://home.ku.edu.tr/-elc/papers.html.

Osguthorpe, R. P. & Graham, C. R. (2003). "Blended learning environments: Definitions and Directions", *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 4/3: 227-33.

Özdener, N. & Satar, H. M. (2008). "Computer-mediated communication in foreign language and education: Use of target language and perceptions", *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 9/2.*

Rilling, S. (2000). A Teacher Preparation Course for Computer-Assisted Language Learning. In Smith & Hanson, E. (Eds.), *Technology-Enhanced Learning Environments*. USA: TESOL Inc.

Valiathan, P. (2002). "Blended Learning Models", *Learning Circuits*. Available from http://www.learningcircuits.org/2002/aug2002/valiathan.html.

Warschauer, M. & Healey, D. (1998). "Computers and language learning: An overview", *Language Teaching 31*, 57-71.

