Blended Learning Between Success and Catastrophe in Third World Countries: IKR as a Case

Shokhan Anwar Hassan Al-Jaf, University of Raparin, Iraq
Mezin Hesen, Bangor University, United Kingdom

Abstract

Despite destructive impacts on Health and economy, COVID19 brought humanitarian disaster, especially for education and learning. Social distancing gave prospects to find an alternative method for students to get connected to their academic modules and educational procedures. Educational technology and e-learning are fundamental system to progress controlling over time, place and pace. Blended learning (BL) is one of the most up to date techniques which has been used in Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) since the spread of the virus, to mention that, this method has not been applied or practiced before. University of Raparin (UoR) and University of Garmian (UoG) are sticking to the same plan (BL) to keep lecturing during pandemic stretch. This paper focuses on the quality and quantity of learning in such poorly organised environment. The method of the research is experimental. Questions have been given to students of UoR and UoG/ English departments. The data has been collected and illustrated in charts. The final figures assert that online educational materials cannot accomplish the process of BL. Also, it is not a satisfactory method for those that have never been trained or prepared for such a plan which has been generalised by the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE).

Keywords: Blended Learning, COVID19, educational techniques, technology, Third World

Introduction

Globalisation or the process of integration is a complex and difficult term to define for scholars (Syamalamma and Reddy, 2009:14). It has affected every area of human existence. People's communication, the philosophy of teaching, education, learning techniques and technology have had giant footsteps toward the progress of prosperity. Education is one of the most affected sectors in the latter decades of the 20th century. The expansion of information technology and the method of teaching have provided a new environment for the effective and efficient implementation of learning settings. Hickman (2007) adds that communication between students and teachers has become much simpler than traditional methods.

In the last two decades, the internet has had a great impact on higher education and has helped develop a new methodology of teaching and learning. Graham (2003) details the accessibility of internet developed the educational choices available to learners and lecturers. Iraqi Kurdistan is an autonomous region in Northern Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government is the official administrative of the autonomous area. The wave of COVID-19 in Iraq and especially the IKR has prompted the Ministry of Higher Education to introduce a pathway for instructors and learners to continue studying without interruption. The MHE declared an alternative method for the pandemic period and issued an instruction that BL was to be undertaken for educational purposes. The full order was issued on 27th September 2020 and referenced 8728. At this time, BL was a technique and scheme that was new to lecturers and students in this region.

Alongside the Bologna system, the BL approach has been applied to UoR and UoG across 2020-2021. Despite lecturers' salary cuts "out of law by constitution" to cope with an economic disaster by the KRG and the pandemic crisis, the educational procedure finalised with hitches (Ghafuri, 2020). Arguably, it is clear that BL is vital as it breaks down the traditional barriers of instruction. Some of these ways are not suited to all learners and modern day access to updated resources and technology can make educational learning skills more accessible for each learner (Humaira et al., 2018:31).

If BL would be regarded as a progression of tutoring mechanism (Krasnova, Popova, 2015:4), thus in IKR is a compulsory approach to fill that gap which the virus has imposed on the educational system. The official statements of the government confirmed that the reputation of BL has not persuaded the KRG to apply it as a success method, but they deal with it as a justification to pelt the instructors' salary cuts and the pandemic crisis especially in education fields (Ghafuri, 2020).

Third World

The term "Third World" dates back to 1955 when Alfred Sauvy used it in a conference. It has since become a widely used term. Politicians and economists have diverse views on this notion. Though an adequate definition has yet to be developed. The Chinese presented the theory of the "three worlds". The "First World" was founded by the dual Soviet-American supremacy, the "Second World" consisted of the Western European States, China, Japan, Australia and Canada. The rest of the world is listed as developing countries and is described as the "Third World" (Bedjaoui: 1979).

According to Langley (1981:1), the term "Third World" is commonly used to describe less developed areas, underdeveloped stated, developing areas. It has ambiguously become associated with various subjects. For example, it can refer to certain states or countries which developed as a result of the "anti-colonial revolution" of the post-World War II period. However, the history of Latin-America rejects this view as some countries fought their anti-colonial revolutions over 150 years ago. For others, the term refers to a certain geographical identification.

Despite numerous classifications for Third World Countries, poverty, human development, economy and press freedom are the keys to examine a nation and categorise into different lists. In accordance with Jangiz, at the commencement of the pandemic in Iraq, the rate of the poverty increased %31.7. Likewise, %94.7 of income of the republic gets from oil sales (Jangiz, 2021).

Thus, Iraq is a country which can be considered to possess the characteristics of a third world country. The Republic of Iraq has neither economic nor political stability. It also meets the characteristics of under-developed, less-developed and undeveloped areas. Langley (1981:27) concludes that the condition of structural poverty guides the meaning of the concept of "Third World Countries".

Blended Learning

Despite its reputation, BL is still a new technique in education. The concept of BL has been defined in several ways by researchers, but all of them agree that it is a cohesive learning practice which is led and controlled by the instructor in both procedures of face-to-face communication and IT or virtual presence (Bryan and Vochenkova, 2016:28). Graham (2006:5) states that BL system is a mixture of computer mediated instruction and face-t-face instruction.

This system claims transformation of outdated teacher into a tutor, who becomes guider or coordinator, as well as an indirect source of information and knowledge (Krasnova and Popova, 2016:4).Bonk and Graham (2006:6) use the following diagram to provide a convenient and comprehensive guide to BL in the past, present and the future.
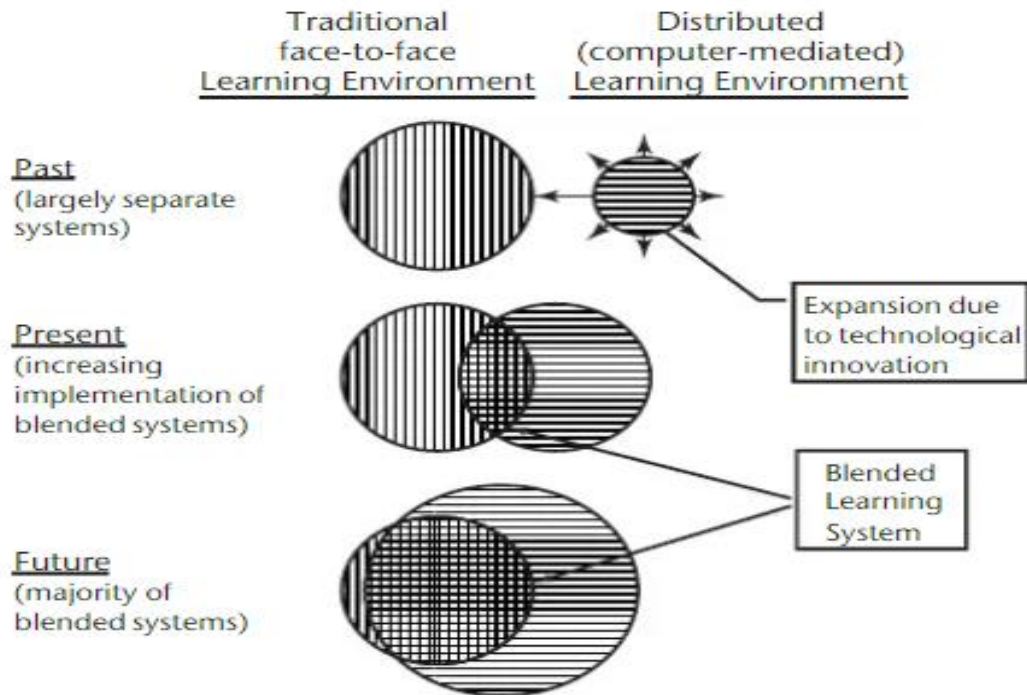
Figure 1: Graham's Diagram of BL

The figure shows the progression overtime of the merging between the outdated learning environment and distributed learning environment. He notes that the BL system will consume traditional face-to-face learning and produce an integrated system in the future. In other words, the future will be owned by BL.

Lalima and Dangwal (2017:130) explain their theory via Figure 2 and believe that BL consists of a blend of traditional teaching and supported teaching. They argue that face-to-face classroom teaching, formal interaction with classmates and teachers as well as non-formal interaction with classmates are the foundation of traditional learning methods. Whereas supported teaching embraces online individual learning, computer assisted learning, offline individual learning and online group interaction.
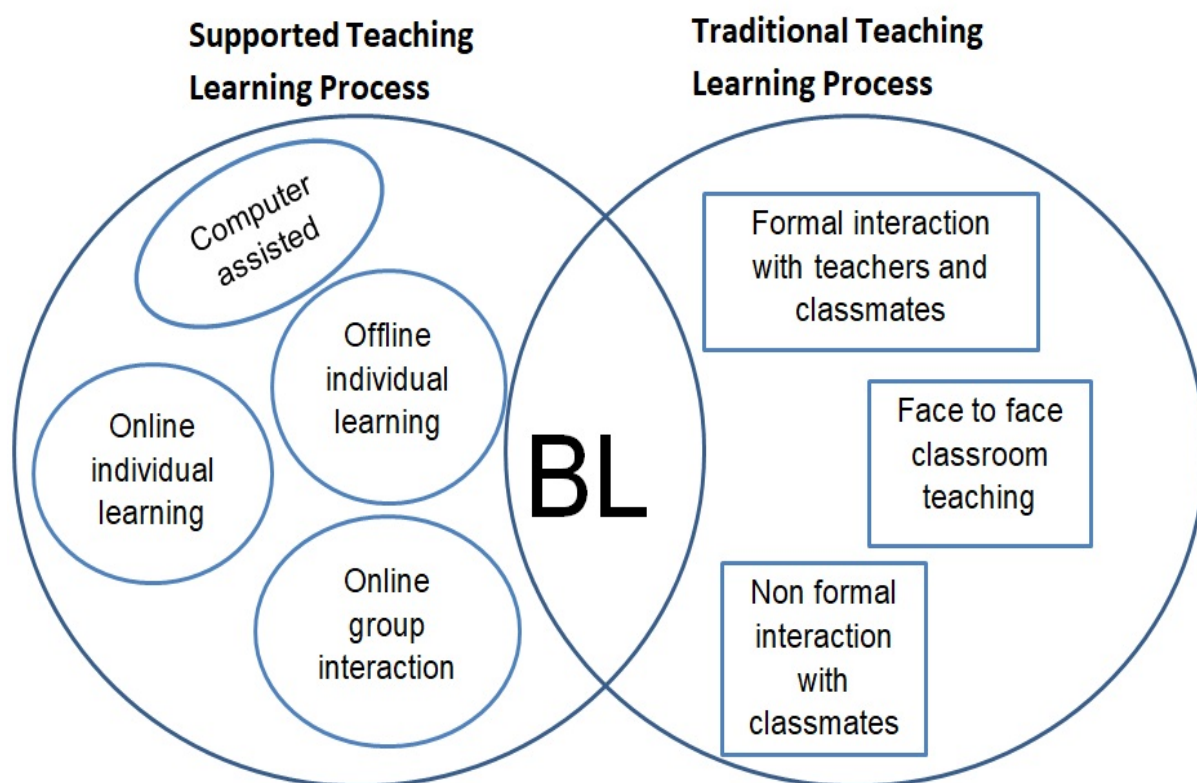
Figure 2: Lalima and Dangwal's Theory of BL

Research Method

This study examines IKR university undergraduates and involves a large-scale data collection. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used for the purposes of this study. The outcome of the quantity approach has been used to support the quality of BL as either a successful or failed method IKR's higher education system. A survey methodology has been selected for this paper. The respondents were asked eight questions. The questions were distributed online via a Google survey. The form link was uploaded for participants in Google Classroom and they were given five days to respond. The survey was issued to first year English department students within the UoR and UoG. This equated to 228 students. The response rate was 67.9%.

Data Analysis

Table 1 details the participant responses. The survey results are presented in statistical mode. Students were asked if they knew the name of the system by which they were learning during the pandemic. 31.60% responded positively. However, Table 2 shows that only 19.3% of the participants were able to provide the correct answer of BL. In summary, a total of 80.7% of the participants did not know their studies had continued under the BL scheme. The success of BL was rejected by 58.70% of students and only 4 out of 155 respondents thought that the system was suited to learning during the pandemic.

Only 20% of the students considered themselves to have prepared for continuing their learning under the system and only 6.5% had taken part in courses or workshops to assist

them in using the system. The responses given around the materials provided to assist with continuing this style of studying would suggest that the MHE and universities haven't made provisions to adopt this system as the preferred method of studying. 23.20% of respondents stated they could overcome the obstacles of the studying process during the pandemic with the remainder having varying degrees of difficulty. Choosing the "Sort of" option highlighted a level of ambiguity between "Yes" or "No" than slightly knowing. When the students were asked about the name of the system, 52.30% students answered "sort of" and 31.60% answered "yes". However, Table 2 shows that those who knew the correct answer only totalled 19.3%. Hence, "sort of" is more likely to suggest a "no" rather than "yes" answer.

Questions	Yes		No		Sort of	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Do you know, which style of study did you continue your academic year during Corona Virus?	49	31.6%	25	16.1%	81	52.3%
Do you think this system of studying is successful for the situation of Covid19?	4	2.6%	91	58.7%	60	38.7%
Have you prepared for continuing your study in the current system which your college or university is following?	31	20%	76	49%	48	31%
Have you participated in any course or workshop in order to be able to use this system of studying?	10	6.5%	136	87.7%	9	5.8%
Does your university or college prepare learning needs and requirements so as to continue this style of studying, that you have gone through during Covid19?	28	18.1%	51	32.9%	76	49%

Were you able to overcome the obstacles that you faced while applying this style to your study?	36	23.2 %	31	20%	88	56.8%

Table 1: Participants' Responses for the Questions

The rate of accuracy regarding the name of the system does not match the first question in table 1. There are various titles delivered which cannot be listed in a graph or table.

Question	Blended Learning		Online Studying		Electronic Studying		Others	
	Frequency	%	Freque ncy	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
What is the name of this style or system of studying?	30	19.3 %	33	21.2 %	13	8.3 %	79	50.9 %

Table 2: Participants' Responses for the Name of the Learning System

The final question was multiple choices which students could pick 5 options out of 6 to demonstrate the barriers or reasons that affected BL process as a method of learning. 55.48% of respondents did not consider BL to be a suitable atmosphere for studying and therefore considered it to be a giant barrier to undergraduates. Poor internet connection and no computer are also highlighted as obstacles for students being able to progress their learning through the BL system.
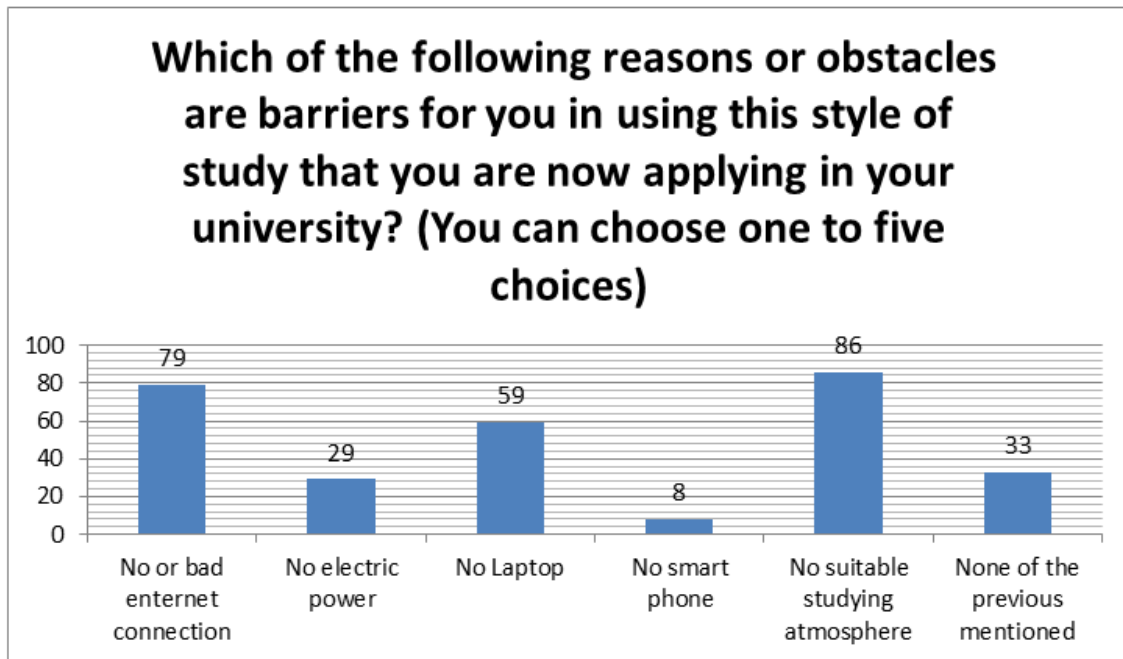
Chart 1: The Barriers or Obstacles Which Affected BL System

Conclusion

This study highlights diverse views on BL. In very short explanation, it combines traditional teaching and supported teaching by technology. The IKR is an area that can be found amongst a group of Third World countries (Jangiz, 2021). This paper concludes that BL has not been applied successfully to improve learning methods and the quality of education. It is offered to cover the absence of the classrooms' attendance during a national lockdown in the IKR. The survey responses support the argument that the MHE and universities in the Kurdistan territory have not set up an adequate academic atmosphere for the BL system. In addition, students' responses confirm that they accessed the system with no prior information or knowledge, nor have they received any courses or workshops to help integrate them into it.

Only 19.3% of students know the exact name of the system, 2.6% of them confess that this system is beneficial and 18.1% claimed that their university has not been equipped to focus on that scheme. Those low rates declare that BL is not an alternative process in Kurdistan for recent situation.

According to Lalima and Dangwal (2017:130), computer assisted, online individual learning, offline individual learning and online interaction group are the significant keys of BL. However, the answers provided in Chart 1 highlight a lack of learning tools and materials such as laptops, electricity and dropping internet connection which are required for the successful implementation of BL, as presented in Figure 2.

Although BL is a qualified method for elevating educational level, which is both time and cost efficient. In the IKR it would be a catastrophe way for recent generation who are ruled and obligated to follow the MHE's statement.

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