

Blended Learning for Effective English Language Acquisition of a Private University Students in Bangladesh: A Phenomenological Study

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

This thesis has been conducted considering all ethical guidelines. I have not used ideas from other sources without explaining and citing the source. I have not copied and pasted from other sources. I have written in my own words and cited references. Also, I have used information only from reliable sources. All other guidelines are further discussed in the methodology chapter.

Abstract

This study explores the role of blended learning in English language acquisition by discussing the perceptions, learning outcomes, and life experiences of students at private universities in Bangladesh. With the increasing use of online platforms among students at private universities in Bangladesh, blended learning has become a prominent educational method here. Further, while blended learning offers various benefits in developing English language skills, it also has some challenges. These challenges include psychological, technological, and teacher–learner rapport. A phenomenological research was chosen to explore these challenges. The findings of this study reveal that blended learning has a positive impact on the development of linguistic skills and contributes to global competence and professional preparedness due to students’ flexible access to online materials and online platforms. On the other hand, there is a lack of development in conversational opportunities and listening comprehension challenges. The study also concluded that the use of AI tools has created opportunities for misuse that have negatively affected the student–teacher rapport. There was a general concern that blended learning, while increasing flexibility, global skills, and professional readiness, has negative impacts on some important aspects. This study is significant because it highlights the importance of creating appropriate and decentralized approaches to English language acquisition to address the challenges facing private university students in Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Blended learning, English language acquisition, Private university in Bangladesh, Online Platforms, Student-teacher rapport.*

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents and my teachers who believed in me and who stood by me throughout my graduate journey.

Acknowledgement

This work is a reflection of all my struggles with mental health throughout my undergraduate degree. I am sincerely grateful to all those who encouraged and contributed to me in completing this work.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Almighty who has guided me on this journey and given me the patience and strength to achieve my goals.

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Lastly, sincere thanks to my parents and my sister for never giving up on me and motivating to go through all my struggles.

List of Acronyms

AI	: Artificial Intelligence
ChatGPT	: Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer
MI	: Multiple Intelligences
TA	: Teaching Assistant

Glossary

Artificial intelligence AI: Artificial intelligence (AI) is the capability of computational systems to perform tasks typically associated with human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and decision-making.

ChatGPT: ChatGPT is an advanced AI chatbot from OpenAI that uses large language models to understand and generate human-like text, enabling it to hold conversations, answer questions, write content, code, and even create images, by predicting the most relevant words in a sequence based on vast training data.

MI: Multiple intelligences is a theory by Howard Gardner. There are nine intelligences, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and existential.

Fixed Mindset: A fixed mindset is a belief of a person that is unchangeable or fixed. A person with a fixed mindset thinks that intelligence and behaviours are fixed and can't be changed. Students who have a fixed mindset avoid challenges and find it difficult to adapt to new obstacles.

Growth Mindset: Growth mindset is a belief of intelligence, which is a never-ending process and it can grow continuously. Growth mindset is a perspective where students are motivated to grow and achieve future goals.

Learned Helplessness: A belief by children that if they fail it is their fault because they are not clever or good enough and that failure is irreversible. They lose their persistence and tenacity as a result.

Teacher-Student Rapport: Teacher-student rapport refers to the positive relationship and mutual respect between educators and their students, which fosters a supportive and engaging learning environment.

TA (Teaching Assistant): A teaching assistant (TA) is an individual who assists a professor or teacher with instructional responsibilities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In recent years, there have been significant changes in the modern approach to education in Bangladesh. The use of technology is relatively high, especially in private universities. Significant changes in the modern approach include the use of digital platforms and increasing access to online resources. With these, blended learning has emerged as a widely adopted approach in private universities. Blended learning is a type of learning where traditional, face-to-face learning is combined with online or technology-based learning using online platforms. In Bangladesh, students have been learning English as a second language since childhood; for learning English, students mainly follow traditional learning. Private universities in Bangladesh use blended learning as a unique method for students to acquire the English language. In the context of the growing demand for higher education, adopting innovative educational approaches has become a central concern for universities worldwide. One approach that has attracted considerable attention is blended learning, a hybrid teaching and learning model that combines traditional face-to-face instruction and online elements (Kanwal et al., 2023). However, not all universities in Bangladesh are yet familiar with blended learning or are comfortable using it. Most institutions continue to rely on the traditional "chalk and duster" instructional method. Multimedia in these classrooms serves only as a supplementary teaching aid. Educational researchers say that this method can be suitable for purely theoretical courses (Hassan, 2025).

In Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka, private universities use English as the primary medium of instruction and academic communication. However, students are admitted to these private universities from different parts of Bangladesh, so not everyone has the same English language skills, and most students have uneven English skills. The main reason for this is that the main focus in the classroom in schools and colleges in Bangladesh is on exams. Many students who are from Bangla medium in private universities face many problems in their technology-based learning. Also, in various villages outside Dhaka, the only medium of education for students is their classroom or teacher. There are few class activities there to develop or improve students' language skills, so that many students cannot achieve proper English language skills. This causes a big shift after students come to private universities. Private universities in Bangladesh are now incorporating blended learning into their

curriculum, which is helping students improve their language skills. In addition to traditional learning, students are also being taught through various online platforms such as Google Classroom, Slack, Google Meet, Zoom, and Google Drive. Rabbi et al, (2024) mention that Google Docs and Slack have also played a role in the learning process of students. However, concerns remain about the ethical use of AI tools and the quality of teacher-student interaction with online platforms in education. In Bangladesh, the face-to-face classroom culture still plays a strong role in traditional learning. The increased use of online platforms there raises questions about proper English language acquisition.

English has now become a common language worldwide. It is not only in the field of education but also in international business and other fields. Blended learning has become widespread in private universities along with the modernization of education. However, if not used properly, it can do more harm than good to students' English language acquisition. From the perspective of students, there is a notable lack of research exploring how blended learning affects English language acquisition in private universities where English proficiency is associated with academic success and employability. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining students' shared experiences, advantages, disadvantages, and perceptions of blended learning related to English proficiency development.

Research Problem

Although blended learning is increasingly being adopted in private universities in Bangladesh, its effectiveness in all aspects of English language acquisition is not yet fully clear. Although students' reading and writing skills have improved through online platforms and access to many e-books, conversational opportunities and listening comprehension practice have become really difficult. In addition, there is scope for using AI tools in the academic field, and recent research suggests that they may lead to a lack of academic integrity and trust between students and teachers. By exploring all the experiences and incidents of students, this study aims to provide valuable insights into these issues. If these issues are not fully addressed, universities will be unable to implement blended learning effectively to support students' English language acquisition; a qualitative investigation is needed to determine whether blended learning effectively contributes to students' English language acquisition.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of blended learning among private university students. At the same time, it examines how blended learning affects their English language acquisition. By exploring students' experiences, motivations, and struggles, this study aims to identify both the benefits and limitations of blended learning and to develop effective blended learning practices for them.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore students' perceptions of blended learning in terms of effective English language acquisition and global competence and professional readiness. Since students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills are very important in English language acquisition, it is important to understand the challenges related to these skills, as well as the psychological and technological challenges. This study also shows that students' development in blended learning is not influenced by any single factor, but rather it is shaped by the integrated interaction of everything in the entire environment of blended learning for students. Another objective of the study is to explore the impact of AI use on educational integrity and teacher-student relationships and their suggestions for overcoming them.

Research Question

1. How do students at private universities in Bangladesh perceive the effectiveness of blended learning in acquiring English language skills, on global skills and professional preparation?
2. What benefits does blended learning provide in developing English language skills among students? How do students negotiate ethical boundaries in using AI tools?
3. What challenges do students face in acquiring the English language in blended learning and how do they affect the teacher-student rapport? What advice do they give to overcome these challenges?

Research significance

This study contributes to understanding the challenges faced by students in private universities in Bangladesh and their struggles. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for private university teachers and curriculum designers to improve teaching using blended learning. This study provides insights into the proper use of blended learning, the need for ethically managed blended learning, and the need for psychologically supportive blended learning practices.

Structural overview of the paper

This thesis is generally divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. It presents the background of the research, highlighting the context of blended learning in private universities of Bangladesh. It discusses the Research Problem, Purpose of the study, Objectives, Research Question, Research significance, and Scope and limitations. The second chapter is the literature review. The third chapter is the methodology. It explains the Research design, Research Questions, Research Procedures, Background of Participants, Data Collection and Instruments, Sampling Technique, Data analysis, and Ethical Considerations. The fourth chapter is the findings. This chapter highlights Student Perceptions of Blended Learning and their learning background, Student Preferences and Pedagogical Integration in English Language Acquisition, Blended Learning as a Pathway to Global Competence, Blended Learning: a Catalyst for English Language Acquisition, and Blended Learning Drawbacks for Effective English Acquisition. Chapter 5 is Discussion. It explains the results in relation to the research questions and existing literature. Chapter 6 is Conclusion. It summarizes all the research findings.

Scope and limitations

This research focuses on examining the effectiveness of blended learning for English language acquisition among students at private universities in Bangladesh, based on their

experiences. It specifically examines the use of online tools, learning materials, online activities, and AI tools by students in blended learning. A qualitative study captures the perspectives and self-reported experiences of specific participants. These findings may not be generalizable to all higher education institutions in Bangladesh, especially public universities.

Chapter 2

Literature review

Nowadays, technology has become very advanced in any language learning. It has become even easier when blended or hybrid learning is used in the education system for effective English learning. Here, basically, a combination of traditional face-to-face teaching with digital or online learning is used. Many call this management blended learning while some call it hybrid learning. Many researchers have conducted their research on blended learning in different countries such as Saudi Arabia, Wales, Turkey, Indonesia, etc.

Conceptual basis of blended learning

“The term 'blended' in blended learning refers to the integration of digital content or instruction and activities within the classroom. Blended learning is a stage between classroom instruction and content delivery in a fully online mode” (Kumar, 2021). Tomlinson and Whittaker (2013), they highlight some of the debates about the definition of blended learning in their book, where Graham (2006) said all kinds of learning are blended learning. At the same time, Masie (2006) says all learning is blended learning, which involves teaching different types of methods together. On the other hand, in the case of Oliver and Trigwell (2005), they say it is a very simple term that is new and is not a real teaching method. Different researchers have used different words for blended learning, such as hybrid, mixed, e-learning, or B-learning. However, their main idea is almost the same, combining face-to-face teaching with digital tools or online activities in class or in a course. Smith and Kurthen (2007) have categorized the terms related to blended learning, where they define blended learning and hybrid learning separately. They mainly talk about 4 terms which are Web-enhanced, Blended, Hybrid, and Fully online. According to them, in blended learning, students participate in face-

to-face classes with some significant online activities. Here, less than 45% of the students' work is online.

On the other hand, in hybrid learning, a large proportion of students are involved in online learning. Here, in addition to face-to-face classes, students do 45-80% of their work online, which is about half or more of their course. In general, blended learning refers to any combination of face-to-face teaching with computer-based or digital learning. According to Allen et al. (2007), in blended learning, 30 to 79% of the content will be online. On the other hand, Korompota and Umyahb (2023), blended learning and hybrid learning are similar. They said hybrid learning means a combination of traditional classroom education with online or distance learning through the use of digital technology. Furthermore, blended learning means a combination of classroom education with modern teaching methods or digital learning. At the 17th European Conference on E-Learning, Cechova et al. (2018) said that there is no agreed definition of blended learning. The definition that everyone accepts is the one developed by the teacher and the course designer. Here, in a course, the teacher plans class activities to incorporate digital technology alongside face-to-face classes. At this conference, he discussed the three definitions proposed by Oliver and Trigwell (2005). It is basically understood that blended learning is the use of traditional face-to-face learning with digital tools or web-based online learning.

Historical Development

Tomlinson and Whittaker (2013) state that blended learning originated in the business world due to corporate training. Later it was gradually used in higher education and finally it has now emerged in language teaching and learning. Although it is difficult to say when the concept first originated, Whittaker first heard the term 'blended learning' in 2003. Whittaker mentions in his book that he saw the use of the term in a published form in Sharma and Barrett's book, *Blended Learning* in 2007. According to Christopher Pappas (2021), blended learning did not start in a hurry. It was first started in 1840 by Sir Isaac Pitman in distance learning. He used to communicate with students and teach them through mail. Deniz (2024) states that blended learning has developed gradually as technology has become a part of education. This was the first step in teaching students without any modern technology other than the classroom in the 1840s. Christopher Pappas (2021) states in his article that the 1960s and 1970s were the beginning of computer-based education when institutions began using mainframe computers

to train employees. "The PLATO system developed at the University of Illinois, allowed learners to study through computer terminals" (Christopher Pappas, 2021). This was the beginning of digital education.

Later in the 1970s and 1980s, video-based and TV education began to be taught through television and video networks. According to Christopher Pappas (2021), Stanford University's Interactive TV Network connected multiple classrooms through video technology. This was an early version of today's webinars and video classes. During the 1980s and 1990s, this technology improved significantly, allowing schools and organizations to store large amounts of information. With the rise of the Internet, web-based education began in 1998. At that time, people could access materials online. Learning through graphics, sound, and video became faster and more interactive. The internet made education more flexible and accessible to all (Christopher Pappas, 2021).

In the 21st century, blended learning became common in the world. Students can now access online discussions, tutorials, and attend virtual classes. Different countries around the world are using this blended learning in different ways. Christopher Pappas (2021) says that in the United States and Europe, universities have started using it to make learning more flexible and technology-driven. "Technology has enhanced traditional teaching methods" (Deniz, 2024). In Asian countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea, it has become a particular method for improving English language learning. "In today's 21st century world, the importance of learning English has become more important than ever" (Deniz, 2024). Blended learning has increased in developing countries like Bangladesh as internet access has improved. It helps students learn English better through both classroom and online platforms. Deniz (2024) states that researchers around the world say that blended learning is more effective and powerful than face-to-face or online learning alone.

Integration of digital tools in blended learning

One of the most important things in blended learning is technological tools. As technology is developing gradually, students' learning is developing. There is now the convenience of online learning from traditional classrooms. Especially in learning English, students are currently seen using various types of technological tools. Along with students, the use of these tools has become necessary for teachers. Students make learning English more effective and interactive with the help of various online platforms.

Digital tools have now become an important part of education for university students. Digital tools are playing a special role in making teaching more effective and practical for students. However, digital tools are used in teaching students for different purposes. Dudar et al. (2021) said that tools like E-mail, Google Drive, Moodle, Zoom, Webex and Google Classroom are used for electronic lectures in blended learning. These tools allow students to join virtual classes, access study materials and submit assignments easily. Nowadays, the use of multimedia is very common in classrooms. It makes students' education more interactive. In the case of multiple intelligences, some students learn better through visuals, while others through listening to sounds. As a result, the use of multimedia makes students more focused and motivated. "Video conferencing tools, such as Zoom and Microsoft enable synchronous online meetings, virtual classrooms, and interactive discussions" (Zhang, 2024). Zhang (2024) states that tools such as Nearpod and Pear Deck are interactive presentation tools that make it easier for teachers to present lessons creatively.

For the online seminar Dudar et al. (2021) talk about two online platforms, namely Zoom, Webex. These platforms make it easy for teachers to conduct online discussions and teach from home very easily. Zhang (2024) also mentions online assessment tools such as Kahoot, Quizzes and Google Forms. These platforms facilitate formative assessments, quizzes, and surveys to help teachers see where students are struggling, how to improve, and provide timely feedback. Simultaneously Dudar et al. (2021) mentioned some online platforms which are Moodle, Microsoft Office Forms and Google Forms. They are used to administer online-based quizzes, tests and assignments. "Labster, PhET Interactive Simulations, and virtual reality applications are tools that provide realistic and interactive experiences that simulate real-world situations" (Zhang, 2024). Dudar et al. (2021) mentions several tools for term papers, projects, calculations and graphic work which are E-mail, Google Drive, Zoom, Google Hangouts Meet, Microsoft Office. He mentions online platforms like Viber, Telegram, WhatsApp, Imo for communication. On the other hand, Zhang (2024) identifies tools such as Google Workspace, Microsoft Teams and Slack as online collaboration tools and communication platforms. These tools help students work together, communicate effectively, and work in groups. Zhang (2024) mentions some coding platforms and software tools that are Scratch, Code.org, and Tinkercad. These platforms help students learn programming languages, develop computational thinking skills, and create digital projects. He also talked about digital portfolios and project-based learning platforms. These are Seesaw and Google Sites.

The flexibility and learning benefits of blended learning

Blended learning has become a powerful educational approach for students today. Pardede (2012) reported six potential benefits of blended learning, as researched by Osguthorpe & Graham. These are pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost-effectiveness, and ease of modification. Shand (2018) states that many researchers have currently explored the various benefits of blended learning in higher education. “Blended learning, known as the thoughtful combination of face-to-face and online instruction, has gained widespread recognition for its effectiveness in enhancing the teaching and learning experience” (Shand, 2018). According to Fatima and Chibb (2023), blended learning is an effective educational approach that supports the holistic development of students. They believe that it promotes cognitive growth through knowledge and critical thinking as well as physical and mental development by promoting communication, empathy, and self-control.

Shand (2018) states that blended learning bridges the gap between traditional classroom methods and modern technology-based learning. Fatima and Chibb (2023) state that one of the main benefits of blended learning is that it provides opportunities for both face-to-face and virtual interactions. Here students can interact with teachers and discuss various topics. Kanwal et al. (2023) state that blended learning is aimed at expanding access to quality education and reducing educational disparities. Based on the research of Alvarez & Guasch (2016), Kanwal et al. 2023 states that blended learning helps reach students in remote and rural areas where access to traditional classrooms is limited. In Bangladesh, there are many people who live in rural areas and do not want to come to the city to pursue higher education. For them, blended learning makes education more equitable by providing online education in addition to traditional classrooms. According to Gedik, Kiran, & Ozden (2012), one of the most mentioned advantages of blended learning is flexibility. “One of the main advantages of blended learning is its flexibility and adaptability” (Kanwal et al. 2023). It helps students learn on their own time and at their convenience (Shand, 2018).

There are many students who come to university and are nervous about new online activities because they are followed in traditional classrooms in schools and colleges. Fatima and Chibb, (2023) stated that blended learning particularly helps students in acquiring deeper knowledge, exploring new perspectives, and developing practical skills relevant to real-life situations. It also emphasizes student-centered learning in addition to teacher-centered

approaches where students play an active role in their own learning process. According to him, blended learning helps in developing important life skills such as communication, critical thinking, patience, and empathy. Shand (2018) cites increased student engagement and interaction as another significant benefit of blended learning. Kanwal et al. 2023 stated that blended learning helps students to be interactive and in group work, students learn to judge, control emotions, and engage with others with respect. Blended learning encourages collaboration among students in a group work and between instructors (Shand, 2018). Fatima and Chib (2023) found in their study that blended learning helps to increase students' motivation, confidence, and success rates. They stated that according to Davis and Fill (2007), blended learning increases student engagement and learning outcomes by promoting self-motivation and accountability.

According to Kanwal et al. 2023, blended learning offers significant benefits for students such as accessibility, flexibility, improved learning outcomes, and equity. Blended learning helps to provide digital education in line with the realities of the present era, in line with the previous traditional classes. Shand, 2018 highlighted one particular benefit that the integration of online tools has been shown to improve classroom management, as the digital environment reduces behavioral problems and distractions compared to traditional classroom settings (Graziano & Feher, 2016). Overall, blended learning is seen to make learning more student-centered, flexible, and interactive for students, which is often not possible with traditional education. "E-learning enables students to freely acquire, formulate, organize, and create experiences through the use of information and communication technologies" (Pardede, 2012).

Limitations in Blended Learning

Although blended learning currently offers many benefits to students in English language learning, some of the notable challenges include technical infrastructure issues, lack of teacher preparation and training, student anxiety and motivation, cultural and institutional barriers, comparison of digital and traditional classroom outcomes, and impact on language proficiency. Shand (2018) noted that maintaining student participation in online blended learning is a particular challenge. Many students prioritize face-to-face English learning over online classes. This results in reduced student participation in digital learning. Shand (2018) noted that in blended learning, all students and teachers need internet connectivity and digital

phones, which are not available in remote areas of Bangladesh. Even those who do have phones face many difficulties and additional costs to connect to the internet. These technological barriers create disparities among students and limit participation in online activities.

In a context like Bangladesh, irregular power supply can affect online classes, reducing the overall effectiveness of blended learning. Nassar et al. (2023) mention the third problem that many teachers face in adapting to new technologies and online teaching methods. There are many teachers in Bangladesh who are not ready for digital learning or have not received proper training for it, which requires significant training in using digital tools. “University instructors often struggle with the increased time required to learn and adapt to new technological tools” (Mozelius and Rydell, 2017). Shand (2018) also states that many teachers face a lack of institutional support in understanding and managing learning management systems (LMS) and in implementing effective online teaching methods. Pardede, 2012 mentions the fourth challenge of blended learning that many students often feel lonely while learning online.

In online classes, they often do not have to turn on their cameras and since they are not physically present in the classroom, their motivation to learn decreases. In addition, being in the classroom, the teacher can see which students are paying attention and which are not, which is not possible in online classes. As a result, many students fall behind. Also, sitting in front of the computer for a long time can make students feel bored or tired, which reduces their interest in learning. This can also be the case for teachers. “In online classes, teachers are involved in extra work because they have to prepare online materials and provide personal assistance to many students. This can lead to stress and fatigue” (Pardede, 2012). He also states that by teaching online, students are deprived of real-life experiences, which are important for deep learning. According to Tomlinson and Whittaker (2013), cultural and institutional factors also play an important role in shaping the success of blended learning. According to them, university is a diverse student body, with students often entering with low English proficiency due to their poor pre-university education and the increasing use of local dialects or pidgin English.

Many students are hesitant to speak in class and instead try to communicate in pidgin or their mother tongue. This makes it difficult for teachers to create an English-speaking environment. Teachers often feel frustrated because, despite their efforts, students show little improvement in English proficiency. To address these challenges, “at the Federal University

of Technology, Akure (FUTA), teachers started by using online materials and later adopted more advanced tools such as wikis and Moodle. However, this transition was not easy. Teachers had to train themselves to understand the new digital tools, manage online interactions, and motivate students to use English in online discussions” (Tomlinson and Whittaker, 2013). Another particular challenge mentioned by Nassar et al. (2023) is the confusion between blended learning and blended teaching. Many teachers focus more on teaching methods than on student learning, making it difficult to balance traditional and online learning while keeping students active and motivated.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted in the study, describing the research design, research setting, research methods, participants, data collection tools, and data analysis methods to examine the role of blended learning in English language acquisition among students of private universities in Bangladesh. For this study, a qualitative method was chosen for data collection because the aim of qualitative research is to collect the feelings, thoughts, and actions of the participants, to explore relevant information. At the same time, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are discussed to maintain transparency throughout the research process and to maintain academic integrity.

Research design

This research focuses on a study of students of a private university in Bangladesh on effective English language acquisition through blended learning. This study uses a qualitative research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the real situation by seeking the perspectives of private university students. It aims to explore students’ perceptions, experiences and challenges regarding blended learning in higher education. This study has chosen qualitative method to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants’ opinions and the relevant factors that influence blended learning practices. The use of qualitative research has made it easier to obtain the necessary information from the students. Further, I have interviewed various students of a private university in Bangladesh to collect primary data and

effectively addressed the real problems related to this research topic. Both in-person and online interviews were conducted in real-world contexts as a component of the qualitative data collection method. The study uses a phenomenological approach of qualitative research which explores in depth the personal experiences and personal insights of university students. The research will be based on student's personal experiences, perspectives, and self-observation.

Rationale for choosing phenomenological approach :

The primary reason for adopting a phenomenological research in this study is that it examines how participants perceive English language acquisition through blended learning in their lived experiences. This study is not simply examining what or how much students learned through blended learning, but rather attempting to examine their perceptions, benefits, challenges, emotions, and expectations as they experienced it. These aspects of the participants cannot be fully understood in any other way. This study must know the subjective realities of all participants. By adopting a phenomenological approach, this study was able to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences.

Research Questions

My study will be guided by the following research questions

1. How do students at private universities in Bangladesh perceive the effectiveness of blended learning in acquiring English language skills, on global skills and professional preparation?
2. What benefits does blended learning provide in acquiring English language among students? How do students negotiate ethical boundaries in using AI tools?
3. What challenges do students face in acquiring the English language in blended learning and how do they affect the teacher-student rapport? What advice do they give to overcome these challenges?

Research Procedures

The researcher followed a systematic process to ensure that data collection was conducted effectively and ethically.

Participants

All the participants are studying in private universities. Most of the participants are in their final year, some are in 11th semester, some are in 12th semester, and one is in 9th semester. The final year students have been selected here so that they can share their long-time university experience.

Background of Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Educational Background	Current Role	Department	Experience (Years)	Blended Learning Tools
A	24	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Zoom, Google Meet, Canva, Google Classroom
B	24	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Google Drive, Slack, Google Forms
C	23	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Google Meet, Zoom
D	22	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	BBA	3	Google Meet, Google Classroom

E	23	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Facebook, YouTube, Google Slide, TikTok
F	23	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	BuX, Slack, Google Meet, Email, Google Translate
G	24	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Google Docs, Google Meet, Zoom
H	24	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Google meet, Google classroom, Slack
I	23	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	YouTube, Zoom, Google Classroom

J	23	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Google slide, Zoom, Google drive
K	25	Male	Bengali-medium	Student	CSE	4	Google doc, Google Meet, Zoom
L	25	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	CSE	4	Google Classroom
M	24	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	CSE	4	Zoom, Google Meet
N	25	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom
O	24	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Google Classroom , Google Meet, Goggle Docs
P	24	Female	Bengali-medium	Student	ENH	4	Google Slides, Google

							Meet, Zoom
Q	24	Female	Bengali- medium	Student		4	Google Meet, Google Classroom , Zoom

Data Collection and Instruments

To collect data for this study, participants were first contacted in person and online. Data were collected mainly through semi-structured interviews. The research instrument used in this study was an interview. The interview questions were open-ended. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher gave an introduction to the participants. All participants were thanked and the purpose of this study was fully explained to all participants. In addition, they were assured of the confidentiality of their information and identity. At the same time, they were allowed to freely express their opinions and were given the option to skip or not answer any question if they did not want to answer. This reduced the hesitation of the participants and helped them answer all the questions honestly. They were even given the option to ask the interview questions and answer in their preferred language, such as Bengali or English.

The interviews of all participants were recorded on a mobile and laptop recorder. Since all the interviews were recorded, it was possible to repeat the answer for investigation. Out of a total of 17 participants, the interviews of Participants A D, F, G, and M were conducted face to face and the interviews of all the remaining participants were recorded online. In addition, if they had difficulty understanding the questions, it was clarified. Each interview was conducted separately and the interviews lasted 12-27 minutes. The participants' Bangla answers were translated into English for analysis, maintaining the original meaning. During the interviews, the researcher asked semi-structured research questions and included them in the findings to increase the amount of evidence collected. The researcher took notes of important information during the interviews.

Sampling Technique

This study collected data from 17 students who came to Dhaka from different parts of Bangladesh and were connected to blended learning and English language acquisition. Here, the experiences and perceptions of a specific group directly involved in blended learning were explored in detail. They all came from different rural areas of the country and were studying at a private university in Dhaka. The participants were selected in a way that English was used as the primary medium of instruction and the participants practiced blended learning on a regular basis. Since this research aimed to collect in-depth data from individuals, the participants were selected who had been familiar with blended learning at their university for a long time.

Most of the participants were fourth-year students of the university. One participant was a third-year student. In order to collect complete and diverse data, the participants were selected based on specific criteria. For example, those who attend all classes at the university, who are familiar with blended learning and online platforms, and students from different educational backgrounds were included. After speaking with 32 students, 17 participants were selected who had different experiences with blended learning to capture different perspectives. Although the participants did not elaborate much on emotional incidents during the interviews because they were not comfortable recording them. For qualitative research, the participants' different experiences with blended learning and different perspectives are very important.

Data analysis

In this study, the data collected from the participants were analyzed thematically through coding. After interviewing the participants, their responses were carefully coded to find the right themes by combining codes with similar meanings. For example, the codes of technological, psychological, linguistic and ethical challenges were combined and captured in the Blended Learning Drawbacks. It was essential to observe the participants' responses repeatedly for the thematic analysis. At the beginning of the interview, they were started with some general questions to make them feel comfortable and to get detailed information about them. The researcher was aware of personal assumptions in this study and ensured that the interpretations were guided by the data of all the participants. The thematic analysis enabled a flexible exploration of how effective blended learning is in English language acquisition in the context of Bangladesh.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, participants were initially informed about the purpose of the study and then interviewed with their consent. All participants were assured that their participation was completely voluntary and that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Although many felt comfortable with being named, no one was named in this study. Since the focus of this study was on participants' experiences rather than identities, the alphabet was used to protect participants' anonymity and maintain confidentiality. Interview questions were allowed to be answered in both Bangla and English so that they felt comfortable during the interview and could express their feelings properly.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter presents the main findings in line with the research questions that explore university students' experiences with blended learning in English language acquisition. The themes of the findings were analyzed thematically through coding. Six themes were identified for analysis.

Student Perceptions of Blended Learning and their learning background

There are 17 participants to report on the effectiveness of blended learning for English language acquisition. To determine how effective blended learning is for them, it is important to know their access to technology, familiarity with the digital learning environment, and their attitude towards blended learning. It is also important to know the age, academic background, and English learning history of the participants to analyze the context in which blended learning for English language acquisition is being conducted. All participants are from private universities, so their courses have been using blended learning since the first semester. Almost all the participants in this study are between the ages of 22 to 24, which is usually the case for undergraduate students. Most of the participants are in their final year, some are in their 11th semester, some are in their 12th semester, and one is in 9th semester. Although they had difficulty using digital platforms at the very first time, they quickly became comfortable with them. According to all participants, this blended learning is not just for their specific needs or situations, but is being used consistently throughout the course.

Being in the young adult stage, it is evident that they are all very familiar with smartphones, laptops, and social media platforms, or digital platforms. However, using these platforms for entertainment and using technology effectively for academic work are not the same. All participants are at a developmental stage where they are using different platforms for their higher education. In terms of acquiring the English language, students now have many types of platforms where they can use those platforms to acquire more advanced English language skills in addition to classes. However, this is not possible for all types of students. Most of the participants in this study are from outside Dhaka; only 2 are from inside Dhaka.

The rest are staying in Dhaka for the purpose of studying. Currently, private universities in Bangladesh are using digital platforms more, due to which students from outside Dhaka face a big change when they enter private universities. According to Participant E, “their school or college strictly followed traditional learning, which is why she was not familiar with blended learning before joining the university.”

All the participants are Bangla medium who have been learning English since primary school. They have acquired more advanced education at the university level. Since they have been associated with English since the beginning of their academic life, English is not new to them. However, after coming to university, they not only learn English but also know the English language. Before university, their English language education was exam-based and grammar-based, so their knowledge was limited. Participant E said, "while in school, we would learn the pronunciation of any word in English from our class teachers, otherwise we would have to look at the dictionary. We would follow the way the teachers taught us grammar. Apart from that, I did not know much as I was heavily dependent on the teacher." Since their school and college were all paper-based, they had very limited sources to learn the English language completely. They had to face various problems in using the digital platform, even though the technology was so advanced.

As a result, they are not only developing English language skills at the university but are also learning English at a more advanced level through blended learning. Due to Covid-19, many institutions in Bangladesh started taking classes online. The sudden use of technology created a confusion among students. All the participants in this study were admitted to their universities towards the end of Covid-19. They said that even though all the curriculum of their universities were online, their exams were taken offline. Even at the beginning of their universities, they had some specific English courses where they had to study online or do assignments and take exams offline. Due to this sudden shift, they faced problems in learning the English language properly, which created problems in their English acquisition. They felt confused in communicating with teachers and in asking questions. Additionally, they face some struggles to understand the idea of blended learning. Among all the participants in this study, participants D, K, L, and M reported that they had no idea about blended learning.

On the other hand, the remaining participants said that they have a limited understanding of blended learning. Participant I said, "Yes, I know about blended learning, it's that it's a combination of traditional learning and online learning." However, blended learning and hybrid learning are the same for them. According to them, both use face-to-face learning and online learning together in the same way. Here, participants are participating in it without being informed about blended learning, its benefits, and rules of use. At the same time, it was seen that the attendance rate of the participants at the university is 80% to 90%. Participants A and E said that their attendance rate is 100% unless they are very sick. The 80% to 90% attendance rate assumes that the participants are regularly involved in university classes and activities. Unless there is an emergency or the teacher is present in person, their classes are taken online. The rest of the assessments in the classes are done online and offline. Participant B said, "We have many courses where our classes, quizzes, and presentations are done offline. However, our midterms and finals are taken online and I had to submit them online to detect AI. Many teachers prefer to submit them via email." Some courses do have offline activities, although they are using technology in their learning, and traditional learning is still preferred among them. According to participants, teachers use "Turnitin" to check their online papers. Participants are required to submit their papers to "Turnitin" so that they are encouraged to write authentic writing.

Student Preferences and Pedagogical Integration of technology

Participants do not support any one approach or system in English language acquisition. Their preferences are not centered on any one aspect but rather on concentration, feedback, motivation, and interaction in the English acquisition classroom. Many participants feel that their preferences are not fixed in one direction but rather that their preferences have changed over time. Firstly, there are some differences in the participants' opinions on feedback from teachers. Participant D said, "I prefer feedback in courses online or by email. Not all teachers are the same; everyone has a different approach toward students. I think offline feedback demotivates me a lot of the time." The participants' problem here is not the feedback itself, but how the feedback is being provided. Participants felt that offline feedback reduced their privacy. During this time, teachers do not maintain emotional distance from students and have less time to provide feedback. This allows teachers to make an instant comment.

Participant B shared an incident where she said, "One day, I went for feedback on an exam. Usually, my teacher would give us feedback on our papers through email. For that exam, our teacher gave feedback for that exam in offline. I also went for feedback. I told my teacher how much I got in the exam and how I could improve my paper. Then he/she scolded me very loudly and said, "What's wrong with you? What do you want?". After that, the teacher says "What is the ID? Here it is, look? Now go". As I was leaving, I heard him/her saying in a lower voice that "boring (biroktikor)". At that time, there were many other teachers at the desk in front of my teacher who I knew and who were also my faculty. At that time, I cried a lot because the other teachers were also watching it. I didn't get proper feedback at that time. Somehow, I came out and completely cried". This is very sad to hear because when a teacher gives feedback to a student in public, harshly or without sensitivity, it damages the students' confidence, motivation and mental health. They have no privacy here and the participants are less able to comment at their own pace. It is very important for a student's mental health that what their teacher says, and how they say it.

Here, Participant I's experience can be connected to two different experiences of feedback in offline and online modes. Participant I received one type of feedback from her teacher in online and another type of feedback in offline. It was the same teacher but two different ways of giving feedback. This highlights that feedback can affect a student's mental response. Since all the participants were from Bangla medium, they had to face problems even in doing everything perfectly in English. If they receive such feedback from teachers, it will turn them into failures in English language rather than helping them with their English language acquisition. On the other hand, Participant G has a completely different opinion. Participant G strongly prefers offline feedback. She feels that in offline feedback, she gets immediate explanation and the opportunity to ask questions repeatedly about a topic, which she does not get in online. Participant A also has some opinion in favor of offline feedback. At the same time, the two types of responses show that there are certain reasons for each participant to prefer online and offline feedback. Participants prefer online feedback because they will have privacy and mental comfort. On the contrary, participants prefer offline feedback because they can directly interact with teachers and ask them questions and get their answers.

Secondly, participants' motivation is largely connected to their feedback. A special place for participants' motivation is the teacher's feedback. When a participant talks directly to a teacher, they feel nervous. Moreover, when they say the same thing in online, they do not feel nervous because they can talk in their own way in offline and no one is watching. Participants also communicate with their teachers and have discussions through email where they cannot see the teacher's reaction and do not lose their confidence. According to Participant D, "I think one-sided motivation for students works a little less. We are motivated by our teachers in many ways. When teachers talk a little better with us, we feel happy, we like it and we want to interact with teachers more". Motivation is not only influenced by the content of the feedback but also by how it is provided. Here, the participant is not emphasizing online or offline learning, but rather respectful and supportive communication with the teacher.

Participant B said, "Speaking is very important for us in English acquisition. In offline classes, we who are from Bengali medium often feel a little shy to speak. As a result, it is seen that even though our other skills improve, we lag in speaking. I think the reason for this is that we do not communicate well with the teacher in offline classes. The motivation for speaking works for us in online. In online, we can actually speak as we want, no one sees. Also, many times we email or comment in the classroom. In offline classes, there is anxiety about someone pointing any mistake or laughing at us, which breaks our motivation. Many times, I have seen that if someone says something wrong in class, many teachers correct them in front of the whole classroom, due to which many students become demotivated and do not want to speak in the classroom anymore." For the participants, the offline classroom is completely spontaneous where they have to give an immediate reaction. In many cases, the participants are of Bangla medium, so they are less confident in the offline classroom. As a result, the participants do not feel motivated to acquire proper English. Although the participants did not specifically say which modes of learning motivate them in English acquisition. However, only traditional learning and only online learning becomes unequal for each participant, so the balance of the two is suitable for all participants.

Thirdly, some participants prefer offline interaction, while some prefer online interaction. Participant C said, "It is not right to limit engagement to just one learning mode. It is not always possible for us to interact offline or online all the time. If we rely entirely on online, there will be a gap in our communication. On the other hand, if we take our learning mode completely offline, then if we go online again in an emergency situation, it will be difficult for the students. We should be used to both." On the same side, participant E said, "In our studies, we often find ourselves studying from online videos or recording classes, but in between we need direct feedback. In this case, I think it is necessary to work with both online and offline because online we often feel hesitant to interact with teachers, then we can email. The teacher also understands very well in email." Although offline classrooms have more interactions between students and teachers, and students with students, participants are still providing opportunities for students to communicate outside the classroom.

Many participants think that even though there is a possibility of interacting offline, many students feel hesitant to talk to many students. As a result, online works as a comfortable place for them. Participant F said, "Students feel a lot of hesitation at the beginning of English acquisition. As a beginner, I prefer blended learning for interaction at first because it gives us that comfortable place." On the other hand, participants G and A prefer offline classroom interaction. According to them, proper interaction with the teacher can be done offline because teacher can communicate effectively and provide a complete idea. The responses of all participants suggest not one interaction but two types of interaction. One is online and the other is offline. Offline participants react spontaneously in the immediate environment, where they are building relationships with the teachers. On the other hand, participants do not feel hesitate to communicate with the teachers in online.

Lastly, in terms of concentration in English language acquisition, all participants have almost the same opinion. Participants A, G, and H directly stated that they do not prefer online learning for concentration because it is a bit difficult to understand a topic online for a long time. However, Participant F said that if the class can be made interesting or discussions can be held without teaching the same topic for a long time, then they are active in the classroom. Also, Participant A said at one point in the interview that she watches many kinds of videos online and learns a lot, but then they need offline discussions along with online learning. Participant H said, "If our class is taken online, it becomes difficult to maintain concentration. It seems that after 30 minutes, we are no longer able to pay attention. Then we open another tab on the laptop or use the phone. In the online class, it seems that the teacher here talks one-sidedly, which is not the case in our traditional class."

Participants prefer offline classrooms with digital platforms to make interesting for their preferred classroom to concentrate in. The main reason for this is that participants feel that the physical presence and direct interaction with teachers helps them stay focused in the class. Participant M said, "As I do online classes from home, so there are many activities in between classes. Due to which I cannot concentrate fully in online classes". Here, Participant M also feels that offline learning is more effective for maintaining focus because offline does not give her the opportunity to do any other activities, and a proper learning environment is available, which is a gap in online classes at home.

Blended Learning as a Pathway to Global Competence

Nowadays, English is not only confined to the classroom but is also being used outside the classroom. In the modern world, the use of English is a common phenomenon. Digital tools used in academic work usually use English. Although the participants were not very connected to digital platforms at the beginning of their academic life. After coming to the university, they have become familiar with various types of digital platforms. The participants are not only acquiring English at the university but they are also developing various skills that connect them to the global context. These global skills of the participants are developing in several ways:

Using Digital Platforms

+

Developing
Communication Skills and
Digital Interaction Skills

+

Professional Preparation
and Access to Global
Knowledge

Participants have become familiar with various digital platforms through online assessments. After joining the university, they were introduced to many digital platforms for the first time in their educational journey. Some of the digital platforms mentioned by the participants include Google Meet, Slack, Google Classroom, Zoom, Email, Facebook, YouTube, Bux, Discord, Canva, Google Slides, Google Translate, and Turnitin. Even Participant E noted that TikTok is also a digital platform through which English language acquisition is possible. Many participants reported submitting their assignments online and receiving feedback via email. Participant B said that she has submitted assignments for various courses online before and, in many cases, also submits assignments through email. The participants' practices reflect global academic norms and are helping them transition from face-to-face classrooms to a more globally aligned education system. Participant J said, "Our technology is very advanced. Although traditional education is still prevalent in Bangladesh, I would say we are at a somewhat advanced level because we have to upgrade with this ever-changing world. These digital tools are giving us an opportunity to practice globally. After completing university, many students want to go abroad for their masters, but they do not understand how to communicate with their teachers or how to make a normal presentation. If we use digital tools in advance, we don't have to face these problems."

Currently, many international universities prefer digital platforms such as email for communication. Moreover, if they do not engage with digital platforms, they do not know how to use them properly, and students do not develop their digital literacy. Participant L said, "The textbooks we read provide limited information on a topic, but YouTube has many videos on a topic, or Google Scholar or JStore has many articles on a topic. Here we have access to many types of information." Online videos and articles are helping participants learn at an advanced level, gain an international perspective, and learn different accents. Participant E mentioned an online educational platform called "10 Minute School." This experience with digital platforms helps participants understand English as a global language rather than just using it for academic purposes.

Afterward, the participants' global competence develops through communication skills and digital interaction skills. In blended learning, participants have to take classes offline in addition to using online platforms. They have to communicate with their teachers online, which helps them develop their communication skills. Most participants in the interview said that although their classes are taken offline, they still have to email their teachers to contact them and in the email, they are informed when to contact them in person if necessary. Participant D also mentioned asking questions and giving feedback through email at one point in the interview. This type of online communication helps them gain a different kind of experience. This allows them to communicate with teachers whenever they want, instead of relying only on traditional communication. This reduces their nervousness about talking to teachers. In many cases, participants said that in the beginning, many of them felt nervous talking to teachers. Participant K said, "When we were in school and college, we could not communicate with teachers on the phone. We had to come to school and talk to teachers. This has changed when we came to university, as teachers now prefer email for communication. Many time they communicate directly, but here we have the option of online. I think this is not only useful for us at university, it also helps us at a professional level. This is because we understand how to properly email at university."

The participants' communication medium at university is slightly different from that at school and college. Here, participants' communication with teachers is formally limited, they have to go through a process. Usually, the direct communication that students have with teachers is informal, but they have a formal communication through email, which has a limit. Participant B said, "When I first started classes at the university, I had a lot of problems. In fact, I could not even email properly. There were many students with us who did not even know what subject to give in an email. I also had this problem. Many times, the teachers in the class would tell us how to send an email and that each email should have a proper subject." Through the participants' emails, they are able to communicate with proper structure, meaning, and limitations in the email. Also, they get time to think properly before any response.

Participant B's response highlights that many students in Bangladesh have weaknesses in their general digital communication skills before entering university. Through repeated instructions from teachers, they learn to communicate properly in academic fields. Writing emails to teachers helps them to use English properly. This allows participants to use English properly in an international context for communication. This not only develops their online communication skills but also reduces their anxiety and nervousness offline. Both types of communication are very important for global competence. The main reason for this is that students need both offline and online skills in a global context.

Further, participants reported that this communication also develops their digital interaction skills. Participant M stated at one point in the interview that she can communicate online because no one sees her and she can talk in English with confidence. At the same time, Participant F stated in her interview that as a beginner, she first came to university and this helped her by doing various assignments and classes online. Here, participants are interacting digitally, they are able to communicate more during online classes and are participating in class discussions. This is developing their digital interaction skills. They also use an online platform called "Slack" for communication. Participants say that they use these digital platforms to communicate with teachers and other students. This digital interaction is helping them to increase their confidence and build collaborative skills. This is giving participants the opportunity to work in teams across cultures, which is important for global skills.

Participants constantly mentioned "Google Scholar" and "JStore" in their interviews. Here they can read various types of books and articles. Here participants can go outside the classroom and gain their knowledge. Many participants said that their knowledge in their schools and colleges was limited which was not the case in their universities because they have online resources. Online platforms allow participants to explore any topic outside the textbooks. In the traditional schooling system in Bangladesh, students are given focus on English grammar and paper-based exams but in universities they are able to explore different topics independently and learn at their own pace. Participant E talks about various lectures, tutorials and explanatory videos on YouTube to acquire English language which plays a special role in global knowledge. Importantly, online platforms are acting as a bridge for participants here. Participants have learned English in the traditional way at school and are now acquiring English language skills at university that are in line with global educational practices. However, not all participants have adapted in the same way. At university level, participants are exposed to authentic English materials, digital libraries and an international perspective. Participants' exposure to diverse sources of knowledge is crucial for global competence. Participants engage with media, literature and people from around the world, which aligns their knowledge with international standards. This prepares them for participation in the global academic community where English is the dominant language.

Moreover, being proficient in English is very important for career preparation. Nowadays, most of the jobs are more interested in online-based work than paper-based work. Earlier, it was common for everyone to perform various office tasks using pen and paper, but now these tasks are being saved online or in document form through laptops. Due to this, students need different skills here. Only the use of paper-based studies is not helping them in their career preparation. Participant I said in her interview, "It is not only important for us to know the English language but we also need to know how to use it or use it digitally. Now, many companies in the country work online or work on laptops. In this case, if we do not know how to do it, then just studying will not help because we have to work as well". Acquiring the English language in a digital environment at the university prepares the participants for various jobs later through the development of various skills. Here, participants' email communication, digital discussions, e-book reading, and various document or paper submissions help them in their professional preparation. Also, most participants mentioned presentations that prepare them for their professional life.

Blended Learning: a Catalyst for English Language Acquisition

Blended learning offers participants a variety of benefits that support English language acquisition and academic success. First, a major benefit mentioned by participants is flexibility. Participant E stated in her interview that blended learning gives her flexibility as she does not have to run to places like Dhaka city when needed but can communicate online which is easily accessible. In addition, she added that having access to online allows her to watch various videos on YouTube. Blended learning gives participants access to various learning materials outside of the traditional classroom. Many participants stated that online platforms help them to study at their own pace, watch videos and submit assignments. Participant H said, "In blended learning, independent learning increases, and there is a lot of support where I can learn something on my own. I think I can create a study plan on my own, and I can get further in my studies. Also, it is not about whether I should just do offline classes or just online classes; if it has a blended method, it is a better option for English acquisition. I can take the good aspects of both and work on it." This flexibility is very necessary for students in university because here they balance their personal life as well as their academic life. Here they have to adapt to university life and academic pressure.

In terms of language skills, there is a positive impact of blended learning on the participants. Participant G mentioned, “My speaking has improved because of blended learning. Since I am from Bengali medium, I had a little problem in speaking. When I first came to university, my friends and I practiced English online on Zoom, which helped us develop our English speaking skills a lot.” Online tools provide participants with the opportunity to practice speaking outside the classroom. Participants can practice on their own without relying on the classroom, which helps develop speaking skills. Also, using online tools reduces participants’ anxiety and makes them feel confident while speaking online. Most participants responded positively to the online speaking tools because they lack confidence and are afraid of speaking in the classroom if the classroom is completely traditional. Participant C, in her interview, talks about pronunciation improvement. Using online tools, she can look up the meanings of common words at any time and learn proper English. Participant E also mentions almost the same thing in this regard, stating that earlier, in traditional classes, she was more dependent on her teachers and had to look up the dictionary to find the meaning of a word, which she can now do through her phone using online tools.

Further, Participant G said in another part of her interview, “It also helps with my writing because I would write 100 words in Google Doc every day, so I could see if I had any mistakes in my sentences or words. So all in all, it was very effective.” Online assignments encourage participants to practice structured writing for their academic progress. In this way, they become familiar with and learn new vocabulary. Unlike traditional classroom activities, online assignments are not as spontaneous as they usually are. There is an opportunity to reflect and edit before submitting online. Participant F stated, “Blended learning gives me a lot of access, so it improves my writing and speaking a lot” and “When we submit something online, we have the opportunity to check whether our vocabulary or sentence structure is correct. So since we have access there, it should be enriched a little.” The participants’ responses indicate that they frequently write online assignments, emails, and academic writing, which makes their writing more formal and improves their academic writing skills. The participant also mentioned earlier that they have to follow some structures when writing papers and writing emails, which increases their vocabulary and improves their academic writing skills.

Following this, some participants mentioned that reading and listening skills improved through blended learning. Participants mentioned that reading e-books not only helped them read classroom-based books but also helped them read online articles on the topic. Participant B said that when a topic was discussed in their classroom, there were many more articles available online, which not only increased their knowledge of the topic but also improved their reading skills. In addition, the presentation slides or digital study materials they used to discuss the topic were also improved their reading skills. Participant F knows that “we improve our vocabulary through online activities. Normally, when our faculty gives an activity, they know that students will have online access, so they use a little difficulty to improve our vocabulary so that we can learn from it”. Simultaneously, the participants’ listening skills are improving. One of the online tools mentioned by the participants is YouTube, where participants can watch various videos on their topic. In addition, they can learn about the authentic use of the English language and see its use. Online platforms give them access to places like videos, podcasts and interactive exercises. Participant M says, “If we come back from offline classes and do more research on that topic, this way we get more time to improve ourselves”. Participants can progress at their own pace and practice authentic English pronunciation. It is not possible to effectively practice listening skills by relying solely on face-to-face lectures, but rather by learning about proper usage and listening to authentic English pronunciation.

Furthermore, participants found blended learning to be less time-consuming than traditional classroom activities. Participant H stated, “If we sit in a classroom all the time and complete tasks, the time it takes is saved if we complete the tasks through online platforms in blended learning.” Online platforms allow them to complete various academic tasks from home. This saves time spent traveling in crowded places like Dhaka city and makes it easier to manage both academic and personal responsibilities more effectively. Participants B, D, E, F, and others also repeatedly mentioned the advantage of blended learning that their various assessments are taken online, which means they do not have to rely on traditional classroom activities but can instead complete the assignments while sitting at home. This allows them to improve their skills on digital platforms while saving time.

Participant B mentioned something very important in her interview, which is "When our learning is blended, we use offline classes as well as online platforms. A lot of time is spent on our courses using these platforms. For example, in our 4-month course, we complete a lot of things. Again, teachers need to complete a lot of things because they also have a rule that what to teach in each semester. In this case, if we do everything completely offline, it becomes difficult for us to do so many activities, as well as for teachers to do so many things in such a short time". Since the participants are all from private universities, their curriculum is the same, and their courses here are usually 4 months long. In these courses, they have to complete a lot of content, which often creates pressure for both participants and teachers to take full face-to-face classes. Blended learning courses help reduce this pressure by conducting some parts of the course online and are a good use of time. Participants can work through the coursework at their own pace, which helps increase productivity and reduce their stress.

Moreover, a significant advantage of blended learning is the opportunity to engage multiple intelligences in the classroom. Participant G, in her interview, highlighted an important point that not all students learn in the same way; each person has a different learning style. According to this participant, not all students can understand everything that is read through in a traditional classroom with face-to-face lectures. Many students understand reading better through visuals. For example, she gave her own example where she said that she understands any reading better when it is presented visually. In this regard, when a reading is explained through multimedia or slides in the class, it is understood more clearly. She thinks that a classroom should give priority to the different intelligences of all students. Howard Gardner's MI theory mentions 9 different intelligences. There are different types of students in a classroom, where not everyone learns in the same way, such as some learn through audio, some through visual, or some through logical, etc.

Blended learning provides students with face-to-face instruction with multimedia resources. Here, participants have the opportunity to access content through visual, auditory, and interactive modes. This flexibility allows participants to learn in a way that is consistent with their intelligence. At the same time, blended learning reduces learning barriers for those who face problems or cannot learn according to their intelligences in traditional learning in Bangladesh. Participant B did not directly talk about the MI theory in her interview, but she said, "It is not the case that we all learn through pen and paper or that we will learn better in one way such as when I read a book, if there is only text there, I find it boring to read that book. On the other hand, if there are pictures in that book, I think I can understand the meaning of it better. The same thing is happening in blended learning." The MI concept is essentially highlighting the diverse learning strategies of students in a classroom and enabling them to utilize them through blended learning.

Blended Learning Drawbacks for Effective English Acquisition

While blended learning has its benefits, participants also mentioned some of its challenges. The challenges mentioned by the participants can be divided into several categories. These are technological, psychological, linguistic, and ethical challenges.

Firstly, a major problem mentioned by most participants is technological problems. To do any work online, one of the most important things is having access to an internet connection and a device. Most people in Bangladesh now have smartphones. According to Participant G, most people in Bangladesh now have smartphones, especially every university student. In this case, having access to a device will not be a problem here. Although Participant H mentioned that the lack of a device would be a problem in blended learning at the university. However, many participants had to struggle here because there is no guarantee of internet connection. Participant G said, "If the class is taken online, then there is an internet issue, the class cannot be held, or the mic does not work". Due to technical errors during an assignment or during the class, they do not hear the correct information and become frustrated. This leads to fewer chances of getting good marks in the exam. If there is any error in the participant's device or any error in the online platform, then it creates pressure among the participants and in many cases they become nervous. Also, most of the participants said that they came from outside Dhaka. They came to Dhaka for university and here they were given online classes and activities for the first time.

Only 1 participant among them was familiar with online tools and all the others were using them for the first time. Due to this, they had to face many technological issues like Participant H said, "Initially, when I had to submit something online, I did not know about it well or was not aware of it so many of my documents were not saved or words were getting deleted. So I think those who are not very comfortable with online technology or do not know how to use it can face problems here". As a beginner, the participants felt extra pressure to do and submit assignments online. At the same time, most of the participants also said that this technical error had a negative impact on their grades. Participant B said, "One of the reasons why my results in the first two semesters were so bad was that I was not good at technology. I had very little idea about how to use online tools, for this reason I could not give many quiz assignments in the course properly and could not write so quickly because I was not used to typing before." Before entering university, participants had to face various problems at university because they did not use online tools regularly for academic purposes. Also, since their studies were completely pen-and-paper based, they had problems with typing at university. This affected their grades.

Secondly, the participants' responses also highlight their psychological challenges. Most participants reported feelings of loneliness, stress, and isolation as blended learning drawbacks. Participant D stated, "My eyes and head hurt when I do assignments online, and I feel mentally sick from sitting for so long." Participants have to spend a lot of time online or on their laptops to do online assignments, which causes them physical discomfort and stress. In classroom activities, participants do not feel lonely and isolated because they interact with the teacher and other students. In offline activities, good friendly relationships are developed between students and teachers. In online activities, students have relatively less interaction with their teachers. Participant D then added that "It is easy for us to do worksheets online or get feedback by email, and it saves time, but when we email, we see that we are distanced from the teachers, and even if we want to, we cannot make the teachers comfortable. It has happened to me many times that after emailing the teachers, there was not much direct interaction with the teachers or I did not feel comfortable."

The lack of communication with other students and the presence of the teacher create a sense of isolation and anxiety among the participants. The social support that is available in classroom activities is missing in online activities, which increases loneliness among the participants. Psychological well-being plays a very important role in the acquisition of proper English language. If online activities are not properly balanced in blended learning, it can create stress and isolation for students. Participant B in her interview said that at the beginning of university, everything except exams was done online, and then in offline classes, she felt friendlessness and isolated, which demotivated her in learning. Interaction with peers is an important element in English language acquisition. This interaction provides opportunities for practice, feedback and social learning among participants.

Thirdly, the most common challenges in language skills cited by participants were a lack of conversational opportunities and listening comprehension challenges. In a traditional classroom, participants have the opportunity to interact in real life with their teachers and peers. This is reduced in online activities. Participants' responses show that face-to-face interaction is decreasing and they have to study through pre-recorded lectures. Participant L spoke about the lack of opportunities for conversation in her interview. She said that real-life interaction is decreasing in their online activities, which reduces her opportunities for conversation with other students. Although she is learning different pronunciations through online activities, it is also reducing her opportunities for conversation. The way online activities are helping participants in their writing is not reflected in their speaking skills. They feel like writing due to their regular engagement with online materials and assignments, but this often affects their listening comprehension and speaking skills.

Participant B said, "I have found a lot of help from watching YouTube. It is very helpful for studying, but there is a big difference between the language used in our videos and the language used in our real life. We are not that good at understanding or speaking in real life." In class, participants need real life conversations in addition to online videos to understand class discussions or classroom readings. Classroom activities provide opportunities to participate in live discussions or oral presentations, which is lacking in online discussions. Since the teacher cannot see the students in online activities, it is difficult to work with proper attention for the students. Participants' English acquisition in online activities is not balanced, and although their writing and reading improve, they lag behind in speaking and listening. This imbalance is creating problems for academic skills and real-world communication. Participant F talked about their recorded materials. It can be seen in these recorded materials that sometimes they cannot be heard clearly, there are internet issues, and they do not understand the concepts properly. In this case, it is necessary to discuss it with the teacher offline. Speaking and listening are very important in English language acquisition. Neglecting these to gain competence can create significant challenges for participants in their later lives.

Lastly, one of the challenges mentioned by the participants is the use of AI tools and the associated ethical concerns. Almost all participants mentioned the use of AI; the most commonly used AI tools are ChatGPT and Gemini. Currently, the use of AI is increasing relatively among students. Many participants stated that AI tools play a significant role in their online activities. Participant E said at one point in her interview that now AI is being used to learn about any topic, to make an outline, or to find out the answer to a question that is not understood. Participants B, D, and F also agreed with this statement. The participants' responses show their excessive dependence on AI. It is sometimes used to write complete question papers or answers to any exam. Participant I said, "I have many exams online. When teachers make questions online, they often ask very difficult questions and the meaning of those questions is not immediately understandable. Then I have to take help from ChatGPT so that I can understand what the answer is and then I can understand what kind of answer needs to be written."

Online submission creates an opportunity for participants to cheat because there is no limit for participants, they can use it for whatever they want. In online activities, teachers cannot see how students are writing their answers. When participants have to write answers or an exam is going on in the classroom, teachers are directly in the classroom, so this creates fear among participants. Then, if they want to participate, they cannot use any phone or AI tool in the classroom. Participant F mentioned in her interview that when an exam is taken online, the exam questions are made relatively difficult because teachers know that students have access to the internet and will use AI, which is why they make the question papers a little harder than usual. This is why participants have difficulty understanding the questions in online exams or understanding the answers. However, many reported using this AI only to understand the questions and outline them. Only one participant reported that many students use AI and then use AI again to humanize the writing. However, all participants mention a web-based AI detection called "Turnitin" to submit any paper online to the university. This allows them to know the similarity of their paper and detect plagiarism.

At this point, the opportunity for participants to cheat online or use AI destroys the trust between students and teachers. Although all participants have mentioned the severity of AI detection, many feel that many students are still cheating in online exams. Online activities are already creating a gap between students and teachers. In that case, if teachers and students do not have trust, it affects the teacher-student rapport. Participant B shared an experience of hers, she said, "I did a course. Before our exam, sir or madam usually explains how many steps the question can have or how many questions will come in the exam. So before the exam, a student was asking the teacher what kind of question might come and the faculty said in the class, "You can easily find out the answer to that question by asking ChatGPT, no problem." We were all very surprised to hear this and felt bad. Saying this in the classroom often demotivates students." It is very painful and frustrating for a student to hear such things from a teacher. Such a lack of trust between teachers and students damages the relationship between them. It also affects the participants' journey to acquire effective English language because trust is essential for acquiring effective language. Participant G expressed her frustration in her interview about being unfairly punished for AI and said that even if they do not use AI, it shows AI in their paper. She suggested that teachers should understand which ones are written by AI and which ones are not. Moreover, when teachers start thinking students are dishonest, students feel frustrated and disconnected from their learning. A strong student-teacher rapport is crucial to maintaining students' motivation and engagement in their language acquisition journey.

Students' Perspective: Blended Learning Expansion and the role of the teacher

Undoubtedly, all participants strongly supported the expansion of blended learning. All participants would like to see the use of blended learning in their universities' upcoming courses. In particular, its flexibility, access to various learning materials, and the opportunity to use various types of digital resources encouraged participants to expand blended learning. Participants are able to prepare for their professional field through it and balance academic workload and personal stress, which is particularly beneficial for students. On the other hand, participants also stated that in the context of Bangladesh, blended learning is not possible in all types of universities. As a result, while some students in Bangladesh may benefit from blended learning, many students may lag.

Participants felt that universities in Bangladesh have a diverse student population and students from different places, which means that not everyone has access to a laptop or a proper device, or not everyone has access to the internet all the time, which means that student in one area are improving, the rest of the students are not able to keep up with the modern world. Participant F said, "We are trying to take ourselves to the international level day by day, I think we all should use online platforms. Whether it is possible to implement it here depends on whether that school, college or university has that facility because in the case of blended learning, I think it is expensive. If the university can afford it, then it should definitely be used." Participants see blended learning not only as a medium of education but also as a means of preparing for a global context. However, all participants expect its balanced implementation at their universities.

Participants in their interviews mentioned several key factors for effective blended learning, one of which is the importance of fostering trust and respect for students. According to participants, since blended learning utilizes a variety of online platforms, there are numerous opportunities for students to cheat. This makes teachers lose trust in students, which affects their learning process. Participants are calling for a change here and are asking for a move away from automatic suspicion of using AI and instead for proper conversations with students about their answer or about their paper. Participant B shares some of her experiences with blended learning in her interview, where she talks about the lack of trust and proper conversations with teachers. Participants also mentioned the change in automatic deduction of marks due to AI, which not only affects their exam marks but also damages the student-teacher relationship. Participants want teachers to verify the validity of students' marks instead of automatically deducting marks for AI. Concurrently, participants also mentioned the need for well-trained teachers in using digital platforms. According to Participant E, teachers who are a little older or who did not use online platforms much during their studies face some difficulties because they are not used to it. Many teachers are seen to depend on teaching assistants who upload materials and arrange everything for online classes or sometimes face problems using projectors.

However, those who are young teachers are not seen to face these problems. Participants feel that there is a lack of well-trained teachers in Bangladesh to use digital platforms properly. Although most participants said that all the teachers who use the platform in their university are well-trained in using digital platforms. A few are seen to disagree a little with this opinion. Participants felt that private universities in Bangladesh have well-trained teachers, but public universities lack them. Participant E stated in another part of her interview that it is almost impossible to access it in all universities in Bangladesh. While private universities see proper use of blended learning, public universities do not see it or lack proper use of it with well trained teacher. Without well-trained teachers in the use of digital platforms, blended learning will lack a balance of material and proper marking.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter discusses the experiences of blended learning in English language acquisition based on data collected from students of private universities. The discussion highlights how blended learning reflects their learning process, skill development and overall academic experience, which elaborates on the research questions. Focusing on the experiences of learning English acquisition, it is seen that it is diverse. No participant completely rejected blended learning but rather talked about its use in areas where it can be implemented. Most participants wanted their classes to be offline and at the same time used online platforms. The experiences mentioned by the participants highlight their academic confidence, global competence, moral awareness, and relationships with teachers. Blended learning is reshaping their English language development, providing them with flexibility, opportunities to develop various skills, and the chance to learn differently based on their individual intelligence.

In blended learning, teachers can utilize multimedia to present different pictures, videos, or audio content, rather than just lecturing in the classroom. This provides opportunities for auditory and reflective students to learn differently. Many participants mentioned in their interviews that if the teacher teaches the lecture to the students through Google Slides or a video, the students understand it better. Participants G and B mentioned their Visual-Spatial Intelligence. Not all students in a classroom understand reading in the same way, so if the learning materials in the classroom are of different types, it is suitable for all students. Gardner (2013) says that no matter what subject you teach, “arts, science, history, or mathematics,” your learning materials should be presented in a variety of ways. Blended learning provides a space where students can develop their academic skills without relying on pen and paper in the same face-to-face classroom.

However, participants reported that online platforms were slightly creating gaps in their English language acquisition. For example, almost all participants reported that although their reading and writing skills improved through blended learning, their speaking and listening skills lacked improvement. This hindered them from learning English effectively. Blended learning for English language acquisition currently does not balance all aspects equally, even though it is aimed at preparing students for global competence

and professional development. Most participants mentioned the widespread use of AI tools in online platforms. Also, with the exception of 1-2 participants, most participants mentioned the use of AI for content understanding and grammar checking.

They also reported an increase in unethical use of AI in online platforms. At the same time, this has an impact on their grades because teachers assume that since they have the opportunity to use online platforms, they must have used them. Most participants reported that they often use AI even when they do not use it, which results in their automatic marking being deducted. This not only affects students' grades but also affects the teacher-student relationship. Most participants expressed their concerns at this point that the use of online platforms is causing a lack of trust in the teacher-student relationship. This is one of the reasons for their stress and frustration. While mentioning these challenges in blended learning, participants also mentioned its advantages such as flexibility, time efficiency, improved reading and writing, and access to global resources. In fact, when asked, participants said that they would like to see a balanced implementation of blended learning in Bangladesh in the future.

Research Questions: Reflection on participants' experience

Research Question 01

How do students at private universities in Bangladesh perceive the effectiveness of blended learning in acquiring English language skills, on global skills and professional preparation?

To answer the research question, it is necessary to review and examine the participants' experiences. In their interviews, participants talked about the development of four core language skills through blended learning. Although they did not explicitly state that the four language skills were developed equally, the impact on writing and reading was more pronounced. The classroom provides opportunities for participants to learn through videos, podcasts, and online lectures. In the case of listening and speaking skills, although not much development was mentioned, it was identified as having a positive impact. In the case of speaking skills, many participants mentioned that they felt hesitant to talk to other students or the teacher in the classroom from the beginning. Participant F, being a Bengali medium student, feels that she lacks practice in speaking English. In blended

learning, she is getting acquainted with various online platforms where she can learn at her own pace. The effectiveness of blended learning varied depending on the students' previous educational background and learning preferences before university.

Most participants mentioned that traditional classrooms, which rely solely on lectures, are failing to develop the proper skills of all students. Aubrey and Riley (2022) say that a teacher should understand the cultural differences and experiences of all students. Most students in Bangladeshi universities are from Bengali medium. It takes time for them to adjust to a sudden English-speaking environment and they often feel hesitant. Therefore, Aubrey and Riley (2022) say that students should be motivated, encouraged to solve problems, and helped to develop and follow their own understanding of new knowledge through discussion with others.

Importantly, blended learning is strongly linked to global skills and professional preparation. Participants repeatedly stated in their interviews that they can use it not only in academics but also outside their classrooms and that it is effective for them. Participants A, B, G, M, K, L and others also mentioned various online platforms such as 'Google Meet', 'Zoom', 'Google Slides', 'Canva' etc. These have helped the participants develop their skills in virtual presentations, discussion forums, virtual communication in this modern era. Participants believe that these are currently giving them opportunities in the global job market and higher education opportunities abroad. This is because in most cases, especially in the field of work or education, everyone prefers 'Email' for communication. Almost all of the respondents mentioned Email as one of their main means of communication. Participant A made a very nice point in her interview that English is a very diverse and changing language. We learn new words every day. We need to be updated to keep up with the current world because we cannot completely rely on teachers. Online platforms are a wonderful way to update yourself.

Research Question 02

What benefits does blended learning provide in developing English language skills among students? How do students negotiate ethical boundaries in using AI tools?

The findings indicate that blended learning accommodates diverse student learning preferences while providing varied opportunities. The advantage most participants

mention is flexibility and less time-consuming. Students have the opportunity to pursue more advanced learning beyond the classroom. Students can learn and do more in less time using online platforms. It is both beneficial for students and teachers. At the same time, if a topic is covered in class, they can watch videos or read more articles on the topic at home through online platforms. The findings show that participant L said that the textbooks she reads provide limited information on a topic or that she can only read the writings of that one author. In this case, she mentions 'YouTube,' where there are many more videos on the same topic, and she can enjoy visuals along with reading. Here, Howard Gardner's 'multiple intelligences' theory can be connected. The reason behind this is that when the participants used to follow the traditional classroom, they were completely dependent on pen-paper study.

The abilities of all students cannot be put on the same line because some are good at speaking, some at math, and some at dancing. Even if classes are taken in the same way in a classroom, students cannot explore and understand what their intelligence is. Participant G is seen in the findings to highlight this issue in a further way. She said that if the classroom is completely teacher-centered, then she only has to listen to lectures from the teacher, where she is not performing very well. On the other hand, if the class is explained through videos or slides, she can understand it better because visuals grab the attention of students. Blended learning is making the classroom more engaging and effective for students by giving them these opportunities.

After that, participants B, N, P and G are able to develop their linguistic skills especially writing and speaking skills by using online platforms. Participant G used 'Google Docs' to practice writing at the beginning of her university. There she used to write 100 words every day so that if she made any mistake in grammar, then she could improve it, and at the same time, her typing was practiced. It encourages independent learning for students. Findings also show that Participant F mentioned practicing the authentic English language and proper pronunciation, where she mentions an online platform named 'Google Translate'. It not only teaches them authentic English and pronunciation but also gives them confidence because many times students feel shy to speak in the classroom due to a lack of proper pronunciation. Participants indicated 'Email' as the communication method they most preferred. The main reason for this is that online communication gives them time to think, and they understand which words to use. It reduces their anxiety and helps

them express their ideas more clearly in English. They also prefer email for feedback because in-person feedback can demotivate students in many cases. Participant B shared a very distressing incident at her university, where she was very broken and very demotivated in direct feedback with her teacher. She feels that if she had received the same feedback online via email, she would not have seen this reaction.

Carol Dweck's notions of mindset¹ can be discussed here. Carol Dweck talks about mindset and motivation. She talks about two types of mindsets. One is a fixed mindset and the other is a growth mindset. In a classroom, not every student has the same mindset; everyone cannot be motivated in the same way. A growth mindset is a student who enjoys the learning process and learns positively from mistakes or negative comments from the teacher, while a fixed mindset is not. Carol Dweck's mindset theory emphasizes giving students proper feedback that focuses on process and effort rather than results, abilities, and perceived intelligence. Feedback should include strategies for future improvement that celebrate and build on students' mistakes. Carol Dweck asks teachers to give feedback in a way that motivates students.

Moreover, findings also suggest that using online platforms gives students the opportunity to use AI tools. Participants mentioned that they have to take exams and submit various assignments or papers online. In this case, participants admitted that they use AI for various academic tasks. However, while most participants talked about correcting grammar, getting ideas, practicing English and learning more about a topic. Some of the AI tools mentioned by participants are:

- ChatGPT
- Gemini
- Grammarly
- QuillBot

'ChatGPT' and 'Gemini' are used more by students for idea generation and clarification of ideas. 'Grammarly' is mainly used for checking the grammar of writing. Finally, 'QuillBot' uses for sentence to paraphrase and for vocabulary

¹ KARL AUBREY and ALISON RILEY, "UNDESTANDING AND USING EDUCATIONL THEORIES," 360.

Research Question 03

What challenges do students face in acquiring the English language in blended learning and how do they affect the teacher-student rapport? What advice do they give to overcome these challenges?

In the interview with the participants, it was revealed that everyone talked about the advantages of blended learning as well as some of its disadvantages. Since the participants have to use an online platform in blended learning, they have to face technological problems. Insufficient internet access, unfamiliar platforms or not knowing how to use any offline platform make blended learning challenging for students. In the interview, when the participants were asked, 'Are there any challenges of blended learning and if so, what are they?', the first thing they said was internet access and technological problems. Participant Q shared an experience where she had to submit a paper online but could not submit the paper on time due to internet issues. Late submission also affects the grade. Most of the participants said that they had difficulty submitting the paper on time due to internet issues before submission, which affected their grade. The findings show Participant B's experience with online tools. She said that her grades were very bad in the first two semesters because she was not good at technology. She had very little idea about using online tools, which resulted in her not being able to give many quizzes and assignments in the course correctly.

Generally, in Bangladeshi education, especially in Bengali medium, students are very unfamiliar with online tools. Also, participants said that online platforms are not used in academic fields in schools and colleges. For this reason, it can be seen that students have to face various types of problems after coming to university. This leads to learned helplessness among students. A significant challenge among these is not knowing how to use online platforms correctly. In many cases, students are shy and cannot tell teachers or other students. This creates frustration among them.

At the same time, if students work continuously through online platforms, they experience illnesses such as eye pain and headache. Participant D shares her experience with online tools. Many times they have to do 3/4 assignments at the same time, then their eyes and head hurt and they feel mentally exhausted. Due to the decrease in classroom activities, they feel friendless and isolated. Many participant feel sad at this part of the

interview. Research asked the reason for this and they say that their friendship and emotions do not work here the way they used to in school and college. Although they did not want to add this information in the interview. They think that many people in universities face the same problem. For the English language acquisition mental health is also important.

Blended learning poses ethical challenges as it allows participants to use AI tools. The findings show that participants use AI for their exams and online assignments or papers. However, while most participants use it for grammar and more detailed types of topics, 1-2 participants reported using AI for their academic writing. Although they did not directly say that they use it for their papers or exams, they were generally talking about students who do this. However, many institutions now use AI detectors. The use of AI is not only destroying student creativity but also making them completely dependent on AI tools. Students are not able to gain their proper knowledge. This is not only affecting their learning process but also affecting the relationship between a student and a teacher. Participants said that the excessive use of AI tools is changing the mindset of teachers.

During the interview with Participant B, she shared an experience where she said that she was in a classroom of a course where everyone was discussing their questions or problems with the teacher. One of the students asked the teacher what the questions would be like in their exam or how the structure could be. Then their teacher gave her a very demotivating and disappointing answer. Her teacher answers that they can easily find the answers to those questions by asking ChatGPT. It is very disappointing for a student that the teacher does not trust them and whatever they write in the exam or the paper they submit, the teacher will never get that honesty in the writing of the students. This will have a big impact on the acquisition of English language by students because when the relationship between the teacher and the student is not good or there is no trust, it makes the students feel isolated and disappointed. The participant suggested that teachers need to understand what their students are like or what their writing might be like. Sometimes, even if the AI detector shows errors, there may be errors. The participant suggested that teachers should not rely entirely on the AI detector but should give importance to their writing.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the role of multimodal literacy in enhancing English language learning from the perspective of students by focusing on the key themes- Engagement and motivation, Active Learning, Skill development, Accessibility issues and cognitive overload. The study reveals that students are more engaged and motivated when multiple elements, such as videos, images, and interactive elements, are incorporated into their lessons. Additionally, active learning was significantly facilitated through multimodal resources. It enables learners to participate more in their educational journey. In terms of skill development, participants shared how multimedia tools enhance specific language skills, particularly listening and speaking skills by giving them the opportunity to practice in real world context.

Moreover, visual and auditory aids associated with multimodal literacy provide better retention of understanding Grammar structures and new vocabulary. However, the study also found some challenges while using these resources, particularly accessibility issues and cognitive overload. While most participants had access to digital devices, while some faces difficulties because of the slow internet or lack of technological literacy. Moreover, rapid use of multiple resources sometimes overwhelms learners. Therefore, there is a need for balanced and well-structured materials. In conclusion, while multimodal literacy offers a lot of benefits in improving English language learning, it is essential to address accessibility and cognitive load issues to maximize its potential.

Overall, this study concludes that blended learning is an effective approach to English language teaching if it is used in a balanced manner. Its success does not depend solely on any one aspect but also on instructional design, ethical use of appropriate technology, and ongoing support for teachers.

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Appendix

Structured question:

- How many years have you been learning English?
- Have you experienced blended learning before coming to this university?
- Which mode of learning do you prefer more? Why?
- Do you feel comfortable and confident using digital platforms and what are those platforms?
- How do your teachers usually combine online and offline classroom activities in English classes?
- Do you think blended learning gives you more flexibility?
- Has blended learning improved your skills in English? How? And which skills improved the most?
- Is blended learning helping you prepare for your career?
- Which classroom is more engaging and effective to you?
- What do you think about the benefits of blended learning?
- What do you think about the challenges of blended learning?
- Does blended learning have any impact on the student-teacher relationship?
- Would you like to see more blended learning courses in the university? Why?
- Is it possible to use blended learning in every kind of university?
- Do you think blended learning should continue in the future? If yes, then what changes would you suggest to improve blended learning in your university?
- Do you think online platforms are trusted in Bangladeshi society?

This study followed a semi-structured questionnaire and the researcher had to add some questions for more detailed, nuanced answers. At the beginning of the interview, all participants were asked general questions, such as their age, purpose of the study, semester, and level of class participation, etc. Since most participants wanted to conduct the interview in Bengali, I had to ask the questions in Bengali.

Transcription of an interview recording

Researcher: Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am conducting this interview as part of my undergraduate thesis on blended learning and students' preference for learning English. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your responses will be kept strictly confidential and you can take your time to respond. There are no right or wrong answers; I am only interested in your honest opinions and experiences. The information you provide will be used only for academic purposes. The interview may take some time. If at any point you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop, you may skip it. You can answer these interview questions in both Bengali or English, whichever you feel comfortable with. If you have any stories or incidents to share, any details to elaborate on, or anything to add, please don't hesitate to share, it would be helpful to me. With your permission, I will now begin the interview.

Researcher: Hello, I am Nusrat Jahan

Participant 01: Thank you. Now you can start the interview.

Researcher: Okay. So which language do you prefer for this interview, Bengali or English?

Participant 01: I prefer both.

Researcher: Okay. Can you tell me your age?

Participant 01: I am around 22 to 23 years old.

Researcher: Are you in Dhaka or outside Dhaka? And what is the purpose of staying here?

Participant 01: I live in Dhaka. I have been here since my childhood, I have been here since my childhood. Not for studies.

Researcher: Are you in a public university or a private university now? And which semester are you in and what is your subject?

Participant 01: I am a student of a private university. This is my second last semester. And I am in Bachelor of Arts in English.

Researcher: How many years have you been studying English language?

Participant 01: I think we are learning from our childhood. In Bangladesh's perspective, we learn English as a second language from a young age. But it is increasing after coming to university.

Researcher: Do you know about blended learning or hybrid learning?

Participant 01: I have some ideas. To me, blended learning or hybrid learning seems to be the same. I think offline and online learning are done together here.

Researcher: Is blended learning used in your university courses?

Participant 01: Yes. Blended learning is used in our university courses. We have a lot of assignments that have to be submitted online. Many times exams are paper-based so that is when it is used.

Researcher: Have you experienced blended learning before coming to this university?

Participant 01: I have never faced blended learning in school or college. I am facing it after coming to the university.

Researcher: How are the classes in your university mostly taken?

Participant 01: The classes are mostly offline, but if the university is off for a long time or has make-up classes, then they take classes online in case of any emergency.

Researcher: How often do you attend classes in your university?

Participant 01: I attend almost all the classes. My attendance is 90%.

Researcher: Okay. Which mode of learning do you prefer more—online, face-to-face, or a combination?

Participant 01: I prefer online. There are many resources online. Many books, articles are available. In offline, it is seen that if you want to know the meaning of a word, it is not possible to know its meaning by looking at the dictionary. Online, we can often find out the meaning of a word. My previous generation might have been able to do this, but we can't.

Researcher: Okay. Do you use any online platforms to learn English? Are you comfortable using them?

Participant 01: Online platforms are now in English. And the learning materials we provide in our courses are provided on Google Classroom.

Researcher: Which platform do you find easiest to use and why?

Participant 01: Google Classroom is easily accessible. If we go to search for secondary resources, we look at Google Scholar or Jstore.

Researcher: How do your teachers usually combine online and offline classroom activities in English classes?

Participant 01: Teachers prefer both online and offline.

Researcher: Has blended learning improved your skills in English? How? And which skills improved the most, such as writing, listening, speaking or reading

Participant 01: Yes. If I talk about speaking, then pronunciation comes first. When we were in school and college, we were dependent on the pronunciation of the teacher, and the pronunciation of the one was always correct. But now, with many online tools, we can watch authentic or native speakers' proper English lectures on YouTube and various blogs. Many English videos come out in the reels of TikTok.

Participant 01: In the case of reading, it used to be seen that we used to read school textbooks offline and didn't have much opportunity to read outside of that, but now we have so many things, so many resources at our fingertips. There are e-books now. Earlier, we had to struggle a lot to get a book by a certain author, but now we can get it online whenever we want. It shows that our reading is developing.

Participant 01: In the case of writing, we are also developing a lot. We can see how to improve our writing on YouTube. Now there is also Chatzipt. Many times it helps us a lot in improving our writing.

Researcher: Okay. So

Participant 01: Again, many times it happens,

Researcher: Yes, yes, continue.

Participant 01: Many times, we tell ChatGPT how we can develop our writing or if we want to improve any skill, then it doesn't help. ChatGPT also gives us a lot of suggestions. Okay, next.

Researcher: Do you think blended learning gives you more flexibility in learning English?

Participant 01: Yes, it does because with online access, we can explore different platforms. A very well-known name in Bangladesh is 10 Minute School. They have many IELTS courses or videos that we can do and watch online. It is not always possible to go and do something, especially in a place like Dhaka. So this is very helpful. It also saves our time.

Researcher: Which classroom is more engaging to you? Traditional or online combination?

Participant 01: In terms of learning, I think blended learning is good because online learning is one-sided, sometimes we need in-person feedback, then blended learning is better. Many times we feel hesitant to communicate with teachers face-to-face, then we see that we can communicate with teachers through email.

Researcher: What do you think about the benefits of blended learning?

Participant 01: The benefits of blended learning are that it gives us the opportunity to communicate with teachers in different ways. If we learn completely online by looking at the screen, I think it is not very effective. If this thing is blended, then if it is online and offline together, then we get many opportunities to explore, and just as students need to understand teachers, teachers also need to understand students.

Researcher: Okay. What do you think about the challenges of it?

Participant 01: Difficulty of blended learning?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 01: Network is a big issue for online platforms. Sometimes it is seen that if the net goes down, we cannot work or if we have to submit a paper, then we have to face problems, teachers do not understand these. Now is the era of online, and cyber attacks also happen. If there is a cyber attack on the learning materials they provide, then all the classes will be lost. So it is very problematic.

Researcher: Do you receive enough feedback from teachers in online mode and is that effective for you? Do you feel motivated by that?

Participant 01: Yes, I get enough feedback online. It seems that if I submit a paper on Google Docs or if the teacher gives me feedback via email, it stays because I can look at it again and again and then I can correct my mistakes from that when I do my next assignment or lecture. I think online feedback is better because there is not much direct communication or it may not be as effective as email.

Researcher: Would you like to see more blended learning courses in the university? Why?

Participant 01: Yes (excited), I would like to see more.

Researcher: Okay (smile), Is blended learning helping you prepare for your career?

Participant 01: Yes, of course. It opens up so many opportunities for us, and in this modern era, it is very important that we become familiar with online platforms.

Researcher: Is it possible to use blended learning in every kind of university? Does everyone have access to device?

Participant 01: In the context of Bangladesh, not everyone actually has access to it because only very good universities, especially private universities, have good accessibility to blended learning. It doesn't seem to be the case in public universities.

Researcher: What do you think about your teacher, are your teachers well-trained to use digital platforms?

Participant 01: Here I would like to give a little bit of our opinion.

Researcher: Yes, of course. You can say whatever you think.

Participant 01: Actually, it's a bit mixed, not all teachers are well-trained. Teachers who are a little older have a little difficulty using online platforms. Since the use of online platforms was not very common in their time, they are less familiar with them. Most of the time, it is seen that many older teachers are dependent on TAs. It seems that they (TAs) do all the work. Those who are recent teachers are seen to be familiar with these tools.

Researcher: Do families support using online platforms for learning?

Participant 01: Actually, the mindset of parents is changing day by day, they prefer things now. They also don't want their children to waste all their time behind this class every day, so if they do some things online, students can stay at home for some time. And what else can I say about the condition of the roads in Dhaka. And those who are fairly middle class or upper middle class, everyone has internet at home now.

Researcher: Okay. Do you think online platforms are trusted in Bangladeshi society?

Participant 01: When you say trusted, blended learning is trusted. There is a lot of learning from accessing many things here.

Researcher: what changes would you suggest to improve blended learning in your university?

Participant 01: Yes, changes are needed. When we have to submit papers, then AI checks, I will say these?

Researcher: Yes, tell me. No problem.

Participant 01: So AI uses Turnitin to check. And they are very, very dependent on it, I think that's what Turnitin says.

Researcher: Does it have any impact on the student-teacher relationship?

Participant 01: Yes, of course. Sometimes teachers can't trust students anymore. If I write a little better or use good vocabulary, teachers think it's AI and Turnitin shows it as AI. Then it gives low grades, many teachers give 0s. This actually needs to be changed. AI is used by many students now, it really should be a little more flexible with it. AI should actually be seen as a good tool in learning, if a student can write well with AI, then it's good.

Researcher: If you got a choice, would you remove online classes completely or keep both? Why?

Participant 01: If I want to remove, I will remove the online classes completely. Offline classes are just as important as online classes, so blended classes are best.

Thank you for your honest opinions and for your time.