

Blended Learning Impact on Studying English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract. The paper focuses on the research of the efficiency of three primary forms of teaching and besides, blended learning influence on learning and teaching English as a foreign language at Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, Ukraine, at Faculties of Economics (particularly, Economic Cybernetics), Law, Pedagogy and Psychology, Philology, for two academic years 2020/2021, 2021/2022. The study sample consisted of 120 students from 4 mentioned faculties who took the compulsory academic discipline English for Specific Purposes in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd semesters in compliance with their curriculum. The objectives of the study are to analyze and compare the effectiveness of the practical application of the three primary forms of education (full-time, distant and blended) and to study the impact of blended learning on teaching and learning English as a foreign language in practical classes of the compulsory English course. For the research, a questionnaire survey divided into two parts was used. Each of the survey parts included four items. The second part of the survey was conducted based on the typical 5-level Likert scale. To analyze the elicited data, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program was used for the qualitative research. The outcomes in both parts are presented in percentages. The study conclusions showed that a blended study is the challenge of the present-day education system and is highly approved by university students. They are sure that using blended learning in teaching EFL at Chernivtsi National University is beneficial, advantageous and productive for improving skills in English as a foreign language course. Four-fifths of the respondents stated that their language proficiency skills significantly enhanced compared to conventional teaching methods.

Keywords: *blended learning, online form, face-to-face, distant learning, offline, EFL course, Likert scale.*

Головацька Наталія. Вплив змішаної форми навчання на вивчення англійської мови як іноземної.

Анотація. Стаття зосереджена на дослідженні ефективності трьох основних форм навчання і, зокрема, впливу змішаної форми навчання на вивчення та викладання англійської мови як іноземної в Чернівецькому національному університеті імені Юрія Федьковича, в Україні, на факультетах економіки (особливо, спеціальність Економічна кібернетика), права, педагогіки та психології, філології за два навчальні роки 2020/2021, 2021/2022. Вибірку дослідження склали сто двадцять студентів чотирьох зазначених факультетів, які в першому, другому та третьому семестрах вивчали обов'язкову дисципліну «Англійська мова за професійним спрямуванням» згідно їхньої навчальної програми. Метою дослідження було проаналізувати і порівняти продуктивність практичного застосування трьох основних форм

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навчання (очної, дистанційної та змішаної) та вивчити вплив використання змішаної форми навчання на викладання та вивчення англійської мови як іноземної на практичних заняттях обов'язкового курсу англійської мови «Англійська мова за професійним спрямуванням». Для дослідження було використано анкетне опитування, яке було розділене на дві частини. Кожна з частин опитування включала чотири питання / проблеми. Друга частина опитування проводилася на основі типової 5-рівневої шкали Лайкерта. Для аналізу отриманих даних з ціллю представлення якісних результатів дослідження була використана програма SPSS (Статистичний пакет для соціальних наук). Результати в обох частинах подані у відсотковому відношенні. Висновки даного дослідження показали, що змішана форма навчання є викликом сучасної системи освіти і високо схвалюється студентами Чернівецького національного університету. Вони впевнені, що форма змішаного навчання при викладанні англійської мови у Чернівецькому національному університеті дійсно вигідна, корисна та продуктивна для підняття їхнього рівня англійської мови як іноземної. Чотири п'ятих респондентів підтвердили, що їхні навички володіння мовою значно покращилися порівняно з використанням традиційних методів навчання при проходженні академічної дисципліни «Англійська мова за професійним спрямуванням».

Ключові слова: змішане навчання, онлайн форма, особиста форма, дистанційне навчання, офлайн, курс англійської як іноземної мови, шкала Лайкерта.

Introduction

In today's educational world so urgent in use 'blended learning emerged as one of the most popular pedagogical concepts in higher education and in English as a foreign language (hereinafter – EFL) contexts at the beginning of 2000' (Halverson et al, 2014). Nowadays, blended learning has become an inherent challenge and a trend in foreign language teaching, because "the overall focus of the research is concerned with the search for better practice, i.e., the attempt to identify the optimum mix of course delivery in order to provide a more effective language learning experience". (Sharma, 2010)

Undoubtedly, blended learning has been gradually getting huge perspectives for higher education students, for it implies "the improvement of face-to-face interface between teachers and learners, using internet or computer based techniques" (Morris, 2010).

During the years of covid pandemic, all forms of teaching and learning (lectures, practical classes, seminars, courses) are successfully conducted due to the use of blended learning, and namely in academic circles it is in great demand. "A substantial amount of seat time, that is, time disbursed in the classroom, is replaced with online activities that include learners in meeting course objectives (Bock et al., 2018).

Literature Review

Blended learning combines two main forms of learning and teaching English as a foreign language: full-time (students are in-person in the classroom) and distant or online (students are present remotely) (Akkoyunlu & Vilmaz-Soylu, 2008; Drysdale et al, 2013; Gleason, 2013; Hubackova et al., 2011; Kern, 2006). F2F learning refers

to the traditional environment where the instruction is conducted face-to-face between teachers and students in a contact teaching situation (Kaur, 2013; Neumeier, 2005). On the other hand, online learning allows learners to interact with learning materials, with or without the physical presence of peers and the instructor (Blake, 2011; Fryer et al, 2014). The success of blended learning is in how well the teacher can combine or blend all that is the most effective in these two basic forms, so that face-to-face and online activities reinforce each other, creating a particular, powerful cohesive English course. Though, a great deal of scientific literature exploring blended learning phenomenon states and is regularly referred to in provision of the argument that “there is no apparent advantage in the learning outcomes of students taught online compared to students taught in a face-to-face setting”. (Boelens et al., 2018)

Via blended learning effective learning strategies through the introduction of different pedagogical methods and approaches are generally used. Modern pedagogical theories contain two main types that are combined in blended learning, synchronous and asynchronous learning. In the mode of synchronous learning, all students simultaneously gain some experience in real time and cooperate together. Asynchronous learning is usually available at different times to different students. “They can choose the pace and the way of accepting experience, but they cannot react mutually in a real time” (Hubackova et al., 2011), i.e. the students cannot give a quick feedback or respond to certain situations or tasks and cooperate with each other as they do in real class time. Though, Allen et al. (2007) argue that namely “the asynchronous nature of the blended module of the courses possesses constructive impact of increasing the time learners spend on course material.”

In Neumeier’s (2005) opinion, the most important aim in designing a blended language learning course is to find the most effective and efficient combination of the two modes of learning for the individual learning subjects, contexts and objectives (Neumeier, 2005).

Covering the same point, Rovai and Jordan (2004) analysed three education courses (traditional, blended, and fully online) in comparison and found out that students in the blended learning course have the highest level of sense of community, similar to those students from the face-to-face section, and higher than those from entirely online section. They state “since students in the blended course exhibited similar sense of community and variability as students in the traditional course, offering the convenience of fully online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact may be adequate to nurture a strong sense of community in students who would feel isolated in a fully online course” (Rovai & Jordan, 2004).

Sharma underlines the impact of blended learning and teaching EFL on pedagogy improvement saying that “blended learning seeks to combine the best of the taught element of a course with the benefits of technology, so that, the argument goes, better learning outcomes can be achieved’ (Sharma, 2007).

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of suggested models, strategies, ways, guidelines and frameworks researchers believe that “determining the right blend isn’t easy or to be taken lightly” (Hofmann, 2001). There are similarly cautionary words

from Sharma and Barrett (2007) that “a blended learning course run without a principled approach may be seen as an “eclectic” blending together of course components, and can end up as rather a mish-mash ... learners may suffer “the worst of both worlds””.

Problem Statement

Blended learning is a relatively new but effective approach to learning and teaching EFL that has developed rapidly in recent years. State of things proves that in Ukraine, especially far from the capital city, EFL students demonstrate low achievements in acquiring English due to lots of reasons, among which the use of conventional teaching methods is still actual. EFL university teachers are not satisfied with the school-leavers’ level of English who face some difficulties in learning English language at university level. Having applied blended learning at our compulsory EFL course *English for Specific Purposes* and reviewed the corresponding recent researches, this article is an attempt to investigate the impact of blended learning on learning English as a foreign language and to compare three main forms of learning EFL from points of view of undergraduate students who study at different faculties, precisely the departments of Economic Cybernetics, Law, Philology and Psychology in Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University (hereafter – ChNU). Therefore, the goal of this study is to scrutinize the influence of blended learning use on teaching and learning English as a foreign language at practical classes at the university level in 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 academic years, to analyze and compare the productivity of practical application of three main forms (full-time / offline, distant / online and blended) in training and teaching EFL.

The following research questions are considered:

RQ1: Which of the three main teaching forms is most favourable for studying EFL?

RQ2: Is blended learning more advantageous for studying English as a foreign language?

RQ3: To what extent does the use of blended learning in the study of English as a foreign language help improve the level of language proficiency of students of ChNU?

To evaluate the effectiveness of the three main types of EFL learning, we undertook the following tasks: analyzing all aspects of blended learning and how it enhances the acquisition of EFL knowledge among undergraduate students.

Method

To elicit necessary data for the study, the following types of survey as questionnaires and interviews of students of 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 academic years were used. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Both the first part “Comparison of Three Main Forms of learning EFL” and the second part “Blended

Learning Influence” contained a list of 4 questions. The second part of the questionnaire was made in accordance with the typical 5-level Likert scale: 1 Absolutely / Strongly agree; 2 Agree; 3 Neutral; 4 Disagree; 5 Totally / Strongly disagree. It related to students' perceptions of the above mentioned foreign language course for professional purposes, the benefits of using blended learning and its impact on teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Statistical method and SPSS program were used to tabulate the research results. The primary data of responses were analysed in a percentage. To calculate the percent of response, the number of responses to each option was divided by the total number of respondents who answered the question. Comparative, descriptive and quantitative analyses were used to make factual and true conclusions.

Participants

The respondents numbering 120 involved in this survey were 1st and 2nd-year students (henceforth – Sts) specializing at Economic Cybernetics, Law, Psychology and Philology (henceforward – Econ. Cyber; Psychol.; Philol.) who take EFL course *English for Specific Purposes* at Chernivtsi National University as a compulsory in their curriculum. To collect primary data, the researcher used purposive sampling technique and took into account the students’ study rating in their academic groups and on their academic course. To ensure privacy, respondents were interviewed in-person and given separate questionnaires to each.

Results and Discussion

The students of 1st and 2nd-year study at the Chernivtsi National University who have the EFL course English for Specific Purposes as a compulsory discipline in their curriculum answered the list of 4 questions in the first part of the questionnaire “Comparison of Three Main Forms of learning EFL”. It covered the following items:

1. Which form of education do you prefer for your university study in general?
2. Which form of education do you prefer in learning EFL?
3. Which form facilitate your adaptation to learning EFL?
4. Which form stimulates your better learning and remembering the EFL course topics?

All data of the research are given in percentage. Table 1 shows the results of the students’ answers to the first question. We see that the students of Economic Cybernetics, Philology and Psychology specialities give preference to distant learning, whilst Law students who have higher rating in their secondary school diplomas and much better level of English, choose F2F study. Obviously, more of them want to acquire knowledge in general studying distantly, though the difference between online and offline total numbers isn’t so striking. All students accept the form of blended learning, but partially.

Table 1
Form of Education Preferred by Students for Their University Study in General

Form of study	Law Sts	Econ. Cyber Sts	Philol. Sts	Psychol. Sts	Total (%)
Online	60	26	31	30	36
Offline	27	49	49	50	44
Blended	13	25	20	20	20

Taking a close look at the data of table 2, we may state that when we speak about learning EFL course, the students' attitude toward the choice between three forms of learning is drastically altered. Students of all four specialities prefer blended learning for their EFL course and only fifth part of them would like to study English as a second language distantly. And it's natural to desire learning foreign language in the form of blended or F2F, together they total 79%. Though, in our opinion, 21% of students – supporters of distant learning is quite big and offbeat percentage. Again, speaking about students with higher rating, those are Law Students, we see that few of them prefer offline learning in their EFL study.

Table 2
Form of Education Preferred by Students for Their Learning EFL Course

Form of study	Law Sts	Econ. Cyber Sts	Philol. Sts	Psychol. Sts	Total (%)
Online	45	14	27	26	28
Offline	5	14	32	32	21
Blended	50	72	41	42	51

Discussing the form facilitating students' adaptation to learning EFL course (table 3), we may point out that 73% see F2F and blended forms as the most equally efficient for their successful study in the EFL course. However, almost the third part of them (27%) consider offline learning as the best to get adapted to EFL course. Quite bizarre is the Economic Cybernetics students' opinion. Few of them choose F2F as an acceptable form of their adaptation to learning English course. It can be explained as they are more used to spending their study time at computers.

Table 3
Form of Education That Facilitate Students' Adaptation to Their Learning EFL Course

Form of study	Law Students	Econ. Cyber Sts	Philol. Sts	Psychol. Sts	Total (%)
Online	65	5	46	26	35
Offline	15	43	27	16	27
Blended	20	52	27	58	38

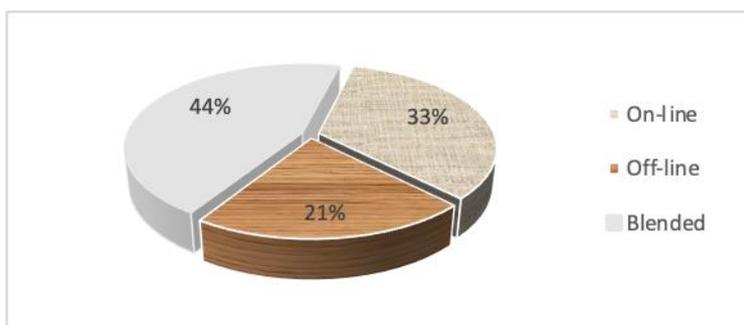
The data presented in Table 4 say that to enhance knowledge in EFL course students prefer blended (44%) and F2F (36%) to distant learning on the whole. Though, the figures in each column for each specialty are extremely various. For the Psychology students blended form is the best to learn and remember English course topics, also for the Law Students and Philology students F2F form is the best to improve their skills in English.

Table 4
Form of Education That Stimulates Students’ Better Learning and Remembering the EFL Course Topics

Form of study	Law Sts	Econ. Cyber Sts	Philol. Sts	Psychol. Sts	Total (%)
Online	65	15	54	11	36
Offline	15	40	14	11	20
Blended	20	45	32	78	44

The obtained data of the answers to these four questions of the first part of the questionnaire are integrated and shown in Figure 1. As we see, 77% of interviewed students want to study English course in the form of F2F and blended learning. The fifth part of questioned students can learn English distantly not meaning any difficulties in completing the EFL course. However, having analysed the rating of all students, we may conclude that the fifth part of those preferring to study offline, are students with poorer rating points and low motivated to study English at high proficient level.

Figure 1
Students’ Preference of Forms of Study for Their EFL Course



As almost half of the students have chosen the form of blended learning, we considered it appropriate to investigate the form more in details. So, the study was furthermore intended to investigate the influence of using blended learning in teaching and studying EFL for students of humanitarian specialties who took EFL course *English for Specific Purposes* at Chernivtsi National University for the academic years 2020/2021 and

2021/2022. The second part of the questionnaire “Blended Learning Influence on learning EFL” was made in compliance with the typical 5-level Likert scale. It comprised a list of the following problems.

I. In your opinion, in the form of blended learning number of students in your group affects the quality of learning EFL ...

II. In your opinion, using blended form of study your level of English ...

III. In your opinion, to what extent the form of blended learning is beneficial.

IV. In your opinion, to what extent your vocabulary has changed with the use of blended learning.

For each of these stated problems there were made up specified options for students’ choice. Respectively,

I. 1) Strongly affects; 2) Affects; 3) Affects 50/50; 4) Doesn’t affect; 5) Absolutely doesn’t affect

II. 1) Intensely grows; 2) Grows; 3) Grows 50/50; 4) Doesn’t grow; 5) Absolutely doesn’t grow

III. 1) Absolutely beneficial; 2) Beneficial; 3) Beneficial 50/50; 4) Unbeneficial; 5) Absolutely unbeneficial

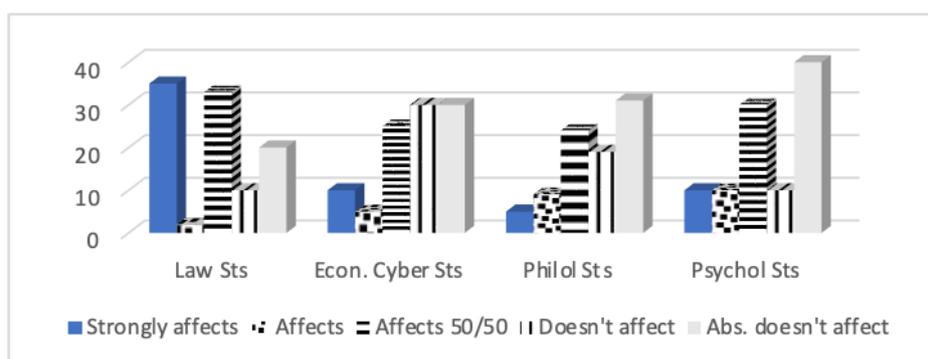
IV. 1) Intensely enlarged; 2) Enlarged; 3) Enlarged 50/50; 4) Reduced; 5) Absolutely reduced.

The results calculated on the basis of the data of the students’ answers are presented in the following charts 2-5. All figures in the charts are in percentage.

Analysing data in Figure 2 we may state, that in the form of blended learning the third part of all students are neutral in their perception that the size of the group affects the quality of teaching and their learning EFL course and a bit more than the third part believe that the number of learners absolutely doesn’t influence their study. The totals of the data in Chart 2 make up: 1) Strongly affects – 15%; 2) Affects – 6%; 3) Neutral – 29%; 4) Doesn’t affect – 17%; 5) Absolutely doesn’t affect – 33%. Four-fifths of all interviewed students regard blended learning as a favourable form to take EFL course to improve their English language skills.

Figure 2

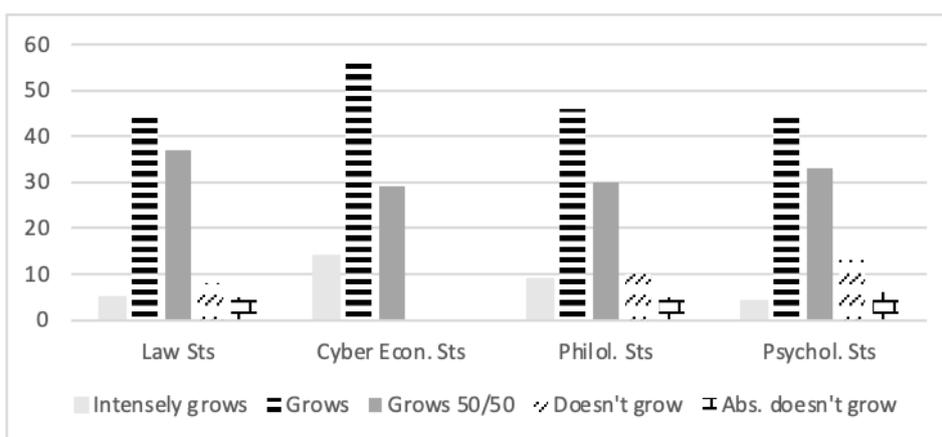
Influence of Group Size on the Quality of Learning EFL



As for the students' responses to the second problem, Figure 3 shows that 88% of the students consider that their level of the English language grows in general, i.e. the blended form advances their level of knowledge in EFL course. 12% of them don't perceive such form of learning English as a good one for them because they think their level doesn't grow. Here, we may add to this point, that the results of module and credit tests almost coincide with these data: 84% of the interviewed students took the tests successfully with good points in the range of A-C grades; 16% got satisfactory in the range of E-D grades.

Figure 3

Influence of Blended Form on Students' Level of English

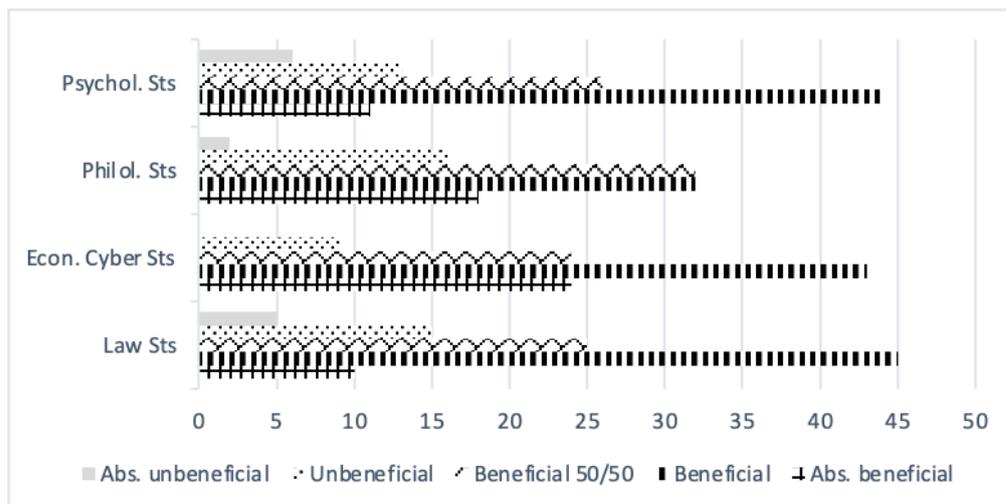


Furthermore, the students at the ChNU who have undergone an EFL course via blended learning, were encouraged to respond whether they find the use of blended form in teaching and learning English at university level advantageous and beneficial or not. Figure 4 depicts the extent to which the students consider how convenient the form of blended learning is for their study at EFL course. The results prove that participants making 57% of all questioned students perceive blended form as useful and advantageous for their study of English; 27% of them have a neutral attitude to this form of education and 16% see blended form as inconvenient and unbeneficial for their EFL study. So, we may conclude, that a bit more than three-fourths of all students think blended learning compared to the use of other conventional methods to be a positive form in improving their English and just less than one-fourth see it as such causing a sort of discomfort and making no use for their study of English.

Analysing how students' vocabulary altered with the use of blended form in learning EFL in comparison with the use of conventional teaching methods, we see in Figure 5, that their vocabulary has undergone positive and beneficial changes. Almost one-fifth of participants felt the intensified enrichment of their vocabulary. More than two-thirds of interviewed students feel that their vocabulary capacity has become larger.

Figure 4

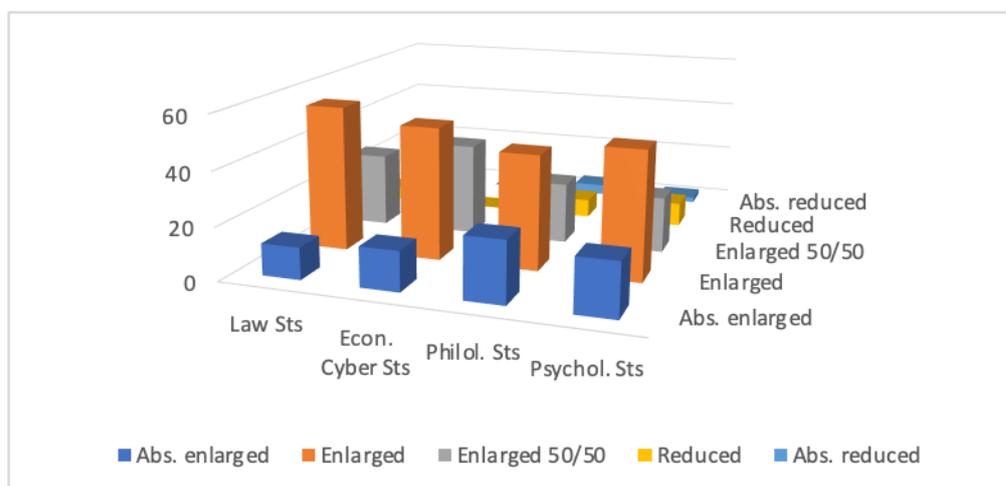
How Convenient Blended Form Is for EFL Course Students



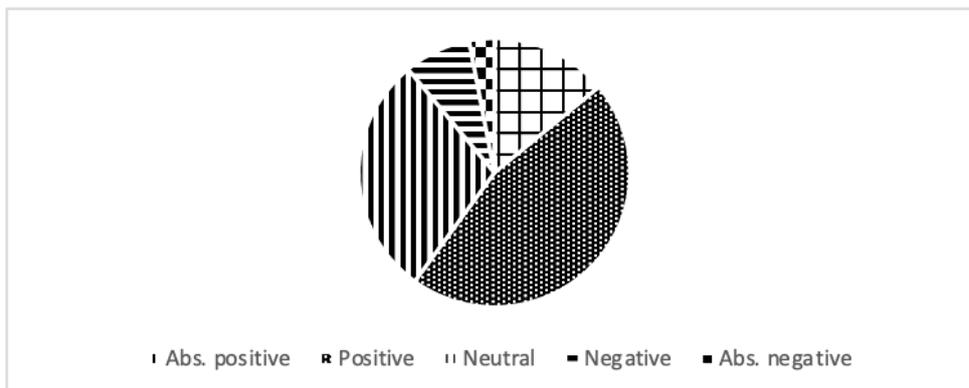
Merely 5% think it shortened and 1% consider that their vocabulary suffered no changes at all. Therefore, we may state that blended learning form is quite favourable for not only studying but for advancing and improving language skills in taking EFL course.

Figure 5

Influence of Blended Form on the Students' Vocabulary in EFL Course



We have analysed and summed up the obtained results from the data of Figures 2–5 to see to what extent blended form is efficient in learning EFL. Figure 6 is a kind of visual comprehension of this issue. It shows us that almost two-thirds of interviewers approve blended learning as a positive, beneficial, productive and efficient form compared to other two conventional teaching forms: F2F and distant. Less than one-third of participants are neutral in their attitude to the forms of learning EFL and few of them have a negative opinion about blended form as such to teach and learn English undertaking EFL course *English for Specific Purposes*.

Figure 6*Students' Attitude to Blended Learning in the EFL Course*

Conclusions

Considering the data and obtained results, we come to the following conclusion: out of three main teaching forms, the blended one is the most promising, beneficial and productive for improving language skills in EFL course at the university level. University students are busy (taking up lots of developmental courses for their professional awareness and competitiveness) and need flexible study process. So in this view, they eagerly approve and favour blended learning in advancing their EFL skills and knowledge. More than two-thirds of the interviewed students stated that their language proficiency skills improved significantly compared to practising conventional teaching methods. Somewhat more than three-fourths of all students think blended learning is an encouraging and advantageous form of improving their English, and less than one-fourth accept it as discomfort and useless for their study of English. 88% of the students consider that the blended form advances their level of knowledge in EFL course. 12% of them don't identify such a form of learning English as a good one for them because they think their level doesn't grow. In our opinion, the students who compose one-fifth of all respondents got entirely used to F2F learning and live in-person communication. As a rule, they are not highly motivated to develop their language proficiency skills and have a low rating position. In the context of an up-to-date eventful world, we may advise blended learning forms for EFL teachers as flexible, advantageous, beneficial and productive for their students' advancing and acquiring knowledge of English language skills.

The author thinks the forthcoming research will be piloted to study and compare the pros and cons of blended learning forms in teaching English as a foreign language in different universities and academic institutions in Ukraine.

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