

## **Exploring Blended Courses: A Case Study of EFL Instruction in Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the implementation of blended learning in higher education through a selective course “Readings from Selected English Journals.” The study investigates the development of an online platform for the course, the adaptation of the teaching syllabus to suit blended course dynamics, student and teacher’s feedback on the effectiveness of online resources and in-class interactions. In spite of some constraints in the syllabus design, differentiated instruction could be provided within the class based on students’ learning interests and motivations. Also, student and teacher expressed positive attitudes towards blended learning, suggesting a promising shift towards digital tools in education. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research to explore diverse course offerings and refine teaching practices. This is to meet students’ evolving needs in blended learning environments.

*Keywords:* Differentiated instruction, blended learning, EFL

## **Introduction**

Blended courses have undergone diverse iterations during the pandemic, encompassing fully online instruction, partial online instruction for both teachers and students, and fully offline instruction. With the rapid advancement of online technology and the insights gained from the pandemic's shift to purely online teaching, there has been a growing recognition of the irreplaceable value of face-to-face classroom interaction. Consequently, in the post-pandemic era, blended courses that primarily utilize offline classrooms as the major teaching venue, while integrating online resources and platform to overcome temporal and spatial constraints, are poised to emerge as a preferred option for some university educators. This study seeks to investigate the design of a feasible syllabus and gauge student and teacher's perceptions of blended course resources and platform, employing differentiated instruction as a framework. The objective is to provide relevant empirical evidence to enrich the discourse on blended learning and differentiated instruction concepts.

## **Literature Review**

Blended learning refers to the phenomenon where students engage in both online

and face-to-face learning activities (Horn & Staker, 2015). Its essence lies in three aspects: 1) online learning, where students can control the time, place, path, or pace of their learning autonomously; 2) at least some of the students' learning activities take place in physical spaces such as classrooms; 3) online and face-to-face learning combine to form an integrated course. This learning method not only better reflects the student-centered learning process and is connected with language learning self-construction characteristics, but also fully retains the advantages of traditional classrooms in emotional communication and teacher-led instruction, making it suitable for language learners (He, 2016).

Blended learning is welcomed by teachers in various disciplines, including nursing, engineering, mathematics, physiotherapy, and others. In language teaching, blended learning is increasingly gaining attention from teachers due to its support for student-centered learning and activation of students' subjective initiative. Li (2019) conducted a literature review of articles on blended learning in SSCI core journals from 2000 to 2019, with a total of 60 articles in the field of language teaching, of which 56 were published from 2010 to 2019, indicating the increasing popularity of blended learning. In the context of blended learning, actively researching and practicing intelli-