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**Challenges Faced by Teachers while Utilizing Blended
Learning in Teaching EFL during COVID-19 at Cycle Two
Schools in Oman**

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Abstract

The main objective of the current study was to identify the challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID–19 at cycle two schools in Oman. A qualitative inquiry method based on semi–structured interviews was used. Thematic analysis was utilized for analyzing the interviews. Seven English teachers were interviewed at cycle two schools. The results showed that the main challenges faced by teachers revolved around their failure to efficiently use digital and software applications and fix several hardware–related bugs during their various BL teaching sessions. This failure emerged due to teachers' lack of training and poor ICT skills. The study recommends conducting further studies on the effectiveness of training programs to develop teachers' competencies and enhance their attitudes towards the use of BL during pandemics.

ملخص

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى التعرف على التحديات التي واجهت المعلمون أثناء استخدام التعلم المدمج في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية خلال جائحة COVID-19 في مدارس الحلقة الثانية بسلطنة عمان. اعتمدت الباحثة على الاستقصاء النوعي القائم على المقابلات شبه المنظمة كأداة للدراسة، كما تم الاعتماد على التحليل الموضوعي لتحليل أسئلة المقابلات التي تمت مع سبعة من مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية في مدارس الحلقة الثانية. أظهرت النتائج أن التحديات الرئيسية التي واجهها المعلمون تدور حول إخفاقهم في استخدام التطبيقات الرقمية والبرمجية بكفاءة وكذلك على القدرة على إصلاح العديد من الأعطال ذات الصلة بالأجهزة أثناء جلسات التدريس المدمج. وقد ظهر ذلك الإخفاق كنتيجة لعدم تلقي المعلمين التدريب الكافية وتدني مستوى مهارات تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات. كما أوصت الدراسة بضرورة إجراء المزيد من البحوث للتعرف على مدى الفاعلية الخاصة بالبرامج التدريبية لتحسين كفايات المعلمين وتعزيز اتجاهاتهم نحو استخدام التدريس المدمج أثناء الأوبئة.



Introduction:

With nearly 1.6 billion students affected across more than 190 countries and all continents, the COVID-19 epidemic has caused the greatest disruption to educational systems in history. 94% of students around the world have been affected by school and other learning space closures, reaching up to 99% in countries with poor and lower-middle incomes (United Nations, 2020). Global health, economic systems, and education systems were all impacted by the unexpected lockdown that followed the pandemic's declaration (Erarslan, 2021). To create an appealing and engaging learning environment, more and more educational institutions are competing to adopt and apply blended learning (Al Bataineh, Banikalef & Albashtawi, 2019).

Blended learning, which couples standard face-to-face education with technologically linked methods, is currently employed as a practical approach to education (Rahim, 2019). Blended learning has progressively evolved to be acknowledged as the preferred method for distributing materials, planning activities, and executing teaching thanks to the advancement of educational technology and the effect of COVID-19 (Huang, Huang & Ling, 2022). Blended learning offers a chance to switch from standard approaches to more creative ones using technology, which promotes teaching and



learning, and offers resilience in education (Rashid, Abdul– Abbas & Younus, 2021). Many researchers in various situations have recently searched how to equip new generations with technology by using a blended learning method to teach English as a Foreign Language (Al Bataineh et al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The application of online teaching including the teaching of language is a result of the coronavirus outbreak. EFL teachers have been actively looking for new solutions as the online teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) faces increasing obstacles. As the number of Coronavirus pandemic cases increased, educational institutions were temporarily locked. During this pandemic, digital learning administration systems, communication devices, and e–learning platforms are critical. Thus, online teaching became the main style of teaching instead of the traditional methods of teaching (Abdel Latif, 2021). The Covid–19 pandemic's first year of taking language teaching and learning within emergency online education is notable for several reasons. scholars, academics, English language teachers, students, and related stakeholders must understand the pandemic's global effect, particularly on language education (Erarslan, 2021).



Research has investigated the effects of technological devices and methods in teaching and learning owing to the modern-age innovation of ICT (Information Communication Technology) and its broad integration into education. Indeed, the integration of technology into learning restructured the education process and set the groundwork for impressive EFL practices. Today, teaching and learning, especially in EFL education, depend on technologically integrated methodologies. It is widely used as a pedagogical factor in educational institutions and not only facilitates a learning tool but also promotes educational policy (Rahim,2019).

Although blended learning is quite popular in the educational process and there are technological advancements that encourage teacher educators to implement blended learning in their classrooms (Wahid, Hali, & Halim, 2022), there are still few studies that discuss teachers' perceptions of implementing blended learning, particularly in the context of the pandemic coronavirus (Aji et al., 2020). Bordoloi et al. (2021) confirmed that there is an urgent demand to investigate teachers' perceptions of the use of online/blended learning as well as the challenges in applying online/blended learning. Based on what has been mentioned above, the researcher the statement of the problem revolves around identifying the challenges faced by the teachers

while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19 at cycle two schools in Oman.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study can be discussed from two main scopes. The first scope is the importance of teaching EFL to young students. English is considered a global language and it is the main language for studying in many specializations at different universities around the world. The second scope is related to the role that can be played by blended learning in helping maintain the continuity of learning, especially in times of epidemics and crises. Accordingly, the researcher sees that blended learning can be used in helping teachers provide EFL lessons for primary school students in an attractive manner.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the current study is to identify the challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19 at cycle two schools in Oman. Under this main objective, certain sub-objectives can be addressed as follows:

1. Identifying the technical challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19.

2. Determining the evaluation challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19.
3. Shedding the light on students' interaction challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19.

Questions of the Study

The main objective of the current study is to identify the challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19 at cycle two schools in Oman. Under this main objective, certain sub-objectives can be addressed as follows:

1. What are the technical challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19?
2. What are the evaluation challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19?
3. What are the student-related challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19?



Literature Review

Corona Virus and its Effect on Education

The most difficult and dangerous natural disasters that strike the earth and threaten mankind's survival are epidemics. They are one of the inevitable components of life. The disruption of education systems around the world brought on by pandemics is extraordinarily difficult, in addition to the tragic loss of human life and the unparalleled challenge to human public health, social, cultural, political, economic, and psychological dimensions (Alvi, Bilal & Alvi, 2021).

The education systems have been exposed to the greatest disruption in history due to the COVID-19 pandemic, impacting approximately 1.6 billion students in more than 200 countries. The lockdown of schools, institutions, and other learning environments has affected more than 94% of students globally. This has caused extensive shifts in all areas of life. Traditional educational practices have been affected greatly owing to social distancing and restrictive movement policies (Çoban & Vardar, 2021; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Schools, universities, and jobs were forced to adopt distance learning due to the COVID-19 as it was impossible to attend traditional classes. People are forced to do their work and study from home without any available resources due to social



distancing, the number of confirmed cases, and variations of the virus (Chirivi, 2021).

Teachers and learners have become physically separated in the classroom. Online learning is based on technology development and internet connectivity. Teachers have to respond quickly and adapt to the massive social innovations as they are considered agents and pivotal players in translating ideas and materials into teaching and learning activities. Teachers must use a creative and inventive teaching method during the pandemic as their attendance has become limited (Roistika, 2020).

Teaching English as a foreign task (EFL) is a challenging mission for both students and teachers. During COVID-19 learning is a complicated, long process with many difficulties. There has been a change in the process of teaching English and other subjects after COVID-19, and today, more teaching methods are needed in addition to utilizing technology and coupling methodologies, providing a variety of possibilities for learners to study English. Teachers are also required to develop their classroom activities and make suitable small group work to help students socially separate. Teachers are also responsible for dealing with learning problems that may occur due to quarantine or infection. As a result,



pedogeological practice changes are regarded as pitfalls that must be treated to find possible solutions (Almahroug, 2021).

Blended Learning

Education in the 21st century demands personalized, productive, and collaborative teaching–learning experiences that may convert the full education process from a standard face–to–face learning style into an independent style of learning based on technology that focuses on developing learners' potential and creativity as much as possible. Nevertheless, the main factors for change and the clue for initiating the democratic basis of education as a whole are providing an equal gateway to the educational process, assuring neutralism and fairness, guaranteeing on–time delivery of content, and offering carefully planned pedagogical support with the latest online/blended learning technologies (Bordoloi, Das & Das, 2021).

When applied as a teaching method, blended learning uses media to help students with low vocabulary. It is a learning model that mixes ICT–based learning and face–to–face learning (Ibhar & Said, 2018). There is a harmonic interaction between the constituent components of the full–time and distance education processes in a blended education system. If this interaction is strategically well organized, the result is a high degree of knowledge among students. Therefore, the blended learning model is not only the use

of ICT in the student's independent work at home or school, but the blended learning model is a part of the student's cognitive activity conducted in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher. Student sub-activity is suggested remotely and independent work is done individually or with a small group of collaborative partners (Kudysheva & Kudyshev, 2013).

Blended Learning seemed to be a solution to the difficulties associated with e-learning. This style of education mixes traditional face-to-face education with electronic learning. It is a combination of the two because it combines e-learning activities with traditional face-to-face training activities. The benefits of the traditional educational process and technological learning are mixed in blended learning (Al Masri, 2020). One of the most significant educational innovations of the twenty-first century is blended learning (BL) owing to its potential to maximize the benefits of both online and face-to-face learning. According to recent studies, BL responds to students' diverse needs and learning styles, improving their learning experience by developing engagement, motivation, and reflection skills, and giving students hands-on practice with technology-based skills necessary for 21st-century success (Pardede, 2019).



Institutions choose blended learning as it gives a chance for variation following students learning preferences. They can improve their academic outcomes by selecting the most meaningful tasks, the place for doing chores, the pace of learning, and the time. Different learning styles may be attracted to different modalities of learning because they offer more ways for engagement and collaboration. Some students, for instance, may need a longer time to study than others or may prefer virtual feedback to in-person criticism, which may be a little alarming to them (especially for first-year students) (Rashid et al., 2021).

Students can be engaged in joint activities in compound, blended, and online lessons through versatile methods that can be used by teachers. Role-playing exercises, policy debate sessions, brainstorming sessions, pair-share, team-based case study discussions, and problem-based learning exercises are just examples of these activities. During online lessons, teachers can pause for a few minutes, asking their students to give a summary of the information presented to them after the discussions of the main concepts. Students are allowed to discuss concepts they learned and find clarifying questions by dividing them into smaller groups via Zoom rooms. In the case that certain pupils do not comprehend key concepts, this might be helpful for teachers in



altering the way that courses are delivered (Singh, Steele & Singh, 2021).

Despite the numerous advantages of using blended learning in English through the use of virtual synchronous classes, online tests, and learning materials posted on Blackboard, which benefited EFL students by supporting their writing skills and encouraging them to do more search widely online while also matching their conditions, numerous difficulties may impede the implementation of using blended learning in teaching English, such as technological issues (Bin Dahmash, 2020).

Teaching English as a foreign language

English is essential in any educational system, both national and international. Learning English will undoubtedly provide students with unprecedented access to information (Shehata, 2019). People from various nations who do not speak or write the same language might communicate ideas by using English as a second or foreign language. By using English, communication between different subjects can be established (Nashruddin, 2015).

Traditional education based on face-to-face interaction has been widely accepted and regarded as the best way to gain knowledge and complete academic tasks (Sheerah et al., 2022) Over the last three decades, information and communication technology (ICT)



has changed many aspects of the industrial and trading sectors. It is currently innovating education (Pardede, 2012).

During the 1900s, technology becomes a part of English language teaching and learning. Its application in ELT classrooms has evolved dramatically since then. Initially, cassette recorders and television were used in ELT classes, but now a more sophisticated variety of audio–visual aids such as projectors, laptops, interactive smart boards, smartphones, and so on are used. The employment of technical instruments in English Language Teaching grew to be associated with the 20th and early 21st centuries. Each English teacher identifies the different tools used in the lesson, relying on the student's level, learning findings, and course schedule. Technology and its multiple tools have been used to complement education and supply language learners with a rich and advanced learning experience (Fatima, 2020).

The COVID–19 Pandemic completely changed how education is delivered, moving it online, in particular for ELE (English language education) (Mahyoob, 2020). Online learning is more convenient and efficient in achieving certain teaching objectives when compared to traditional classroom environments. To achieve effective and efficient learning engagement and classroom management in online EFL instruction during a pandemic, including



live communication, bilingual instruction, group activities, malleable attendance and assignments, and explicit instruction Suggested ways to maintain attention and interest After the pandemic, blended teaching was preferred over fully online teaching due to concerns about insufficient social and emotional development in online instruction (Han & Yi, 2021). Blended learning has recently been seen as a hot topic in education, especially for teachers and students to develop their English around the world (Hashemi & Na, 2020).

The role of blended learning in EFL teaching

Teaching online using traditional online teaching during the CoVid-19 Pandemic was a challenge as teachers' insufficient knowledge of experiences associated with this type of learning (Coman et al., 2020). Recent developments in the area of technology in education have sparked renewed interest in combining traditional teaching approaches with technology that can enhance language teaching and learning (Sheerah, 2020). Blended learning in foreign language teaching has become a topic of interest to language teachers around the world. Unlike pure e-learning which uses only electronic media for learning, blended learning complements the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning environment with different types of technology-enabled instruction (Tosun, 2015).



Because English is not their first language, it seems that EFL students struggled with reading comprehension. It is confirmed that several new concerns, including students' low motivation, restricted vocabulary, lack of prior knowledge, in addition to metacognitive methods, and lack of exposure to the target language, contribute to their difficulties in understanding academic English texts. As an alternative to addressing different reading comprehension problems in the EFL context, it is essential to create a blended learning model that couples both online and face-to-face instruction (Pammu et al., 2021).

The use of blended learning, according to Sheerah (2020), can assist EFL learning and optimize EFL learners' opportunities to practice the English language freely with enjoyment. Some problems must be treated and resolved, such as assuring that the library facility can deliver this type of method, online materials are convenient for the students who need to get them, and blended learning approaches are created to take into account students' preferred learning strategies as well as the workload required for success.

Almahroug (2021) sought to shed light on the tasks of teaching English to elementary school students during COVID-19. As a result, it is very difficult for teachers to observe and track a



student's work in the classroom as the student conducts writing exercises and other class activities to provide feedback to the student about their work. I found out. In addition, many teachers attribute the limits of student observation and feedback primarily to social distance and fear of transmission. Therefore, teachers found that most efforts and explanations were useless if the students did their activities without ascertaining whether they understood the information and received it shortly after work.

Mahyoub (2020) discovered that technological, academic, and communication difficulties are the key issues that affect and have an effect on online EFL learning during COVID-19. In other words, there are still some flaws in the way that technology is being used to teach and study English that teachers may run against as they try to help pupils learn effectively (Rachman, Sudiyono & Phonix, 2021). Putra (2020) acknowledged that there were certain difficulties in creating study timetables, choosing online platforms, and dealing with internet network technical problems. Kosar (2016) indicated that EFL teachers faced challenges in the BL environment that included problems of the increasing workload of teachers, the existence of different learning methods, and issues in the internet network connection. Fryer and Bovee (2016) confirmed that



teachers had trouble engaging low-motivated and passive students in a blended learning environment.

The state of blended learning in the Sultanate of Oman

Oman is a country that officially adopts ICT in all areas, including education. Through the official Internet service provider, General Telecommunications Organization (GTO), the Sultanate of Oman joined the Internet in January 1997. A few years later, in November 1999, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said clearly stated his vision for ICT development in His Royal Speech on the 29th National Day of Oman: "It is critical that Omani society – government and citizens – recognize the extent of the need to be prepared to meet the challenges of globalization. We will work to strengthen our national capacities, build an economy based on global productivity and competitiveness, improve the performance of our institutions, and acknowledge the importance of knowledge, technology, and research as the drivers of progress (Al-Hosni, 2016).

Jose (2015) has stated that it is critical to benefit from Moodle e-learning in delivering EFL lessons. It can be blended with face-to-face teaching in Omani educational institutions. Al Mashaikhi et al. (2020) have confirmed that the blended learning model provides a flexible platform for teaching the English language. The researchers also recommend that Omani English language teachers should

make full use of blended learning principles and techniques in enriching their practice in Oman.

Research Design

To answer the research questions and explore the confronted challenges in the BL environment in teaching EFL at cycle two schools, a qualitative inquiry method is used. Also, according to Abu Samra and Al-Titi (2020), the qualitative method is a methodology that aims to "apply qualitatively rather than holistic research methods, to achieve the maximum degree of understanding of the phenomenon studied, by delving into its details and standing on its latent dimensions and the factors affecting its continuation and development" (p. 179).

However, when it comes to the qualitative method of the current study and upon reviewing the literature, thematic analysis was used for analyzing the interviews. As indicated by one of the most comprehensive studies conducted by Vaismoradi et al. (2017), they highlighted the possibility of using thematic analysis to analyze certain codified patterns that can be observed and reported as they frequently appear within the study's data. Furthermore, in the current study, thematic analysis was used to collect data that could be further categorized into separate passages due to the repetitive pattern of some parts of the data. Braun and Clarke (2012)

identified thematic analysis as a manner through which researchers could identify the collective of different strands of data through a given data set.

Study Population

The study population consisted of all English language teachers in the Sultanate of Oman, whose number was (1647) male and female teachers (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Study Sample

This study was limited to English language teachers at cycle two schools in three Governorates (Muscat/Al Batinah North/Al Dhakhliya) in Oman. These three governorates were selected as a representative sample of the original population. Male and female English language teachers were involved. Seven English teachers were interviewed at cycle two schools and selected from the study population.

The Study's Instrument

Semi-structured interviews have been used. To analyze the semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis was administered. The thematic analysis was applied to identify the challenges of using BL in EFL classes. Starting with reading and taking notes on the interviews to establish familiarity with the data, the researcher followed the Braun and Clarke (2012) framework's six phases.

Second, descriptive and interpretive codes were developed as a starting point. Next, code frequencies were determined, and relevant codes were grouped to create a representative theme. Then, the extracted codes and constructed themes were rechecked in the fourth phase to confirm the quality of the extracted codes and constructed themes. In the fifth phase, the themes were determined and given names depending on their specific emphasis. Finally, thematic analysis tables and reports were constructed in the sixth phase as follows:

- **Phase 1 Familiarization with the Data:** The first stage in phase one involved reviewing the data without taking notes. This is known as "active reviewing" by carefully reading every response written and sent by each respondent to become fully immersed in the interview and familiar with its indicators. The second stage, however, included specific notes taken after reviewing the data.
- **Phase 2 Generating Initial Codes:** In this phase, the preliminary codes are generated by drawing upon the interview's responses. Each code reflected the essence of every response provided by the respondents in the study.
- **Phase 3 Generating Themes:** In this phase, previously generated codes had to be gathered and then combined with

the ones that share a specific pattern to include them into a reflective theme and identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes.

- **Phase 4 Reviewing Potential Themes:** In this phase, the researcher chose the most suitable ones that fit the narrative of the data set as follows.
- **Phase 5 Defining and Naming Themes:** In this phase, each theme is demonstrated according to the original data set and to what extent it relates to other themes. In addition, conceptual essence is explained in each sub-theme concerning the data representing it.
- **Phase 6 Producing the Report:** Upon completion of the last five phases, the researcher became well aware of the steps taken and methods that were maintained to produce the steps that, in turn, formulate the overall analytical structure of each phase. Some themes did not have enough data to support them and meet the criteria set forth by Braun and Clarke (2012), so the researcher was prompted to disregard them as themes, which transformed them into sub-themes, as they appeared to fit other major themes. On the other hand, other themes were eliminated because they did not seem to be of great significance for the complete thematic

analysis. They could not form a clear relationship with the research questions.

The coding process was integral for the analysis, as it was necessary for understanding how themes would be constructed based on what amount of codes. However, the researcher did not stop at one phase, as the themes were supposed to be further refined and filtered through an elimination process, based on the significance of each theme and to what extent each theme met the established criteria (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Themes were constructed by extracting the essence of each set of coded data. This essence has normally labelled as a theme, and it happens to be the basis of any thematic analysis. The main themes and codes can be reviewed as follows:

Codes	Themes
Technical	Assessment challenges
Online difficulties	
Poor school infrastructure	Students' interaction challenges
Interactive	
Evaluation	Technical challenges
Students' motivation	
Students' emotions and feeling	

Table (1) Challenges of Implementing BL in Teaching EFL

The "Challenges facing blended learning" Theme answers the main research question stating, "What are the challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during

COVID-19 at cycle two schools in Oman?" This theme helps the researcher better understand the challenges and difficulties that EFL teachers in Oman could experience using BL as a novel teaching practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first theme includes the following subthemes:

“Assessment Challenges”: This subtheme can be defined as the difficulties teachers face when assessing the students’ levels of academic achievement, marking tests, and prompting students to carry out online tasks. The online tasks help teachers assess their students’ achievement due to the indirect manner of communication and the use of electronic tools that could be technically complicated sometimes. This is evident in the following quotations:

Respondent 5 reported: *"Difficulty in recognizing the real level of students because there is no face-to-face contact. Not sure if the students get the knowledge or not."*

Respondent 1 was even more concise and completely honest about his experience with using BL in teaching EFL. This respondent mentioned that *“Test Assessment”* was proven to be more than enough to show that taking grades, identifying students’ levels of achievement, and evaluating their academic progress were hindered by indirect communication and the reluctance of students to take part in the evaluation process.

Respondent 4 suggested that different test assessment criteria should be designed specifically for BL settings, which proves the lack of such criteria used in the system. He reported, "*I suggest having assessment rules that are built for BL.*"

Respondent 7 reported: "*Students reluctant to do the assigned tasks.*"

"Technical challenges": This subtheme could refer to the technical difficulties including the slow internet connection, poor WIFI, and BL infrastructure, the inability to use ICT tools and devices, the student's failure to use certain platforms, and the unavailability of modern smart devices that can operate all sorts of applications.

This is evident in the following quotations:

Respondent 3 reported: "*1. Students had difficulties following the technical instruction. 2. Internet problems for students and teachers, and 3. Not all students have devices that are capable of opening all applications used in the online platforms.*"

Respondent 6 reported: "*Third challenge was the technical problems. Sometimes, I prepared activities, and all of a sudden, they disappeared, or they became stuck, which caused me to start over.*"

Respondent 7 reported: "*Sometimes some classes were not suitable for using technology in them, i.e., electricity issues or wifi*

issues. Also, some students did not have devices to use besides to wifi. Also, sometimes we as teachers did not have enough devices to use at school.”

Respondent 2 reported: *“Third challenge was the technical problems. Sometimes, I prepared activities, and all of a sudden, they disappeared, or they became stuck, which caused me to start over.”*

Respondent 4 reported: *“Technical problems, network, some students weren’t able to access some activates designed by teacher.... some apps teacher use indirect lessons couldn’t be used by students and they need to register ...”*

“Students’ Interaction Challenges”: This subtheme refers to the challenges teachers face due to the students’ fear of making mistakes in online settings, the lack of motivation and positive experience students had towards using BL and online platforms, and their unwillingness to interact with teachers. This is evident in the following quotations:

Respondent 6 reported: *“Some of them are reluctant to interact, and when I asked them the reasons why they said they were afraid to make mistakes, and everyone listened. It’s not obvious who was attending the lessons as it could be members of families who attended, too. Therefore, they refused to interact.”*

Respondent 5 reported: *“The major problem we faced was the lack of motivation where students were not completing their work, and some were not attending sessions.”*

Discussion

This current study investigated the challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19 at cycle two schools in Oman. The main research question is "What are the challenges faced by English language teachers while utilizing BL at cycle two schools?" The quantitative data indicated that EFL teachers at cycle two schools in Oman were challenged by technical difficulties when they used BL tools. The EFL teachers did not possess the proper ICT training before using BL in teaching and could not raise students' awareness or heighten their motivation towards using BL in learning EFL content. Similarly, the qualitative data analysis indicated that EFL teachers at cycle two schools in Oman lacked significant software and hardware technical skills and competencies. Moreover, they could not use BL tools and online platforms to assess students and did not know how to increase students' engagement and motivation in BL classes.

In addition, the results were consistent with the findings of Putra's (2020) study. Putra stated that English teachers had problems



teaching English skills during the CoVid-19 pandemic, including producing learning schedules and selecting online platforms. Kosar (2016) indicated that EFL teachers faced challenges in the BL environment that included problems of the increasing workload of teachers, the existence of different learning methods, and issues in the internet network connection. Thus, the results of the current study showed how EFL teachers at cycle two schools in Oman were neither successful in engaging students, especially low-achieving ones, nor inducing their excitement and motivation.

Furthermore, the results were consistent with the findings of Coman et al. (2020) who confirmed that students who were taught using online teaching during the CoVid-19 pandemic got distracted and easily lost focus because of the use of inappropriate teaching strategies and the lack of teachers' experiences associated with this type of learning also confirmed it.

In addition, the results also coincided with Fryer and Bovee's (2016) study, which indicated that teachers had trouble engaging low-motivated and passive students in an online learning environment. This might be attributed to the viewpoint that the absence of teachers and classmates negatively affected the engagement process and led to the emergence of motivational deficits.

These challenges emerge as a result of the following facts:

1. BL is still a relatively new approach that requires further development by the Omani government, and the majority of teachers in Oman still use traditional instructional methods, even if they do not resist the implementation of BL as an advanced method of teaching.
2. The recent consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic occurred very quickly and did not give Omani EFL teachers any room to prepare themselves or receive the required amount of technological-based training, supported by national professional development programs.
3. Students in Oman tend to use online tools for other non-educational purposes, and some of them lose interest very quickly while learning online. This makes it difficult for Omani EFL teachers to either assess their levels of achievement or entice their enthusiasm to learn in online settings.
4. The Omani government is fully aware of the importance of digital transformation in general, but it

might not have a conducive infrastructure to implement BL yet.

Summary of the Main Findings

This study investigated. The main findings of this study are as follows:

- The main challenges that were faced by teachers revolved around their failure to efficiently use digital and software applications and fix several hardware-related bugs during their various BL teaching sessions. This failure emerged due to teachers' lack of training and poor ICT skills.
- The teachers were challenged by technical difficulties while using BL tools.
- EFL teachers could not raise students' awareness or heighten their motivation toward using BL in learning EFL content.
- The teachers lacked significant software and hardware technical skills and competencies, and they could not use BL tools and online platforms to assess students' achievement.
- The teachers did not know how to increase students' engagement and motivation in BL classes.

- EFL teachers at cycle two schools in Oman faced both software and hardware technical difficulties using BL tools and online platforms in teaching.

Implications of this Study

In the light of the above findings and the study's discussion, some implications are introduced as follows:

- Teachers could require new skillsets from basic information technology (IT) skills to learn new ways of interacting. Teachers' important training skills revolve around IT, information literacy, and e-learning development. Teachers need to be trained to acquire skills in IT, e-learning mode, and time management and need advice on organizing e-learning tasks in the platforms.
- The Omani Ministry of Education should pay special attention to supplying schools with electronic devices to aid them in the BL process. The user support systems, adequate time or skills to develop e-learning materials, IT teachers' skills, development of teachers' training programs, and support teachers and administrators at schools have all been identified as necessary. Furthermore, the policymakers should specify the maximum workloads for



English teachers at schools to help them design tasks and materials in the BL environment.

- English language teachers and supervisors work to increase student understanding of electronic media and the relevance of incorporating it into the educational process.

Suggestions for the Future Research

Based on the current study results, the researcher recommends conducting future studies on developing a suggested proposal about applying BL in teaching English as a foreign language during the CoVid-19 at cycle two schools in Oman. The study recommends conducting further studies on the effectiveness of a training program to develop teachers' competencies and enhance their attitudes towards the use of BL during pandemics.

Conclusion

This study investigated the challenges faced by the teachers while utilizing blended learning in teaching EFL during COVID-19 at cycle two schools in Oman using the qualitative approach. Seven English teachers were interviewed at cycle two schools. The study's findings indicated that EFL teachers faced some technical, interactive, and assessment challenges during the implementation of BL practices. To overcome these obstacles, the research recommends conducting training programs to improve the

competencies of teachers while using the blended learning approach.

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