MOODLE: A WAY FOR BLENDING VLE AND FACE-TO-FACE INSTRUCTION IN THE ELT CONTEXT?

Gulden ILIN
Cukurova University, Faculty of Education - ELT Department
Balcalı - Adana - Turkey
email: guldenilin@cu.edu.tr

ABSTRACT
This classroom research explores the probable consequences of a blended Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYLs) course comprised of Moodle applications and face to face instruction in the English Language Teaching (ELT) context. Contrary to previous face to face only procedure, the course was divided into two segments: traditional classroom instruction where lectures and discussions on how to teach English to young learners were held and the Moodle application where students uploaded their micro-teaching sessions and discussed and criticised one another's work online. This blended course was also thought to be a potential aid to save time in overcrowded classes. The procedure was designed in a manner that time to be devoted to micro-teaching sessions in the classroom was expected to be saved and left room for classroom discussions. To gather data, a student readiness scale, a questionnaire eliciting student teachers' views about the experience and, to bring more depth to the study, semi- structured interviews were used. The results reveal that a blended young learner course has various positive contributions other than time management for the instructor as well as on behalf of the course attendants.

INTRODUCTION

In this age we have been living, we inevitably benefit from the advantages of technology in every field of life including education. As institutions struggle hard to provide a constantly increasing number of people with training or education, use of CD ROMs, interactive computer programmes, web based or online learning, distance education, e-learning programmes and the like have gained more and more value. As a consequence of scrutinizing the pros and cons of the variety of these means of education and virtual learning environments, new doors were opened for newer conceivable innovations such as blending face-to-face and online education. Moreover, over the past decade web-based Virtual Learning Environments (VLE, also known as Course Management Systems, CMS) have become a standard part of teaching and learning provision in further and higher education. To begin with, defining a virtual learning environment may contribute well to the discussion of the study.

According to the definition of Techterms, a VLE is a virtual classroom that allows teachers and students to communicate with each other. Class information, learning materials, and assignments are typically provided via the Web. Students can log in the class website to view this information and may also download assignments and required reading materials to their computers. Some VLEs even allow assignments and tests to be completed online.

Similarly, Wikipedia defines a VLE (or a learning platform) as "an education system based on the web that models conventional real-world education by providing equivalent virtual access to classes, class content, tests, homework, grades, assessments, and other external resources such as academic or museum links. It is also a social space where students and teacher interact through threaded discussions or chat. It typically uses Web 2.0 tools for two-way interaction, and includes a content management system" (pa.1).

On the other hand, Dillenbourg, Schneider and Synteta (2002) write about a virtual learning environment as not referring to any educational web site, and not being restricted to systems including some 3D virtual reality technology. According to them, a "virtual learning environment" is not a synonymous to a "virtual campus". However, it provides university courses, while the name "virtual learning environment" does not restrict the scope to any age or level. In other words, a virtual learning environment is a designed information space for all. It is a social space; educational interactions occur in the environment, turning spaces into places. The virtual space is explicitly represented; the representation of this information/social space can vary from text to 3D immersive worlds. Students are not only active, but also actors; they co-construct the virtual space. These environments are not restricted to distance education; they also enrich classroom activities and integrate heterogeneous technologies and multiple pedagogical approaches. Finally, they point out that most virtual environments overlap with physical environments.

Nowadays, such systems as VLE or CMS are now also increasingly to be found in secondary schools and even primary schools. "These tools provide a wide range of features for supporting teaching and learning, from

simple document sharing to enabling online discussions and assessments and integration with institutional information systems" (Livingstone and Kemp, 2008, p. 59).

A growing body of research in the field of virtual learning environments concerns the consequences of using VLE tools in teaching and learning (Ilin, 2006 ; Inozu & Ilin, 2007; Douglas and Hegelheimer, 2007; Polding, 2007; Zeng and Takatzuka, 2009; Tuparova, and Tuparov, 2010; Ozkan, 2011; Johanesen, Erstad, and Habib, 2012). Findings emerged from these studies similarly suggest that contribution of VLEs shows itself in various educational components in academic terms as students' becoming more proficient in certain language skills as well as in affective terms as utilising collaboration and co-operation with peers which eventually leads to the formation of a group spirit. Moreover, Johanesen et. al. report teachers' negative attitude toward the use of VLE at their schools in primary and university level in the Norwegian context. However, over time it was observed that teachers who were opposing to the use of VLE in their contexts developed a number of teaching practices at both levels. In addition, changes were detected in relation to the perceived pressure coming from the governance of school which then was followed by teachers' coming to a mutual understanding and approval of VLE. Next, it is worth mentioning that teachers changed their views on the empowerment as regards their teaching practices as well as relationships with parents and co-teachers. Teachers further began to find VLE as a supporting professional, flexible and creative practice. Finally, they confessed that VLE triggered students' interest toward the course and in both type of schools, teachers stated they held the belief that VLE allowed for a closer follow-up.

A highly favoured course management system (CMS) for online learning Moodle, as defined in Wikipedia is "one of the most user friendly and flexible of the globally-free open source courseware products available, and is specifically designed to help educators who want to create high quality on-line courses. It is said to have excellent documentation, strong support for security and administration, and is evolving towards information. According to Wikipedia, Moodle enables teachers to provide graded assignments, lessons, and choice, to share documents, quizzes, workshops, and chat, and to offer a forum for learners, in a manner that is both easy and offers high quality teaching" (pa.3). Furthermore, as a courseware package and learning system, Moodle has great potential for supporting conventional classroom instruction, for example, to do additional work outside of class, to become the delivery system for blended (or hybrid) course formats, or even to be used as a standalone e-learning platform. Another important issue not to be disregarded about Moodle is that it is a web-based Learning Content Management System (LCMS), that is, a CMS and VLE designed around pedagogical principles, namely a social constructivist philosophy using the collaborative possibilities of the Internet. It allows teachers to provide and share documents, graded assignments, quizzes, and the like with students in an easy-to-learn way, and to create quality on-line courses (Al-Ajlan and Zedan, 2003).

Provoked by the underlying social constructivist philosophy, practicality and feasibility of Moodle that seems highly compatible with the ELT context; this study investigates the consequences of a blended Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL's) course. The course was designed comprising of Moodle application and face to face instruction. The questions the answers of which were sought after in this study are as the following:

Research questions
1. How ready are the student-teachers of ELT department for a blended face-to-face instruction and Moodle application in the Teaching English to Young Learners course?
2. How do prospective teachers of English view such a change?
3. In what ways, if any, did the blended application have an influence on the course in student teachers' point of view?
4. Can Moodle be used as an aid to save time in crowded classes in the ELT department?
5. If student-teachers had the chance, would they prefer the face-to-face instruction or the blended course?

THE STUDY
This classroom study initially sets out to explore the probable consequences of a blended TEYLs course comprised of Moodle applications and face to face instruction in the ELT context. It also tests the blended course as an alternative way to economise the time devoted to micro-teaching sessions shifting the time consuming follow-up teacher and peer criticism stage on to Moodle. Thus, time would be saved for more classroom discussions on ways to teach English to young learners in overcrowded classes. Totally 100 3rd year student-teachers taking the second semester of TEYLs course in the ELT Department of a Turkish University participated in this study. As the nature of this course requires, student-teachers are involved in lecture type sessions, discussions, and micro-teaching and follow- up critique procedures. The idea for blending the course with Moodle application partially emerged from the need for more time for the last procedure mentioned in addition to the inspiration that such a change might end up with a two-fold benefit on behalf of the course

attendants as becoming more proficient in both language teaching methodology and technology. With this estimation, student teachers were informed about the change in the course design and that from then on, they were going to upload their micro-teaching sessions on Moodle. A brief training on how to use Moodle sufficed as all student teachers were highly familiar with various similar forum and social media platforms on the net. The inclusion of Moodle to the course design entitled each student teacher the chance both to present their own work with comfort and ease and devote as much time as they needed to go through their peers' work. Moodle also provided the participants with the opportunity to visit the platform in their own time and as many times as they felt was adequate. With this new procedure, the student teachers criticised one another's work on Moodle instead of in the classroom setting, which was expected to save time.

On the other hand, student-teachers were busy with the other dimensions of the course and continued their face-to-face instruction and formed their groups for their final drama presentation. To elaborate, the assessment for this course had three legs: the micro teaching sessions uploaded on Moodle, criticism toward peers' work and finally a drama activity bearing two specifications; first, designing an appropriate drama activity with a purpose for teaching or recycling a language unit and second, giving a hidden moral or ethical message to their imaginary prospective young learners.

To start with, in order to identify the student-teachers' status of readiness for such a blended course, at the very beginning of the term, they were given a readiness scale. Following this, 14 week blended TEYLs course started. At the end of the semester, a questionnaire designed to elicit student teachers' views about the experience was administered. In addition, in order both to bring more depth to the study and warrant triangulation, semi- structured interviews were held with randomly selected 20 participants. The analysis of the mixed type data collected comprised of two planes; SPSS analysis of the quantitative data gained through readiness scale and the questionnaire and the interview data that were subjected to content analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic information section of the readiness scale reveals that the participants, at the time of the study, were between 19-25 years of age, and more than half of the student- teacher population had been actively using computers for about "*five to ten years*" (51,6%), "*almost every day*" (54,7%), "*for study reasons*" (67,2%) as well as "*to have fun*" (26,6%). The type of activities they mainly involved in comprised of "*searching information*" (%89, 1), "*sending and receiving mails*" (%62, 5), "*downloading*" (%46.9) and finally, "*chatting*" (%38. According to the scale results, we see that % 69, 8 of the participants were "*comfortable communicating with others over the internet*" and "*with online written communication*" (%73, 5). These clearly indicate that all student teachers were familiar with computer and internet use. Regarding cognitive, meta-cognitive, social/ affective strategies (Dörnyei, 2005) and autonomy, most probably as a natural consequence of their major, student-teachers appear to be very well aware of their own preferences and responsibilities for learning. To go in detail, they find themselves "*self-directed in terms of studying and learning*" (% 65.6), "*self-disciplined and capable of setting aside further study and homework time*" (% 67.2), and "*managing study time effectively and easily to complete assignments on time*" (% 65.7). Furthermore, they find it "*easy to set goals and believe that they have a high degree of initiative*" (%68, 2).

According to the results gained in the SPSS analysis, student-teachers appear to be autonomous learners; they hold the belief that "*knowledge is largely constructed by the learners and regard teachers as facilitators of learning than dispensers of information*" (% 71, 8). In addition, they believe that they are "*the only responsible people for their own learning*" (% 67.2); some say that they can "*figure out novel ways to solve problems*" (%43, 8). However, contrary to the confidence they displayed in almost all their answers, they apparently "*need constant feedback about their performance to stay on task*" (%71, 9).

When it comes to student-teachers' learning preferences, it appears that most can "*work in groups in collaboration with their peers*" (% 69.9); and also "*enjoy working alone with minimal support or interaction*" (%53, 14).

The analysis also reveals a positive attitude in the student teachers toward a blended course and we find out that they "*view blended learning as of at least equal quality to traditional classroom learning*" (% 76.6). Fifty-seven per cent appear to be "*willing to communicate actively with their classmates over Moodle*" and % 64.5 is "*enthusiastic to set aside an amount of time each week to effectively engage in activities on Moodle*". Taking into account all these findings reached at the end of the analysis, we may suggest that most of the student teachers appear to be ready for the Moodle application in their TEYLs course.

At the end of the 14 week semester, student teachers were given a 25 item Likert type questionnaire to elicit answers on their experience of the blended young Learners course from various standpoints. The results

demonstrate that according to the % 96, 5 of the participants the course was "*interest generating*", they were "*motivated to access the site of the course*" (% 91.4), it was easy for %70, 7 to "*feel motivated to start this course*", and for the majority, "*such an organisation doubled their benefit from the course*" (%81, 3). For % 98, 3, "*the course was satisfactory and valuable in academic terms*" and in a course like this, "*learning was easy and fun*" (%89, 8). Probably, derived from this belief, they viewed blended delivery as a "*useful tool for language teacher education*" (% 94.9). These resemble Sanchez and Hueros' (2010) findings by which they discussed that Moodle usage was directly influenced by perceived ease of use and attitude. As they put it, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness on attitude were highly important motivational factors. However, we should not ignore the probability that the design of the course and the activities the student-teachers involved in may well have a trace on the positive reactions given by the participants.

As the questionnaire results reveal, cooperation on the Moodle was another component that triggered the student teachers interest toward the course. "*The presence of their peers on the net positively contributed to their learning*" (%81, 4) and "*instant feedback they received from both their teacher and peers on Moodle provided them with more awareness on their academic improvement as well as evaluation of their work*" (%91, 4). Furthermore, "*the virtual learning environment established by Moodle was deemed as supportive in terms of reaching the content of the course as many times as the student teachers needed in their own time*", which was not possible in a traditional face-to-face course (%93, 2). Parallel to what we found in the readiness scale, the student-teachers "*were comfortable working on Moodle*" (%94, 9), "*did not experience any difficulties once they learnt how to do proceed through Moodle*" (%76, 3) and when they faced difficulties "*the instructor was always there to help*" (%98, 3).

According to Keramati, Mofrad and Kamrani (2011) readiness factors have the most important effect in e-learning outcomes besides teacher's motivation and training. In line with this finding, if tutors are motivated and engaged, then the process will ultimately produce a better result for all concerned (Polding, 2007). If a student is not self motivated, or if getting online is considered a challenge or inconvenience, the use of Moodle will be difficult (Beatty and Ulasewicz, n.d.). Furthermore, they depict that feedback is the most important factor of any kind of communication, especially in learning. While designing and implementing learning activities, teachers need to be very aware of providing good feedback. In distance learning (also e-learning) the feedback has more importance because of the lack of face to face interaction.

On the other hand, in spite of the readiness for a blended course the student-teachers displayed in the analysis of the scale, we see the reality that their instructor was around whenever they encountered difficulties strengthened the participants and gave them a sense of security. Teacher's existence for support motivated the student-teachers and led to participants' more positive reactions. This feeling might have emerged from the fact that the student-teachers were experiencing a blended course for the first time and were sometimes hesitant about what is right and what is wrong to do. In such instances, with teacher's support they felt themselves more at ease. Similarly, Brenton (2009) notes the importance of the teacher's presence in online courses as follows "(t)he role of the teacher in e-learning is just as important to student learning as it is in the seminar room or lecture hall" (p. 97)

Although not within the scope of this study, it seems to be worth mentioning as the results signal related implications; teacher support can be considered as an important component leading to course satisfaction. A significant body of literature has supported the assertion that communication in the classroom is central to the learning process (Baker, 2004; Moore&Kearsley, 2005; Saba, 2007in Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis and Lopez 2011, p.162). To go in detail, Lee et. al, (2011), studied the relationship between course satisfaction and teacher support in an undergraduate online course in the USA. They explored the matter from three aspects of support; instructional, peer, and technical support. The results show that perceived support was significantly related with to the students' overall satisfaction of the course. Their findings suggest that teachers should communicate what types of support are available to students and provide an easy way of accessing and taking advantage of the support. Similarly, Paechter and Maier (2010) state that students prefer face-to-face learning when discourse with teacher serves to build up knowledge but appreciate online learning for its potential in providing a clear and coherent structure of the learning material, in supporting self-regulated learning, and in distributing information. Furthermore, as the findings of this present study imply, students prefer face-to-face learning for communicative purposes in which a shared understanding has to be derived or which interpersonal relations are to be established. When conceptual knowledge in the subject matter or skills in the application of one's knowledge are to be acquired, students prefer face-to face learning. However, when skills in self-regulated learning are to be required, students advocate online learning. Therefore, e-learning courses should be designed, in a way to implement face-to-face components in which the instructor obtains the role of a facilitator of learning process and students receive explicit feedback for their accomplishments. The instructor should provide

opportunities to develop knowledge together and students should obtain the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and develop a model on a subject matter.

In spite of the positive reactions shown toward Moodle and the blended course, and although all the lecture notes in the form of PowerPoint presentations together with songs, rhymes, chants, tongue twisters, games, visuals and the like were already uploaded on the site, an undeniable percent of the student-teachers said that they had a tendency to forget information obtained from the net as opposed to published materials (% 47, 5). This finding can be synchronised to the findings reached by Woody, Daniel, and Baker, 2010; Poulton, Conradi, Kavia, Round and Hilton; 2009. In fact, Noorhidawati, and Gibb (2008) categorise different types of e-book use in an academic setting: (a) fact finding; (b) finding relevant content; and (c) extended reading. The most popular reason for using e-books was for "finding relevant content" which indicated that e-books were not read in their entirety but instead were consulted or used for reference purpose. Most probably, the echoing findings reached in this study were the result of a belief derived from a similar epistemological ground. This may also be a reflection of their habit they developed through their face-to-face educational background.

In terms of the learning outcomes, as % 62, 7 stated, student-teachers "*put more time into this class than they would have invested in a regular TEYLs class*" and eventually, % 45, 8 bear the belief that they "*learnt more than they would have in a traditional face-to-face class*". "*The activities they involved in the blended course greatly contributed to %89, 7's ability to constructively criticise and discuss, as well as confidence in their ability to use technology*" (%91, 5), which were "*relevant to their real life needs as prospective language teachers*" (%81, 4). The student teachers consider blended courses as "*giving a deeper understanding of the course content as opposed to traditional ones*" (%67, 8) and maybe based on similar beliefs, they wish they "*had other blended courses in the department*" (%77, 6). If given a chance, %64, 4 "*would take the blended course rather than the traditional TEYLs course*". This finding echoes in Blake, Wilson, Cetto and Pardo (2008) who examined the case of first year Spanish course offered at the University of California, in both hybrid and distant learning format. As they argue, the students are not being disadvantaged by taking Spanish in a non-traditional format. According to their view, without doubt, students will continue to self-select for the type of language instruction they prefer whenever given the chance, as also found in this study. Accordingly, the profession should concern itself with providing legitimate options increasing all avenues of access to language instruction. (p. 124).

When it comes to results reached through interviews, we reveal that out of 20 interviewees, only one stated that s/he did not benefit from Moodle application and the blended course. The remaining participants explained the ways they benefitted from the blended course in various ways as displayed in the table below.

Table 1. Areas students benefitted from blended course

n	Benefits gained from	F
1	Criticism toward friends' work on Moodle	16
2	Technology use	16
3	More opportunities for discussion	12
4	Preparation of micro teaching sessions on the net	10
5	Awareness of better language use	8
6	Awareness of innovative ways for teaching	6
	Total	68

As seen in the table, the most frequently cited benefit of the blended course according to the student-teachers was "*providing and receiving criticism regarding both their own work and their friends' work*" (16 citations). As they stated, they "*found criticising their peer's work negatively in a face-to-face situation was more difficult than doing it in a virtual environment*". As the results show, for some, this procedure helped them to eliminate their sense of hesitation and shyness in criticising one another's work. In addition, in terms of the time allocated to the course; a lot many face-to-face class hours were saved, and thus the need for extra time to catch up with the syllabus requirements was eliminated.

Furthermore, the course had a twofold benefit; first, they "*learnt how to teach young learners* and secondly*, became more familiar with technology*" (16 citations). As they believed, *"Moodle provided a ground for more discussions"* (12 citations), and "*preparing their micro teaching sessions on the net was easier than doing it with pen and paper*" (10 citations). Finally, *"seeing their micro teaching sessions on the internet and going through these criticisms to learn about peer comments created an awareness in them in terms of using classroom language in a more effective way"* (8 citations). This procedure additionally seems to have *"opened new horizons in front of them to teach in alternative ways"* (6 citations).

The participant student-teachers also talked about the most beneficial aspects of the blended course. The first three that bore the priority were respectively "*being able to reach their peers' sessions on Moodle whenever and as many times they felt the need*" (14 citations), "*displaying their session on Moodle rather than presenting it in the classroom*" (9 citations), "*being able to hold more discussions on the micro teaching sessions than they could have in the classroom*" (7citations).

When asked whether or not the students are satisfied by the blended course, parallel to Kufi and Ozgur's (2009) findings where they report that the majority of their participant students was positive about the use of an interactive web environment and found its use beneficial for their learning, all respondents of this study but one commented positively. When asked about the experiences that contributed most to the course satisfaction and the most important predictors for their satisfaction, we see that "*the real life likeliness*" bears the highest priority*" (14 citations) together with "*using Moodle was similar to using social media*" (14 citations) which they were highly familiar with. The accompanying factors are shown in the following table.

Table 2. Reasons for satisfaction by the course

n	Satisfied by the course because of	F
1	Real life likeliness	14
2	Limitless time	12
3	Curiosity	9
4	Equality	6
5	Confidence	6
6	Absenteeism	5
7	Opportunity to reach everybody's work as many times as needed	4
	Total	56

In regard to other reasons, contrary to face-to-face environments, in the blended course "*there was no time constraint and they were able to reach one another's work in their own time*" (12 citations). Moodle also "*triggered their curiosity to learn about who commented on their work and whether they commented positively or negatively*" (9 citations). Similarly, as there was no time constraint as opposed to the traditional classroom atmosphere, they "*had equal rights to criticise their peers' work*" (6 citations) which "*gave them more confidence*" (6 citations). In their studies, Carr,2000; Dreyer, Bangeni and Nel,2005 claim that many students belatedly find out that both hybrid and distance learning language classes require high degree of self-motivation and independent work skills. This accounts for the routinely high dropout rate for the distance learning environments for all disciplines (in Blake et. al 2008, p.115). Contrary to the findings of their studies, the results obtained in this present study indicate that with Moodle, student-teachers "*did not miss any micro teaching sessions and this eliminated the problem of absenteeism*" (5 citations) and finally, "*Moodle let the students view their friends' work as many times as they felt adequate*" (4 citations).

The three mostly satisfying activities were "*working on Moodle as a whole*" (14 citations), "*working collaboratively for the drama activity*" (11 citations), and eight student-teachers stated that they were "*satisfied by all the activities they were involved in during the course period*". Furthermore, the student-teachers were invited to share their experiences on, if any, using any of the components of the blended course for other reasons except for the course itself. The answers indicate that the blended course encouraged the students to try new ideas out. To illustrate, almost all the students stated that they "*went through all the micro teaching sessions to gain more insight and learn about whether they could create a repertoire of lesson plans as prospective teachers*" (18 citations). Some participants who were already teaching at language schools declared that they "*tested their friends' sessions in their classes*" (12 citations). Ten "*prepared extra lesson plans, tried them in their classes and shared them with their friends on Moodle*". Four "*used the songs which were shared on Moodle to indirectly teach their students vocabulary and new structures*". Two student-teachers said that they "*used the microteaching visuals uploaded on Moodle to establish a positive attitude in their primary or secondary level brothers and sisters toward learning English*".

When asked, all students except one stated that they "*would choose a blended course rather than a face-to-face course if they had the chance to do so in the future*" (19 citations). This finding, as quoted above, echoes in the belief Blake et al. (2008) hold regarding their participants' probable learning preferences for the future.

Although the majority uniformly wanted to take a blended course, the reasons varied; first, "*absence of time constraint played a crucial role*" on the students' preference (16 citations), next, students found the "*blended course superior to a face-to-face one in terms of keeping what you have learnt in your long term memory*" (12

citations). They attributed this to the belief that their mind was activated from two different perspectives. To elaborate, as student-teachers they concentrated on the theoretical side by the classroom lectures on one hand, building upon what they already knew about teaching English to young learners. On the other hand, they put their newly received knowledge into practice on Moodle. In this respect, the participants find the blended course more effective than a face-to-face course. In addition, in their view, the inclusion of technology within the course enriches the content since the student-teachers "*added to their knowledge of both technology and course content*". They also found the blended course "*fun and satisfying*", they felt themselves "*more relaxed as compared to a face-to-face course*" and finally, they felt "*more confident*" as they were able to reach all the course content and micro teaching sessions on Moodle to use whenever they needed.

In the interviews, the students were asked about their comments on the probable ways to improve the blended course. Their responses are shown in the table below.

Table 3. Probable ways to improve the course

n	Course could have been more improved if	F
1	25% of assessment had been made by peers	9
2	An extensive blog had been added for more materials	3
3	Some micro teaching sessions had been held face-to-face	2
4	More examples of games had been uploaded on Moodle	1
5	Micro teaching sessions had not been obligatory	1
	Total	16

The most frequently cited suggestion to improve the blended course was related with the assessment technique used. Nine out of 20 students thought that "*25% of the assessment procedure could have been devoted to peer assessment*". This idea may have emerged from the feeling that the students might have felt themselves even more secure in such a situation. The next suggestion was related with the technical aspect of Moodle use. According to three students, "*if an extensive blog had been added to Moodle, it would have been much easier for them to upload their materials*". As they explained, with this extended blog, they would both increase their upload quota of 20 MB and also would not have to work on a Word page before they uploaded their micro teaching session. Two citations signal the student-teachers' "*need for face-to-face interaction with peers and teacher*", which may also mean a need for more security. As these citations reveal, according to some participants, at least the first micro teaching sessions could have taken place in the traditional classroom setting. Rovai and Jordan (2004) elaborate on the situation as dependent learners are less self-regulated, and they need frequent direction and reinforcement from a visible professor. As they put it, these students feel confident and relaxed when combined with periodic opportunities for face-to-face interactions. Virtual learning environments necessitates technological ability and frequency of usage that varies from student to student based on individual characteristics. Accordingly, all these differences influence the benefits that each student derives from online environments and help explain why some students are not fully satisfied with online courses and feel isolated. On the other hand, as they suggest, discussions in traditional classrooms, where vocal students can dominate and discussions may be superficial, spontaneous, and limited, while they can frustrate those students with a more introverted personality.

These student-teachers who needed a face-to-face interaction, as revealed during the interviews, wished to use the feedback they would receive from the lecturer as a guide for their forthcoming micro teaching sessions on Moodle. As another suggestion, one student-teacher, keeping in mind the strong emphasis put on games in a young learner class during the face-to-face lectures, expresses "*the need for more examples of games on Moodle*". Finally, one citation is somehow a complaint that "*the micro teaching sessions should have been on a voluntary basis rather than obligatory*".

Table 4. Student-teacher remarks on the blended course

n	Positive	F
	I am happy to have such an experience	19
	Blended instruction is superior to face-to-face instruction	8
	The course added to my world knowledge	8
	The course added to my academic qualities	8
	I would benefit from Moodle and similar means in the future as a teacher	7
	I will miss such a course	4
	Total	54

Regarding the students' closing remarks about the course, all 54 reactions that came from the student-teachers were entirely positive. To go in detail, the activity they involved in turned into a social interaction which was highly fruitful by various means. To illustrate, they were "*happy to have had such an experience*" (19 citations), and they viewed "*blended instruction as superior to face-to-face instruction*". Moreover, as the student-teachers clarified during the interviews, by its blended nature, "*the course added to their world knowledge as well as their academic qualities*" (8 citations). In their opinion, they became more familiar with technology; they interacted with one another whenever they needed and definitely more frequently than they could have in an only face-to-face course. The feedback they received from both their peers and the teacher motivated them, and they "*would like to benefit from Moodle and similar means in the future as teachers*" (7 citations), and they stated that "*they would miss such a course*" (4 citations).

CONCLUSION
Van Raaij and Schepers (2008) attribute the success of a virtual learning environment, to a considerable extent, to the students' acceptance and use of such an e-learning system. In line with this proposition, initially, we explored whether the student-teachers of ELT department were ready to accept a blended face-to-face instruction and Moodle application in the Teaching English to Young Learners course in this study. The findings acquired from the analysis of the data reveal that all student-teachers were familiar with computer and internet use and they appeared to be highly autonomous as learners; well aware of their own preferences and responsibilities for learning. However, contrary to the confidence they displayed in their answers, they also confessed that they needed constant feedback and support from the peers and teacher on Moodle about their performance to stay on task. Senior (2010) emphasises the vital role of support coming from peers and teachers in building and maintaining learning communities. As for the interactive support the participants of this study needed, the social constructivist nature of Moodle appears to have played an important role. The presence of peers and teacher together with instant feedback from both parties on the management system led to more awareness on the participants' academic improvement. This social interaction further contributed to the student-teachers' conceptualisation of the meaning and role of objectively evaluating themselves as prospective teachers. Apart from all these above, Moodle encouraged the participants to give negative but constructive criticism for their peer's work, which they would have found rather difficult in a face-to-face situation. Based on all these findings, we may suggest that blending the face-to-face situations with VLE's may not fully meet the expected outcomes of a given course. That is, the blended courses should be designed in a fashion that the nature of both the course itself and population taking the course should not be ignored, taking into account the needs of the course attendants. Moreover, blended courses should not be mistakenly viewed similar to an on-line delivery; on-line and face-to-face components should be carefully balanced so that attendants would be provided with adequate interaction with and support from the lecturer and peers.

Similarly, in designing teaching learning activities, teachers should not underestimate the importance of feedback. Based on the findings, we may suggest that student teacher as well as peer interaction and feedback both in face-to-face and VLE contexts should be carefully figured out while designing blended courses.

One the inquiries of this study was whether Moodle could also be used as an aid to save time in crowded classes. The results show that, contrary to the previous years, the class hours sufficed through Moodle component. On the other hand, regarding the time student-teachers invested in the course, it is apparent from student-teacher remarks that the flexibility of study hours led them to putting more time and effort into the course than they would have in a regular TEYLs class. This ended up with more learning outcomes as compared to a face-to-face class. Furthermore, Moodle made it possible for course attendants to reach the course content as many times as they needed in their own time, which was not possible in a traditional course. Consequently, student-teachers managed their own time according to their own desire. Thus, Moodle component can be said to be effective in triggering the student-teachers motivation for self-study as well as removing the time constraint on behalf of both the lecturer and the course attendants.

When it comes to how the student-teachers viewed the change in their course, according to the results, the majority found that the variety the blended delivery of the course brought to the teaching learning situation was interest generating, and the course takers were motivated to access the site of the course. The blended nature was found to be satisfactory and valuable in academic, fun and enjoyable in attitudinal terms. Similar to Suchanska, and Keaczkowska (2007) and Brine, Wilson and Roy's, (2007) findings, Moodle enhanced the teaching learning process not only regarding methodology but also technology. To sum, blended organisations can be used as a means to double the participants' benefit from courses and Moodle appears to be appropriately fitting in the area of language teacher education as a development tool.

In regard to student-teachers' gains from the blended course, the course had a twofold benefit; first, it contributed to the participants' ability to make assessments on both their own and peers' work, as well as constructively criticise and discuss teaching issues. Secondly, they appear to be aware that blending traditional courses with technology such as virtual components was going to be a crucial part of their teaching procedure in the future. The blended course was viewed as giving a deeper understanding of the course content as opposed to traditional ones. In line with Bremer and Bryant (n.d.), the participants of the present study appear to be intrinsically motivated toward taking blended courses rather than traditional courses in the future. This may have derived from the fact that technology shows itself in every aspect of our lives including education; the participants found the blended course relevant to their real life needs as prospective teachers. The finding reached may imply the need for teacher education programmes to revise their curricula to keep up with the current improvements compatible with them and implement the necessary changes.

To sum, we may conclude that in general terms the blended TEYLs course was found to be advantageous in terms of triggering the motivation and provoking the interest of the course attendants, using time more effectively and flexibly by both parties involved, developing a mutual rapport among the participants, bringing the real life likeliness to the teaching learning context. However, negative criticism, though only a few, and suggestions drawn to better the course should not be ignored.

Finally, the results reached are limited to this study itself and cannot be generalised. The replications in different contexts may contribute to a deeper understanding of the matter.

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