The Use of YouTube and WhatsApp in English Teacher Training Blended Programs in Iraq

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ABSTRACT

Training English language teachers in Iraq faces crucial challenges such as the lack of financial support because of the austerity policy during and after the war against ISIS, the frequent change in English curricula during the last 15 years, the crucial drop down in the quality of education. Those challenges have made ordinary (face-to-face) training problematic. This leads to the urgent need for a more developed way of training. Blended learning is a good alternative to face-to-face (classroom) training because it passes over most of the problems in the traditional training, and because this type of training needs different settings, this study is an attempt to analyze the available blended training tools and choose what suits the situation in Iraq. Because blended learning needs online tools that facilitate training, the researcher suggests a number of online platforms and chooses YouTube and WhatsApp platforms together. This choice is based on their availability and suitability to the Iraqi environment and the characteristics of each one of them. Training, evaluation, and the training material have been distributed between face-to-face and online parts of the training depending on the characteristics of each one.

Keywords: Face-to-face learning, blended learning, online learning, teacher training.

Introduction

Teacher training is a continuous process that needs lots of effort and time and of course a huge amount of money. The situation of teacher training in Iraq is even more difficult. Tens of thousands of teachers need to be trained every year, and the continuous change in the Iraqi curricula without training makes the Iraqi teachers outdated and confused. Almost about all the teachers working in the Iraqi schools are state employees, which means that all the training workshops, sessions and meetings and even transformation costs should be spent from the national budget. (Lessing & Witt, 2007)

All the above-mentioned issues lead us to think in a different way about training. And the only solutions available are online and blended training. The first one seems to be ideal because it leads to self-training and it costs nothing as compared to ordinary classroom (face-to-face) training. But online training is difficult to be controlled, and needs some settings that Iraqi teachers might not be ready for. So, the only alternative solution available for us is Blended learning/training.

Blended learning/training is to some extent, a mid-way between ordinary classroom (face-to-face) and online learning (Hubackova et al, 2011). It can be controlled during the classroom (face-to-face) training time, and it ensures more interaction, more content and less time, effort, and money. See (Fedynich, n.d.; Hanisi, 2018)

This study is an attempt to analyze the use of YouTube and WhatsApp as blended learning platforms and find out whether they suit the situation in Iraq. This is because the researcher tries to exclude the platforms that are problematic, difficult to use, or unavailable to Iraqi teachers.

The findings of this study will redound to the benefit of the Iraqi educational process through finding the suitable

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tools for blended training of the Iraqi English language teachers which will facilitate the following:

- 1) Decrease the costs, time and efforts spent for the training process.
- 2) Does not need places for training reduces the need for such places.
- 3) Suitable for Iraqi teachers and does not need additional training to use them.
- 4) Easily controlled by the trainers in terms of monitoring and evaluation.

2- Problem Statement

Due to the importance of the teacher being the third member of any educational process (Student, Teacher, Curriculum), continuous professional development becomes a must. This process faces crucial problems in Iraq that can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Iraqi English Language teachers need a lot of training due to the tremendous changes in the Iraqi pre-college English curriculum.
- 2) Training costs a lot of money, time and effort that makes it hard for the Iraqi ministry of Education to supply it whereas our country suffers from austerity policy due to the war and the great drop down in the quality of educating.
 - 3) Most of the Iraqi teachers are not acquainted with the new educational technologies used in other countries.

3- The Aim of the Study

This study aims to analyze the use of YouTube and WhatsApp as instructional blended learning tools and find out whether they can be used in the training of English language teachers in the Iraqi schools.

4- Theoretical Framework

In this part of the study we will shed the light on the previous studies. The researcher could not find any studies that dealt with training EFL teachers using YouTube and/or WhatsApp, in addition to other social platforms that may replace or support them, and found the following studies which are related to the topic of this study in a way or another. Those studies are:

4-1 Using WhatsApp to extend learning a blended environment

(Annamalai, 2019), in this qualitative study, explores "the use of WhatsApp chat group as a platform for extending learning in a blended learning classroom with a small group of undergraduates in the Malaysian context. This study was to explore the students' reflections after their engagement in WhatsApp group for interaction and collaboration related to their course. Ten part-time undergraduate students in a higher institution. The researcher concluded that the use of WhatsApp has improved the students progress in undergraduate blended classrooms.

4-2 The use of WhatsApp in collaborative learning to improve English teaching and learning process

In this study, (Hanisi, 2018) tried to study the use of WhatsApp in English language classroom to optimize the function of mobile phone for students' learning process. They also aimed to improve students' cooperative skill in the process of completing their tasks and overcoming their problem. The study showed " that WhatsApp is beneficial to students' knowledge of the language." They found that the advantages to the use of WhatsApp in teaching are "the broad availability of the teacher to the students, the opportunity for students to help one another, and the opportunity for more in-depth acquaintance with the students on the educational and personal levels".

4-3 YouTube in the Classroom: Helpful Tips and Student Perceptions Bethany

As related to this study, (Fleck, Beckman, Sterns, & Hussey, 2014) believe that it "provides a literature review that focuses on the usefulness of YouTube media as a form of lecture support and conversation starter in the classroom." The study did not reach into clear conclusions and finalized the research with some tips " for successful integration of

YouTube into the classroom include recognizing or measuring students' familiarity with it and being very explicit in its intended use. Re- search suggests that the more familiar students are with online learning tools". This study focuses, just like other studies on the use of blended instruction with students and not I teacher training.

4-4 Use of Facebook group as blended learning and learning management system in writing

For this study, (Tananuraksakul, 2014), presented a qualitative research that deals with "how undergraduate students at a small-sized university in Thailand perceive Facebook group usage in a writing class.". The study aimed at exploring undergraduate students' experiences in English language learning through the use of Facebook group to answer two questions:

- 1. Has the use of a Facebook group helped to improve students' English writing skills?
- 2. If yes, in what way has the use of a Facebook group improved students' English writing skills?

The study used a qualitative research technique using structured open-ended questions. The sample of the study was 53 students.

The qualitative data analysis of this study reveals the students' positive views on the use of the Facebook group with two common themes emerging. "The first theme regards their personal perceptions of how and why they learned and improved their English through the Facebook group usage. The second is about their preferences of teaching and learning strategies. Yet, this study did not focus on the dangers might be faced in using Facebook as teaching platform.

5- Blended Learning vs face to face learning vs online learning

From the very beginning of the humanity, our ancestors have tried to learn new skills and gain new information and make use of any technology they can use. They have sent letters to each other in order to communicate about certain topics when sending letters has become available, and after the invention of Radio and Telephone, they have been used in facilitating teaching/learning, but the biggest change in our life has occurred after the computer (personal computer) has been invented see (Kocoglu et al, 2011), (Graham, 2006).

The invention of the personal computers and their availability to almost everyone has its huge effect on teaching/learning. The use of computers in teaching or what is called Computer-based teaching urged the governments all over the world to try to supply computers to all learners. Campaigns such as "Laptop Per-Child" have become a universal demand, and companies haven't spare efforts to produce low-cost computers. (Fedynich, 2013)

The invention of the Wide World Web and the development of the Internet to the extent we witness nowadays has urged educators to develop new methods that makes use of the Internet and introduced what is known as "Online-teaching". Millions of training material are spread now of the Internet, and many learning platforms (paid and free) are now available and they give thousands of tutorials and courses of different levels in various topics (Graham, 2006).

Due to some, issues the Online Learning suffers from, Blended teaching has been introduced as a Mid-way between ordinary teaching and online teaching. So, Blended Teaching is a mixture between online and ordinary teaching. It occurs both online and, in the classroom," and it shares the benefits of both of them, and avoids most of the shortcomings of both of them. Bliuc et al. (2007) believes that blended learning describes learning activities that involve a systematic combination of co-present (face to face) interactions and technological mediated interactions between students, teachers and learning resources. Yet, (Oliver and Trigwell 2005: 17) states that blended learning is "The integrated combination of traditional learning with web based on-line approaches", while (Graham 2006:5) indicates that is the combination of instruction from two historically separate models of teaching and learning: traditional face-to-face learning systems and distributed learning systems.

6- Classroom (face-to-face) Training Cons

Classroom (face-to-face) or traditional training has many issues and obstacles that affect its frequent occurrence. Those issues and obstacles can be summarized as follows:

• It is time consuming: one of the problems that that the training departments face is the answer to the question: When shall we achieve the training? And this is a real problem because the teachers have their own jobs and job requirements that prevent them from flexible training time. (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001)

- It needs place preparations: Most of the training activities occur inside the schools and most of the Iraqi schools have (double school-time) due to the shortage in the number of schools as compared to the increasing number of students. This means that most of the training in Iraq hinders or stops the school-time of some of the schools.
- Teachers leave a real gap in their schools when leaving them to get training, and the trainers themselves, most of them are teachers who will leave a gap in their schools.
- The huge number of teachers needs a huge number of qualified trainers, and the lack of qualified trainers leads to the dependence upon unqualified trainers.
- The shortage in the time of training limits the content of the training material and leaves the teachers with many unsolved issues that need more training time which is unavailable.
- Some of the training material need advanced settings that are not available within the classrooms such as the use of a good number of authentic videos, recording and testing the teacher speaking skills and the like.(Anderson et al., 2001)
- Due to the huge number of teachers and the real shortage in the training time, the trainer-trainee interaction decreases to its lowest levels.
 - Many activities can be facilitated when supported by technology.
 - It is hard to be a student-centered due to the huge number of trainees.
 - Due to the shortage of the time and the huge number of trainees, the feedback decreases to its lowest levels.

7- Classroom (face-to-face) Training Pros

Although the traditional or classroom (face-to-face) training suffers from many problems, but it still has its own benefits that we cannot ignore ever. Those benefits can be summarized as follows:

- It is a face-to-face training and this means that it creates a comfortable atmosphere because most of the trainers feel more confident when dealing with face-to-face training and communicate directly with the trainers.
 - · It contains the use of nonverbal notions and activities that create a more comfortable environment.
 - It allows the trainers to monitor the whole training process and assess the progress that occurs.
- Testing the trainees is very important both to evaluate the training session and the trainees, and testing is very easy to accomplish within the classroom.(Motteram, 2009)
 - It requires less preparations and less complex training material.
- Trainers and trainees have to afford the costs of transportation. (trainees might be rewarded by the government, but not the trainees in most cases)(Motteram, 2009)

8- Online Training Cons

Online training, on the other hand, contains its own problems that makes it hard to depend on it. Those problems can be summarized as follows:

- The lack of face-to-face interaction between the trainer and the trainees.
- Most of the trainees feel lost and worried when dealing with online training.
- It is hard to monitor the trainees' reactions on the training activities and their daily progress.
- Testing is to some extent is troublesome issue.
- It requires more complicated preparations and advanced training materials.
- It may cost extra costs on the side of the trainees, but the good news is that most of the costs are payed for one time only. This includes the price of the computer (a tablet or a smart phone can do the job) and the Internet service costs (most of the teachers nowadays have Internet access at home) see (Graham, 2006), (Oliver and Trigwell 2005)

9- Online Training Pros

• Flexible in time: the trainees can access the training anytime and anywhere they want.

- It does not need a location or a classroom, so the school-time will not be affected.
- Trainees are not obliged to leave their own classes and may continue training and practice their everyday teaching easily, i.e. they are not leaving any gaps because they are not leaving their schools at all.
- Online training doesn't need a huge number of qualified trainers. A limited number of highly qualified trainers can cover a wide range of trainees, and another team of good qualified trainers can assist the main trainers in following up the trainees needs.
- More trainees means more interaction because the trainees can inter the discussion spaces and discuss certain issues seriously.
 - The amount of the training material is sufficient because the process is, to an extent, a timeless process.
- More videos and materials can be consumed by the trainees via the internet, and extra material can be added for good trainees.
 - The whole process tends to be student-centered due to the absence of the teacher (physically).
 - Increased trainer-trainee online interaction.
- Trainees can develop their own speaking (by recording audios) and listening (by consuming more video and audio material) activities more easily and the trainers can supply them with suitable feedback. (Motteram, 2009)
 - Feedback is more flexible and available most of the time.

10- Online tools used in blended learning/training

There are too many tools and platforms that serve as learning/training tools for both online and blended learning, but some of them may suite in some circumstances while the others may not according to some of their characteristics, their limitations, what they require in order to be ready for the activities they are used for, and whether or not the people in the country of action are acquainted with it.

The following are some platforms that can serve as learning/training tools for both online and blended learning:

11- Facebook

Facebook is the mostly used social media platform with about 2.32 billion active users until 31 December 2018. It is widely used as an online and blended learning platform. It contains most of the tools needed in online and blended learning/training activities including the following (Espinosa, 2015; Tananuraksakul, 2017):

- Video streaming.
- Video watching together.
- Video lesson uploads.
- Private groups.
- Polls.
- Private chat (via Facebook Messenger)
- Uploading photos and documents of different extensions both privately and inside close groups. (Tananuraksakul, 2017)
 - Posts.

Despite all those the previously mentioned tools that can support blended learning/ training other than the fact that it is widely used in Iraq, Facebook has two issues that can affect their use in Iraq. Those issues are:

- People can use fake names instead of their real names and those names might become confusing to trainers. Some names are similar and it is hard to differentiate between them.
- Facebook gained a bad reputation due to its being unsecure and so many people in Iraq have suffered from hacking their own Facebook pages and privacy has been a subject to threatens, that makes many Iraqis to stop using it (especially for young females.

12- Google Classes

Google Classes is a platform designed for online and blended learning/training. It supports teachers and trainers

with almost every tool they might need. The only issue that it faces is that we will need to train all our teachers and teacher trainers to use it. This means a lot of effort, time and money.

Google Classes as well as other teaching platforms might be useful in Iraq in the future, but for now we should look for easier ways to train our teachers.

13- YouTube

YouTube is a video platform that is used widely for teaching, learning and training. It contains millions of tutorial videos, various training, and a very easy user and video maker platform. Despite the fact that YouTube is merely a video platform, it tries to become more and more a social media platform. It contains now the ability to upload and stream videos, supports video conferences and webinars, supports private chat and general comments. It contains interaction signs (like, dislike). It contains polls and written posts. And the best characteristic that YouTube has is that the videos of YouTube are easy to watch without stopping. And even for weaker internet connections, YouTube supports video download (temporary download).

14- WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a communication platform that supports easy group making, voice and video calls. It supports video, sound, document sharing, and it is easy to recognize people in it because it requires phone numbers and not names. Furthermore, trainers can name and change the names of the trainees as they require. (Hanisi, 2018)

WhatsApp is widely used in Iraq and almost all people who have smart phones have WhatsApp on them. And even those who do not have WhatsApp on their smart phones are able to install it and be ready for using it in no time.

What we should take into consideration is that WhatsApp cannot be a stand-alone teaching platform, yet it can be a good addition to YouTube because it can fill the gaps found in YouTube such as the private groups and easily managed chat rooms.

15- Determination English Language Teachers' needs

Determination of teachers/trainees' needs comes from two main sources, the first is the instructions coming from the Iraqi Ministry of Education that depend on the analysis of the huge data the ministry has and the researches submitted by its researchers.

The second source to determine what the teachers/trainees' need is from the educational and specialized instructors' findings from their daily observations inside the schools they visit.

There are two more additional sources, that supply us with the teachers/trainees' needs, the first is the teachers/trainees themselves through polls and frequent issues they might ask about, while the second source is the pretests and post-tests of the previous workshops accomplished by the directories of Preparation and Training in the Iraqi Directorates of Education all over Iraq.

The following figure shows the sources depended on while determining teachers/trainees' needs:

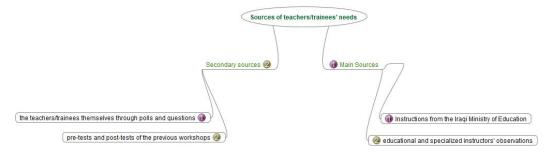


Figure No. 1: sources of the teachers' (trainees) needs

16- What parts of the training activities should be included in online part of training?

In the online part of the training the following are included:

- Lesson sample videos: those give the teachers a vivid idea about the ways certain activities could be taught. They can be included in a unified YouTube channel that they can reach whenever they need to or they have time for.
- Polls: they can be done with the YouTube channel and they can supply the trainers with the trainees' opinions and interactions, and can be a good ongoing overall evaluation of the progress of the training.
- News about the schedules of the face-to-face meetings, the instructions from the ministry of Education, and some of the instructions that are supplied when needed via the WhatsApp group/Groups.
- Questions and issues the trainees face can be sent through WhatsApp group/groups. Those questions in face-to-face training might be time consuming and can hinder the whole training process, while in online training, they will be positive interactions. The responses to those interactions from the trainers' part can refer to the main question by just swiping the question to the right (in the Arabic version to the left). Very important questions, urgent issues, and frequently asked questions can be answered through a YouTube video, a poll, or an illustration.(Erben, Ban, & Castañeda, 2008:pp 150-164)
- Illustrations, charts, photos, posters and the like, can be given either through a post on YouTube or with the WhatsApp chat group. The benefits that come from sending or issuing illustrations, charts and photos in the online training has the following benefits:
 - o Low cost of electronic versions of those illustrations, charts and photos as compared to the paper versions.
 - o Every trainee can keep his/her own electronic copy easily and with no costs.
- O Illustrations, charts and photos can be sent in high resolution that the trainees can zoom them in and read or study them clearly.
- O The design of the illustrations, charts and photos will not be expensive, and trainers can sometimes find free versions online.
- Lectures can be either streamed as webinars or recorded and made available for every trainee to access any time, pose, replay and go to certain points freely. This cannot be done with such flexibility in the traditional face-to-face training. Trainers can upload whole workshops via YouTube, but this will make the videos bigger and the interaction lesser.

17- What parts of the training activities should be included in Face-to-Face part of training?

Training Online has its defects that blended learning passed over as shown above, because of the existence of the face-to-face instruction part. The following issues can be covered in the face-to-face meetings that will be now in shorter, more organized, summarized and extremely beneficial:

- Guidance about how to use the online part and the regulations that should be taken into consideration by both the trainers and the trainees.
- Pre-test, post-tests, examinations (if required). Those can be done online but they will not be accurate like face-to-face settings.
 - Open discussions about the material made available in the online part.
- Instructors, trainers and the ministry representatives will have a clear, on-ground evaluation of the whole training process in addition to the seriousness both the trainers and trainees.
 - The trainees will become more confident and feel more secure with the existence of the face-to-face activities.
- Some of the teaching samples, training material could be given during the face-to-face meetings when the online training seems to fail to give better results.
- Face-to-face interaction between the trainers and the trainees is very important for the continuity of the training, the trainees confidence, and even for the online training.

18- Additional content

Good external material like videos available online, websites, webinars from international institutes can be referred to by the trainers and can serve two goals, the first goal is the information they contain and the second goal is that those

material are mostly authentic ones.

There are too many online training materials that the trainees can be directed to such as Oxford University Press ELT YouTube channel and National Geographic Learning ELT channel and so. Those provide training, advice, webinars and many other video materials.

19- When does the online training occur?

The main reason why the online training is worthy to consider is the time factor. Online training does not need schedules (except for webinars of course), the trainees themselves decide when to take the training and when to stop. They are free to take the training anytime anywhere, when drinking their tea (or coffee), at midnight, in the early morning or any time that suits their personalities (all night learners or owl readers vs morning bird readers), their time schedules and their ability to consume the training materials.

20- When Does the Face-to-Face Learning Occur?

Face-to-face learning or more specifically meetings occur in the following occasions:

- In the first day of the training process in order to take the pre-test, being instructed about who the training will occur and how they are expected to behave during the training process.
- In the last day of the training process in order to take the post test, the final evaluation if needed, and to take their participation documents if there are any.
- There are several face-to-face meetings scheduled according to the needs, such as the progress measurement, tests, required face to face training, and (demanded) face to face training.

21- Different trainees, Different needs, different online material

It is clear that different teachers have different need, and belong to different kinds of learners. Their abilities are different, their language abilities are different, and their weakness points are different.

Some teachers need linguistic training that should occur sometimes before the professional training. The linguistic training needs differ according the extent of weakness and the skills they need to develop more.

Those issues need more and more online material, a library that is ready for most of the linguistic and professional training requirements. The trainers' job here is to determine which part certain trainers need and this of course is not an impossible job thanks to the availability of the online training part. (Higgins & Gomez, 2014)

22- Ongoing and Final Evaluation

Evaluation is troublesome when dealt with in the online training, but in blended training it is fine thanks to the existence of the face-to-face training part. Evaluation in blended training is mostly done within the face-to-face training, but there is still a part that belongs to the online training. The following figure shows the distribution of evaluation on both the face-to-face and online parts:

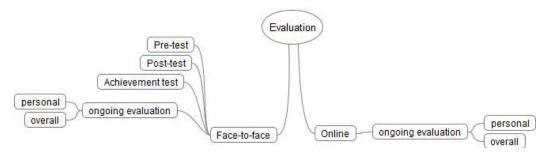


Figure No. 2 show the evaluation types and their distribution between online and face-to-face training

23- Conclusion

The use of blended learning (training) in English language Teachers' training has its benefits, yet it needs some

online tools that suit both the environment where the training takes place and the requirements of the taught discipline. Activities should be distributed according to the characteristics of each of the two parts of the training (face-to-face and online training). As related to the platforms suitable for the Iraqi environment, a combination of YouTube and WhatsApp platforms appeared to be one of the best tools to be used for the online training part of the English language teachers' training. Evaluation of the training and the trainees occurs in both parts (the online and the face-to-face), but each part is suitable for certain types of evaluation.

24- Recommendations

- The researcher recommends more studies that experiment the use of YouTube and WhatsApp in teacher training in a blended training context.
- Official YouTube Channels that assist EFL teachers in Iraq will be a very good addition to the training activities and will lead to more progress.
- Officially appointed trainers available on WhatsApp groups in each governorate in Iraq with a main group of trainers from all over Iraq will be very beneficial for both Iraqi EFL teachers and the ministry of education in Iraq.

YouTube Training Channels can be extended to expert teachers who can supply Iraqi students with the suitable instructions after taking into consideration the difficulties that may face such groups. There are some YouTube Channels, One of them is supervised by the Ministry of Education. It issues videos of lectures provided by well qualified teachers that are not a good representation of blended learning.

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استخدام منصتي يوتيوب وواتس اب في برامج تدريب معلمي اللغة الإنكليزية المدمجة في العراق

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ملخص

يواجه تدريب معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في العراق تحديات جسيمة، مثل الافتقار إلى الدعم المالي بسبب سياسة التقشف أثثاء وبعد الحرب ضد داعش، والتغيير المتكرر في مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية خلال السنوات الـ 15 الماضية، والهبوط الخطير في مستوى جودة التعليم. وقد جعلت هذه التحديات التدريب الاعتيادي (وجها لوجه او التدريب الصفي) امرا غاية في التعقيد. وقد أدى هذا إلى الحاجة الملحة إلى طريقة أكثر تطورا للتدريب. ويعد التعلم المختلط بديلاً جيدًا للتدريب الصفي لأنه يتخطى معظم المشكلات التي نواجهها في التدريب التقليدي/الصفي، ولأن هذا النوع من التدريب يحتاج إلى إعدادات مختلفة، فإن هذه الدراسة هي محاولة لتحليل ادوات التدريب المختلط المتاحة واختيار تلك التي تناسب الوضع في العراق. ونظرًا لأن التعليم المختلط يحتاج إلى أدوات عبر الإنترنت تسهل التدريب، يقترح الباحث عددًا من المنصات عبر الإنترنت ويختار منصات يوتيوب وواتس اب معًا. يعتمد هذا الاختيار على توفرها وملاءمتها للبيئة العراقية وخصائص كل منها. تم توزيع التدريب والتقييم والمواد التدريبية بين أجزاء كل من التدريب الصفى والتدريب عبر الانترنت بما يلائم خصائص كل منها.

الكلمات الدالة: التعلم وجها لوجه، معلمي اللغة الانجليزية المدمجة.

^{*} معهد الفنون الجميلة للبنين في ديالي، العراق. تاريخ استلام البحث 2019/3/27، وتاريخ قبوله 2019/6/12.