

# Challenges and Benefits of Blended Learning on Tertiary Education ESL Classrooms: A Literature Review

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## Abstract

A relatively emerging subject called blended learning mixes conventional classroom methods with online instruction. Recent studies that look at the academic and social benefits of this teaching method have emphasised the usage of blended learning. Since it combines traditional and online teaching modes, the strengths of blended learning rest on both teaching approaches. However, literature on the difficulties that English language instructors' experience while implementing blended learning is still scarce. A process of in-depth critical analysis of existing literatures on blended learning is carried out. Hence, this paper presents the benefits and challenges of blended learning on tertiary education ESL classrooms along with the comparison of UTAUT 2 model.

## Keywords

Blended Learning, Tertiary Education, ESL Classrooms, Challenges, Benefits

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## 1. Introduction

In this digital era, many aspects of teaching and learning revolve around technologies. Singh (2021) mentioned that everyday life includes technology, which is usually used to increase productivity and efficiency. In this regard, using technology in the classroom is unavoidable. With the help of digital technology, teaching and learning will become a more rewarding experience for both teachers and students. The advancement of technology and communication devices or gadgets, eases communication and makes interaction easier. These results have an

impact on a number of industries, including education and the teaching and learning process. Blended learning is described as the fusion of in-person instruction and online learning (Asare, Yun-Fei, & Adjei-Budu, 2016). According to Garrison and Kanuka (2004), blended learning happens when a classroom is combining classroom instruction with online learning, utilising a variety of media to enhance engagement, physical contact between students and educators, and creating a relevant yet inspiring learning environment through different teaching strategies concurrently.

Integration of technology in teaching and learning activities has sparked a lot of interest among higher education institution practitioners (HEI) in Malaysia. Information and communication technology (ICT) solutions, such as electronic learning, have gained popularity among higher education institutions as a flexible teaching and learning method that can be used both within and outside of the classroom. This can be seen in blended learning classrooms whereby technology is being combined with traditional classrooms. In the context of tertiary education, traditional classrooms required the instructor to present, interact, discuss, demonstrate and communicate with students face-to-face. Blended learning, on the other hand, will still be having the traditional classroom except there is an integration of technology (Alowed, 2020).

Blended learning has been known for the benefits it has to offer for both students and educators, according to Aziz (2010). Through the use of technology, blended learning connects people, activities, and events. It is a vital tool for fostering understanding on a worldwide scale. Additionally, interaction between students and the teacher, as well as students with one another, can create online communities and learning practices where knowledge, concepts, insights, and other learning outcomes are shared and appreciated. However, the integration of blended learning in the education sector will also present new challenges for tertiary education ESL classrooms. For instance, Thorne (2003) mentioned that many students lack the excitement, energy, and dedication that blended learning requires. Thus, this paper attempts to discuss the challenges and benefits of blended learning on tertiary education ESL classrooms.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definition of Blended Learning

Blended learning is a heterogeneous teaching and learning approach which can be described in a number of ways, all of which agree that it is a hybrid approach. On a continuum from face-to-face to online, the nature of its hybridness is still up for debate (Lawless, 2019). This is further corroborated by Caner (2012), who notes that although being used extensively in most educational institutions, the phrase “blended learning” is still vague. Lawless (2019) claims that only certain conditions dictate how blended learning is used, making it even more challenging to come up with a definition that is accepted worldwide. Blended learning is a kind of instruction that combines conventional, in-person instruction methods

with online learning opportunities (Lawless, 2019). Other definitions view blended learning as a careful blending of offline and online experiences (Cheung & Wang, 2019), a combination of several technologies to help with teaching and learning (Cronje, 2020), a form of education that uses modern technology to improve traditional teaching techniques (Willis et al., 2018), a technique for instruction and learning that mixes online learning with conventional classroom techniques (Joksimović et al., 2015). Similarly, according to OBrien et al. (2021), blended learning is a combination of dynamic and engaging online learning with a dynamic offline learning that can influence students over the time, space, place and path of their learning.

Blended learning is a concept that enables teachers and students to collaborate in teaching and learning through different settings. Blended learning can be defined as a transformative concept that can be used for both online learning and offline learning and aims to maintain the cooperative learning whether in constructive learning or learning with the help of computer (Lalima & Dangwal, 2017). Similarly, blended learning combines particularly in face-to-face and online learning with instructional modalities (Tayebinik & Puteh, 2012). Moreover, the concept of blended learning is to improve the learning content and the way it is being learnt, not to discard the role of the teacher in the classroom (Bakeer, 2018). In addition, Bakeer (2018) also stated that every student has distinct styles of learning, thus, a blended learning approach meets the students' needs rather than traditional classroom settings. Thus, blended learning refers to a combination of a variety of pedagogical approaches in order to achieve the best learning and teaching outcomes (Caner, 2012).

## 2.2. ESL Teaching and Learning in Tertiary Education

Across many educational contexts, namely preschool, primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, most students are taught in a second or foreign language other than their native (Macaro et al., 2018). As such in Malaysia, English holds an important status as the second most crucial language to acquire where it is commonly used as a medium of instruction regardless of informal or formal situations. Moreover, in the tertiary level of education, English is widely used in every lecture, journals, and even books (Hashim, Yunus, & Hashim, 2018). As mentioned by Abdullah and Shah (2014), the English language has been fundamental particularly in the academic fields and for future use of university students. Apart from that, university students are expected to be fluent in English owing to their level of education and the common use of English in tertiary level (Harun et al., 2021). Other than that, according to Akbarov et al. (2018), English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) will change according to the educational environment, thus, it has to follow the current technological, informatics, and educational advancements. Recently, The Ministry of Education has outlined some strategies specifically for higher education in the years to come (Abd Majid & Abd Rahman, 2021). The researcher then added that academicians in higher institutions need to provide relevant and current not only in their teach-

ing content but also teaching method.

In 21st-century teaching and learning, incorporating an online component with physical classes is required for both primary and higher education (Islam et al., 2022). Mohd Adnan et al. (2019) mentioned that even though English teaching mainly emphasises on the acquisition of four essential skills which are listening, reading, writing and speaking, the older teaching methods are no longer suitable to cater to current generation learning preferences. For instance, the “chalk and talk” method might no longer be practical in ESL teaching especially now that there are more effective options available that encourage students to be more engaged in their learning process. For that reason, the curriculum of tertiary education must be apt and innovative in order to cater to the needs of undergraduates both at the personal and technological demands (Ehlers & Kellermann, 2019; Schwab & Davis, 2018). Therefore, the implementation of blended learning has become more popular due to its effectiveness in higher education with the help of technological tools.

### **2.3. Blended Learning in ESL Classrooms at Tertiary Institutions**

Blended learning is known for the potential to help students in improving their academic performance. This can be supported by Aljaraideh and Al Bataineh (2019) who conducted research among Jordanian students and found that grammar performance of those who did blended learning was higher than those who did not. Students in the blended learning group managed to score higher than those in the control group for the final test, thus, blended learning enhanced students’ listening and speaking skills (Hussein Alsowayegh et al., 2019). According to Al-Mashaqbeh and Al Hamad (2010), test results of those who did their tests online outperformed those on the paper test. This has proven the effectiveness of blended learning relative to their performance in English. Additionally, it demonstrates how taking exams online has helped students’ grammar, spelling, and punctuation (Ahmed & Eljack, 2020). Blended learning also supports students’ language skills (Aljaraideh & Al Bataineh, 2019).

Blended learning provides students with the opportunity to learn independently and equipped them with more options of learning. Ahmed and Eljack (2020) mentioned that the environment of blended learning is very healthy. For instance, students can search for other platforms available through an internet connection to learn, this motivates students to look for learning resources to achieve their academic goals and encourages them to take advantage of other websites’ potential to enhance their English language ability. She also mentioned that after class, she immediately searches YouTube for English learning resources to help her remember what she covered in the English lesson. She studies the lesson before class. Similar findings were made by Aljaraideh & Al Bataineh (2019), who stated that blended learning increased students’ digital skills, and Hussein Alsowayegh et al. (2019), who reported that students were inspired to check additional social media accounts. Other researchers (Bukhari & Mahmoud Basaffar, 2019) who discovered that pupils were driven to learn indepen-

dently concurred with this finding.

Despite the benefits of blended learning that can be used effectively to develop language skills of ESL language learners, there are several challenges that have been identified for this method of teaching (Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019). As averred by Riel et al. (2016), there are six types of challenges that teachers encounter throughout the process of implementing blended learning curriculum. For instance, difficulty in communicating and delegating tasks among students, struggle in finding adequate time to conduct lessons as well as scheduling time to complete the work given outside of the classroom. In line with that, Bonk and Graham (2012) also identified six other significant challenges when implementing blended learning environment which is “the function of real communication, the learners’ choices and self-regulation, models for support and training, dealing with the digital divide, adaptation of a culture, and finding balance between production and innovation” (p. 10). For example, in “dealing with the digital divide”, an individual’s socioeconomic background will affect their ability to obtain information and communication as well as accessibility to available technologies. This assertion is confirmed by Alvarez Jr. (2020), who noted that there is an unstable electrical supply, particularly in distant places, which will ultimately damage a person’s capacity for teaching and learning.

Within the context of ESL teaching and learning experience in tertiary institutions, Alam et al. (2022) discussed the major challenges to maintain students’ engagement and motivation during blended learning as well as technological hindrance such as insufficient internet connection encountered by both students and teachers. One of the examples stated in the study is where some of the ESL teachers reiterate that students feel demotivated and feeling isolated during an online discussion due to the unstable internet connection. Other than that, Mirriahi et al. (2015) as cited in Smith & Hill (2019) emphasised that the lack of institutional clarity and staff disengagement in the implementation of blended learning are challenges for higher education. Moreover, other challenges found are inadequate information for teachers regarding proper implementation of blended learning, lack of technology literacy, the greater workload required in integrating technology on teachers’ part, and inefficient technology facilities to support blended learning (Muhtia et al., 2018; Alvarez Jr., 2020). Apparently, these challenges mentioned by researchers could hinder the blended teaching and learning process from being delivered effectively.

#### **2.4. Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT 2)**

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) was initially developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003) and has been a model of reference to those who are looking at technology acceptance. According to Morton et al. (2016), UTAUT has always been used to examine how people want to make full use of technology and their motivations for doing so. A study conducted by Yeou (2016) discovered that individuals’ behavioural intention to use and embrace

technology varies by 70%. The UTAUT model comprises four major constructs which are performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. However, in 2012, UTAUT 2 was developed by Venkatesh et al. as a newer version of the UTAUT model. Three additional constructs were added to the UTAUT model (Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows the constructs of UTAUT 2. Behavioural intention and use behaviour are individually affected by seven constructs altogether, the three recent constructs added in UTAUT 2 are Hedonic Motivation, Price Value and Habit. In this paper, challenges and benefits of blended learning on tertiary education ESL classrooms in Malaysia were explained and studied in terms of seven constructs which are performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value and habit.

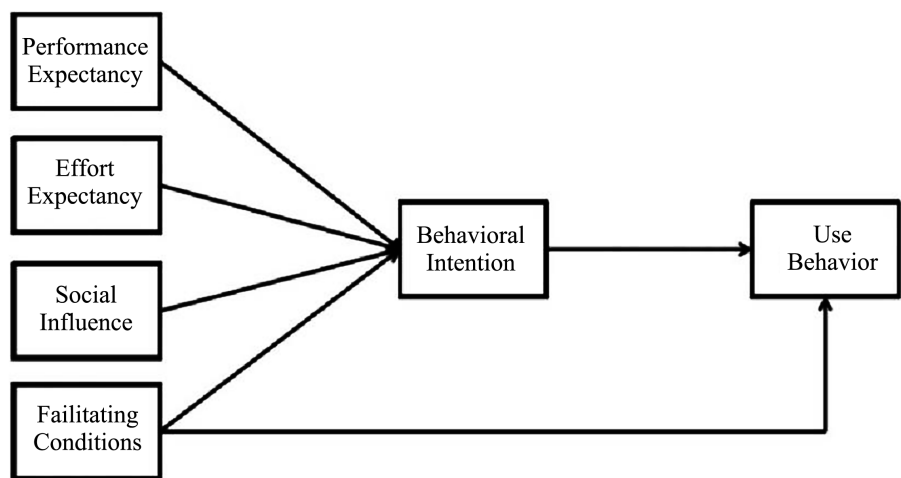


Figure 1. UTAUT.

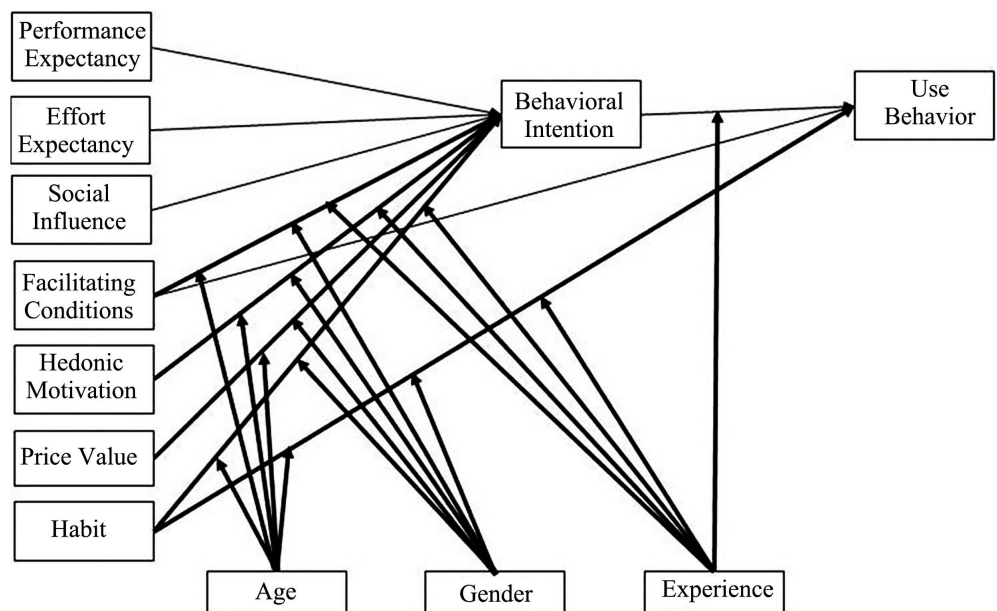


Figure 2. UTAUT 2.

#### 2.4.1. Performance Expectancy

The first construct of UTAUT 2 is performance expectancy. Venkatesh et al. (2003) defined performance expectancy as the extent to which a person thinks that utilising a system will help them improve their effectiveness at work. Based on performance expectancy, tertiary education ESL classrooms developed an expectation that blended learning will be able to act as an assistant to them in improving their academic performance in achieving teaching/learning objectives. According to research done by Chao (2019), he draws the conclusion that if university students think that blended learning will improve their academic performance, they will accept it. In another study conducted by Stacey and Gerbic (2007), they stated that when online learning is combined with traditional course delivery, learning outcomes are known to improve. Thus, this contributes to the benefits of blended learning in tertiary education ESL classrooms. Two separate studies found that there was a positive relationship between performance expectancy and behavioural intentions of students to accept blended learning. This statement can be seen in the study of Aljaafreh (2021).

#### 2.4.2. Effort Expectancy

The second construct is effort expectancy, which relates to the outcomes of effort being put in the teaching/learning process. The definition of effort expectancy is simplicity with which tasks can be accomplished while utilising technology in education (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In the context of tertiary education ESL classrooms, they will be looking at whether or not blended learning helps in easing the process of teaching and learning for them. Numerous research have also emphasised the importance of effort expectancy on users' behavioural intentions to embrace a learning system. Studies by (Aljaafreh, 2021; Azizi et al., 2020; Kiviniemi, 2014; Morton et al., 2016) discovered a strong correlation between effort expectancy and technology users' behavioural intent to accept blended learning. Abou Naaj et al. (2012) revealed that students were happy with the technology, which was a part of blended learning that incorporates video conferencing. Incorporation of technology in the education system could ease the learning process for students. For example, the traditional method of learning will require students to print assignments to be submitted, but in blended learning, since there is an incorporation of technology, students could submit the assignments online. However, a study by Tucker, Meyer and Barde (2001) revealed that students' dissatisfaction with the use of technology in the classroom was brought on by their difficulties using it and by their peers' ineffective participation in group activities. Due to that, blended learning will be a challenge for those who are not good in technology.

#### 2.4.3. Social Influence

For the third construct, which is social influence, described as the degree to which a person uses technology while giving other people's opinions and considerations on the importance of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In other words, this means that when someone uses a system, like blended learning, it is

because they think that other people in their social network think it is crucial that they do. Studies by Aljaafreh (2021), discovered that social influence has a substantial impact on people's behavioural intentions to use blended learning. Thus, in tertiary ESL classroom context, social influence refers to situations in which other people, such administrators or co-workers, can have an impact on an English teacher's decision about how to use technology to conduct online teaching and learning and create educational resources for their students. From the student's point of view, blended learning will only be accepted if the peers support the system. Additionally, it was mentioned that students who find it difficult to form acquaintances may give up on blended learning altogether, becoming detached and feeling lonely (Willging & Johnson, 2009). Blended learning can be successful if students interact with teachers and peers, as their absence causes them to wither away (Astleitner, 2000). If many students prefer the traditional method of learning, then that decision will influence others' perception on blended learning.

#### **2.4.4. Facilitating Conditions**

Waheed et al. (2015) stated that the availability of sufficient resources and help are referred to as "facilitating conditions" for someone to use technology in education. This suggests that a person will acquire behavioural intentions to use blended learning if they believe that their organisation has the resources to employ the mode. In the context of tertiary ESL classroom, this relates to whether tertiary education ESL educators and learners have adequate facilities and infrastructure such as laptops, smartphones, and internet connection, as well as good technological skills and knowledge, to support and facilitate them in conducting and learning online teaching and learning of English in blended learning. Students will form their behavioural intentions to use the blended learning mode in their academic studies if they perceive that their institution has the organisational and technological infrastructure to support their learning. In blended learning and e-learning environments, effective use of learning management systems and their tools improve their academic performance. It has been noticed that learner satisfaction with a learning management system may operate as a precursor to the success of blended learning (Goyal & Tambe, 2015). Overall, people are not satisfied with low-quality technology, so this has a significant impact on how satisfied users are with the technology (Piccoli et al., 2001). In a study conducted by Aljaafreh (2021), the findings stated that in order to use the internet whenever and whenever they want, every student in Jordan universities has his or her own laptop. Therefore, they are equipped with enough facilities and have access to blended learning. This will be an issue for the students who are not well equipped in technology, whether the technology it selves or the users' technological skills.

#### **2.4.5. Hedonic Motivation**

The fifth construct is hedonic motivation and it is described as the pleasure or a



joyful experience as a result of using or applying technology. When an individual enjoys or experiences pleasure in using technology, that particular individual is most likely to continue using technology in the future (Lee, 2009). This construct of the model relates to the pleasure or joy experience of tertiary education ESL educators and learners in using or applying technology in blended learning. Students who enjoy using blended learning as a method of instruction are more likely to develop behavioural intentions in the acceptance of blended learning in their academic pursuits. Venkatesh et al. (2012) indicates that hedonic motivation has a favourable and important association with people's behavioural intentions to embrace a system, like blended learning. According to Dreyer and Nel (2003), technology-based reading instruction increases student engagement and willingness to study. Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003) also insist that technology can be a tool for reading skill practice based on each student's interests and needs by serving a range of reading-related purposes.

#### 2.4.6. Price Value

The next construct of the UTAUT 2 model is price value. It describes a person's understanding of an exchange between the advantages of technology experienced and the monetary expenses paid resulted from its use (Venkatesh et al., 2012). They are more likely to adopt online teaching and learning if the benefits are considered to outnumber the costs. Students are more likely to acquire behavioural intentions to adopt blended learning as a form of learning in their studies if they believe that the benefits of learning through the system outweigh the financial costs of the system. Numerous researches have also emphasised the impact of price value on users' behavioural intentions to accept a system. Moorthy et al. (2019) and Aljaafreh (2021) stated that there was a substantial correlation between price value and users' behavioural intent to accept a system in their studies. In terms of benefits, blended learning could help students to save much money. This can be seen in research conducted by Sita Nurmasitah et al. (2019). The data indicated that the practicality of sharing materials, independent learning, saving time and money during the learning process are just a few of the reasons that the implementation of blended learning has been well appreciated. When it comes to the delivery of materials, students can easily access the information offered by lecturers without having to struggle to locate it in hard copy, such as books, journals, or papers which could also be costly at times.

#### 2.4.7. Habit

Habit, on the other hand, is defined as the degree to which someone wants to carry out any behaviour automatically as a result of earlier conditioning or learning (Limayem et al., 2007; Venkatesh et al., 2012). According to Crabbe et al. (2009), people who have prior technical experience were more likely to be impacted when the newest related technology was first launched. Thus, those who are used to technology will be more comfortable in a blended learning experience. In the long run, students will build behavioural intent to employ

blended learning in their studies if it becomes a regular or a daily activity for them. Numerous research have emphasised the significance of habit in people's behavioural intentions to accept a system like blended learning. Studies by (Al-jaafreh, 2021; Huang & Kao, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2014) found that users' behavioural intents to embrace a system, like blended learning, are greatly influenced by habit.

### 3. Discussion

Researchers have regularly used the UTAUT constructs to explore the attitudes of students and educators on technology acceptance in many settings, especially for online and blended learning in higher education (Delmas & Moore 2019). Similarly, the constructs of UTAUT was developed to determine technology acceptance and adoption among people along with identifying factors that can affect online learning uptake (Alshehri et al., 2019). Previous studies have also given significant understanding on the constructs of UTAUT 2 in teaching and learning process, notably in describing users' attitudes and the factors that influence those attitudes towards the information technology used for emergency learning (Bamoallem & Altarteer, 2022). Apart from that, as averred by Jong and Wang (2009), the constructs of UTAUT is seen as the most suitable model in literature study to predict technology acceptance.

The integration of blended learning in tertiary education ESL classrooms has brought remarkable benefits on teaching and learning. In line with the UTAUT 2 constructs, students have been known to produce better outcomes in their academics. This is expected in the first construct of UTAUT 2, performance expectancy, whereby finding in a study noted that there has been an improvement ever since blended learning was introduced. Next, students think that blended learning has helped to ease their burden when technology was integrated in education. This is aligned with effort expectancy as the second construct in UTAUT 2. Physical submission for assignments can easily be replaced with online submission, thus, students no longer have to invest a lot of money, time and energy for the physical submission. Apart from that, students' motivation level tends to increase with blended learning because it is said that technology based reading questions and text are more fun to read rather than the traditional materials, like books and paper sheets. It is also said that these motivated students will be able to engage in the classroom better. This is stated in the fifth construct of UTAUT 2, which emphasised on hedonic motivation. Furthermore, students will be able to save much money with blended learning. For example, if a student lives outside of the university, he or she would have to spend money on a lot of things to get to the university. But with the existence of blended learning, that student can opt for online learning instead. This is supported by price value as one of the constructs in UTAUT 2. Last but not least, blended learning is beneficial to those who are used to having technology on a daily basis. Students who are more familiar with technology are more likely to enjoy blended learning than

those who are not familiar with technology. This is seen from the last construct of UTAUT 2 which talks about habit.

Despite the benefits of blended learning within the context of ESL teaching and learning in tertiary education, there are significant challenges that can be identified by using the UTAUT 2 constructs. By referring to the second construct of UTAUT 2, which is effort expectancy, past literature mentioned that students' feeling easily detached from the learning process due to the poor technology facilities as well as difficulties in using it. Not just students, but teachers also are having difficulties in managing the technology during blended learning. Therefore, if there are any challenges from the blended learning, learners and educators will be highly discouraged. Moreover, some of the other challenges stated are the inability to engage during the lesson due to lack of social influence. It is found that students are easily demotivated if the teachers and peers are absent around them, this can be seen through the third construct which is social influence. This will further disrupt students' motivation, effort and performance in learning the target language. Other major challenges of blended learning that can be seen is when most learners and educators are experiencing poor facilitating conditions or skills in using technology as well as insufficient facilities that will give a huge impact on learners' learning process. This is in line with the fourth construct of the UTAUT 2, which is facilitating conditions. In sum, the concept of UTAUT 2 is beneficial for researchers in identifying the challenges of blended learning in tertiary education ESL classrooms.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of blended learning in ESL classrooms should inevitably be part of every modern higher education institution. Numerous studies highlight the benefits of blended learning in tertiary education ESL classrooms, such as providing an opportunity to learn independently and competency in mastering the language. In addition, this paper provides past findings on the challenges of blended learning in tertiary institutions ESL classrooms, including learners, feeling demotivated due to inefficient technology and inadequate information on blended learning, as well as lack of training among teachers. Therefore, some practical suggestions need to be addressed to solve these problems such as providing proper training to educators, implementing an action plan to ensure the effectiveness of blended learning in classrooms as well as creating a supportive learning environment for students and educators in blended learning. This paper also shed light on the relationship between constructs in UTAUT 2 which are "performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value and habit" along with the challenges and benefits of blended learning in tertiary education ESL classrooms. This paper recommends future research to further investigate the relationship of constructs in UTAUT 2 and blended learning, especially in the context of the Malaysian ESL classroom given the potential benefits and challenges it brings to

learners' learning experiences. Thus, this literature review concludes that a significant correlation between blended learning in tertiary education ESL classrooms and constructs in UTAUT 2.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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