Research Article

Towards a Blended Programme for Arabic and Other Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) in the South African Higher Education Context

Tawffeek A. S. Mohammed ,[1] **Mustapha Saidi** ,[2] **Blanche Nyingone Assam** ,[3] **and Elsanosi M. Eldokali** [4]

[1]*Department of Foreign Languages, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa*
[2]*Department of Foreign Languages, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa*
[3]*Department of Foreign Languages, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa*
[4]*Director of Languages Centre, Sirte University, Sirte, Libya*

Correspondence should be addressed to Tawffeek A. S. Mohammed; tawffeek@gmail.com

Disruptive technologies are widely used in education today. They aim to develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies of students. The field of applied linguistics, in general, and foreign language teaching, in particular, have benefited immensely from the developments taking place in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). However, meaningful learning cannot be achieved by using technology indiscriminately; an understanding of educational theories and key instructional design models is urgently required. The present study argues that the adoption of established instructional design models will yield effective learning materials not only for the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) but also for language classrooms in general. It investigates the use of ADDIE instructional design model for designing and developing a blended syllabus for teaching Arabic as a foreign language in South African institutions of higher learning. The study also deals with the attitudes of the students towards the designed blended syllabus. The proposed syllabus is based on a wide range of web-based tools and e-learning specifications such as Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) and Shareable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM). This study serves as a guideline for developing instructional materials for teaching Arabic, as well as other languages.

1. Introduction

Developments and changes in the field of technology have greatly aided foreign language instruction. The twentieth century witnessed various attempts to employ technology in teaching foreign languages, and these attempts culminated in the emergence of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). By the same token, the advancements in telecommunications and mobile technology have resulted in the rise of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). The latter approach has grown at a faster rate than others due to the relatively low cost of mobile devices as well as its user-friendliness.

However, according to the UNESCO, both CALL and MALL have so far failed to substantially influence education [1]. Thus, the leveraging of technology to enhance the teaching experience in the language classroom is long overdue. Technology can be used in the preparation of course materials, for facilitating the logistics of a programme, in the delivery of content, and as a source of motivation for students. Technology has made the design and delivery of fully online and hybrid or blended courses amazingly simple and interesting. Indeed, blended learning is the fruition of developments in the fields of MALL and CALL. Language specialists and syllabus designers have been

compelled to revisit and, in a sense, revive traditional instructional design models and to make them more practical in the language classroom. In this regard, the present paper investigates the use of the ADDIE model in designing a blended programme for teaching Arabic. Despite its international, political, economic, and religious significance, Arabic is still one of the less commonly taught languages in South Africa. To be more precise, this study aims to design a technology-enhanced blended syllabus for teaching Arabic in the Department of Arabic Studies at the International Peace College South Africa (IPSA). The motivation for this is to discover the extent to which such a programme can help learners improve their Arabic language skills. IPSA is one of the few institutions that offer Arabic language courses at the undergraduate level in South Africa. Furthermore, this study also investigates the attitudes of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) students at IPSA towards the proposed syllabus. In particular, this study attempts to answer three main questions as follows:

(1) Do Arabic students at IPSA have positive attitudes towards a blended syllabus?

(2) Is there a correlation between the learners' attitudes and their study level?

(3) Is there a correlation between the learners' attitudes and their gender?

To answer the second question, a null hypothesis is formulated as "there is no statistically significant relation at $P \leq 0.05$ between the study level of participants and their attitudes towards the blended syllabus." Similarly, a null hypothesis is formulated for the third question, stating "there is no statistically significant relation at $P \leq 0.05$ between the gender of participants and their attitudes towards the syllabus."

Hence, this study does not only explore the adoption of the proposed model in designing and developing interactive online materials and websites for teaching Arabic online but also for developing a ubiquitous learning prototype that will potentially provide new learning experiences to learners of Arabic as a foreign language. The approach and format adopted in this study may serve as a guideline for the design of instructional resources for language teaching and learning in the South African context and beyond.

2. Blended Learning

Blended or hybrid learning is an emerging model of learning which includes the combination of traditional teaching methods with online learning [2, 3]. Some educators, however, argue that blended learning has a broader scope, and it may include the combination of e-learning tools to achieve the learning objectives of a lesson. Blended learning also has the potential to incorporate various pedagogical approaches such as behaviorism and constructivism to produce an optimal learning outcome. In the latter case, the use of instructional technology may not be mandatory [4].

It should be noted that the combination of self-paced online education and face-to-face training can be beneficial, but if it is not wisely applied, it can become counterproductive. It should not be expected that all students and teachers will be passionate about this paradigm shift in teaching and learning. Some of the challenges that hinder successful implementation of blended learning can be the lack of essential infrastructure, the high cost of software and hardware technology, IT literacy, and the implications of blended learning in terms of workload, especially in the initial phases of implementation. Additionally, the technological resources used in blended learning might not be user-friendly, and hence might not be accepted by all teachers and students. A blended programme may also increase the cognitive load on students, especially if it is poorly designed. Furthermore, a blended programme is likely to create some issues with plagiarism and cheating [5].

Blended learning can take different forms and models. Its design and implementation are likely to differ amongst teachers, programmes, and schools [6]. As suggested by Hannon and Macken [7], there are three models of blended learning: blended presentation and interaction, blended block, and fully online, as shown in Figure 1.

As its name indicates, the first model combines presentation and interaction. Classroom engagement is the primary focus in this form of blended learning. The online component, which consists of supplemental activities, serves as support. The flipped classroom is an example of this model of blended learning. A blended block or programme flow model incorporates a sequence of face-to-face sessions and online tutorials. Students might have face-to-face presentations afterwards. In contrast to the first two models, the fully online model does not include any face-to-face physical interaction. The blend takes place through the incorporation of synchronous meetings via platforms such as Zoom and asynchronous sessions or activities. These three models "provide initial frameworks for the deliberate structuring of blended learning to improve learning outcomes." [6] Hence, blended learning is not simply the adding of technology-enhanced activities to a lesson or a course. It is a sophisticated blend that combines face-to-face instruction and online learning with the aim of achieving certain pedagogical needs and overcoming time and location constraints.

3. Literature Review

The use of blended learning for language instruction, including Arabic, has been investigated in various studies. For instance, studies which investigated the outcomes of using a blended language learning environment on English as a foreign language (EFL) include learners in an Indonesian context [8], a Chinese context [9], and a French university context [10]. These studies found that a blended syllabus plays a significant role in enhancing students' motivation and learning autonomy [9]. It has also a great impact on student learning, test results, and classroom language use [10]. However, despite its benefits, blended learning also involves several problems and weaknesses. Noninteractive activities and materials, connectivity issues, and a lack of technology-literate instructors are just a few of the drawbacks [8]. In addition, some students remain hesitant to
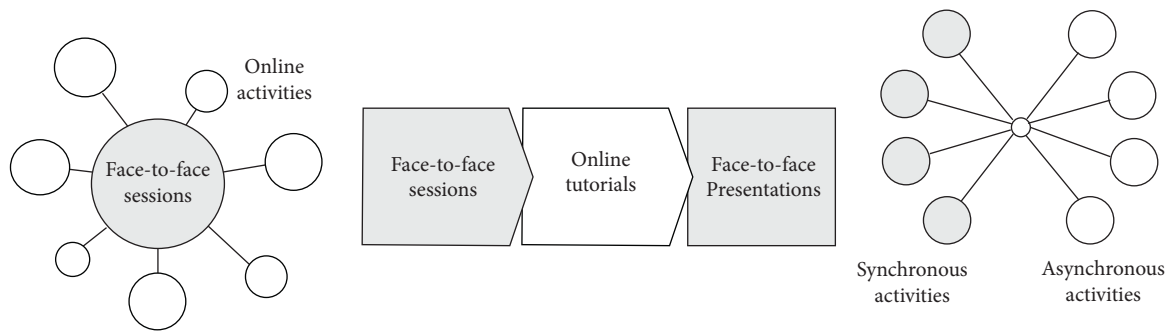
FIGURE 1: Models of blended learning [7].

accept blended learning despite the likelihood of receiving greater instructor input in a blended program than they would in a class of forty or fifty students [10].

The use of blended learning in an EFL class was also examined in a recent study [11]. The participants of the study were thirty-nine students, some of whom were people with physical or intellectual disabilities. The study concluded that the participants, especially those with disabilities, were satisfied with the blended course and the flipped learning model adopted in it. Web tools such as infographics, Padlet, Google Docs, and Canvas were also employed in a blended English reading course. The use of infographics, Padlet, Google Docs, and Canvas enhanced collaboration among the learners and allowed them to actively participate in reading tasks [12].

Similar studies were conducted to investigate the impact of a blended learning approach on the performance of students of Arabic at Islamic State University in Indonesia [13] and at Islamic University in Madinah, Saudi Arabia [14]. It was also used in the teaching of students of Arabic as a foreign language in a Singaporean context [15]. Blended learning was found to be more effective than traditional face-to-face instruction [14]. It improved the average scores of learners of Arabic [13], promoted problem-based learning, and was shown to result in an increased level of self-autonomy of students. It also played a key role in the development of the digital and communication skills (ICT) of the learners [15]. A blended learning course was also designed to teach the Arabic alphabet at an American elementary school. The blended materials were created and delivered via Google applications. The pronunciation of the students as well as their reading and writing skills showed notable improvement [16].

For the optimal use of blended learning in the language classroom, the adoption of instructional design models is essential. Unfortunately, very few studies have examined the use of established instructional frameworks in the design of blended syllabi in language courses. The ADDIE instructional design model was used to create a website for teaching Arabic for tourism purposes at a Malaysian university. The Grav® CMS platform was used to design the syllabus [17]. Similarly, the ASSURE model was used in the design of a blended syllabus for teaching a ḥadīth (i.e., the recorded traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) module for students of Arabic as part of learning about Shariah in a South African undergraduate class. The design applied the six phases of the

ASSURE model. These phases are analyze the students; state the objectives of the course; select methods, media, and materials; utilize media and materials; require student participation; and evaluate and revise [18].

The e-learning industry has created a wealth of software that makes the design of blended and fully online courses easy and appealing. Learning management systems such as Moodle and Sakai enable teachers to design integrated course layouts and enriching course sites that raise the students' motivation and enhance learning. Moodle, for instance, was used to present a blended course model for teaching a Turkish course for beginners at Tel Aviv University [19].

Although the above studies report on the design of blended materials for one or more language skills, few of them explain how the materials were created. This study, however, attempts to avoid any haphazard or hasty approaches in the development of blended syllabi. This study is part of a deliberate and phased project that was conducted over three years. It is based on well-known pedagogical theories and an established instructional design model, namely, ADDIE. It was carefully implemented across three undergraduate levels (i.e., National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 5, NQF level 6, and NQF level 7). Based on the review of the known literature, this is the first study that attempts to design a comprehensive blended Arabic programme for teaching Arabic and less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) in South Africa and perhaps globally. Most of the published studies focus on languages such as English, even in the Arab world. The above studies also employ and test limited technological tools and thus fall short when exploring potentially more effective web-, computer-, and mobile-assisted language learning tools, all of which can be used for the creation of an array of textual and multimodal language learning prototypes.

4. Research Methods and Materials

4.1. Syllabus Design. The present research aims to design a blended syllabus for teaching Arabic as a foreign language at the International Peace College South Africa (IPSA) based on the ADDIE instructional design model. This is a qualitative study which describes various phases of the model from analysis to implementation. The ADDIE instructional model is widely used for developing a variety of instructional

programs, courses, and training [20–22]. The model is composed of five phases, namely, analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Each of these five phases is composed of different procedural steps. The entire process in ADDIE's instructional design model is illustrated in Figure 2.

This study not only deals with the description of the blended syllabus but also investigates students' perceptions towards it.

4.2. Questionnaire. A cross-sectional study design is adopted in the current study to find out the perceptions of the students towards the proposed blended syllabus. The participants in this study were thirty-three undergraduate students enrolled in three Arabic language courses in the academic year 2020 at IPSA. The blended syllabus was initially designed and implemented in the first semester of the academic year 2018-2019. It was completed and fully implemented across three undergraduate levels at IPSA during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. Due to the small number of students at the college, all students were considered part of the sample for this study. The distribution of participants across gender and academic levels is shown in Figures 3 and 4, respectively.

4.2.1. Procedure. Prior to the data collection, permission to conduct this study and undertake research was acquired from the principal of IPSA. This study has therefore received formal ethical clearance from the postgraduate division at the International Peace College South Africa (IPSA). A close-ended structured questionnaire of twenty-five items was prepared via Google Forms. The questionnaire covered three main components: design and layout, resources and activities, and the impact of the syllabus on the students' language skills. The questionnaire clearly stated that participation in the study was voluntary, and there were no known or anticipated risks. Participants were clearly informed that they could decline to answer any of the questions and exit the questionnaire at any time. The form also stated that all data collected would be treated as confidential and the participant's anonymity protected in any reports or publications produced as a result of the questionnaire. Twenty-three participants completed questionnaires.

4.2.2. Reliability and Validity. Before using it for data collection, the questionnaire was sent to two experts for review, one of whom is an instructor in the Department of Arabic Studies at IPSA. The other teaches at the Centre of Languages and Translation at Taiz University in Yemen. Both recommended some modifications to ensure the questionnaire's validity. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire items. First, a pilot study with ten students was conducted to test the questionnaire's reliability. The participants of the pilot study were excluded from the final sample. The Cronbach alpha outcome of the pilot study shows that its coefficient exceeds

the standard benchmark of 70%. This indicates high reliability of the questionnaire items.

5. Description of the Instructional Design

This paper presents a blended syllabus for Arabic as a foreign language which strikes a balance between the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) while using an aesthetically appealing and uniquely tailored course website. In the following, the designed blended syllabus is explained using the ADDIE model. Special reference is given to one of the units in the intermediate Arabic module [23].

5.1. Analysis Phase. This phase is concerned with the analysis of four key issues or factors as follows.

5.1.1. The Students. The syllabus is designed for students of Arabic as a foreign language at the undergraduate level at a South African tertiary institution. The syllabus is designed following a progression; elementary Arabic begins at level 1, intermediate Arabic at level 2, and advanced Arabic at level 3.

5.1.2. Instructional Goals. An effective instructional design cannot be produced if there are no clear instructional goals. The key goal of this project is to come up with a blended syllabus that enables undergraduate students at IPSA to learn Arabic for general purposes. To facilitate this, an interactive website must be meticulously designed with the aim of motivating learners and enhancing their language skills. Moreover, the proposed technology-enhanced syllabus should facilitate self-paced learning outside the classroom.

5.1.3. Instructional Analysis. Having identified the goals of the programme, syllabus designers require an action plan for the essential steps that must be followed to achieve instructional goals. This may include the selection of topics, materials, and websites needed for teaching, as well as the learning activities and prototypes to be embedded on the website of the proposed blended course.

5.1.4. Learning Objectives. The blended syllabus under investigation consists of several units. Each unit is divided into various lessons. Each lesson begins with a set of defined learning objectives and outcomes that contribute to the overall objectives of the course, as shown in Figure 5.

5.2. Design. The design phase focused on the conceptual construction of the blended syllabus. Special attention was paid to e-learning ecology (e.g., website and learning management system (LMS)), its features, and how it can be used in the foreign language classroom. In this phase, the syllabus designers focused on three key design elements: learning contents, assessments, and instructional strategy.
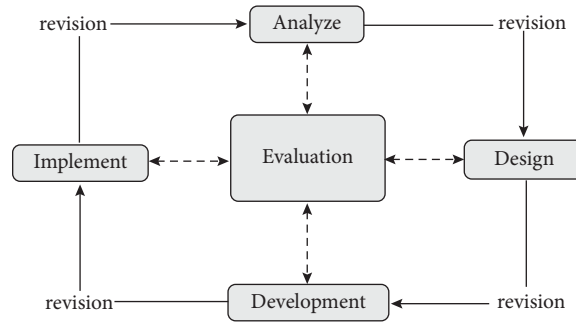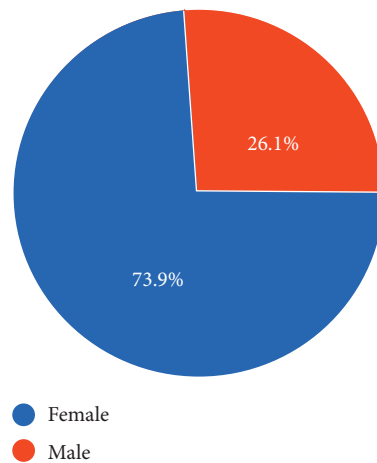
FIGURE 2: ADDIE's instructional design model.

FIGURE 3: Gender of the participants of the study.

5.2.1. Learning Content Design. The content strikes a balance among the four language skills. The texts selected in the content are all authentic general-purpose topics. Undoubtedly, the design of a successful and balanced blended syllabus requires a vibrant learning environment with a media portal that includes a wide variety of contents, interactive videos, narrated PowerPoint videos, screencasts, podcasts, branching scenarios, dialogue simulations, and animations.

5.2.2. Assessment's Design. For the assessment to be effective, both formative and summative assessments are essential. Formative assessment takes place in various steps of the lesson or unit through interactive videos, gamified quizzes, and peer assessments, among others.

5.2.3. Designing the Instructional Strategy. The design of a website that divides the content into short segments in line with the course descriptions and the time of the lectures was initiated as part of this study. The website was divided into five main pages (i.e., units), and each page was further divided into six subpages, segments, or lessons, as shown in Figure 6.

Each unit on the syllabus consists of a reading lesson, a listening lesson, a speaking lesson, and an extensive reading or a reading-for-pleasure lesson. Writing assignments are incorporated into various components.

A Google site was then embedded into the institution's learning management system, namely, NEO LMS. This was to facilitate more effective teaching and management of the learning process, as shown in Figure 7.

Several instructional methods and techniques were employed to achieve the lesson's objectives and learning outcomes including collaborative learning, project-based learning, scenario-based learning (SBL), wikis, discussions, and presentations. A proposal for design and structure was also drafted to guide the subsequent development phase.

5.3. Development Phase. In the development phase, the content assets and methodology that were described in the design phase were created, assembled, and tested. The existing infrastructure at the host institution, including hardware and software required for the development of the blended syllabus, was considered. Although IPSA has a fully equipped multimedia lab and a high-speed, dedicated server with good bandwidth and a resident maintenance team, the aim is to design a blended syllabus that does not require a sophisticated technology such as a dedicated server and a traditional language lab. The syllabus is designed with student accessibility and learner-centredness in mind. That is, materials, including lab-based sessions, can be accessed
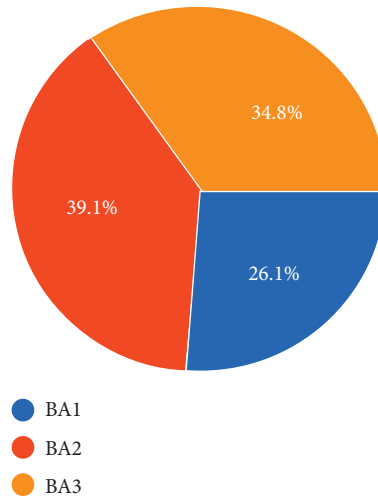
FIGURE 4: Academic levels of the participants.

FIGURE 5: Learning outcomes of a reading lesson about Nelson Mandela [22].

FIGURE 6: Interface of the blended syllabus [22].

anytime and anywhere via the mobile or PC. For this purpose, the syllabus utilizes some web 2.0 applications such as Google Sites, simulation tools, SCORM packages, and the LTI functionality available in most learning management systems. However, for the content to be SCORM or LTI compliant, the materials must be developed in specific formats in advance. Hence, storyboards and similar materials were prepared in an electronic format. Technology-enhanced activities for each unit were developed and integrated directly onto the website. Activities were prepared

Figure 7: Interface of the blended syllabus in NEO LMS.

Table 1: Content and activities in a sample unit.

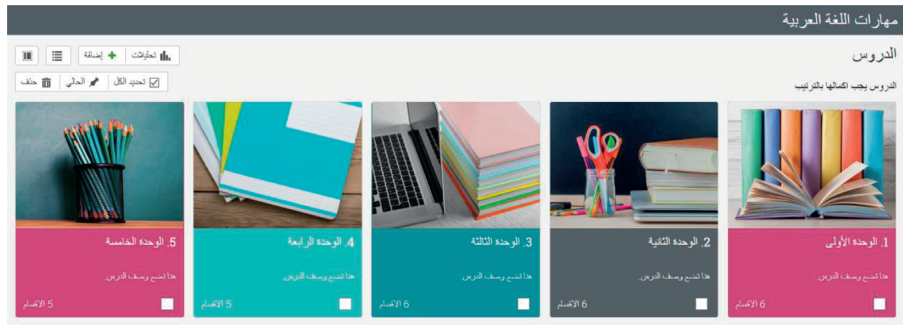| Lesson component	Activity	Offline access
Prelesson	Write two sentences about Mandela (discussion)	
Poem	Reading comprehension (https://multidict.net/cs/4875/mandela0.htm)	
Reading aloud	Watch a recording of the poem	
Dictionary work (vocabulary)	https://multidict.net/cs/4875/mandela1.htm	PowerPoint/SCORM package saved as a zip folder
Grammar (singular vs. plural)	https://multidict.net/cs/4875/Mandela2.htm	
Comprehension	https://multidict.net/cs/4875/mandela3.htm	
Creation	Wiki page about Mandela	

with various web-based tools, and they were tested. All related materials and procedures were also debugged. Table 1 provides an example of the storyboards and activities from a unit on the syllabus.

5.4. Implementation Phase. This stage is concerned with the distribution and delivery of the learning materials to students, namely, the students of Arabic across the three undergraduate levels at IPSA. Before the actual implementation, the virtual learning environment (i.e., the website and NEO LMS) was prepared, the technology and media were previewed and tested, and each lesson was examined closely and thoroughly. All materials were tested to find out whether they function properly and to what extent they are appropriate for the intended audience [24].

The proposed syllabus can be described as a blended presentation and interaction in which students participate in face-to-face sessions in a classroom. Concurrently, they are given online activities for further practice and interaction. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled educators to undertake blending in the form of synchronous and asynchronous activities. There is no single method for the implementation of blended learning in the language classroom; blending may differ even from one lesson to another or from one language skill to another. The blended learning model adopted in the implementation of the proposed syllabus is outlined in Figure 8.

As shown in Figure 8, the model consists of three blocks: teacher-led instruction, online instruction, and a hybrid block for collaborative activities. The latter can be implemented either in a physical classroom or virtually. The teacher-led, face-to-face instruction can be devoted to the delivery of almost any skill. A teacher can, for instance, introduce a reading lesson in the classroom and let students read the text and complete skimming and scanning activities in the classroom. Teacher-led instruction can also be conducted online for intervention purposes. In emergency cases, teacher-led instruction can migrate fully online.

Online instruction can take the form of interactive asynchronous activities that can be completed independently by students. These activities typically target content covered in the classroom and incorporate the four language skills. Examples of these tasks are vocabulary quizzes, interactive activities and videos, gamified tasks, recordings of the reading text, a speech recognition practice, etc.

Collaborative learning can be conducted in a physical classroom for teaching various skills. It can also take place in synchronous sessions. A clear example is the use of breakout rooms in a Zoom class, in which students are divided into small groups or pairs for the purpose of completing assigned exercises. It can also be used for long-term collaborative projects such as digital storytelling, presentations, and translation projects. Table 2 summarizes the tasks and activities that are assigned across the three blocks in a listening and speaking unit.

The syllabus features several interactive activities and resources that have been created in line with e-learning standards such as SCORM and LMS LTI, as stated previously. The content can, therefore, be presented either in a brick-and-mortar classroom or virtually. The proposed syllabus incorporates a myriad of activities that enable instructors to teach all language skills with confidence. Sanako Connect, for example, is used to teach speaking and listening
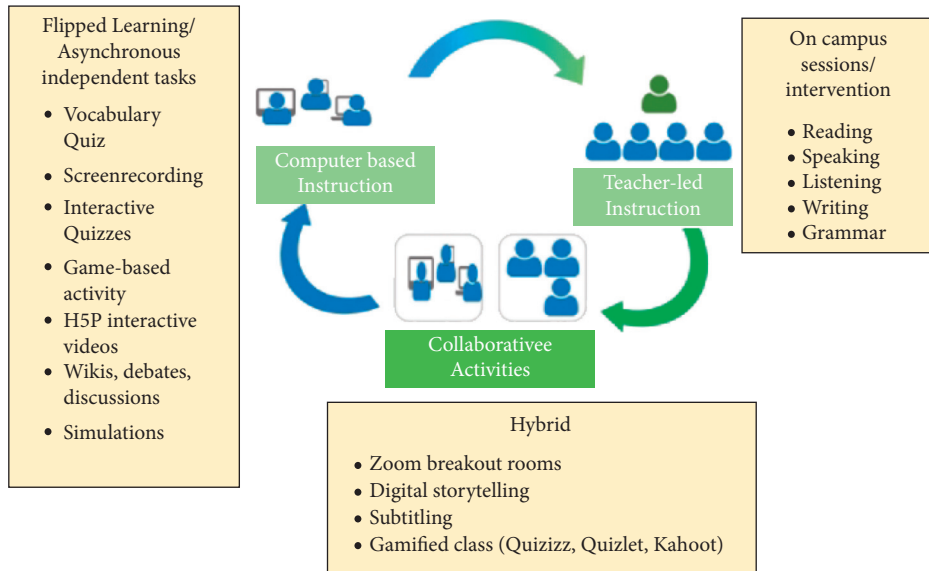
FIGURE 8: Description of the blended learning model.

TABLE 2: Application of the model in a speaking and listening unit.

	Teacher-led instruction	Computer-based instruction	Collaborative activities
Listening	Prelistening	Brainstorming (Padlet)	Online review game
	Listen to/watch a two-minute report	Vocabulary game "collocations"	Subtitling/closed caption of a video
	Learn the meaning of new vocabulary	Interactive activities "multiple-choice, fill in the blanks"	
	Listening comprehension	Word link quiz	
	Use new vocabulary in similar contexts		
Speaking	Dialogue	Interactive tasks	Digital storytelling
	Role-play	Dialogue simulation	Online review game
	Pronunciation/spelling practice	Interactive board/discussion via Sanako Connect	
		Interactive video	

skills in a similar way to how they are taught in a physical language lab. Synchronous sessions via web conferencing tools should be learner-centred to a great extent. Students can complete simple activities, such as spelling practice, by using a collaborative whiteboard or more advanced activities such as a debate via Sanako Connect.

5.5. Evaluation Phase. Evaluation is the final phase in the ADDIE model. Evaluation ensures that the proposed blended syllabus achieves the intended outcome. This phase evaluates materials, media, technological tools, and teaching strategies. Feedback from students and instructors constitutes part and parcel of the evaluation process. Student feedback, in particular, provides an indication about attitudes towards various components of the programme and the challenges students encountered during its implementation. In technology-enhanced blended programmes, learner input is always essential for improving and recalibrating the learning prototype, if necessary.

The evaluation phase also explores and tracks the performance of students in the course. The LMS can, for example, keep track of students who have completed their quizzes and assignments and those who have not yet submitted. A user's log activity can also indicate whether a learner has navigated the content. Statistical tools available in most LMSs enable authorised users such as instructors, tutors, or site owners to view user activity. Figure 9 provides an example of the site usage statistics by one of the students.

6. Findings from the Questionnaire

To investigate the attitudes of the AFL students at IPSA towards the proposed blended syllabus, descriptive statistics including the mean and standard deviations of each item of the questionnaire were calculated. Table 3 shows the students' responses to the items of the first component (i.e., the design and layout).

As the data in Table 3 show, the average for items in the relevant section of the questionnaire ranges from 1.87 to 2.87. This indicates a medium to high level of agreement on all items. The statistics reveal that the participants of this study are satisfied with the design and layout of the blended Arabic language course.

<div dir="rtl">

Thu Jan 28, 2021

📄 Visited #2 (00:03:02) الوحدة الأولى > القراءة الدينية - الدرس الاول: اقرأ

📄 Visited #2 (00:00:04) الوحدة الأولى > الإستماع- الدرس الرابع: مؤتمر التقريب بين المذاهب الإسلامية

📄 Visited #2 (00:00:02) الوحدة الأولى > القراءة المعلوماتية -الدرس الثالث: المولد النبوي الشريف

📄 Visited #2 (00:12:23) الوحدة الأولى > القراءة الأدبية - الدرس الثاني: شعر

Mon Feb 1, 2021

📄 Visited #2 (00:00:07) الوحدة الأولى > القراءة الدينية - الدرس الاول: اقرأ

📄 Visited #2 (00:00:07) الوحدة الأولى > القراءة الأدبية - الدرس الثاني: شعر

Wed Feb 3, 2021

📄 Visited #2 (00:01:04) الوحدة الأولى > القراءة الدينية - الدرس الاول: اقرأ

📄 Visited #2 (00:00:00) الوحدة الأولى > تقويم الوحدة الأولى

📄 Visited #2 (00:00:08) الوحدة الأولى > القراءة والقصص الرافدة- الدرس الخامس: علي في القفص الذهبي

📄 Visited #2 (68:51:34) الوحدة الأولى > القراءة المعلوماتية -الدرس الثالث: المولد النبوي الشريف

📄 Visited #2 (00:03:49) الوحدة الأولى > القراءة الأدبية - الدرس الثاني: شعر

</div>

FIGURE 9: Snapshot of a student's logs and hits.

TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics for students' perceptions towards the syllabus design and layout.

Item	N	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. dev
The designed blended course is well organized	23	26.09	52.17	21.74			1.96	0.71
The course layout is attractive	23	26.09	39.13	30.43	4.35		2.13	0.87
The course is motivating and interesting	23	30.43	43.48	26.09			1.96	0.77
The course enhances the interaction between teachers and learners	23	39.13	34.78	26.09			1.87	0.81
The course gives me enough time to do tasks	23		78.26	13.04	8.70		2.30	0.63
The course considers issues such as slow internet connectivity and access to data	23	8.70	26.09	43.48	13.04	8.70	2.87	1.06
I fully support blended learning but not fully online learning	23	21.74	34.78	34.78	4.35	4.35	2.35	1.03

For the second component of the questionnaire, seven items were created to explore the impact of the proposed syllabus on the enhancement of students' language skills. The results are provided in Table 4.

The data in Table 4 show that the average for items in the relevant section of the questionnaire ranges from 1.87 to 2.26. This also indicates a medium to high level of agreement on all items. This shows that the participants in this study believe that the blended syllabus has enhanced their language skills and linguistic competence.

The third section of the questionnaire deals with the attitudes of the students towards the activities and resources in the blended syllabus. This component includes ten items. Table 5 provides details of the perceptions of students towards the activities and resources of the blended syllabus.

As the data in Table 5 show, the average of items in the relevant section of the questionnaire ranges from 1.57 to 2.35. This also indicates a medium to high level of agreement on all items cited. Thus, the participants of this study appear to have been satisfied with the resources and activities of the blended course.

To answer the second question posed in this study, which was to discover whether there is a relationship between the attitudes of the respondents and their academic level or not, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The results appear in Tables 6 and 7.

The results of the ANOVA test indicate that there is no statistically significant relation at $P \leq 0.05$ between the attitudes of the respondents and their study level. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Significance was found to be 0.993, which is greater than 0.05. Students at all three levels reported similarly positive attitudes towards the programme.

Similarly, an ANOVA to determine if there is a relationship between the attitudes of the respondents and their gender (i.e., male vs. female) was conducted. Tables 8 and 9 provide the results of the ANOVA test.

As the results in Table 9 show, there is a statistically significant relation between the gender of the respondents and their attitudes towards the blended syllabus. Thus, the null hypothesis, which states "there is no relation between the gender of participants and their attitudes towards the blended syllabus," is rejected. The significance was found to be 0.011, which is less than $P \leq 0.05$. The findings show that female respondents reported greater positivity in their attitudes towards the blended syllabus than male students. However, in a small-sized study like this, such a difference may be attributed to the discrepancy in the number of males and females. Out of twenty-three respondents, only seven of them are males. This is insufficient for determining whether female

TABLE 4: Descriptive statistics of responses towards the syllabus and language skills.

Item	N	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. dev
The course enhances my reading skills	23	26.09	47.83	26.09			2.00	0.74
Blended learning makes me socially connected and gives me opportunity to practice my speaking and communication skills	23	21.74	34.78	43.48			2.22	0.80
Online videos provide authentic learning experience and allow me to listen to native speakers	23	34.78	43.48	21.74			1.87	0.76
I found the web-based tools useful for the improvement of my language and life skills	23	13.04	52.17	30.43	4,35		2.26	0.75
Interactive videos improve my listening and speaking skills	23	21.74	60.87	17.39			1.96	0.64
The blended course enhances my writing skills	23	26.09	39.13	34.78			2.09	0.79
The blended course enhances my active participation and learning as well as my creativity	23	17.39	69.57	13.04			1.96	0.56

TABLE 5: Responses towards the activities and resources of the syllabus.

Item	N	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. dev
The course includes various collaborative activities/tasks	23	39.13	43.48	13.04	4.35		1.83	0.83
The tasks are clear	23	13.04	69.57	8.70	8.70		2.13	0.76
Live classrooms via web conferencing make up for face-to-face interactions, and they are highly beneficial	23	26.09	39.13	17.39	17.39		2.26	1.05
Blended learning helps us to think in depth about a subject and to be involved in more discussions and debating activities	23	17.39	30.43	43.48	8.70		2.43	0.90
Discussion forums, wikis, and chat groups help me in learning	23	21.74	52.17	26.09			2.04	0.71
Blended learning allows us to use different computer programs and web applications	23	26.09	73.91				1.74	0.45
Blended learning helps me to be able to apply what I have learned in the future	23	17.39	60.87	17.39	4.35		2.09	0.73
Blended learning facilitates timely support and constructive feedback from both learners and teachers	23	21.74	56.52	17.39	4.35		2.04	0.77
Gamified activities and game-based learning have made learning enjoyable	23	52.17	39.13	8.70			1.57	0.66
Peer review assignments are highly beneficial	23	21.74	39.13	26.09	8.70	4.35	2.35	1.07

TABLE 6: Descriptive statistics of the sample.

						95% confidence interval for mean			
		N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error	Lower bound	Upper bound	Minimum	Maximum
Sum	BA1	6	51.67	13.28	5.42	37.73	65.60	36.00	73.00
	BA2	9	52.33	8.73	2.91	45.62	59.05	32.00	62.00
	BA3	8	51.75	14.02	4.96	40.03	63.47	29.00	67.00
	Total	23	51.96	11.42	2.38	47.02	56.89	29.00	73.00

TABLE 7: ANOVA results for students' responses based on the study level.

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Sum	Between groups	2.12	2	1.06	0.01	0.993
	Within groups	2866.83	20	143.34		
	Total	2868.96	22			

students generally have more positive attitudes towards the blended syllabus than male students. More studies are needed to investigate this correlation.

7. Discussion

The results indicate that the respondents are satisfied with the layout of the designed course. Ultimately, a linear thematic layout consisting of various topics may not be appropriate for teaching Arabic and other foreign languages. The presentation of the syllabus in the form of weekly chronological units, or modules, may be more beneficial and motivating to students. The respondents reported that the blended syllabus is attractive, well designed, and motivating.

Additionally, a blended syllabus may ensure a smoother learning process and greater interaction between students and instructors and allows more time for discussion. It provides students with the opportunity to speak more and to

TABLE 8: Descriptive statistics of the sample.

						95% confidence interval for mean			
		N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error	Lower bound	Upper bound	Minimum	Maximum
Sum	Male	6	42.17	12.95	5.29	28.57	55.76	29.00	62.00
	Female	17	55.41	8.85	2.15	50.86	59.96	36.00	73.00
	Total	23	51.96	11.42	2.38	47.02	56.89	29.00	73.00

TABLE 9: ANOVA results for students' responses based on gender.

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Sum	Between groups	778.01	1	778.01	7.81	0.011
	Within groups	2090.95	21	99.57		
	Total	2868.96	22			

discuss topics they could not in the classroom. The respondents also agreed that the proposed syllabus considers the logistics and limitations of blended and online learning, such as slow connectivity and access to data. Most of the activities in the syllabus are designed in a manner that allows both online and offline access.

The findings of this study have also shown that the blended syllabus enhances linguistic competence and communication skills. In their view, blended learning enhances student reading skills, provides social connections with other students, and provides the opportunity to practice speaking and communication skills. Online videos provide authentic learning experiences and allow students listen to native speakers. The respondents also reported that interactive videos are beneficial for the improvement of listening and speaking skills. The blended course also ensures more time to participate in discussions, debates, and wikis, thus allowing students to practice their speaking and writing skills. The blended course also enhances active participation, learning, and creativity. Furthermore, various web-based tools used in the course not only enhance language skills but also students' digital literacy and ICT skills.

The findings of this study have also shown that students are satisfied with the activities and resources in the blended syllabus. In their view, discussion, wikis, and debate activities encourage them to work collaboratively. The synchronous meetings enrich their learning experience. Students also reported that certain activities stimulate their higher-order thinking, such as critical thinking skills in the target language. Gamified activities are especially favoured by students, who indicated that the game-based activities increase their motivation to learn the content. The blended syllabus also provides students with the opportunity to participate in the assessment process. They reported that peer assessments enhance their confidence and autonomy within the programme, as well as their learning experience. A cursory look at the peer assessments submitted via the LMS shows that students generally provided constructive feedback to their peers. The findings have also shown that the blended syllabus facilitates timely support and constructive feedback from both students and instructors. Additionally, the syllabus familiarizes students with a considerable number of computer and web tools that they can use in the future.

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first of its kind both locally and internationally that attempts to design a blended syllabus for Arabic as a less commonly taught language. The proposed model can be used as it is or with idiosyncratic modifications to design blended or fully online syllabi for teaching languages. This study mainly focuses on the development of accessible, learner-friendly, and interactive materials, as well as the perceptions of students towards blended curricula. However, further study would be required to explore the success of blended syllabi and the perceptions of other stakeholders towards these, including the instructors, tutors, administrators, and parents. In addition, this model could be applied to other less commonly taught languages including French, German, and Latin.

9. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated how instructional design frameworks such as ADDIE may be utilized to construct e-learning and blended courses. This model has been used to design a blended syllabus for teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the South African context. The adoption of this model ensures the design of effective and well-structured blended learning prototypes. The use of well-established instructional design models can help to reduce the haphazard approach in the design of many blended and remote syllabi. Even though the current study focuses on the format of an Arabic course offered in the Department of Arabic Studies at IPSA in South Africa, the proposed blended syllabus is intended to serve as a model for blended learning foreign language courses in the broader South African context and beyond. Moreover, the model can be offered and delivered to students via a user-friendly website, or it can be directly

incorporated into an institution's learning management system such as Moodle, Sakai, NEO, and Canvas.

This study has also investigated the attitudes of three cohorts of students towards a blended syllabus. Findings from the questionnaire have shown that students reported positive attitudes towards the design, activities, and resources, as well as towards its impact on various language skills. This study has also concluded that there is no statistically significant relation between the attitudes of students and their academic level. The study has, however, found that there is a statistically significant relation at $P \leq 0.05$ between the attitudes of students towards the syllabus and their gender. That is, female students were found to have more positive attitudes towards the syllabus than male students. In a small study like this, such a finding is not necessarily representative of a large trend. The fact that the female students who participated in the study outnumbered male participants further limits the possibility of a correlation.

Data Availability

The data are collected from the learners via a cloud-based online survey tool. The data are included within the article.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

References

[1] UNESCO, *The Future of Mobile Learning*, UNESCO, London, UK, 2017, http://www.waccglobal.org/articles/the-future-of-mobile-learning.

[2] Ö. Delialioğlu and Z. Yildirim, "Students' perceptions on effective dimensions of interactive learning in a blended learning environment," *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 133–146, 2007.

[3] R. Kupetz and B. Ziegenmeyer, "Blended learning in a teacher training course: integrated interactive e-learning and contact learning," *ReCALL*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 179–196, 2005.

[4] M. Oliver and K. Trigwell, "Can "blended learning" Be redeemed?" *E-Learning and Digital Media*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 17–26, 2005.

[5] S. Winstead, *6 Disadvantages of Blended Learning You Have to Cope with' My E-Learning World (Blog)*, 2020, https://myelearningworld.com/6-disadvantages-of-blended-learning/.

[6] M. Cleveland-Innes and D. Wilton, *Guide to Blended Learning*, Commonwealth of Learning, Metro Vancouver, Canada, 2018.

[7] J. Hannon and C. Macken, *Blended and Online Curriculum Design Toolkit*, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, 2014, https://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/602178/Blended-learning-Toolkit-v4.pdf.

[8] H. Mudra, "Blended English language learning as a course in an Indonesian context: an exploration toward EFL learners' perceptions," *Journal of Foreign Language Education and Technology*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 28–51, 2018.

[9] Na Wang, J. Chen, M. Tai, and J. Zhang, "Blended learning for Chinese university EFL learners: learning environment and learner perceptions," *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, vol. 27, 2019.

[10] M.-F. Narcy-Combes, J. McAllister, and J. McAllister, "Evaluation of a blended language learning environment in a French university and its effects on second language acquisition," *ASp*, vol. 59, no. 59, pp. 115–138, 2011.

[11] A. Andujar and F. Zahra Nadif, "Evaluating an inclusive blended learning environment in EFL: a flipped approach," *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, vol. 30, 2020.

[12] S. Manowong, "Incorporating online tools to promote English reading for EFL learners: an action research study," *Pasaa Paritat Journal*, vol. 32, pp. 98–124, 2017.

[13] S. Bin-Tahir, S. Zulfiqar, N. Mufidah, M. Irfan Islamy, and I. Rofiki, "Blended learning approach in Arabic teaching for non-native speaker students," in *Proceedings of the Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Quran and Hadith Studies Information Technology and Media in Conjunction with the 1st International Conference on Islam, Science and Technology, ICONQUHAS & ICONIS*, Bandung, Indonesia, October 2020.

[14] A. Alasraj and H. Alharbi, "The effectiveness of blended learning in teaching Arabic as a second language," *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 13–17, 2014.

[15] M. Yassin, "Blended learning for teaching Arabic in Singapore–listemaa3.com as an example," *Proceedings of CLaSIC*, vol. 428–442, 2016, https://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/cls/CLaSIC/clasic2016/PROCEEDINGS/yassin_muzzammil.pdf.

[16] S. M. AlNajdi, "Design a blended learning environment to teach Arabic Alphabet for non-Arabic speaker children based on ASSURE model," *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 128–132, 2018.

[17] M. T. A. Ghani and W. Daud, "Adaptation of ADDIE instructional model in developing educational website for language learning," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 7–16, 2018.

[18] T. A. S. Mohammed, B. Al-Sowaidi, and F. Banda, "Towards a technology-enhanced blended approach for teaching Arabic for shari'ah purposes (ASP) in the light of the South African national Qualifications framework," *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 1–9, 2021.

[19] D. A. Shechter, "Blended learning course format on Moodle: a model for beginner level Foreign Language courses in higher education," *Journal of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages*, vol. 19, pp. 183–209, 2016.

[20] H.. N. Auji, "The effectiveness of animated transition in qur'anic braille courseware design," Ph. D thesis, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjung Malim, Malaysia, 2016.

[21] S. Noordin, W. Fatimah Wan Ahmad, Y. Kwang Hooi, F. Wan Ahmad Wan, and Y. Kwang Hooi, "Study of effectiveness and usability of multimedia courseware integrated with 3-dimensional model as a teaching aid," *International Journal of Computer Application*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 20–27, 2011.

[22] S. B. M. Saber and M. T. Abdul-Ghani, "The design of computer courseware in teaching Arabic language via website for students with the specialization," *Journal of Linguistic and Literary Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2016.

[23] T. Mohammed, Intermediate Arabic for General Purposes: A technology-enhanced course, 2018, http://bit.ly/2PIPCh6.

[24] R. A. Reiser and J. V. Dempsey, *Trends and Issues in Instructional Design and Technology*, Pearson, Boston, MA, USA, 2012.