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Shakespeare in Blended Learning Mode: Examining Effectiveness at the British University in Egypt (BUE) during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

Educational institutions aim to offer appropriate teaching environments that would enhance the learning process. They have come to embrace various tools that enable creating such learning environments, many of which are technological and are no longer limited to the institutions' physical premises. This led to the rise of what has come to be known as Blended Learning (BL): learning strategies that combine face-to-face with virtual instruction modes. The focus of such an atmosphere would be targeted towards a student-centred approach that maximises teaching effectiveness by employing relevant and effective learning techniques.

The COVID-19 pandemic, with its forced lockdown of educational institutions, challenged face-to-face learning environments and contributed greatly to the adoption of BL approaches. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of a BL model applied in an undergraduate Shakespeare module at the British University in Egypt (BUE). To address the module Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), the process employed a Flipped-Enriched Virtual Model involving instructor-student interaction in face-to-face and virtual modes in which the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) was utilized as the medium for the online Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The effectiveness of the model was assessed by interviewing students for their feedback. The findings of this study support that the Flipped-Enriched Virtual Model could benefit educators as best practice to achieve module ILOs within and beyond a literature module and in different teaching contexts.

Keywords: *Blended Learning (BL), British University in Egypt (BUE), COVID-19, flipped-enriched virtual model, Shakespeare*

1. Introduction

Generally defined as the merge between onsite and offsite or remote teaching modes, Blended Learning (BL) has become paramount in the twenty-first century. Frequently used nowadays, BL emerged as a new technology at the turn of the century. It links time and space to provide students with an individualized approach that allows them to control their own learning process, not only at their own pace, but also involving their choice of path, time and location (Bryan & Volchenkova, 2016, p.24). It likewise allows educators to develop teaching material and select among various interactive techniques that would best suit this kind of learning environment and their students' needs.

Since its initial emergence, the definition of BL has been substantially developed at the hands of theorists, educators and practitioners in the field. From perspectives of entirely virtual classes to a mix of virtual and face-to-face instruction, it has currently reached its mostly practiced form as a blend of real time face-to-face and virtual modes. The most influential definitions in the field to date – Graham's, Krasnova's as well as Horn and Staker's – reflect this. Graham stated that 'Blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction' (Graham, 2006, p.28). Krasnova (2015) maintained that BL is 'a method of teaching that combines the most effective face-to-face teaching techniques and online interactive collaboration, both constituting a system that functions in constant correlation and forms a single whole' (p.401). Similarly, Horn and Staker (2014) expounded that 'Blended Learning is the strategic combination of online and face-to-face learning with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or place' (p.34). Thus, the approach of this paper relies on these definitions that incorporate both modes, online or virtual learning and face-to-face physical classroom interaction between instructor and students, in a combination that creates space for students' own individualized learning environments. Through applying the selected BL model and by evaluating the achievement of the module ILOs alongside student feedback, the authors aim to assess how far the integration of the applied specific BL model succeeded in achieving the educational effectiveness. The extent of this model's effectiveness could benefit educators using BL in different teaching contexts.

2. Why Use Blended Learning?

There are various reasons why educational processes currently tend to adopt BL approaches. Okaz (2015) states how digital technology has become a given fact in today's world, especially within workplaces. She recommends what Garrison & Kanuka (2004) proposed, that technological tools can help create a more 'interactive and communicative learning environment and provide meaningful learning outcomes' (Okaz, 2015, p.600); so, accordingly, educational institutions should adopt technology both to prepare their graduates for thriving in technology-reliant workplaces and to enhance their own educational processes.

The main factor that motivates the employment of BL is the rapid development in virtual technologies – in and beyond the educational field – since the turn of the millennium. The rise of E-learning systems such as Moodle, Blackboard, Canvas and Sakai, videoconferencing technologies like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet together with file sharing services as OneDrive, Google Drive and Dropbox, have all contributed to providing a wealth of technological tools. The swift adoption of such technologies in educational institutions has allowed, not only enhancing the educational process *within* the confines of the classroom, but more importantly, for more student-empowerment and lesser restriction of space or time. E-learning systems, which act as dissemination centres of resources, announcements, written and recorded lectures and other course materials, provide an unprecedented ease of access and communication off campus. Instructor-student communication is facilitated and accelerated. Instructors can upload material for students to review, read or watch before class, customize testing strategies, upload assessments with clear instructions and guidelines, provide links to reliable online material and the like. Videoconferencing technologies allow for holding online forums, written or live discussions and for recording offline lectures and uploading them to the E-learning system. Such flexibility was unheard of before the advent of these virtual technologies that now appear to be changing the face of education. The nature of such changes, however, became critically imperative on the worldwide scene only with the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 (Allan, 2007, pp. 54-55).

COVID-19 has been declared as 'a serious global health threat' (Arendt et al., 2020; *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2020). It is a highly infectious disease caused by a novel coronavirus first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-About COVID-19*, 2020), Highly contagious, the disease spreads via respiratory droplets transmitted through human contact, and surfaces that come within range of such droplets. For many who became infected, COVID-19 proved fatal or at least destructive of various body organs. To guard against its spread, experts recommended, and in many cases enforced, a social distancing of 1 meter (3 feet) between individuals, continuous sanitization, the wearing of face masks and the physical closure of non-essential services for prolonged periods of time (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19, 2020). These included undergraduate and postgraduate colleges and universities in most countries, and schools in some cases.

The pandemic-induced lockdowns thus urged educators worldwide to anxiously restructure their teaching strategies in adapting to the situation, and the urgent need to integrate virtual modes in educational modules reached unparalleled heights. Initially, with the lockdowns in several countries, the dire need for an entire online teaching environment off-campus emerged. With the apparent decline of the pandemic's first wave and the attempts at a gradual recommencement of normal life, alongside the preliminary return to face-to-face instruction, BL became indispensable. It provided a means for the implementation of both on and off campus teaching strategies for the maximum benefit of the students. It is the BL strategy implemented in such a semester that this paper studies in detail.

3. Objectives of Applying Blended Learning Approaches

The benefits of applying a BL strategy are numerous. Its objectives enable the use of suitable methods in communicating with students and addressing a module's Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). One major objective is making possible the integration of different approaches. The numerous BL models provide varying degrees of integrating technology within face-to-face teaching modes. Allan (2007) elucidates that the learning environment that comprises face-to-face and virtual modes contributes to the learning programme's enhanced effectiveness. A learning environment that integrates a physical social interaction of face-to-face classes, that allows space for pair or group work activities alongside a relevant space for personalized individual online learning process through a user-friendly E-learning tool motivates learners and provides a fruitful learning environment (pp. 30-44).

This integration is also one of synchronous and asynchronous teaching tools. Synchronous teaching provides space for 'face-to-face interaction' between instructors and students, which has been found to positively impact the learning process (Akkoyunlu, & Soyulu, 2008, p.183). Asynchronous teaching – which relies on technological tools – provides the learning process ample space to continue beyond the campus premises through virtual communication, to review recorded lectures, to engage in written forum discussions and other asynchronous activities. Thus, instructors and students are no longer bound by their total physical presence on campus. Such a blend of face-to-face teaching with E-learning through synchronous and asynchronous tools is a positive strategy that increases the success of student learning to a great extent.

Another core BL objective is enabling the creation of student-centred rather than teacher-centred pedagogical approaches. Teacher-centred pedagogies are learning environments that rely greatly upon instructors and the dissemination of predetermined knowledge. The focus is on reproducing knowledge, on set testing techniques and on rigid measurement criteria. The learning environment consists of structured didactical lectures, various exercises and tests intended to ensure that students have learnt certain predetermined chunks of information. Such environments provide students little agency, whether concerning the choice of the material to be learnt or the method by which to approach the material. The last decade, however, witnessed a rise in research on student-centred pedagogies that view the student as an

active participant in the learning process. Beyond encouraging students to process information gained from texts and interactions within and beyond the classroom such as class discussions, group projects and other techniques, they open a space for that information to interact with and inform the students' own knowledge structures. Student-centred pedagogies thus pave the way for a greater appreciation of diverse learning approaches and emphasize empowering students' learning experience. These socially oriented learning approaches have gained popularity and become more applicable in various educational modules worldwide (Allan, 2007, p. 48).

It is worth noting that BL, as a combination of face-to-face and virtual instruction (Graham, 2006, p. 28) can support both teacher-centred and student-centred approaches. The ultimate 'blend' of face-to-face and virtual tools in a specific module depend on numerous factors like the instructor's vision for its intended learning objectives and the accessibility of technological tools within the educational institution (Stein & Graham, 2020, p. 21). For example, E-learning systems can be utilized for the asynchronous dissemination of educational materials, administrative announcements, virtual testing and the like, which support a teacher-centred approach. Other features of E-learning systems such as wikis and discussion forums would provide the technological infrastructure for a more interactive and participatory student-centred learning experience. Though a module's use of BL does not automatically imply a student-centred approach, the development of BL techniques has opened novel avenues for it, especially in its ease and speed of asynchronous communication and access to information.

A main anchor of student-centred learning approaches is its prioritizing of and adapting to students' individual learning styles. Various theories and typologies of diverse learning styles have emerged, demonstrating how students approach the learning process differently and how their diverse personalities respond to the tangible learning environment they find themselves in. In attempting to adapt to these differences, the use of BL techniques opens a remarkable flexibility to instructors. As Singh (2003) puts it, 'having a mixture of students with different learning preferences and styles necessitates using multiple modalities for learning in order to deliver the right content in the right form' (as cited in Okaz, 2015, p. 601). According to Akkoyunlu and Soylu's (2008) research on student perceptions of a blended learning module, students differed in preferring face-to-face interactions with instructors and peers, and in preferring to work alone or in groups according to their personal learning styles. BL offers a variety of tools to instructors by which they can address such different preferences (p. 188). Wishing to teach via assigning group projects, for instance, instructors can combine face-to-face instruction with a virtual learning environment; one that gives students the tools to research information online, enhances them to collaborate on thinking through their knowledge as well as structure coherent presentations and discussions.

As such, BL techniques give instructors the opportunity to structure the learning process in a manner that encourages students to assume agency over their learning processes. This creates space for students to maximize their productivity and respond creatively to the knowledge they receive, given their different learning preferences. To illustrate, certain students may be able to express their thoughts in speech and others in writing, especially non-native speakers of the language of instruction. By combining face-to-face classes with virtual discussion forums, an instructor can offer space for oral discussion and for written comments (Stein & Graham, 2020, p. 48). The integration of both tools in this case grants the instructor the opportunity to maximize student participation and empowers students to approach the material and discussion in their own unique styles.

The final educational BL objective to be discussed here is enabling the creation of different channels for giving and receiving feedback. Feedback is much more than an evaluation of students' work against a defined benchmark; it is a vital principle that constitutes their 'learning futures'. Eraut (2006) emphasizes that their 'very sense of professional identity, is shaped by the nature of the feedback they receive' (p. 12); it determines how students interact with the content of the module, the teacher and their peers. Different types of feedback assist students in their learning experience, whether formative, summative, formal or informal, generic or individual. While traditional feedback focuses on instructor comments to students, more recent research and practice considers feedback a constructive dialogue between both parties. The success of such feedback, however, becomes highly dependent on the communication medium: a very valid BL concern, as feedback can take place either virtually or face-to-face in BL approaches.

4. Models of Blended Learning

According to Figure 1, there are four main models of BL. They are identified as Rotation, Flex, A La Carte, and Enriched Virtual (Beaver et al., 2015; Blended Learning Models, 2021).

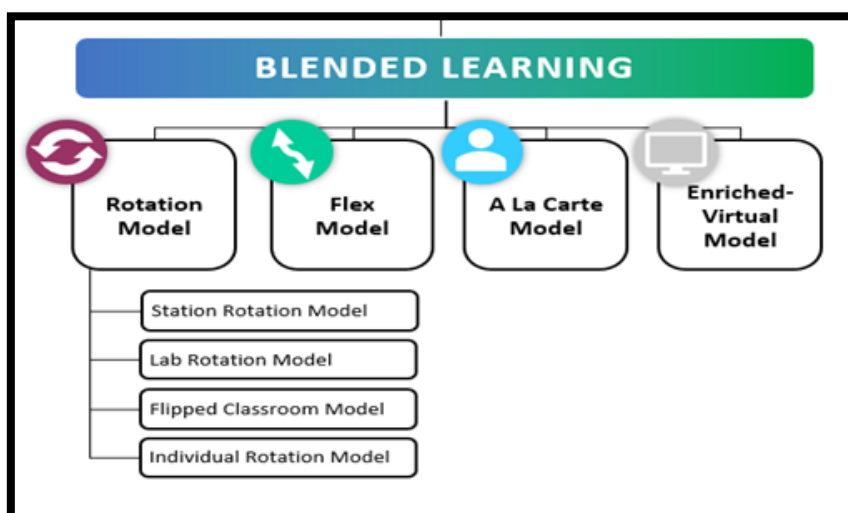


Figure 1: The four models of BL
(Innosight Institute 2012 as cited in *Models of Blended Learning*, 2017)

The main goal of these four BL models targets students' benefit, and their different implementations or diverse patterns address and adapt to various contexts in order to eventually meet students' needs. For example, students can learn completely online in the Flex Model whereas in the A La Carte, they can choose to blend their courses and take some entirely online ones and others offline. The Rotation model enables students to alternate between online and offline, from performing one task to another in 'stations', in a 'lab', online in the individual rotation using software algorithms or in a Flipped Mode where they perform assigned tasks at home and class time is used for implementation (Blended Learning Models, 2021).

5. Shakespeare Module at the BUE

The BUE Shakespeare module studied in this paper is offered to students in their second year after preparatory foundation in the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The module aims at introducing students to the drama of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) as a landmark in the history of English literature. It provides an in-depth analysis of a selection of his plays as histories, comedies and tragedies that expose them to his timeless human themes, language, techniques and great skill in characterization through which they learn to appreciate the richness of his canon.

The module has several ILOs; these include learning and understanding Shakespearean terms and concepts and by comprehending them, students can grasp the contextual meaning of his words. Learning how to conduct a critical textual analysis is another crucial ILO as a subject specific cognitive skill; it allows them to focus on the analysis of the text as well as develop the skill of evaluating it. The third main ILO is acquiring a practical skill through a Shakespearean scene performance. It assists them in developing teamwork collaboration and time management. Related to that is the fourth ILO which aims to enhance students' ability in orally and coherently expressing ideas.

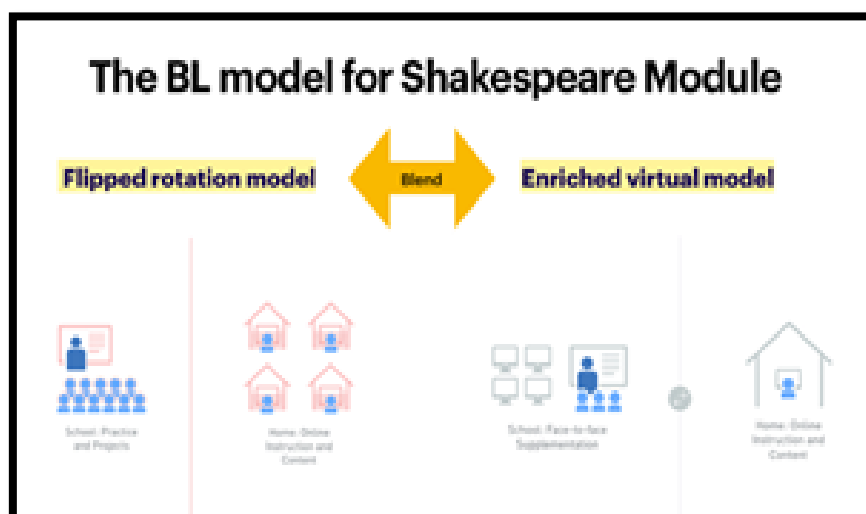


Figure 2: BL model for Shakespeare module
(Adapted from: *Blended Learning Models*, 2021)

The two main key factors in selecting the most suitable BL model are achieving a module's ILOs and addressing students' needs. Therefore, the various levels of students' engagement should be determined prior to the choice of model in designing the module, such that it would integrate students' interaction with the content, instructor and other students. Furthermore, it should consider students' learning pace and promote different modes of feedback to enhance the learning experience.

Since the Shakespeare module requires students to read and examine a myriad of sources prior to class attendance as well as post-class readings and tasks, the Flipped Mode comes as a natural practice. However, the emergence of COVID-19 demanded a supplementary adjustment to adapt to the situation, since that mode became insufficient on its own; because it requires frequent face-to-face presence, which was no longer feasible with the pandemic. As the Enriched Virtual model 'allows students to complete the majority of coursework online at home or outside of school but attend school for required face-to-face learning sessions with a teacher' (Blended Learning Models, 2021), it was merged with the Flipped mode. As a result, classes shifted online, and students came to campus only once per week for guided discussions to ensure their understanding and to monitor group projects. Therefore, as the module could not be entirely shifted either online or face to face, a blend of both the Flipped Rotation and Enriched Virtual models was created to suit the needs of the students studying it as described in figure 2.

6. Implementation

The Flipped-Enriched Virtual Model employed in this Shakespeare module has been designed to maximize the students' learning experience and achieve the module ILOs. Table 1 summarizes the connections between the interactive activities and the ILOs intended to be accomplished.

Activity	BL tool	ILO	Description
Globe Theatre Terms Shakespearean vocabulary jam	Padlet / Globe Theatre application	Understanding Shakespearean terms and concepts	Collaborative (Synchronous) (Asynchronous)
Characters scorecard	Scorecard	Critical textual analysis	Collaborative (Synchronous)
Student character reflection	Flipgrid forum	The lucid oral expression of ideas	(Individual) (Asynchronous)
King Lear character board	Miro	Key themes and characters	Collaborative (Synchronous)
Role Play Performance	Role play	Performing a Shakespearean role play	Project-based

Table 1: Implemented Flipped-Enriched Virtual Model per ILO

6.1. Moodle Learning Management System (LMS)*

In designing the BL module, using a platform to facilitate the student-teacher interaction becomes a requisite. Many educational institutions nowadays employ the Moodle LMS for various purposes. It is used to disseminate material, instructor-student communications, recorded lectures, and hold discussion forums. Moodle provides 'ready-made spaces' (Stein & Graham, 2020, p.21) or an online medium that complements the online sessions; it helps to organize assorted course material and make them accessible to students as also illustrated by Zhang & Zhong (2018). Teachers will upload network teaching resources that can be utilized or consulted, including content presentation, explained education resources, exam questions and test papers for teaching evaluation, bibliographic index for expanding learning non face-to-face teaching (home, office, lecture room) guarantee students' learning activities. Besides, teachers can design some teaching activities through referring to designed course objectives, course contents, and presentation types according to the teaching progress (p.3).

Additionally, LMS embeds a wide range of tools used specifically for BL to enhance communication and collaboration via discussion forums and announcements, alongside accessing feedback tools such as Turnitin to make the learning process more user-friendly. By hosting a variety of materials and tools, Moodle gears students towards becoming independent learners by implementing 'habits and practices' that will eventually allow them 'to grow and thrive within and beyond the boundaries of the classroom' (Stein & Graham, 2020, p.22). Therefore, LMS was a primary vehicle in the utilization of a BL model in the Shakespeare module. Since in the Enriched Virtual model the face-to-face interaction is dedicated for discussions, the course material was made accessible to students for E-learning support. The Flipped Rotation Model was thus structured within the module's Moodle page to guide students' rotation, helping them to move smoothly from pre-class materials to their online/offline class and, finally, guiding them towards their post-class tasks to conclude and reinforce what they have learned. It also enabled sharing objectives and discussion material during class. Moreover, the external sources and links provided helped students enrich and intensify their experience by exploring other learning resources. The BL model thus utilized Moodle with other technological tools that aided the learning process and adapted to students' learning styles.

6.2. Designing Activities (Synchronous and Asynchronous)

The process of creating a successful interactive module in BL mode is not solely determined by how far it serves the ILOs for the designed module or even the amount of technology-based teaching involved in the process. To attain this

goal, merging synchronous and asynchronous activities within the BL model itself improves and supports students' learning. Stein and Graham (2020) define asynchronous activities as online tasks that students can perform at their own pace 'without ... having to be in the same place at the same time' (p.19). This ensures flexibility and gives them time to process what they have learned, whereas synchronous ones are carried out in real time on-site or during online classes or live chats to trigger enthusiasm, enhance teamwork and increase student engagement. Consequently, the activities in the module were designed to encourage students to participate in class online/offline, to monitor their understanding of the module and give them feedback, as well as encourage both collaboration and scaffold students' independent learning. Following are examples of the utilized activities.

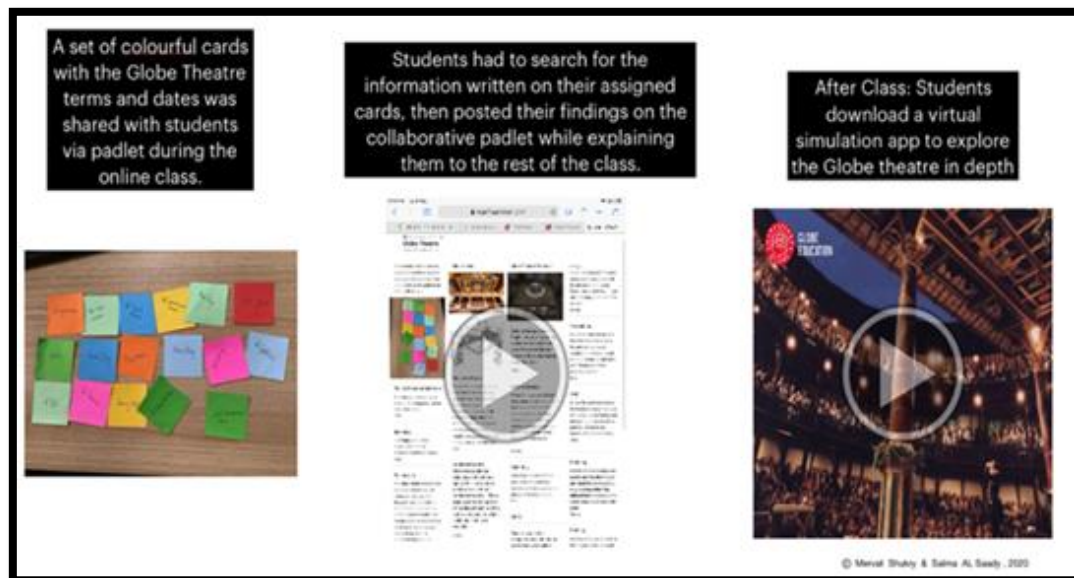


Figure 3: Globe Theatre - Padlet Activity

6.2.1. Globe Theatre Activity

The aim of the activity is to introduce students to terms related to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. The tools used include the Padlet collaborative application and Shakespeare's Globe virtual reality simulation application. A set of colorful cards with the Globe Theatre terms and dates was shared with students via Padlet during the online class on Microsoft Teams. Students were instructed to look for the information written on their assigned cards within an allocated time, then post their findings on the collaborative Padlet while explaining them to the rest of the class. The Padlet tool helped students work collaboratively in sharing their findings on the activity and geared them up for the online class discussion. Following the class, they downloaded the simulation Augmented Reality application which allowed them to explore Shakespeare's Globe theatre itself in virtual reality mode, thus working both synchronously in class and asynchronously. Studies have shown that using Augmented Reality technology in education helps students bring together the concepts they have learned to the real world. Therefore, AR helps students to visualize them since, as Tekederea and Gökera (2016) state, they can 'interact with virtual and real objects, ensuring learning by doing and learning by experience, and increasing the attention and motivation', thus guaranteeing their understanding since 'more senses are involved within the learning process' (p. 9470). This, in itself, engages students actively in the process of learning.

6.2.2. Character Scorecard Activity

SHAKESPEARE SCORECARD

Keep track of the action in *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS* like you would in a baseball game! Use the chart below to score the major actions of the characters during the performance. Adapted from *Shakespeare for Dummies* by CSC's Artistic Director John Doyle.

♥	Falls in love	!	Captured	A	Arrested
+	Reunited with long-lost kin	🔑	Escapes	-	Appears in scene
?	Mistaken for someone else	⚔️	Challenges to a duel	*	Famous quote

ACT	1		2		3		4				5
SCENE	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	4	1
Egeon of Syracuse											
Duke of Ephesus											
Antipholus of Syracuse											
Dromio of Syracuse											
Dromio of Ephesus											
Adriana											
Luciana											
Antipholus of Ephesus											
Angelo											
Balthasar											
Courtesan											
Pinch											
Emilia											

Figure 3: Scorecard Activity on the Comedy of Errors (Classicstage.Org, 2021, P. 27)

Generally, it is a challenge to follow the plot when the play has many characters and subplots. As the face-to-face class aims to follow up on students' understanding of the plays, the character scorecard activity is implemented and used to help them keep track of the plot and characters throughout *The Comedy of Errors*. In this activity, students were divided into groups and seated at round tables in the classroom. Each group was assigned certain characters. Using their textbooks, they traced what happens to the character(s) throughout the play and draw symbols next to them on the scorecard. This encourages students to refer back to the text and search for the relevant information while, at the same time, assists the teacher in facilitating their understanding and providing instant feedback.

6.2.3. Student Character Reflection

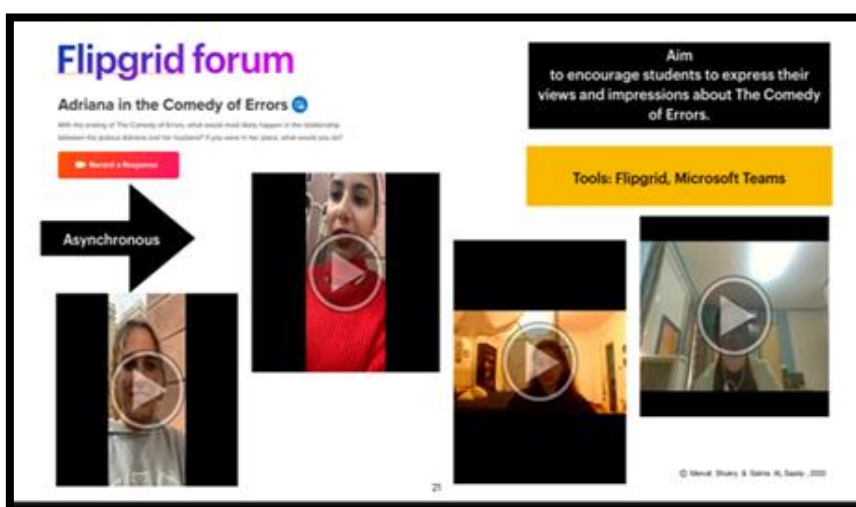


Figure 4: Flipgrid Forum- Adriana in the Comedy of Errors

Flipgrid is a platform designed for video discussions where teachers can post questions or topics that students can respond to by recording a short video. As one of the ILOs is enhancing students to express their ideas orally and clearly, the instructors created the Flipgrid activity and integrated it as an asynchronous platform encouraging them to share their insights about the posted topic.

In this activity, students expressed their own views and impressions about the characters. They were required to respond orally to a question posted on Flipgrid about one of the major characters in *The Comedy of Errors*. McClurg and Andrews (2016) perceive that Flipgrid 'promote[s] students verbal reflective development' (p.1) as it allows students to voice their perspectives via video responses. This in turn 'increase[s] instructor awareness of student understanding of course concepts' (p.1). Moreover, it raises the engagement of those students who usually 'sit back' and refrain from participation in class discussions (Stoszowski, 2018, p. 2).

6.2.4. Vocabulary Jam Activity

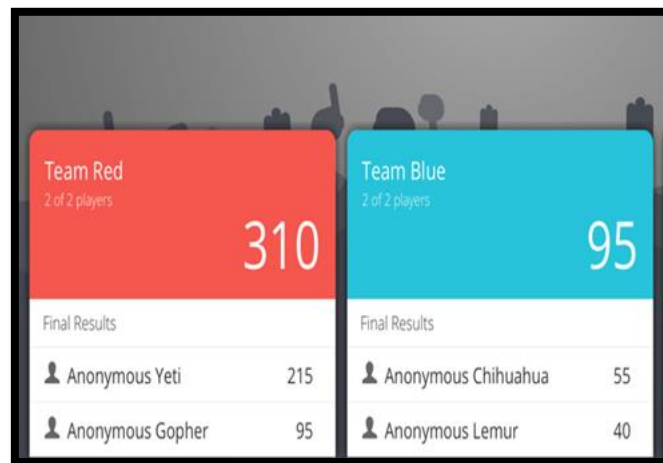


Figure 5: Vocabulary Jam Colour Teams
(*The Comedy of Errors: Vocabulary.com, 2021*)

Despite its benefits of convenience and flexibility, one of the major setbacks of offsite classes is the difficulty of maintaining students' engagement since, as mentioned before, some students feel isolated and demotivated while attending an online class, so using Vocabulary Jam fits in well to address different learning styles. It is a game-based synchronous activity that ignites enthusiasm since students compete against each other. The activity was used to test students about Shakespearean language. A joining key was shared with students during class via Microsoft Teams and different teams competed against each other within a predetermined time period, announcing the winning team before the end of the class.

Reading Shakespearean vocabulary is quite challenging, and students usually feel disconnected from his language, so this jam activity helps them learn Shakespearean words and expressions in a modern context, bringing them closer to the meaning. Furthermore, the game-based approach which uses elements such as 'images, sounds, texts, kinesthetic manipulation... a rapid pace, a random selection, different roles, presence of rivals and rewards' helps students recall what they have learned, increases their motivation and 'stimulate[s] active participation' (Tokarieva et al., 2019 p.80).

6.2.5. Character Board

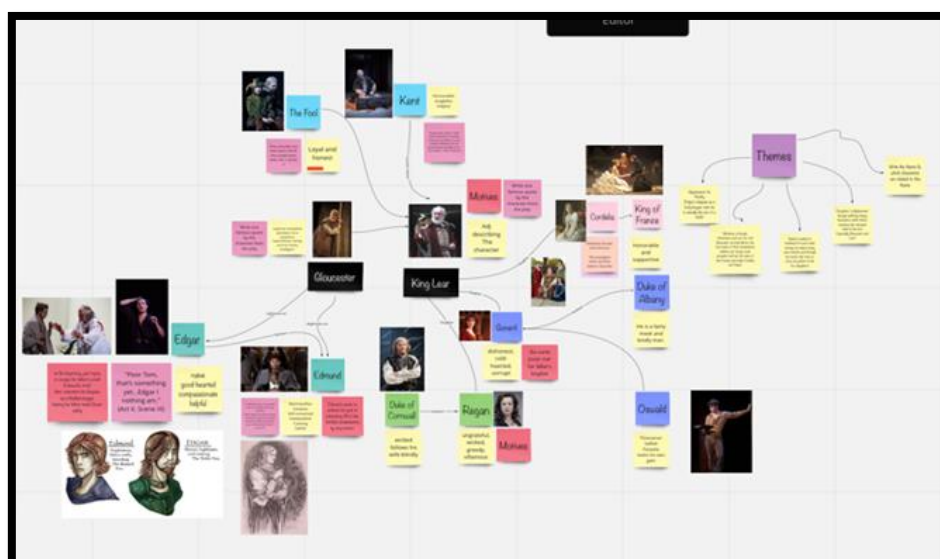


Figure 6: Miro King Lear Collaborative Activity

This collaborative board activity is both synchronous and asynchronous, designed to highlight the main themes and characters in *King Lear*. The module instructors have, therefore, created a board via Miro application for brainstorming and invited students during class to log in using their university emails. Giving them a time duration, they write down their ideas about characters, their role and relationships with other characters and themes. This activity aims to give students a panoramic view of the play and encourages them to brainstorm ideas together, which significantly deepens their understanding of it. Furthermore, they can add pictures, comments and other media that makes their ideas more vivid and boosts their motivation, especially when they see their colleagues also at work. Using Miro helps the teacher to monitor their activity, view them in action, give them immediate feedback and identify the contribution of each student. As the play progresses, students can still access the board to add more details at their own pace.

6.3. Role Play Performance (Oral Test)

The third ILO of the Shakespeare module involves a project-based group role-play performance of a scene that the students select from one of the studied plays throughout the semester. The students are assessed on their language (in terms of speech and pronunciation), their tone and intonation, their preparedness, levels of cooperation as a group and keeping to their allotted time during the performance. The aim of this activity is to measure students' ability to collaborate in performing a Shakespearean scene by expressing ideas clearly, logically and fluently, thus revealing their level of comprehension. This is applied through the employment of videotaping and editing through iMovie application, and the Gibbs Reflective Cycle. Introduced by Graham Gibbs in his 1988 book *Learning by Doing, A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*, the Gibbs Reflective Cycle integrates six steps (description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan) within the learning process (p.50). In this module, it is employed as a technique to encourage students to provide thoughtful and critical reflections on the literary characters they study

Students form groups of two to three and select a scene to perform from one of the plays studied in the module. Following their role-play, they participate in a 'reflective talk' in which they remark and give their observations on the characters they played, while receiving guidance on performance rehearsals from instructors and peers. Following the stages of the Gibb's reflective cycle, they analyze the character role they performed. The performance is instantly followed by feedback on the character, language fluency and Shakespeare's characterization.



Figure 8: Role-play Performance
(Katherina and Petruchio in the *Taming of the Shrew*)

6.4. Giving Feedback

Nowadays, computer-based and technology-based feedback is becoming more predominant and can boast several benefits. Being asynchronous and not bound to classroom timings, it affords the students and instructor more time to discuss the students' progress. Beyond face-to-face classroom discussions, instructor and student can communicate via the E-learning system announcements and emails. Instructors can record and upload individual verbal feedback for each student and discussions can occur via video conference technology. Such a variety of utilized tools provides more flexibility as students can receive feedback on and off campus as Chen et al., (2018) exemplify, 'where it is most convenient ... a dorm room, on-campus common study space, or Starbucks, for that matter' (p.60). These platforms promote 'self-regulated' learning since it develops 'metacognitive skills such as time management, goal setting, and self-monitoring' (p.63).

Feedback reaches its utmost effectiveness when tailored to fit seamlessly into the BL model used in the module. For this purpose, four tools were used for feedback with a differentiated role for each. Generic feedback per written assignment was uploaded on Moodle LMS then shared and discussed in class. For the detailed feedback on formative assessments, Turnitin proved to be effective. As a plagiarism detecting tool, it assists students in endorsing academic honesty; for through the option of resubmitting their assignments till the due date and viewing their similarity index, they could further develop their paraphrasing and summarizing skills. Besides, the grade mark feature allows teachers to use the embedded quick marks and insert them in the paper, in addition to writing and recording comments. Such a process saves time and gives students thorough feedback. Moreover, the uploaded rubric with its detailed descriptors helps them

assess and refine their own ideas because it 'allows students to see the breakdown of sub-categories and note how the grade was derived' (Krishnan, 2016, p.40), therefore ushering them towards understanding and evaluating their own performance and developing accordingly. As for individual conferencing, Microsoft Teams was used for an elaborate feedback and discussion with the teacher which motivated students and made them feel the presence of the instructor. It was also used for instantaneous feedback when students were working on an asynchronous activity during the online class. Finally, students' short oral responses to questions were evaluated using Flipgrid. According to Stoszkowski (2018), Flipgrid enables students to receive 'easily -regular written and/or video-based tutor feedback on videos, with the option to create custom rubrics' (p. 2). Furthermore, it helps students learn effectively 'by connecting the instructor's feedback with their physical performance' (Taylor & Hinchman, 2020, p.29). Hence, it allows them to be responsible for their own learning towards becoming autonomous learners.

7. Methodology

The research used an interview format with the students registered on the Shakespeare module in the fall 2020 semester at the BUE. It aimed to encourage and provide space for students to share their experience and respond freely. The interview was structured around the students' experience with the E-learning platform and the various BL activities that addressed the module's ILOs. Students were asked to express their opinions concerning the activities' usefulness for improving their learning experience in terms of comprehension, analysis, textual criticism, reception of instructor feedback and engagement with the material. The activities were also technically assessed in terms of ease of access and user-friendliness. Six out of the eight registered students attended the interview and the following section records their experience as expressed in their responses.

8. Results

In the interviews, students unanimously applauded the Moodle LMS and E-learning platforms' value and convenience. Most commented that it was 'very useful,' that it 'aided my learning,' 'has all the helpful material,' such as 'multiple documents to look at for better learning like textbooks and excellent academic articles, and the recorded performances of the plays were very useful,' because 'we could actually see it and not just read from the plays and analyze.' Students were asked to assess the module interactive activities as learning techniques, encouraging their engagement and their user-friendliness. In terms of effectiveness as learning techniques, opinions differed according to student preferences and learning objectives. Those who stated they preferred creativity and analytical work chose the Miro *King Lear* collaborative activity and Flipgrid forum oral character analysis because they 'were effective in that they were more analytical ... [as] in the activity itself it was required to be analytical.' Flipgrid was also deemed 'innovative,' 'helped one reflect deeply about the play by putting myself in the character's place,' 'gives more freedom to express thoughts better,' 'improved my understanding of the play and helped me analyze the character even more by putting in her place,' 'very interesting to do and unique. I had to talk and analyze the character of Adriana even more deeply than we had in the classroom in order to be able to create a holistic view of the character and how it was portrayed, and I especially enjoyed the part where I enjoyed what I would do in her position since I felt that that was very inclusive and I felt it created a deeper level of analysis.' However, one of the setbacks reported in studies and students' feedback alike is ease of access, 'students must have a suitable digital device (i.e., with camera and microphone) and a good internet connection. Students who have older or 'lower specification' phones or tablets with a sound and picture quality inferior to that of recent high-spec. models may therefore experience problem' (Stoszkowski, 2018, p. 2). This has also been reported by students that 'some students couldn't upload their videos' and 'was little bit tricky to submit it as you know, I had to submit it in university'. Eventually, they managed to submit their videos and receive feedback. Miro, on the other hand, was described by students as 'enjoyable' and engaging since it 'helps in retaining information relating to the play as well as makes room for creativity'. They also find it collaborative because 'seeing everyone's contributions, I enjoyed getting the pictures' and still 'enjoyable' despite the online setting. They also believe it to be 'user-friendly', since 'everything got uploaded quicker' and 'everything was easier, simpler' and favoured it more than other collaborative boards that have been used in the module such as *Microsoft White Board*.

Those who preferred memorization profited most from the Character Scorecard, Vocabulary Jam and Globe Theatre terms. The former 'helped recognize the characters in the play' and was 'a very good way to give a small summary for the whole play which is extremely beneficial when it comes to revising for the exam.' as well as challenging because 'it was very much fun to go through the acts again and figure out what character did what and where, so we could work on it'. The latter two activities being focused on terminology, one student who appreciated them stated that 'it's easier for me to understand and memorize things especially when it comes to vocabulary during multiple choice, so that I benefited personally from them a lot.' Moreover, the correct answers appeared whether the answers were correct or not, which helped students understand better. Finally, the students found the Globe Theatre activity 'interactive', 'user-friendly' since accessing Padlet was smooth, and the interface was 'extremely friendly' and 'simple'. One of the students felt a bit felt somewhat confused and needed further guidance on the activity.

With regards to the Role Play Performance, students considered it 'unique and enjoyable', 'brings excitement', 'very fun', and yet 'daunting as I've never done this before.' One student remarked that they did not enjoy it. Those who did cited its novelty, uniqueness and its reflection of a Shakespearean module that does not only focus on reading the plays but on performing them. Comments included that 'Shakespearean plays or plays in general are meant to be performed' and hence 'performing it gives us a better and more holistic understanding and appreciation of the plays themselves'. One student also commented that 'a lot of people can benefit from it. Maybe they're a little bit weaker when it comes to writing

essays and this could really lift up their scores.' As such, the Role Play Performance enhances the module's inclusivity of different learning styles.

Regarding instructor feedback on student work, four approaches were used in the module: (1) generic feedback uploaded on Moodle LMS E-learning after each written assignment and shared in class online, (2) written individual feedback via Turnitin, (3) oral feedback/individual conferencing between instructor and student, and (4) oral character analysis feedback conducted on Flipgrid. Student response displayed a usefulness of all four with the most usefulness being attributed to the individual oral feedback. Commenting on the generic feedback strategy, some students found it 'extremely helpful' and 'helpful for my research on the topic', while one student stated that it is 'good but the document is sometimes too generic and sometimes can't be applied on our work'. Written individual feedback on Turnitin was a 'useful written form of feedback to refer to whenever in need to reflect on past work, for instance, when writing a new paper.' Another student commented that it 'helped create a better assessment per critical reflection paper for reflection 2 which I appreciated.' The highest level of satisfaction was reserved for the individual oral feedback, in which Microsoft Teams was used for an elaborate feedback and discussion. One student expressed that conferencing helped her perform better not just in this module, but in other modules as well 'most of all the oral feedback was perfect for me; I felt that I understood everything that was requested of me to improve & everything I did correctly. It was motivational, it was uplifting and made me feel I could do a much better job when it came to my other assessments, and the feedback was also very applicable to a lot of other modules and assessments so I could carry on with the feedback that I was given'. Another student preferred online conferencing over written feedback, stating that 'the oral individual feedback was done really well. There was a schedule and it was followed ... I definitely believe that it is more effective than the written feedback on Turnitin because with the oral feedback individually per student we can ask questions, more explanation and if we didn't understand the feedback, we can get more elaboration and such.' Microsoft Teams was also used for instantaneous feedback when students are working on an asynchronous activity during the online class.

Feedback on oral character analysis was performed via Flipgrid; students posted short oral responses to questions and received instructor evaluation on it. This method was employed for its usefulness as promoted by Stoszkowski (2018), that it allows them to 'take control' of their learning since it enables them to receive 'easily – regular written and/or video-based tutor feedback on videos, with the option to create custom rubrics' (p.2). Concerning this activity and its feedback approach, students found receiving feedback through Flipgrid 'helpful and beneficial', since they got notified by email once teacher feedback was available. Furthermore, it helps students learn effectively 'by connecting the instructor's feedback with their physical performance' (Taylor & Hinchman, 2020 p. 29).

Remarking on the module as a whole, students suggested integrating 'maybe more activities' that would be 'friendly and enjoyable, and more analytical and not just descriptive.' Overall, comments included that the module was 'really enjoyable and beneficial and helpful'; 'I feel the module is very well designed', and that 'this is one of the most interactive, inclusive and engaging modules I've had this semester, even in the circumstances we are in right now. When it came to COVID and online learning, a lot of us freaked out about how we will be able to perform in modules but this module made it feel like we don't really have much to worry about and all the activities were at-home friendly and university friendly'.

9. Discussion

The belief that 'the more technology-based activities are used the better the outcome' is fallacious, since studies have shown that despite the integration of synchronous and asynchronous activities, some students report their dissatisfaction with online classes. This arises from their feeling of 'isolation' and lack of 'teacher's guidance' (Waha & Davis, 2014, p. 172). Therefore, the only guarantee to a successful blend is not just the variety, but the balance between both to facilitate the communication between students and teachers and create a constructive learning environment. As observed from the student interviews, a BL model's success or failure is crucially linked to adequate instructor-student communication and to technology accessibility and user-friendliness. For instance, the 'unfamiliarity' of teachers with collaborative platforms and their lack of involvement can hinder their effectiveness. To ensure a successful collaboration, teachers should first be acquainted with the board before involving students. Bower and Richards (2006) conceive that 'By providing structured collaborative opportunities that support the development of communication skills, academics can improve student confidence and enjoyment when it comes to working with others' (p.81). Therefore, they must give clear instructions about the content to be added, orient the students about the task and guide them when necessary until they feel comfortable.

As forgiving feedback, instructors and students tend to be more at home with face-to-face communication, so virtual feedback is considered more challenging. The presence or lack of feedback promptness, thoroughness and a chance for instructor-student dialogue can easily lead to a disconnection between students and instructor, to miscommunications or even to frustration and a lack of motivation for the students to engage further in the class (Tanis, 2020, p.9). For instance, the synthesis of feedback processes allows students to rethink their own work through continuous dialogue with their instructor. It also adapts to the different learning styles of students; research shows that students are more receptive to audiovisual than written feedback. Winstone and Carless (2019) clarify that when a module can present both forms, as well as the chance of constructive dialogue between instructor and student, chances are higher that students will constructively respond to feedback and adapt their learning accordingly (p. 66)

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

The results and discussion reveal that the Flipped-Enriched Virtual Model employed in this Shakespeare module allowed for a flexible adaptability to students' needs, and for increased teacher-student communication in different modes.

Beyond its ability to create a more empowering learning environment than only face-to-face approaches, the model was especially critical for semesters impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. When face-to-face teaching was subject to fluctuating policies beyond the institution's control, the Flipped-Enriched Virtual Model allowed instructors to respond to health imperatives without disrupting the learning process, ensured that instructor-student communication proceeded unhindered and maintained a smooth and effective learning environment. As such, the Flipped-Enriched Virtual Model could benefit educators to achieve their ILOs beyond literature modules and in diverse teaching contexts.

Further research on BL in COVID-19 semesters could take several directions. Other combinations of face-to-face and virtual instruction in Flipped-Enriched Virtual Models can be studied and assessed. Besides, the applicability of a Flipped-Enriched Virtual Model in scientific faculties in which laboratory work, and beyond the humanities, is theorized to yield different instructional blends and results. Such research would both expand and enrich the literature and practice of BL, which is slowly but surely changing the face of education today.

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Moodle and LMS are used interchangeably in this paper.

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