Chilean university students' perceived levels of satisfaction with a blended learning programme for English as a foreign language

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Education by Monica Frenzel

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Abstract

Although the relationship between blended learning and student satisfaction has been studied extensively, research conducted in this area in Latin American Higher Education contexts has been scarce. This research study was carried out in a large university in Chile and aimed at investigating the possible factors that may influence students' perceived satisfaction levels towards an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) blended learning (BL) programme. In addition, relationships between satisfaction and students' learning outcomes, i.e., students' marks in a standardised test, an oral test, and a written test, and their final course marks, were also examined. A mixed methods explanatory research design was employed. The first phase involved gathering the data by means of an online questionnaire (N = 391) and the second phase through a semi-structured interview (N = 8). The analysis of the questionnaire data informed the semi-structured interview design. The results obtained suggest that all factors examined (*instructor, technology, interaction, course set-up,* and *outcomes*) affect student satisfaction with the course. *Instructor* and *interaction* resulted in impacting students' levels of satisfaction the most. Interview data revealed student satisfaction with the blended learning course. The results are discussed under the lens of the Community of Inquiry framework. This is a novel study in the context of English as a foreign language programmes in higher education in Chile. Recommendations for the improvement of the EFL blended learning programme is provided.

Keywords: *Blended learning, student satisfaction, English as a Foreign Language, university students.*

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List of Abbreviations

BL	Blended learning
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CoI	Community of Inquiry
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELT	English Language Teaching
GPA	Grade Point Average
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Chapter 1. Introduction of Study

This dissertation presents a research study assessing the levels of satisfaction that higher education students exhibit toward their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses taught in a blended learning (BL) mode. Due to the importance that the institution, the university where the study was carried out, places on EFL learning, the investigation focused on finding out what factors contributed to student satisfaction in the EFL programme, how satisfied students were with it, and whether a relationship could be found between their levels of satisfaction and their learning outcomes, i.e., the standardised test mark, the written test mark, the oral test mark and their final course mark. The participants were part of the undergraduate student body of a private university in Chile (hereafter it will be referred to as the Chilean University, which is not the institution's real name).

The insights gained from this study will provide guidelines to introduce evidence-supported improvements to the institutional English language programme and contribute to increasing the knowledge about what helps students learning another language achieve their learning outcomes in a BL environment. Furthermore, it will conduce to understanding what factors promote students' satisfaction with technology supported learning environments. This is particularly significant nowadays, as since early 2020 educational institutions worldwide were forced to turn almost overnight to online teaching and learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has impacted all actors significantly, posing great challenges, and will continue to do so in the future. Although online teaching and learning is now definitely here to stay (James, 2021), it is most probably some kind of BL that has largely been replacing face-to-face learning, which used to be the predominant learning environment before the pandemic (Daniel, 2020; Kim, 2020, Witze et al., 2020). Furthermore, few studies have been carried out at the local and regional level on BL and more particularly on foreign language learning in such environments. The implications emerging from this study can be useful to foster the design and implementation of such programmes in the country and beyond.

This chapter will first lay out the background in which this study is situated by succinctly describing the situation of English language learning in Chile. This will

include the policies implemented in the country that have supported it, as well as their impact in schools and universities. A brief view of the status of EFL in Latin America will also be presented. Next, there will be a reference to BL and technology supported learning in general and in Chile. This will be followed by a concise description of the purpose, relevance, and significance of the study. Furthermore, the research setting of the investigation will be portrayed, as well as the English language programme which has been implemented in the higher education institution where the study has been carried out. Finally, a brief outline of how the thesis has been organized will be provided.

1.1. Background

1.1.1. *English Language Learning in Chile*

The English language is by far the most widely used language in the world to establish communication among people in areas such as business, science, commerce, and technology. It has thus been called the global language (Crystal, 2003) since it is recognized as holding a particular status, which is acknowledged in every country. English is also often considered a symbol of status which sets those who master it apart from those who do not. Moreover, from a socio-political perspective, countries that need to establish commercial relations to grow are aware that they require a common language to do so. Therefore, very often it has become part of a policy established and supported by the different governments that the population (especially schoolchildren) must reach certain levels of proficiency within a set period. To do so, a series of actions and plans are designed in the short, medium, and long term to achieve this goal in those countries (British Council, 2013; Gil & Najar, 2015). This has also been the case of policies that have been implemented in Chile regarding the teaching and learning of the English language.

1.1.1.1. Policies Supporting English Language Learning in Chile. The acknowledgement that fostering the English language is fundamental to the progress of Chile and to its citizens brought with it the establishment of several private primary and secondary bilingual schools, mostly at the start of the 20th century (Pueblas & Perez, 2012). They are attended by students who are between the ages of 6 and 13 (primary education) and 14 and 17 (secondary education). However, these schools have only catered for a small percentage of the population as their high fees are not

within the reach of families with average income. In fact, the highly stratified Chilean education system is determined by social class, which is particularly noticeable with regards to learning a foreign language. The most prestigious private schools, based on British and American education models, have constructed their curriculum using English as the language of instruction. Children of the socio-economic elite are educated in such institutions (Matear, 2008). Although Chile is recognized as the country with the most stable economic situation in South America, it exhibits a highly stratified social structure. Actually, among the OECD (Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development) member countries, it presents the second highest income disparity (after Mexico) (OECD, 2019). The education system is a reflection of this, as in 2019 only 30% of public-school leavers were accepted by universities. In contrast, 79% of the students leaving the private school system were admitted to higher education institutions (Said, 2019). The highly segregated schooling system was the reason for massive student protests taking place in 2006 and 2011, which demanded quality education and the end of fee-paying university education to make social mobility possible (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013). One of the major issues brought forward during the protests and violent turmoil that took place in the country during some months since October 2019 has been the persisting social inequality, whose main cause has been attributed to the very segregated educational system that prevails in Chile (Langman, 2019; Taub, 2019).

Over the last fifteen years, the Chilean Ministry of Education has put forward several initiatives and programmes that reflect their recognition of the fact that learning the English language is a determining factor in social mobility (Munandar, 2015). Social mobility can be defined as “the movement in time of individuals, families, or other social units between positions of varying advantage in the system of social stratification of a society” (Müller & Pollack, 2015, p. 640). A social unit refers to an individual, a family or a group of a society (Merriam-Webster, n. d.). One of these initiatives corresponded to an ambitious plan initiated in 2003 based on the crucial goal of making Chile a bilingual country, for which a programme called “English Opens Doors” (“Inglés Abre Puertas” – PIAP) was launched nationwide in 2004 (Matear, 2008). It was aimed at designing public policy and setting up measures that could produce improved English teaching quality throughout the country. The initiatives that

were implemented included summer camps for schoolchildren, short stays in English-speaking countries and English language courses for schoolinstructors, and volunteers from English-speaking countries assisting English language instructors in schools (Ministerio de Educación, 2019).

In 2011, the Ministry of Education rescheduled the "Chile, a bilingual country" goal for 15 to 20 years ahead. Thus, another national plan was announced, and emphasis was placed on assessing what other countries in which English is not the first language had done to become bilingual, such as Finland, Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands. Moreover, it was proposed that English language teaching should begin before 5th grade or, if possible, in pre-school. Additionally, the use of new technologies, including the Internet, would also be emphasized (Biobiochile, 2011).

1.1.1.2. English as a Foreign Language at School and University. Chile is a country in which EFL is taught at school and at most higher education institutions. In primary and secondary school, it is taught compulsorily for at least 8 years (from grades 5 to 12, i.e., when schoolchildren are between the ages of 10 and 17). However, the many years English is taught does not result in students being able to communicate at the level expected at grade 12 (B1 Common European Framework of Reference). This was evidenced in 2012, when an English test given nationwide to 214281 school students who were in their 11th grade (aged 16) produced diverse results. The results obtained were reported to show how they depended on the socio-economic level the students' families belonged to, i.e., the type of school they attended. The higher the socio-economic level, the better the students' language proficiency level (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2012; Ariani & Ghafournia, 2016; Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Walczak et al., 2017).

One way of characterizing the socio-economic levels the Chilean population is divided into can be expressed with regard to the household's monthly income. The OECD (2019) compared the Chilean percentage of population to the OECD average reporting the following:

Table 1

Income Levels Chile and OECD Compared

Income level	*Chile*	*OECD*
Upper income (more than 200% of median)	19%	9%
Middle income (75% -200% of median)	47%	61%
Lower income (50% - 75% of median)	17%	18%
Poor (0% - 50% of median)	17%	11%

Note. Source OECD (2019)

This evidences the social and economic inequality which is reflected in the results obtained in the English test carried out in 2012: 83,3% of 18194 students belonging to the higher end achieved a basic or intermediate language level, whereas only 0,8% of the 41247 students at the lower end reached a basic or intermediate language level. Higher language levels were not reported as the test only measured up to B1 level (Walczak et al., 2017). In general, considering the whole student sample, consisting in 214281 school students, while 18% achieved either the basic (CEFR A2) or lower intermediate level (CEFR B1), 82% reached the beginner level (CEFR A1) or scored lower than that level (CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference) (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, n.d.; Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2012). However, the results obtained in English tests given to 16-year-old students in 11th grade have later shown some improvement. Thus, in 2014, the English test was taken by 154091 students, of whom 75,5% obtained A2 or above (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2014). Moreover, in 2017 a different English test was taken by a representative sample of 7340 students, of which 32% achieved basic or lower intermediate level (CEFR A2 or B1), and 68% a beginner level (CEFR A1) (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2018; Ministerio de Educación, 2019). Table 2 summarizes the information given above.

Table 2

Results English Test 11th Grade Students

			Results % per CEFR level			
Year	*N° students*	*Test applied*	*B1*	*A2*	*A1*	*Below A1*
2012	214281	Key English Test Cambridge Assessment	8,2%	9,6%	26,8%	55,4%
2014	154091	Key English Test Cambridge Assessment	12,6%	12,0%	22,3%	53,2%
2017*	7340	Aptis for Teens British Council	32,0%		68,0%	

*_Note_. In 2017 results were only reported divided into two groups: B1/A2 and A1/Below A1 levels

The results obtained in 2017 were still disappointing for the Ministry of Education and educational institutions considering the efforts and resources that had been put into the improvement of the EFL programme in the primary and secondary school system for many years.

According to the Ministry of Education (2019), the most relevant factors affecting students' performance are the number of hours dedicated to teaching and learning the language at school, how well instructors have been trained, and the use of English in class. Consequently, a new plan was launched denominated "English in English", which aims at fostering a more frequent use of the target language in the EFL class (Ministerio de Educación, 11 June 2019). However, despite directions given by the Ministry of Education, the teaching methods used continue to be very traditional. The most employed approach is the "grammar-translation method" (Bowen, 2020), which is based on the translation of texts from English into Spanish (the students' native language). Furthermore, the focus is also placed on the explanations of grammar structures using Spanish rather than English. Thus, the students have few opportunities to produce and listen to the language being taught. This has resulted in students not being able to communicate in English.

At the higher education level, institutions are not required to implement English language programmes. However, at present about 75% of the undergraduate programmes offered nationwide include at least two semesters of English. As indicated before, most secondary school students have not acquired the expected level in English (CEFR B1) when they finish their education. Therefore, higher education institutions implement English language programmes that start at beginner level (Emol, 2019). The aim is to provide their students with some courses that may help to start developing the language skills they will need to face academic and future professional challenges. However, the number of courses and the levels achieved can be quite diverse and will depend on the institution and the learning outcomes of the undergraduate programme chosen by the students.

1.1.2. *Blended Learning*

The term Blended Learning (BL) can be applied to the mixture of any two or more kinds of teaching and learning media or environments, e.g., printed texts, visual or audio materials and hands-on practical experiences. Nonetheless, it has become a general concept in education, an umbrella term, which considers the integration of technology and face-to-face delivery in the learning experience (Camacho et al., 2012; Hrastinski, 2019). This concept has developed into a widespread approach to learning in higher education, although definitions and explanations of the term BL vary considerably (Friesen, 2012; Ossianilsson, 2017). According to Moskal et al. (2012), a universal definition of BL is hardly achievable since it is highly context dependent. The blend in which learning takes place can be quite varied: face-to-face and online learning, video conferences and online learning, use of computers in the face-to-face classroom, synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated meetings and activities (Hrastinski, 2008), and collaborative and self-study tasks. However, for some researchers to be considered BL, it should include face-to-face meetings and a proportion of online content delivery. The latter has been specified as ranging between 30% and 79% (Allen et al., 2007) or between 20% and 80% of the course (Bernard et al., 2014).

In Chile, the implementation of technology supported environments in the school system has increased considerably in the last two decades with the aim of closing the digital divide, defined as “the problem that exists because some groups of people have the opportunity and knowledge to use computer technology and some do not” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). The Ministry of Education has made continued efforts to provide students and instructors with adequate infrastructure (computer laboratories), Internet access, and training in the use of information and communication technology resources. In a report on the topic in which 147 countries were examined, Chile has even been mentioned as leading the implementation of ICT (information and communication technology) in Latin America and the Caribbean (Dutta et al., 2015). The results obtained in a test administered in 2013 by the Ministry of Education to a representative sample of students in their 10th grade (age 15) indicate that they achieved the necessary skills to communicate with their peers and search for information with the use of computers. However, most of these students

were not capable of applying more complex cognitive abilities requiring processing and generating of information (Jaramillo & Chavez, 2015; Ministerio de Educación, 2014).

While there have been official policies regarding the implementation of technology supported environments in the school system, no explicit guidelines can be found regarding the use of BL at school. Nevertheless, it may be inferred that most of the technology-supported activities were carried out in this way until fully online teaching and learning was implemented with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since March 2020, the Ministry of Education has provided instructors and students with online learning platforms and materials to make it possible for them to continue accessing an education, which also included English courses (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.).

More globally, the lack of universal access to the Internet and the necessary skills to use technology adequately exhibited by instructors and students in deprived sectors of society were already present before the COVID-19 pandemic (U.S. Department of Education. Office of Educational Technology, 2017; OECD, 2012). They became even more evident during the pandemic, especially affecting the learning outcomes of socio-economic disadvantaged students (Karakose, 2021; Lamb et al., 2020). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of connectivity and technological devices (computers, smartphones, tablets, etc.) has impacted at least one third of students around the world (UNESCO, 2021). Furthermore, the lack of proficiency in how to use technology and lack of skills to teach and learn using online technology, affected both instructors and students. Before the pandemic, it had been reported that young people's level of technology proficiency was generally low and that technology was mainly circumscribed to entertainment and personal consumption, and not for learning (Margaryan et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2014). Furthermore, regarding the necessary skills to use a learning platform, often students do not know how to employ it, especially when their instructors do not feel confident and adequately equipped to deliver instruction by means of it (Gillett-Swan, 2017). A study carried out on university freshmen revealed that students did not use technology for deep and critical learning. Instead, they frequently employed it to search the web to gather information quickly (Thompson, 2013). Moreover, it has been stated that, compared to higher-income students, young people from low socioeconomic status neighbourhoods use

computers at home for multimedia and social media activities rather than for educationally focused activities and learning programmes. Thus, their pattern of technology use may not promote academic attainment (Harris et al., 2017).

With regards to English language teaching and learning in higher education in Chile, there are no government guidelines or policies for it as there are for the elementary and secondary school sectors by means of the national curriculum. Thus, each higher education institution designs and implements the English language programme they deem most adequate for their students and graduates, according to the resources they can invest in such initiative. Some institutions exhibit their English programmes on their web sites, but many do not provide access to such information, thereby making it difficult to examine and learn about their expected learning outcomes, teaching and learning environments, among other aspects.

The university where the present study was carried out, started to implement an English language learning programme 9 years ago, which became part of its educational model (Universidad Andres Bello, 2016). It was then decided to teach it in a BL mode, consisting of a weekly face-to-face session with the instructor, and mostly autonomous online work carried out by the students on a learning management platform. (More details on the English language programme are provided in 1.3.2. below). The aim of the programme is to provide future professionals and graduates with communicative tools that help them access career and academic opportunities worldwide. Students are expected to achieve a low intermediate level of English (Common European Framework of Reference B1) at the end of their fourth English course. The English level achieved by the students until before the COVID-19 pandemic could be improved further as only 50% of the students obtained the B1 level. Moreover, it remains to be seen what the effects of the fully online teaching and learning environment used for the English language programme since the onset of the pandemic will be with regards to the students´ learning outcomes. Since 2021 the university has again been implementing assessment instruments at the end of the English language programme which serve as benchmarks. However, the scores obtained so far by the students have not been satisfactory. This is an issue that deserves to be looked into further in the near future.

1.2. Purpose and Relevance of Study

The challenges and developments in the field of English language learning mentioned above and the need to understand students' perceptions of BL applied to English language courses in the Chilean higher education context, has triggered the student researcher's interest in carrying out this research study. One of the ways of doing so is to examine the level of satisfaction university students exhibit towards their learning experience with blended English language courses. Finding out if students are satisfied with their learning experience has been an important concern for educational institutions, particularly in higher education. Although, the concept satisfaction has been defined in different ways by a variety of researchers, it can be stated that it involves "the learner's perceived value of their educational experiences in an educational setting" (Bolliger & Erichsen, 2013, p. 6). The concept of satisfaction will be further discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation. The present study focuses on finding out which factors determine student satisfaction in a BL environment.

As indicated previously, among the main challenges found in the field of English language teaching and learning in Chile, there is the issue of social inequality, which impacts the type of school students can attend. Consequently, the quantity and quality of English language education they receive at school greatly depends on their families' socio-economic level. Furthermore, the measures implemented for years by the Ministry of Education have had a slow impact on the improvement of the students' English language learning outcomes in state-supported schools. Among the main causes for this are the use of traditional teaching methods, based on a grammar-translation method, and the predominance of grammar explanations in the English language class. Furthermore, students are not offered the opportunity to make use of the English language, either productively or receptively, since Spanish, rather than English, is mostly used during the English class.

As the head of the English Department of the university, the student researcher is responsible for the implementation of the EFL programme that is being administered in a BL mode to almost 20.000 students per year. She has overseen this academic unit for 16 years but has also taught the English language alongside during that time. Before, she had worked as an instructor of English at another higher education institution. Hence, she is interested in finding out whether technology-enhanced

language learning environments might increase students' opportunities to become involved with their language education and achieve their language learning goals more effectively, particularly in a country where students have few opportunities to use and practice English on a day-to-day basis.

Carrying out a study in the same setting where the researcher is fully employed, as is the case of the student researcher, is denominated insider research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). It has commonly been viewed as not being tenable as insider researchers are personally interested and emotionally involved in the context (Alvesson, 2003). Thus, they are not objective enough to apply scientific rigour to the issue studied. However, these opinions have been challenged putting forward the benefits that insider research brings with it, such as providing valid, useful, and important insights about the setting that may not be available to researchers that are not part of the organization. Nonetheless, as they have to deal with the organizational and the researcher roles, they need to pay special heed to how their organizational role and politics affect the research process and the participants in it, both staff and students (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Fleming, 2018). Together with the possible conflicts that the dual roles of academic and researcher can produce, other challenges can involve the potential risk of coercion of the participants due to power issues, and the lack of acknowledgement of the inclination to obtain positive results (Fleming, 2018). However, practitioners who attempt to tackle an issue that is carried out within their organization as part of professional development at postgraduate level may be expected to be critical and rigorous regarding their research (Hamilton & Appleby, 2009). How some of the issues about being an insider researcher and the ethical issues involved were dealt with in this study are presented in chapter three.

Due to the social and economic inequalities existing in this country, which in turn lead to differences in how students are educated at school, the students' knowledge of the English language is fairly low and their skills in using technology for educational purposes are quite underdeveloped when they enroll in the university. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out if students, once they have been given the opportunity to acquire English language and platform user skills, exhibit some level of satisfaction with their BL English language courses and if this can be related to their achievements in those courses. This inquiry is based on the assumption that student

satisfaction is an important factor to predict students' academic achievement (marks obtained) (Martirosyan et al., 2014) (to be further dealt with in chapter 2). This is particularly significant in the case of BL courses because such environments require students to be involved with their learning. Thus, "satisfied students are motivated and are more likely to accomplish their cognitive goals" (Giannousi et al., 2009, p. 65). However, informally, some students at the Chilean University at times have expressed their dissatisfaction with the BL English language courses, particularly with the online component, indicating that they preferred face-to-face classes since the online activities were too time consuming. This was brought to the student researcher's attention by some of the instructors and students. On the other hand, course instructors also voiced their concerns about the fact that some students did not dedicate time to carrying out the tasks they had to do online. This issue and others that had not been clearly detected also deserved to be investigated as the reasons for them could impact the students' levels of satisfaction with the course.

Another aspect that has been a matter of concern was the low rate of achievement that students exhibited in the standardised tests, particularly in the B1 level test they sat for at the end of English IV. Even though the factors that affected students' measured language learning outcomes and the effectiveness of the programme may have been quite varied, a crucial variable could have been the level of satisfaction they experienced with their blended courses. As has been previously reported, students who are involved with their BL coursework, demonstrate higher levels of satisfaction (Kuo et al., 2014; Sajid et al., 2016). Moreover, students' positive assessment of their learning environment and experience has been linked with better learning outcomes (Duque & Weeks, 2010). As students at the university were not exhibiting the expected learning outcomes in the standardised tests and neither did they seem to be sufficiently involved with the online activities of their blended courses (according to previously mentioned personal comments made by students and instructors), studying the relationship between satisfaction, students' learning experiences, and learning outcomes could help provide some insights into this issue.

In the student researcher's view, in an era in which technology is readily available most of the time and in most of the spaces, making it possible to access information as needed, it seems anachronic that students would not make the best

use of the online component of a course to increase their performance in the language they are learning. Furthermore, after online instruction has become the new "new normal" (Hew et al., 2020, p. 1) and the solution in times of COVID-19, online teaching and learning have no doubt had a significant impact on education and are here to stay whether or not face-to-face instruction is resumed.

Although BL has been extensively researched worldwide, studies on the topic have been very scarce in Chile. To the student researcher's knowledge, the most significant study was published almost 15 years ago and was done to assess a BL model for the teaching and learning of EFL in a university in this country (Bañados, 2006, 2016). Even though it reports the application of a satisfaction questionnaire at the end of the pilot stage of the study, its main focus is on the pedagogical model constructed for the programme.

The insights that can be obtained from the proposed study on BL and student satisfaction will be significant at several levels. First, it will allow the student researcher to understand the factors that EFL students consider to be the ones that contribute to their satisfaction with BL courses, and how this affects their learning outcomes. This awareness will have an impact on the teaching practices in the student researcher's role of instructor, and on the guidance she will be able to give to the teaching staff and coordinators with regards to teaching and learning strategies in a BL environment. Second, it will impact on the institutional level as it will produce evidence-based information that can help in the development of teaching practices and policies in such environment. It can be particularly useful for suggesting improvements to the design of the already existing English language programme at the university, and for enhancing the students' learning experience in the BL environment, to hopefully produce better learning outcomes, which in turn can be measured by further satisfaction questionnaires and standardised tests. However, these improvements will certainly also be applicable to courses in other areas, not only to the EFL programme, as the institution has implemented BL as the mode in which many courses and programmes are delivered after returning to face-to-face instruction. Third, the results of the study will add to the experience that other higher education institutions nationwide may be gaining on the topic and will help understand what factors promote students' satisfaction in technology supported learning environments. The

implications emerging from the study can be useful to foster the design and implementation of foreign language BL programmes in this country and beyond, which may contribute to increasing students' satisfaction levels, hence improving their learning experiences and, consequently, their achievement of better English language outcomes and language performance indicators.

1.3. Research Setting

1.3.1. *The University*

The university where this study was carried out is a private institution founded in 1988 which currently has 44000 undergraduate students. It has been deemed not eligible to take part in the tuition-free programme by the Ministry of Education. Even though the university authorities initially criticised the decision of not being included, they have stated that such a large institution would not have been able to cover the financial gap which would have been produced due to the implementation of such a programme (El Mostrador, 2016). Other institutions ascribed to it have also manifested their concern about this issue (Acuña, 2019; Herrera & Quevedo, 2018; Kershaw, 2019). As declared by one on the authorities of a private university in Chile, "15 private universities and colleges have closed or are in the process of closing because it's hard to compete with "free"" (Nadworny et al., 2019). Surprisingly, contrary to what might have been expected, in 2018, the Chilean University, being the largest institution in the country, obtained the largest resources from the tuition fees students paid for their studies, as compared to other universities in the system (Herrera & Quevedo, 2018). The amount was even 3,4% higher than what had been raised the previous year (CNED, 2019). By contrast, it was also the institution whose new student enrolments dropped the sharpest in 2020 as an effect of the social unrests that the country experienced in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic because it is the largest university nationwide and therefore offers more places than any other (Said, 2020).

Being a relatively new private university, the Chilean University has been successful so far in being recognized for the fourth consecutive year among the 4 most prestigious national universities by Shanghai Ranking Consultancy 2019 (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2020). Until 2020 it was part of an international network of higher education institutions and, as such, the advancements made by the Chilean University with regards to establishing academic relationships with prestigious

institutions have constituted an important incentive to become nationally and internationally recognized. For this reason, it has established an educational model that reveals the vision, mission and the strategies set forth to accomplish academic excellence. A broad definition put forward for the concept of educational models is that "educational models are the philosophical foundation of any overall approaches and beliefs about learning, instruction, and content" (Bussinger, 2018). The concepts constituting the institutional values, innovation, and student-centred education are fundamental to the institution's educational model (Universidad Andres Bello, 2016). Furthermore, it highlights the development of 21st century skills in order to give students the tools to confront academic and future professional challenges (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). At the same time, students are expected to develop communicative skills in EFL to be prepared to take part in academic activities and future professional and social contexts, as well as being able to access knowledge available to them globally. The desired level that students should achieve after participating in the English language programme offered by the Chilean University is also explicitly stated in the document containing the educational model.

1.3.2. *The English Blended Learning Programme*

Almost all the 69 undergraduate programmes offered by the Chilean University include four mandatory English courses students have to attend, which are provided by the English department where the student researcher holds the position of director. These are aimed at developing general English language communicative skills. The students are on average between 18 and 22 years old when they attend their English language programme. Their level of English on entering the university is quite low or moderate as 77% of them have studied in state schools or state-supported schools (C. Tassara, personal communication, 30 July 2020) where English language instruction is still not producing the expected performance levels, as indicated previously. Most of the students start their English language programme with English I in the second half of their first year and finish it with English IV in the first half of their third year. At that point, students should be able to communicate at the level of an independent user (B1 of the Common European Framework of References), who is described in the following terms:

> Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2011, p. 8)

To implement an English language programme that would make it possible to reach such goals, with the instructional support of the international education network it was part of, the Chilean University decided to break away from the traditional face-to-face language courses and adopt a BL approach instead. It was chosen based on the reported benefits that BL brought to students, faculty, and institutions. These benefits included making more efficient use of classroom space by providing students with online activities that partly replaced face-to-face instruction, grant faculty the flexibility to do some of their teaching activities online and generating learning environments that had been reported to produce higher satisfaction levels in students (Owston et al., 2013).

The weight of the face-to-face and online components was planned to be equally balanced with regards to the time dedicated to them (50% each). For the online component, the programme required the use of an online platform prepared by Cambridge University Press, which included a sequence of units that contained grammar, listening, reading and pronunciation activities that provided automated feedback. The platform also offered Web 2.0 tools for collaborative language production (blogs, forums, chats, and wikis). Students attended one weekly face-to-face session with their instructors (2,25 chronological hours per session) throughout the 16-week semester. They were expected to work at their own pace and time on the assigned activities on the online platform for another 2,25 chronological hours per week. Students were also asked to participate in some interactive online blog activities during the course. In the face-to-face sessions, the students were given the opportunity to put into practice what they had learnt online by means of pair or group work activities facilitated by the instructor. This was also the place and time to discuss topics and grammar items that needed reinforcement.

Each of the four courses the language programme consists of lasts a semester (16 weeks of instruction and 2 weeks for exams). As there are two academic semesters per year, students´ enrollment in the English language programme normally extends over a period of two years. All students must pass these four courses. A few undergraduate programmes, such as Ecotourism and Journalism, have chosen to extend the language programme to six courses, expecting their students to achieve a B2 CEFR level (CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference). Every course has several tests and assessed tasks, as well as a final exam. The tasks, tests and final exam a usually designed by the instructors and coordinators of the English department. Furthermore, towards the end of the semester, some random class sections (a group of students within a course) were given standardised tests to measure if they had achieved the expected CEFR level: English II (A1), English III (A2), and English III (B1). These instruments, as most standardised tests, had been developed by an external test writer and contained question items that were common for all the students. They were also scored in a consistent way so that comparisons between individuals or groups of students were possible (Great Schools Partnership, 2015). More information about the standardised tests will be provided in chapter 3.

Due to the social unrests that occurred during the second half of 2019 and to the COVID-19 pandemic, standardised tests could no longer be administered as the Chilean University did not have a remote supervision system (proctoring), which is necessary for assessments that take place online. Until the first half of 2019, about 50% of the English IV students achieved B1 level in the standardised test, which was a lower percentage of students than expected. By contrast, the number of students that passed the English language course was high (80%), even though half of them had failed to achieve the B1 level in the standardised test.

1.3.3. *Measuring Student Satisfaction at the Chilean University*

At the Chilean University, student satisfaction surveys are being carried out to measure their satisfaction with the institution and its services. At the end of the academic year, the data obtained thus is analysed and presented considering the whole institution and also broken up at a programme and campus level. At the same time, all students complete an instructor evaluation form for every course they have taken. The results have been used to improve teaching by focusing on those

instructors who, according to the perceptions of the students, do not reach positive levels of teaching quality. These instructors are singled out and invited to participate in specific initial and continuing professional development activities, which are also open to those who have received positive feedback from their students. The establishment of a short and medium term institutional professional development programme, partly based on the instructor evaluation results, is one of the key point initiatives that has provided important support to instructors over the last two years and is expected to continue to do so in the future. It was particularly useful for instructors during the abrupt transition from face-to-face to online teaching and learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, a host of professional development initiatives have been offered online to all instructors so that they can acquire the necessary tools and skills required to face the challenges involved.

1.4. Organization of Thesis

The present chapter is the introduction to the thesis. It encompasses the background to the study, the purpose and relevance of the research, and the research setting.

Chapter 2 examines the literature that underpins the study. It includes research done on EFL locally and globally, considering factors that challenge its effectiveness, research carried out on BL, the concepts of learning experience and learning outcomes, and the concept of student satisfaction, including some of the factors that contribute to it. It concludes with a presentation of the theoretical framework that will guide the research.

Chapter 3 discloses the philosophical perspective assumed for the design and methodology of the research. It gives an account of the research samples, the instruments used, the pilot study, and the analyses of the data sets. Validity and reliability issues are discussed.

Chapter 4 reveals the findings of the study. Descriptive demographic data are presented for both data sets. Descriptive data obtained from the satisfaction questionnaire, and the themes resulting from the interview data are disclosed. Learning outcomes and their possible relationship to satisfaction are examined. The triangulation of the data is discussed. The answers to the research questions are based on the findings presented.

Chapter 5 entails the discussion of the study findings. Factors contributing to student satisfaction are examined through the lens of the theoretical framework when applicable. Recommendations for the improvement of the EFL BL programme at the Chilean University are brought forward.

Chapter 6 presents the limitations encountered during the process of thesis and proposes future research directions based on the results obtained.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is to examine and analyse what has been done in the field of student satisfaction in BL, especially regarding learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and then identify the research gaps that this study can potentially address. The literature explored and presented in this chapter provides the background to this study which has been carried out on the satisfaction that students have expressed with regards to their BL EFL courses. The research seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How satisfied are students with the BL programme for English as a foreign language?

1.a. What are students' perceptions regarding their BL course?

1.b. To what extent, if any, is there a relationship between their satisfaction with their BL course and their learning outcomes?

2. What are the factors contributing to students perceived levels of satisfaction with a BL programme for English as a foreign language?

To begin with, in this chapter, a global view of EFL and the challenges it poses for students will be presented. Some of the most relevant general factors affecting EFL learning will be discussed. Next, a few views on the topic of widening access and participation in education will be presented. Subsequently, information related to BL will be put forth, followed by a synthesis of its advantages and disadvantages, and the use of it in EFL. Then, the concepts of learning outcomes and learning experience will be dealt with. Subsequently, the notion of student satisfaction will be addressed, together with its importance in higher education, and some of the factors that impact BL environments. To follow, a theoretical framework, the Communitiy of Inquiry (CoI), underpinning the research will be examined, and finally, some conclusions will be brought forward.

2.1. Learning English as a Foreign Language

Why is English being taught and learnt as a foreign language in countries, such as those in Latin America, where people do not need it for communication purposes among their fellow citizens? The main reason is that the English language is recognized as the medium of international communication that allows those who can use it to

extend their sphere of connections and influence in business, academia, culture, or other areas.

It seems to make sense to focus this study on the context of Latin America due to the characteristics that most of these countries share, among these a common language (Spanish), with the exception of Brazil (Portuguese). Furthermore, most Latin American countries have put policies and programmes in place to improve English proficiency levels among the population. English proficiency is increasingly required to be able to communicate, participate, compete and grow in the global economy. However, the results obtained in EFL standardised tests reflect the low level that persists in students' English language proficiency in the region (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).

Teaching and learning EFL in a country where it is not used as a medium of communication is a challenging task for both instructors and students. Although globally some research has been done on challenges that students are exposed to when learning EFL, little has been investigated and published on it in Latin America. However, more research, although still insufficient, has been undertaken on teaching EFL in the region (Banfi, 2017; Porto, 2014) with regard to the implementation of English language programmes, methodologies, teaching strategies, assessment instruments, educational resources, and instructor development opportunities involved. The line between EFL learning and EFL teaching (ELT) is a thin one to draw since one may inevitably impact the other. According to Brown (2007), the relationship between teaching and learning is one of dependence and subordination. Instructors guide, facilitate, and establish the conditions for learning, as well as motivate students to learn. In order to employ the adequate educational approach, methods, teaching strategies, and techniques, instructors have to be aware of the circumstances and of how students learn. Moreover, the most interesting and carefully prepared lessons are no use if they are not conducive to learning (Cook, 2001). In areas in which English is a foreign language, as is the case of all Latin American countries, English is predominantly learned in school. This makes the instructor a decisive and most influential factor in the way and how much students learn that language.

The challenges that students face when learning EFL in Latin American countries are several. However, the information available on the topic is rather scant.

This seems to be due to the fact that research carried out on students' opinions and experiences during the process of learning the language is either difficult to access or has not been done or published. Therefore, the information provided here will be viewed from a more global perspective, including some studies done in the region. Although there are a host of factors that impact on EFL learning, among the most relevant are motivation and attitudes towards the language, socio-economic factors, and instructor preparation and students' exposure to English, which will be dealt with below.

2.1.1. *Motivation and Attitudes*

A student-related factor that has been pointed out as relevant is motivation and attitudes to learn another language (Dörnyei, 2001; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Motivation in language learning has been defined by Gardner (1985) as "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (p. 10). It is considered to be a complex phenomenon and has been described as consisting of two categories: instrumental and integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). These are associated to the communicative needs the language student has, and to the student's attitudes in relation to the community and culture that represent the foreign language. Students that require the use of the foreign language in a variety of social situations or for professional goals will become aware of the value of being able to communicate in the foreign language. Therefore, they will be motivated to become proficient in it. In such a case their motivational stimulus is instrumental. On the other hand, the motivational integrative stimulus is present in students that have positive attitudes towards the foreign language culture and community and are willing to interact with and be integrated to it (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). It has been put forward that the integrative approach contributes to students' internalizing the significance of learning a second or foreign language and develop their intrinsic motivation, which is the inner drive or pleasure that a student experiences when learning. In this way they become more autonomous and success driven with regards to their education. Such a motivational approach should lead to increased learning outcomes (Nichols, 2016).

It has been reported that in Latin America most students study EFL because it is mandatory at school. However, the next motivational factor they have mentioned is the desire to have better employment opportunities. Other significant factors that motivate learning English are the need to access information and the ability to travel (British Council 2015 a, b, c, d, e, f, g). Based on this information it seems that the predominant motivational approach students of EFL have is instrumental in Latin American countries in general. This makes learning EFL challenging for Latin American students.

In a study carried out in Chile based on the results obtained in 2012 and 2014 in the national high stakes English test taken by over 150000 11th grade students, it was reported that the majority of the students were motivated to learn English although their motivation to do so was not particularly triggered by the English test. About half of the students found it important to obtain a good mark in the test and the certificate of the test. However, the relationship between motivation and students' successful performance in the test could not be established as statistically significant (Walczak et al., 2017). It can be inferred that these students' motivation towards learning English was still mainly instrumental based on the answers given. The level of satisfaction experienced with learning English was not part of the study.

A study by Despagne (2010) on Mexican university students illustrates their high level of instrumental but low level of integrative motivation towards learning English. Their desire to acquire the language is triggered by the opportunities of finding a better job or pursue further studies in the United States. However, their perception toward the American culture is not positive due to the historic, political, economic, and social issues that have existed between those two countries.

2.1.2. *Socio-Economic Factors*

The impact of socio-economic factors in learning a foreign language has not been extensively researched (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013). However, some studies have pointed out the significance of the social context in the foreign language learning process and outcomes. According to Walczak et al. (2017), Chilean high school students whose families had a higher socio-economic status tended to have better outcomes in the EFL test mentioned above. The relationship observed between the socioeconomic status of the students' family, the parents' educational level and the

students' performance in English has been explained as being due to how the education system is structured in Chile. Its educational system is one of the most segregated in the world (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013), as mentioned in Chapter 1. Private schools have the best results but are attended by only 8% of the students in the school system (OECD, 2017). Kormos and Kiddle (2013) surveyed 740 secondary school students that belonged to various social classes in the capital of Chile, Santiago. Their findings confirmed that social class impacted two EFL learning goals: instrumental motivation and international posture. International posture includes ""interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to study or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners … and a non-ethnocentric attitude towards different cultures" (Yashima, 2002, p. 57). The higher the social class, the higher the students' instrumental motivation and international posture. On the other hand, Chilean students in lower social classes may feel they have no need to use English in the future in their professions or occupations (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013).

Moreover, Aguilar (2017) carried out a study on sixteen 9th to 12th grade students in two disadvantaged Chilean schools. At each school eight students participated in a focus group. The study revealed that most of the students were aware of the importance attributed to English as a means of global communication. However, the two instructors interviewed at each school recognized that students did not achieve the level of English expected according to the national curriculum due to factors such as lack of study habits, focus, and motivation, among others. These factors can partly be attributed to the disadvantaged status of the students.

Studies carried out in other contexts confirm that socioeconomic status has a significant effect on students' EFL achievement. Ariani and Ghafournia (2016) researched 350 Iranian postgraduate students from five different social classes. They concluded that upper class student obtained the highest scores in a TOEFL test (general language proficiency test) whereas lower class students obtained the poorest scores. Furthermore, they found a positive correlation between social class, eagerness to study, and results in the TOEFL test.

According to Gao (2014), the increasing social inequality in China is also impacting the opportunities Chinese students have to achieve a high level of English. Being proficient in English is highly desirable for Chinese students as it gives access to

the most demanded educational institutions, better jobs, and social status. Chinese students need to study EFL throughout their school years to be accepted into a prestigious higher education institution since English forms part of the national university entrance examination. Furthermore, to graduate from university they are required to achieve a certificate in English. Once they have graduated, their English competence allows them to obtain a good workplace and work promotions. Due to these high demands, parents with an economic and social capital provide their children with high-quality education and send them to private language centres where they are taught EFL to complement what they are learning at their regular school. On the other hand, lower class parents are faced with greater challenges to give their children such opportunities. Thus, "in China, English education is increasingly becoming a site for the reproduction of social-class differences" (Gao, 2014, p. 94).

Results published by Salinas (2021) on foreign language learning (not only English) as measured by PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) evidenced that the opportunities to learn a foreign language are greater in higher socio-economic status schools than in those that are disadvantaged. These findings point towards the existence of a social divide that does not allow the development of effective communication skills in a foreign language for socially disadvantaged students.

2.1.3. *Instructor Preparation and Students' Exposure to English in the Classroom*

Instructors are essential in introducing the necessary changes and adequate methodologies in the EFL classroom which will allow students to learn the language effectively. However, according to Cronquist and Fiszbein (2017), in the Latin American region, there are not enough quality English instructors. Most of them do not exhibit the required levels of language proficiency for teaching EFL. Nevertheless, the strongest performance has been evidenced by instructors in Chile and Costa Rica. Although many instructors have adequate performance ranging between B2 or B2+ (CEFR), there are still many others that only reach the A1 or B1 proficiency level. This means that they can hardly hold a basic conversation in English but are nevertheless expected to prepare their students to achieve higher levels of communicative competence. Moreover, Walczak et al.'s (2017) large-scale study revealed that most Chilean students spoke Spanish or mainly Spanish during their English classes, while

only a minority (2%) spoke English. Half of the students mentioned that their instructors spoke mostly or only English in class, while about one-fifth of the students indicated that the language used by their instructors was Spanish only or mostly Spanish. If students are expected to develop communicative language skills in English, a major obstacle to it is the lack of exposure to interacting in English with their peers and instructors. An example of this is that high school students participating in a study focusing on EFL in disadvantaged schools stated that their instructors did not possess enough language competence to teach it and to allow for the class to be carried out in fluent English (Aguilar, 2017). Walczak et al. (2017) concluded that students who spoke more English in class had better English language performance.

Besides this, the number of years and number of hours students are taught EFL also has an impact on how much they can develop their foreign language competencies. Walczak et al. (2017) found that the earlier Chilean student started learning English at school, the more hours, and more classes per week the school offered, the higher the chances of performing well in the high-stakes English test. The number of hours taught and how much English was used in the classroom largely depends on the educational institution and its type: public (municipal), voucher-subsidised private, or private. According to Harmer (2021), the small number of hours of instruction that EFL students in Latin America have is insufficient. Having between 1 and 3 lessons a week does not allow language to be learnt as more exposure to it is required to be consolidated.

On the other hand, EFL instructor preparedness in Latin American countries has often been addressed since the availability of quality EFL instructors is very limited (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017). In Chile the situation is not different, in spite of the initiatives carried out by the Ministry of Education, as presented in Chapter 1. The educational institutions that prepare English instructors are mainly universities. These offer between 4- and 5-year programmes that should ideally provide prospective EFL instructors with English language knowledge and skills, methodologies, and other topics in education, so they can become high quality professionals in the field. However, the preparation they are receiving has been criticised as inadequate for the needs and context of the country. There has been little innovation in the instructor education curricula for years to make them more relevant to the reality in schools.

Adding to this, instructor education faculty are seldom involved with the realities of the schools where pre-service instructors carry out their teaching practicum (Abrahams & Silva Rios, 2017). These are some of the factors related to EFL instructor preparedness that impinge on the quality and level of English and their pedagogical skills.

Furthermore, due to the lack of innovation in instructor education curricula, Chilean EFL instructors persist in delivering instructor-centred lessons and still rely on the grammar translation method, which has long been replaced by other more updated language teaching methods worldwide (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013). Thus, instead of experiencing enjoyment when learning EFL, many students have endured it as a curricular requirement with low levels of successful outcomes (Aguilar, 2017; Kormos & Kiddle, 2013).

If students were able to access learning technology to enhance language learning at school and during their free time, they would find that learning English can be a desirable goal which will enable them to participate in computer games, social networks, and other sites. This could motivate them to learn and apply English both at school and outside it. Although disadvantaged students still have limited access to modern technological developments due to their limited financial resources, in Latin America some schools have introduced teaching programmes which make use of technology giving those students the opportunity to learn English they did not have before (Banfi, 2017). Moreover, many educational institutions could make use of the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that numerous families have made great efforts to provide students with appliances that have allowed them to keep connected to their schools, instructors, and materials. It is the right timing for adopting a mix of technology supported environments and classroom instruction: BL. Its definitions, advantages, and disadvantages for EFL will be discussed after some views on widening access and participation in education are presented.

2.2. Widening Access and Participation in Education

The COVID-19 pandemic not only made the need for technology to access education more visible, but also increased the difficulties that students from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced. According to Schleicher (2020), the crisis generated by the pandemic has evidenced the innumerable shortcomings and

inequalities that educational systems have. These include the availability of computers and adequate internet connection (necessary for accessing online education), conditions that are suitable for concentrating on learning, as well as the disparity existing between needs and resources. Many Chilean students enrolled in the higher education institutions, including those participating in the present study, have also experimented the inequalities that the education system has. Thus, it seems relevant to discuss the topic of widening access and participation in education, which is a global matter of concern.

The issue of widening access and participation in education is complex and significant. It is especially crucial in the context of higher education as opportunities for further studies and career development are closely connected to someone's economic and social background (Dearing, 1997; Milburn, 2012; Sosu et al., 2016). The different views discussed on this issue reflect the diverse opinions existing about the role of education in society and about how to achieve access and success in education. Three of these views will be mentioned below.

One of the views highlights the importance of creating opportunities for all children and youngsters to access education, no matter their socio-economic status, race, and gender. Research has evidenced that these factors strongly predict educational outcomes (Reardon, 2011). Supporters of this view argue that obstacles to education generated by lack of resources, poverty and inequality should be addressed with initiatives and policies implemented by governments and institutions (Rivero, 1999). OECD (2019) reported that increased spending on early childhood, especially on disadvantaged students, can positively impact educational outcomes. It has also been stated that not giving opportunities to the poorest children to take part in every stage of education results in diminished learning and is "a key driver of the global learning crisis" (UNICEF, 2020, p. 3). Although it has been acknowledged that more resources need to be spent on education to give disadvantaged students the chance to be educated, it has also been contested that such measures have not always been effective, particularly when the funds have not been large enough (Dynarski & Kainz, 2015). Moreover, it has been proposed that financial resources should be invested in research which provides insights into the areas that are impacted the most by

spending increases, as well as into the contexts in which further spending results in better learning outcomes (Jackson, 2020).

A different view is held by proponents who state that access to education should be determined by individual choice and responsibility. This perspective is endorsed by studies which evidence that motivation, effort, and skill predict educational outcomes (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Furthermore, individual student's attitudes, such as the lack of motivation to learn can become a barrier that is harder to overcome in accessing higher education than their socioeconomic background (Burke, 2017). Moreover, to widen participation retaining students and helping them progress in their studies, the focus has been on remedial forms of support, such as counselling, study skills, and time management, among others. However, this approach has been criticised as it reproduces social inequalities by locating the problem at the level of the individual rather than on the population of disadvantaged students (Jones & Thomas, 2005).

Still another view underlines the relevance of supporting access to and participation in education through the creation of a market-oriented educational system. Its proponents emphasize the potential benefits of competition, innovation, and efficiency in obtaining better educational outcomes. Due to the demographic pressure to expand the access of students to education, charter schools, voucher programmes, and performance-based funding was introduced. Furthermore, some higher education institutions were created that were not fully accountable to the state (McCaig, 2010; Waslander et al., 2010). Critics of this perspective contend that a market-driven approach may augment already existing inequalities and may not deal with the structural barriers that prevent disadvantaged student access to education (Kerr & Ainscow, 2022).

Worldwide many more students have been able to gain entry to higher education, although the need for widening access and participation is still significant. The global number of students has increased from 19% to 38% between the years 2000 and 2018. Notwithstanding, the existence of a gap between the rates of enrolment and graduation is to be observed (Viera et al., 2020). In the Latin American and Caribbean context, the percentage of enrolments more than doubled. It went from 21% in 2000 to 52% in 2018. Nevertheless, there are significant disparities in

access to higher education based on socioeconomic status. Students from lower-income backgrounds have fewer opportunities to enrol in university than wealthier students (World Bank, n.d.).

The use of technology has made it possible to introduce innovative ways to widen access and participation in Latin America, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In Mexico, a higher education institution has implemented online courses and online programmes for students who are unable to attend traditional university courses. Students living in remote areas, as well as those who have job or family responsibilities have successfully accessed higher education opportunities (Universidad de Guadalajara, 2023). In Chile, a few institutions have implemented fully online programmes for working adults, which have made it possible for them to obtain a first or second professional degree and promote lifelong learning (Universidad Andres Bello, 2023; Universidad San Sebastian, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted some of the existing inequalities in higher education worldwide, including Latin America. With universities moving to online and blended learning, those students who do not have access to technology or who live in areas with limited Internet connectivity are at a disadvantage. Therefore, although efforts have been made to widen access and participation in higher education, there is still much work to be done. Policymakers, universities and other stakeholders need to continue to collaborate and develop innovative solutions to the challenges that higher education is posed with, particularly for disadvantaged students.

2.3. Blended Learning

2.3.1. *Blended Learning: What is it?*

Although BL has been defined in numerous ways, there is no universally agreed definition for it. The absence of an unambiguous definition may be explained by the continuous change that technologies are undergoing and by the constant experimental convergence of technologies and the pedagogical approaches used by instructors in two representative learning environments (Ismail, 2018; Ossiannilsson, 2017). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) have defined BL as the “thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences” (p. 5). It is said to combine the best of both worlds, i.e., traditional face-to-face instruction and online learning (Dziuban et al., 2004; Watson,

2008). Christiansen et al. (2013) emphasize the personalisation of the learning experience which allows the students to have a certain degree of determination, flexibility, and agency over it (Jackman, 2018; Koneru, 2019) by adding that in BL there is "some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace" (Christiansen et al., 2013, p. 8), particularly in the online environment.

For the purposes of this study, BL will be defined as a mix of face-to-face instruction and online learning, which is based on contents and activities made available on a learning platform. In the classroom, the contents and skills acquired online are put into practice and enhanced through the use of an approach that integrates behaviourist and constructivist learning. The proportion of face-to-face and online learning is intended to be fairly equal. While the face-to-face class has a fixed schedule and the same duration for all students in class, students may invest more or less time on the online component as it will depend on their interest in the course and the language, their previous level of knowledge of the language, as well as their self-direction and commitment with their own learning.

However, in order to obtain a better understanding of what the term BL encompasses, more research needs to be carried out producing institution and cross-institutional studies which can be disseminated in the more technical and general literature (Smith & Hill, 2018). Moreover, the fact that researchers are still struggling to define what BL is and to construct significant models that address this topic suggests that it is not a well-established domain yet (Graham et al., 2014).

2.3.2. *Blended Learning: Advantages*

According to the literature reviewed, many studies addressing BL have focused on the advantages and disadvantages of such modality of instruction. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, under the current COVID-19 pandemic, the advantages of BL make it one of the most viable solutions to access educational services for a great number of students worldwide (Bordoloi et al., 2021).

Among the advantages reported is its capability to allow for innovations to the traditional classroom learning approach and giving students flexible access to the contents. It can thus enhance the flexibility required in an educational environment that experiences increasing demand, at the same time that it continues to maintain

the opportunities for personal interactions provided by the traditional face-to-face classroom (Norberg et al., 2011).

Murray et al. (2016) reported on an exploratory study on the perceptions of graduate engineering students with regards to a management course that was redesigned from a traditional face-to-face to a blended format. Most of the students (49) had not experienced a blended or online course before. They were surveyed before and after they had completed the blended course. Although the majority were at first hesitant about participating in a blended course, once they had finished it their perceptions about the experience were predominantly positive. They not only stated their belief that the flexibility and work pace were beneficial and helped to learn the course material, but also that they were willing to take another BL course. However, their grades and performance were only slightly higher than those obtained by other students in the same course taught by the same instructor in face-to-face or online formats, which might indicate that the delivery method did not significantly impact students' performance (Larson & Sung, 2009).

From an institutional perspective, Porter et al. (2014) carried out a study in which they examined various higher education institutions in the U.S. that were implementing BL. They found that in general there exist three goals for its adoption. First, it allows for enhanced pedagogy by providing a learning environment that results in better learning outcomes and learning experiences. To examine the impact of a BL environment on students' learning outcomes, objective measures, such as marks obtained by the students, as well as subjective measures, such as students' perceptions, have been used (López-Pérez et al., 2011). Second, it makes increased access and flexibility for students and faculty possible, as indicated previously. Third, it improves cost-effectiveness by permitting better use of resources and classroom space. In spite of a growing number of students who enroll in higher education, it is often difficult to finance additional classrooms. Thus, by utilizing BL, seat time that would have been used for a face-to-face lesson is freed for other courses to make use of (Moskal et al., 2013).

BL provides students with greater opportunities of collaboration (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) The face-to-face environment can facilitate it as online discussions among students may result in not being as high quality as those occurring in face-to-

face environments due to the lack of structure and facilitation of those activities (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Other researchers (e.g., Bliuc et al., 2011) have indicated that students taking part in traditional classroom discussions produce more elaborated and critical reflections, while online discussions often lack depth and are regarded by students as a formal requirement rather than a contribution to the learning process of the community they are part of.

It has been stated that introducing BL in schools and higher education institution courses can contribute to enhanced course outcomes (Al Noursi, 2020; Bowyer & Chambers, 2017; Hipol et al., 2020; Kazu & Demirkol, 2014), such as higher retention rates and improved student pass rates (López-Pérez et al., 2011). Improved course outcomes, including increased student satisfaction, enhanced performance in examination, and better class attendance, have also been reported (Stockwell et al., 2015). A quasi-experimental study carried out on ninth graders in the United Arab Emirates also revealed that BL had a positive impact on students' achievement and on positive attitudes towards BL in a science course (Alsalhi et al., 2019). Likewise, a quantitative study done at the University of Jordan by Obiedat et al. (2014) was carried out involving students in the School for Information to research the impact of BL on academic achievement. The results demonstrated that BL had a positive impact on and showed a significant correlation with the marks students obtained in the courses.

On the other hand, there are few studies reporting that BL does not impact students' performance significantly, especially when comparing student outcomes in BL courses with those delivered online or face-to-face (Larson & Sung, 2009; Maki et al., 2000; Reasons et al., 2005; Vaughan & Garrison, 2005). For instance, two quasi-experimental studies were carried out by Alshwiah (2009) and Tosun (2015) to test a proposed BL strategy with students studying the English language at Arabian Gulf University and at META prep-school in Turkey respectively. The studies did not report any significant difference between the experimental and control groups with regards to academic achievement or attitude towards English.

According to Garrison and Kanuka (2004), the most significant advantage of BL in the context of higher education is that it can set up environments for students to learn and undergo a transformative process. The combination of face-to-face and online instruction can become an enriched environment in which the best

characteristics, media, strategies, and technological means of both components may be used to the students' advantage (Bolliger & Eriksen, 2013). The complex interconnections between the physical and the online environments have the potential to transform the educational experience since communication among the participants is multidimensional. As a consequence, the learning relationships between students and instructors can transcend the timeframe in which a class or course takes place. The learning process in such an environment becomes more flexible and adaptable, providing authentic opportunities for collaboration and the development of students' critical and creative thinking skills (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Furthermore, Vernadakis et al.'s (2012) study on 53 undergraduate students revealed that BL fostered student-centered learning since it encouraged them to become more responsible for their learning. At the same time, students' involvement and participation increased, which is a necessary requirement for learning to take place.

2.3.3. *Blended Learning: Disadvantages*

Despite its numerous advantages, BL has not always proved to be the most effective learning approach because the course and learning outcomes may be affected by several factors (BakarNordin & Alias, 2013). These factors include the students' study environment preference (i.e., online, face-to-face, or a combination of both) and whether they are low or high achievers (Owston et al., 2013). According to Owston et al.'s (2013) conclusions, high achievers experienced higher levels of satisfaction with BL. They were more engaged with their studies, seemed to learn important concepts better, and found BL flexible and convenient. On the other hand, low achievers did not experience much satisfaction with BL, were not willing enough to take another course in this modality and preferred face-to-face instruction. Thus, it appears that for low achieving students to be successful, additional support needs to be given to them when they have no choice but to take part in blended courses. This support can be in the form of especially trained instructors to facilitate their learning, and especially designed courses.

Another disadvantage is the increased workload, particularly in the online component, both for students and instructors. The use of technology supported learning environments requires changing from an instructor-centered to a student-centered approach, in which students have to learn to become autonomous, flexible,

and organized. Lack of time management skills may cause students to fall behind with their coursework (King & Arnold, 2012).

The lack of support from the instructors, peers, family, or friends may also become a disadvantage as it affects learning effectiveness. Park and Choi (2009) showed that not having family, peer, or organizational support may lead to students dropping out of online courses. They came to this conclusion after investigating 147 students that had dropped out or finished an online course at an American university. Students who dropped out and those who persisted showed statistical differences in their perceptions about organizational and family support. Thus, it is highly probable that students in online or BL courses who do not get enough support will drop out of their courses.

BL has made communication, interaction, and participation potentially available and possible "any place, any time, on demand" (Dede, 1996, p. 1). However, this notion is being challenged as still at present not all students and instructors have access to broadband Internet, the skills required to use technology for educational purposes (which are different from the ones used to take part in social networks), and students' learning competences are not the same everywhere (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018). Thus, another factor that negatively affects student success in online and BL is students' and instructors' lack of necessary skills and experience to use computer and Internet applications. This factor has been reported to impact students' perceptions and outcomes in BL language courses (Bueno-Alastuey & Lopez Perez, 2014). The researchers examined students' views on the usefulness of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in an English language course and a Spanish language course. Each course had different levels of ICT integration. They concluded that about one-third of the students did not find ICT had helped them learn nor that it was useful for language learning. Mahlangu (2018) rightly states that "With the increasing diversity of the student population, it is vital to identify practices that can better equip students to utilize technology in ways that will promote learning, development, and success for all students" (p. 24). Therefore, it is recommended that instructors pay heed to students who reject ICT in online and blended courses. To transform the use of technology into a positive experience, students require guidance

and training from their instructors, as well as clear explanations about why certain activities are useful for their learning process.

2.3.4. *Blended Learning for English as a Foreign Language*

BL for EFL has been researched globally to suggest improved ways to learn and teach English. Its use has demonstrated that it brings about a variety of effects that are beneficial to students' learning and to the learning environment. Among these are the opportunities to establish collaborative learning and meaningful interactions, rich exposure to English, and enhanced motivation (So & Brush, 2008; Yoon, 2014). Moreover, it has also proved to be effective in the development of language skills, although with varying results (Al-Zumor et al., 2013; Banditvilai, 2016; Tosun, 2015; Yen et al., 2019).

In Latin America, some studies on BL used for EFL have been reported. Several of these have been carried out in the context of the Colombian educational system. Two examples of research undertaken will be mentioned. Clavijo et al.'s (2008) study focused on the exchanges that a group of teacher trainees in Colombia and a group of senior high school students in Canada carried out on an online forum platform as part of their regular language course over a seven-month period. Mentored by their respective instructors, students explored each other's local culture and learned about the way societies in other countries live. This was carried out using the foreign language they were learning (English for Colombian and Spanish for Canadian students). The researchers concluded that the use of technology generated a productive learning community, centered on and owned by the students, which contributed to the promotion of language learning.

Another research undertaken in Colombia on blended learning EFL courses used a virtual foreign language program (ALEX Virtual English Program) (Cantor, 2009). Four groups of EFL university students took part in the study, which extended over a term. The focus of the study was the interactions (dialogs and debates) taking place in English on a discussion board initially facilitated by the instructor and the tutor of the courses. Although one of the goals of the study was for students to develop autonomy to discuss and review topics, the research concluded that to motivate students to use the tool more direct accompaniment was needed from the teacher (by giving feedback on language structures, vocabulary, and written discourse features).

As the present study was carried out in Chile, it was necessary to investigate to what extent published research on the topic of EFL in a BL environment had been attempted in this country. It was found out that there is a dearth of information on it. This may be due to the fact that few validated EFL experiences using this approach have been reported in this country (Morales Rios & Ferreira Cabrera, 2008a). The published research has mostly viewed the learning process from the teaching perspective. The key papers include the research carried out by Bañados (2006, 2015), who has focused mainly on looking into the design and implementation of a pedagogical model offered to university students and faculty through an English language learning programme over ten years. According to her findings, the BL pedagogical model set-up has been successful as the students participating in the pilot study improved their language skills considerably.

Further research has focused on presenting empirical evidence on the effectiveness of language learning based on BL activities that combined task-based instruction, and cooperative learning (Morales Rios & Ferreira Cabrera, 2008a, 2008b). The studies conclude that students' language learning skills improve when an adequate pedagogical model for BL is implemented. Morales Rios and Ferreira Cabrera (2008a) reported that students exposed to a BL context increased their language skills substantially, especially written production. Oral production, oral comprehension, and written comprehension were impacted less. Based on these findings, research has been carried out on combining them with the use of student training and language learning strategies (Garcia Salinas, 2010; Garcia Salinas et al., 2012; Ferreira Ferreira et al., 2014). These studies have concluded that a BL environment is effective in fostering students' metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies during the learning process, which impacts positively on the development of students' English language skills.

A few other studies done on BL EFL programmes in the Chilean higher education context include the following. Johnson's (2013) study concentrated on the topic of university teacher perceptions about their engagement with blended learning courses. The research arrived at the conclusion that instructors need to take part in the design of such courses to address issues such as learners' lack of involvement and teachers' marginal presence in the online components of blended learning courses.

Based on the data obtained from a longitudinal study with university administrators, instructors and students, the application of a socio-cultural model which considers student agency and identities to engage students in online and BL environments was proposed (Charbonneau-Gowdy, 2017; Charbonneau-Gowdy, 2018; Charbonneau-Gowdy & Chavez, 2018; Charbonneau-Gowdy & Chavez, 2019). The research carried out suggested that the lack of active participation from part of the students was due to the failure to create a community of learning that takes their complex social and psychological characteristics into account. However, these studies have not intended to establish a relationship between the English language skills and knowledge achieved by the students and the BL programmes examined.

More research has been done globally in the use of BL for EFL. It has focused on the enhancement of language skills as well as on its capacity to develop collaborative learning, among other topics. In Taiwan, So and Brush (2008) studied how much collaborative learning took place among students enrolled in two colleges in which BL was used to teach the English language. Their research did not include the improvement of EFL skills. They concluded that social interaction and a student-centered environment were produced as a result of the integration of synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication features. Nevertheless, they pointed out that students do not adopt active learning strategies automatically as a consequence of the use of BL. They have to be guided with regard to the roles they need to play to foster productive online and offline interaction.

Tosun's (2015) study in Turkey revealed that although students seemed to be satisfied with the BL strategy used to teach them EFL vocabulary, they preferred to learn it in the face-to-face class. They were not motivated enough to learn on their own in the online environment. As a result, their vocabulary achievement did not improve. Tosun (2015) suggested that different types of online tools should be used to incorporate authenticity and interest. Al-Zumor et al. (2013) studied the impact of using BL on EFL students' language skills in a higher education institution in Saudi Arabia. They concluded that the most significant advantage of this experience was the increased opportunities for reading and for enhancing the learning of vocabulary. Other language skills, such as spelling, writing, grammar, listening, speaking and

pronunciation, were not particularly improved but if some adjustments suggested by the students are implemented, they might be achieved.

Banditvilai (2016) carried out a study to determine whether by adding an online component to the face-to-face class EFL skills would be enhanced. The participants were higher education students in an English for Specific Purposes class in Thailand. A control group and an experimental group were examined with regard to their achievements and attitudes at developing language skills and student autonomy. The researcher concluded that through the use of the online component the four EFL skills, student autonomy, and leaner motivation were enhanced.

Research undertaken in Vietnam explored university students perceptions regarding their EFL skills development in a BL English foundation programme. Half of the students' thought their listening skills were enhanced since they were able to understand courses taught in English and the discussions their peers held. They also believed in the improvement of their English competence, understood as "mastery of language knowledge" (Yen et al., 2019, p. 61). Pronunciation, reading, vocabulary, grammar, writing and speaking skills were less improved.

2.4. Learning Outcomes and Learning Experiences

Learning outcomes have been defined as explicit "statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate at the end of a period of learning […] - the results of learning" (Adam, 2006, p. 2). The focus of learning outcomes is on the product rather than on the process. The latter is related to the learning experience. A learning experience can be described as "any interaction, course, program, or other experience in which learning takes place" (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). This may take place in classrooms and schools (traditional educational settings) or in outdoors or other-than-school environments (nontraditional settings). Furthermore, it may consist in interactions that involve students and instructors (traditional interactions) or students learning by means of software applications and other technology enhanced environments (nontraditional interactions). Different factors combine to determine what kind of learning experience students have. These factors include student satisfaction, motivation, participation, knowledge acquisition, persistence, delivery methods, and the support received from instructors and the institution (Bleffert-Schmidt, 2011).

Learning outcomes can be measured directly and indirectly to find out if the required learning has occurred in a course. Direct measures may consider quizzes, reports, homework, exams, case study analysis, research projects, essays, and rubrics for written and oral assessments. The results of such assessments are often expressed in grades or marks, which become indicators of students' academic performance. (Bean & Bradley, 1986). On the other hand, indirect measures may involve student surveys, course evaluations, course enrollment data, programme retention data, alumni surveys, and employer surveys (Cornell University, 2022).

Learning outcomes have been adopted in different forms by many countries. Their significance lies in that by assessing them institutional accountability and educational quality can be improved. The alignment of learning experiences, learning outcomes and assessment tasks contributes to establishing the basis for quality teaching and assurance, which impact on student learning and provide evidence of it (Brumwell et al., 2017).

At the Chilean University learning outcomes have been measured both directly and indirectly including all the different forms indicated above. The learning outcomes are measured directly by using the traditional way, which is by means of marks (for a description of the grading system used, please refer to Chapter 4). Both direct and indirect measurements of learning outcomes are elements that contribute to the evidence of academic quality presented for the national and international accreditation processes the university ascribes to. These processes also contemplate the university's educational model (Universidad Andres Bello, 2016), which systematises the reflection, learning, and evolution of the institution's learning experiences throughout its existence. It contains the main pillars that underlie the model and establishes the guidelines to execute the institution's understanding of its role in providing a transformational change in higher education. Thus, since 2017 a student learning assessment project was started which has considered the design of 59 assessment plans for courses where integrative learning is expected. These include the establishment of learning outcomes, their measurements and achievements for all undergraduate programmes.

Another way in which learning outcomes have been indirectly measured at the Chilean University is through satisfaction surveys that are administered to all students

in every course they have taken in a semester. In general, these surveys focus on the instructors, their ability to motivate the students, their use of innovative teaching methods, the alignment of assessment and course contents, among other aspects (see below for some more information). The impact of student satisfaction on students' learning experiences and learning outcomes has not been researched in the context of the Chilean University.

However, other studies abroad have revealed that such a relationship between student satisfaction, learning experiences and learning outcomes can be positive. Although Goh et al.'s (2017) study was carried out in Malaysia on online courses, they concluded that students' experiences with course design, interaction with peers, and interaction with instructors influenced learning outcomes and satisfaction. Furthermore, Nortvig et al. (2018) undertook a literature review to find out what factors impacted the learning experiences, learning outcomes and satisfaction of students in online and BL education. They concluded that among others the most noticeable were instructor presence in online environment, interactions taking place between students, instructors and content, and the coherence between the activities taking place online and offline, as well as between classroom-related or practice-related activities. They suggest that more research should be done to gain a better understanding of what affects students' learning experiences in the online environments of their courses.

2.5. Student Satisfaction

2.5.1. *Defining Student Satisfaction*

As the study deals with the satisfaction that students experienced with a specific learning programme (English language learning courses taught using BL), it seems necessary to attempt to define the concept of satisfaction first. Several definitions have been put forward in the field of education, such as Lo's (2010) who described it as being the student's subjective perception of "how well a learning environment supports academic success" (p. 48). Lo concluded that student satisfaction is related to their perceptions of how the instructor's performance, their own commitment to learning, and the course policies contribute to their learning. Similarly, Bolliger and Erichsen (2013) refer to it as "the learner's perceived value of their educational experiences in an educational setting" (p. 6). Likewise, Weerasinghe

et al. (2017) conclude that it is “a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of students’ educational experience, services and facilities” (p. 533). They reviewed literature on the topic of student satisfaction in higher education, where satisfaction was measured considering a wide range of factors, which among others included campus services, infrastructure, tuition costs, but paid less attention to learning and teaching.

In this study, the term satisfaction will be based on Bolliger and Erichsen’s (2013) definition and adapted to the research context, i.e., the perceived value that students attach to their educational experiences with an EFL BL course at university. More precisely, these experiences are related to their perceptions about the instructor, the technology, the course set-up, the interactions, and the outcomes of the EFL BL course.

2.5.2. *Measuring Student Satisfaction and Using the Data*

Measuring and studying student satisfaction is becoming increasingly important, particularly in Higher Education contexts (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007). The data obtained are often being used as a key measure of the quality of the institution or a programme. This information is made available to prospective students or used internally as a benchmark among different programmes. Furthermore, the use of course evaluation instruments allows for the supervision and improvement of the teaching and learning experience (Arbaugh, 2014), which, in turn, contribute to student satisfaction and to greater levels of retention and graduation (Schreiner, 2009).

An example of how satisfaction has been measured and managed in the higher education system at provincial level is the British Columbia Student Outcomes Survey, published annually by British Columbia BC Stats (2016), which gathers former students’ perceptions about their satisfaction with their studies. Higher education institutions employ this information to make improvements to their services and programmes, as well as to advise students who intend to apply for a place in an institution or continue studying.

Another instance of student satisfaction measurement at national higher education level is the Student Academic Experience Survey, which has been carried out in the UK since 2006. In 2016, almost 75000 students were invited to participate of

which 15221 responses were received, which was equivalent to a 20% response rate (Neves & Hillman, 2016). In 2021, over 47000 students were invited to take part in it and 10186 responded (21,35% response rate) (Neves & Hewitt, 2021). Over the years, the survey has asked a number of questions which in general have remained unchanged, such as those related to value for money, contact hours, who should pay for higher education, and wellbeing. These allow for results to be compared to those obtained in previous years. However, some new questions are usually added to gain further insights into the areas that impact the sector. The survey results have had a considerable influence on policymakers, helping to increase the quality of teaching and learning in universities in the UK to previously unseen levels of prominence (Neves & Hillman, 2016).

Researchers have also carried out studies to establish if learning outcomes, i.e., marks obtained and assessments of academic performance, can be related to satisfaction with the courses students have attended. Bean and Bradley (1987) investigated the interrelationship between students GPA (grade point average, i.e., a calculation of the scores obtained in the courses on average), an indicator of academic performance, and satisfaction, understood as a psychological outcome of university life. They concluded that a reciprocal relationship exists. However, students' academic performance did not have a strong positive effect on satisfaction, while satisfaction had twice as large an influence on academic performance. Dhaqane and Afrah (2016) investigated the role of satisfaction on students' academic performance in a university in Somalia. Their study revealed they were strongly related, whereby satisfaction promoted academic achievement. Furthermore, Dong and Lucey (2013) reported a positive linear relationship between average assessment performance and overall student satisfaction after studying first-year students participating in an Engineering Mechanics course in two different campuses of a university over four semesters. In line with these findings, Kirmizi's (2014) research, involving undergraduate distance English language students in Turkey, concluded that a weak but significant relationship existed between satisfaction and academic success. The results obtained indicated that 7.45% of students' academic success could be attributed to satisfaction.

Conversely, Maki et al. (2000) did not find an association between satisfaction and academic performance. They concluded that students in an online course scored

higher than the students in a face-to-face course. However, the latter manifested greater overall satisfaction with the course. Likewise, Khan and Iqbal (2016) indicated that they could not establish the existence of a significant correlation between satisfaction and academic achievement in their study with postgraduate students in a distance programme at a Pakistani university. Blanz (2014) researched the relationship between study satisfaction and academic performance (course marks) of undergraduate students at a German university. Almost no correlation between them could be found, which was attributed to the influence of different variables. Non-cognitive factors (motivation and course organization) affect study satisfaction, while cognitive factors (final school mark and learning behaviour) determine academic performance. The association between satisfaction and it being a predictor of expected learning outcomes is still uncertain and entails more research (Lane et al., 2021).

2.5.3. *Factors Influencing Student Satisfaction in BL Environments*

One aspect closely related to the learning experience is student satisfaction, as research in several educational contexts has demonstrated. It has been put forward that there appears to be a need for research addressing how students understand the learning experience in BL environments in terms of their perceptions and reactions to them (Lam, 2015; Murray et al., 2016). Therefore, in this section, some of the main factors that impact student satisfaction with courses taught in BL mode will be presented. Research on the topic indicates that student satisfaction is particularly influenced by the instructor, technology, interaction, and course set-up (Bolliger & Erichsen, 2013; Naaj et al., 2012), among a host of other factors.

- ***Instructor***

The main predictor of student satisfaction is the instructor (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004). This finding was also confirmed by Naaj et al.'s (2012) study. Likewise, Gray and DiLoreto (2016) concluded that among the five subscales they studied, the instructor subscale obtained the highest satisfaction score. It has been reported that instructors need to exhibit several characteristics in order for the student to be satisfied with their performance, such as helpfulness, openness, flexibility, availability and adequate response time (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Moore & Kearsley, 2005), together with exhibiting adequate skills and knowledge (Ali & Ahmad,

2011). Students also expect their instructors to give directions and support. In a study on how satisfaction impinges on perceived learning, Lo (2010) concluded that students who expected an A grade in their course exhibited greater satisfaction with how the instructor gave instructions than students expecting lower marks. Moreover, instructors do not only perform the role of facilitators but also of motivators (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Bolliger & Halupa, 2012). In their study on student satisfaction in online and blended courses based on personality type, Bolliger and Erichsen (2013) revealed that students particularly appreciated fair and clear assessments and marks given by the instructor, the instructor's accessibility and availability, the instructor communicating course expectations clearly, as well as how the instructor made them feel part of the class.

- ***Technology***

Technology is essential for online and blended courses. Therefore, in order for any such course to be successful and for learning to take place, students need to be able to access working equipment and Internet services that provide them with reliable tools. Familiarity with the technology being used in the course is also an important factor to consider (Knight, 2014). Moreover, students who have limited access to the Internet are not only at a disadvantage compared to those who have unrestricted access (Alhumaid, 2019; Wegerif, 1998), but also exhibit high levels of dissatisfaction (Islam, 2014; Kintu et al., 2017). One of the most significant factors that impinge on student satisfaction in technology supported environments is online access (Pham et al., 2019). In their study on first-year non-English major undergraduate and postgraduate Chinese students, Wu and Liu (2013) concluded that system functionality was one of the main factors determining student satisfaction in BL. System functionality was defined as "flexible access to learning and assessment function in EFL BL system" (Wu & Liu, 2013, p. 178). Wu et al. (2010) had also arrived at that conclusion when doing research on Taiwanese university students.

Research has shown that anxiety and negative attitudes regarding technology correlate positively (Conrad & Munro, 2008). Therefore, the more anxiety students feel and the more frustrated they feel with technology, the less satisfied they are (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Wei & Chou, 2020). At the same time, the learning experience can be highly affected by negative emotions that are technology-related (Saadé & Kira, 2009).

Al Zumor et al. (2013) reported that students' general dissatisfaction with BL experiences was caused by technical problems with the online learning environment used in their English language courses.

- ***Interaction***

Interaction may occur between students, between student and instructor, and between student and content of the course (Abbas, 2018). According to Bolliger and Halupa (2012), an important aspect of students' learning experience is the interaction with their peers and the instructor. Being able to discuss issues or challenges online with other peers whose circumstances are similar to theirs were especially valued. Furthermore, student satisfaction increases when the interaction with their instructors is constant and of good quality (Abdous & Yen, 2010; Bolliger & Halupa, 2018). Bolliger and Erichsen (2013) reported that a great number of students expressed their satisfaction with the blended course content and the interactions with their peers and instructors. In the online environment, interaction is a particularly significant challenge as students may feel separated from their peers and instructor (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016). Thus, the creation of a sense of community through interaction between students, and between students and instructor greatly contributes to student satisfaction with a blended course (Abbas, 2018; Faour et al., 2012). Furthermore, Abbas' (2018) study revealed that learning is facilitated by means of the interaction between student and content, course materials, assignments, and the online feedback that students receive from their instructors. Additionally, the level of interpersonal interaction that takes place in a course represents the most significant factor in the prediction of the marks obtained by students. Thus, the higher the interaction in the course, the higher the marks (Jaggars et al., 2013).

- ***Course set-up***

The elements of the course set-up are related to how the course is structured and organized, based on how its resources, instructional strategies, methodologies, schedule and planning have been developed and designed, before, during and after the course is delivered (Garrison et al., 2000; Gray & DiLoreto, 2016).

Bolliger and Erichsen (2013) reported that students in blended courses were satisfied with doing projects on their own and appreciated the flexibility of the course delivery method. According to Wu and Liu (2013), student satisfaction is associated

with well-designed and personalized, clearly displayed and easy to understand course content. Bañados' (2006) study revealed a high level of satisfaction with the set-up of EFL BL courses. However, a third of the participants indicated that the time assigned to carry out the online lessons was not enough for them to finish every section in it.

- ***Performance expectations***

Performance expectations have been defined as "students' anticipation concerning ideal rewards after certain behaviour" (Wu & Liu, 2013, p. 177). It has been reported that they contribute significantly to student satisfaction. Students count on certain expectations related to their test and exam marks, the course schedule, the interactions with their peers and instructors, among other elements, to be met. In fact, Wu et al. (2010) proposed a research model based on social cognitive theory in which they examined the factors that affected learning satisfaction in a BL environment. Their findings showed that what most contributed to satisfaction were performance expectations. They do not only correlate with learning satisfaction but also with students' learning performance (Firoozi et al., 2017). This can be explained based on the likelihood that students carry out activities that make them feel satisfied. Thereby they may predict the results of their actions. If they develop expectations of positive outcomes even before doing them, by feeling more confident about the tasks to be performed, they will exhibit higher levels of satisfaction, which will result in progressing further and being more successful (Firoozi et al., 2017).

In order to study student expectations and their relationship with student satisfaction, the expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1977, 1980) has been used. It involves four constructs: expectation, performance, disconfirmation, and satisfaction. Disconfirmation occurs when there is an inconsistency between the original expectations and the actual performance as perceived by the student. This may lead to one of three outcomes: When the actual performance matches the original expectations, there is zero disconfirmation, when the actual performance exceeds expectations, positive disconfirmation takes place, and when actual performance fails to meet expectations, it results in negative disconfirmation. Satisfaction is produced by positive disconfirmation, while dissatisfaction is produced by negative disconfirmation (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006). Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) researched the relationship between student expectations and

satisfaction to prove if the expectancy/disconfirmation theory could be confirmed. Their results indicated it depended on whether expectations and actual perceptions are measured together at the end of a course or whether expectations are measured at the beginning of it to be later compared with the actual perceptions of fulfilment. The former method seems to predict student satisfaction well, while the latter does not. These conclusions "imply that although expectations do have an effect on satisfaction, depending on when assessment occurs, levels of student satisfaction can actually shape recall of expectations" (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006, p. 262).

2.6. Theoretical Framework for Blended Learning

Several theories have been suggested to be relevant for blended learning research. Among these are the Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky, the Community of Practice by Lave and Wenger, the Conversational Framework by Laurillard, the Theory of Interaction by Moore, and the Community of Inquiry framework by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (Halverson et al., 2017). According to Shea (2007), establishing theoretical or conceptual models can help to investigate what requirements and tasks may be necessary to produce increased learning and student satisfaction. In this way, more effective BL environments can be designed.

A conceptual framework that has frequently been used for BL is the Community of Inquiry (CoI) (Garrison et al., 2000), which looks at the design and implementation of BL comprehensively. Therefore, by adapting it to the needs and particular characteristics of the students, it can be applied to all levels of education: schools, universities, the corporate world, among others (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018). Shea (2007) suggested that the CoI is an appropriate theorical framework to guide research in BL in the context of higher education as it "focuses directly on issues relevant to online pedagogy and processes" (p. 25). Although originally proposed to guide the research and practice of online learning, Garrison and Vaughan (2008) extended its applicability to BL as "the generic nature of the framework and its resonance with both face-to-face and online education make it a useful guide to understand and design BL environments" (p. 9). It has been extensively used in research on online and BL, which has resulted in over 4000 citations in the corresponding literature of the original article in which Garrison et al. (2000) explain the framework (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018). As will be mentioned below, it is

based on the interaction of three presences: social, cognitive, and teaching, and on a constructivist view of learning and teaching. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) argue that "a community of inquiry is a unifying process that integrates the essential processes of personal reflection and collaboration in order to construct meaning, confirm understanding, and achieve higher-order learning outcomes" (p. 29). Thus, to foster inquiry-based learning, opportunities for meaningful engagement need to be provided, while direct content instruction promotes passive learning (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018). This framework is particularly suitable for higher education contexts, where the aim is to enhance the learning of concepts, higher order thinking and discourse based on significant information and ideas, rather than the acquisition of fragments of information.

Garrison and Vaughan (2008) advocate strongly for an educational paradigm based on the existence of both face-to-face and online learning in an integrated manner. Their approach continues to be of interest until now and will continue to be so, as the rapid advent of communications technology in education is now being taken for granted by our students. This means that faculty are required to keep up with these technologies and adopt them adequately to engage students to achieve learning goals.

The CoI framework is based on two concepts that are key in the context of higher education: community and inquiry (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). On the one hand, community reflects the essentially social character of education and the process by means of which knowledge is constructed, i.e., through interaction and collaboration. On the other hand, inquiry indicates that meaning is being constructed by each individual involving their own preference and accountability in the process. Therefore, a CoI is made up by a close-knit group of students who interact in order to produce, reflect on, and validate useful knowledge. Furthermore, it integrates three fundamental elements which are "social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 9).

Figure 1

Community of Inquiry Framework

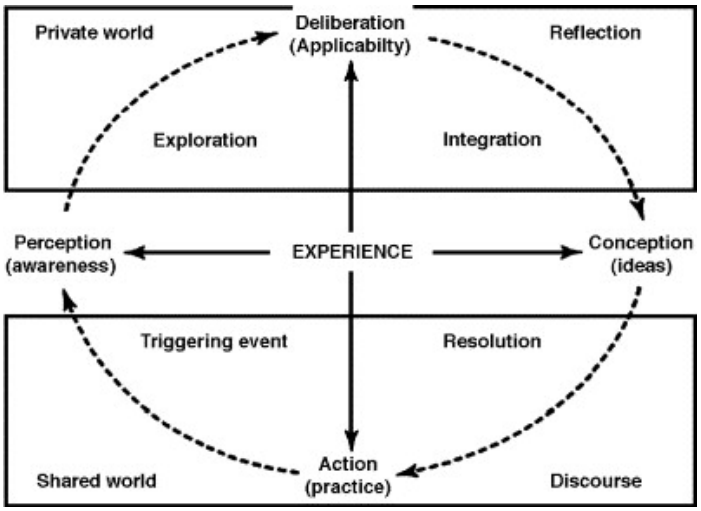
Note. Taken from Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 18.

Social presence is developed in a CoI through open communication, group cohesion and affective/personal relationships. It has been defined as "the ability of students to project themselves socially and affectively into a community of inquiry" (Giannousi & Kioumourtzoglou, 2016, p. 440). By means of the establishment of social presence, a CoI can achieve more advanced levels of learning, which entails using adequate language for interactive construction, critical reflection, and confirmation of understanding. This part of the process is known as cognitive presence and is the basis for building knowledge. An event triggers the identification and definition of a problem, which is then explored by refining and collecting pertinent information. Next, the information is integrated and analyzed in order to hypothesize a solution through rational debate, which is finally tested. Cognitive presence is defined as "the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication" (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 89). Another significant element that makes up a CoI is teaching presence, which integrates social presence and cognitive presence effectively and efficiently. This is done by the establishment of the curriculum, approaches, and methods, as well as the guidance and the focus on tasks and communication. It is an ample concept that involves "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning

outcomes" (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 5). Teaching presence is essential for the development of student cognitive and metacognitive processes and understanding. In order for students to engage in advanced levels of learning they need to be aware of these processes, so as to be able to become autonomous students.

Figure 2

Practical Inquiry Model



Note. Taken from Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 22.

Regarding the relationship between the CoI framework and students' satisfaction with blended courses, it has been reported that the three presences indicated above are important general predictors of satisfaction in such learning environments. Giannousi and Kioumourtzoglou (2016) revealed that cognitive presence was a stronger predictor of satisfaction than teaching and social presences in their study on higher education students. This was relevant as cognitive presence is closely correlated to learning**,** so more enhanced learning can be expected, although this relationship was not examined in Giannousi and Kioumourtzoglou's (2016) study. Other research has pointed towards teaching presence (Siah et al., 2021) or social presence (Lane et al., 2021; So & Brush, 2008) as contributing more to student satisfaction. However, when the three elements of a learning community (cognitive, teaching and social presence) are integrated to allow reflection and discussion, the outcome will be successful and satisfied students. Furthermore, the complete

integration of the cognitive and social elements is achieved by the teaching presence, hence its particular importance (Aykol, 2009; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2004).

The CoI framework has been implemented in a variety of second/foreign language contexts. It has been proven that it can be a relevant alternative to produce a significant learning experience for such students. Existence of social, teaching, and cognitive presence in language learning environments have been observed. Social presence can be especially found in interactive activities online, promoting student learning (Gonzalez Miy & Herrera Diaz, 2015).

In the case of the present study, the CoI framework will be used to discuss the results in order to attempt to understand students' satisfaction or lack of it with their EFL BL courses. As such, the insights gained through the analysis of the study data and the discussion of results will be useful to suggest ways of improving the English language BL programme at the level of the Chilean University and make a contribution to the theory and practice existing in this field in Chile and beyond.

2.7. Summary

This chapter first presented an examination and analysis of the research that has been done in the area of EFL, both in Chile and globally, in particular with regards to some factors challenging its effectiveness, such as student motivation and attitudes towards the language, socio-economic factors, as well as instructor preparation and students' exposure to English in the classroom. It was uncovered that not enough research on EFL from the students' perspective (i.e., learning) has been published in Chile and Latin America as most research has focused on teaching (ELT). It was followed by the presentation of views on the topic of widening access and participation in education due to the high numbers of first-generation university students that can be observed, both in the context of the study and worldwide. Later, it dealt with the concept of BL, its advantages and disadvantages, and some research done globally on this learning environment in the area of EFL. Few studies can be found about it in the region. A brief definition of the concepts of learning outcomes and learning experiences was provided, together with the importance of measuring them. Next, the notion of student satisfaction was explored and why it is significant to measure it. The literature also revealed that although satisfaction may predict expected learning outcomes, there is no conclusive evidence about the relationship

existing between them. The relationship will partly depend on the context and the variables involved. Thus, there is a need to investigate this topic further. The following factors influencing student satisfaction in BL environments were brought forward: instructor, technology, interaction, course set-up, and performance expectations. Finally, the CoI framework was introduced as it constitutes the theoretical framework through which the present study results will be examined. It will help explore and explain the factors that cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction with blended EFL courses in the context of higher education in Chile.

The proposed study can, therefore, contribute to the knowledge gaps that exist due to the lack of research on student satisfaction with EFL taught in a BL environment in the region, and the relationship of student satisfaction with learning outcomes in English language instruction in the context of Higher Education in Chile.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter deals with the methodology used in achieving the goal of the study i.e., investigate the levels of satisfaction university students experienced with their blended learning (BL) English course, the factors that exert an influence on those levels, as well as the relationship that exists between their perceived satisfaction levels and the results obtained in standardised tests, oral tests, written tests and their final course marks. A brief review of the philosophical perspective underlying the chosen research approach and design, mixed methods, the sample, and the ethical considerations will be described. This will be followed by the quantitative data collection procedure, the choice and adaptation of the instrument used, and the qualitative data collection procedure and the development of the instrument used.

3.1. Philosophical Perspective: Pragmatism

In order to understand the issues that the BL approach brought with it in implementing the English courses at the Chilean University, and to find possible answers to the research questions in this study, the student researcher assumed a pragmatic worldview. This allowed the application of both quantitative and qualitative perspectives to the study. The discussion chapter of this dissertation will intent to provide explanations for the findings that the present research exposes.

In the student researcher's view, pragmatism makes it possible to look at research from different perspectives which complement each other and give it greater depth. It allows for the combination of methods deemed suitable and necessary to search for answers to particular research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Dudovskiy, 2016).The positivist worldview would contribute to objectively observing the phenomenon by studying and analysing numeric data that could be replicated in further research, while the constructivist worldview would underlie the use of open-ended questions that could make it possible to gather subjective meanings of the participants' experiences in the context they lived. In such way, the study intended to integrate both views to understand and explain the research issues and questions. Additionally, as pragmatism concentrates on the problem that is to be studied and on

the outcomes of the research, it appears to provide a different standpoint to the worldviews represented by positivism and constructivism (Feilzer, 2009).

Pragmatism has been regarded as a new paradigm that replaces the philosophy of knowledge approach, which deals with research in social sciences in terms of ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Morgan, 2014). Pragmatists believed that "descriptions, theories, explanations, and narrative" in research are preceded by "values and visions of human action and interaction" (Cherryholmes, 1992, p. 13). This determines the direction in which research is carried out. Furthermore, there is more interest in looking for the consequences of actions and situations rather than the conditions that caused them. In this way, the search is focused on finding solutions to problems by applying "what works" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 10). As pragmatism is not committed to a particular philosophy or reality, it allows research to be carried out following both quantitative and qualitative assumptions when required. Consequently, pragmatic researchers are free to adopt the techniques, methods, and procedures they believe are necessary to reach their objectives.

Thus, pragmatism can make use of elements associated to positivism, which views the world as a closed system that can be controlled, measured, and predicted. It searches to identify the cause and effect of the phenomena studied through the application of the scientific method, involving standards and procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). Often positivism is related to quantitative research approaches. Due to its eclecticism, pragmatism can also employ a constructivist paradigm to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants themselves. By doing so, the researcher is not imposing a single external view on the phenomenon but works with the world as it has been understood by the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). As a result, constructivism frequently underpins qualitative research.

3.2. Mixed Methods Approach and Research Design

The study was based on mixed methods, whose commonly given basis is pragmatism (Cohen et al., 2018). It has been defined in numerous ways (Cohen et al., 2011; Small, 2011) but basically integrates or combines two different research methods (Gunasekare, 2015; Riazi & Candlin, 2014). This has led to mixed methods being objected for the issue of "commensurability" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 36), since it

intends to bring together methods that are based on different worldviews. Nevertheless, precisely that may not have been obtained analyzing and evaluating data separately" (Bowen et al. , 2017, p. 10). Of the three core mixed methods designs identified by Creswell and Creswell (2018), convergent, exploratory sequential, and explanatory sequential, this study applied the latter design. The explanatory sequential design is a two-phase design, in which quantitative data are collected in the first phase, the data are analysed and the results obtained are used to build on to the second qualitative phase. Thus, the qualitative data are used to help find more detailed explanations for the quantitative results.

Conducting a mixed methods study in general involves more challenges than carrying out a mono-method study because its design, data collection and analysis encompass two or more research approaches, which require knowledge on how to deal with them and additional time to conduct them (Almalki, 2016; Molina Azorín & Cameron, 2010). Despite these challenges, the research questions posed for this study (which are indicated further on in this chapter) needed to be answered with the use of different approaches, which combined can reflect a broader and deeper perspective of the research problem (Creswell, 2015). Thus, of the various mixed methods designs that exist, the one chosen for this study corresponded to a "sequential, explanatory approach" (Bowen et al., 2017, p. 10) or "explanatory sequential design" (DeCuir-Gunby & Schultz, 2018, p. 6), due to the scope of the study. For this study, the rationale for choosing the explanatory sequential approach over any other approach was that the application of an online questionnaire to a wide population of students, at a point in time when they were close to finishing their English course, would provide sufficient quantitative data that could show trends and results from a broad perspective. This could later be further explored by means of an interview applied to a smaller sample of participants, which would contribute to understanding those results from a deeper perspective and add additional data from the interview thereby allowing for richer insights.

According to this approach, the quantitative phase (numeric data) is followed by the qualitative phase (personal experience or text data) (Bowen et al., 2017; Ivankova et al., 2006). The weight is commonly placed on the quantitative data (represented by capital letters QUAN) rather than on the qualitative data (represented by lower case

letters qual). The participants in the latter phase are typically purposefully selected based on the results of the quantitative phase, which also determine the types of questions that the participants will be asked (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, the quantitative data and the results obtained can contribute to a general understanding of the research problem. The qualitative results can help contextualize, explain, and enrich the results obtained in the quantitative phase, as well as contributing to the generation of new knowledge (Bowen et al., 2017; Ivankova et al., 2006).

The present study was carried out in two phases. The first involved the application of an online questionnaire, which mainly gathered the quantitative data that would provide answers to the following research questions:

1) How satisfied are students with the blended learning programme for English as a foreign language?

1a) What are students' perceptions regarding their blended learning course?

1b) To what extent, if any, is there a relationship between their satisfaction with their blended learning course and their learning outcomes?

2) What are the factors contributing to students' perceived levels of satisfaction with a blended learning programme for English as a foreign language?

The second phase consisted in interviewing participants individually to gain further insights into the results obtained from the questionnaire data in the first phase of the study.

Table 3 summarizes the research design of the study, and the stages of the process. The details of the design will be discussed in the following sections.

Table 3

Summary of the Research Design and Process

Research Design	Research approach

Philosophical perspective	Pragmatism. Quantitative research (online questionnaire data) using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 24); Qualitative research (interview data), thematic analysis using Atlas.ti 8.0.
Methodology	Mixed methods explanatory sequential research;
Participants	University students
Data collection method	Online questionnaire administered through SurveyMonkey; Interviews given individually to participants via Zoom (and face to face)
Ethical considerations	University codes were followed (of both institution where the study was done and UoL)
Data analysis	Online questionnaire data analysed using SPSS (version 24); Interview data were transcribed; then thematically coded and analysed using Atlas.ti 8.0.
Validity, reliability	Measures and factors taken into considerations to guarantee validity and reliability of research to the fullest extent possible. Cronbach alpha applied to instrument used to gather quantitative data. Sample size of study population was calculated with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.
Limitations	Limitations were pointed out and recognised
Note. Adapted from Bowen et al., 2017, p. 12.	

3.3. Research Study Participants

The information regarding the organization of the EFL programme for the term the study was conducted is presented in table 4. It includes the number of students, sections, and instructors per English course level and location. Students enrolled in the

course level English I were excluded from the outset as they were not required to take a standardised test.

Table 4

General Data per Course Level for EFL Programme (First Semester 2019)

Course Level	City/Campus	N° sections	N° students	N° instructors
English II	Santiago	56	1744	38
	Viña del Mar	24	655	16
	Concepcion	15	419	10
	Total	95	2818	64
English III	Santiago	38	1127	27
	Viña del Mar	14	408	12
	Concepcion	10	324	7
	Total	62	1859	46
English IV	Santiago	37	1146	23
	Viña del Mar	15	469	11
	Concepcion	7	194	6
	Total	59	1809	40
	Grand total	216	6486	87

Note. Most instructors were teaching several sections during the semester

The numbers of the potential research participants were much lower than those presented above. They had to comply with the requirements to be considered to take part in the study, which included being an active student in an English II, English III or English IV class during the term the study was carried out and being expected to sit for the respective standardised test. Thus, the total number which could participate in the study were 1991 Chilean University students. They had already been identified and their email addresses were available in the university registration system. These

students were enrolled in English II, III or IV courses, which also determined the year in which they were in their study programme. Most students in English II and III were in their second year, while the majority of English IV students were enrolled in their third year. The undergraduate programmes they were enrolled in were varied: Ecotourism, Civil Engineering, Computer Engineering, Veterinary Science, Biochemistry, Environmental Engineering, Speech & Hearing, Nutrition and Dietetics, Nursery Education, Accounting and Auditing, Business Administration, Psychology, Kinesiology, Dentistry, Medical Technology, Chemistry and Pharmacy, Nursing, and Business Engineering.

The online questionnaire was applied in June 2019, which corresponded towards the end of the first academic semester in the Chilean University. Students in the selected classes were sitting for a standardised EFL test around that time. Although the number of students attending the three levels of English courses totaled approximately 6500, only a fraction of them could be given the standardised tests due to logistic reasons.

The 1991 potential participants in this study were studying in the three cities where the Chilean University is established: Viña del Mar, Concepcion, and Santiago. The Table 5 shows the distribution of the potential participants according to the city and course levels. All these students sat for the corresponding standardised test.

Table 5

Potential Participant Distribution, According to City/Campus and English Course

City/Campus	Course level				
	English II	English III	English IV	Total N° of participants	Percentages
Viña del Mar	124	70	110	304	15,27%
Concepción	35	101	75	211	10,60%
Santiago	629	415	432	1476	74,13%
Total N° of participants	788	586	617	1991	
Percentages	39,58%	29,43%	30,99%		100%

3.4. Ethical Considerations

In order to be able to execute a research study, ethical considerations which ensure the participants' dignity, well-being, privacy and anonymity need to be complied with (Jenn, 2006). These apply throughout the different phases of any qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research study. Thus, considerations have to be given to issues before carrying out the study, at the start of it, during data collection and data analysis, and when the data are reported, shared, and stored (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, prior to carrying out the pilot study and the data collection procedures, ethical approval was sought as required by the University of Liverpool. First, the Bioethical Committee of the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences of the Chilean University provided approval of the project proposal submitted. Next, the required ethical documents were filled in and presented to the Virtual Programme Ethics Committee (VPEC) at the University of Liverpool. These included the following forms: application for recognition of external ethics committee approval, request for participation in research, participant information sheet, and consent forms (one for the first phase and another for the second phase of the study). The approval of the process depended on having completed the aforementioned documents adequately. A few ethical concerns were raised by the reviewers which were addressed as follows. One of the points made was the concern about the collected data being anonymized as it would be retained for five years before being destroyed. It was clarified that anonymization would be carried out soon after each of the data collection phases had taken place, so that no participant could be identified (Toom & Miller, 2017). The length of time the data would be kept was also addressed as the instructions for it were found in a document called University of Liverpool Research Data Management Policy, which recommended retaining the data for at least 10 years to support or validate a research project's observations (University of Liverpool, n. d.). (Please see appendix 1 UoL Ethics approval letter, appendix 2 Participant information sheet, and appendices 3 and 4 Participant consent forms).

A second concern raised was related to the role the student researcher had in the institution, which might have led to coercive student participation and/or conflicts of interest. The fact that the student researcher had two roles in the institution, one as

the head of the English language programme, and the second as a language instructor, could have caused students to feel forced to participate in the study and thus introduce a bias in their answers. None of the participants in the research study would be among her students, thus no conflict could arise with regards to this point (Ferguson et al., 2004). Moreover, in order to avoid such a situation to occur, the communication with the information sent to the potential participants was carried out by the English Department coordinators, who acted as intermediaries, so students could freely take the decision to participate in it or not.

Furthermore, the third point that needed to be clarified referred to the number of participants in the second phase of the study. The potential number of participants in the first phase was fairly high, but the second phase would only consider 12 volunteers. The question raised was related to the exclusion criteria used in case more than 12 participants showed interest in taking part in the second phase of the data collection. This issue was addressed by indicating that they would be selected according to certain criteria: a representative participant per level of satisfaction, course level, city, and on a "first-come, first-served" basis until 12 participants were obtained (Gupta et al., 2015; St. Jeor et al., 1997). The selected participants would be contacted individually per email to find out if they continued being interested in taking part. In case they were, they would be required to sign the participant consent form before being interviewed. If selected participants did not show interest in taking part, other students that had expressed their willingness to be interviewed would be contacted, and so on until the definite number of participants had been reached.

A further question was related to the language used in the communication carried out with participants (emails, interview) and documents sent to them (e.g., request for participation in research, participant information sheet, online questionnaire). In case English was used, there was concern about whether the language used would be beyond students' language abilities. This point was addressed by keeping all communication with and information for the students during the research process in their native language (Spanish), for which all documents used were translated into that language by the student researcher, who is a native Spanish speaker and fluent in both written and oral English and Spanish (Cormier, 2018).

Both the request for participation in research and the participant information sheet highlighted the voluntary nature of the student's participation in the study, and the right to withdraw any time without having to give further explanation. Moreover, it was also indicated that their personal details would not be made public anytime, as privacy and confidentiality would be honoured (Cohen et al., 2018; Dooley et al., 2017).

Furthermore, they were provided with the student researcher's and supervisor's contact details, as well as those corresponding to the ethics committees in both institutions in case they had questions or comments about the research or its ethical considerations (the Ethics documents can be found in appendices 1, 2, 3, and 4).

3.5. Data Collection Methods

In order to gather data to understand the learning experience that students undergo during their time at a higher education institution, the most common way to do so has been by means of surveys (Klemencic & Chirikov, 2015; Radwin, 2009; Williams, 2014). However, attention should be given to what has been called "survey fatigue" (Klemencic & Chirikov, 2015, p. 372) or "respondent fatigue" (Ben-Nun, 2008), which causes students to answer surveys carelessly, or not answer them at all. Therefore, efforts should be made towards the improvement of survey instruments to obtain better quality data and to avoid pitfalls that may lead to bad data, which in turn, will not yield useful results (OECD, 2012). Accessing data obtained through surveys can be used to design action plans that lead to the improvement of learning and teaching (Lake et al., 2017). Furthermore, although survey data are an important source of evidence, they are not enough and must be complemented with data coming from other sources to validate them. Thus, contextualized data can be obtained through qualitative methods, thereby rendering data which are more authentic, deeper, and richer on the student experience. The disadvantage of qualitative data lies in the difficulty in obtaining large amounts of it, since the data collection procedures are time-consuming and expensive. Moreover, due to their limited scope, it is not possible to make generalizations based on them. However, at present the gathering of larger quantities of data for qualitative research can be done by means of social media platforms, such as Twitter (Andreotta et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it seems that until

ethical considerations concerning privacy and confidentiality of data obtained through the Internet have been addressed more thoroughly, qualitative data will still continue to focus on a limited participant population (Klemencic & Chirikov, 2015).

3.5.1. *Quantitative Data Collection: Questionnaire*

3.5.1.1. The Selection of the Questionnaire. For the first phase of the research study, a questionnaire that could help answer the proposed research questions was looked for. Many articles on the topics of student satisfaction and BL were examined to find a suitable and validated questionnaire. However, most of the articles reviewed would not include the questionnaire that had been used for the reported study. Thus, the search for a published instrument was ongoing. Finding it would make it unnecessary to create such an instrument from scratch.

While reviewing the literature, several questionnaires were analysed against the research questions in this study to assess if they were appropriate. Research question 1) sought to find out about how satisfied they were. Research question 2) involved enquiring about the factors that contributed to the students' levels of satisfaction with their EFL blended course. Some of the questionnaires examined were those used by Naaj et al. (2012), Poon (2013), Shantakumari and Sajith (2015), Bauk (2015), Cabero et al. (2010), Bolliger and Erichsen (2013), as well as the Blended Learning Toolkit prepared by the University of Central Florida (n.d.).

Naaj et al. (2012) made use of the Student Satisfaction Survey Form (SSSF), which consisted of 3 sections and contained 35 items on a 5-point Likert scale and 2 open-ended questions. The 35 items on the Likert scale involved 5 student satisfaction factors: instructor, technology, class management, interaction, and instruction. On the other hand, Poon (2013) adopted a student survey questionnaire from Garrison and Vaughan (2008), which collected information on the students' experiences of blended learning, their overall satisfaction with BL, their comments on blended learning, and the comparison they could make between BL and face-to-face learning. It also requested information on the students' background (year of study, mode of study, and age).

Although Naaj et al.'s (2012) questionnaire contained several items that would have been suitable for this study, it also had others that did not fit the context in which this research was going to be carried out. For example, the online component of the BL

class was based on the lecturer giving a videoconference with the male students attending the session in the same room and female students attending it synchronically in another room. Moreover, one of the aims of Naaj et al.'s (2012) research was to study students' satisfaction in a gender-segregated environment, which was also the focus of one of the items in the questionnaire. Conversely, one third of the items in the questionnaire that Poon (2013) used were open-ended questions that required students to give longer answers. If this instrument had been chosen for the present study, the analysis of the data collected would have become more complex, particularly because of the large number of participants expected to take part in it.

Among the other questionnaires examined, some had items that specifically asked about the students' perceptions about the online component of BL contrasting it with the face-to-face part of it (e.g., Blended Learning Toolkit prepared by the University of Central Florida, n.d.; Shantakumari & Sajith, 2015). Still others included items that only inquired about aspects related to the e-learning dimensions of the BL environment examined (e.g., Bauk, 2015; Cabero et al., 2010). As the present research study's aim was to examine BL in a learning context that combined the face-to-face and the online environments, a questionnaire that would not make a marked difference between them was preferred.

Thus, the choice fell on Bolliger and Erichsen's (2013) validated instrument as it seemed to fit the context and research questions more adequately. It consisted of 27 five-point Likert scale questions, which ranged from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree. The following dimensions were addressed: instructor, technology, course set-up, interaction, outcomes, and overall satisfaction. It also included five demographical questions and some open-ended questions. One of the authors, D. U. Bolliger, was contacted by email to request permission to use the instrument. The author wrote back granting authorization to use, modify and translate the questionnaire.

3.5.1.2. Adaptation of the Questionnaire. The selected questionnaire could not be used entirely in its original form. First, because a few items had to be omitted due to their specificity and the context in which the instrument would be applied. As three items were omitted, the number items in the modified version was reduced to 24. An example of such an item was item 8, "I am satisfied with the use of the chat tools"

(Bolliger & Erichsen, 2013, p. 11). It was excluded because chat tools were not used in the delivery of the courses dealt with in this study.

Second, the original language of the instrument was English, whereas the participants' control of English was not good enough to apply it in that language. Therefore, it had to be translated into Spanish. The translation process followed the steps suggested by Tsang et al. (2017). First, a voluntary expert committee was established. They would determine if the translated instrument closely resembled the original questionnaire. Then, the forward translation, i.e., translation into Spanish, was carried out by two bilingual translators whose mother tongue was Spanish. Next, three native speakers of English were asked to translate the Spanish version of the instrument back into English (i.e., backward translation) to ensure that the translation had been accurate. Finally, the original version (English) and the translated version (Spanish) of the questionnaire were sent to 10 professionals working in the fields of education, English language learning, and BL. Three of these were external to the Chilean University, while the rest were faculty members of it. They were asked a few questions in writing about the questionnaire to validate its content, construct, clarity, retention of original meaning, and its coherence and logic. They could also comment on any other aspect they wanted to point out. All of them validated the translated instrument. Any significant observation was taken into consideration to produce the version of the questionnaire that was piloted in the next step.

The adapted instrument consisted of 24 five-point Likert scale items which ranged from 1 – strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree. It focused on the same six dimensions as the original questionnaire: instructor, technology, course set-up, interaction, outcomes, and overall satisfaction. As previously stated in chapter 2, research has demonstrated that these factors (represented by the six dimensions) particularly impact student satisfaction in BL environments.

The number of items per factor was the following: instructor (6), technology (4), course set-up (4), interaction (5), outcomes (4), and overall satisfaction (3). The original and the adapted questionnaires contained seven negative items, which were included to avoid students answering arbitrarily or selecting the same answer for each item, such as item 12, "I am dissatisfied with the level of self-directedness required of me". Furthermore, the instrument used in this study included 8 demographic

questions (name, ID number, age, gender, study programme, study schedule – day or evening, present English course, university campus). It also contained an open-ended question in which the participants were invited to leave their comments, if they wished to do so, on their expectations and experiences with the BL course. It is worth mentioning that their comments were used as additional input for the construction of the protocol for the interview with which the data were collected in the second phase. Furthermore, the online questionnaire contained a question for students to answer if they were interested in participating in the interview, by opting to choose either "Yes, I want to participate" or "No, I do not want to participate". Subsequently, another item asked them to leave their email address, in case they were interested in taking part. (Please see appendix 5 the Blended learning satisfaction questionnaire, which was administered online).

3.5.1.3. The Pilot Study. It has been stated that the pilot study is an essential stage in a research study as possible problem areas and shortcomings can be identified before the study is fully implemented (Hassan et al., 2006). Thus, to test the feasibility of the research instrument – the questionnaire – a pilot study was conducted. This was done with 20 students as recommended by the literature to pre-test questionnaires (Perneger et al., 2014). The students were studying the following undergraduate programmes at the Chilean University: Business Administration, Psychology, Preschool Education, and Physical Therapy. The courses they were enrolled in were English II and English III. These students were not among those sitting for the standardised test, which meant that they would not be included in the data base for the main study. If they had been, their answers would have introduced a bias in the results of the full study because of the experience obtained in the pilot study (Hassan et al., 2006). Moreover, they were chosen as they were within the student researcher's easy reach. Participants were sent an email inviting them to take part in the pilot study at a given time and place outside their classroom hours. The first 20 students that showed interest in participating were asked to attend the pilot study session. They completed the online questionnaire in a computer laboratory at the university. In this way, it was possible to collect their comments on the feasibility of the instrument and their experience of completing it online. Questions about the comprehensibility, the

appropriateness, and the sequence of the items were also made (Hassan et al., 2006) once they had finished answering the questionnaire.

Students were asked whether they understood some of the terms used in the questionnaire, such as “blended”, “feedback”, and “interaction”. A few students did not understand what was meant by “blended” but most of them did not have any issues with it nor with the other two concepts. The time taken by the students to answer the instrument was also measured, which was helpful to give precise instructions to the participants of the full study. Nobody took more than 10 minutes. Any substantial remark and observation made was recorded and considered for the final version of the questionnaire.

Some of the comments made by a small number of participants in the pilot study included their disagreement with the negatively worded items in the questionnaire, such as item 6 “I am dissatisfied with the accessibility and availability of the instructor.” These participants were studying Psychology and had been taught that negatively worded items should not be used in questionnaires as often the literature has put forward that they have a negative impact on the results obtained (Van Sonderen et al., 2013). However, it has also been indicated that they are useful as they avoid respondent bias of participants who seek to please the researcher or those who get bored and tend to answer almost every question positively (yea-saying) or negatively (nay-saying) (Johnson et al., 2011). Finally, although recognizing that the use of negatively worded items could confuse respondents (Johnson et al., 2011; Van Sonderen et al., 2013), they were maintained to make the instrument as coherent as possible with the original questionnaire used by Bolliger and Erichsen (2013). Bolliger and Erichsen’s (2013) instrument’s internal reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .87$, which was considered acceptable.

Reliability “refers to the consistency or repeatability of an instrument” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 154). For multi-item scales, such as the one used in this study, the most significant measure of reliability is the internal consistency of the instrument used. Thus, to demonstrate whether the items of the instrument assess the same underlying construct, and have adequate intercorrelations, the Cronbach alpha is applied. The values may extend from 0 to 1. However, the ideal values range between .7 and .9 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). The literature states that an

instrument's alpha coefficient is "a property of the scores on a test from a specific sample of testees" (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011, p. 53). Therefore, Cronbach's alpha should be measured every time an instrument is used, rather than relying on the alpha estimates that had been published before (Streiner, 2003).

Once the questionnaire had been administered to the pilot group and after the seven negative worded items had been recoded, the Cronbach alpha was calculated for the complete questionnaire (24 items) in SPSS (version 24) to test its reliability. The coefficient was α= .905, which is considered optimal (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.5.1.4. Questionnaire Distribution. To administer the adapted and final version of the questionnaire to the potential participants after it had been piloted, at first two possible options were examined. The first alternative was asking teachers of the selected classes to hand out to their students a printed version of the instrument during their class time. The second alternative involved producing an online version of the questionnaire on an online survey tool. Considering the large number of potential participants and their wide geographical distribution, the second option was chosen. Administering the questionnaire online would be convenient for both the students and the student researcher. On the one hand, the student researcher would not have to involve the teachers in the questionnaire data collection process nor take away from their class time, although it has been stated that the response rate of face-to-face administered paper surveys is higher than that of online surveys (Nulty, 2008; Yetter & Cappacioli, 2010). On the other hand, the students would be able to answer the questionnaire at any time that was appropriate for them. They might also prefer to be given the opportunity to take more time to reflect and answer the questions in a different place (Cohen et al., 2018), other than the classroom.

Another positive feature of using an online survey tool would be that it facilitated the collection of large quantities of data in an efficient and economical way (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). Data would be protected against loss and responses could be transferred onto a compatible database, thereby eliminating transcription errors, and reducing the efforts needed during the collection and management of data. This would add to improved reliability and validity of the data and the data collection process (Regmi et al., 2016). The online survey tool selected was SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey, n.d.a) as it complied with the General Data Protection Regulation

(GDPR) (SurveyMonkey, n.d.b), which ensured the privacy and security of the data collected through it.

3.5.2. *Qualitative Data Collection*

As this was a mixed-methods study, the data collection in the second phase contemplated the gathering of data by means of a qualitative research instrument. The participants that were initially invited to take part in the interview were selected from among those who answered the online questionnaire completely in the first phase of the study and explicitly expressed their interest in being involved in the second phase. Eventually, due to the national turmoil and unrest taking place at the time of the qualitative data collection (referred to in the first chapter), only 8 students were willing to take part in the interview. These students' demographics are presented in chapter 4. The protocol used included open-ended questions which were prepared based on the quantitative results. The information obtained from a small set of participants allowed for deeper insights into their experiences with BL and could throw light on the results obtained with the online questionnaire.

3.5.2.1. The Semi-Structured Interview. When research studies, such as the present mixed-methods study, require rich and deep insights into the phenomenon being examined, it can be gathered by means of observations, focus groups, and interviews, among other instruments. The latter can be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured (Fox, 2009). Each of these instruments can be used with a rather limited number of participants as their preparation, organization and application consumes time, requires knowledge about the topic being dealt with, and usually produces considerable quantities of transcripts and notes for the analysis of the data.

The qualitative instrument that was used for the present study was a semi-structured interview. In spite of being time-demanding and labour-intensive, the advantages offered by the semi-structured interview are several. On the one hand, the researcher can prepare open-ended questions in advance, based on information that they have obtained from other sources of data, such as a survey or questionnaire. These open-ended questions can be followed up by "why" and "how" questions, allowing a focused and interactive conversation, as well as giving the researcher the opportunity to probe further into the participants reflections and thoughts about the topic. On the other hand, a semi-structured interview is usually carried out in the form

of a relaxed and friendly dialogue, which puts both participants and researcher at ease, yielding data that can be quite valuable or unforeseen (Adams, 2015).

3.5.2.2. Design of the Semi-Structured Interview. Based on the responses obtained to the online questionnaire, some preliminary analysis was carried out on SurveyMonkey and Excel. Thus, initial analysis which included statistics at a basic and descriptive level was done, yielding the mean, standard deviations, and percentages of the questionnaire data. The information that the initial analysis produced became the input for the design of the semi-structured interview (Ivankova et al., 2006). Therefore, in order to better understand some of the quantitative results and to provide answers to the research questions, particular aspects about each of the six questionnaire dimensions (i.e., instructor, technology, course set-up, interaction, outcomes, and overall satisfaction) were followed up. Basically, the intent was to explore more in depth why certain factors associated to those dimensions contributed to the participants being more or less satisfied with their BL English course. Furthermore, information that could provide additional insights into the research question (1a.) on what students' perception were regarding their blended courses, and on (1b.) whether some light could be thrown on the relationship between their perceived satisfaction and the learning outcomes was sought.

The interview protocol (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012), also called interview guide (Adams, 2015), was constructed to allow the participants to expand their perceptions on their particular and general learning experiences with the English language course they had attended. It included the content questions, together with their probes, e.g., "Can you tell me what your English teacher did in the class both face-to-face and online?" (Probes: Set-up of tasks, activities (before, during and after the class); provide support and guidance in the learning process; relationship with students; assessments). The content questions were open-ended, allowing the student researcher to go into more depth when needed, and the respondents to provide extended answers if they wished to do so (Cohen et al., 2018). The number of content questions was 9, which conforms to the recommendation given in the literature that they should be "somewhere between 5 and 10" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 190). The interview protocol also served as a guide with regards to how the student researcher would introduce herself at the beginning of the interview, how to remind

the participant of the purpose of the study, how to set them at ease regarding the confidentiality and privacy of the information they would share with the student researcher, and how to end the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The instrument was constructed in Spanish. It was discussed with and validated by three experts who have experience in carrying out qualitive research in the Social Sciences and Education. The semi-structured interview was not piloted due to the circumstances (national turmoil, academic activities being carried out online due to that context, and the very few participants willing to take part in the second phase of the study). (Please see appendix 6 The interview protocol).

3.6. Phase One - Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

3.6.1 *The Online Questionnaire*

The 1991 potential participants received an email towards the end of the semester (first week of June) inviting them to participate in the research study. Attached to this email was the Participant Information Sheet. The email was sent to them by the departmental coordinators. Ten days later, participants were sent another email containing the link to the questionnaire on SurveyMonkey. Before they could start answering the questionnaire, they were faced with the electronic Participant Consent Form, which they had to accept or reject. Only by accepting it, could they continue answering the questions in the online questionnaire.

The participants were sent three reminders to answer the questionnaire. In all, 597 students had responded it by the end of the first week of July, when the data collection period for the first phase finished. The representative sample was estimated to consist of 323 valid and complete questionnaire responses. This figure was calculated with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error (or confidence interval) of 5% (Creative Research Systems, 2012; SurveyMonkey, n.d.a). The final number of participants that complied with the various criteria to be part of the study amounted to 391.The quantitative phase of the study was based on those 391 complete responses.

Table 6

Distribution of Final Number of Participants per Course Level

	English Course							
	English II		English III		English IV		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
N° of participants and percentages	152	38,9%	121	30,9%	118	30,2%	391	100%

It can also be observed that the total number of students per English course was fairly equal for English III and English IV, while it was somewhat higher for English II. The percentages of responses obtained per course corresponded approximately to the percentages of potential participants per course (see table 3.2. above).

3.6.2. *Quantitative Data Analysis – Frequencies and Correlations*

To measure the reliability of the data obtained through the application of the online questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the entire questionnaire (24 items) once again as the group to which the instrument was administered was different from the pilot study participants (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The questionnaire exhibited a good Cronbach's Alpha reliability value (α = .919) after reversing the scores of the negative items, which indicates that there is very high internal consistency among the items of the instrument used.

Table 7

Cronbach's Alpha – Items "Recoded"

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items
,919	,921	24

The quantitative questionnaire data were analysed using SPSS (version 24) but for presentation purposes, some tables have been prepared using Excel. No cases of missing data were included in the data set. After recoding seven negative items of the satisfaction questionnaire, frequencies, and descriptive statistics (numbers, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were calculated for the questionnaire items and the six dimensions. This would help answer the research questions on the factors contributing to the students' perceived levels of satisfaction with their BL English course and how satisfied they were. Correlations were run between dimensions and standardised, oral and written test marks, as well as between dimensions and final course mark. As the variables involved were ordinal (questionnaire Likert scale dimensions and items) and scale (test marks and final course mark) Spearman rank, and not Pearson product-moment, correlations were run (Connolly, 2007). Pearson correlations are calculated for scale variables (Connolly, 2007). The assumptions held were that the data were not normally distributed and that there might exist a monotonic relationship between the variables. To test these assumptions histograms and scatterplots were run on the variables with SPSS (version 24). It was expected that there could exist a relationship between the satisfaction questionnaire dimensions and the four marks, i.e., the higher the student satisfaction rates, the higher the test marks and the final course marks (Bean & Bradley, 1986; Dhaqane & Afrah, 2016; Dong & Lucey, 2013). These correlations were attempted to find out if they could throw light on the factors that impinge on the students' learning outcomes.

Correlation coefficients indicate the strength of the relationship between two variables (x and y). Correlations are measured considering a range of values between -1 and +1. Positive correlations are those that are greater than zero, while values that are less than zero are negative. Although several stratifications have been published to interpret a correlation coefficient (Schober et al., 2018), Evans' (1996, in Statstutor, n.d.) guide for a correlation value of *r* (both for Spearman and Pearson) was used: .00 - .19 "very weak", .20 - .39 "weak", .40 - .59 "moderate", .60 - .79 "strong", .80 - 1.0 "very strong". The Spearman rank correlation coefficient is represented by the symbol r_s (or the Greek letter ρ, which is pronounced rho).

Together with the correlation coefficient, a test will also indicate the statistical significance of the correlation, which is expressed by the p value (probability value). It assesses how confident a researcher can be in using a finding taken from one sample to generalize it to the population as a whole. The chances are reported as probabilities that run from "0" (no chance at all) to "1" (100 percent chance). It is widely accepted that a 5 percent chance ($p < 0.05$) is used to ascertain the confidence level in a finding obtained from the sample studied. Thus, when the probabilities that the finding reported is 5 percent or less due to the random nature of the sample, this indicates at least 95 percent confidence that the finding reflects a tendency in the population as a whole. At times, a more stringent significance level ($p < 0.01$) is reported, which increases the confidence to 99 percent (Connolly, 2007).

3.6.3. *Learning Outcomes: Standardised, Written, Oral Test and Final Course Marks*

One of the goals of the study was to find out whether there was a relationship of the students' levels of satisfaction with their learning outcomes. The learning outcomes that were selected for the study consisted in the mark students obtained in the standardised test they sat for towards the end of their course, the written test, the oral test, and the final course mark. Thus, four marks were considered per student.

The online standardised tests were created by assessment experts for the international education network which the institution where the study was carried out belonged to. The standardised tests were tried out and used in the EFL programmes of the majority of the higher education institutions that were members of the educational network. Thus, the large numbers of students that took them year after year allowed for the standardisation of these instruments with regards to their validity and reliability. However, they were not applied to educational institutions outside the network so they did not have external international recognition. Thus, they served as a benchmark instrument for the EFL programmes within the network.

The standardised tests were taken by the students in the computer laboratories when about three quarter of the academic semester had passed. Standardised test A1 was given to the students in English II, standardised test A2 to those in English III, and standardised test B1 to students in English IV. The tests consisted of four sections: Listening, reading, speaking, and writing, which in all took about one hour and thirty minutes to complete. These tests were implemented to obtain an objective

assessment of the students' performance in the English language as they were not graded by the students' instructors.

The oral and written tests were prepared by the instructors under the guidance of the English Department coordinators. Several versions of each of these tests were made available to ensure greater security. The oral test consisted in the students carrying out a dialogue for which they were given the topic, the situation, and further details that helped to give the context for the oral exchange. The assessment was done with the use of a rubric per course level. The written test was intended to measure the students' three other EFL skills: reading, writing and listening. The tasks became more challenging as students progressed in their EFL programme.

The final course mark was a combination of individual assessment items that were given to the students during the course. These consisted of in-class quizzes, work done on the learning platform, a written test, and an oral test. The standardised test mark was another assessment item that contributed to the final course mark.

The above-mentioned marks are uploaded by the instructors onto the university's software programme called Banner, an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. A number of administrative university employees, the student researcher included, have access to this system and the information in it. It contains the most important officially recorded student data. This constitutes another instance of the opportunities and risks involved of being an insider researcher as the fact of being the head of an academic unit provided access to a great amount of data (students' marks), which is usually treated confidentially and would not be shared with outsider researchers nor with faculty that are not in an administrative position.

3.7. Phase Two: Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

3.7.1. *The Interview Participants*

The quantitative questionnaire included a final question which asked the participants if they were willing to take part in the one-on-one interview of the second phase of the study. From the 391 participants in the first phase of the study that complied with all the requirements to be considered to represent the sample for the study, 56 indicated they were willing to participate and confirmed their email addresses to be contacted once the initial data analysis of the first phase had been done.

Originally, the participants in the interview were going to be chosen on a "first-come, first-served" basis, from among those who indicated in the online questionnaire to be highly dissatisfied or highly satisfied with their BL courses. However, after looking at the data, a purposive sampling strategy (Robinson, 2014) was chosen. This decision was taken since a large majority of participants that expressed their intention to be interviewed were either satisfied or highly satisfied with their English course (73,68%), while a very small percentage (7,01%) was either dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied, and about a fifth were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (19,29%). Thus, participants for the interview were selected according to city, level of the English course, and satisfaction level. In this way, a total of 18 participants were chosen to be invited to participate in the interview.

However, the events that took place nationwide in mid-October 2019, referred to in the introduction of this study, continued for a period of at least 2 months, thereby seriously disrupting the normal development of activities. Consequently, the Chilean University cancelled all face-to-face classes, and the two last months of the academic year were carried out in an improvised online environment. Additionally, as there were difficulties in finding appropriate transport to get to and from work, among other challenging situations, and the safety of students, academic and administrative staff could not be guaranteed, it was not possible to resume normal working conditions until about two months after the inception of the turmoil and revolts.

This period of social and political unrest coincided with the time those 18 initially selected participants were contacted by means of various emails. As a very small number of those participants answered, all other 38 students were approached to find out if some of them were still interested in participating. Unfortunately, eventually only 8 confirmed their willingness to take part in the interview. These took place over the span of a month, from early November to early December. The distribution of these 8 participants, according to the course level they were in, was the following: One participant was in English II and he was highly satisfied. Four participants were in English III; one was highly satisfied, another was satisfied, and two were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Two of the three participants that were in English IV were satisfied and the third one was dissatisfied.

The small number of participants in the qualitative phase of the study was not the ideal number intended originally as it only represented 2,1% of the 391-student sample that answered the quantitative questionnaire completely. As explained previously, the national circumstances existing during the second phase of the study, deterred students from participating in larger numbers. Additionally, there has been ongoing debate regarding the sample size that is right for qualitative research. There is variability among researchers and book authors in the suggested minimum number, which can be "anywhere from 5 and 50 participants" (Dworkin, 2012). It has been stated that sample size sufficiency should be justified (Vasileiou et al., 2018), so the justification for including the small set of participants in the qualitative phase of this study is that the aim of the interview was to be able to obtain rich data to understand the quantitative results better, rather than draw generalizations from it and extrapolate conclusions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Regarding the validity of the results that emerged from the qualitative phase, these should again be taken as part of the whole study to add depth to the statistical data obtained in the first quantitative phase.

3.7.2. *The Conduct of the Interview*

The 8 participants that had confirmed their willingness to be interviewed were given the chance to indicate their preferences regarding the day and time they would be available. The students received a copy of the participant consent form, which had been prepared for the second phase of the data collection procedure. Together with responding about their availability for the interview, they sent the student researcher the signed participant consent form. After the day and time had been agreed on, they received an invitation per email to connect to a video-call by Zoom on the chosen date. They could take part in the meeting with or without the use of the camera, according to their preference. All participants attended the video-call as scheduled. In spite of the national social unrests and conditions of insecurity, which made the online interview the best option for the participants, one of them preferred the interview to take place in a face-to-face environment. It could eventually take place in the student researcher's workplace and it was audio-recorded.

The one-on-one interviews were carried out following the protocol established previously. During the interviews, only few notes were taken in order to give the

participants full attention and to prevent them from being intimidated by it (Cohen et al., 2018). Those notes were made in the spaces left between the questions in the interview protocol (Creswell, 2007). The interviews were carried out without interruptions or distractions. The longest took 59 minutes, while the shortest lasted 34 minutes. The average time of the eight interviews was 41 minutes. The length of the interviews complied with what is suggested in the literature (Jamshed, 2014). Participants had been informed in the Participant Consent Form about the approximate time it would last (Creswell, 2016) and that the interview would be recorded. Seven interviews were video- and audio-recorded with the use of the Zoom platform and a voice recorder. The interview that took place face-to-face was audio-recorded on a voice recorder. The interviews were later entirely transcribed in Spanish and saved as Word documents. They were translated into English after the data analysis had been carried out. The participants' names were replaced by codes, such as P1 (participant 1), P2 (participant 2), and so on, to ensure their anonymity and the need for confidentiality of the participants' identities (Cohen et al., 2018).

3.7.3. *Qualitative Data Analysis*

The qualitative data consisted in the eight above-mentioned interview transcripts. In this case, the focus was on reading carefully through the data to understand what the participants had expressed regarding the topic of the study, which allowed refining and gaining deeper insights into the results obtained from the online questionnaire data. The interview data were processed and analysed with the use of the software Atlas.ti 8, which made the systematic arrangement, reassembling and management of the material possible.

The interview transcripts were uploaded to the software for analysis. Thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) with data, was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As indicated in the literature, the advantage of using thematic analysis is that it constitutes a method, not a methodology, therefore it is not attached to a particular theoretical or epistemological stance, giving it the flexibility needed to deal with research in the field of teaching and learning (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Furthermore, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), it "…provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis" (p. 78), thus it is desirable to learn it before any other qualitative method.

The analysis of the data was done by using an inductive approach which made it possible to allow the codes to emerge from the data. The process involved finding the important segments of the data in all the documents “based on the problem to be analysed and on the research objective” (Soratto et al., 2020). They were selected thereby creating quotations. Next, open codes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), i.e., not pre-set ones, were generated systematically across the data set and collated into potential themes or code groups.

The thematic analysis process followed the six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), which are: 1) Becoming familiar with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining themes, and 6) writing up the report. The process was initiated by reading through the complete data set to get to know it well. As the analysis was done by means of the software programme Atlas.ti 8, the text passages where codes were identified were selected, and code labels attached to them. Each code thus created was associated to a selected extract from the data item or data set. In Vivo coding was also used, which allowed the code to be named exactly as a term or word found in the transcribed text document as used by the participant or participants. After creating the codes, these needed to be defined, although the initial definitions may later have been changed during the process. As indicated in the literature, the steps are not required to be taken linearly, since it is often necessary to move forward and backward across the whole data set to modify, add or eliminate already identified codes in the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Codes that were related were clustered together under broader categories called themes, which are usually much fewer than the number of codes. The process of generating and refining codes, as well as generating and refining themes was ongoing, and the interview transcripts were read and reread many times. According to Creswell (2016), depending on the data set, codes should be kept to between 30 and 50, and themes between 5 and 7. The final themes are presented in chapter 4, together with extracts or quotations taken from the data set that evidence the participants’ voices as a way of contributing to the understanding of the topic under study.

3.8. Validity and Reliability

When a research study is carried out, researchers need to attempt to check for the validity and reliability of the instruments employed, the data and the results

obtained. This is also the case for a mixed methods study, which may be more complex due to the use of different data collection methods and analysis. Moreover, researchers are confronted with an overwhelming number of terms used to evaluate and describe validity and reliability of a research study, particularly for the researcher who is still unexperienced (Dellinger & Leech, 2007). Although threats to validity and reliability cannot be completely cancelled in research, it is necessary to make every effort to assess them so as to ensure the quality of research done (Cohen et al., 2018).

In this study, internal validity was attempted through two of the methods recommended by Merriam and Grenier (2019): triangulation and investigator's position or researcher bias. Methodological triangulation, as used in this study, was carried out across method combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. On the one hand, the online questionnaire, which yielded quantitative data, and, on the other hand, the semi-structured interview, which produced qualitative data. This type of triangulation has been found to help confirm findings, provide more all-encompassing data, greater understanding of the issue under study, as well as increased validity. Furthermore, the use of two methods can neutralize the weaknesses and strengths that each method has, thereby producing better results (Behket & Zausniewski, 2012; Hussein, 2009). Regarding investigator position, the researcher is expected to remain as unbiased as possible towards the study, i. e., by not influencing the collection of the data (especially qualitative data) with their own assumptions, values or positions, nor by affecting the research to arrive at certain outcomes (Cohen et al., 2018). To achieve this, the student researcher has attempted to remain nonjudgmental, clear, and honest throughout the study so as to carry out the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data as impartially as possible.

Construct validity is achieved when the instrument used measures the concept or construct it intends to. In this way, the focus is on whether the scores obtained are useful, which indicates that the instrument can be well applied in survey research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The present study used an existing instrument whose scores obtained from past use were valid as reported by Bolliger and Erichsen (2013). With regard to content validity, the items that make up a data collection instrument are meant to measure all aspects of the construct, content, or topic, covering the subject fully. It also includes how clear instructions are, the content and grammar of

the items, how representative the item pool is, and how adequate the response format is. The content validity of a test determines how accurately the construct or concept is measured (Koller et al., 2017). In the present study, content validity has been achieved in the quantitative phase by means of involving volunteering experts in the field of education and language learning in the process of translation of the questionnaire instrument. The translated instrument was also piloted as mentioned before in this chapter. For the qualitative phase another group of experts volunteered to examine the questionnaire and interview protocol that was prepared for the semi-structured interview. Their contributions consisted in revising the questions and rewording those that lacked clarity. Any ineffective questions were also pointed out and discarded.

Reliability is related to how consistent, dependable, and replicable are the findings revealed of a research study (Nunan, 1992). This is usually achievable in quantitative studies due to the fact that results are expressed in the form of numbers. In this study, several steps were taken in the quantitative stage to check reliability, which included the procedure described in this chapter of adapting and translating the online questionnaire with the support of voluntary experts, and the pilot study, as explained above. Moreover, the reliability as internal consistency of the instrument for the quantitative phase was measured by using Cronbach alpha. It exhibited a high internal consistency between the items of the questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2018).

However, in the case of qualitative research, reliability is particularly critical since it is difficult to obtain the same results due to the subjective and narrative character of the data. Therefore, it has been suggested that it is preferable to achieve results that are dependable and consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To do so, in this study the student researcher's position has been made as clear as possible by explaining the various phases and processes of the research done (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Furthermore, methodological triangulation has been used through the application of an online questionnaire and a semi-structured interview by means of which to collect the data. Both sets of data were used to confront the respective findings, complement and integrate them. Thus, it would be possible to replicate the study later. An additional way to allow for a replication of the study is through audit trail, whereby in this research a detailed description has been made about the

collection and the analysis of the data, as well as how the results were obtained. (Cohen et al., 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Moreover, the data corresponding to both the quantitative (responses to the online questionnaire) and the qualitative (semi-structured interview) phases have been recorded as Excel files and SPSS documents, and audio- and video-recordings respectively. This would make it possible to analyse or reinterpret the data by any independent researcher, whereby reliability of data and results can be increased (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

3.9. Summary

The present study was carried out using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Thus, for the quantitative data collection phase, an existing questionnaire was chosen, adapted, and translated into Spanish. Twenty students took part in a pilot, which resulted in ensuring that the final version of the questionnaire could be administered online to the 1991 potential participants who had previously been identified. The final number of participants who answered the online questionnaire completely and who also complied with having the four marks that would be used in the study was 391. The quantitative data underwent a preliminary statistical analysis, which was the basis for the construction of the semi-structured interview protocol. All 56 students that had shown interest in taking part in the interview were contacted by email. Due to the disruptive national circumstances, only 8 of them accepted to be interviewed. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed. Results of quantitative and qualitative analyses will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Data Analysis and Findings

In this chapter, the analysis and findings of the study data on student satisfaction with EFL BL courses will be presented. The demographics of the study sample will report the students' gender, age range, undergraduate study programme, and the EFL course they were attending at the data collection time. Furthermore, the quantitative questionnaire data will be reported using descriptive statistics. Quantitative analysis also includes looking into the students' learning outcomes, consisting in the standardised test mark, the written test mark, the oral test mark, and the final course mark. Finally, the qualitative data will be presented, analysing the elements that were found by means of a thematic analysis of the interview data.

4.1. Questionnaire Data and Analysis: Descriptives

The questionnaire used for this study aimed at gathering information about different factors related to student satisfaction. The factors were called dimensions, of which there were 6 (instructor, technology, course set-up, interaction, outcomes, and overall satisfaction). Each dimension was measured by means of items, which ranged from 3 to 6 per dimension. The total number of items comprising the questionnaire was 24.

Data obtained from the online questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the 6 dimensions, and frequencies of the individual items of the questionnaire were determined. Only completed questionnaires, with no missing data, were considered. Additionally, statistical analysis, in the form of Spearman rank correlations, was done on the questionnaire dimensions, the standardised test mark, the oral test mark, the written test mark and the final course mark to establish whether a relationship existed between the levels of satisfaction and students' learning outcomes. Participants that had completed the questionnaire but lacked one of the marks were discarded from the data.

4.1.1. *Satisfaction Questionnaire: Demographics*

The online questionnaire was first sent to the 1991 potential participants about a month before the end of the academic semester (semester March-July 2019). Together with the 24 closed-ended questions (5-point Likert scale), demographic information was requested. As indicated in chapter 3, 391 usable responses were

considered for the data analysis. The demographic data revealed that more female students (n 252 = 64,5%) than male students (n 137= 35,0%) answered the questionnaire. Two students selected the gender option “other” (0,5%). This can be observed in table 8.

Table 8

Gender Distribution

Gender	N	%
female	252	64,5%
male	137	35,0%
other	2	0,5%

The participants’ mean age was 21.5 and the median 21.0. The age range of 77,5% of the students was between 19 and 22. However, there were some students who were older than 30, even 40 and 52.

Participants were either attending an English II (n 152 = 38,9%), English III (n 121 = 30,9%), or English IV (n 118 = 30,2%) course, as can be seen in table 9. The number of students attending the English II course that answered the questionnaire was somewhat higher than those in the other two courses but the percentages of respondents were fairly evenly distributed among the three courses.

Table 9

N° Students per English Course

English course	N	%
English II	152	38,9%
English III	121	30,9%
English IV	118	30,2%

Participants were enrolled in one of 18 undergraduate degree programmes. The larger number of students belonged to Business Engineering, Nursing, and Chemistry and Pharmacy, together totaling over half of the participant sample (52,9%). Table 10. shows the number of participants in the top 8 undergraduate programmes. The other programmes were represented by between 8 and 1 participants.

Table 10

N° Students per Undergraduate Degree Programme

Undergraduate Degree Programme	N	%
Business Engineering	82	21,00%
Nursing	74	18,90%
Chemistry and Pharmacy	51	13,00%
Medical Technology	39	10,00%
Dentistry	36	9,20%
Kinesiology	29	7,40%
Psychology	23	5,90%
Business Administration	19	4,90%
Other programmes	38	9,70%
	391	100,00%

The areas undergraduate degree programmes belonged to that congregated the most participants were the health sciences (N = 244; 62,4%) and business studies (N = 109; 27,9%). Other programmes were represented by a much smaller number of participants (N = 38; 9,7%).

4.1.2. *Satisfaction Questionnaire: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations*

- **Questionnaire dimensions**

Students' answers to the 24 items (each identified with the letter Q) in the satisfaction questionnaire were grouped into 6 dimensions of student satisfaction. These were instructor (items Q1 to Q6), technology (items Q7 to Q9), course set-up (items Q10 to Q12), interaction (items Q13 to Q17), outcomes (items Q18 to Q21), and

overall satisfaction (items Q22 to Q24). These dimensions had been defined by the authors of the questionnaire (Bolliger & Erichsen, 2013).

The results for the data set comprising the three course levels reflect that dimension 1 (instructor) received the highest mean score (*M* = 4.15), followed by dimension 4 (interaction) (*M* = 3.73), dimension 2 (technology) (*M* = 3.61) and dimension 6 (overall) (*M* = 3.54). The lowest mean scores were reported for dimensions 5 (outcomes) (*M* = 3.50) and 3 (course set-up) (*M* = 3.39). The mean scores correspond to a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Higher mean scores indicate that the participants showed higher levels of agreement with the dimensions in the questionnaire. Lower mean scores indicate the contrary. Higher standard deviations indicate that there is a greater variation from the mean (average) so they are more spread out, while lower standard deviations signal that the data are closer to the mean.

Table 11 displays the mean scores and standard deviation for each dimension of the questionnaire for the complete data.

Table 11

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Dimensions (all Course Levels)

Dimension	***M*** (*N*=391)	***SD*** (*N*=391)
1. Instructor	4.15	0.77
2. Technology	3.61	0.94
3. Course set-up	3.39	1.00
4. Interaction	3.73	0.82
5. Outcomes	3.50	0.87
6. Overall Satisfaction	3.54	0.77

The data were also disaggregated per English course level to examine whether differences existed between them. It showed that dimension 1 (instructor) received the highest mean score in the three course levels (English II *M* = 4.08; English III *M* =4.07; English IV *M* = 4.32). The second highest score was for dimension 4 (interaction)

(English II *M* = 3.80; English III *M* =3.60; English IV *M* = 3.77), followed by dimension 2 (technology) (English II *M* = 3.64; English IV *M* = 3.71) and dimension 6 (overall satisfaction) (English III *M* =3.53). The lowest mean scores were reported for dimension 6 (overall satisfaction) (English II *M* = 3.55; English IV *M* = 3.56) and dimension 5 (outcomes) (English III *M* =3.29), as well as for dimension 3 (course set-up) (English II *M* = 3.50; English III *M* =3.17; English IV *M* = 3.46). English II showed higher means than the other two course levels in dimensions 3, 4, 5, and 6. English IV showed higher means than the other two course levels in dimensions 1 and 2. English III showed lower means than the other two course levels in most of the dimensions. This can be observed in Table 12.

Table 12

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Dimensions per Course

	English II		English III		English IV	
Dimension	***M*** Mean	***SD*** Std. Deviation	***M*** Mean	***SD*** Std. Deviation	***M*** Mean	***SD*** Std. Deviation
1. Instructor	4.08	0.79	4.07	0.81	4.32	0.66
2. Technology	3.64	0.94	3.47	0.97	3.71	0.89
3. Course Set-Up	3.50	0.94	3.17	1.02	3.46	1.03
4. Interaction	3.80	0.77	3.60	0.85	3.77	0.82
5. Outcomes	3.61	0.85	3.29	0.87	3.58	0.86
6. Overall Satisfaction	3.55	0.79	3.53	0.77	3.53	0.76
N Valid	152		121		118	
Missing	0		0		0	

With the aim of interpreting the data of participants' satisfaction levels towards the dimensions of the satisfaction questionnaire, the following table based on the 5-point Likert scale was used (Table 13). For the results shown in table 13, the

dimensions instructor, interaction, technology, outcomes and overall satisfaction can be interpreted as satisfactory. The only dimension which appears to be moderate is course set-up. The disaggregate results per English course level shown in table 13, indicate that for English II all six dimensions can be interpreted as satisfactory. For English III, five dimensions are satisfactory, and one dimension is moderate (outcomes). For English IV, five dimensions are moderate, and one dimension is very satisfactory (instructor).

Table 13

5-Point Scale Interpretation of Dimension Mean Scores

Score range	Mean rating	Interpretation
4.21 - 5.00	strongly agree	very satisfied
3.41 - 4.20	agree	satisfied
2.61 - 3.40	neither agree nor disagree	moderate
1.81 - 2.60	disagree	dissatisfied
1.00 - 1.80	strongly disagree	very dissatisfied

Note. Adapted from Svebwongsuwan & Nommian, 2020, p. 708.

4.1.3. *Satisfaction Questionnaire Items: Percentages*

In order to appreciate the levels of satisfaction students exhibited with each of the 24 satisfaction questionnaire items, the frequencies in terms of percentages for each of the questionnaire items were calculated. The 5-point Likert scale allowed participants to answer any of five options: “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “disagree” or “strongly disagree”. To present the results in a more manageable form, the answers provided for “strongly agree” and “agree” were added together under the column heading “strongly agree or agree”, as well as those for “strongly disagree” and “disagree” in another column heading “strongly disagree or agree”. Responses to “neither agree nor disagree” were maintained. Table 14. exhibits the frequencies in terms of percentages.

Table 14

Frequencies of Satisfaction Questionnaire Items (Grouped) (all Course Levels)

Dimension	Satisfaction Survey Items	Frequencies (grouped)		
		Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree
Instructor	Q1. The course expectations were clearly communicated to me.	84,90%	7,40%	7,70%
	Q2. The class assignments were clearly communicated to me.	85,40%	7,20%	7,40%
	Q3. The assessments/grades in the course were clear and fair.	76,00%	13,30%	10,70%
	Q4. Feedback and evaluation of tests and other assignments was given in a timely manner.	77,00%	12,50%	10,50%
	Q5. The instructor makes me feel that I am part of the class and belong.	87,20%	7,90%	4,90%
	Q6. I am dissatisfied with the accessibility and availability of the instructor (R)	11,50%	12,50%	76,00%
Technology	Q7. I am satisfied with the use of "threaded" online blogs or forums.	58,10%	18,70%	23,30%
	Q8. I am satisfied with how I am able to navigate within the course management system.	68,80%	17,90%	13,30%
	Q9. I am dissatisfied with download times of resources in the course management system. (R)	21,20%	27,90%	50,90%
Course set-up	Q10. I am satisfied with the frequency I have to attend class (e.g., log into the course, participate)	48,80%	19,40%	31,70%
	Q11. I am satisfied with the flexibility this course delivery method (blended) affords me.	54,70%	21,20%	24,00%
	Q12. I am dissatisfied with the level of selfdirectedness required of me (R).	22,30%	25,80%	51,90%
Interaction	Q13. I am satisfied with the quality of interaction between students.	70,80%	18,90%	10,20%
	Q14. I am dissatisfied with the process of collaborative activities during the course (R).	13,80%	22,50%	63,70%
	Q15. I felt I could relate to the other students in my course.	70,30%	21,00%	8,70%
	Q16. I am dissatisfied with the amount of student-to-student interaction in the class. (R).	19,70%	24,60%	55,80%
	Q17. I felt comfortable participating in class through this course delivery medium.	61,60%	18,90%	19,40%
Outcomes	Q18. I am satisfied with the level of effort this course required.	64,70%	17,90%	17,40%
	Q19. I am dissatisfied with my performance in this course (R).	25,80%	22,30%	51,90%
	Q20. I believe I will be satisfied with my final grade in the course.	44,50%	27,40%	28,10%
	Q21. I believe I will be able to apply what I have learned in this course.	65,20%	19,90%	14,80%
Overall satisfaction	Q22. I am satisfied enough with this course to recommend it to others.	58,80%	22,30%	18,90%
	Q23. Compared to other course delivery methods, I am less satisfied with this learning experience. (R).	43,00%	29,40%	27,60%
	Q24. Overall, I am satisfied with this course.	68,00%	17,90%	14,10%

The frequencies of responses in terms of percentages for each item in the satisfaction questionnaire were also calculated for each course level. (Please see Appendix 7 Frequencies of satisfaction questionnaire items (grouped) for English II, III and IV).

4.2. Learning Outcomes: Descriptives

4.2.1. *Test Marks and Final Course Mark Results*

To find out what learning outcomes the students had achieved, the marks obtained in the standardised tests, the written and the oral tests, as well as the final course marks were reported, i. e., four marks per student.

The academic grading system in Chile ranges from 1.0 up to 7.0 (with one decimal place). The highest mark is 7.0 and the minimum passing mark is 4.0. The Chilean University has the following grading scale for undergraduate study programmes (Universidad Andrés Bello, 2012). It is shown in table 15.

Table 15

*Chilean University Undergraduate Programme Grading Scale**

Mark	Mark Description
7.0 (seven)	Excellent
6.0 (six)	Very good
5.0 (five)	Good
4.0 (four)	Sufficient
3.0 (three)	Not sufficient
2.0 (two)	Insufficient
1.0 (one)	Poor

Note: *The scale may contain fractions of the marks up to one decimal.

- ***Standardised test, written test and oral test mark results.***

The percentages of the standardised, written and oral test marks corresponding to students that did not pass the test compared to those that obtained a passing mark are presented in Table 16.

Table 16

Test Marks Divided Above and Below Passing Mark (4.0) (all Course Levels)

	Failing mark		Passing mark	
Test	1.0 - 3.9		4.0 -7.0	
	N	%	N	%
Oral Test Mark	51	13,0	340	87,0
Written Test Mark	82	21,0	309	79,0
Standardized Test Mark	188	48,1	203	51,9
Total	N =	391	%	100

Table 17 presents the marks obtained by the participants in the three tests, disaggregated by English course level. It can be observed that as participants progress towards higher course levels, they obtain better marks.

Table 17

Standardised Test, Written Test, and Oral Test Results (per Course Level)

	English II				English III				English IV			
Mark	1.0 - 3.9		4.0 -7.0		1.0 - 3.9		4.0 -7.0		1.0 - 3.9		4.0 -7.0	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Oral Test Mark	24	15,8	128	84,2	14	11,6	107	88,4	13	11,0	105	89,0
Written Test Mark	32	21,1	120	78,9	24	19,8	97	80,2	26	22,0	92	78,0
Standardized Test Mark	78	51,3	74	48,7	62	51,2	59	48,8	48	40,7	70	59,3
Total	N =	152	%	100	N =	121	%	100	N=	118	%	100

Table 18 presents the descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) of the marks obtained in the standardised, written and oral tests by the 391 participants. It can be noticed that the mean, median and mode were barely a passing mark for the standardised test. The marks for the written and orals tests were considerably higher. However, marks ranged from 1.9 to 6.8 in the standardised test, and from 1.0 to 7.0 in the written and orals tests, evidencing a wide distribution of students' performance results in the tests.

Table 18

Descriptive Statistics of the Three Test Marks (all Course Levels)

	All course levels				
Mark	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Oral Test Mark	5.29	5.30	1.17	1.00	7.00
Written Test Mark	5.05	5.10	1,14	1.00	7.00
Standardised Test Mark	4.06	4.00	0.99	1.90	6.80
N Valid		391			
Missing		0			

Table 19 presents the descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) of the marks obtained in the standardised, written and oral tests for the participants disaggregated by course level. The marks obtained showed a tendency to improve as students progressed in their English programme.

Table 19

Descriptive Statistics of the Three Test Marks per Course Level

	English II					English III					English IV				
Mark	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Oral Test Mark	5.03	5.05	1.18	1.00	7.00	5.16	5.10	1.13	2.30	7.00	5.49	5.70	1.15	3.00	7.00
Written Test Mark	4.94	5.00	1.10	1.00	7.00	5.12	5.10	1.05	2.70	7.00	5.11	5.30	1.28	1.00	7.00
Standardised Test Mark	3.97	3.90	.82	2.10	6.60	4.00	3.90	1.04	2.10	6.60	4.25	4.15	1.12	1.90	6.80
N Valid		152					121					118			
Missing		0					0					0			

- ***Final course mark results (all course levels)***

The percentages of the final course marks corresponding to students that failed the course (3,9%) compared to those that obtained a passing mark (96,1%) is presented in Table 20.

Table 20

Final Course Mark Results (all Course Levels)

	All course levels			
Mark	1.0 - 3.9		4.0 -7.0	
	N	%	N	%
Final Course Mark	15	3,9	379	96,1
Total	N =	391	%	100

Table 21 presents the final course marks of the three course levels. The data show that as students enrol in higher level courses, their final course marks improve.

Table 21

Final Course Mark per Course Level

	English II				English III				English IV			
Mark	1.0 - 3.9		4.0 -7.0		1.0 - 3.9		4.0 -7.0		1.0 - 3.9		4.0 -7.0	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Final Course Mark	9	5,9	143	94,1	4	3,3	117	96,7	2	1,7	116	98,3
Total	N =	152	%	100	N =	121	%	100	N=	118	%	100

Table 22 presents the descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) of the final course marks obtained by all students participating in the research study. When compared with the test marks, it can be observed that the mean and median were similar to the written test mark. Furthermore, the minimum mark was a 3.0, which is a failing mark, and the maximum a 6.9. Considering the standard deviation, results indicate that 68% of the sample obtained between 4.3 and 5.7 in the course.

Table 22

Descriptive Statistics of Final Course Marks (all Course Levels)

		All course levels				
Mark		Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Final Course Mark		5.09	5,00	.73	3,00	6,90
N	Valid		391			
	Missing		0			

Table 23 presents the descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) of the final course marks obtained by all student in the three course levels. The data show that students obtain better learning outcomes as they progress in their EFL programme.

Table 23

Descriptive Statistics of Final Course Marks per Course Level

		English II					English III					English IV				
Mark		Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Final Course Mark		4.99	4.95	.71	3.10	6.70	5.10	4.90	.75	3.00	6.60	5.22	5.20	.74	3.80	6.90
N	Valid		152					121					118			
	Missing		0					0					0			

4.3. Satisfaction Questionnaire and Course Marks: Correlations

As indicated in chapter 3 and earlier in this chapter, Spearman rank correlations were run between the questionnaire dimensions and the course marks to establish whether a relationship could be found that would allow to throw light on whether any of the satisfaction factors was impinging on the learning outcomes. The significance levels ($p < 0.01$ or $p < 0.05$) were calculated by SPSS (version 24) and assume a two-tailed (non-directional) test (Connolly, 2007). The research question "To what extent, if any, is there a relationship between their [students'] satisfaction with their blended learning course and their learning outcomes?" is non-directional as there is no indication regarding the direction of the relationship, i.e., whether the learning outcomes are higher if they are more satisfied or lower if they are not.

- ***Correlations between standardised test mark and dimensions.***

When the data of the three course levels (not disaggregated per level) were analysed, a few correlations were found between the standardised test mark and the six dimensions. A weak positive relationship was present for the dimension instructor (r_s = .241; $p < 0.01$), which indicates that there is a relationship, however weak, between the standardised test marks the students obtained and the instructor of the course. Likewise, the correlation for the dimension outcomes (r_s = .253; $p < 0.01$), albeit weak, indicates that a relationship exists since one of the outcomes of the course is the mark obtained in the standardised test. A very weak correlation was found between the standardised test mark and the dimension interaction *(r_s* = .132; $p < 0.01$). No other significant correlations were found.

When disaggregating the data of the three course levels, very weak correlations could be found for dimension technology *(r_s* = .169; p < 0.05) for English II and *(r_s* = .199; p < 0.05) for English IV. For dimension instructor, the correlations were weak *(r_s* = .231; p < 0.01) for English II and *(r_s* = .303; p < 0.01) for English IV. They were also weak for dimensions interaction *(r_s* = .232; p < 0.01), outcomes *(r_s* = .325; p < 0.01) and overall satisfaction *(r_s* = .239; p < 0.01) for English II. For English III, they were weak for dimension outcomes *(r_s* = .247; p < 0.01). For English IV, weak correlations were also found for dimension course set-up *(r_s* = .229; p < 0.05).

- ***Correlations between oral test mark and dimensions.***

By analysing the three course levels (not disaggregated per level), only a weak but positive correlation was found between the oral test mark and the dimension instructor (r_s = .214; p < 0.01) and the dimension outcomes (r_s = .236; p < 0.01). The correlation exiting with the dimension overall satisfaction was very weak (r_s = .113; p < 0.05). No other significant correlation was found.

When analysing the three course levels in a disaggregated manner, very weak correlations were obtained for dimensions outcomes (r_s = .198; p < 0.05) and overall satisfaction (r_s = .198; p < 0.05) for English II. For English III, correlations were weak for the dimension outcomes (r_s = .308; p < 0.01). They were also weak for dimensions instructor (r_s = .390; p < 0.01) and overall satisfaction (r_s = .231; p < 0.05) for English IV.

- ***Correlations between test written test mark and dimensions.***

For the three course levels (not disaggregated per level), two very weak correlations were found between the written test mark and the dimensions. One was with the instructor (r_s = .155; p < 0.01) and the other with the dimension outcomes (r_s = .170; p < 0.01). No other significant correlation was found.

When disaggregating the three course levels, a weak and a very weak relationship could be found respectively for dimensions outcomes (r_s = .246; p < 0.01) and overall satisfaction (r_s = .164; p < 0.05) for English II. English IV showed a weak correlation for dimension instructor (r_s = .298; p < 0.01).

- ***Correlations between final course mark and dimensions.***

For the three course levels (not disaggregated), one weak positive relationship could be established between the final course mark and the dimension outcomes (r_s = .282; p < 0.01). This can be explained because the final course mark is an important outcome

of the course and because one of the items in the satisfaction questionnaire (Q20) asked whether the participant were satisfied with the final mark of the course. Two very weak correlations were found between the final mark of the course and the dimension instructor (r_s= .180; p < 0.01) and the dimension interaction (r_s = .110; p < 0.05). No other significant correlations were found.

When analysing the disaggregated course level data, for English II, very weak correlations were obtained for dimensions technology (r_s = .163; p < 0.05) and overall satisfaction (r_s = .173; p < 0.05), and a weak relationship was found for dimension outcomes (r_s= .283; p < 0.01). For English III, a weak correlation was observed for dimension outcomes (r_s= .320; p < 0.01). English IV presented a very weak correlation for dimension course set-up (r_s = .193; p < 0.05), and weak correlations for dimensions instructor (r_s= .300; p < 0.01) and outcomes (r_s= .293; p < 0.01).

- ***Correlation between Q24 and standardised test mark.***

In order to establish if a relationship could be found between item Q24 overall satisfaction with the BL English course (dimension 6 overall satisfaction) and the standardised test mark, Spearman rank correlations were run. The results obtained for the three course levels (not disaggregated) indicate that the relationship was positive but very weak (r_s = .157; p < 0.01).

When the three course level data were disaggregated, a very weak correlation was found for English IV (r_s = .196; p < 0.05) and a weak one for English II (r_s = .229.; p < 0.01).

- ***Correlation between Q24 and oral test mark.***

For the three course levels (not disaggregated), a very weak correlation was found between the item Q24 overall satisfaction with the BL English course (dimension 6 overall satisfaction) and the oral test mark (r_s = .147; p < 0.01).

When analysing the disaggregated course level data, only a weak correlation could be found for English IV (r_s = .209; p < 0.05).

- ***Correlation between Q24 and written test mark.***

The data for the three course levels, including the disaggregated course level data, indicated that there was no relationship between the item Q24 overall satisfaction with the BL English course (dimension 6 overall satisfaction) and the written test mark.

- ***Correlation between Q24 and final course mark.***

Spearman rank correlations were also computed for the three course levels (not disaggregated) to determine if item Q24 overall satisfaction with the BL course (dimension 6 overall satisfaction) correlated with the final course mark. There was a very weak positive correlation between the two variables ($r_s = .150$; $p < 0.01$).
The disaggregate data per course level indicated that a weak correlation existed for English II ($r_s = .169$; $p < 0.05$) and a weak one for English IV ($r_s = .218$; $p < 0.05$).

- ***Correlation between standardised test and final course marks.***

To find out about the relationship existing between the standardised test mark and the final course mark, Spearman rank correlations were run for the three course levels (not disaggregated). There was a moderate positive correlation between the standardised test mark and the final course mark ($r_s = .567$; $p < 0.01$).
On disaggregating the course levels, a moderate relationship was found for English II ($r_s = .412$; $p < 0.01$), and strong relationships for English III ($r_s = .670$; $p < 0.01$) and English IV ($r_s = .600$; $p < 0.01$).

4.4. Semi-Structured Interview Findings and Analysis

The qualitative phase of the study was carried out after the satisfaction questionnaire had been administered to the students. Only 8 participants accepted to be interviewed as mentioned earlier in chapter 3, and each interview was carried out on a one-to-one mode.

4.4.1. *Semi-Structured Interview: Demographics*

Some demographic information on the participants is presented as follows. Regarding their gender, this was equally distributed: 4 female and 4 male students.

Table 24

Gender Distribution

Gender	N°
female	4
Male	4
Total	8

The participants mean age was 22.38 and the median was 22.5. Their ages ranged between 20 and 25. As shown in Table 25, they were attending English II (n = 1), English III (n = 4 =), or English IV (n = 3).

Table 25

N° Students per English Course

English course	N° students
English II	1
English III	4
English IV	3
Total	8

Over half of the participants (n = 5) were enrolled in an undergraduate degree programme in the area of the health sciences: Nursing (n = 4) and Medical Technology (n = 1). The other participants (n = 3) were studying a programme in the area of business studies: Accountacy-Auditing (n = 1), Business Administration (n =1), and Business Engineering (n = 1) (Table 26).

Table 26

N° Students per Undergraduate Degree Programme

Undergraduate Degree Programme	N° students
Nursing	4
Medical Technology	1
Accountancy-Auditing	1
Business Administration	1
Business Engineering	1
Total	8

According to the item overall satisfaction (Q24) of the satisfaction questionnaire, over half (n = 5) of the 8 participants in the second phase of the study were satisfied with their EFL BL course. A quarter (n = 2) expressed neutrality, and only one was not satisfied (Table 4.20).

Table 27

N° Students per Overall Satisfaction (Q24) With EFL Blended Learning Course

Overall Satisfaction	N° students
Strongly Agree	2
Agree	3
Neither agree nor disagree	2
Disagree	1
Total	8

4.4.2. *Semi-Structured Interview: Results*

The semi-structured interview instrument was constructed to allow the participants to expand on their perceptions regarding the satisfaction questionnaire they had answered previously, as well as on their general learning experience with the BL approach. The interview consisted in 9 major questions which were prepared based on the preliminary results obtained from the application of the questionnaire. These results yielded data that were interesting to follow up, e.g., to understand why the instructor provoked high levels of satisfaction. Thus, the interview participants were asked about this factor to examine it more closely, for example, about what the instructor did in class and online. Furthermore, the questionnaire data indicated that the factor technology did not show high satisfaction levels which required examining it further to understand why participants were not quite satisfied with it. Another questionnaire result that stood out was that participants showed they were not especially satisfied with the BL mode as compared to other course delivery methods. Therefore, it was relevant to understand their perceptions on this aspect. The

statistical results on the views of participants on the student-to-student interactions were of interest to explore further as one of the pedagogical features of the BL English courses was the systematic participation of students in interactive activities. It was also pertinent to follow up on the questionnaire results that showed that participants were not particularly satisfied with their performance in the course nor did they expect to achieve a satisfactory final mark in it. Moreover, the statistical data indicated that there were some weak correlations between some of the dimensions of the questionnaire with either the standardised test mark or the final course mark. Hence, it was of interest to find out if the participants in the interview could shed some light on this fact.

In what follows, the results of the thematic analysis carried out after familiarization with the eight interview transcripts will be presented. Once the codes had been identified and grouped thematically, the most relevant themes emerged. They corresponded to *instructor centrality*, *variations in teaching approaches*, *accessibiliy of online learning environment*, *preferences in relation to course delivery methods*, *peer interaction*, and *recalling performance expectations*.

4.4.2.1. Instructor Centrality. The theme instructor centrality encompasses the importance students attributed to the instructor with regard to their process of learning English in a BL environment. It also involves how the participants experienced the attitudes and actions that instructors exhibited towards them both online and face-to-face. It appeared most frequently as the eight participants revealed that the instructor was a key element in the context of BL. According to all of the participants their learning experience was to some extent determined by the instructor. Five participants highlighted the ability of the instructor to motivate and guide them, clarify online contents, as well as making their classes entertaining. “He would help us with what we had not understood on the platform by explaining it in a more entertaining way and perhaps a more intelligible way” (Participant 8). Another participant indicated that the main satisfaction factor was the instructor. “The instructor is our guide and apart from that he motivates us, so he tried his best to make our classes entertaining” (Participant 7). Students appear to equate being satisfied with the instructor when he or she has introduced an element of fun in the class. On the other hand, it was also pointed out once that some of the instructors “instead of motivating us [the students]

to learn, they demotivate us" (Participant 1). The student referred to a particular instructor who would make disparaging remarks aimed at her and one of her classmates, such as "'Why are you here [in English II]? You should be in English I'. She was always making those comments. This was demotivating and I ended up passing English II but I was not interested in learning anymore" (Participant 1). Furthermore, according to the student, the instructor's attitude towards their students led many of her classmates to abandon the course. Apart from being motivating, entertaining and a guide, students hoped the instructor would show an empathetic attitude towards them, especially when they experienced learning issues or when their knowledge of English was extremely basic or non-existent. "She cared and she sent us …, prepared some short handouts, and that was very helpful in class" (Participant 7).

The instructor's availability and accessibility were often mentioned as students expected them. They counted on their instructors to respond to their online queries and emails as promptly as possible, although this would not always occur. Instructors were acknowledged as being more accessible and available in the face-to-face environment. "You sent her emails to ask about something that was online and she would be slow in answering but in class she was very willing to answer all the questions we had" (Participant 1). The feeling of frustration at not being able to establish a connection with the instructor was also mentioned by another student. "It was difficult for me to communicate with the instructor because she gave me an email but never answered, so in that sense, things were rather difficult" (Participant 3). Moreover, students' online interactions with the instructor were mentioned as an important element to enhance learning. "… that the instructor responds right away, as they do face-to-face, makes you retain the contents better. Yes, that is what happens when they respond right away" (Participant 1). The availability and accessibility of their instructors were essential factors determining student satisfaction with the English course. One of the students had particularly good experiences with all the English course instructors in this programme and pointed this out. "The ones I had were excellent, they were always willing to answer questions, if you made a mistake they tried to help, no problem, that is, I think their work was outstanding" (Participant 8).

4.4.2.2. Variation in Teaching Approaches. The theme variation in teaching approaches relates to how the participants perceived the strategies and methods the

instructors used in the BL courses to teach English in the face-to-face and online environments. This theme recurrently came up in the interviews. It became apparent that every instructor had their own way of organizing their classes, choosing, and using different resources, especially in the face-to-face environment. Thus, although the courses were based on specific contents and a set syllabus, students noticed differences in how the course contents were delivered and the activities associated to them were carried out. Some instructors would adopt a more traditional method, presenting the contents of each unit in the classroom first and then have the students work on their own on the learning platform. “In the classroom, first we went over the contents, according to the programme, doing different activities with him, with interactive Power Point videos and then, the instructor did not interfere with what was done online” (Participant 5). Other instructors tried to implement a flipped classroom approach by means of which students first worked on the platform activities in an autonomous manner. Subsequently, in class, the instructor would have students carry out activities in which they practiced the work done previously online, thereby reinforcing, and elaborating on the course contents more profoundly.

> In the face-to-face class what she did was to review the unit which we should have done on the Cambridge learning platform … what the instructor always tried to do, what she always focused on, was to make us participate in dialogs, or to improve our speaking, instead of so many exercises. (Participant 4)

Moreover, even when students were expected to do the online activities autonomously before the face-to-face class, i.e., use the flipped classroom approach, some instructors seemed to find it necessary to explain the contents again in class and go over the same platform activities to make sure that students had understood them. Some instructors “showed us the Cambridge learning platform projected on the whiteboard and there we would be doing the exercises together with him; so, we learned better instead of doing it alone at home” (Participant 1). Students appreciated instructors’ skills to facilitate their learning. For example,

> The instructor in English III was very good at giving us tips of how to learn the words and of how, by separating them into different parts, you could find the meaning easily, although you did not really know what they meant. (Participant 8)

Another element related to the approaches used involved the feedback that instructors gave their students with regard to their language performance as this was considered important for their learning process. Four participants referred to how feedback was given. However, it would vary from one instructor to the other. “In other English courses, instructors gave us feedback about positive and negative aspects of our assessments, but in general, in English IV the instructor wrote on the tests what we had to use” (Participant 8). One student mentioned that the instructor provided oral feedback to the class after having given them a quiz during the previous class. “She gave us back the corrected quiz and explained each item indicating the correct answers and why they should have been answered in that way” (Participant 7). Another instructor had students prepare in groups and present to the class the contents of the platform units. “He would give us feedback on what we had not explained well enough” (Participant 2). In one of the courses, feedback was provided orally by the instructor to each individual student after the oral test. The student indicated that this contributed to her satisfaction with the course “I am satisfied with the course, with what I was taught, the content and the feedback provided. I am satisfied with the English courses” (Participant 4). These comments made by the students on how they received feedback from their instructors reflect the different approaches used. However, they also indicate the absence of peer feedback and that the provision of feedback came from the instructor. Neither were students expected to reflect on their performance or to correct their mistakes to produce deeper learning.

4.4.2.3. Accessibility of Online Learning Environment. Another significant theme that emerged from the interviews was related to the online learning environment. It can be described as the space mediated by a computer where online distance education occurs, often asynchronous and Web- or platform based (Hawkins & Baker, 2009). The online learning environment constituted an essential aspect of the BL English courses. It involved the Cambridge platform and the Internet connectivity to work autonomously on the course contents. Participants reported having to carry out a variety of automated activities on the Cambridge learning platform, which has been referred to in chapter 1. The eight participants did not experience major difficulties with the interface and the layout of the contents on the platform. Thus, they were quite satisfied with its usability and design. “The platform

itself was very friendly, it tells you: enter here, click here, unit 9, ready, and then it opens immediately, and you have to answer according to the contents you are seeing on it" (Participant 6). In fact, although students may have been expected to have some issues with it, they found accessing the contents "quite easy … The instructors would say that it was sometimes a bit complicated, but for us it was similar to most platforms we use now" (Participant 8). Two students reported having had occasional problems with the learning platform as it was sometimes down, meaning that the website could not be reached. They would then be concerned about not being able to finish the online activities on the given deadline. They resorted to contacting their instructor or classmates to find out about it.

> When the website was down, I wrote an email to the instructor or communicated with my classmates who were working on the activity at the same time. … [The instructor] confirmed that the platform was down and that there would be some extra time to finish the activity. (Participant 8)

Other students did not experience any issues with the Internet nor with the online platform. "It's not that heavy, so it can work with a cheap Internet service. … I saw my classmates doing the platform activities on their mobile phone while travelling on the underground" (Participant 6). However, depending on the Internet connectivity, students reported having trouble accessing some platform contents, which made them decide to disregard them. "Sometimes you had to watch videos, which introduced the topic, and they took far too long to download, so you skipped them and continued with the unit" (Participant 1). Internet stability was also an issue at times as indicated by two of the students, "I did the online exercises at home, and suddenly Internet would fail, and I had to do everything again because the platform had not saved it" (Participant 4). This was also confirmed by another student who mentioned "I could have been working on it [the online platform] for one hour and suddenly I realized that there had been no [course] progress [regarding the activities done]" (Participant 7). The fact that the online platform sometimes did not save the online work the students had been doing could be very frustrating for them, particularly because they had to redo the work to comply with the course requirements. These hitches could be caused by an unstable or weak Internet connection, a failure of the platform, or other technical issues.

One of the factors that was negatively valued by the students was the quantity as well as the lack of variety of the online activities on the platform. Students felt that they needed a large amount of time to complete the online tasks. Each unit contained many exercises, which could take considerable time to complete and submit. “Weekly I think I worked on the Cambridge platform activities for about five hours” (Participant 1). Having to spend so much time to work on the online activities was significantly more than students thought they could afford as their other subjects also demanded great dedication. “There were time conflicts with the rest of the subjects. I am studying Nursing and for me it was often difficult to do those online activities during the week” (Participant 7). The latter student indicated that he and his peers were doing their internship at hospital, which did not leave them much time to work on the English course.

Moreover, the activities were similarly designed in every unit on the platform making the online work quite repetitive, although the contents practiced were different. “It is not a didactic platform, always the same, always the same, and some units even had eight parts, so working on the Cambridge platform became very boring” (Participant 1). The exercises followed a traditional pattern used in EFL courses: Fill-in-the-blanks, drag-and-drop, multiple choice, true and false, among others. The type of activities was even compared to another online language learning application which, according to two of the participants, was far more entertaining and game-oriented, generating better learning than the one used in the BL course. This other application, called Duolingo, was used by the participants as a private tool. “It [learning on the Cambridge platform] is not a didactic way of learning, because there are other applications, for example, I used Duolingo, which I think is much more didactic. I retained more contents with Duolingo than with Cambridge” (Participant 1). The design of the Duolingo application was found to be “more interactive, much shorter” (Participant 5), thus allowing the student to repeat the unit again quickly. However, a participant made a positive statement about the contents on the Cambridge learning platform. “It contains a little bit of everything” (Participant 3), although online learning was not their preferred learning environment. “I do not like the online mode” (Participant 3). Another participant expressed that their satisfaction with the course was influenced by the technology used in it. “I believe that the most important factor

was the technological one, both in class and the development of the work at home. … [It] was the one that determined my satisfaction with the course" (Participant 5).

4.4.2.4. Preferences in Relation to Course Delivery Method. Course delivery method refers to the way by means of which educational contents are imparted by the instructor to the students. The most common course delivery methods being face-to-face (in person), online, and hybrid (blended) (mix of in person and online) (Iowa State University, 2020). In the context of the study, the course delivery method was a combination of face-to-face and online (i.e., blended).

Four out of eight participants indicated their preference for the face-to-face delivery method rather than blended or fully online. They preferred the face-to-face option because "… you can always discuss with the instructor when you have a question" (Participant 1). Furthermore, this method allowed "… you to interact more with the instructor and also with your classmates, and more learning takes place, while the online method is more boring and monotonous" (Participant 3). Learning a language "… requires person to person practice, for example responding and listening, and speaking fluently, which the online mode does not provide" (Participant 5). The face-to-face instruction was preferred to online as it produced more learning "… although online work may be more convenient, it lends itself to not being taken so seriously and to be done only to comply" (Participant 7). Two of the participants studying undergraduate programmes in the health area, such as Medical Technology and Nursing, especially complained about the time required to do the online tasks in the BL English courses. "…doing the online part, the activities, took too much time. Most of my classmates were also affected by it" (Participant 3). They indicated that their English course expectations were not met due to the time issue as their other courses also demanded dedicating much study time. Those that were enrolled in an English III or English IV course were spending considerable time on their internships, which took up a large portion of their weekly schedule. In fact, they stated that other BL courses they had attended were not as time demanding. "… [these other BL courses] make our university studies lighter because you do most of the work at home and then you go to the university only once a month to sit for the test" (Participant 8). Whereas for the English courses they had to do the online work as well as attend face-to-face classes once a week.

However, two out of eight participants acknowledged the usefulness of the BL mode to learn English. “I think that the method that the university uses, with the Cambridge platform, is very useful, it is a good method. I feel that working on it with time, with enthusiasm, prioritizing English … is very useful (Participant 2). According to one of the participants it contributed to learning.

> Although I know there were many negative comments about it [the online work], I did learn because I first worked on the Cambridge units and then the instructor went over them in class and any questions about them were answered. (Participant 4)

4.4.2.5. Peer Interaction. A further relevant theme that the interviews revealed was peer interaction. Interactions can be defined as the exchanges that students have among them asking each other questions, discussing, or commenting on a topic. It also involves paying attention to the opinions of their peers and collaborating to carry out a given assignment (Demirel & Baser, 2021). This was evidenced through the interactions that students reported having had in the face-to-face class. However, peer interaction also occurred frequently through online blogs. In the face-to-face environment instructors asked students to carry out different types of tasks and problem-solving activities for which students cooperated and collaborated to successfully accomplish them (Garcia-Sanchez & Burbules, 2016). “We would often do group or pair work activities, sometimes we would do them in pairs or in groups of four or five people, but there was always some kind of interaction” (Participant 3). Students were also asked to prepare presentations in groups for which “we also had to formulate questions, and make it all interactive, like a class” (Participant 2). Given the chance to choose who to work with in the class, one student declared “We would work with those that were closer to us, but there were tasks for which the instructor made us interact with the others. We constantly interacted among all” (Participant 4).

Peer interaction clearly occurred through the online blogs they had to participate in during the course. These interactions were carried out based on the topic defined by the instructor. Students were required to write an initial post entry, and then comment on their peers’ entries. Most often the instructor did not participate nor facilitate the student interactions in the blogs. “We had to comment on at least two or three entries using a certain number of words, not only a sentence with

five words, and that was quite interactive" (Participant 5). Students could decide who they wanted to interact with. "I would write a comment reacting to the people I knew … and as briefly and concisely as possible" (Participant 3). They tended to choose to reply to the blog entries which according to them were written in comprehensible English. "You wanted to finish the task quickly by commenting on the classmate's entry that was easier to understand" (Participant 1). The task was sometimes considered tiresome since "the blogs are quite long so I get somewhat bored" (Participant 3). However, it was considered entertaining and fun by other students as "… a very fun atmosphere is created" (Participant 5). One student even indicated that "they were the most enjoyable activities of the course … you could give your opinion on something and respond to your peers' comments, and I think I liked participating in blogs very much" (Participant 8). Blogs became a means to socialise with their peers outside the face-to-face class environment. "Blogs were actually entertaining because at the end you could become aware of all the opinions of all your classmates, and you could know them better" (Participant 1).

4.4.2.6. Recalling Performance Expectations. Performance expectations can be defined as "students' anticipation concerning ideal rewards after certain behaviour" (Wu & Liu, 2013, p. 177). This theme was related to how, in retrospect, the participants viewed their satisfaction with their performance in the course, in terms of the mark obtained in the standardised test and their final course mark. Two students indicated that the mark obtained in the standardised test was not satisfactory. For one of the participants the standardised test mark did not reflect the effort put into learning the language. "It was lower than my knowledge level of the language" (Participant 5). These students found the standardised test quite challenging. They did not expect the low marks obtained since they had worked hard at complying with the online and face-to-face tasks. Furthermore, as evidenced by the final course marks, they had obtained higher marks in the other course assessments. Therefore, they expected the standardised test mark to be fairly similar. A main reason given by one of the students for the results in the standardised test was that "…there are too many external factors that make it difficult to answer that test without anxiety" (Participant 2). These external factors could be related to Internet connection issues while sitting for the test since it was online. Moreover, some students experienced problems with the online

test platform during the listening and speaking sections, which affected the scores and mark obtained. Another participant mentioned that he found the test difficult and that the poor mark obtained "was an indication of his level of English at the time" (Participant 7). In fact, one participant indicated that getting a low standardised test mark had lowered her final course mark. "[At the end of the course, I obtained] a mark which was much worse than I expected" (Participant 1). Therefore, she was not satisfied with her marks. Half of the students did not feel satisfied with their performance in the test, but for a few it reflected the progress they had experienced during their English programme, which contributed to their satisfaction with the course. Thus, despite the length of the standardised test and the challenges it posed, one participant indicated that "he didn't do so badly" (Participant 3). Another participant mentioned that she did better in the English III standardised test than she had done in English II, which "was an achievement for me … it was like a ladder I could climb" (Participant 4). A participant indicated that although she had worked harder in the previous courses, "I obtained a much better mark in [the] English III [standardised test]" (Participant 8). Furthermore, one of the participants obtained the highest mark in the class in the standardised test and considered it "fun" (Participant 6). These last three students expressed their satisfaction with having reached higher levels of language learning as reflected by the results in the test.

With regard to the final course mark, four participants agreed that their final course mark reflected their dedication to learning English. It "was equivalent to the effort I put into it" (Participant 3). One participant admitted not having worked so hard in the course, which "… resulted in the mark obtained" (Participant 8). These students were aware they could have obtained a much better mark. Another had previous knowledge of English but he did not do all the tasks required so "this lowered my mark" (Participant 6). On the other hand, one participant who obtained a high mark in the course indicated that he expected to achieve that mark because "I invested time in learning English since it is a useful tool in any sphere of life" (Participant 5). The latter student expressed his satisfaction with the final mark obtained and with the course as a whole. He acknowledged that the effort put into it did not only result in good marks but also in knowledge and skills that would be conducive to success in his academic and future professional activities.

According to the data obtained from the participants in the interview it can be seen that their levels of satisfaction with the marks obtained in the standardised test and the final course marks varied. The mark obtained in the standardised test was mostly attributed to the challenges placed by that test (length, level of difficulty, among others). Regarding the final course mark, participants tended to acknowledge that it was the result of the effort they had put into doing the required activities and the time they had invested in learning the language.

4.5. Triangulation of the Questionnaire and Interview Data

The most significant findings that the analysis of both data sets yielded are the following. First, they have in common that the instructor is highly relevant for a positive learning experience in a BL course. Their availability and accessibility, especially in the face-to-face environment, is acknowledged. Nevertheless, students expect their instructor to be available and accessible in the online environment as well, which does not always occur. They also count on them to be caring and empathetic with them and their learning process. Furthermore, the questionnaire data revealed that the participants particularly acknowledge the instructor's making them feel part of the class and that they belong, as 87,2% of them agreed or strongly agreed with the questionnaire item. Whereas the interview data did not particularly emphasize this aspect in relation to the instructor. Instead, the instructor's significance in motivating, guiding, and making classes entertaining for their students is evidenced in the interview data but not in the questionnaire data as this aspect was not elicited directly.

Regarding the instructors' teaching approaches, the descriptions and opinions expressed by the participants in the interviews on what the instructors did in the face-to-face and online environments and how they dealt with the activities and contents permitted to obtain an enhanced understanding of the students' perceptions of their BL courses. This rich information was not gathered in detail through the questionnaire. However, both the questionnaire and the interview data indicated that students rely on the instructor's timely and constructive feedback. Their levels of satisfaction with the feedback provided were fairly high in the corresponding item in the questionnaire (77%). The interview data provided further evidence of this aspect as half of the participants expressed their opinions on the topic. Moreover, details as to how the feedback was given could also be ascertained, thus providing deeper understanding of

one of the aspects of the instructor's teaching approaches.

The results concerning the accessibility of the online learning environment showed consistency between the questionnaire and the interview data. To be precise, the questionnaire data revealed that students' levels of satisfaction were quite high regarding the navigation features of the learning platform. Moreover, the interview data indicated that the interface and layout of the contents on the platform were not an issue as navigation was straightforward, the platform was user-friendly, and the contents could be accessed easily. Conversely, both types of data evidenced that students experienced problems when the Internet bandwidth was not appropriate as it could cause difficulties to download resources, especially videos. The interview data also revealed that the platform would occasionally be down, which caused students' concern since they could not carry out their online work. Furthermore, Internet instability was another issue mentioned in the interviews. Due to it, work done online on the platform was sometimes not saved, which meant doing everything again. Another aspect about the online learning environment that evidenced dissatisfaction and was present in the interview data was the great quantity and lack of variety of the activities on the platform. This could also be connected to the way the course was designed and delivered.

In respect to the course delivery method, both the questionnaire and the interview data showed students' lack of satisfaction with the amount of time they needed for the completion of the tasks on the online platform. The interview data revealed that due to the length of the tasks and the frequency with which they had to log onto the platform, the online work was considered too time consuming. Thus, students often preferred the face-to-face portion of the course, which was less demanding and involved dealing with the course within a limited time frame. Moreover, the face-to-face mode allowed for greater language practice opportunities and direct interactions with instructor and peers, which could produce enhanced learning. However, one of the most revealing findings of the study, based on the questionnaire and interview data was that, in general, students did not express a preference for the BL modality over any other, such as full online or completely face-to-face. This could depend on the type of study programme they were enrolled in,

their learning preferences, the instructor that was in charge of the course, and their time availability, among others.

Both sets of data made it clear that peer interactions were relevant for the development of face-to-face and online activities. They also determined the students' satisfaction levels with the course, in particular with the quality of the interactions and the opportunity to get to know their peers better. The latter aspect was especially highlighted in the interviews in relation to the interaction through online blogs. However, it was also mentioned that despite sometimes being a tiresome task, it could become an entertaining activity. The interview data helped to understand students' perceptions regarding the work on the online blogs better.

Regarding the mark students obtained for the standardised test, the statistical test (Spearman rank correlation) run between the test mark and the satisfaction questionnaire dimensions, revealed there existed a very weak relationship with the dimension interaction, and a weak relationship with the dimensions instructor and outcomes. The interview data indicated that half of the students were dissatisfied with the mark obtained in the test as it was thought not to reflect their level of English due to the challenges it posed. However, some students acknowledged the fact that the mark achieved in the test was high enough to evidence the progress they had made in their language learning process. Thus, the satisfaction with the standardised test mark cannot be attributed to a specific factor, except that it could be the result of the effort they put into the course. However, the level of dissatisfaction with it may be related to the students' poor performance due to the external difficulties they faced when sitting for it.

As to the final course mark, the statistical test (Spearman rank correlation) run between the final course mark and the questionnaire dimensions revealed a very weak relationship between this mark and the dimension instructor and the dimension interaction. A weak relationship was found between the final course mark and the dimension outcomes. The latter could be explained as occurring because the dimension outcomes contained an item that elicited information about whether the students believed they would be satisfied with their final course mark. Only 44,5% of the participants thought they would be.

Both the questionnaire data and the interview data showed that the final course mark reflected the effort students had put into the course although they were not particularly satisfied with it. The interview data showed that some of the students thought they could have obtained a better mark but did not work hard enough for it. Interestingly, the questionnaire data were collected before the end of the course, therefore the students were predicting how satisfied they would be with the final course mark. Less than half of them believed they would be satisfied with it. On the other hand, the interview data were obtained after the course had finished, so the participants could reflect in hindsight about the mark achieved. These reflections seemed to demonstrate honest opinions about their own academic performance.

4.6. Summary

This chapter presented the results of the mixed methods study carried out to reach the objective established for it, i.e., determine the levels of satisfaction and the factors contributing to it that university students experienced with a compulsory EFL BL course they were enrolled in. Furthermore, it also attempted to find out if a relationship existed between the levels of satisfaction and factors that caused it with the students' learning outcomes (standardised test mark, written test mark, oral test mark, and final course mark).

The data gathered by means of the online questionnaire during the first phase of the study were analysed according to the dimensions (instructor, technology, course set-up, interaction, outcomes, and overall satisfaction) involved. The frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated with the use of SPSS (version 24). The dimensions making up the satisfaction questionnaire were measured to find out which factors exhibited higher or lower levels of satisfaction. Furthermore, Spearman rank correlations were run between the questionnaire dimensions and the course marks. The results showed relationships that varied depending on whether the analysis considered the aggregated or disaggregated course level data. However, all correlations between the course marks and the dimensions were weak or very weak.

The qualitative phase of the study involved interviewing eight participants. Based on the transcripts of the interviews, a thematic analysis was carried out. Six major themes were revealed: Instructor centrality, variations in teaching approaches, accessibility of online learning environment, preferences in relation to course delivery

method, peer interaction, and recalling performance expectations. Finally, a triangulation between the quantitative and the qualitative data was presented to integrate and compare the findings obtained in both phases of the study.

Chapter 5. Discussion

This chapter highlights the findings of the study and discusses them to attempt to provide answers to the research questions:

1. How satisfied are students with the blended learning programme for English as a foreign language?

   1a. What are students' perceptions regarding their blended learning course?

   1b. To what extent, if any, is there a relationship between their satisfaction with their blended learning course and their learning outcomes?

2. What are the factors contributing to students' perceived levels of satisfaction with a blended learning programme for English as a foreign language?

The data gathered in the quantitative phase of the study proved to be valuable to answer research questions 1, 1a, 1b, and 2, whereas the qualitative data contributed to enhancing understanding of all of them. The questions will be addressed through the lens of the theoretical framework, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework and its three presences (teaching, social, and cognitive). The CoI framework, which was presented in chapter 1, will be applied to the discussion when suitable.

The study aimed at focusing on the satisfaction levels that an EFL learning context generated and the factors associated to them. It also sought to find out about how students' grades and perceptions compared in such context. Thus, reference will be made to EFL whenever appropriate.

5.1. Satisfaction With EFL Blended Learning, Perceptions, and Relationship Between Satisfaction and Course Marks

Three aspects will be dealt with to answer research questions 1, 1a, and 1b. In the first place, students´ satisfaction with their EFL BL courses will be examined. Second, their perceptions regarding those courses as revealed through the quantitative and qualitative results of the study will be reviewed. Third, the possible relationship between the satisfaction expressed by the students and their learning outcomes (course marks) will be discussed. The elements that contributed to students' higher or lower levels of satisfaction with the EFL BL course were the result of student perceptions and experiences. Thus, students' perceptions of the BL environment may affect their satisfaction with the EFL course. Therefore, higher levels of satisfaction are

associated to positive perceptions whereas negative perceptions to lower levels of satisfaction. Perceptions are expected to have an influence on students' learning and, as a consequence, affect performance (Ferreira & Santoso, 2008). Consequently, it is of interest to examine whether satisfaction can be correlated to academic performance.

5.1.1. *Satisfaction With EFL Blended Learning*

In general terms, the study revealed that students were satisfied with their EFL BL course, as the mean obtained from the questionnaire data regarding dimension overall satisfaction (M = 3.54) can be interpreted as indicating satisfied students. This dimension included questions on whether the students would recommend the course to others, whether they were less satisfied with the BL experience compared to other course delivery methods, and their overall satisfaction with the course. Overall, 68% of the students were satisfied with their EFL BL course, which is a positive indicator but it also means that improvements can be made to the course to increase the level of satisfaction with it. The analysis of the factors that impinge on student satisfaction discussed in this chapter can be used to improve students' learning experience and instructors' teaching, which may contribute to better learning outcomes (Arbaugh, 2014).

Over fifty percent (58%) of the students responding the satisfaction questionnaire indicated they would recommend the course to others, while other authors analysing blended learning have reported higher satisfaction, for example, Abbas' (2018) findings revealed that all participants in her study would recommend the BL English for Academic Purposes writing course to others. Abbas' study involved the participation of only 25 Iraqi higher education students, who were divided into two groups taught by the same instructor. Therefore, the instructor variable was constant, i.e., it was not affected by different instructor personalities nor teaching approaches. Moreover, the class size was small, which is an advantage for language learning, both face-to-face and online. Possibly largely due to the class size, an online learning community was created. In spite of the online component of the course being satisfactorily evaluated, the recommendations made to the administration were related to extending the face-to-face weekly sessions. Thus, the relevance of the face-to-face environment for some of the students' learning to take place was acknowledged.

The participants in the present study were enrolled in classes that on average included as many as 35 students, which is a higher number than usually recommended for language classes. Although the ideal number of students in a language classroom depends on the context, the University of Texas at Austin (2010) suggests between 10 and 12. However, no evidence could be found in the present study about class size affecting students' language learning, academic performance or satisfaction. This might be investigated in a further study.

The result for students recommending the course to others (58%) is lower than the overall satisfaction with the course (68%). It can be explained by the fact that students at the Chilean University are not given a choice to choose the courses they take. However, students can select the instructor who teaches a course if more than one class section is offered. Furthermore, it is the instructor who is evaluated by the students when the course has finished as no course evaluations are applied. All undergraduate programmes have a particular curriculum consisting of a compulsory set of courses which they have to complete over a given timeframe to satisfy the degree requirements. The courses constituting the EFL programme are compulsory and can only be taken in a BL mode. Thus, the only choice they can make is selecting the instructor who will teach the course. Furthermore, only 27% of the students expressed being more satisfied with the BL modality than with other course delivery methods (face-to-face or online). Likewise, Nasutrion et al. (2021) concluded that given the choice of any of the three modalities, students preferred face-to-face learning. This study's interview data revealed that students' preference for a particular course delivery method varied greatly, depending on their study programmes, the year they were in, and their learning style. The reasons for not preferring BL over face-to-face instruction (or even online) may be sought in other elements of the dimensions studied, such as perception of greater online workload, frequent participation requirements, insufficient development of self-directedness, low performance expectations, and lengthy and uninteresting online activities. Alternatively, as has been pointed out in other studies, students' preference for and satisfaction with a course is not dependent on the course delivery method but on the instructor (Bleffert-Schmidt, 2011).

Learning EFL is challenging for most students, as pointed out in earlier chapters of this study. According to Ochoa Alpala and Roberto Florez (2011), learning EFL can be compared to participating in a "game" where instructors and students take on different roles. Instructors facilitate students' progression during the EFL process and present the resources available to them to learn the language. The metaphor of comparing language education with a game seems suitable to the comments made by participants in the interviews. Most of the students referred to aspects of the EFL BL course as entertaining and fun or as boring and tedious. The most outstanding element that was considered entertaining and fun was the interactions taking place in the online blogs between peers. Thus, it contributed to the student satisfaction with the course.

On the other hand, the activities taking place on the online platform were the cause of generalized boredom and feeling of tediousness due to the amount of work involved and the lack of variety of the online activities. These were causes of dissatisfaction with the course. As mentioned earlier, Harris et al. (2017) reported that students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to make use of technology at home for social media and multimedia (including computer games) activities. These activities are usually carried out for entertainment and fun. Thus, online activities that demand an educational focus and are related to a learning programme are not motivating enough for those students as they lack the element of personal interest and involvement. In view of this, the adoption of the use of games in EFL courses may be considered. According to Gozcu and Caganaga (2016), they are important when learning EFL as they not only provide amusement and fun but also instances of practice. Jung had already put forward in 2005 that through the use of games, communicative competence and spontaneous and creative use of the EFL were promoted. Furthermore, Iaremenko (2017) reported the existence of a direct relationship between enhanced motivation and entertainment in competitive online games in EFL. Therefore, it may be inferred that the use of some class and online game-based activities that have clear learning objectives can produce effective language learning, enhanced academic performance and increased satisfaction. The interview data revealed that some students made use of EFL applications that were based on gamification, such as Duolingo, which they found fun and effective. Gamification has

been defined as “the use of game elements in a non-game context” (Hanus & Fox, 2015, p. 152). However, Hanus and Fox (2015) have warned that including too many instances of gamification can generate opposite effects as the initial novelty and excitement can give way to demotivation, lack of engagement, and dissatisfaction, especially in students that are intrinsically (i.e., driven by personal motives) motivated in learning. It may be concluded that in order to enhance students’ motivation and satisfaction towards EFL BL courses, some game-based activities with precise learning objectives can be included, especially in the online environment.

5.1.2. *Perceptions Regarding EFL BL Courses*

In what follows, some of the elements found in the qualitative and quantitative data will be addressed. They reflect students’ positive and negative perceptions of their EFL BL courses. These perceptions were expressed in the form of feelings or beliefs.

The majority of students feel that their instructor includes them in the learning community and is accessible to them, especially in the face-to-face environment. This positive perception is reflected in the high levels of satisfaction obtained by the dimension instructor. However, a small number of students expressed their feeling of frustration about their instructors not communicating promptly and frequently online with them. They perceive the absence of a strong teaching presence when instructors are not accessible online as expected in a BL course. In such learning context, communication transcends the physical classroom and extends towards the online environment (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). With regard to this research, the occasional absence of the instructor online can be explained as the result of instructors having a heavy teaching load which entails being overwhelmed with work. At the time of the study, instructors were provided with some guidelines regarding online communication with their students. These have been emphasized as a result of full online instruction during COVID-19 lockdown measures.

The instructor’s accessibility and availability for the students are not only related to how they communicate with each other online and offline. It also refers to the willingness and disposition of instructors to answer students’ questions about course contents, guide them in how activities and tasks are carried out, and give them feedback on their academic performance. These are teaching behaviours that

are often taken for granted as they are expected from instructors that have received adequate teacher training and professional development. However, students that exhibit low proficiency in EFL may find it challenging to communicate in English in the classroom, especially when it is the main language of instruction and communication used by the instructor. When this occurs, low proficiency students may not feel confident enough to use English to ask their instructor to explain or review aspects of the language being learnt they have not grasped. Thus, instructors and students often make use of the students' native language, which in the context of EFL is a debatable issue. Hall and Cook (2013) studied the implementation of a large-scale global project on the use of the first language in EFL. They pointed out that over fifty percent of the instructors use the first language to develop rapport and a pleasant classroom atmosphere. Similarly, in a study on the use of the native language in the EFL classroom by Saudi Arabian higher education students, Alheri (2017) reported that instructors made use of Arabic to establish rapport with their students, as well as for some specific functions in EFL classes (e.g., explaining vocabulary and grammar structures). It can be concluded that for the instructor to be considered accessible and available in the EFL course, a reasonable amount of the students' native language needs to be used, particularly with lower-level English-language students, who otherwise may feel excluded from the learning environment.

The quantitative and qualitative data show that most of the students feel they can relate to other students in their course, which is perceived as positive. The course design of the EFL blended courses contemplates face-to-face and online interactive activities with their peers through which social presence is established. As a learning community they can exchange opinions, information, and knowledge, which allows them to become acquainted with each other and generate a climate of trust and mutual support. The establishment of such a learning environment has effects on how EFL is experienced and learnt. On the one hand, through the use of social interaction, communication and language learning are promoted as meanings are negotiated (Long, 1981, 1989). On the other hand, the online environment reduces the student's anxiety about their English production and the texts produced may be revised before being posted (Goda & Yamada, 2013). Goda and Yamada (2013) investigated 42 Japanese higher education EFL students' online discussions and

concluded that students must be supported first by their instructor by encouraging open communication. Then focus should be placed on the discussion topics and on encouraging the production of student interactions that require more sophisticated knowledge and skills. As has been reported previously, the existence of a positive relationship between social presence and connectedness with their peers affects students' self-motivation to collaborate with others and to work individually (So & Brush, 2008).

By analysing the study data, it appears that over half of the students feel comfortable participating in the course through BL. These perceptions may be explained by the familiarity the students have achieved with the face-to-face and online blend used in the English course, the type of face-to-face and online activities, the online platform features, and the interaction with the instructor and their peers. The social and teaching presences established sustain the learning community so its members feel supported and motivated to participate. At the same time, a small number of students do not feel comfortable or are unsure of their perceptions towards participating in a BL course delivery medium. These negative perceptions may be accounted for by students' preferences for fully face-to-face or fully online courses, as the interview data revealed. The questionnaire data also demonstrated that about a third of the students did not show preference for BL or was not sure about preferring it to face-to-face or online learning. This can be attributed to students' perceptions as regarding the online workload as tediously long and time-consuming. McGee and Reis (2012) offered an analysis of best practices that have been published with regard to the adoption of blended learning. Some of these best practices may apply to the context in which the present study was carried out. Therefore, the diversity of the student population represented by the participants in this research, which include those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, should be taken into account to increase students' positive perceptions towards blended learning. On the one hand, students should be helped to develop necessary skills and should be provided with adequate support to become independent learners and take responsibility for their learning both online and face-to-face. The provision of support for online technology increases student involvement with their courses. Furthermore, the workload assigned should be manageable (Mcgee & Reis, 2012). Often blended

learning courses involve increased workload for students (and instructors), which is the reason why many students dislike them (Fadde & Vu, 2014).

Less than half of the students believed they would obtain a satisfactory final course mark. These negative perceptions may be caused by their results in the standardised test, which is perceived as challenging and lengthy. Generally, marks obtained in the test are low, thus generating low performance expectations with regard to the final course mark. Students perceive the time and effort they invest in the course is not reflected in the marks obtained.

Over half of the students believed they would be able to apply what they had learned in the course. They perceived the contents of the course to be useful and relevant for their studies and future professional career. These positive perceptions may have been caused by their awareness of English being the key to career opportunities in a country whose economic development is highly dependent on international commercial relations. Regarding the impact of the blended learning mode on students' learning experiences, Zhang's (2020) study on 83 Chinese graduate students revealed that 98.86 percent of the participants indicated they had learned what they expected to learn in the course, were motivated to learn English, were interested in improving their proficiency in the language and in applying what they had learned to their studies. Zhang's (2020) participants were more mature students, who were enrolled in an English for Specific Purposes course related to the agriculture and forestry disciplines they were majoring in. Although the undergraduate students in the present study were possibly younger and were enrolled in a general communicative EFL programme, many of them were able to recognize the significance of learning English for their future professional career.

5.1.3. *Relationship Between Satisfaction With BL Course and Learning Outcomes (Course Marks*)

One of the aims of this study was to find out whether a relationship existed between the results of the satisfaction questionnaire and the course marks (standardised test mark, oral test mark, written test mark and final course mark). Thus, as indicated previously in chapters 3 and 4, Spearman rank correlations were calculated. The correlation analyses conducted between the course marks of the three course levels (not disaggregated per level) and the satisfaction questionnaire

dimensions found either weak or very weak relationships between the course marks and the dimensions. For the standardised test mark, they were weak for the instructor and outcomes, and very weak for interaction. The oral test mark correlated weakly with instructor and outcomes, and very weakly with overall satisfaction. For the written test mark, correlations were very weak for instructor and outcomes. The final course mark and outcomes correlated weakly. The final course mark and instructor and interaction correlated very weakly. Moreover, when disaggregating the three course levels and running correlations between course marks and the dimensions, the results showed weak and very weak relationships among them. However, the correlations varied depending on the course level. In English II, all four course marks correlated with outcomes and overall satisfaction. In English III, only three course marks correlated with outcomes, while the four course marks correlated with instructor in English IV.

Furthermore, additional correlations were run to determine whether item Q24 (overall, I am satisfied with this course) of the satisfaction questionnaire showed a relationship with the course marks. These were found to be very weak. The findings indicating that few weak or very weak relationships could be found between the satisfaction dimension and the course marks are in line with the results reported in the following studies. Chernosky et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between satisfaction rates and students' performance (marks, learning goals, dropout rates) in four courses of an Engineering programme for graduate students. A redesign of the courses was undertaken and its outcomes examined. Results indicated that no significant correlation could be established between satisfaction and marks. Khan and Iqbal (2016) carried out research on 351 Pakistani graduate students to explore the relationship between their satisfaction and academic achievement in distance courses. Although most students were satisfied with the interactions studied, they concluded that satisfaction and academic achievement were not significantly correlated. Furthermore, Maki et al. (2000) carried out a semi-experimental study with American university students enrolled in a general psychology course that was offered both online and face-to-face. They reported that no relationship could be found between satisfaction and academic performance. In fact, students in the online course achieved

higher marks than students in the face-to-face lecture-based course. Nevertheless, students in the latter course exhibited overall higher satisfaction rates with the course.

On the other hand, the results of this study are different from those suggesting that satisfaction contributes to higher marks. Ko and Chung (2014) investigated how the teaching quality of culinary arts instructors affected learning satisfaction and academic performance of 406 hospitality students. The results showed a significant positive correlation between the students' learning satisfaction and their academic performance, as well as between the teaching quality of instructors and students' learning satisfaction, and between teaching quality of instructors and students' academic performance. Likewise, Dhagane and Afrah´s (2016) study examined the relationship between student satisfaction and academic performance on 133 university students in Somalia. They found a strong relationship between satisfaction and performance. Together with this, their study revealed that satisfaction increased academic achievement and student retention. Owston et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between student perceptions and academic achievement of 577 Canadian university students. After running statistical tests, the researchers concluded that a very strong relationship could be established between perceptions and marks.

The fact that no moderate or strong relationships could be established between satisfaction with the BL courses and students' marks suggests that students may obtain low marks and still be satisfied with the course and vice versa. However, it is the dimension instructor which, however weakly, correlated with the course marks (when not disaggregated by course level). This dimension also correlated with all course marks for English IV. Therefore, indicating the significance that teaching presence, represented by the instructor, has on academic achievement (i.e., marks) in the context of technology-mediated learning. The data suggest that higher student satisfaction with the instructor may lead to higher marks. The correlation between the course marks and the dimension outcomes is explained by the fact that they form part of that dimension.

In order to find out whether the standardised test mark affected the final course mark, correlations were run between them. A moderate relationship was revealed when the data were not disaggregated by level. Furthermore, when the course level data were disaggregated, it showed a moderate correlation for English II,

and strong correlations for English III and IV. This indicates that the standardised test marks obtained by the students relate positively with the final marks obtained in the course. However, this finding does not involve students' satisfaction with the BL course nor with the factors contributing to it. The relationship demonstrates that the higher the test marks, the higher the final course mark, which shows that most students that exhibit a good performance in the tests also do better in the other course evaluations and obtain a higher final course mark as a result. In that sense, the test marks (especially the written test mark) could be a good predictor of the final course mark the students will obtain. This can be observed in all course levels in this study. The present finding is in line with the results obtained by Jensen and Barron (2014), who carried out research on 780 American college and university students enrolled in Biology courses. This study extended over a four-year (college) and five-year (university) period with the aim of studying whether midterm and first-exam marks could predict final course marks. They concluded that early marks and final marks obtained in the courses were strongly correlated. A variety of other academic disciplines at the college were also investigated, yielding as a result that midterm and final grades were strongly correlated as well. The midterm test in Jensen and Barron's research may be considered equivalent to the tests mentioned in the present study as they are administered well before the final exam of the course.

Although no moderate or strong relationships could be found between the course marks and students' satisfaction with the course, the standardised test mark average was a passing mark, and the oral test mark, the written test mark and the final course mark average were good. Undergraduate students at the Chilean University may feel satisfied with the EFL BL programme irrespective of the marks they obtain. Due to their overall low EFL performance level before enrolling in higher education (as described in chapter 1), they may find the EFL BL programme challenging. Thus, students' performance expectations, with regard to their marks, may not be very high, which does not affect their satisfaction with the course. Based on these results, further examination of the factors impacting students' learning outcomes (course marks) and academic performance needs to be undertaken.

Considering the diverse social backgrounds that students at broad-access universities belong to, which is associated to the prior educational level they bring with

them, it seems it would be relevant to carry out diagnostic tests in EFL at the start of their English programme. Diagnostic tests in the EFL classroom are useful for the programme administrators, instructors and students as they provide information about the strengths and weaknesses of the students regarding the English language (Ali et al., 2019). Such a test would render data regarding their initial knowledge and skills in EFL, and it could be applied as an entry test and again towards the end of the course as an exit test to measure the progress made in learning the language over the term.

Furthermore, in order to increase student satisfaction with EFL BL courses, as well as their learning outcomes (marks) associated to their language performance, students' motivations towards learning EFL will have to be taken into consideration by the instructors when planning and implementing future EFL courses. Students' motivation for learning EFL can be elicited as an additional item to the diagnostic test at first and systematically along the different courses of the EFL programme. As indicated previously in chapter 2, motivation is a significant driver in the process of learning a language (Gardner, 1985) and is particularly relevant in contexts in which English is a foreign language.

5.2. Factors Contributing to EFL Student Satisfaction With BL

The study revealed that the main factors contributing to learner satisfaction with BL were instructor, and interaction. In decreasing order, the other factors were technology and online learning environment, outcomes and performance expectations. Course design and set-up contributed slightly less.

5.2.1. *Instructor*

The results obtained from the satisfaction questionnaire and the interview evidenced that the instructor is pivotal in the students' learning experience in the BL course. These results are consistent with those reported in other studies, which concluded that the instructor obtained the highest satisfaction score (Bolliger & Erichsen, 2013; Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Naaj et al., 2012). Students' responses demonstrated they were satisfied with and showed positive feelings towards their instructor. A significant aspect leading to students' high levels of satisfaction was how the instructor made them feel they belonged to the learning community. They also recognized the clarity with which assignments and course

expectations were communicated to them. The instructor's clarity and fairness regarding assessments and the timely feedback given were acknowledged. Furthermore, students appreciated the instructors' availability and accessibility, especially in the classroom environment.

The satisfaction factors associated to the instructor that were revealed in this study are particularly relevant for broad-access universities, which is the case of the institution where this study was carried out. These universities enroll high numbers of students that belong to socially disadvantaged groups. Among such students are those classified as first-generation, who tend to belong to a minority, come from lower-income families, and have poorer academic performance. These students are often confronted with financial restrictions and lack of prior adequate academic education. Gibbons and Borders (2010) investigated differences in the expectations about college in students who would be first-generation with those whose parents had attended college. They found that prospective first-generation students exhibited lower self-efficacy (perceived ability to enter and stay at college), higher negative outcome expectations, and more perceived barriers. This can cause difficulty in areas like establishing friendly relationships with other students or in obtaining good marks, which leads to their perceiving they do not belong and eventually to drop their studies. Murphy et al. (2020) carried out research aimed at increasing the sense of belonging of 1063 first-year students at a broad-access university. The results showed that due to the intervention there was an increase in the probability that first-generation students maintained continuous enrollment over a period of two years. Murphy and Destin (2016) generated a framework based on empirical evidence on some of the barriers that low-income, minority and first-generation students encounter in order to be successful at college. They examined how social identity, cultural stereotypes, and the college cultural and institutional structures determine students' identity, motivation and academic achievement. Among other elements, they propose that the instructor's role in fostering a positive learning climate is vital. This can be achieved by making no differences between socially advantaged and disadvantaged students, promoting collaboration, creating unambiguous and clear standards and procedures, and giving feedback aimed at providing students the opportunity to improve. They suggest that

such learning environment can result in a greater sense of belonging, more motivation and higher retention rates (Murphy & Destin, 2016).

According to the present study, the physical presence of instructor and students in the same place appears to be important in order to establish a positive relationship with each other enhancing learning and student satisfaction. However, instructors are also expected to be present in the online environment by interacting with their students as timely and frequently as required (Giannousi & Kioumourtzoglou, 2016). Overall, these factors have been found to make up one of the elements that constitute a community of inquiry: the teaching presence (Aykol, 2009). Teaching presence is predominantly performed by the instructor in any learning environment.

It is particularly so in the teaching and learning of EFL since the instructor establishes the groundwork and the guidelines along which the students' language learning process will develop. To carry out their work successfully, according to Al-Seghayer (2017) the EFL instructor needs to exhibit explicit knowledge about language teaching (disciplinary, pedagogical, and technological), achieve a high level of English language proficiency, and possess a number of personality traits (flexibility/adaptability, agreeableness, patience and passion, tolerance, and a caring attitude). Furthermore, they are expected to promote students' autonomy, provide students with abundant opportunities to practice the language, give timely and constructive feedback, and create the conditions in which learning is facilitated, and new understandings are assimilated and incorporated.

Moreover, instructors have been adopting the roles of facilitator, moderator, advisor, and guide-on-the side due to the changing identities required from them, particularly in technology-supported learning environments, such as BL (Wang et al., 2015). In a BL environment, teaching presence is the unifying force that forges and supports the CoI when students are alternating between the communication taking place in the physical classroom and online (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

The high satisfaction rates obtained by the instructor may reflect students' satisfaction with the effectiveness of the teacher, their grades obtained during the course during the academic semester, or with their previous academic experiences in such courses. Teaching evaluations can also be the result of students' individual

personality characteristics, such as motivation, reasons for taking the course, and whether they have a “positive frame” or a “negative frame” to evaluate their instructors (Grayson, 2004).

5.2.2. *Interaction*

Both the questionnaire and the interview data suggest that the interaction that took place between peers and between students and instructor contributed to student satisfaction with the course. Together with the dimension instructor, the mean scores of the dimension interaction rated among the highest satisfaction levels of the questionnaire. The students were especially satisfied with the quality of interaction with their peers, and with being able to relate to other students in the course. The interactions took place in the face-to-face class and online. When participating in online blogging activities, students were able to get to know each other better, share opinions about the topic being discussed, and reinforce personal connections. Although some students may have experienced these tasks as long and tiresome, most found them an entertaining way to socialize with their friends and classmates.

The degree of participation and social interaction among the learning community members determines their social presence, which makes it a crucial factor for the learning process. Although social presence takes time to develop (Kreijns et al., 2014), the results of this study evidenced that students were satisfied with the instances in which they could interact with their peers and with the instructor. These results do not agree with the conclusions arrived at in other studies which indicated that student interactions did not seem to have any effect on satisfaction (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Kuo et al., 2014).

Although the present study used the same (albeit adapted) satisfaction questionnaire as Bolliger and Ericksen (2013), their results are different with regard to the dimension interaction. They reported that among the six dimensions studied, the mean of the interaction dimension was the second-to-last in their study on learner satisfaction with blended and online learning. This may be due to cultural factors since Canada is characterized as an individualistic society, while Chile, like most other Latin American countries, is depicted as a collectivist society (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Participants in this study seemed to prefer group work to individual work as reflected in the satisfaction they experienced by interacting with their peers. Similarly, Cabero

and Marin (2013) conducted a study on the level of knowledge of social networks that university students had and on their perceptions of group work. The participants were 1040 students from Argentina, Spain, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. Regardless of the Latin American country of provenance, the results showed students had very positive perceptions of group work and of the chance to collaborate online with students in other countries.

It may, therefore, be suggested that the positive results in the present study regarding student interactions in their BL course, through online blog posts and face-to-face class pair or group work, facilitated by the instructor, helped to create a learning community. The online interactions through the blogs were carried out in English. However, students often used an online translator, which could be easily detected as their posts demonstrated a proficiency in English they did not possess. The peer interactions carried out during the face-to-face class took place with the use of English and Spanish, as students' knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar was quite limited.

Both the quantitative and the qualitative data revealed that students were satisfied with the interactions that took place in the course. This enhanced students' learning experience and developed the social presence. Thus, the role of the instructor is again highlighted when regarded from this perspective, of how instrumental their actions are to generate a pleasant, safe, rewarding, and challenging learning experience, both face-to-face and online. Although social presence can be developed in both environments through affective expression, open communication, and group cohesion, it is in the classroom where it is usually perceived more clearly due to physical closeness, verbal and non-verbal cues, and body language. The advantages of face-to-face interaction are that students can establish trust and group identity from the start of the course (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Aykol (2009) reported that affective expression tended to decrease over time in BL courses, while group cohesion increased.

5.2.3. *Technology and Online Learning Environment*

The satisfaction questionnaire examined the dimension technology through the satisfaction students experienced with the use of "threaded" blogs, the ability to navigate within the course management system (online platform), and the download

times of resources in the course management system. The quantitative results indicated that students were satisfied as the mean score obtained for technology was M = 3.61. This might indicate that students did not experience major issues with technology in the course. The qualitative data confirmed these findings as the online platform was considered easy to use, to navigate, and its contents were adequately laid out. Therefore, it complied with the features of quality (user-friendly, functional, and attractively designed) suggested by Diep et al. (2017). However, both data sets revealed that presumably due to insufficient Internet bandwidth or weak Internet connection at times students experienced challenges with downloading resources from the online platform, especially videos. Anderson (2004) has pointed out that to be useful for online and BL, an online platform cannot have poor response time, especially when bandwidth is limited. Almost 20 years later, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the forceful shift from face-to-face to online education, the same issue could be detected in countries which had poor Internet connections. Santiago Jr. et al. (2021) examined the learning tools, e-learning resources, learning platforms, online learning systems, skills and learning engagements of 364 students at a university in the Philippines. Among their findings and recommendations, they suggest strengthening online teaching and methods of course delivery, as well as the implementation of a robust platform which will allow the integration, collaboration and student interactions in online learning.

Moreover, the interview data disclosed that occasionally the online platform exhibited technical issues which caused students to lose the progress made while working online. These findings are in line with the technical challenges experienced by EFL students in less developed countries. A study carried out at a university in Saudi Arabia by Al Zumor et al. (2013) indicated that students perceived that the Internet connectivity and technical problems (no details given) encountered constituted the most serious limitations and issues for BL to be effectively implemented. Another more recent research undertaken at a Saudi Arabian university, revealed that EFL students faced technical challenges (lack of technical support or advice, no training courses, deficient home internet access) which made it difficult to use the E-learning software (Ja'ashan, 2020).

However, in the present study, students did not have such negative perceptions of technology. This may be explained by the fact that the implementation of information and communication technology is in general highly developed in Chile as compared to other Latin American and Caribbean countries (Dutta et al., 2015). Nevertheless, differences between access to fast and stable Internet connections and to adequate computer devices still exist, both of which depend on the socio-economic levels of the population. This was evidenced during the closure of educational institutions as a result of COVID-19 lockdown measures. Many students did not possess a computer with which they could connect to the online platform and to their online synchronous lessons. They often used their mobile phones instead. However, some online platforms (such as the Cambridge platform used for the EFL courses at the Chilean University) are not intended to be employed on such a device. The impact of technology on student satisfaction with their online and BL courses has been reported even before the pandemic started (Islam, 2014; Kintu et al., 2017). It has been pointed out that online access is one of the most determining factors influencing student satisfaction in technology-supported environments (Pham et al., 2019).

In BL, technology is the medium that allows for the integration of face-to-face and online learning experiences. Garrison et al. (2004) suggest that the learning experience in the face-to-face environment is more teacher oriented, while the learning experience in the online environment is more cognitively focused. The integration of the strengths of both environments can provide the students with the opportunity to learn individually and collaboratively with and through technology across time and space (Garrison, 2016). Although the Community of Inquiry does not account for technology as a presence, its role in enabling learning to take place enhances cognitive presence. Students can construct knowledge by interacting online and in the face-to-face environment as well as approaching the learning experience from an individual perspective. Therefore, EFL learning also requires the existence of others in a community of inquiry with whom to practice, check understanding, build hypothesis, and refine one's understanding about how the language works. In this way, cognitive presence is developed supported by the social and teaching presences mentioned earlier.

5.2.4. *Outcomes and Performance Expectations*

The results (M = 3.5) obtained for the dimension outcomes in the satisfaction questionnaire indicate that students were satisfied with this factor (according to table 4.5 in chapter 4). More than half of the students agreed with the effort the course required, being able to apply what they learned in the course, and with their performance in the course. However, less than half of them expected to experience satisfaction with the final mark in the course. This was an unexpected finding as historically the majority of students pass the EFL courses at the Chilean University. Their answers in the satisfaction questionnaire may have been prompted by the marks obtained in the standardised test, which had taken place shortly before the questionnaire was applied. About half of the students achieved a passing mark in the test (51,92%). The students who did not perform well in the test may not have felt confident enough about their abilities and knowledge to be successful in their learning process, consequently, developing expectations that were not very positive. Firoozi et al. (2017) studied the role of socio-cognitive variables in the prediction of student satisfaction in 383 Iranian primary school students. They concluded that performance expectancy (together with computer self-efficacy and learning environment) was one of the best predictors of learner satisfaction with smart schools (technology-based educational institution). Regarding the present study, at the time of the distribution of the questionnaire the course had not finished, thus the final course marks were not available yet. In contrast to the standardised test mark, the percentage of students that obtained a passing mark at the end of the course was 96,10%. The above findings on performance expectations in EFL BL courses confirm Wu et al.'s (2010) conclusion about their significant contribution to student satisfaction.

The elements examined under the dimension outcomes are directly associated to the knowledge-building processes students experience during the course. Therefore, they constitute the cognitive presence of the Community of Inquiry. Cognitive presence is strongly associated to learning (Akyol & Garrison, 2008, 2011). Cognitive presence is developed by students participating in collaborative and constructive activities that take place in the learning community (shared world) and on their own (private world). Cognitive presence consists in a recursive series of stages that involve encountering a problem, gathering, refining and sharing information, making sense of the information and hypothesizing solutions, and finally applying what

has been learned along the process. It continues being debatable how the outcomes of cognitive presence are measured (Garrison & Vaughan 2008). Furthermore, the development of critical and creative thinking skills is brought about by the existence of the teaching presence and the social presence as mentioned above.

5.2.5. *Course Design and Set-up*

According to the data obtained from the satisfaction questionnaire, the dimension course set-up obtained the lowest mean score (M = 3.39), which has been interpreted as moderate satisfaction level. Course set-up involved attendance frequency, course flexibility, and level of self-directedness required. The finding from this study on course design and set-up differed from the result obtained by Bolliger and Erichsen (2013), whose research showed that their participants were quite satisfied with the set-up of BL courses. However, their study involved graduate students, who are usually more mature, goal-oriented, and autonomous than undergraduate students. Undergraduate students may bring expectations to the course which are not entirely fulfilled, which may cause lack of satisfaction. It has been suggested that when course set-up, understood as the organization of the course, can be modified or personalised by the instructor to follow students' expectations, higher satisfaction levels result (Gopal et al., 2021). The instructors in the EFL BL programme studied could not adapt the course set-up as the online contents, activities and layout were determined by the online platform used. Nevertheless, the instructors could organize their face-to-face class according to the course contents they detected their students needed language practice and additional language input in. They also had a great influence in helping the students understand the importance of attending and participating in class as required (both face-to-face and online), as the courses have been designed to develop students' competences to achieve the learning goals intended. That is, communicating course expectations clearly and providing explicit guidance is essential. The course design is, therefore, a component of teaching presence (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008), and gives structure to the contents and activities carried out by the students and facilitated by the instructor. Cognitive presence follows when there is a balance between social presence and teaching presence. In a BL course design, the face-to-face and online contexts complement each other. It is more difficult to reflect and retain information in a face-to-face

environment than online. When online, students can access the contents anytime to reflect upon them and pursue deeper learning. Thus, the design needs to contemplate students' acceptance of their responsibility for their online learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

According to the quantitative and qualitative data of this study, less than half of the students were satisfied with the frequency with which they had to attend class, i.e., participate in the face-to-face class and carry out online tasks. This may in part be explained by students' unrealistic expectations towards the course and by previous experiences with BL courses in other subject areas. Learning a foreign language requires constant exposure to the language to be able to assimilate, internalize and use the structures, vocabulary, and discourse features to which the students are being exposed. Furthermore, in order to practice the language (both in written and oral form), a language student needs an interlocutor who will understand (or not) what is being communicated. Opportunities for these interactions to take place are facilitated in the classroom through the instructor and through peer support. Learning EFL is different from learning topics in other knowledge areas that do not require taking part in communicative interactions, opportunities for practicing and receiving feedback, and which can be studied by the student on their own with the use of instructional materials (books, digital contents, software programmes, and so on). Therefore, it is necessary to provide students with the information about how they will benefit from participating regularly and actively in online and face-to-face activities.

The results obtained in the dimension course set-up can also reflect students course delivery method preferences, as some favour the face-to-face environment and others feel more comfortable working online. Deeper understanding of the reasons for their low levels of satisfaction with this factor could be obtained through the interviews. Although the number of participants was small, each of them seemed to voice other students' opinions which supported their own. The quantity of online contents and activities which they were required to work on weekly took up much of their time (between 5 and 6 hours a week). The increased online workload of BL courses has previously been reported as a disadvantage (Bueno-Alastuey & López-Pérez, 2014; Gedik et al., 2012). However, from the course design perspective, the large quantity of contents and activities on the online platform were intended to give

students as much linguistic input in EFL as possible and feasible. Their main exposure to English was during the face-to-face class and the online work as English is seldom used in everyday situations in Chile. Students may not have appreciated having access to being exposed to a comprehensive and rich variety of contents and activities because learning English was still not a priority as they rarely had the necessity to use it in real life and for their studies.

5.3. Summary

The present chapter addressed the research questions brought forward in the study. An overall account on learner satisfaction with EFL BL courses was presented. Some of the negative and positive student perceptions related to the EFL BL programme were discussed. The absence of a relationship between satisfaction and the course marks was found. The factors contributing to student satisfaction were examined through the lens of the theoretical framework when applicable.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

As a conclusion to this thesis, the major findings and some implications of the study results for the EFL BL programme will be presented. Next, some study limitations will be indicated. These comprise the sample for the qualitative phase of the study, the instrument used for the quantitative phase, the data, and the implementation of proposed changes. In spite of the limitations found, the findings of the present research can be extended further to gain deeper insights into the implementation of a blended learning programme for EFL students in the context of higher education. Then, future research directions will be proposed and a personal account of the doctoral journey will be provided.

6.1. Major Findings

To conclude, a brief summary of the major findings of the thesis will be presented. The aims of the study were to find out about how satisfied students were with their blended learning programme for English as a foreign language at the university where the research was done. Furthermore, students' perceptions regarding their blended learning course were examined. Additionally, satisfaction with the blended learning course and the learning outcomes (i.e., course marks) were analysed to find out if a relationship between them existed or not. The factors that contributed to students' satisfaction levels with the EFL BL programme were also investigated.

The study revealed that students were overall satisfied with their EFL BL course but did not prefer it to other course modalities (100% online or 100% face-to-face). Students were much more familiarized with the face-to-face modality when the research was carried out, which was before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. It would be useful and enlightening to continue the study in the present post-pandemic times to assess whether students' perceptions with EFL BL courses have changed and to what extend they have done so. This would allow to adjust the EFL BL programme based on these new findings. To carry on with the study, the same instruments (online questionnaire and semi-structured interview) can be used.

Satisfaction with EFL BL courses seems to involve an element of fun and entertainment with learning a foreign language. Students mentioned feeling enjoyment with interactions with their peers taking place in the online blogs as it allowed them to get to know each other better and establish relationships beyond the

classroom. The element of entertainment was also mentioned for in-class activities. However, working on the activities on the online platform was described as boring, tedious and time-consuming.

A factor that students assessed as highly satisfactory was the instructor. They were pivotal to students' learning process and course satisfaction. By establishing a strong teaching presence, the instructor made students feel they were part of a learning community in which they could feel safe and supported. Instructors' accessibility and availability contributed to students' satisfaction and to feeling supported when they required it. Moreover, clear communication of course assessments and course expectations, together with timely feedback, helped students focus on what they were required to do in the course.

It can be concluded that students expected EFL BL courses to be less demanding in relation to the frequency they had to attend face-to-face classes and the work they were required to do online. Although students may acknowledge that learning English is an important asset for their future academic or professional career, while being an undergraduate student, English is not a priority since they are not required to use it in real life or for their studies. Thus, students seem not to be making the best use of the opportunity they are provided with.

No significant relationship could be found between students' satisfaction with their blended learning courses and their learning outcomes (i.e., course marks). The interpretation that could be given to it is that irrespective of the course marks students may feel satisfied or dissatisfied with their courses. Thus, marks do not affect students' satisfaction with the course. This suggests that other factors (not marks) determine satisfaction, and impact on the marks obtained. The assumption previously held was that the higher student satisfaction was, the higher the marks would be.

6.2. Implications of Study Results for EFL BL Programme

The present study has yielded significant insights that can be used to inform and develop guidelines for the EFL BL programme. Since no course evaluations are carried out at the Chilean University, the application of the satisfaction questionnaire for the EFL BL course, which included six dimensions (instructor, technology, interaction, course set-up, outcomes, and overall satisfaction), as well as the interviews carried out with a small number of participants, provided a valuable

opportunity to gain deeper understanding of different aspects of the EFL programme as perceived by the students. The results constitute evidence-based student data of the factors that impinge on student satisfaction in such a programme.

The implications and recommendations that can be suggested for the improvement of the current EFL BL programme include several aspects: Addition of game-based activities, preparation for standardised tests, and course satisfaction questionnaire administration.

- **Addition of game-based activities**

Based on the findings of the study, the present course design could be enriched by including in it game-based activities with clear language learning objectives. These activities have to be carefully prepared and chosen to avoid being overused, thereby becoming boring and routinary for the students. To carry out the inclusion of game-based activities, the teaching staff may be invited to participate voluntarily and collaboratively in it. In this way, they can feel their teaching experiences and insights are considered and their contributions are valuable. Eventually, it will be the instructors who implement these changes in the classroom. The period of time in which this process can be done is the month of January (2024), when most part-time instructors are not teaching. The meetings will be planned and communicated well ahead in time to allow instructors to organize their time. They will mostly be online, as instructors from the different campuses in the three cities where the university is located will be participating. Different groups of instructors will be working on the various course levels: English I, English II, English III, English IV, English V, and English VI. Once the game-based activities have been chosen, according to the objectives they will aim at, the instructions for the instructor and for the students will have to be prepared for each of the activities. The implementation of these activities would start at the beginning of the first academic semester (March 2024). During the semester, meetings will be held with the instructors to find out how the implementation is taking place, what the students' perceptions are, and whether some activities need to be replaced or adapted for the next time the course is taught. The follow up should be done over two semesters so that instructors gain confidence in using the activities and in suggesting improvements.

These activities will only be included in the face-to-face classroom. No additional activities can be incorporated in the online platform. For this to happen, the educational software provider would have to set up a development project, which could take years. However, the inclusion of game-based activities in the online platform will be suggested to the software provider to make online activities more appealing to the students.

- **Preparation for standardised tests**

The data suggest that the standardised tests are challenging and daunting for students. Therefore, systematic preparation for the test should be included in the course (both face-to-face and online). Test preparation will be part of the course syllabus. The different parts of the standardised test will be systematically reviewed with the students. The test contains four parts: Listening, reading, speaking and writing. Listening and reading consist of 4 or 5 sections each, while speaking and writing comprise only one each. Therefore, in class, instructors will show, explain and practice those sections one by one with the students. This activity should take at the most 45 minutes of the class session. In this way, the complete test structure will have been covered over the semester. On the other hand, the student will have the possibility to use 3 practice tests on the online platform. One of these practice tests will be programmed at the beginning of the semester, another midsemester and the third at the end of the semester. In this way, student progress with regards to the performance in the test can be measured. The instructor will be able to monitor whether the students have done the tests or not. No mark will be given for this activity. Through this practice, students gain confidence and may increase their marks and enhance satisfaction with the course.

- **Course satisfaction questionnaire administration**

Since no course evaluations are carried out at the Chilean University, the application of the satisfaction questionnaire used in this study for the EFL BL course can provide a valuable opportunity to continue gaining deeper understanding of the different aspects of the EFL programme as perceived by the students. Before the implementation of the instrument, a plan of the sequence of activities leading to it has to be prepared. Once the plan has been built and discussed with the Department team, it should be discussed and agreed on with the academic authorities. The course

satisfaction questionnaire can be implemented midsemester to allow for the analysis of the data before inviting volunteering students to participate in a semi-structured interview. The online questionnaire can be sent to a random sample of the population with the help of the unit in charge of the institutional communications that students receive. The student researcher has access to the persons involved. Even if the data are not used for a formal research project every semester, it will be valuable information to monitor the EFL BL programme and to make adjustments as soon as they are needed. This will be part of a continuous improvement process.

These initiatives require the collaboration and commitment of instructors, academic administrators, students, among others, as well as the support of the higher academic authorities. The importance of implementing these initiatives has been highlighted by Dziuban et al., "Maximizing success in a blended learning initiative requires a planned and well-supported approach that includes a theory-based instructional model, high quality faculty development, course development assistance, learner support, and ongoing formative and summative assessment" (2004, p. 3).

6.3. Limitations of the Study

The findings should be contemplated in the context of the study and generalisations to other settings may not be applicable. All participants were studying at the Chilean University, a large private institution, which enrolls students that are able to pay the corresponding fees for their undergraduate programme. However, about 70% of them are first-generation students and represent a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, the participants were studying in the university campuses located in three cities, thus they were geographically distributed. However, the study did not consider examining and comparing results obtained from the various campuses. This would have extended the scope of the research and it did not lie in its focus. Nevertheless, it can become an expansion of the design of the present study, which would require additional time to be carried out.

The response rate obtained for the questionnaire in the quantitative phase of the study corresponded to a representative sample of the potential participants. However, due to the national circumstances described in chapter 1, the sample for the qualitative phase of the study was smaller than the design of the research contemplated. Moreover, it was not possible to purposefully select a number of

participants that would equally represent each of the three course levels (English II, n =1; English III, n = 4; English IV, n = 3). Likewise, the level of satisfaction with item Q24 (overall, I am satisfied with this course) was also imbalanced (strongly agree and agree, n = 5; neither agree nor disagree, n = 2; disagree, n = 1). However, when comparing the percentages of positive responses to the item Q24 in the questionnaire (strongly agree or agree, 68%) with the number of interview participants exhibiting that satisfaction level (strongly agree or agree), both seem to correspond.

Regarding the instrument used in the quantitative phase (the online questionnaire), its original version was in English. Nonetheless, since the participants were native speakers of Spanish and their level of English was very low, the questionnaire was translated into Spanish. In the process of translation, some misinterpretation of the original items of the instrument may have occurred. However, the translation process followed a thorough step-by-step procedure (Tsang et al., 2017) to ensure retaining its original meaning, coherence and logic. Furthermore, the instrument was piloted to validate its construct validity. Nonetheless, issues of validity and reliability can never be completely eliminated in research but efforts should be made to minimize them (Cohen et al., 2018).

The questionnaire and the interview data were gathered before the COVID-19 pandemic (June 2019 and November 2019 respectively) when undergraduate students at the Chilean University had not been exposed to fully online learning environment. If the study was replicated now with blended learning implemented again, the results might vary on account of the online learning experience students underwent. It may be assumed that students' satisfaction with blended learning courses will increase, due to the opportunity to interact with peers and instructor in the face-to-face environment. The students' feeling of isolation while fully online has given way to a feeling of accompaniment and greater support in the post-pandemic blended learning courses. This has been informally expressed by students at present.

6.4. Future Research Directions

Future research on the topic of the assessment of blended learning may be approached considering a more comprehensive assessment framework, such as the one proposed by Bowyer and Chambers (2017). This framework encompasses three spheres of influence (*situation, course organization,* and *individual perspectives*). Each

of them comprises different variables. *Situation* considers the institutional elements as well as the wider context. *Course organization* involves planning and design, technology, content, and assessment. *Individual perspectives* contains elements related to the student and to the instructor, as well as aspects of collaboration, interaction and communication. These spheres constitute the processes and inputs of the blended learning programme. The most central part of the sphere involves the *outcomes,* which contemplate student satisfaction, engagement and course outcomes. Therefore, this framework considers central to it two of the elements that have been dealt with in the present study. Starting from here, the expansion would allow for the incorporation of other equally important elements, such as the inclusion of the instructors' and academic administrators' perspectives on the assessment of the programme. Furthermore, students' engagement levels with their online activities could be measured, as well as their engagement with face-to-face participation. In this way, relationships between their engagement, satisfaction and outcomes could be examined. Ideally, such study could be carried out as a longitudinal study extending over the four-course programme to research the impact of the different variables indicated in the framework above on the outcomes (student engagement, satisfaction and course outcomes). This would shed light on the changes occurring to the student variables over time (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Such research has, to the best of the student researcher's knowledge, not been attempted with regard to EFL BL in Chile.

6.5. Personal Account of Research Journey

The research journey that I have gone through has been one of the most important challenges in my professional and personal life. When I started the EdD programme, back in 2015, I hardly imagined how much this experience would transform my life and the lives of those who I care for. It has meant spending long hours, especially in the evening, at night, and over weekends and holidays dedicated to studying and researching. It has broadened my understanding of education in general and about my research topic in particular. The preparation received in the EdD modules was fundamental to be able to continue on this journey with the research for the thesis. By working through the different chapters of the thesis, I kept coming up with more and more questions on how to tackle the challenges that I was facing as

every step forward brought about issues and tasks that I had not faced before. I have learned to use SPSS to run some statistical tests, I have learned to carry out thematic analysis, I have tried to learn to be critical and not take things at face value. However, I feel that I am just beginning. I am still a novel researcher and have to continue honing those skills. However, as I have continued working at the same university where I have been for many years and maintain my position as the head of the academic unit responsible for the English language programme, I have noticed that my capacity to observe, analyse and discuss academic matters has increased, which has helped me become more strategic and mature. In my leadership role, I believe I have grown both as a professional and as a person. This journey has enriched me enormously. I do expect to be a good example for others to follow as getting here has required persistence, hard work, and humility to accept one's many limitations.

6.6. Closing Remarks

The present study has added to the body of knowledge by investigating and providing evidence of student satisfaction in EFL BL environments. The findings have confirmed what previous research had revealed, i.e., instructors are pivotal to student satisfaction in blended learning (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004; Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Naaj et al., 2012). Teaching presence, as represented by the instructor, seems to determine students' involvement in their learning process. Furthermore, the interactions taking place among students and their peers, and between students and their instructor are essential to establish social presence, which lays the ground for the construction of knowledge. Other factors studied also contribute to student satisfaction in BL environments, such as technology and outcomes. The factor that least impacted on satisfaction was course set-up, which indicates that attention should be given to this aspect as it is fundamental to develop cognitive presence. The relationship between well-designed and user-friendly blended learning courses and satisfaction has been demonstrated (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Eom et al., 2006).

The post-COVID-19 scenario that educational institutions are facing today seems to have become a welcoming place for blended learning. The lessons learned (positive and negative), while attempting to continue providing education online during lockdown, have brought about enhanced students' and instructors' technological skills. However, changes in technology and its applications are ongoing. It

is the adequate combination of online and face-to-face instruction, and the continuous improvement of the instructional quality, through initiatives such as student satisfaction course evaluations and continuous programme improvement which can provide the opportunities for further enhanced teaching and learning in technology-mediated educational contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) ethical approval

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL | ONLINE PROGRAMMES

Dear Monica Frenzel,				
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.				
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)			
Review type:	Expedited			
PI:				
School:		School of Histories, Languages and Cultures		
Title:	Chilean university students' perceived levels of satisfaction with a blended learning programme for English as a Foreign Language			
First Reviewer:	Dr. Marco Ferreira			
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Ewan Dow			
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Lucilla Crosta, Mariya Yukhymenko, and Greg Hickman.			
Date of Approval:	22nd February 2019			
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:				
Conditions				
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.		

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc. Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).				
Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.				

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC

Appendix 2

Participant Information Sheet

1. **Title of Research Study: Chilean university students' perceived levels of satisfaction with a blended learning programme for English as a Foreign Language**

2. **2 February 2019.**

3. **Invitation to participate in a research study**

   You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends, and relatives if you wish. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

   Thank you for reading this.

4. **What is the purpose of the research study?**

   My name is Monica Frenzel, an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, Universidad Andres Bello. I am also a student researcher at University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom, where I am enrolled in the Doctor of Education (EdD) Programme. The research study that I am conducting for my thesis is titled: "Chilean university students' perceived levels of satisfaction with a blended learning programme for English as a Foreign Language". The purpose of the research study is to obtain a deeper understanding of the learning experiences that university students have in the blended course they are attending to learn English as a Foreign Language. Their level of satisfaction with the course will be assessed to determine what factors contribute to their engagement with this blended learning environment and to their effective language learning. A relationship between their perceptions regarding the level of satisfaction with and their

learning outcomes in their course will be attempted as well. The research study aims to provide answers to the following questions:

1. How satisfied are students with the blended learning programme for English as a foreign language?
   1a. What are students' perceptions regarding their blended learning course?
   1b. To what extent, if any, is there a relationship between their satisfaction with their blended learning course and their learning outcomes?
2. What are the factors contributing to the students' perceived levels of satisfaction?

5. **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

You are invited to participate in this research study because you are currently taking part in an English as a Foreign Language course (English II, English III, or English IV), which is taught in a blended learning mode (with a face-to-face and an online component). The course you are attending involves sitting for a standardised Level Test (A1, A2 or B1) at the end of the semester. Furthermore, while the research study is being carried out, you are not my student in any course that I teach.

6. **Do I have to take part?**

No. Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to be part of it, skip questions, or retrieve any information that you have provided, you are free to do so. You can also withdraw from it at any time without explanations and without any consequences for you.

7. **What will happen if I take part?**

Online survey

Soon you will receive an email. It contains a direct link to the "Participant Consent Form (PCF)" and the survey. The PCF will ask your consent to participate in the first phase of the research study (i.e. online survey) before answering the survey questions. This is done by opening the link to the survey and in the beginning of the survey, you will find the electronic PCF. Clicking on the "agree" button at the end of the PCF, will indicate that you have read the information and that you voluntarily agree to participate. If you wish not to take part, you can click the "disagree" button or just ignore this email. By clicking on the "disagree" button, you will not be able to proceed with the survey. The following text will appear "as you don't provide your consent to take part in the research, you won't be able to access the survey questions; if you want to answer the survey, please read the consent form again and click on the "agree" button." Therefore, by answering the survey you are providing your consent to take part in the first phase of the research study.

If you "sign" the PCF by clicking the "agree" button, you will be invited to answer the survey. It is about your satisfaction with the English as a Foreign Language course (English II, English III, or English IV) that you are currently enrolled in and that is being taught in a blended learning mode. The survey itself will take no more than 15 minutes to answer. Furthermore, in it you will also be asked to provide your personal details, i.e. your name, ID number, gender and age, together with the name of your study programme and campus location. This information is necessary for the correlational study I will carry out between the results of the survey and your final course grade.

At the end of the survey, there will be a question asking about your willingness to participate in the second phase of the research study i.e. a "one to one" interview with me (i.e. the student researcher). You will answer the question by clicking on a "yes" (willing to take part) or "no" (don't want to take part) button. Only 12 participants will be selected to take part in the interview.

Interview

In case you are one of the 12 interview participants, you will receive an email after the blended English course has finished. The email will remind you briefly of the purpose of the research study and will inquire about the appropriate date, time and mode (face-to-face or online) in which you prefer it to take place. It will also include another PCF for the interview. You will be requested to answer this email by sending an email within the next two weeks explicitly expressing your agreement to be interviewed and by enclosing the PCF with your name on it to express consent.

The interview should not last for more than 45 minutes. It will be held in Spanish and both, you and I, should make sure there is privacy in the place where the interview takes place, whether it will be face-to-face or online. The aim of the interview is to allow you to express your opinions or perceptions on the topic of the study in a more detailed manner. You will not be asked sensitive questions such as evaluating your teachers, their teaching or your peers. However, should you feel uncomfortable in any way, you may refrain from answering any questions or stop taking part in the interview. The interview will be audio recorded. It will be anonymised during the process of transcription, which should occur shortly after the interview has taken place. Once transcribed, the recording will be deleted from the voice recorder.

Should you have any questions, concerns or require further information before agreeing to take part in the survey or in the interview, you can write to me or my Supervisor. This can be done up to 10 days after the Participant Consent forms (Survey and Interview) were sent out.

All documents involved and communication with you will be carried out in Spanish, which is your and my native language. Likewise, the data collected through the survey and the interview will originally be in Spanish. Nevertheless, the survey data and the interview transcripts will be translated entirely into English to be used in the research study. Be assured that nobody will have access to your personal details as they will be removed from the survey data and the interview transcript, and replaced by codes (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) to protect your identity. The survey data will be anonymised as soon as it is collected and the interview data while it is being transcribed.
The collected digital data will be safely stored on the University of Liverpool network drive and the printed documents in a locked cabinet at home.

8. How will my data be used?

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit".

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. The Supervisor of my doctoral thesis, Dr. Ruolan Wang, acts as the Data Processor for this research study, and *any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to Dr. Ruolan Wang, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom,*

Email: ruolan.wang@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below.

How will my data be collected?	Personal data and online survey data will be collected on an online survey platform. Audio recordings of interviews on voice recorder. Course final grades and results of standardised tests will be obtained from the institution student information system.
How will my data be stored?	Your personal survey and interview data (name, ID number, email, Skype ID) will be stored safely until anonymised. The survey data will be stored on a secure online platform. It will be anonymised as soon as it is collected. The interview data will be stored in an audio recorder and will be kept in a locked cabinet. It will be anonymised while transcription takes place, which should occur shortly after the interview. The digital data will be kept on the UoL network drive. The interview recordings will be transcribed as a Word document with all identifiers removed and kept on the UoL network drive. Printed copies of these materials will be stored in a locked cabinet. Course final grades and results of standardised tests will be stored on digital files on the University network storage drive and in my secure password protected personal computer.
How long will my data be stored for?	The audio recording of the interviews will be kept until the transcript has been completed, which will take about a month to complete after the interview has taken place. The anonymised survey data and audio transcripts, the course final grades and results of standardised tests will be kept for about 5 years or as long as is necessary to support the research study's findings, after which all documentation and backup information related to this study will be deleted and destroyed appropriately.

What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	All electronic files will be kept on secure password-protected UoL network storage drive and in my personal computer. The paper documents and the audio recorder will be in a locked cabinet.
Will my data be anonymised?	Yes, the personal data accompanying the survey, the course final grades and standardised test results, as well as the interview transcript will be fully anonymised and labelled as 'Participant 1, Participant 2', etc. Your educational institution will also be coded as 'HE institution'. Anonymization will occur as soon as the survey data has been collected and while the interview data is transcribed.
How will my data be used?	It will be analysed together with all the other survey, interview and course grade data collected from other participants, for the purpose of a Doctor in Education student's thesis and for future publications.
Who will have access to my data?	My Doctoral Thesis Supervisor and I. It must be pointed out that my role in the study is as a student and not as part of any other professional role that I hold (teacher and academic unit director).
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	No
How will my data be destroyed?	Electronic files will be deleted. Paper documents will be shredded.

9. Expenses and/or payments

There will be no payments made for taking part in the study. You will not incur any expenses.

8. **Are there any risks in taking part?**

You will not be exposed to any major risks, hazards or adverse effects as a result of your participation in the study. Nevertheless, you will have to spend at least 15 minutes of your time on answering the survey, and another 45 minutes on the interview (if chosen for it), which is time you might have used otherwise.

A possible risk may be an unintended breach of confidential information by being overheard by others during the interview. In order to ensure your privacy, you will be asked

to find a private place if the interview takes place on Skype. If the interview takes place face-to-face in my work office, I will make sure we are not interrupted. Moreover, you might feel uncomfortable when expressing your opinions on your blended English course as you may think it involves evaluating your peers' or teacher's participation in it. Please be sure that you are free to refrain from giving any opinion you may not want to share and that the information you provide will be kept in complete privacy. Therefore, in the unlikely event that you experience any discomfort or disadvantage as part of the research, please make this known to me straight away.

9. **Are there any benefits to taking part?**

There are no immediate benefits to you in taking part in this study. However, there are potential benefits that may arise from the results of the research study. It will provide useful information that can be applied to plan and develop strategies. These strategies will contribute to achieving more effective learning outcomes regarding the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language. They will be especially applicable to foreign language education in a blended learning environment within the context of Higher Education in Chile.

10. **What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results of the study will be used for the doctoral thesis which I will submit to the University of Liverpool, United Kingdom, for the degree of Doctor of Education (EdD.). Furthermore, they may be presented in academic conferences or published in journals related to the field of the study. However, your privacy will be protected at all times by not disclosing your personal details nor making it possible to identify the participants in this study. In case you should be interested in obtaining access to the doctoral thesis and/or possible further publications based on it, you just need to let me know.

11. **What will happen if I want to stop taking part?**

You may decide to withdraw from taking part in this study at any time, without further explanations. Simply contact me and let me know. The information obtained up to the period of your withdrawal may be used in the research study if you do not mind. However, if you prefer it to be destroyed and no further use be made of it, you may request so. It is important for you to realize that the data can only be withdrawn before it has been anonymised as it will not be possible to identify it in order to destroy it afterwards. The personal, survey and interview data will be anonymised three months after the interview has taken place.

12. **What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?**

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let me know by contacting me at monica.frenzel@online.liverpool.ac.uk or mfrenzel@unab.cl, or by contacting my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Ruolan Wang at ruolan.wang@online.liverpool.ac.uk and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact Dr. Maritza Rosas, President of the

Faculty of Education and Social Sciences Ethics Committee, Universidad Andres Bello, at maritza.rosas@unab.cl. You might also like to contact the University of Liverpool Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@live.ac.uk. When contacting the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the research study (so that it can be identified), the student researcher involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University of Liverpool strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling (+44) 0303 123 1113.

13. **Who can I contact if I have further questions?**

You should contact the me (i.e., student researcher), Monica Frenzel, at monica.frenzel@online.liverpool.ac.uk or mfrenzel@unab.cl

You may also contact the Thesis Supervisor for the research study, Dr. Ruolan Wang, at ruolan.wang@online.liverpool.ac.uk.

Appendix 3

Participant Consent Form (Survey)

Version number & date: Version 3, 2 February 2019

Title of the research study: Chilean university students' perceived levels of satisfaction with a blended learning programme for English as a Foreign Language

Name of student researcher: Monica Frenzel

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [DATE] for the above research study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that participating in the research study involves answering an online survey which is part of the doctoral thesis of the student researcher. She is a University of Liverpool Doctor in Education student called Monica Frenzel. The survey will ask about my level of satisfaction with the blended English Course I am enrolled in and it will take about 15 minutes of my time to answer it. ☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the research study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions. ☐
4. I understand that I can ask for access to the information I provide, and I can request the destruction of that information if I wish at any time prior to anonymisation of the data I provided. I understand that following anonymisation, which will happen shortly after the survey has taken place (as soon as the data is collected), I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide. ☐

5. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for the student researcher to have access to my fully anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the thesis and publications that result from the research. My personal data will be anonymised by labelling it as corresponding to "Participant 1, Participant 2, etc." ☐

6. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Liverpool until it is fully anonymised. ☐

7. I understand that data gathered online (consent forms and surveys) will be retained on a secure, password-protected University of Liverpool network storage drive, accessible only by the student researcher and the Supervisor until the completion of the student's study period at the University of Liverpool. In all, the data will be kept about 5 years or as long as is necessary to support the research study's findings. ☐

8. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Participant name	Date	Signature
MONICA FRENZEL	_____	_____
	Date	Signature

Doctoral Thesis Supervisor
Ruolan Wang
University of Liverpool Online
ruolan.wang@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Student Researcher
Monica Frenzel
University of Liverpool Online
monica.frenzel@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 4

Participant Consent Form (Interview)

Version number & date: Version 3, 2 February 2019

Title of the research study: Chilean university students' perceived levels of satisfaction with a blended learning programme for English as a Foreign Language

Name of student researcher: Monica Frenzel

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [DATE] for the above research study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that taking part in the research study involves participating in an individual interview, either face-to-face or on Skype, with the student researcher, who is a University of Liverpool Doctor in Education student called Monica Frenzel. Taking part in the interview, will take about 45 minutes of my time. The interview will be audio recorded. ☐

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the research study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions. ☐

4. I understand that I can ask for access to the information I provide, and I can request the destruction of that information if I wish at any time prior to anonymisation of the data I provided. I understand that following anonymisation, which will happen during the transcription process (as soon as the interview has taken place), I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide. ☐

5. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for the student researcher to have access to my fully anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the thesis and publications that result from the research. My personal data will be anonymised by labelling it as corresponding to "Participant 1, Participant 2, etc." Likewise, the name of my educational institution will be labelled as "HE institution". ☐

6. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Liverpool until it is fully anonymised. ☐

7. I understand that audio recordings will be retained in an audio recorder in the researcher's locked cabinet to which only the student researcher will have access until the data has been transcribed and anonymised. Then it will be deleted from the audio recorder and stored on a secure, password-protected University of Liverpool network storage drive, accessible only to the student researcher and the Supervisor until the completion of the student's study period at the University of Liverpool. In all, the data will be kept about 5 years or as long as is necessary to support the research study's findings. ☐

8. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Participant name	Date	Signature
MONICA FRENZEL	_____	_____
	Date	Signature

Doctoral Thesis Supervisor
Ruolan Wang
University of Liverpool Online
ruolan.wang@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Student Researcher
Monica Frenzel
University of Liverpool Online
monica.frenzel@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 5

Blended Learning Satisfaction Questionnaire

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree, nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q1. The course expectations were clearly communicated to me.					
Q2. The class assignments were clearly communicated to me.					
Q3. The assessments/grades in this course were clear and fair.					
Q4. Feedback and evaluation of papers, tests, and other assignments was given in a timely manner.					
Q5. The instructor makes me feel that I am part of the class and belong.					
Q6. I am dissatisfied with the accessibility and availability of the instructor (R).					
Q7. I am satisfied with the use of “threaded” online discussions or forums.					
Q8. I am satisfied with how I am able to navigate within the course management system.					
Q9. I am dissatisfied with download times of resources in the course management system.					
Q10. I am satisfied with the frequency I have to attend class (e.g., log into the course, participate)					
Q11. I am satisfied with the flexibility this course delivery method affords me.					
Q12. I am dissatisfied with the level of self-directedness required of me (R).					
Q13. I am satisfied with the quality of interaction between students.					
Q14. I am dissatisfied with the process of collaborative activities during the course (R).					
Q15. I felt I could relate to the other students in my course.					
Q16. I am dissatisfied with the amount of student-to-student interaction in the class (R).					
Q17. I felt comfortable participating in class through this course delivery medium.					
Q18. I am satisfied with the effort this course required.					
Q19. I am dissatisfied with my performance in this course. (R)					
Q20. I believe I will be satisfied with my final grade in the course.					
Q21. I feel I will be able to apply what I have learned in this course.					
Q22. I am satisfied enough with this course to recommend it to others.					
Q23. Compared to other course delivery methods, I am less satisfied with this learning experience. (R)					
Q24. Overall, I am satisfied with this course.					

Note. Adapted from Bolliger & Erichsen, 2013, pp. 11-12.

Appendix 6

Interview Protocol

My name is Monica Frenzel. I am a student researcher at the University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom, where I am enrolled in the Doctor of Education (EdD) Programme. This interview is part of the study I am carrying out for my thesis.

As you may remember, this research study is about the perceived levels of satisfaction that university students have with their blended learning English course. Its purpose is to obtain a deeper understanding of the learning experiences that university students have in the course.

Before we begin, do you have any question regarding the confidentiality and privacy of the information you will provide in the interview or the study?

1. Now, I would like you to tell me about your overall learning experience with the blended learning English course.

Probes:

- Did you have a good/bad overall experience?
- Why?

2. Can you tell me what your English teacher did in the class? First tell me about the face-to-face classroom. (Wait for answer). Now tell me about what he/she did in the online platform.

Probes:

- Set-up of tasks, activities (before, during and after the class)
- Provide support and guidance in the learning process
- Relationship with students
- Assessments

3. Tell me about your learning experience with the online learning component of the blended course.

Probes:

- Were the contents easy to access?
- Did you enjoy working online? Why/why not?
- Did you enjoy contributing to the online forums?
- Did you need help from other students or the teacher?
- Was the platform user-friendly? Why/why not?

4. What factors impacted on your blended learning experience with the technology?

Probes:

- Internet issues, such as bandwidth speed, strong/weak connection
- Time when and place where online work was carried out
- Your skill in handling technological resources

5. Were the online and face-to-face components/activities well balanced for you?

Probes:

- What did you do in the face-to-face class?
- Amount of face-to-face work
- What did you do online?
- Amount of online work
- Were they complementary? Why?
- What did you like/not like?
- In what kind of activity did you work better?

6. Tell me about the interactions that took place among students while working on the course.

Probes:

- Kind of interactions you experienced online and face-to-face
- How useful were they?
- Who did you interact with? (always close friends or other classmates)
- Quality and quantity of interactions (good enough?)

7. Can you tell me about the interactions between the students and the teacher?

Probes:

- What kind of interactions?
- Did they take place online and face-to-face?
- How useful were they? Why/why not?

8. Do you think that the blended learning course has helped you achieve your learning goals?

Probes:

- The final mark obtained reflected the effort put into the course
- Learn to communicate in written and oral English at the level of the course
- Be able to apply the contents dealt with in the course

9. Tell me about your overall satisfaction with the course.

Probes:

- What factors affected your level of satisfaction most (instructor, technology, interaction, course set-up, language learning, marks obtained)?

- If you could choose between a blended learning course, a 100% online course and a face-to-face course, which would you choose and why?

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

I would like to ask you if I may contact you later, should I have additional questions to ask you.

Thank you very much for participating in this interview.

Appendix 7

Frequencies of satisfaction questionnaire items (grouped)
English II, English III, English IV

Dimension	Satisfaction Survey Items	Frequencies (grouped)								
		English II			English III			English IV		
		Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree	Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree
Instructor	Q1. The course expectations were clearly communicated to me.	79,6%	10,5%	9,9%	83,5%	7,4%	9,1%	93,2%	3,4%	3,4%
	Q2. The class assignments were clearly communicated to me.	80,2%	11,8%	7,9%	84,3%	6,6%	9,1%	93,2%	1,7%	5,1%
	Q3. The assessments/grades in the course were clear and fair.	72,4%	13,2%	14,5%	69,4%	19,8%	10,8%	87,3%	6,8%	5,9%
	Q4. Feedback and evaluation of tests and other assignments was given in a timely manner.	73,0%	14,5%	12,5%	73,5%	14,9%	11,6%	85,6%	7,6%	6,8%
	Q5. The instructor makes me feel that I am part of the class and belong.	88,2%	7,9%	3,9%	81,0%	11,6%	7,4%	92,4%	4,2%	3,4%
	Q6. I am dissatisfied with the accessibility and availability of the instructor (R)	8,5%	16,4%	75,0%	17,4%	8,3%	74,4%	9,3%	11,9%	78,9%
Technology	Q7. I am satisfied with the use of "threaded" online blogs or forums.	57,3%	18,4%	24,4%	54,5%	22,3%	23,2%	62,7%	15,3%	22,1%
	Q8. I am satisfied with how I am able to navigate within the course management system.	70,4%	16,4%	13,2%	66,1%	19,8%	14,0%	69,5%	17,8%	12,7%
	Q9. I am dissatisfied with download times of resources in the course management system. (R)	18,4%	28,9%	52,6%	29,0%	28,1%	42,9%	17,0%	26,3%	56,8%
Course set-up	Q10. I am satisfied with the frequency I have to attend class (e.g. log into the course, participate)	52,7%	19,7%	27,7%	43,0%	21,5%	35,6%	50,0%	16,9%	33,0%
	Q11. I am satisfied with the flexibility this course delivery method (blended) affords me.	57,9%	22,4%	19,8%	49,5%	20,7%	29,8%	55,9%	20,3%	23,8%
	Q12. I am dissatisfied with the level of selfdirectedness required of me (R).	16,4%	27,0%	56,6%	32,2%	29,8%	38,0%	19,4%	20,3%	60,2%
Interaction	Q13. I am satisfied with the quality of interaction between students.	73,1%	17,8%	9,2%	61,1%	28,1%	10,7%	77,9%	11,0%	11,0%
	Q14. I am dissatisfied with the process of collaborative activities during the course (R).	11,1%	26,3%	62,5%	14,9%	28,1%	57,0%	16,1%	11,9%	72,0%
	Q15. I felt I could relate to the other students in my course.	73,1%	21,1%	5,9%	68,6%	20,7%	10,8%	68,6%	21,2%	10,1%
	Q16. I am dissatisfied with the amount of student-to-student interaction in the class. (R).	17,1%	26,3%	56,6%	21,5%	27,3%	51,2%	21,2%	19,5%	59,4%
	Q17. I felt comfortable participating in class through this course delivery medium.	66,5%	21,1%	12,5%	54,6%	20,7%	24,7%	62,7%	14,4%	22,8%
Outcomes	Q18. I am satisfied with the level of effort this course required.	67,8%	20,4%	11,9%	54,5%	19,8%	25,7%	71,2%	12,7%	16,1%
	Q19. I am dissatisfied with my performance in this course (R).	18,4%	26,3%	55,3%	33,9%	24,8%	41,4%	27,1%	14,4%	58,5%
	Q20. I believe I will be satisfied with my final grade in the course.	43,4%	30,3%	26,3%	38,8%	28,1%	33,0%	51,7%	22,9%	25,4%
	Q21. I believe I will be able to apply what I have learned in this course.	71,8%	15,1%	13,2%	55,4%	27,3%	17,3%	67,0%	18,6%	14,4%