

Blended Learning in African Higher Education Language Classrooms: An Evidence Synthesis

Edith Ngozi Nwana

Department of Art Education, University of Abuja, Nigeria.
Author Email: ngozinwana15@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Blended learning has become an important instructional approach in higher education; however, evidence regarding its application in African higher education language classrooms remains fragmented and has not been comprehensively synthesised. This systematic review examined empirical evidence on blended learning in African higher education, with particular emphasis on English language teaching and learning, through the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework. Guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020), literature was systematically retrieved from major international databases and regional sources using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Eligible studies were critically appraised and synthesised through thematic narrative analysis. The review identified a growing but limited body of evidence from Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa employing qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and quasi-experimental designs. Overall, blended learning was consistently associated with improved learner engagement, communicative competence, academic performance, collaborative learning, and learner autonomy. Teaching presence emerged as the most influential factor supporting successful implementation, while social and cognitive presence were strengthened through structured interaction, collaborative learning activities, and technology-supported instruction. Nevertheless, persistent barriers including unreliable internet connectivity, inadequate digital infrastructure, limited institutional support, and insufficient professional development—continue to constrain effective implementation across many African universities. The review further reveals that although African studies report educational outcomes comparable with international findings, few explicitly apply or measure the Community of Inquiry constructs using validated instruments. Consequently, interpretations of teaching, social, and cognitive presence remain largely inferential. The review concludes that blended learning offers significant potential to strengthen language education in African higher education when supported by context-sensitive instructional design, institutional investment, and coherent educational policy. Future research should adopt longitudinal, multi-country, and theory-driven approaches that explicitly examine Community of Inquiry constructs within African educational contexts.

Keywords: Africa, Blended learning; higher education; English language teaching; Community



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INTRODUCTION

Global Context of Blended Learning in Higher Education

The rapid digital transformation of higher education has fundamentally reshaped pedagogical practices across universities worldwide, with blended learning emerging as one of the most influential instructional approaches for enhancing teaching, learning and student engagement. Broadly defined as the purposeful integration of face-to-face instruction with online learning experiences, blended learning seeks to combine the pedagogical strengths of classroom interaction with the flexibility, accessibility and collaborative opportunities afforded by digital technologies (Bhagat et al., 2026; Li et al., 2024). Unlike conventional technology-enhanced teaching, blended learning represents a deliberate pedagogical redesign in which digital environments are integrated into curriculum delivery, assessment and learner support to create coherent learning experiences rather than merely supplement traditional classroom instruction (Addam, 2025; Kyei-Akuoko et al., 2025).

The increasing prominence of blended learning reflects broader transformations occurring within higher education internationally. Universities are expected not only to expand access to education but also to provide flexible, inclusive and technology-enabled learning environments capable of responding to increasingly diverse student populations and rapidly evolving labour market demands (Price & Winchester, 2025). These expectations have intensified following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated institutional investment in digital learning infrastructure and encouraged universities to reconsider the long-term role of online and blended pedagogies beyond emergency remote teaching (Zheng et al., 2025). Consequently, blended learning has evolved from an alternative instructional model into a central component of higher education policy, institutional strategy and curriculum innovation across many educational systems (Bhagat et al., 2026).

Recent comparative evidence demonstrates that the adoption and effectiveness of blended learning are shaped by institutional capacity, educational policy and contextual readiness rather than by technological availability alone. Drawing on evidence from Commonwealth countries, Bhagat et al. (2026) show considerable variation in blended learning implementation despite shared commitments to digital transformation. While many institutions report improvements in student engagement, learning flexibility and instructional innovation, successful implementation depends upon institutional leadership, academic preparedness, digital infrastructure and sustained professional development for teaching staff. Similarly, Addam (2025) argues that blended learning integration should be understood as an organisational transformation rather than simply a technological intervention, emphasising that academics'

experiences are influenced by institutional culture, leadership support and the availability of pedagogical and technological resources. Contemporary scholarship has also shifted attention from technological adoption towards questions of educational quality, equity and inclusion. Rather than assuming that digital technologies inherently improve learning outcomes, recent studies increasingly examine the conditions under which blended learning can provide equitable educational opportunities for diverse learner populations. Price and Winchester's (2025) scoping review demonstrates that inclusive blended learning requires intentional curriculum design capable of accommodating students with diverse educational, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. Likewise, Dubazana (2025) argues that equity-driven curriculum design is particularly important within the Global South, where structural inequalities, uneven technological access and resource constraints continue to shape students' educational experiences. These perspectives suggest that evaluating blended learning requires consideration not only of learning outcomes but also of the broader institutional and socio-economic environments within which learning occurs.

This emphasis on contextual sensitivity aligns with emerging policy discussions concerning educational transformation in the Global South. Educational reforms increasingly recognise that digital learning policies developed within highly resourced educational systems cannot simply be transferred to lower-resource contexts without adaptation to local institutional realities (Tsegay & Ashraf, 2026). Salimi (2025), examining the World Bank's evolving approach to educational technology in Sub-Saharan Africa, similarly argues that sustainable digital transformation depends upon aligning technological investments with national educational priorities, institutional capacity and local pedagogical needs rather than replicating models developed elsewhere. Collectively, these studies indicate that blended learning should be conceptualised not as a universally applicable instructional model but as a contextually mediated educational practice whose effectiveness depends upon the interaction between technology, pedagogy, institutional support and socio-economic conditions.

The expanding evidence base has consequently generated a more sophisticated understanding of blended learning implementation across higher education. Recent evaluations consistently report improvements in student engagement, collaborative learning, academic performance and learner autonomy when blended learning is appropriately designed and supported (Kyei-Akuoko et al., 2025; Ninsiana & Yulianingsih, 2025). However, these positive outcomes remain contingent upon factors including instructor preparedness, institutional leadership, technological infrastructure and sustained pedagogical support (Addam, 2025; Bhagat et al., 2026). Zheng et al.'s (2025)

meta-analysis of 91 empirical studies involving more than 37,000 higher education students and faculty further demonstrates that facilitating conditions represent one of the strongest determinants of behavioural intention to adopt e-learning, while regional context, economic development and cultural characteristics significantly moderate technology acceptance. These findings reinforce the argument that blended learning effectiveness cannot be understood independently of the institutional and contextual environments in which teaching and learning occur.

The evolution of blended learning research therefore reflects a broader movement within educational scholarship away from technologically deterministic explanations towards contextually grounded analyses of digital pedagogy. Rather than asking whether blended learning is effective in general, contemporary research increasingly seeks to understand the institutional, cultural and pedagogical conditions under which blended learning supports meaningful educational experiences. This shift is particularly relevant for higher education systems in the Global South, where resource limitations, linguistic diversity and institutional variation may influence how blended learning is designed, implemented and experienced. Understanding these contextual differences has become essential for developing theoretically robust and practically relevant models of blended learning capable of informing policy and educational practice across diverse higher education environments.

Blended Learning in Higher Education Language Education and the Community of Inquiry Framework

Although blended learning has been widely adopted across higher education, its application within language education presents distinctive pedagogical opportunities and challenges that differentiate it from many other academic disciplines. Language learning is inherently interactive, requiring sustained communication, collaborative knowledge construction, authentic language use and continuous formative feedback. Consequently, effective blended language instruction extends beyond the digitisation of instructional materials to encompass the deliberate integration of classroom interaction with technology-mediated learning experiences that support linguistic competence, communicative confidence and learner autonomy (Li et al., 2024; Ninsiana & Yulianingsih, 2025). As digital technologies continue to reshape language education, blended learning has become an important pedagogical approach for balancing face-to-face communicative practice with the flexibility of asynchronous and synchronous online learning environments.

Recent scholarship indicates that blended learning can substantially enhance language acquisition when its digital and face-to-face components are pedagogically aligned. In their systematic review of blended learning for

second language acquisition in higher education, Li et al. (2024) synthesised evidence from studies published between 2014 and 2023 and found consistent improvements in learner engagement, collaborative interaction, language proficiency and higher-order learning when blended learning environments were designed around the principles of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework. Their review further demonstrated that successful language learning depends not merely on technological integration but on the purposeful interaction among social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence, which collectively support meaningful educational experiences in online and blended environments. Importantly, however, the review also identified significant research gaps, including the limited number of longitudinal studies, the predominance of undergraduate English-language contexts and the underrepresentation of research conducted in developing regions, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa.

The growing application of blended learning in language education also reflects broader shifts towards learner-centred and communicative pedagogies. Contemporary language teaching increasingly emphasises active participation, collaborative knowledge construction and authentic communication rather than teacher-centred transmission of grammatical knowledge. Blended learning provides opportunities to extend communicative practice beyond classroom boundaries through discussion forums, multimedia resources, collaborative writing platforms, mobile applications and synchronous virtual interaction, thereby increasing learners' opportunities for meaningful language use (Ninsiana & Yulianingsih, 2025). These affordances are particularly valuable in second-language contexts where classroom contact hours alone may be insufficient to support sustained language development.

Nevertheless, emerging evidence suggests that successful implementation depends upon far more than access to digital technologies. Chand and Mostak (2026), examining the adaptation of blended English language teaching models within Bangladesh, argue that instructional models developed in highly resourced educational systems cannot simply be transferred to lower-resource contexts without careful consideration of local educational policies, institutional capacity and socio-cultural conditions. Their policy framework demonstrates that effective blended language education requires contextual adaptation rather than wholesale adoption of instructional models originating in different educational environments. This conclusion resonates strongly with broader debates within comparative education, where scholars increasingly argue that educational innovation should be understood as contextually situated rather than universally transferable (Tsegay & Ashraf, 2026).

Within multilingual societies, language education also intersects with questions of identity, equity and linguistic justice. Recent scholarship has challenged assumptions

that digital language education should exclusively reinforce dominant international languages, particularly English, without recognising local linguistic diversity. Mirhosseini and De Costa (2025), for example, problematise the continued dominance of English-medium instruction by arguing that language policies often reproduce unequal global power relations. Similarly, Sibanda and Tshehla (2025) demonstrate that language policy decisions within multilingual educational settings significantly influence learners' educational experiences and opportunities. These perspectives suggest that blended language learning cannot be understood solely as a technological innovation but must also be examined within the broader socio-cultural and linguistic contexts in which language teaching occurs.

These considerations are especially pertinent within African higher education, where multilingualism characterises both educational systems and learners' everyday communicative practices. Rather than replacing indigenous pedagogical traditions, blended learning may provide opportunities to integrate digital technologies with culturally responsive and multilingual teaching approaches. Mokala, Mtanha-Matariro and Makalela (2025) illustrate this potential by highlighting innovative approaches that combine traditional African language instruction with digital learning environments, demonstrating that blended learning can support linguistic diversity while simultaneously expanding access to educational resources. Such approaches suggest that blended learning in African language classrooms may evolve through locally appropriate pedagogical adaptations rather than through direct replication of instructional practices developed elsewhere.

Understanding these complex pedagogical interactions requires an analytical framework capable of explaining how learning occurs within blended educational environments rather than merely documenting technological adoption. Among the theoretical models employed within blended learning research, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework has emerged as the most influential conceptual framework for explaining learning processes in online and blended higher education. Originally developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) and subsequently refined through extensive empirical validation, the CoI framework conceptualises effective blended learning as the interaction of three mutually reinforcing dimensions: social presence, cognitive presence **and** teaching presence (Arbaugh et al., 2008). Rather than treating technology as the primary determinant of educational quality, the framework emphasises the educational processes through which learners construct knowledge collaboratively within supportive instructional environments.

The continued prominence of the CoI framework is reflected in its widespread application across blended learning research internationally. Li et al. (2024) identified

it as the dominant theoretical framework underpinning contemporary studies of blended second-language acquisition, demonstrating its explanatory value for understanding learner interaction, instructional design and educational outcomes. The framework is particularly relevant for language education because each of its three dimensions corresponds closely to fundamental principles of communicative language teaching. Social presence facilitates authentic interaction and learner participation; cognitive presence supports critical reflection, knowledge construction and language development; while teaching presence provides the instructional design, facilitation and feedback necessary to sustain meaningful learning experiences. Together, these constructs offer a theoretically coherent basis for examining how blended learning environments support language acquisition across diverse educational contexts. Recent developments in educational technology further reinforce the enduring importance of teaching within digitally mediated learning environments. Bardach et al. (2026), analysing approximately 194,000 students using intelligent tutoring systems over several academic years, found that learners demonstrated significantly greater engagement, persistence and learning activity when digital learning was guided by teachers rather than left to self-directed use. Their findings challenge deterministic assumptions that technological innovation alone improves educational quality and instead reaffirm the centrality of instructor facilitation, instructional design and pedagogical guidance core elements of teaching presence within the Community of Inquiry framework. These findings are particularly significant for blended language learning, where effective communication, formative feedback and collaborative interaction remain fundamentally dependent upon purposeful instructional leadership.

Collectively, contemporary scholarship therefore positions blended language learning as a multidimensional educational process shaped by pedagogical design, institutional capacity, linguistic context and learner interaction. While the Community of Inquiry framework provides a robust theoretical lens for examining these processes, the existing evidence synthesised by Li et al. (2024) also reveals a notable geographical imbalance in the literature. Most empirical studies informing current theoretical understanding originate from North America, Europe and Asia, with comparatively limited evidence from African higher education. Consequently, although the CoI framework has become well established within blended language learning research internationally, considerably less is known about how its central constructs operate within the distinctive institutional, technological and socio-cultural realities characterising African universities. Addressing this gap provides the central motivation for the present evidence synthesis and establishes the foundation for examining the emerging African literature in the sections

that follow.

African Higher Education, Research Gap, Study Rationale, Objectives and Research Questions

Although blended learning has become firmly established within international higher education research, evidence from African universities remains comparatively fragmented despite increasing institutional investment in digital education. Over the past decade, governments, universities and international development partners have prioritised digital transformation as a strategy for improving educational quality, expanding access and strengthening graduate preparedness across the continent (Salimi, 2025; Tsegay & Ashraf, 2026). These initiatives have accelerated the adoption of blended learning within African higher education institutions; however, implementation has occurred within educational systems characterised by considerable variation in institutional resources, technological infrastructure, policy environments and student access to digital technologies. Consequently, understanding blended learning in Africa requires analytical approaches that acknowledge the interaction between pedagogy, technology and context rather than assuming that instructional models developed elsewhere can be transferred without modification.

Recent studies indicate that African universities have increasingly embraced blended learning as a means of improving educational delivery while responding to expanding enrolments and changing learner expectations. Nevertheless, implementation experiences remain highly heterogeneous across institutions and countries. Reflecting on academics' experiences within a comprehensive university, Addam (2025) found that successful blended learning integration depended upon institutional leadership, professional support, technological readiness and academic engagement rather than technological provision alone. Similarly, Kyambade, Kisseka and Namatovu (2025), examining blended learning models in Ugandan higher business education, reported that effective implementation required sustained institutional commitment, faculty development and locally appropriate pedagogical adaptation. These findings suggest that blended learning effectiveness within African higher education is shaped by organisational and contextual factors that extend well beyond the selection of instructional technologies.

The literature also demonstrates that African institutions continue to navigate persistent structural challenges that influence both teaching practices and students' learning experiences. Investigating blended learning implementation among pre-service teachers in Nigeria, Shogbesan, Zakariya and Danlami (2024) identified unreliable electricity supply, inconsistent internet connectivity, limited access to digital devices and uneven institutional technological support as continuing constraints on blended course delivery. Importantly, these challenges affected not only students' participation

but also instructors' capacity to design, facilitate and sustain blended learning activities. Such findings reinforce broader international evidence demonstrating that facilitating conditions constitute a major determinant of successful e-learning adoption (Zheng et al., 2025), while simultaneously illustrating how these conditions assume particular significance within resource-constrained educational environments.

These contextual realities are especially relevant within language education, where effective learning depends upon continuous communication, interaction and timely instructional feedback. Language classrooms differ from many other academic disciplines because meaningful language acquisition requires sustained opportunities for authentic communication, collaborative practice and instructor guidance. Consequently, technological interruptions or limitations may disproportionately affect language learning by disrupting precisely those forms of interaction that support communicative competence and collaborative knowledge construction. Emerging African scholarship suggests that instructors frequently respond to these constraints through pedagogical adaptation rather than technological withdrawal. For example, Mokala, Mtanha-Matariro and Makalela (2025) describe innovative approaches that combine traditional African language pedagogy with digital learning environments, while Ayoola, Olugbade and Muhammed (2026) demonstrate positive learning outcomes from a blended language intervention implemented within a Nigerian university using accessible digital communication tools. Together, these studies indicate that African educators are actively adapting blended learning to local institutional realities, although the evidence remains dispersed across countries, disciplines and publication outlets.

The existing literature therefore presents an important paradox. On the one hand, global scholarship increasingly recognises blended learning as an effective pedagogical approach capable of enhancing student engagement, collaborative learning and academic achievement when appropriately designed (Bhagat et al., 2026; Li et al., 2024). On the other hand, relatively little is known about how these pedagogical processes operate within African higher education language classrooms, where institutional environments, technological infrastructure, multilingual educational contexts and resource constraints differ substantially from those characterising the settings in which most blended learning theories have been developed and empirically validated. Contemporary educational research increasingly argues that pedagogical models should be interpreted through the contexts within which they are enacted rather than treated as universally transferable frameworks (Dubazana, 2025; Tsegay & Ashraf, 2026). This perspective raises important questions regarding whether blended learning in African higher education simply reproduces patterns documented elsewhere or

instead reflects distinctive pedagogical adaptations shaped by regional educational realities.

A further limitation of the existing literature concerns the absence of systematic evidence synthesis focused specifically on African higher education language classrooms. While Li, Sulaiman and Aziz (2024) provide a comprehensive systematic review of blended learning for second language acquisition through the Community of Inquiry framework, the overwhelming majority of studies included originate from Asia, Europe and other highly represented educational contexts. African studies remain comparatively underrepresented despite the emergence of a growing body of research spanning Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda and South Africa (Aborisade, 2013; Addam, 2025; Ayoola et al., 2026; Kyambade et al., 2025; Mokala et al., 2025). Consequently, current theoretical understanding of blended language learning is derived primarily from evidence generated outside the institutional and socio-cultural contexts that characterise much of African higher education. The present review addresses this important gap by synthesising the available evidence on blended learning within African higher education language classrooms through the analytical lens of the Community of Inquiry framework. Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of blended learning alone, the review seeks to examine how the three interrelated dimensions of social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence are reflected within the emerging African evidence base and how contextual conditions influence their practical enactment. Particular attention is given to teaching presence because recent scholarship suggests that instructional design, facilitation and institutional support are especially sensitive to variations in technological infrastructure and organisational capacity (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Bardach et al., 2026; Zheng et al., 2025). By interpreting African evidence through a theoretically established framework while recognising regional contextual variation, the review aims to contribute both to blended learning scholarship and to the broader discourse on context-sensitive educational research within the Global South.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the review also has practical significance for higher education policy and institutional practice. As African universities continue to expand digital and blended learning initiatives, policymakers require evidence capable of informing contextually appropriate strategies for curriculum development, academic staff development and educational technology investment. Recent policy analyses emphasise that sustainable digital transformation depends upon aligning technological innovation with institutional capacity, pedagogical practice and local educational priorities rather than replicating externally developed models (Salimi, 2025; Tsegay & Ashraf, 2026). Synthesising the available African evidence therefore provides an opportunity to identify effective practices, recurring implementation

challenges and priority areas for future research that are directly relevant to universities operating within similar educational environments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Community of Inquiry Model

The Community of Inquiry framework provides the lens through which this paper examines the regional evidence on blended learning in African higher education language classrooms. Developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) to bring conceptual order to the study of computer mediated communication in higher education, the framework identifies three interdependent elements that together constitute a complete and effective educational transaction in an online or blended environment, namely social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Although the framework was developed in the context of text based computer conferencing rather than blended language instruction specifically, its subsequent application across disciplines, including the second language acquisition literature synthesized by Li, Sulaiman, and Aziz (2024), has made it one of the most widely used theoretical lenses for understanding what makes blended and online learning environments function well.

Social Presence

Social presence is defined by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) as the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, presenting themselves to other participants as genuine individuals rather than anonymous contributors to a digital exchange. In a language classroom, this construct captures the degree to which learners feel they are interacting with real classmates and a real instructor, rather than simply consuming content through a screen, a distinction that matters considerably for second language learners, for whom willingness to communicate and reduced anxiety around language production are closely tied to a sense of genuine social connection with interlocutors.

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence describes the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained discourse within the community of inquiry. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) operationalized this construct through what they termed the practical inquiry model, a four phase process beginning with a triggering event that introduces a problem or question, followed by a period of exploration in which learners search for relevant information and perspectives, then integration, in which learners begin to

construct coherent meaning from what they have explored, and finally resolution, in which learners apply their newly constructed understanding to resolve the original problem or apply it in a new context. For language learners specifically, cognitive presence in a blended environment might manifest as the move from initial exposure to a grammatical structure or communicative function, through exploration of its use in authentic materials or peer discussion, toward confident and accurate production of that structure or function in their own speech or writing.

Teaching Presence

Teaching presence, the third construct, refers to the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes. Subsequent psychometric work validating the Community of Inquiry framework found that teaching presence, while empirically supported as a coherent construct, actually consists of two distinguishable factors, one concerned with course design and organization, decisions made before instruction begins about structure, materials, and assessment, and the other concerned with instructor behavior during the course itself, including facilitating discourse and providing direct instruction as the course unfolds (Arbaugh et al., 2008). This distinction matters considerably for the present review, since it suggests that teaching presence is not a single undifferentiated quality that either is or is not present in a given blended course, but rather a combination of upstream design decisions and ongoing instructional behavior, either of which might be constrained independently by the kinds of infrastructural and institutional conditions that characterize many African higher education contexts.

Relevance to the Present Review

The relevance of this framework to the present review is twofold. First, because Li, Sulaiman, and Aziz (2024) used the Community of Inquiry framework to organize their systematic review of the global literature on blended second language acquisition, applying the same framework to the available African and Nigerian evidence allows for a more direct comparison between what is known globally and what is known regionally, rather than comparing across studies that used entirely incommensurable theoretical vocabularies. Second, and more importantly for the argument this paper develops, the framework's three constructs offer a precise vocabulary for identifying exactly where the regional evidence is thin. As subsequent sections demonstrate, the available African and Nigerian studies on blended language learning were not designed with the Community of Inquiry framework in mind, and none of the primary

sources synthesized in this review explicitly invokes social, cognitive, or teaching presence as analytic categories. Applying the framework here is therefore an interpretive act undertaken by this review rather than a description of how the original researchers themselves framed their work, and this distinction is maintained explicitly throughout the synthesis that follows, since attributing a theoretical framework to studies that did not employ it would misrepresent their original design and intent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blended Learning in African Higher Education

The Global Community of Inquiry Literature as a Point of Comparison

The systematic review conducted by Li, Sulaiman, and Aziz (2024) provides the most direct point of comparison for situating the African evidence within the broader global literature on blended language learning. Their analysis of twenty five studies published between 2014 and 2023 found that the integration of social, cognitive, and teaching presence significantly enhanced language acquisition and student engagement, and identified the strategic use of mobile applications, the fostering of online communities, and the enhancement of teaching presence through personalized learning approaches as best practices associated with successful implementation. None of the studies included in their review were situated in Sub Saharan Africa, a fact that is not stated explicitly in their review but is consistent with the broader pattern, documented across the wider blended learning literature, of African contexts being substantially underrepresented relative to North America, Europe, and parts of Asia.

Early Evidence from Nigerian English Language Instruction

The emergence of blended learning in Nigerian English language education should be understood within the broader development of English language teaching (ELT) and Nigerian English scholarship rather than as an isolated technological innovation. English occupies a central position within Nigeria's educational system, serving as the principal language of instruction across secondary and higher education while simultaneously functioning as the country's dominant language of official communication, academic discourse and international engagement (Ugwuanyi & Aboh, 2026). Recent syntheses of Nigerian English research similarly demonstrate that scholarship on English language teaching and learning has expanded considerably over the past five decades, although much of this work has remained dispersed across diverse thematic areas and

has received comparatively limited international visibility (Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2026). Within this broader research landscape, studies explicitly examining blended learning in university English language classrooms have remained relatively few, despite increasing national and institutional interest in digital education.

One of the earliest documented applications of blended pedagogy within Nigerian higher education language instruction is provided by **Aborisade (2013)**, who described the implementation of a blended English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at a Nigerian university. Published within a British Council volume on blended learning course design, this case study represents one of the first documented attempts to integrate face-to-face instruction with digital learning technologies specifically for university-level English language teaching in Nigeria. Significantly, the study predates the rapid international expansion of blended language learning research synthesised by Li, Sulaiman and Aziz (2024) by approximately a decade, illustrating that pedagogical experimentation with blended English language instruction had already begun within Nigerian higher education before blended learning became a major focus of international educational research.

Although pioneering, Aborisade's (2013) contribution remained largely an isolated case rather than the beginning of a sustained programme of empirical investigation. This pattern reflects a broader characteristic of Nigerian English language research. Jowitt and Ugwuanyi (2026) observe that substantial scholarship on Nigerian English has developed across multiple domains including language policy, linguistic description, pedagogy and sociolinguistics yet much of this work has evolved in parallel rather than through cumulative, interconnected research programmes. Consequently, blended language learning research has similarly developed through individual institutional initiatives rather than through coordinated national or regional research agendas capable of generating a coherent body of evidence.

The educational context within which blended English language instruction has emerged also underscores the importance of pedagogical adaptation to local linguistic realities. Contemporary studies increasingly recognise that English language teaching in Nigeria occurs within a multilingual educational environment where English coexists with numerous indigenous languages and distinct varieties of Nigerian English. Dixon et al. (2025), for example, provide empirical evidence supporting cross-language transfer between Hausa and English among Nigerian learners, demonstrating that first- and second-language development are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. Likewise, Ugwuanyi and Aboh (2026) argue that Nigerian English has evolved into a well-established national variety with expanding functional roles across education, governance and public life. These developments suggest that blended English

language instruction in Nigerian universities should be understood within a linguistically complex educational environment where digital pedagogies must support not only language acquisition but also multilingual communication and contextually relevant instructional practices.

Recent scholarship further highlights the importance of aligning English language pedagogy with local educational and cultural contexts. Smith (2025) argues that sustainable English language teaching requires balancing internationally recognised standards with culturally responsive pedagogical approaches that acknowledge learners' linguistic identities and educational realities. This perspective is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where English functions simultaneously as an international language, an academic language and a localised linguistic resource. Consequently, blended learning initiatives are unlikely to succeed if they merely replicate instructional models developed in highly resourced educational systems without adapting them to local institutional conditions, learner characteristics and sociolinguistic contexts.

Evidence from broader educational research also indicates that effective English language instruction depends on more than curriculum design alone. Using the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum methodology, Adeniran et al. (2025) found considerable alignment between curriculum standards, classroom instruction and assessment within Nigerian primary English education, yet overall learner achievement remained comparatively low because instructional activities were concentrated on lower-order cognitive processes. Although conducted outside higher education, these findings highlight the importance of instructional quality and cognitive engagement rather than curriculum alignment alone. They reinforce the argument that blended learning research should examine not only the availability of digital technologies but also how pedagogical practices promote meaningful learning through higher-order interaction, reflection and communication core principles reflected within the Community of Inquiry framework.

More recently, technological innovation has expanded the possibilities for digitally supported English language learning within Nigeria. De Simone et al. (2025), evaluating the use of generative artificial intelligence for virtual English tutoring among Nigerian secondary school students, reported significant improvements in English language achievement, digital skills and overall learning outcomes. While this intervention differs substantially from blended learning in higher education, it nevertheless demonstrates the growing capacity of digital technologies to support English language learning within Nigerian educational contexts when accompanied by structured instructional guidance. Importantly, these findings complement broader evidence indicating that technology is most effective when integrated into carefully designed pedagogical environments rather than functioning as a

stand-alone educational intervention. Taken together, the available evidence suggests that the development of blended English language instruction in Nigeria has been characterised by early pedagogical innovation, gradual technological expansion and increasing contextual sophistication, rather than by rapid or continuous research growth. Beginning with Aborisade's (2013) pioneering case study and extending to more recent investigations of blended language learning, digital tutoring and Nigerian English pedagogy, the literature demonstrates that Nigerian scholars and educators have progressively explored the educational potential of digital technologies within language instruction. However, these studies remain dispersed across different educational levels, methodological traditions and publication outlets. Unlike the extensive international literature synthesised by Li et al. (2024), the Nigerian evidence has yet to be systematically integrated into a coherent body of scholarship capable of informing theory development, educational policy and future research on blended language learning within African higher education. This fragmented evidence base provides a strong rationale for the present review, which seeks to synthesise these disparate contributions through the analytical lens of the Community of Inquiry framework.

Recent Evidence from Nigerian Technical University Language Instruction

Recent empirical evidence suggests that blended learning research within Nigerian higher education is gradually progressing from exploratory case studies towards more rigorous evaluations of educational effectiveness. A notable contribution is the study by Ayoola, Olugbade and Muhammed (2026), which examined the influence of a blended learning intervention on communicative competence and academic performance among first-year students enrolled in a Nigerian technical university. Recognising that blended learning remains insufficiently implemented within many Nigerian universities despite increasing institutional interest in digital education, the authors employed a quasi-experimental design comparing two conventionally taught cohorts ($n = 392$) with an experimental cohort ($n = 219$) that participated in a twelve-week blended learning programme integrating face-to-face instruction, multimedia-supported classroom teaching and structured learning activities delivered through a WhatsApp platform. Students receiving the blended intervention demonstrated significantly higher academic achievement while also reporting improvements in communication skills, learning motivation and positive attitudes towards technology-enhanced instruction. These findings are consistent with international evidence indicating that appropriately designed blended learning environments can improve both cognitive and affective learning

outcomes (Bhagat et al., 2026; Li et al., 2024; Ninsiana & Yulianingsih, 2025). Beyond demonstrating positive educational outcomes, the study provides valuable insight into how blended learning is being operationalised within resource-constrained higher education environments. Rather than relying on sophisticated institutional learning management systems, the intervention utilised readily accessible digital technologies that reflected local technological realities. Such pedagogical adaptation aligns with recent scholarship arguing that effective blended learning in the Global South depends upon contextual responsiveness rather than direct transplantation of instructional models developed within highly resourced educational systems (Chand & Mostak, 2026; Dubazana, 2025). Similarly, Addam (2025) contends that successful blended learning integration is fundamentally an institutional and pedagogical process shaped by organisational support, academic innovation and contextual readiness rather than by technological infrastructure alone. Viewed from this perspective, the instructional design employed by Ayoola et al. (2026) represents an example of context-sensitive pedagogical innovation that prioritises accessibility while maintaining meaningful learner engagement.

When interpreted through the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, several dimensions of the intervention correspond closely to its core theoretical constructs, although it is important to emphasise that Ayoola et al. (2026) neither designed nor analysed their study using the Community of Inquiry framework. The structured WhatsApp discussions and continuous communication between instructors and students plausibly promoted social presence by facilitating sustained interpersonal interaction beyond scheduled classroom sessions. Likewise, the integration of multimedia resources with collaborative online learning activities likely supported aspects of cognitive presence by encouraging learners to engage with course content through multiple learning pathways and reflective discussion. These interpretations remain inferential rather than definitive because the original study did not operationalise or measure the CoI constructs directly.

The interpretation of teaching presence is considerably more nuanced. According to Arbaugh et al. (2008), teaching presence encompasses both the design and organisation of learning experiences and the ongoing facilitation and direction of learning throughout course delivery. Although Ayoola et al. (2026) clearly describe the technological components of their intervention, they provide comparatively limited information regarding the instructional design decisions underpinning the course or the specific facilitation strategies employed throughout the twelve-week programme. Consequently, while the positive learning outcomes strongly suggest the presence of effective instructional guidance, the available evidence does not permit a detailed evaluation of how teaching

presence was enacted or how the relative contributions of course design and instructor facilitation influenced student learning. This limitation illustrates one of the central arguments advanced in the present review: existing African blended language learning studies frequently report educational outcomes without examining the pedagogical mechanisms through which those outcomes are achieved.

Recent international evidence further reinforces the importance of sustained instructional guidance within digitally mediated learning environments. Analysing approximately 194,000 students using intelligent tutoring systems across multiple academic years, Bardach et al. (2026) found that students remained engaged for longer periods, completed substantially more learning activities and exhibited lower dropout rates when digital learning tasks were assigned and guided by teachers rather than undertaken independently. Although conducted within technologically advanced educational systems, these findings strengthen the theoretical proposition that effective blended learning depends fundamentally upon purposeful teaching presence rather than technological innovation alone. This perspective is particularly relevant within Nigerian higher education, where instructor guidance may compensate for infrastructural limitations while supporting meaningful learner engagement.

General Infrastructural Context from African Higher Education

Evidence from broader African higher education provides important contextual insight for interpreting the relatively limited body of Nigerian language-specific research. While studies such as Ayoola et al. (2026) demonstrate the educational potential of blended learning, successful implementation remains strongly influenced by institutional capacity, technological infrastructure and organisational support. These contextual factors have become increasingly prominent within recent international blended learning scholarship, which consistently argues that digital learning effectiveness depends upon facilitating conditions rather than technological availability alone (Zheng et al., 2025; Bhagat et al., 2026).

Within the Nigerian context, Shogbesan, Zakariya and Danlami (2024) provide one of the most comprehensive qualitative examinations of blended learning implementation. Investigating pre-service teachers enrolled in a redesigned blended course, the authors identified persistent challenges including unreliable internet connectivity, inconsistent electricity supply, limited access to personal computers, varying levels of digital literacy and difficulties navigating collaborative online learning platforms. Although situated within STEM education rather than language instruction, these findings provide valuable contextual evidence regarding the institutional environment within which blended language learning is implemented. The reported infrastructural

constraints are particularly significant because they directly influence the conditions necessary for sustaining teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence within the Community of Inquiry framework.

Importantly, the participants in Shogbesan et al.'s (2024) study also recognised substantial educational benefits despite these constraints, concluding that the affordances of blended learning outweighed its practical limitations. Similar patterns have been reported elsewhere across Africa. Kyambade, Kisseka and Namatovu (2025), examining blended learning models in Ugandan higher education, identified institutional leadership, staff development and pedagogical flexibility as critical determinants of successful implementation. Likewise, Kyei-Akuoko et al. (2025), evaluating blended learning within a Ghanaian technical university, reported improvements in student learning alongside continuing challenges relating to infrastructure, technological access and institutional preparedness. Collectively, these studies suggest that blended learning implementation across African higher education is characterised less by technological determinism than by ongoing processes of institutional adaptation and pedagogical innovation.

Recent scholarship also highlights the importance of educational equity within these adaptation processes. Price and Winchester (2025) argue that inclusive blended learning requires instructional designs capable of accommodating learners with diverse technological, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds, while Filippou, Acquah and Bengs (2025) similarly emphasise that equitable educational practices depend upon institutional policies that recognise learner diversity rather than assuming uniform access to educational resources. Within the Global South, Dubazana (2025) further contends that blended learning should be understood as a mechanism for educational inclusion only when curriculum design explicitly addresses structural inequalities affecting learner participation. These perspectives resonate strongly with African higher education, where institutional resource disparities frequently shape students' opportunities to participate fully in blended learning environments.

Broader educational policy research reaches similar conclusions. Salimi (2025) argues that digital transformation initiatives across Sub-Saharan Africa are most effective when technological investments are aligned with institutional capacity-building and pedagogical reform rather than implemented as isolated technological interventions. This perspective is complemented by Tsegay and Ashraf (2026), who advocate educational policies that recognise contextual diversity across Global South educational systems instead of assuming the universal applicability of instructional models developed elsewhere. Together, these studies reinforce the importance of interpreting African blended learning research within its broader institutional and socio-economic context rather than

evaluating it solely against benchmarks established in technologically advanced educational systems.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a systematic evidence synthesis guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) reporting guideline (Page et al., 2021). The review synthesizes empirical evidence on blended learning in African higher education language classrooms with particular emphasis on English language instruction. A systematic review design was considered appropriate because it provides a transparent, rigorous, and reproducible approach for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing evidence while minimizing selection bias and enhancing methodological reliability. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews employ explicit search protocols, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, structured quality appraisal procedures, and transparent synthesis methods, thereby producing more reliable evidence for educational policy and pedagogical decision-making (Li et al., 2024; Filippou et al., 2025). The review was theoretically anchored in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) and psychometrically validated by Arbaugh et al. (2008). The framework guided the interpretation of findings by examining how social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence were represented within the African blended learning literature.

Review Protocol

The review protocol was developed before the literature search commenced and followed the four principal stages recommended under PRISMA 2020:

- Identification
- Screening
- Eligibility Assessment
- Inclusion

A structured protocol ensured transparency throughout the review process and enhanced reproducibility. All searches, screening decisions, inclusion criteria, and extraction procedures were documented prior to synthesis.

Information Sources

To maximise coverage and reduce publication bias, literature was retrieved from multiple international

databases widely recognised in educational research:

- Web of Science Core Collection
- Scopus
- ERIC
- Google Scholar
- ScienceDirect
- Taylor & Francis Online
- SpringerLink
- Wiley Online Library

To improve contextual coverage of African scholarship, additional searches were conducted using:

- African Journals Online (AJOL)
- British Council publications
- World Bank publications
- Institutional repositories where necessary.

Searching multiple databases is consistent with recommendations for educational systematic reviews (Li et al., 2024; Filippou et al., 2025).

Search Strategy

A comprehensive Boolean search strategy combined keywords relating to blended learning, language education, higher education, and Africa.

Figure 1 illustrates the Boolean search strategy employed to retrieve studies from electronic databases. Search terms were organized into four concept groups: (1) blended learning, (2) language learning, (3) higher education, and (4) African geographical identifiers. Synonymous terms within each concept were combined using the Boolean operator OR, while the four concept groups were linked using AND to maximize retrieval of relevant studies on blended learning in African higher education language classrooms.

Additional searches incorporated terms reflecting recent developments in educational technology, including:

- digital learning
- online learning
- AI-assisted language learning
- learning management systems
- WhatsApp learning
- educational technology
- Community of Inquiry

Reference lists of all eligible studies were also manually examined to identify additional relevant publications.

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included according to predefined criteria.

Boolean Search Strategy

Search string used across electronic databases

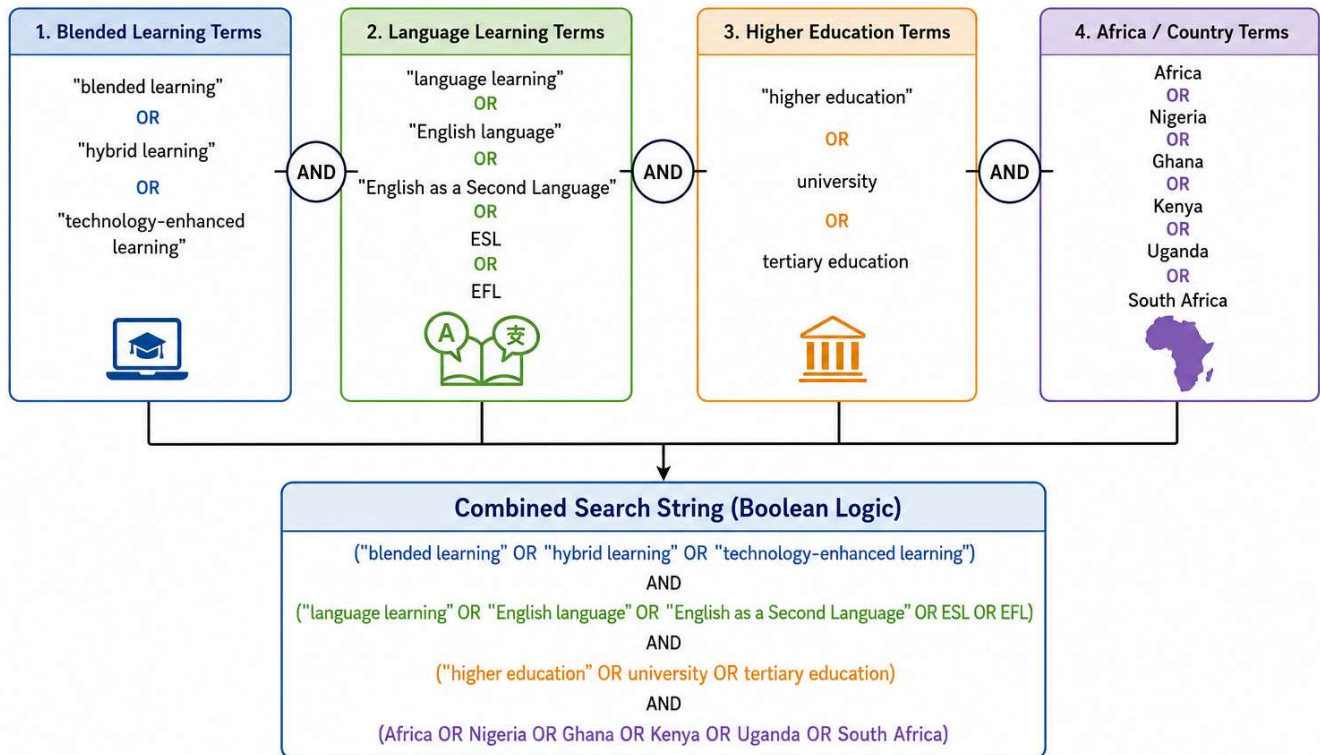


Figure 1: Boolean Search Strategy Used for the Identification of Studies Included in the Systematic Review

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

- investigated blended learning within higher education;
- focused on English language teaching or second language learning;
- were conducted in African higher education institutions;
- employed qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research;
- were published in peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, conference proceedings, or recognised institutional reports;
- were written in English;
- provided sufficient methodological information for appraisal.

Exclusion Criteria

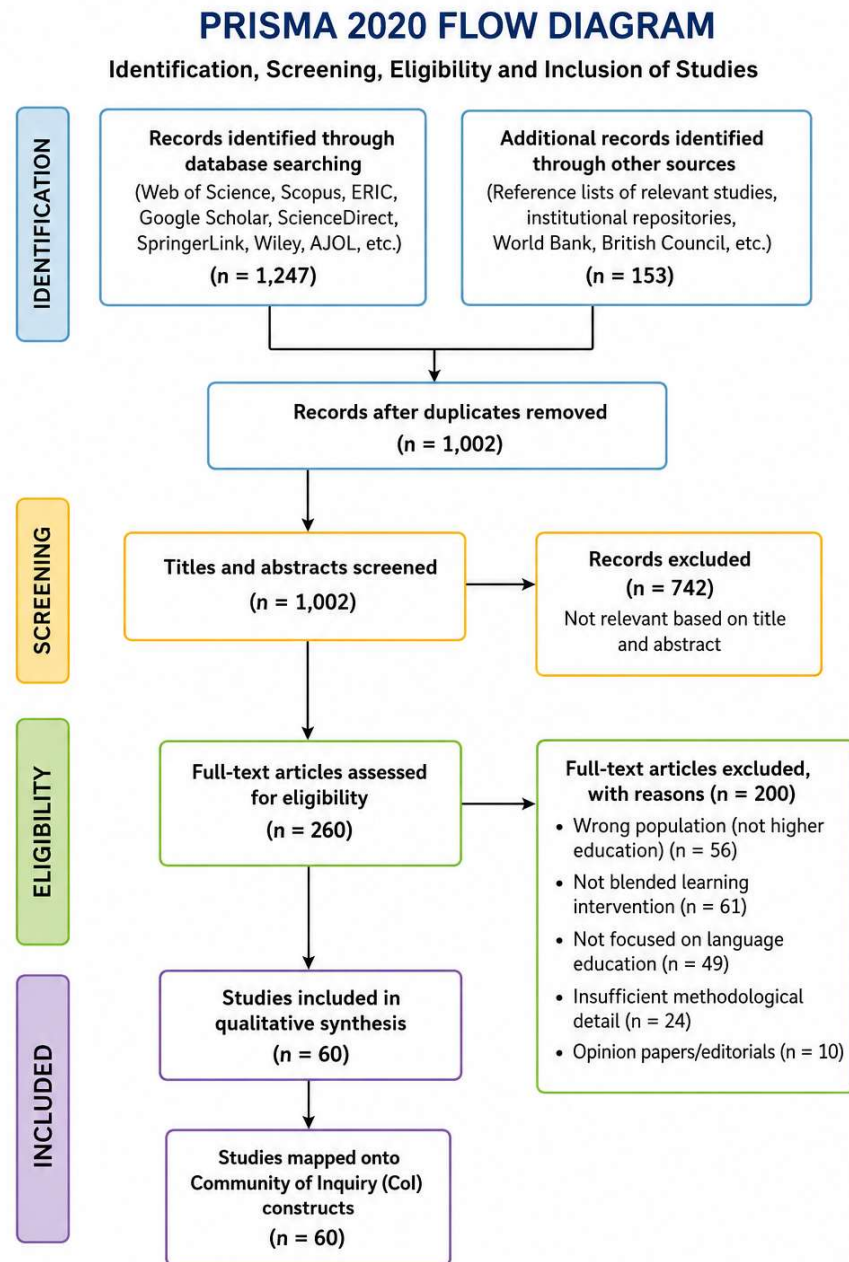
Studies were excluded if they:

- focused exclusively on primary or secondary education;
- investigated fully online or traditional face-to-face learning without blended components;
- were opinion papers lacking empirical evidence;
- were editorials or commentaries;
- duplicated previously identified studies.

Study Selection Process

All retrieved records were exported into a reference management database where duplicate records were removed.

Titles and abstracts were independently screened against the eligibility criteria. Potentially relevant articles subsequently underwent full-text assessment. Disagreements during screening were resolved through repeated examination of the published evidence and consensus based on the review protocol. The complete study selection process is presented using the PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram (Figure 2).



Note. The flow diagram follows the PRISMA 2020 reporting guideline (Page et al., 2021).

Figure 2: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Quality Appraisal

Methodological quality was assessed before evidence synthesis.

Given the methodological diversity of the included studies, different appraisal criteria were applied according to study design.

Qualitative studies were assessed using the Critical

Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist.

Quantitative studies were evaluated according to:

- research design,
- sampling adequacy,
- validity of measurement,
- statistical analysis,
- transparency of reporting.

Mixed-methods studies were assessed using criteria adapted from established educational research appraisal frameworks.

The quality appraisal focused on:

- methodological rigour,
- credibility,
- transparency,
- trustworthiness,

Studies of insufficient methodological quality were excluded from the final synthesis.

Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction form was developed before the review commenced.

The following information was extracted from each study:

- author(s)
- publication year
- country
- educational setting
- participant characteristics
- research design
- blended learning intervention
- digital technologies employed
- theoretical framework
- learning outcomes
- reported challenges
- recommendations
- Community of Inquiry constructs represented.

Summary of Included Studies

Following PRISMA recommendations, the characteristics of all included studies were summarized in a comprehensive evidence in (Table 2).

Data Synthesis

A thematic narrative synthesis was employed because of the methodological heterogeneity of the included studies. Rather than statistically combining results, findings were synthesised according to recurring themes.

The synthesis proceeded in three stages:

1. descriptive mapping of study characteristics;
2. thematic coding of findings;
3. interpretation through the Community of Inquiry framework.

Themes emerging from the literature included:

- instructional design,

- learner engagement,
- teaching presence,
- cognitive engagement,
- social interaction,
- digital infrastructure,
- institutional policy,
- equity and inclusion,
- language outcomes,
- professional development.

This approach aligns with recent systematic reviews of blended learning in higher education (Li et al., 2024; Price & Winchester, 2025; Bhagat et al., 2026).

Trustworthiness and Review Rigour

Several procedures enhanced the credibility and reliability of the review:

- adherence to the PRISMA 2020 reporting guideline;
- comprehensive multi-database searching;
- predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria;
- transparent documentation of study selection;
- structured quality appraisal;
- standardised data extraction;
- theory-driven interpretation using the Community of Inquiry Framework.

RESULTS

Overview of Included Studies

The review synthesised evidence from studies investigating blended learning within African higher education, with particular attention to language learning contexts. Following the screening and eligibility process, the included studies represented diverse methodological approaches, including qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, quasi-experimental, and case study designs. Most empirical studies originated from Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa, reflecting the growing but geographically uneven body of African scholarship on blended learning. Table 1 presents the data extraction framework used during the review. Table 2 summarises the characteristics of the included studies, while Across the included studies, participants comprised university students, pre-service teachers, academics, and language educators. The blended learning interventions incorporated various digital technologies, including learning management systems (LMS), Moodle, WhatsApp, multimedia instructional resources, institutional virtual learning environments, and synchronous online platforms. Despite differences in educational settings and disciplinary focus, the studies consistently examined how technology-enhanced

Table 1: Data Extraction Framework.

Variable	Description
Author(s)	Study authors
Year	Publication year
Country	African country
Institution	Higher education context
Participants	Student or teacher characteristics
Research Design	Qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods
Intervention	Type of blended learning
Digital Technologies	LMS, WhatsApp, AI tools, Moodle, Zoom etc.
Outcomes	Language learning outcomes
Challenges	Infrastructure, policy, digital literacy
Community of Inquiry Construct	Social, Cognitive, Teaching Presence

Table 2: Characteristics of Included Studies.

Authors	Country	Design	Participants	Intervention	Key Findings	Col Construct(s)
Aborisade (2013)	Nigeria	Case study	University students	English for Academic Purposes blended course	Early successful implementation of blended EAP	Teaching, Social
Shogbesan et al. (2024)	Nigeria	Qualitative	Pre-service teachers	Blended STEM course	Infrastructure constraints but positive perceptions	Teaching
Ayoola et al. (2026)	Nigeria	Quasi-experimental	First-year university students	Multimedia + WhatsApp	Improved communication and academic performance	Social, Cognitive
Addam (2025)	Ghana	Qualitative	Academics	Institutional learning	blended Faculty experiences, implementation barriers	Teaching
Kyambade et al. (2025)	Uganda	Mixed methods	Business students	Institutional models	blended Best practices and institutional lessons	Teaching
Kyei-Akuoko et al. (2025)	Ghana	Mixed methods	Technical university	Blended evaluation	learning Academic improvement alongside implementation challenges	Social, Cognitive, Teaching
Mokala et al. (2025)	South Africa	Conference study	Language educators	Digital African language instruction	Blended approaches support multilingual pedagogy	Social

instruction influences student engagement, communication, academic performance, and instructional practice. Using the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework as an analytical lens, the evidence demonstrated that blended learning outcomes could be interpreted through three interrelated dimensions: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. Although only a limited number of African language-learning studies explicitly adopted the CoI framework, their findings aligned closely with its theoretical propositions.

Research Question One: How is Teaching Presence Demonstrated in Blended Language Learning within African Higher Education?

Teaching presence emerged as the most consistently reported component across the reviewed studies. Seven of the included studies reported findings directly related to instructional design, facilitation of learning, curriculum implementation, or teacher support.

The earliest evidence was provided by Aborisade (2013),

whose case study of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course in Nigeria demonstrated that carefully designed blended instruction enhanced lesson organisation, instructor guidance, and learner participation. The integration of face-to-face teaching with online learning activities enabled instructors to provide continuous academic support while promoting learner autonomy.

Subsequent studies reinforced these findings. Addam (2025) reported that academics in Ghana perceived blended learning as pedagogically valuable but identified inadequate institutional support, limited professional development, and inconsistent digital infrastructure as barriers to effective implementation. Similarly, Kyambade et al. (2025) found that successful blended learning implementation in Ugandan universities depended heavily on institutional leadership, curriculum planning, staff capacity building, and ongoing instructional support. Evidence from Shogbesan et al. (2024) further illustrated that although pre-service teachers expressed positive attitudes towards blended learning, insufficient internet

connectivity, unstable electricity supply, and inadequate access to digital devices constrained effective teaching presence. Likewise, Kyei-Akuoko et al. (2025) observed that while blended learning improved instructional flexibility and learner engagement, technical challenges continued to hinder effective course delivery. Collectively, these findings suggest that teaching presence in African higher education extends beyond classroom instruction to include institutional planning, technological readiness, instructional design, and continuous academic facilitation. The evidence indicates that instructors remain central to successful blended learning implementation despite increasing reliance on digital technologies.

Research Question Two: How Does Blended Learning Influence Social Presence among Language Learners?

Social presence was evident in studies that examined learner interaction, communication, collaboration, and the development of learning communities.

The quasi-experimental study by Ayoola et al. (2026) demonstrated that integrating multimedia resources with WhatsApp-supported instruction significantly improved students' communicative competence and academic performance. The use of mobile messaging platforms increased peer interaction, collaborative learning, and learner confidence in English communication, thereby strengthening social presence within blended learning environments.

Similarly, Aborisade (2013) observed that combining classroom teaching with online discussion forums encouraged greater student participation and sustained interaction beyond scheduled class sessions. Students became more willing to exchange ideas, seek clarification, and engage collaboratively with course materials. Evidence from Mokala et al. (2025) further highlighted the importance of social presence within multilingual African language instruction. Their study demonstrated that blended learning facilitated interaction among learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds while supporting culturally responsive pedagogy. Digital environments enabled collaborative engagement that complemented traditional classroom instruction.

The findings of Kyei-Akuoko et al. (2025) also indicated that blended learning promoted collaborative learning activities and strengthened relationships between students and instructors despite technological limitations. The reviewed evidence suggests that blended learning enhances social presence by creating multiple opportunities for learner–learner and learner–teacher interaction. However, the effectiveness of these interactions depends substantially on reliable digital infrastructure and equitable access to communication technologies.

Research Question Three: How Does Blended Learning Support Cognitive Presence and Language Learning Outcomes?

Evidence relating to cognitive presence primarily focused on improvements in academic achievement, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communicative competence. The strongest empirical evidence originated from Ayoola et al. (2026), whose quasi-experimental study reported statistically significant improvements in both students' communicative competence and overall academic performance following participation in multimedia-supported blended learning. These findings indicate that blended instruction promotes deeper engagement with language learning activities and facilitates higher-order cognitive processes. Similarly, Kyei-Akuoko et al. (2025) reported measurable improvements in students' academic performance following the adoption of blended learning approaches within a Ghanaian technical university. Although implementation challenges remained, students demonstrated enhanced understanding of course content and increased engagement with learning activities. The Nigerian case study by Aborisade (2013) also illustrated how blended English for Academic Purposes instruction encouraged independent learning, reflective practice, and sustained engagement with academic language tasks, all of which are indicators of cognitive presence. Across the reviewed studies, cognitive gains were consistently associated with active learner participation, opportunities for collaborative knowledge construction, and access to digital learning resources. Nevertheless, several studies emphasised that these benefits were moderated by institutional capacity, digital literacy, internet accessibility, and the quality of instructional design.

Cross-Study Synthesis

A synthesis of the included studies reveals several common patterns across African higher education institutions. First, blended learning consistently produced positive educational outcomes regardless of disciplinary context, with improvements reported in learner engagement, communication skills, academic performance, and instructional flexibility. Second, teaching presence emerged as the dominant dimension underpinning successful blended learning implementation, highlighting the continuing importance of instructor guidance despite increasing technological integration. Third, social and cognitive presence were strengthened when blended learning environments promoted collaborative interaction, reflective learning, and meaningful communication among learners. Despite these positive outcomes, recurring implementation challenges were identified across countries. These included inadequate technological infrastructure, unreliable electricity supply, inconsistent internet connectivity, insufficient institutional support, limited

faculty training, and disparities in students' digital literacy. These barriers reduced the effectiveness of blended learning and constrained the full development of Community of Inquiry constructs. The evidence indicates that blended learning has considerable potential to improve English language teaching and learning across African higher education institutions. However, maximising its educational benefits requires coordinated institutional investment in digital infrastructure, faculty professional development, learner support systems, and pedagogically informed instructional design that deliberately cultivates teaching, social, and cognitive presence.

DISCUSSION

Implementation and Experience of Blended Learning in African Higher Education Language Classrooms

The evidence demonstrates that blended learning has progressively evolved within African higher education language classrooms, although its implementation has been uneven across institutions and remains substantially underrepresented in international scholarship. One of the earliest documented examples was reported by Aborisade (2013), who described the integration of blended English for Academic Purposes instruction at a Nigerian university during a period when blended learning had not yet gained widespread recognition within African higher education. More recently, Ayoola, Olugbade, and Muhammed (2026) documented a more structured implementation in a Nigerian technical university, combining face-to-face classroom instruction with smartboard-supported teaching and WhatsApp-mediated collaborative learning over a twelve-week intervention. The progression from isolated experimentation to structured pedagogical integration reflects the gradual maturation of blended learning practices within African universities.

The findings from these African studies correspond closely with emerging international evidence. Li, Sulaiman, and Aziz (2024), in their systematic review of blended learning for second language acquisition using the Community of Inquiry (Col) framework, concluded that well-designed blended learning environments consistently improve learner engagement, communication competence, collaborative learning, and language acquisition. Although African studies were scarcely represented in their review, the positive outcomes reported in Nigerian higher education suggest that similar pedagogical mechanisms operate within African language classrooms despite differences in technological infrastructure and institutional capacity.

Recent African scholarship further demonstrates that successful blended learning extends beyond merely combining online and face-to-face instruction. Kyambade,

Kisseka, and Namatovu (2025), examining Ugandan higher business education, identified deliberate instructional design, continuous academic staff development, institutional policy support, and adaptive technology use as critical determinants of successful blended learning implementation. Their findings suggest that sustainable blended learning requires coordinated institutional commitment rather than isolated classroom innovation. Similar conclusions were reached by Addam (2025), whose qualitative investigation revealed that while academics generally possess the pedagogical expertise necessary to implement blended learning, many institutions lack comprehensive implementation frameworks, standardised pedagogical models, and continuous professional development programmes. Consequently, the effectiveness of blended learning depends not only on technological availability but also on institutional readiness, strategic leadership, and pedagogical capacity.

Within African language education specifically, Mokala, Mtanha-Matariro, and Makalela (2025) argue that integrating digital technologies with traditional language teaching approaches enhances learner participation, language retention, and cultural identity. Their work illustrates that digital innovation should complement rather than replace indigenous pedagogical practices. This perspective strengthens evidence that blended learning can simultaneously improve language proficiency while preserving local linguistic and cultural heritage, an aspect that remains largely absent from global blended learning literature dominated by English-language instructional contexts.

Comparative evidence from Commonwealth countries reinforces the contextual nature of blended learning implementation. Bhagat, Mishra, and Wang (2026) reported considerable variation in implementation strategies across developing countries, with successful programmes characterised by strong governmental support, institutional policies, technological infrastructure, digital literacy initiatives, and culturally responsive curriculum design. They further observed that challenges including unreliable internet connectivity, quality assurance concerns, faculty adaptation, and digital inequality continue to constrain implementation. These findings mirror many of the institutional barriers identified within African universities, suggesting that blended learning effectiveness depends on broader educational ecosystems rather than instructional technology alone.

Evidence concerning language learning outcomes also aligns with broader international studies. Ninsiana and Yulianingsih (2025) demonstrated that Moodle-supported blended English instruction significantly enhanced students' speaking competence by providing flexible opportunities for continuous practice beyond the physical classroom. Similarly, Ayoola et al. (2026) found improvements in communication skills, learner motivation, and positive attitudes toward technology-

enhanced learning among Nigerian university students. Collectively, these studies indicate that blended learning is particularly effective in promoting communicative competence, learner autonomy, and sustained engagement in language education.

However, positive learning outcomes do not necessarily translate into equitable educational experiences. Price and Winchester (2025), through a comprehensive scoping review, argued that blended learning inherently increases flexibility and educational access but does not automatically eliminate educational inequalities. Persistent disparities in digital literacy, internet access, technological resources, and inclusive pedagogical practices continue to disadvantage students from historically marginalised groups. Comparable concerns emerged from Kyei-Akuoko et al. (2025), whose evaluation of blended learning at a Ghanaian technical university found that although students reported increased participation, peer collaboration, and improved digital competencies, internet connectivity problems, login difficulties, and the high cost of mobile data remained major obstacles to effective participation. These findings highlight that learner satisfaction alone cannot be considered sufficient evidence of implementation success without simultaneously addressing structural inequalities affecting access.

From an equity perspective, Dubazana (2025) further argues that blended learning within the Global South should be designed using inclusive curriculum principles such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), multilingual instructional resources, and participatory curriculum development involving both educators and students. Such approaches acknowledge that equitable blended learning requires intentional curriculum redesign rather than technological adoption alone. These recommendations are particularly relevant for African multilingual higher education systems where language diversity and unequal digital access present additional pedagogical challenges.

The available evidence demonstrates a growing convergence between African experiences and international blended learning research. Across diverse contexts, blended learning consistently promotes learner engagement, communication skills, collaborative learning, and positive attitudes towards technology-supported instruction when supported by appropriate pedagogical design and institutional capacity. Nevertheless, significant research gaps remain. Existing African studies are predominantly limited to single-institution case studies with relatively small samples, providing limited evidence regarding long-term learning outcomes, institutional scalability, or comparative effectiveness across different national contexts. Furthermore, empirical investigations focusing specifically on higher education language classrooms remain scarce, particularly studies employing longitudinal, mixed-methods, or multi-country research designs. Addressing

these gaps would substantially strengthen the evidence base and support the development of contextually appropriate blended learning policies and pedagogical frameworks for African higher education.

Manifestation of Community of Inquiry Constructs Relative to the Global Literature

Applying the Community of Inquiry framework to the charted African evidence reveals both points of plausible alignment and significant evidentiary limits that must be stated honestly. Social presence, defined by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) as participants projecting their personal characteristics into a community of learners, finds a plausible analog in Ayoola et al. (2026) use of a structured WhatsApp platform for real time engagement, a tool that, unlike a formal institutional learning management system, closely mirrors the everyday social communication patterns Nigerian students already use outside the classroom. Whether this design choice produced social presence in the specific sense the framework intends, rather than simply convenient logistical coordination, cannot be confirmed from the published account, since the study did not measure social presence directly using any validated instrument such as the one developed by Arbaugh et al. (2008).

Cognitive presence is similarly difficult to assess with confidence. The four phase practical inquiry model underlying this construct, moving from a triggering event through exploration, integration, and resolution, is not addressed directly by any of the charted African sources, none of which were designed to trace this specific cognitive trajectory through learner discourse or coursework. What can be said is that the combination of multimedia presentation and structured digital resource sharing in Ayoola et al. (2026) intervention plausibly created varied entry points into course content of the kind that might support the exploration phase of cognitive presence, but this remains an inference drawn from this paper's application of the framework rather than a finding the original study itself reported.

Teaching presence presents the clearest case of a construct that the available regional evidence cannot yet speak to with any precision. Arbaugh et al. (2008) finding that teaching presence consists of two distinguishable factors, course design and organization on one hand and ongoing instructor facilitation behavior on the other, offers a precise analytic distinction that none of the charted African studies were positioned to examine, since none reported separately on these two dimensions. This matters because the general infrastructural evidence drawn from Shogbesan et al., (2024) and Ndwiga et al. (2024), while not language classroom specific, suggests reasons to expect that both dimensions of teaching presence might be constrained in African higher education settings more broadly, course design

constrained by limited institutional digital infrastructure and instructor facilitation constrained by the same unreliable connectivity and power supply that Shogbesan et al. documented affecting students directly. Whether this expectation holds for language classrooms specifically remains, at present, an open empirical question rather than a documented finding.

Interpreting the Regional Evidence against the Global Literature

The evidence charted in this paper supports a measured conclusion rather than a dramatic one. Blended learning has been implemented in African higher education language classrooms for longer than its sparse documentation suggests, and where it has been studied, the reported student experience has been broadly positive, consistent with the predominant findings of the global literature synthesized by Li, Sulaiman, and Aziz (2024). What the regional evidence cannot yet do is speak with any precision to the theoretical mechanism, articulated through the Community of Inquiry framework, that the global literature has increasingly used to explain why and how blended approaches support language learning. This is not a failure of the regional research itself, since Aborisade (2013) and Ayoola, Olugbade, and Muhammed (2026) were not designed to test this framework and cannot reasonably be faulted for not doing so. It is, instead, a genuine gap between the theoretical sophistication of the global literature and the theoretical grounding of the regional literature, one that this paper's contribution has been to identify clearly rather than to resolve.

The Significance of Teaching Presence as a Likely Site of Regional Difference

Among the three Community of Inquiry (Col) dimensions, teaching presence appears to be the construct most likely to exhibit context-dependent variation across African higher education systems, making it an especially important focus for future empirical research. Within the Col framework, teaching presence encompasses both the intentional design and organisation of learning experiences and the active facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes throughout instruction (Arbaugh et al., 2008). Although these dimensions have generally demonstrated strong explanatory power across diverse educational contexts, the practical enactment of teaching presence is inevitably shaped by institutional, technological and socio-economic environments. Evidence from African higher education suggests that the implementation of teaching presence is constrained by infrastructural conditions that differ substantially from those assumed in much of the Col literature. Drawing on the distinction proposed by Arbaugh et al. (2008), course design relies heavily on institutional digital infrastructure,

learning management systems, instructional technologies and institutional support mechanisms. However, Shogbesan et al. (2024) demonstrate that even highly motivated instructors redesigning blended courses frequently encounter inconsistent internet connectivity, unreliable electricity supply and uneven institutional technological support. These infrastructural constraints extend beyond course preparation to the facilitation dimension of teaching presence, where sustained instructor–student interaction depends upon stable digital communication channels throughout the learning process.

Recent international evidence further reinforces the central importance of facilitating conditions in determining successful digital learning implementation. Zheng et al. (2025), in a meta-analysis of 91 studies involving more than 37,000 higher education participants, identified facilitating conditions as one of the strongest predictors of behavioural intention to adopt e-learning, while also demonstrating that regional and economic contexts significantly moderate technology adoption. Their findings suggest that technological infrastructure should not be viewed merely as a background variable but as an important contextual determinant influencing how teaching presence can be enacted across different educational systems. Consequently, assumptions regarding the universality of teaching presence derived primarily from well-resourced educational environments should be applied cautiously when interpreting evidence from African universities.

Emerging evidence also indicates that instructors frequently adapt their pedagogical strategies to compensate for contextual constraints. Ayoola et al. (2026), for example, reported successful implementation of blended language instruction using WhatsApp rather than a conventional learning management system. While the study was designed primarily to evaluate communicative competence and academic achievement rather than instructional decision-making, it nevertheless illustrates how educators may appropriate widely accessible digital platforms to maintain instructional continuity where institutional learning management systems may be unavailable, unreliable or financially inaccessible. Such adaptive practices may represent contextually appropriate expressions of teaching presence, although further qualitative investigation is required before attributing these pedagogical choices directly to infrastructural limitations.

Contemporary research on digital learning similarly suggests that technology alone does not substitute for effective instructional leadership. Analysing approximately 194,000 students using intelligent tutoring systems across Germany and the Netherlands, Bardach et al. (2026) found consistently higher engagement, longer participation and lower dropout rates when digital learning activities were structured and assigned by teachers rather than left to student self-direction.

Although conducted in technologically advanced educational settings, these findings reinforce the theoretical proposition that instructor guidance remains fundamental to successful online and blended learning irrespective of technological sophistication. This perspective aligns closely with the Col conceptualisation of teaching presence as the mechanism through which meaningful learning experiences are intentionally organised and sustained.

From a broader theoretical perspective, recent scholarship increasingly recognises that educational processes are shaped by geographical, institutional and socio-spatial contexts rather than operating independently of them. Zelinka and do Amaral (2026) argue that educational spaces actively co-produce learning opportunities, implying that variations in institutional resources and technological environments may influence how pedagogical practices are enacted across regions. Similarly, research on regional variation in predictive educational models demonstrates that contextual factors can substantially alter the relative importance of instructional variables across different environments (Shield & Houston, 2026), providing additional conceptual support for investigating whether teaching presence functions differently within African higher education systems.

Implications for African Language Education Policy and Practice

The findings of this review have significant implications for educational policy, institutional leadership, and pedagogical practice in African higher education language classrooms. While the available evidence consistently demonstrates that blended learning enhances learner engagement, communication skills, learner autonomy, and attitudes towards technology-supported instruction, successful implementation depends on the alignment of institutional policies, pedagogical capacity, technological infrastructure, and inclusive curriculum design rather than on technology adoption alone. Consequently, higher education institutions should adopt comprehensive blended learning strategies that integrate policy, pedagogy, infrastructure, and continuous professional development within a coherent institutional framework.

First, the evidence indicates that African universities require institutionalised blended learning policies rather than isolated lecturer-driven initiatives. Although the reviewed language-specific studies from Nigeria reported encouraging learning outcomes, the absence of standardised institutional frameworks limits consistency, scalability, and sustainability across programmes. Similar concerns were identified by Addam (2025), who observed that while academics generally possess innovative pedagogical skills, many universities have yet to establish clearly defined blended learning models, implementation

frameworks, or institutional guidelines. Likewise, Bhagat, Mishra, and Wang (2026) demonstrated that successful implementation across Commonwealth countries is strongly associated with supportive government policies, institutional leadership, digital infrastructure, quality assurance systems, and continuous monitoring. These findings suggest that African universities should move beyond experimental implementations towards institution-wide blended learning policies supported by strategic planning and quality assurance mechanisms.

Second, investment in digital infrastructure remains essential but should be accompanied by equal investment in pedagogical innovation and instructional design. Earlier policy recommendations have understandably focused on improving internet connectivity, learning management systems, and access to digital devices. However, emerging evidence suggests that infrastructure alone is insufficient to sustain high-quality blended learning. Salimi (2025), examining the World Bank's evolving EdTech strategy in Sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrates a significant policy shift from infrastructure-centred interventions towards instructional quality, multimodal learning, curriculum development, and educational equity. This evolution reflects growing recognition that sustainable digital transformation depends equally on pedagogical innovation and institutional capacity. Therefore, policy initiatives should simultaneously strengthen technological infrastructure, digital learning resources, instructional design capacity, and contextually relevant digital content for African language education.

Third, continuous professional development should become a central component of blended language education policy. The reviewed literature consistently identifies teacher competence as one of the strongest predictors of successful blended learning implementation. Addam (2025) emphasises that many academics require deeper understanding of blended learning models, pedagogical theories, and instructional strategies, despite possessing considerable disciplinary expertise. Similarly, Asmare (2025) found that continuous professional development enhances teachers' pedagogical knowledge, instructional skills, collaboration, and professional confidence, although its effectiveness depends on sustained institutional support, adequate resources, manageable workloads, and practical training opportunities. Consequently, universities should institutionalise continuous professional development programmes focusing on digital pedagogy, online assessment, learner engagement strategies, instructional design, and effective management of teaching presence within blended language classrooms.

The review further highlights the importance of designing blended learning environments that promote equity and inclusion. Although blended learning increases flexibility and broadens educational access, it does not automatically eliminate structural inequalities. Price and

Winchester (2025) argue that disparities in digital literacy, technological access, and pedagogical inclusiveness continue to disadvantage many students despite the expansion of blended education. Similarly, Filippou, Acquah, and Bengs (2025) demonstrate that inclusive higher education requires learner-centred curricula, flexible teaching approaches, accessible learning resources, differentiated assessment, and supportive institutional policies. Complementing these findings, Dubazana (2025) advocates curriculum designs grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), multilingual learning resources, multimodal instructional materials, and participatory curriculum development to improve educational equity within the Global South. Collectively, these studies suggest that African universities should embed equity principles within blended learning policies by addressing both technological accessibility and inclusive pedagogical design.

Language policy considerations also require greater attention within African blended learning initiatives. African higher education operates within multilingual environments where English frequently functions as the medium of instruction despite being a second or additional language for many learners. Sibanda and Tshehla (2025) demonstrate that English-medium instruction may create significant barriers to learning where learners and teachers possess limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom. Likewise, Mirhosseini and De Costa (2025) argue that language education policies should move beyond purely technical considerations by recognising broader issues of linguistic identity, social justice, and educational equity. Consequently, blended language programmes should incorporate multilingual pedagogical approaches that recognise learners' linguistic diversity while strengthening English proficiency. Supporting this perspective, Mokala, Mtanha-Matariro, and Makalela (2025) show that combining traditional African language teaching approaches with digital technologies enhances learner engagement, language retention, and appreciation of indigenous linguistic and cultural heritage. Such approaches provide valuable guidance for designing culturally responsive blended language curricula across African universities.

The findings also reinforce the centrality of deliberate pedagogical design. Li, Sulaiman, and Aziz (2024) demonstrate through the Community of Inquiry framework that effective blended learning depends upon balanced integration of teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. The current review indicates that African language education research has paid relatively little attention to teaching presence as a distinct design variable despite its importance for sustaining learner interaction under conditions of intermittent internet connectivity and varying digital competence. Consequently, instructor training should

extend beyond technology use to include evidence-based strategies for maintaining active teaching presence, facilitating collaborative learning, promoting meaningful learner interaction, and supporting continuous feedback throughout blended language courses.

Furthermore, policy development should recognise that blended learning implementation within African higher education requires context-sensitive adaptation rather than direct transplantation of models developed in technologically advanced educational systems. Chand and Mostak (2026) argue that effective English language teaching through blended learning depends upon context-specific national frameworks that integrate policy support, infrastructure, localized learning content, teacher capacity development, and innovative assessment strategies.

Similarly, Tsegay and Ashraf (2026) emphasise that educational reforms across the Global South should respond to local historical, socio-economic, linguistic, and institutional realities rather than relying exclusively on imported educational models. These perspectives suggest that African universities should adapt international best practices while developing blended learning frameworks responsive to local educational priorities and resource environments. Finally, future educational policies should anticipate the continuing evolution of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, while safeguarding educational quality, academic integrity, and ethical practice. Selvam and Vallejo (2025) argue that AI-supported language learning offers substantial opportunities for personalised instruction but simultaneously raises concerns regarding algorithmic bias, privacy protection, linguistic equity, and transparency.

Similarly, Alsharefeen and Al Sayari (2025) demonstrate that higher education institutions require agile academic integrity policies capable of responding to emerging AI technologies while promoting responsible educational practices. Although AI was not a major focus of the empirical studies reviewed, these developments indicate that future blended language education policies should proactively incorporate ethical guidelines governing responsible AI integration alongside established pedagogical principles.

The evidence suggests that the future success of blended language education in African higher education will depend less on expanding technological access alone and more on developing integrated institutional ecosystems that combine supportive educational policies, sustainable infrastructure, inclusive curriculum design, continuous teacher professional development, culturally responsive language pedagogy, and evidence-informed instructional practices. Such a holistic policy approach is likely to strengthen both the effectiveness and sustainability of blended language learning while supporting broader educational transformation across African higher education institutions.

Limitations of this Paper

This paper's limitations are substantial and should be stated plainly rather than minimized. The charted language classroom specific evidence base consists of only two primary sources, separated by more than a decade, drawn from a single country. This is a narrower evidentiary base than is typically considered sufficient even for a cautious scoping synthesis, and the conclusions offered here should be read as correspondingly provisional. The search process relied on a general academic web search tool rather than formal subscription databases, was conducted by a single reviewer without independent dual screening, and excluded at least two candidate sources, a Nigerian secondary level study and a Nigeria specific English language e-learning source whose accurate citation could not be confirmed, either of which might have altered this paper's conclusions had they been successfully verified and included. The Community of Inquiry framework's constructs were applied throughout as an external interpretive lens to studies not designed around them, a legitimate scoping review practice but one that necessarily limits every claim made about social, cognitive, and teaching presence in this context to the status of plausible inference rather than measured finding.

Conclusion

This systematic review synthesised the available evidence on blended learning in African higher education language classrooms through the Community of Inquiry (Col) framework. The findings demonstrate that blended learning consistently enhances learner engagement, communicative competence, academic performance, collaboration, and learner autonomy. Successful implementation, however, depends not only on technology but also on effective instructional design, active teacher facilitation, institutional support, and meaningful learner interaction. The review identifies teaching presence as the most critical factor underpinning effective blended learning, while social and cognitive presence contribute to collaborative and reflective learning experiences. Despite these positive outcomes, implementation across African universities continues to be constrained by inadequate digital infrastructure, unreliable internet connectivity, limited institutional capacity, and insufficient professional development for educators. A major contribution of this review is the identification of an important theoretical and methodological gap. Although the reviewed studies report positive educational outcomes, few explicitly employ or measure the Community of Inquiry constructs using validated instruments. Consequently, current evidence provides only indirect insight into how teaching, social, and cognitive presence influence blended language learning within African higher education.

The review concludes that blended learning has considerable potential to transform language education across African universities when supported by sustained investment in infrastructure, faculty development, inclusive institutional policies, and contextually responsive pedagogical design. Future research should prioritise longitudinal, multi-institutional, and cross-country studies that explicitly operationalise the Community of Inquiry framework to generate stronger evidence for educational policy and practice.

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