USING BLENDED METHODS IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Annotation: This article describes Blended method and its use. Traditional face-to-face learning and e-learning settings are shared and combined to achieve the anticipated objectives.

Key words: approach, method, program, learning, teaching styles

Introduction

What are Blended methods? The emergence and growing popularity of the Internet have significantly changed the teaching and learning processes. It is significant to recognize that this concept is in a constant state of flux and evolution, requiring continuous revision as technology improves.

E-learning is commonly considered one of the most prominent trends to emerge from the Internet proliferation. At the same time, purely online courses and learning programs have been criticized for a low level of socialization as well as the lack of support benefits of traditional teaching styles and approaches. This discrepancy has led to a blended learning approach that combines both online and offline instruction. Given that the blended method concept is relatively new, there is still no consensus among researchers and scholars on what constitutes blended method. Defined blended method as "a combination of onsite face-to-face with online experiences to produce effective, efficient, and flexible method".

Historical Development Blended Method

Although this definition provides the reader with the main idea behind the blended learning concept, it does not consider its focus on personalization. Therefore, in addition to the notion of time and place flexibility, blended learning provides students with ample occasions to attain actual personalized instruction. Littlejohn and Pegler agreed that the nature of BL consists of contemporary learning that engages eLearning using information technology (IT) and interaction tools, such as online activities, where learners have the chance to communicate with the teacher and other students in the classroom.

Accordingly, both traditional **face-to-face** learning and e-learning settings are shared and combined to achieve the anticipated objectives. In assessing what is meant by the term blended method, it is found that its definition varies markedly. Besides, the

term is often misapplied to situations in which e-learning components are clumsily integrated into otherwise offline courses or where practice within the same session varies significantly among educators who have different attitudes toward digital education. For these commentators, a reconfiguring of digital education is required so that control over the social and interactive aspects of courses resides with learners rather than educators.

The interactional aspects of teaching and learning can be fostered organically by students rather than being corralled or ignored per the approach of different teaching figures. These commentators drew on variation theory, positing that, for learning to occur, "variation must be experienced by the learner. Without variation, there is no discernment, and without discernment, there is no learning. Discernment is at the core of our ways of experiencing the world" (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005, p. 22). It is emphasized that the effective integration of both types of learning: "thoughtful integration of classroom **face-to-face** learning experiences with online learning experiences" (p. 96).

BL is not just bringing technology into the classroom. It is not replacing textbooks with laptops or tablets. It is redesigning the instructional model, changing the way of working with students, and giving students more control. It is contended that it is crucial that both researchers and practitioners consider the meaning of the term blended learning in the context of ELT as well as having an appreciation of why there is a necessity to offer blended learning opportunities in language learning. It is equally significant to recognize the reasons behind using technology for teaching and learning, ranging from looking at the use of specific technology or technologies used within a particular area. It is concluded that a growing body of research exploring the notion of blended learning in languages falls into two distinct categories: comparison and non-comparison studies. She states that comparison studies look to compare the impact of blended learning courses and traditionally delivered courses.

Non-comparison studies concentrate exclusively on blended approach, concerning themselves with issues of course design, the implementation of blended learning programs, and the attitudes prevalent for teachers and learners towards a blended learning approach. Hockly observed that the prevalence of non-comparison studies could be rooted in the issues that arise due to comparing two different attitudes towards the delivery of learning programs in a meaningful way. She reported that the
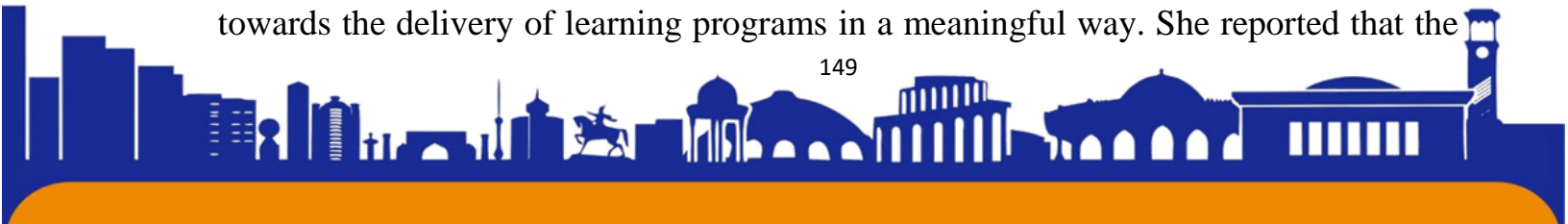
findings of existing studies are mixed, quoting Aguilar, who stated that some researchers had reported enhanced language learning as a result of exposure to a blended learning model. In contrast, others have concluded that there is no significant improvement compared to conventional teaching methods. It is also highlighted that some cultural considerations must be taken into account concerning the impact of blended learning; for example, studies and it is indicated that students might be reticent to engage in written discussions on the Internet due to a genuine fear of making mistakes.

The findings of these two studies suggest that the design of blended learning courses must consider a multitude of different factors that can impact language learning. It is generally agreed that the idea of blended learning rests on the idea that the technology should not displace the traditional knowledge, but should add a further dimension to the learning experience. Part of the value of blended learning is that mutual support engagements in the classroom and other offline contexts can transfer to the e-learning elements of the commitment and vice versa. Distance Learning Prewitt traced the development of distance education during the nineteenth Century, explaining that universities in Pennsylvania and Chicago led the revolution of distance learning by presenting correspondence courses that provided students with broad access to essential skills to develop their knowledge.

The first university course adopted distance education in several developments; for example, regarding correspondence courses, the first one was the Pitman Shorthand training program in the United States. It is listed four purposes of correspondence learning: students had specific circumstances that prevented them from continuing their education, students lived in remote areas, qualified students did not enroll because they could not find a place in universities. Some individuals had a desire to continue their education in a particular field of discipline.

The majority of attendees in such courses were female. Following the advent of radio, lectures broadcast in the 1920s attracted many students, particularly Wisconsin's School of the Air, as it was the first distance learning American program. In the 1970s, educational television (ETV) was beneficial mainly in rural and remote areas. During this period, the use of technological methods was without interactions. In the 1980s, the Open University in the United Kingdom served as an example to shift to distance
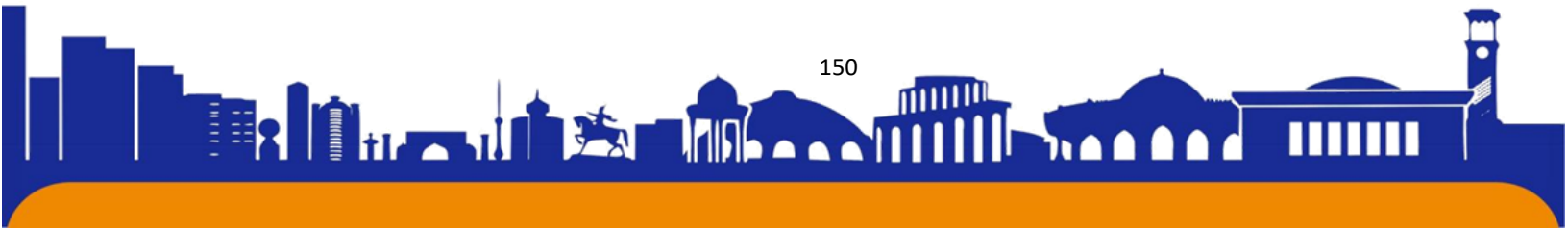
learning and improve the quality of teaching and learning. It mainly concerned adult distance learners.

This stage uses two methods of communications media, video conferencing and the Internet, to enhance learners' skills by increasing interactivity. It is added that the evolvement of online learning dramatically changed the nature of education by improving communications to simplify collaborative interactions between learners: "the traditional sage-on-the-stage has been replaced with the guide-on-the-side" (p. 189). Besides, the widespread use of distance learning at the time resulted in the creation of some virtual universities, such as Jones International University (www.jonesinternational.edu), the first completely online university, and Western Governors' University, which aimed to develop students' aptitudes. The following paragraph presents some definitions of distance learning. An expansive definition of distance education can still account for much of the technology-enabled learning pedagogy in use today. Sauve used the term distance education to refer to "an umbrella concept covering correspondence courses, televised teaching, radiobroadcast, open learning, computer-assisted instruction, individualized learning and self-learning" (p. 102). This definition considers the primary purpose of distance learning as a teaching method containing several technological communications.

Similarly, Greenberg defined distance education to refer to "a planned teaching-learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning" (p. 36). This definition is close to Willis's description of distance education as "[a] basic level... [and] takes place when a teacher and student(s) are separated by physical distance, and technology (i.e., voice, video, and print) is used to bridge the instructional gap" (p. 4). This means students and teachers are geographically distant, and learners work independently with the learning materials.

Distance education opened opportunities to women and persecuting minority ethnic groups, changing the culture of campus life. required further investigation. This is emphasized these issues and merged the two separate aims—that of changes like teaching approaches and modifications in how teachers teach and learners learn. Besides, they noted that many studies concentrated on the former, but not on how this teaching happens. They concluded that the potential for technology to have a transformational impact on teaching and learning has not yet been realized in research
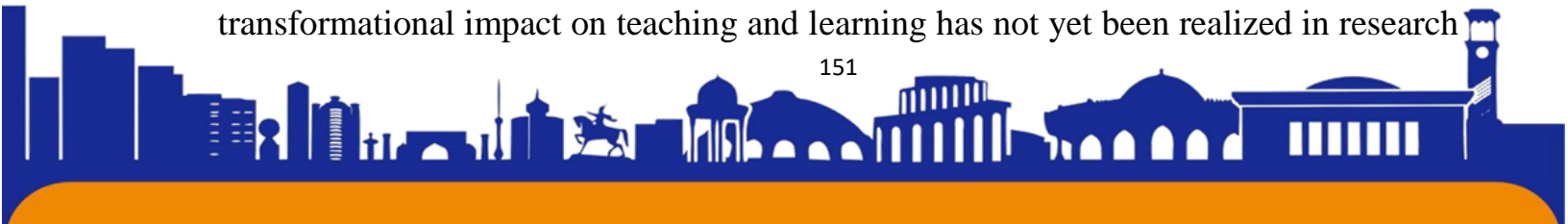
as most studies focus upon the reproduction or reinforcement of existing practice. They also highlighted the fact that research needs to be carefully targeted and indeed analyzed within a specific educational context to ascertain whether learning has been transformed.

One of the most influential organizations in distance education is the UK's Open University, which has established a global reputation for distance learning from its origins as a correspondence school through cutting-edge online and blended learning opportunities. Indeed, Daniel pointed out that the Open University initially lacked prestige because of its widening participation agenda—indeed, it still accepts many students without traditional qualifications—but the quality of education soon established its status.

The Rationale of Blended Methods

With this rise in the status of a technology-focused university came the growth of the state of online education such that, today, world leaders in training, such as Harvard and Yale, now offer some of the best online, and even blended, learning opportunities. Indeed, these highly elite universities offer these courses free to anyone who wants to study them and, in many cases, also invite the public to campus or offer tutorials, thereby demonstrating the potential for online learning to democratize education. However, the dominance of these English-speaking institutions has arguably led to idiosyncratic practices in distance learning, which neglect parallel innovation in Eastern Europe and Asia. Nevertheless, these examples of the Open University and the Harvard and Yale collaboration through EdX also reflect historical trends in distance education.

Expanding participation becomes inextricably linked with very high-quality provision. Although some initial distance education provision was intended as a next-best alternative for those living in remote areas or otherwise unable to come to campus or find a place, widening participation soon showed just how many people could benefit from and enrich the university experience. The Rationale of Blended Learning One explanation for shifting to the blended learning approach is that it allows for creating autonomous or self-directed learners.

Blended learning permits the learner to become engaged in the construction and the use of the knowledge, rather than acting as passive absorbers. It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by autonomy and self-directed learning. It is given that
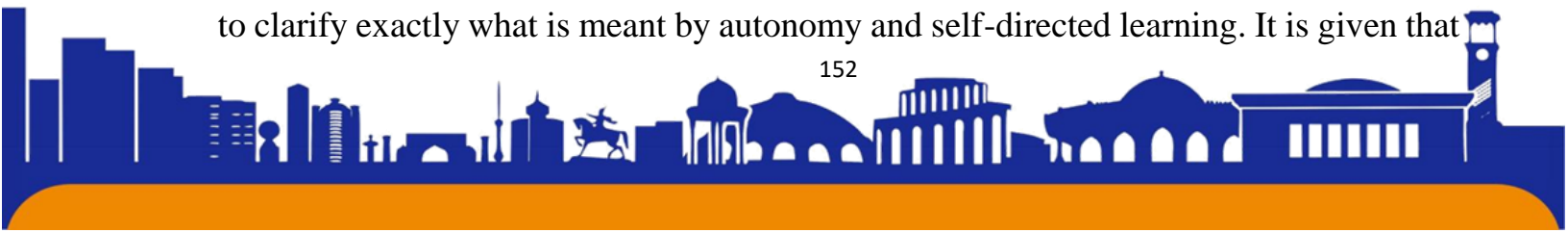
his definition of the former as "the capacity of detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (p. 15). Another definition as a "procedure where the learner considers and decides on the learning topic based on his/her own interests and abilities" (p. 156). In settings of blended learning, where the teacher is physically absent for a large part of the time, two essential issues must be considered: First, the design of materials and activities must be clear and purposeful; second, the teacher's role is crucial in encouraging and supporting learners in their learning decisions and choices. This view is supported, who claimed that it is challenging for learners to exhibit autonomy without teachers' intervention and guidance.

Furthermore, it has commonly been assumed that learners, who can accomplish further efforts to develop their learning skills will only profit from the useful outcomes of self-directed learning. Supporting this view, asserted that, when an institution decides to adopt self-directed learning (SDL) approach, they have to consider heterogeneity and individual skills differences between students. The authors conducted a research project in an undergraduate medical program in India to compare two groups of students in terms of their exam scores by using a t-test; the first group was taught by SDL as a part of their learning method whereas the second one was prepared using a conventional approach.

The result indicated that not all students could benefit from SDL; only good students with excellent learning skills could become capable self directed learners. Another study of Austrian university students and their use of modern technology in independent settings led her to make the case that there should be a higher degree of attention given to online, informed methods of learning the English language. Her research indicated that online learning resources are of great value to students, not only in terms of the practical benefits to their language learning but also for improving their digital literacy and in encouraging self-directed learning, which will be essential for their future learning practices Much of the current literature on blended learning pays particular attention to the rationale for choosing it by large numbers of learners.

Experimental study set out to examine the efficacy of using BL to support self-directed learning within language skills among 60 undergraduate students in Thailand enrolled in a communicative business English module. In terms of academic listening skills, the results indicated that online supplementary materials provided in BL offered more positive advantages by supporting time flexibility, which allowed students to

practice listening at any time convenient to them as well as take the responsibility for their learning, which students strongly appreciated.

The flexibility of time and place, where every student chooses the time and place that suits him or her, is considered a vital. This is undoubtedly true in the case of adult learners who have to balance their jobs and families with their studies. Students who live far from the university or have other responsibilities that prohibit them from attending class illustrate this clearly. Such flexibility and approachability provided by blended learning have enabled more learners to access higher education, regardless of geographical location and culture. Much can be learned from previous studies and experiences of utilizing online and digital language learning and blended learning. It can support flexible pedagogies and provide enhanced choices for learners in terms of where they learn, the pace at which they learn, and their mode of learning. Each of these things can be supported through appropriate approaches utilizing modern computer technology on campus, at the workplace, or in the home. He observed that the use of technology in people's lives is nothing new in the modern age.

However, technology can enable the use of a diverse range of approaches in the delivery and assessment of courses. Researchers have recently shown an increased interest in describing the role of blended learning in enhancing student engagement. Furlong and Christenson defined student engagement as "a concept that requires psychological connections within the academic environment the respondents demonstrated a higher level of self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and flexibility. These findings can be explained by the fact that, in such an environment, students can spend a significant amount of time reading, watching lectures, and preparing before attending face-to-face lectures. A highly relevant empirical study on the relationship between the blended learning approach and student outcomes was conducted. The researcher investigated the level of satisfaction and commitment of 100 Saudi higher education students with a blended elearning program.

By employing both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, it is found that those students who were enrolled in a blended education program demonstrated better academic results in terms of their grade point average scores as well as higher levels of commitment. Empirical findings, not all students were satisfied with the online study courses, which negatively affected their willingness to stay in blended learning as well as to comply with its requirements. These outcomes

can be partly explained by such factors as the educational approach taken by the instructor, the quality of the Internet connection, and students' attitudes towards and perceptions of blended learning.

Following, the holistic learning theory, the effectiveness of the learning process significantly depends on students' characteristics, including emotions, imagination, and intellect. Each of these elements should be activated to ensure that the learning process is effective. The significance of blended learning lies in the fact that it involves a broader range of learning methods and channels than traditional learning, more significantly contributes to the development of students' skills, and can evoke positive emotions. From this vantage point, it is relevant to state that blended learning is more effective in activating the previously mentioned elements of students' personality compared to conventional approaches to learning.

At the same time, four researchers reported no significant difference in examination scores and course evaluations between those students who had completed traditional and blended courses. These findings may demonstrate that, although the mixed learning strategy can add to students' ability to attain their course goals, its effectiveness and contribution depend heavily on the context in which it is implemented.

Potential Challenges of Using Blended Method to Support English Language Skills Development

Recent research has tended to show that technology provides both opportunities and challenges for students and institutions. For students, the opportunity to use technology and a blended learning approach allows them to have an element of control over how, when, and where they learn while enabling them to personalize their learning to the extent that they can navigate their way through learning materials with the support of systems suited to their style of learning. This flexibility of education is also vital to settings which offer this type of approach, particularly concerning part-time and, or distance learners, although challenges are faced in terms of the delivery of safe, collaborative learning environments allowing the maximum use of resources while also controlling and regulating the potential for plagiarism.

Students who are learning English as a second language also face challenges in terms of the use of the internet for supplementary reading. This is investigated the perceptions of second language learners towards TESLrelated hypermedia reading
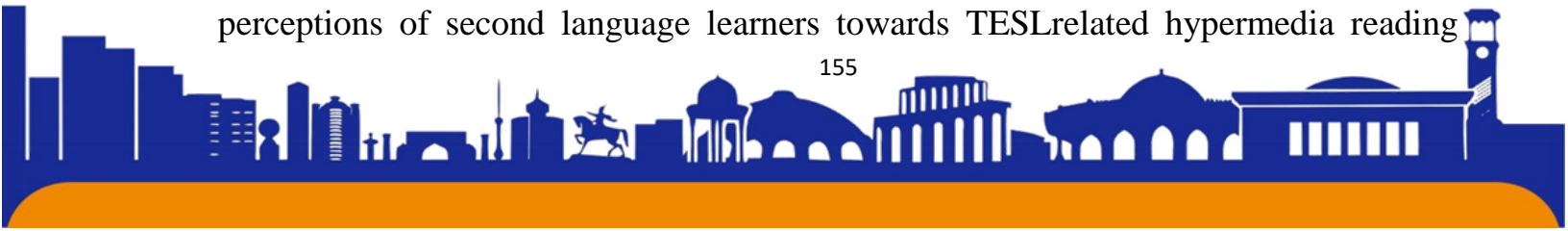
materials and factors impacting their reading comprehension. Utilizing the Think Aloud Protocol, reflective notes, and semi-structured interviews as data collection methods, the authors identified a number of factors affecting students' reading comprehension. Both the design and display of reading materials were found to be necessary, particularly in terms of long texts; the participants felt that it would help their reading comprehension if illustrations, diagrams, pictures, tables, videos, and audio materials were also made available with the text. They also highlighted the usefulness of glossaries to their comprehension.

The participants noted being distracted by advertisements on websites, poor internet connections, and the easy accessibility of social media websites, which had a detrimental impact on their reading comprehension. Another challenge identified by Kintu, Zhu, and Kagambe (2017) is matching students with appropriate courses to meet their specific characteristics and needs.

Conclusion

Equally important is the balance between face-to-face and online activities and, or time to ensure that all students are catered to. Some will prefer to work as an individual, alone at their own pace, whereas others will value the interaction that occurs in face-to-face encounters in the classroom. Some issues need to be addressed and/or resolved, such as ensuring that the library facilities are capable of delivering this type of approach towards the curriculum, that online materials are suitably supportive of the students required to access them, and that the design of blended learning approaches take into account students; preferred learning methods, the assessment of their courses, and the workload required to be successful.

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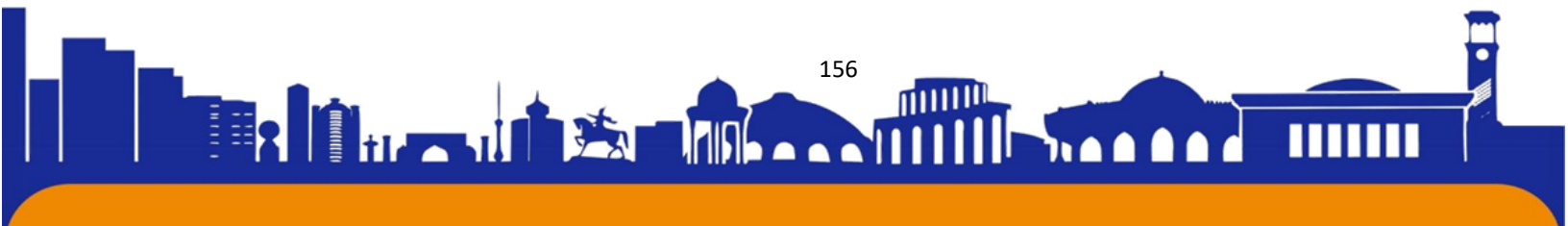
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