

## The Role of Blended Learning in Teaching English at Under Graduate Level

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### Abstract

In order to be successful in their teaching, teachers always look for different ways to increase the quality of their teaching. These days the use of computers and new technologies play pivotal role in teaching a foreign language, particularly English. In this situation computer-based distance learning courses that are supported by e-learning have emerged. E-learning is also exploited in the 'blended learning'. The term 'blended learning' is defined as 'a combination of online learning and face-to-face learning'. This has been defined in different ways by different people. Blended Learning instruction is a new teaching and learning approach that is being promoted at many higher educational institutions and universities at under graduate level, involving an integration of learning technologies and face-to-face teaching. It emerges as one of the most widespread teaching modalities used nowadays in the educational field, mainly by Universities and Higher Education Institutions mainly at under graduate level. Based on the concept of blended learning, it can be assumed that the introduction of this form in teaching and learning process can improve the efficiency of the educational process in a changing standard of modern education. So it is hoped that the blended learning approach is likely to emerge as the predominant instructional model in the future particularly at under graduate level.

**Key words:** teaching, computers, blended learning, e-learning

In order to be successful in the process of their teaching, teachers always look for different ways to increase the quality of their teaching. These days the use of computers and new technologies play pivotal role in teaching a foreign language, particularly English. In this connection, Brown says 'Teachers of English have a mission to help everyone in the world to communicate with each other and solve global problems. Of course, this is so because of the global status of English' (Brown, 1991). In this situation, computer-based distance learning courses have emerged. 'One of the supports of the distance learning is e-learning. Sometimes e-learning is also exploited in the so-called 'blended learning'.

The term blended learning originated in 'the business world in connection with corporate training' (Sharma and Barrett, 2007), then 'was employed in higher education' (MacDonald, 2006), and lastly it appeared in language teaching and learning. The research on blended learning reveals that this type of learning is used to increase the quality of learning. As opined by Dziuban, et al, 'Many researchers believed that blended learning is an essential learning process to enhance the efficiency and quality of learning because the blended learning supports all the benefits of pedagogical approaches that combine effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technological enhance active learning possibilities of the online environment' (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004, P.2).

The term 'blended learning', in general, is defined as 'a combination of online learning

and face-to-face learning'. However, this has been defined in different ways by different people. Blended learning has been described as 'a pedagogical approach that combines effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment' (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004). Graham considers 'blended learning as an approach, and defines it as a learning approach that combines different delivery methods and styles of learning. The blend could be between any forms of instructional technology (e.g., Videotape, Web-based learning, CD-ROM, etc.)' (Graham, 2006). Rooney said, 'Appearance of the information technologies in teaching foreign languages led to appearance of a relatively new method, called blended learning. The term is most commonly defined as a combination of online and face-to-face instruction' (Rooney, 2003). Lieser & Taff define as, "Technology has been used inside and outside of the classroom for teaching and learning in many ways. Blended learning is a formalized model that provides individualized learning for students using a combination of face-to-face and technology-based learning in a planned, systematic way" (Lieser & Taff, 2013). Harvey elaborates, "The amount of technology used and time for students to spend with the technology depends on the implementation of the blended learning model. Blended learning is a flexible approach that combines face-to-face teaching/learning with remote (usually internet-based) learning" (Harvey, 2004–9). Bliuc et al. regards blended learning as the set of "learning activities that

involves a systematic combination of face-to-face interactions and technologically-mediated interactions between students, teachers, and learning resources” (Bliuc et al, 2007, P. 234). Based on the definition by C. Graham “three components of blended learning can be singled out:

- face-to-face learning that represents a traditional format when instructors and students meet during classes;
- self-study learning that assumes different types of activities, such as search on the Internet, webquests, etc, performed by students unassisted;
- online collaborative learning – an online cooperative work of students and instructors in forms of webinars, wikis, Skype conferences, etc.” (Graham, 2005).

The role of blended learning in teaching English at under graduate level is useful, and blended learning facilitates the students acquire language with utmost interest. According to Thorne ‘blended learning is the most logical and natural evolution of our learning and it suggests an elegant solution to the challenges of tailoring learning and development to the needs of learners. Thus, blended learning represents an opportunity to integrate the innovative and technological advances offered by online learning with the interaction and participation offered in the best of traditional learning. Blended Learning emerges as one of the most widespread teaching modalities used nowadays in the educational field, mainly by Universities and Higher Education Institutions’ (Thorne, 2003). Blended

Learning instruction is a new teaching and learning approach that is being promoted at many higher educational institutions and universities at under graduate level, involving an integration of learning technologies and face-to-face teaching, and it can not only hone the English language proficiency of learners, but also allow them to have more access to the language of native speakers.

Previous studies investigating the effectiveness of the blended learning approach have reported that ‘it meets the educational needs of students such as enhancing flexibility and convenience, allowing the attainment of higher achievement and attitude levels, and improving language learning skills as well as developing critical thinking skills (Lee & Chong, 2007). Another aspect of blended learning is whether it deepens learning engagement and increases motivation in learning. Sucaromana finds that ‘students who are taught in a blended learning environment have higher levels of intrinsic motivation, a better attitude toward the learning subject, and even better satisfaction with the learning climate than a face-to-face only environment. However, studies have reported on students’ apprehension, anxiety and confusion when interacting with online materials’ (Sucaromana, 2013). This type of experience is very common when students have no sufficient exposure to technological innovations in the classrooms. Moreover, ambiguous instructions and guidelines may cause students to become lost and disengaged, and so innovations involving technology should be integrated appropriately and effectively within

classrooms in order to improve and maximize the learning outcomes of the students. This study posits that the incorporation of self-access online reinforcement exercises would have positive pedagogical impact on them.

The role of teacher in implementing this blended learning approach is prominent. With reference to English Language Teaching using blended approach, Sharma suggests 'for blended learning to be effective the two component parts should be integrated with the technology complementing and not replacing the efforts of the teacher' (Sharma, 2007). According to Lewis, "technology is nothing without a teacher and a plan" (Lewis, 2009, P. 9).

Language learning is such a complex process that it is impossible to offer a single solution to all our problems, and to arrive at the perfect approach or technique for language learning in Indian context. Perhaps the best method is the one which works, and this varies from context to context. Any method which creates conditions for learning to take place is good. It should enable the learner to acquire the strategies of learning rather than merely equipping him with knowledge. What is important for the teacher, therefore, is to find out what approach and what method will enable him to realize a particular objective under a set of particular circumstances. Since it is felt that blended learning at under graduate level is useful, it is preferable that teachers and educationalists can make it an integral part in their curriculum. Focus should be drawn to learning center instruction. Blended learning offers approaches to solving one of the main tasks of modern traditional

education, i.e. the implementation and development of each student's potential abilities. Based on the concept of blended learning, it can be assumed that the introduction of this form of training to teaching practice can improve the efficiency of the educational process in a changing paradigm of modern education. The blended learning approach is likely to emerge as the predominant instructional model in the future.

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