



Blended learning in English language teaching: Characteristics adoption, effectiveness, and limitations

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Abstract

This study aims to critically investigate the characteristics and adoption of blended learning as a strategy applied in English Language Teaching. It also aims to give a rich discussion on the effectiveness and limitations of the strategy based on varied literatures and studies conducted locally and internationally. Moreover, it seeks to find solid evidence on the effectiveness and identify limitations of this teaching-learning approach to improve the quality of education and meet the educational needs of the students. Qualitative research design was utilized to analyze and interpret the gathered data through a systematic review. A systematic review answers the defined research question through the collection and summarization of all empirical evidence from studies that fit the specified eligibility criteria. Only journals or research studies published at least 10 years ago were included in this study. The study revealed that characteristics of blended learning include the usage of two modes in teaching such as the traditional and ICT modes. Multicultural and multidimensional approaches of teaching and learning are emphasized. The teaching-learning process is child centered. Teachers and students adapt to the new strategy positively. Studies proved that blended learning is effective in teaching and learning English. Students' interest, attitude, motivation and perception toward the use of the traditional teaching strategies and manipulation of technology greatly affect their performance in English. However, computer literacy or limited ICT skills, internet connection, availability of computer, time management, misuse and underuse of technology are perceived to be the challenges and limitations of the strategy. It is therefore recommended that a systematic tool and tools online that can easily be accessed may be created. Trainings and workshops to improve teachers and students' ICT skills may be conducted for them to acquire the skills needed to effectively apply and implement the strategy in the English classrooms.

Keywords: blended learning, computer-assisted instruction, face-to-face interaction, adoption

1. Introduction

In recent years, biased ferrite material for microstrip antenna structures has attracted noticeable attention. Ferrite is one of the important magnetic materials which are used as in both Developments in the field of education come with the changing times. Nowadays, the use and integration of technology as an aid in teaching and learning made noise in the field of education. Universities and other higher education institutions are now integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to improve the quality of education and to address the educational needs of 21st-century learners. With the hope to escalate students' success and satisfaction, teachers are challenged to combine the conventional method of teaching and information technology.

Blended learning (BL), in the context of English Language Teaching, is a teaching pedagogy which involves a thoughtful integration and mixture of teaching strategies and media through the use of traditional language teaching and modern technology through computer assisted language learning (CALL) where they complement the limitation of one another. It is perceived to maximize and improve students' learning in a way that students are given a wider arena for learning. Teachers take advantage of students' interest in technology to provide more meaningful experiences through this new strategy.

Balci (2017) ^[4] defined and described blended learning as a strategy where teachers use different modes, media and strategies to enhance learning. He emphasized that in this approach, students use their printed materials or textbooks

in the classroom and are expected to log in the online operating system for practice and revision purposes. Teachers also sign up for them to guide and check their students' improvement. According to Claypole (2003), blended learning has been applied in English language teaching since many teachers in the past already attempted to mix the traditional and modern way of teaching. In general, it is a teaching model or strategy which includes more than one mode of delivery. It specifically refers to the teacher's use of varieties of media, mode, and strategies to maximize and improve students' learning. With this, it cannot be denied that blended learning has always been in the ELT world.

In the global scenario, it has been found generally that 21st century learners are not motivated to learn through the traditional mode of teaching, rather they only choose to learn to use the technology. In Saudi for instance, Khan (2013) found out that students are friendly with computer-assisted instruction. On the case of the KAU Community College, students show more motivation in manipulating the computer and engaging into online learning or e-learning mode of education. The teachers also observed that most students were positive towards the utilization of electronic resources in the learning and teaching process.

The Philippines, in the light of the K-12 curriculum, adapt to the rapid changes and developments in education to be at par with other countries. According to Morales (2012), the first and only blended learning center in the Philippines started in 2007 as an after-school center. The center offered enrichment and plays activities for young students. Based on

parents' testimonies, their children enjoyed after-school activities more than their regular classes. The parents requested the center founder, Joanne Tupas- Parsons, to transform the center into a regular school (Rappler.com).

It has been observed that many Filipino teachers in higher institutions are starting to adopt the strategy in the hope of improving the quality of education in the midst of globalization. With the implementation of the CMO on Outcomes-based Education in the Philippines, many teachers in universities and colleges sought for innovation in teaching their field of expertise. However, many schools still find not applicable due to some limitations in terms of the teachers' competence in using computer-based instruction, availability of internet and computer, students' computer skills, and more.

The studies on this strategy are very limited as of this time, most especially in the Philippines. In fact, there is no study in the country conducted to investigate on the teachers' adoption of Blended learning and its effectiveness in teaching English as a Second Language. It is in this premise that this study would like to focus on the adoption, effectiveness and the challenges in the application of this strategy in an English Classroom. Since researches on blended learning is in its infancy, this will add to the literature which could be the bases of further studies.

2. Theoretical background

The main theories related to blended learning are the theories of Ajzen and Fishbein (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Connectivism by Seimens and Downes (2009).

TRA and TAM take into consideration the behavior elements in adopting technology. Both assume that someone who forms an intention to act will be free without limitation. TAM is used extensively in international researchers (Chen and Tseng, 2012), as well as in the context of this study. It deals with the prediction of acceptability of an information system. It explains the process of adoption and implementation of new technology among individuals is through the two factors such as the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. In addition, it also used to explore the beliefs, attitudes and intentions in the use of a specific technology.

The theory of Connectivism (Seimens & Downes, 2009) is a learning theory in the digital age which was developed to explain the impact of using the internet for people to share and learn information from people all around the world through the World Wide Web. It is a networked social learning. Some of the technologies used as a tool in this theory are the Web browsers, email, YouTube, wikis, online discussion forums, social networks and others which enables the users to learn and share information (Duke et.al, 2013).

These theories are connected to blended learning since this strategy focuses of the integration and use of technology in the classroom. Schools in the Philippines has been aiming for digitization especially the leading Universities. This strategy adheres to the idea of the two theories that through the use of technology in the classrooms, teachers will give the students the chance to guide and support the learning of the students by providing answers to any question as needed in a virtual classroom. With this, students are encouraged to search for information on their own and share what they found out online. Like what the connectivism theory

imphasized, through the strategy, the students are empowered thus making them responsible for what they learn and how they share the information.

3. Methodology

This study employed the qualitative descriptive method design which aims to critically analyze and interpret data from varied local and international journals. Qualitative research design is completely derived and is generally characterized by collecting and analyzing data simultaneously. A systematic review method was used. A systematic review answers the defined research question through the collection and summarization of all empirical evidence from studies that fits the specified eligibility criteria. Journals or research studies must be published at least 10 years ago. Studies were selected and evaluated based on its accuracy, appropriateness and relevance to the study conducted. The objectives of this study were given importance in choosing the published journals as well. Fuzzy logic was used to search for specific articles through search terms. Titles and abstracts related to the characteristics, adoption, effectiveness and limitations of blended learning are searched. The entire article was read as well to validate its content. Data are appraised critically by evaluating the method, population size of the respondents, findings and results. Journals or articles which are not related to the study are rejected. This study is limited to studies published online. The data are extracted based on the objectives of the study. The data are then synthesized. Thematic analysis was used in reporting the results of the study.

4. Results and discussion

Nature and characteristics of blended learning

Nowadays, universities worldwide experience a paradigm shift through the gaining interest of educators in Blended Learning. This strategy is perceived to provide learners with more differentiated lessons in learning environment that is student-centered. Despite its popularity, no single definition can perfectly define this term because various educators, researchers and practitioners give different interpretations. Researchers such as Lalima & Dagwal (2017)^[15]; Mabuan & Ebron (2016)^[17] and Kintu, *et al.* (2017) all agreed to the definition that blended learning is an innovative strategy which mixes the traditional face-to-face teaching which allows teachers and students to interact in a four-cornered classroom and ICT supported learning where students have the chance to manipulate technology and learn independently at their own pace, place and time of convenience.

According to Hockley (2018), blended learning was first used in English Language Teaching in 2007. Despite the fact that it is now widely used, no single definition can fully define the term since there were a lot of interpretations given or proposed by various researchers and practitioners. Researchers namely, Lalima & Dagwal (2017)^[15], Mabuan & Ebron (2016)^[17], and Kintu, *et al.*(2017) defined blending learning as a complementary innovative approach combining the traditional teaching and ICT- aided learning where students get to experience learning in the classroom in a formal or non- formal discussion and learn independently at their own pace and time at home which gives them more chances to review, recheck and study lessons and activities they are expected to accomplish in a

specific period of time. Higgins and Gomez (2014) [10] emphasized that this approach is transforming the process of learning and teaching in higher education. In the study of Lalima and Dangwal (2017) [15] titled: "Blended Learning: an Innovative approach", they gave the seven characteristics of blended learning. First, students and teachers have the chance to choose between the two modes: the traditional mode or the ICT supported teaching learning. This also means that teachers are well-versed in both areas making her play a diverse role. The choice depends largely on the lesson's objectives. Second, students can interact with each other in the classroom and get full experience using new technology as well. Thus, students' knowledge becomes wider. Third, students get trained in different life skills such as love, empathy, patience, critical thinking and decision-making. Fourth, the cognitive, physical and

emotional personality of the students are developed. Collaborative projects and classroom performances also develop the students' cognitive, affective and physical domain. On the other hand, experiences online though a social group help in developing their values. Fifth, Students are widely exposed to a modern perspective with a human touch at the same time though the presence of the teacher. Sixth, multicultural and multidimensional approach to teaching learning process are emphasized since students may exchange ideas anywhere in the world. Lastly, this approach makes teaching and learning process child centered where students learn independently on their own with the guidance of the teacher. The following conceptual framework summarizes the idea of blended learning.

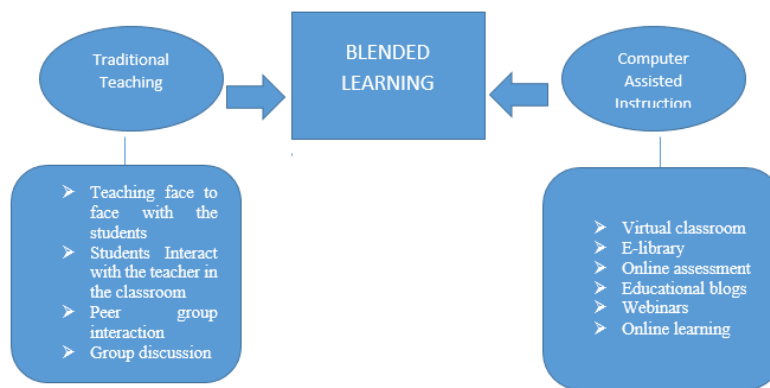


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

Adoption of blended learning in the English classrooms of higher education institutions

According to Liu and Yu (2012) [16], many universities here and abroad have developed and designed web-based instruction system for teachers and students through blended learning which emerged to address the need to continually improve the quality of teaching and learning English effectively and efficiently.

In a study on Faculty Training for blended learning in North Central University by Grosz (2012), it was found out that teachers have a positive perception of blended learning and are willing to adopt this strategy for they perceived it to be better than the traditional teaching. In addition, Dullien (2016) [7] of the same university also indicated that the integration of technology in higher education Blended Language Learning (BLL) environments is apparent at the entry, adoption and adaptation levels.

Bath and Burke (2010) as cited in Balci (2017) [4], emphasized that teachers, as designers and facilitators of learning, find ways to rethink, redesign and update their course delivery. They consider the effect of technology everywhere in the world today. This means that blended learning is an evolution of learning which has already been expected to happen. Moreover, Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) as cited in Balci (2017) [4] found out six reasons why higher education institutions have to study blended learning. First, because of the richness of the teaching pedagogy; second, the accessibility of knowledge; third, it emphasizes social interaction; fourth, it develops personal agency; fifth, it produce good results without spending a lot of money; and lastly, there is ease in revision.

In the case of institutional adoption of blended learning, Brown (2016) stated that instructors of colleges and universities are now utilizing online tools into the traditional teaching practices. With this, it was predicted that blended learning will soon become the "new traditional model" of teaching. Moreover, he indicated that there are six factors influencing the teacher' adoption of blended learning. These are the interaction of faculty members with technology, workload, school environment, student interaction, teaching attitudes & beliefs of teachers and the professional development opportunities. This shows that a lot of factors may affect the teacher's adoption in higher education institutions. These factors are expected to be considered in the different studies on blended learning strategy.

In the past decade, international studies were conducted to examine the adoption of blended learning in Higher Education Institutions.

A study in Southern African University conducted by Ustun (2018) entitled: "Moving Toward Blended Learning: A Multiple Case Design based Research Study in Higher Education" revealed that instructors have an overall positive toward the adoption of blended learning in their classes. The study also showed that teachers are satisfied in teaching the course applying blended learning. This implies that instructors consider the application of this strategy as an innovation in their respective classes and sees it to be advantageous.

Slechtova, *et al.* (2015) in their study entitled: "Blended Learning: promising Strategic Alternative in Higher Education", they found out that the adoption of blended learning transforms traditionally passive teaching style to a

more flexible and active teaching experience. Findings also show that appropriately trained, institutionally supported and fully equipped teachers can address more students with lower expenses and higher quality. This shows that teachers are positive in the adopting blended learning. However, they still need to be trained to be equipped with the skills needed with the support of the institution.

In the study of Gomez (2015), the findings revealed that teachers think that students are still not prepared for blended learning. He also found out that some of the critical factors in the higher education institutions' adoption of blended learning are the engagements of students and teachers, subjects taught by the teachers and the support the faculty gets from the school administrators.

Tshabalala, *et al.* (2013) also conducted a study on the academic staff's challenges in adopting blended learning and found out that there are variety of perceptions which are hindering the teachers from adopting blended learning. These are the electronic learning and the policy which underlies in the adoption of blended learning, support from the institution, skills in manipulating technology, and inadequate computer access by the students. The findings show that readiness, technological skills and support from the school administrators are important in the successful adoption of blended learning in higher education institutions.

Another study entitled: "Faculty Training for Blended Learning in Higher Education" conducted by Grosz (2012), faculty are found to have a positive view on blended learning and showed willingness to adopt the strategy since they see it as superior to traditional teaching. Like the previous studies, faculty believed that they need training that will allow them to have time to reflect with their colleagues. This means that collaboration among teachers is also important in the successful adoption of the hybrid strategy.

In the field of English Language Teaching, limited studies were conducted to critically investigate the influences of blended learning among the English teachers in Higher Education Institutions. Some of these are the studies of Dullien (2016)^[7], Burnett (2015) and Larsen (2012).

The study of Dullien (2016)^[7] on the Integration of Technology in Higher Education Blended Language Learning in North Central University revealed that teachers are found to be at the entry adoption and adaptation levels. This implies that teachers need training to professionally develop blended language learning. Moreover, the study shows that technology integration development and training are needed to successfully adopt and apply blended learning in English classrooms.

Another study by Larsen (2012) on teachers and students' perspectives on a blended learning intensive English writing course showed a positive result. The study proved that it is very beneficial if teachers plan collaboratively and were given technical and pedagogical support. Because of this, teachers were found to provide assistance to students personally, guide them and keep track with their individual improvement and utilize more differentiated materials. The study implies that trainings, support and camaraderie of teachers are the factors in making the adoption of BL successful.

Generally, the studies on the adoption of Blended Learning in Higher Education Institutions identified the challenges and the positive results as perceived by the teachers as the

designers, facilitators and evaluators of the new teaching strategy. The challenges which are consistently shown in the studies are the lack of technological trainings to improve technological skills and absence of institutional support from administrators. On the positive side, it was shown that teachers have a positive attitude and perception on the adoption of BL. If collaboration is present among stakeholders, improving the quality of education in the Philippines through this new teaching and learning strategy is possible.

Impact and effectiveness of blended learning on students' Achievement in English

A number of local and international studies were conducted to find out the impact and effectiveness of blended learning on students' achievement in English. Some of these are the studies of Banditvilai (2016)^[5] of Kasetsart University, Thailand, Liu & Yu (2012)^[16] Dalian University Technology, China, Balci (2017)^[4] of Dokuz Eylül University, a school of Foreign Languages in Turkey, Khan (2014)^[13] from King Abdulaziz University Community College, Saudi Arabia, Karkour (2015)^[17] of Durham, USA and Mabuan & Ebron (2016)^[17] of Lyceum University Manila, Philippines. These researches employ the case study and qualitative method through surveys and interviews. College students are the respondents of all these studies.

Based on these studies, attitude and motivation of students' towards the blended ELT learning environment affect their achievement in English. According to Liu & Yu (2012)^[16] in their research, "Effectiveness Study of English Learning in Blended Learning Environment", students displaying more adaptive self-regulatory strategies have better learning efficacy and higher motivation for learning. The study also proved that students who learn English unwillingly have unsatisfactory performance. The Self- Access Learning System effectively increased the examination scores of the students.

Similarly, Khan (2013) in his research entitled: "Effectiveness of Blended Learning for Teaching English: An Exploratory Study", found out that students are very interested in interacting with computers and online mode of education which results to their positive attitude toward the use of e-sources. The study also revealed that through the different tools, blended learning was proven to be effective. Moreover, a study entitled: "Enhancing Students' Language Skills Through blended Learning" conducted by Bonditvilai (2016) proved that the practice of using online resources is directly beneficial in enhancing the students' language learning skills. Students were also found to become autonomous learners and were motivated to learn. According to Larsen (2012, as cited by Bonditvilai, 2016) students become more responsible for their own learning when they learn in an environment which they can be more autonomous and more focused.

In another study by Mabuan & Ebron (2016)^[17], they found out that using e-mail in the classroom as a part of blended learning helped develop students' interest and confidence in writing. It also enhanced their technological and social skills and improved their attitude toward English Language Learning. Karkour (2015)^[12] stated that text manipulation (TM) and blended learning are useful and effective ways to teach reading in a foreign language classroom.

Despite the perceived factors hindering the successful adoption of blended learning among English Teachers in

Higher Education Institutions, the study of Burnett (2015) entitled: "Assessing Blended Learning in Adult English as Foreign Language Learning", found out two positive results. First, Blended Learning (BL) improves EFL learning through utilizing varied modes and media in addressing different learning styles. Second, BL improves the EFL learning since it is found to be interactive and at the same time encouraging students to learn independently. Technology is still perceived by the teachers to be a challenge in adopting BL.

Limitations of blended learning

Many studies have already proved the effectiveness of blended learning in teaching and learning English. However, there were also challenges and downside of this approach that surfaced. This makes the limitations of this hybrid teaching learning strategy.

Limalima and Dagwal (2017) ^[15] found out that factors such as computer literacy, time management, internet connection and computer availability affect the effectiveness of blended learning strategy. This signifies that the success of blended learning in teaching the second language is dependent on the factors mentioned. Computer literacy plays a significant role in the success of the application of the strategy. Without the teachers and students' knowledge in manipulating the computer, blended learning is not possible. If teachers will not be properly oriented and trained, managing time for face-to-face interaction and providing activities to work on line may become a hindrance in accomplishing the target competencies on time. Furthermore, schools in rural areas may also have problems with the availability of computers and in accessing the internet. Purchasing a personal computer to do the tasks online may not be the priority of the family. If they can afford, problems may come with the signal and speed. Hence, it hinders the students to do the task at their own convenience at home defeating the purpose of the strategy.

In the study of Balci (2017) ^[4], the interview transcript revealed that students are favorable on the use of blended learning strategy. However, they are not satisfied with how it is implemented by teachers. The online tool also needs to be improved as well. Creating a systematic tool and tools online that can easily be accessed may help students do the task with competence. Before English teachers allow students to do language or speech activities online, guidelines and clear instructions must be given. He suggested that online tool should be well established and improved first since it is vital in the success of using the blended learning strategy.

In addition, Banditvilai (2016) ^[5] stated that in an online activity, students find it difficult to cope with the lesson due to the lack of actual face-to-face feedback from the teacher. Some students who were interviewed stated that e-learning can be used to aid students' learning. However, it should not be used to replace the valuable interaction between teachers and students. According them, human interaction provides a feeling of social connectedness which is not possible in virtual communication.

Furthermore, Mabuan and Ebron (2016) ^[17] found out in their study that the challenges students encountered in blended learning include absence and difficulty of internet access at home or in school, the lack of active participation, time consuming, misinterpretation of ideas, lacks immediate feedback and limited ICT skills. Internet service in the

Philippines is one of the slowest in the world thus creating one of the limitations of effectively adopting and implementing blended learning strategy in the country. If students are not properly guided, it might lead them to less participation in class. Misinterpretation of ideas may also happen in the absence of the teacher. ICT skills is seen to be very important in achieving the effectiveness of the strategy in teaching and learning.

Lastly, Higgins and Gomez (2014) ^[10], stated that instead of elevating learning, computer-assisted instruction, technology may become a distraction to the main goal of teaching and learning once students and teachers misuse or underuse its full potential. Common distractions and misuse may imply using technology may refer to all other activities not related to the activities needed to be done. Accessing social media sites while doing the online tasks may divide the focus and attention of the students. Therefore, discipline in the implementation of the strategy is very important to both teachers and students.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Generally, blended learning is a teaching pedagogy which involves a thoughtful integration and mixture of teaching strategies and media through the use of traditional teaching and modern technology where they complement the limitation of the other. It is perceived to maximize and improve students' learning in a way that students are given a wider arena for learning. Teachers make use of students' interest in technology to provide more meaningful experiences through this new strategy. It is widely used by the English language teachers especially in higher education.

Literatures and studies point out that English teachers and students are positive toward the adoption of the strategy in the classroom. Teachers and students perceived blended learning to be more effective than the traditional teaching. Factors influencing the teacher' adoption of blended learning include the interaction of faculty members with technology, workload, school environment, student interaction, teaching attitudes & beliefs of teachers and the professional development opportunities. Adoption of blended learning transforms traditionally passive teaching style to a more flexible and active teaching experience. However, some teachers think that students are still not prepared for blended learning. Electronic learning and the policy which underlies in the adoption of blended learning, support from the institution, skills in manipulating technology, and inadequate computer access by the student are the concerns of some educators.

Studies empirically proved that blended learning is indeed effective in teaching and learning English. Students' interest, attitude, motivation and perception toward the use of traditional teaching strategies and manipulation of technology greatly affect their performance in English. This implies that students who find meaning and joy while learning perform better in class. The positive attitude and high motivation of students only mean that they like to manipulate technology and learn through face-to-face interaction. As a result, they perform well in class when teachers use the blended learning approach.

Regardless of the fact that blended learning is proven to be effective, it is very important as teachers and practitioners of this approach to address the problems and challenges to ensure that solutions be provided. This is also to avoid

complications that will create further damage. Taking these factors into consideration would most benefit both the students and the teachers. This implies that English teachers' mastery and preparedness and the students' motivation, interest and attitude determine the success of this approach. Hence, English language teachers and learners should work hand in hand in elevating the quality education through the use of blended learning strategy. Teachers should use technology to motivate and inspire students to learn better. They should update their methods of teaching and learn how to teach the 5 macro skills to students in this generation. Learners on the other hand, should use technology responsibly. They have to learn independently and keep track with their own progress.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, this study offers the following recommendations:

1. Computer- Assisted Instruction trainings and workshops may be conducted to improve teacher's computer literacy.
2. Online tools or system in schools must be developed first in order to succeed in blended learning.
3. English Teachers and students' ICT skills may be evaluated and improved first before adopting the strategy in their classes.
4. Proper guidelines and policies may be established to effectively implement the strategy and to avoid further conflicts in schedules, submission of outputs, discussions, giving of feedbacks and guiding the students in the virtual classroom.
5. Studies on adoption and effectiveness of blended learning strategy in teaching English in Higher Education Institutions and Senior High School in the Philippines may be studied further.

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