

Practice and Principles of Blended Learning in ESL Pedagogy: Strategies and Techniques

Sohaib Alam

Research Scholar, Dept. of English, AMU, Aligarh, (UP)

Email: Sohaibalig80@gmail.com

Language is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow.

—**Oliver Wendell Holmes**

Abstract- *Blended learning combines the traditional face to face classroom experiences with new innovative learning technologies that have the potential to democratize language learning. It is supported by an intelligent adaptive technology and it enables to learn the learners as the learner learns. Adaptive learning technologies are the way through which it learns the learners as the learner wants to learn not as the teachers want to teach. It also understands the different level of understanding of the students and provides the materials accordingly. The concept of blended learning can be defined as using a computer and online materials and sources as a tool for learning and not necessarily learning about computers or online materials. A model of teaching that combines or merges classroom learning and online learning where the instruction of the lessons follow with organized teacher interaction; and, the discussion in the classroom with students and computing devices. The main focus of the study is to provide support system to the students in the classroom teaching. Blended learning offers flipping a classroom between face to face teaching and web based or online teaching. This paper aims to provide the idea of blending the language teaching in ESL classroom. It also explores the ways through which one can flip their classroom and incorporate blended learning in language pedagogy.*

Key Words: Blended Learning, Flipped Classroom, Classroom Community, Technological Competence

Introduction

English as a global language and its acceptance as lingua franca demand the teachers and students to become a proficient facilitator and active learner. The power of English language can be seen from its acceptance across the globe; wherever it goes it becomes the necessity in recent times. It is the language which creates a kind of bridge between the speaker and listener through which they can share their thoughts, emotions, information, and their feelings. However, the reality of the recent time is in a number of situations and occasions students feel problems and hesitation in uttering the appropriate language structures. For example, every linguistic form has its own function in usage; sometimes students are unable to perform in the real life spontaneous situation despite having the necessary competency. This happens because students are adapted what they have been taught throughout years in the classroom situation. The traditional methods of teaching English partially develop or

enhance the language skills and its usage in real-life situations. So, the questions arise that what is the solution? How can it be solved? And what are the measures that have to be taken care of?

Moreover, the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education has positively influenced language teaching across the world. It has simplified the process of learning through its flexibility of accessing anywhere in the world. Simplifying the ICT concept in education is receiving the information through the web, creating the educational stuff on the internet, transmitting among others, communicating with the peers, and collaborating with others to understand it in a better way. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) also exist in the segment of ICT pedagogy.

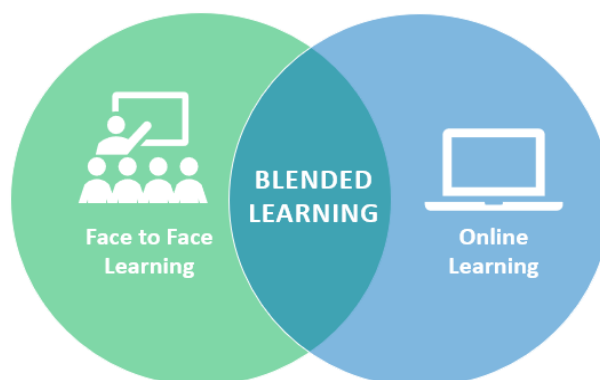
Additionally, there are two models of teaching and learning that have emerged or evolved in recent time. One is learning through the classroom teaching and other is teaching-learning through the internet. The argument is if there is any praxis of going with the mixture of both the platforms where the learning process of students can be intensified by the effective implementation of strategies in the classroom. Here comes the idea of Blended Learning in the classroom pedagogy because it blends or creates a mixture of both the models like traditional model of teaching in the classroom and modern idea of learning through the online materials and courses.

Blended Learning: Concept and Background

Blended learning combines the traditional face to face classroom experiences with new innovative learning technologies that have the potential to democratize language learning. It is supported by an intelligent adaptive technology and it enables to learn the learners as the learner learns. Adaptive learning technologies are the way through which it learns the learners as the learner wants to learn not as the teachers want to teach. It also understands the different level of understanding of the students and provides the materials accordingly. Through blended learning, one can support, scaffold learners irrespective of the different background knowledge and level of understanding. Moreover, blended learning helps to learn how to learn. One has to be conscious that getting the wrong answers does not mean failure; blended learning helps to unlock learning potential of the students. Amalgamation of online and web-based materials in the real classroom provides authenticity of the materials are adapted and graded by the teacher and also it provides the opportunity to have a range of activities, lessons, and topics which can be improvised and used as teaching materials. The students can make use of the content and develop their creativity and appropriateness of language usage in real authentic and spontaneous situations which they encounter in day to day life.

The concept of blended learning can be defined as using a computer and online materials and sources as a tool for learning and not necessarily learning about computers or online materials. A model of teaching that combines or merges classroom learning and online learning where the instruction of the lessons follow with organized teacher interaction; and, the discussion in the classroom with students and computing devices. This model of learning

is also known as Hybrid Learning. For example, a student can learn about grammar rules and its usage in the classroom and practice it online with the use of mobile applications and computer. This model of learning empowers students and provides confidence. Furthermore, by practicing the complex linguistic structure and their usage inside or outside classroom scenario minimizes the hesitation of the students.



Furthermore, the idea of using blended learning as a model of teaching in the classroom is a dire necessity in this era of globalization where English is not considered as only a language but a vehicle through which one can access to the entire world. It has also become the reason of employability nowadays and considered as a status symbol too. In a situation like this where traditional teaching approaches failed to develop the mutual intelligibility and confidence among students of using language in a spontaneous situation, there is a need to change the teaching practice and implement the new trends and techniques which can offer unique ways to express and learn the language in real-life situations. Blended learning as a teaching methodology has the capability to develop the confidence and creativity of the students and also able to promote students centred classrooms. It is a purely learner-centred approach which engages students in the classroom and outside to develop language skills.

Blended learning can be simply defined as the mixed approach of teaching which incorporates the traditional classroom teaching and online learning in the classroom. It can be explained as a combination of ‘face to face learning’ and ‘web-based learning.’ The idea of using blended learning in the classroom provides the opportunity to manufacture the learning experiences through the help of online contents and classroom discussions which offers the appropriacy and correctness in learning the language at the suitable time with necessary accuracy for every individual. The term ‘blended learning’ is commonly explained or understood as most an amalgamation of traditional teaching plus the use of internet-based teaching. White lock and Jelfs in their article entitled “Editorial: Journal of Educational Media Special Issue on Blended Learning” under a special issue of *Journal of Educational Media* on ‘blended learning’ introduced three definitions of the term ‘blended learning’:

- “The integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches;
- The combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment; and;

- The combination of a number of pedagogical approaches, irrespective of learning technology use.” (99-100)

Denise Whitelock and Anne Jelfs write an editorial in the Journal of Educational Media

Blended learning is the integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based on-line approaches. It is almost similar to the idea of face-to-face tuition with online interaction. This interpretation is in contrast to another description of blended learning, where the blend is more concerned with the combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment. Though, the focus of the blend characterizes the role of individual study and group work where both can be facilitated through the use of online tools. However, there is yet another definition of blended learning offered by Driscoll (2002) which suggests the blend can be a combination of a number of pedagogical approaches which is not necessarily dependent on the use of learning technologies. Perhaps an exploration of the collaboration afforded by blended learning systems can provide a great deal of acceleration of learning the language in the classroom. Blackboard is their major application for supporting computer-assisted collaborative learning and they report the group structure is a vital ingredient to successful group work. (99-100)

Since the world is becoming a global village and everything is available at one click, the only thing which is needed is to have a good internet connection and rest of the work will be done by the Google. Blended learning as a strategy and technique of teaching can become effective only if it is used consciously in the classroom pedagogy. It is capable of promoting and developing the group cohesion and collaborative learning. However, in ELT it can be effective through the integration of the two components i.e. online-learning and face-to-face learning. The idea is to complement each other with the proper use of technology not to replace the efforts of the teacher. Furthermore, the idea of blending refers to the use of ICT in the teaching methodology because it uses the online web-based learning model. Use of technological advancement and platforms which offers online distance mode learning has an impact on learning outcomes. Nowadays, even at university level use of ICT and language labs especially when it comes to English language teaching and training is rigorously used. It is a strong medium which offers authentic materials and native exposure to the non-native students and teachers. J M O'Toole and Douglas advocates “Student response to ICT in the classroom is mixed and it is not difficult to find e-learning enthusiasts but hints of concern about the technology are beginning to emerge” (180).

Form the above-discussed ideas it clearly hints about the technological competence of the students and teachers who want to use blended learning as a strategy of teaching in their classroom. In addition, a country like India which is in the transition phase of technological advancement in education, although partially in government-funded universities or some private university has proper infrastructure and latest technology in their classroom but in semi-urban or rural areas universities do not even have their language labs.

Technological Competence

Blended learning model is a mixed approach to teaching which uses online-learning and normal classroom pedagogy which it says face-to-face learning. The model demands

expertise in computer technology and how to use it for teaching-learning purposes. Because blended learning requires interaction through the internet and then the information gets incorporated in the classroom conversation for the doubt clearance and to understand the materials in a better way which is being circulated online for study. In this regard, **Martin Graff accentuates:** Web-based instructional systems and for some time such programmes have allowed the facility for online interaction between learners. It has been suggested that such interactions between learners in online programmes are vital to their success (for example, Shale & Garrison, 1990). Further studies also provide evidence to support the benefits of online collaborative environments. Citera (1998) suggests that online discussions encourage more reticent individuals to participate to a greater extent, and Warschauer (1997) advocates interaction in online environments, as there is less opportunity for intimidation between individuals and also less time pressure on them than in face-to-face settings. (203)

In the field of education, online-based tools or ICT serves as a force that changes the dynamics of traditional pedagogy. Internet and Google have changed the educational collaboration into the reality irrespective of the distance one can connect around the globe in one click using the internet. ICT has enabled the pedagogues around the world to connect and share their thoughts and information. In addition, Youtube tutorials are the best example for the computer-supported collaborative teaching. Face-to-face learning model does not provide much exposure and flexibility and it has been noticed that the classroom interaction some time get affected or diverted because of the heterogeneous nature of the classroom. Fleischman points out “in classroom discussion it is not routinely possible to depend on a lively diversity of viewpoints when engaging a particular text, case study or issue” (171). Online contents offer a diversity of choice and multiple interpretations to understand the content in a better way. Using technology just for the sake of using technology is wasteful if it does not transform your classroom or learning process of students.

New E-Learning Model

Blended learning can provide or open a wide range of content for access and introduce a new e-learning model for the teachers and practitioners. It can be helpful for ELT practitioners around the globe. The only thing that needed is to have a crystal clear model of teaching and supports form the institution for the use of technological tools. It can serve to bridge the gap between the students’ teacher and the course content. The idea is to embrace the knowledge of students and they will embrace their learning.

Classroom Community

The idea of blending the online and blackboard teaching develops classroom into a community which learns together. It promotes group cohesion and collaboration between the students. Apart from that, it offers opportunities which can serve as scaffolding and supports to learning English language where one can have a native language experience through the online content. It promotes virtual learning environment with the use of classroom teaching to develop constructive discussion and opens the gate to facilitate learning procedure. Pat Jefferies, Frances Grodzinsky, and Griffin Joe highlights:

Setting up an international collaboration using this same technology opened up even more opportunities for students to engage with students in other countries, thereby allowing them to gain first-hand experience of the issues raised in a global context. Using the asynchronous, text-based medium of computer conferencing also encouraged the students to reflect more closely on their own particular use of the technology. Students were, for example, required to negotiate at a distance, to take account of time/cultural/language differences and to use ICT in a professional manner. (192)

Blended learning is a collaborative approach to pedagogy which is supported by instructional technology and it is potentially capable of leading to a deeper understanding of language structure and usage. Nevertheless, it offers knowledge creation through exposure to online content and offline discussion and it develops the creativity of the students. Pat Jefferies, Frances Grodzinsky, and Griffin Joe comments:

Collaborative learning has a positive effect through social interaction during learning. Furthermore, collaboration with other students has been shown to stimulate activity, make learning more realistic and to stimulate motivation. It has also been suggested that dialogue is an important aspect of a rich learning experience and learning can occur not only through participation in dialogue but also through observing others participating in it. (193)

As far as accuracy and fluency are concerned, students develop gradually when they are exposed to the native content and imitate the same in the classroom. The role of the teacher is to moderate the information according to the contextual meaning and usage. Regardless of all the advantages, it has some drawback or there is required infrastructure for this model of teaching that is initially required in an institution or university wherever it is going to be used as a teaching methodology.

Issues and Challenges in Implication of Blended Learning Model

The blended learning model, first of all, needs the specific infrastructure of accessing the online content with a high-speed internet facility which should be available to all the students and teachers. So it should be the responsibility of the policy makers to have a good infrastructure for example language labs, required and updated software, lab technician which can easily handle those complex software's, tutorial classes containing how to use those online platforms and so forth. Apart from this, the second issue is teacher training programmes which enable the pedagogues to utilize the potential of blending. The training programmes should focus on content and instructional methods how a teacher should use instruction in the classroom while using blended learning model.

The next important aspect is content moderation as the process of blending uses the online platforms so the teacher has to moderate the content which he/she wants to teach. The concern is what kind of material student should be allowed to access and how much should they be guided by the teacher. In the country like India problem of electricity always exists, so this has to take care while using the blended learning models. The institution should provide ample electricity to use the technical tools like laptops, desktop in the language labs.

If the language lab is not available then the necessary steps should be taken by the concerned authority.

Furthermore, the syllabus designer and content developer should recommend this method for better pedagogical outcomes. For example, if the students have access to the content in advance they will have the necessary information and basic understanding of the topic which is going to be taught in the classroom. This will enrich the classroom discussion and students can share their thoughts and opinions. This will have a positive effect on the learning outcomes of the students and can reflect on the terminal behaviour of them. The teacher role is to become a moderator, guide and facilitator throughout the course.

The issue in this approach is the assessment of the students. It is challenging to evaluate students using this model but one can mix modern and traditional testing tools to evaluate the class. For example one can give the students portfolio's to check the competence level, formative assessment can be extremely helpful and so on.

Strategies and Techniques used in the Classroom Teaching

To use blended learning in the language classroom with the use of Bloom's Taxonomy can be effective and efficient. For example, if the teacher is using the analyzing, evaluating, and creating for the development of the cognitive ability of the students in the classroom. Apart from this, collaborative learning techniques like group work, pair work and think pair share can be utilized using the process of blending. To incorporate the blending process platforms like EDMODO can be used where one can give assignments and receive feedbacks also. Khan Academy, BYJU, EDX, COURSERA are the online platforms that offer a range of course for teaching and self-regulated learning. The teacher can assign online courses from these platforms and moderate the content for better learning outcomes. Adaptation of materials can be extremely effective if it is done seriously according to level and background information of the students. Teachers and practitioners should make sure their students can access the content easily that one wants to teach. For example, simply going to Google do not fulfill the means of the flipped classroom. One can use the pen drives, CD's, and flash drives to sort out the problems. Make sure the students should know how to watch a video. They can watch anything but educational videos are different and made by experts for a certain purpose.

Students should know how to watch these videos and make notes to discuss in the forthcoming classes. Teacher job is to make them able to interact with video content in a meaningful way that causes to reflect and enhance the critical thinking on what they are exposed to. One of the problems that blended learning and in flipping a classroom is how to ensure that students should watch the video and make the notes because there may be the situation where students make excuses that they are not prepared or not saw the video content. To resolve the issue teachers can make use of google forms and they are an easy way to make sure students are attentive to the lessons that are going to be discussed in the next class. Google forms can have a different kind of questions related to the video content that is supplied to the students. For assessment of the students make some questions on Google forms ask students to fill after watching the video. The answers should be the entrance ticket

to the classroom. The idea is to use videos as effective content delivery tools in the classroom pedagogy.

Conversely, these techniques and strategies only are helpful in teaching after proper training of teachers in content moderation and instructional methods. In-service programmes and induction courses should be made compulsory for the teachers to use blended learning model.

Conclusion

The paper clearly demarcates the positive facets of blended learning and the challenges of using it in a classroom scenario. Although, there are challenges of using it in the Indian context it can be extremely helpful to the students and the teachers if they use it in a cooperative environment. Teaching is about the relationship between the teacher and the students and if it any means can maximize the relationship by harnessing the technology that will impact the learning outcome. Blended learning as a teaching strategy enables students to have a clear picture of what they are going to be taught in the classroom. It promotes students to become an independent learner and give full autonomy where teachers and learners actively and voluntarily engage in the teaching-learning process. It personalizes the learning for each individual.

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