

The Effects of Blended Learning Instructions on Vocabulary Development

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the effects of blended learning instruction on the vocabulary development of students. Blended learning is a very innovative teaching pedagogy for improving students' vocabulary knowledge. The present study used a mixed method approach to find out the effectiveness of blended learning, they are such as qualitative and quantitative. Quantitatively the scores of the 1st Baseline Test and 2nd Baseline Test were used for the study. The 1st Baseline Test was conducted after the completion of four weeks of the traditional mode of teaching and the 2nd Baseline Test was conducted after the completion of four weeks of blended mode teaching. The qualitative method focused on students' perceptions of blended learning instruction and for this, a semi-formal interview was conducted with the students. A total of 50 students were selected for the study from the Bachelor of Technology (CSE), 2nd Semester, of Centurion University of Technology and Management, Paralakhemundi, Odisha, India. The finding of the quantitative result was that the 2nd Baseline Test score was higher than the 1st Baseline Test. Students' opinions were also found to be more favorable for blended learning teaching. Both from the qualitative and quantitative approach it was found that blended learning instruction can improve the students' vocabulary knowledge. Hence, the study suggests that blended learning should be introduced in every institution for the improvement of vocabulary knowledge in a more progressive way.

Keywords: Vocabulary Knowledge, Blended Learning, Language Learning, Traditional Learning, Online Tools

1. Introduction

Language is the source of communication. Without Language one cannot communicate with others. A person in order to make one's own communication to be more effective he/she needs to know the utilization of the elements of language. One such element of language is word or vocabulary. An Individual without having proper vocabulary cannot communicate effectively. Hence it is considered the backbone of any language. Even if individuals have mastered grammar if they fail in vocabulary knowledge, they will be failures in their communication.

Vocabulary is an element of language that helps language learners to form sentences and express themselves in meaningful ways. English is such a language where vocabulary plays a very important role to make English Communication more effective. Often in different stages of life, students face many difficulties in English Communication because of the lack of vocabulary. Mastery of vocabulary can only be achieved with teaching strategies that appeal to various learning styles. A number of studies have proven that different technology-based studies play a vital role in the effectiveness of verbal and written communication (Schmidt & Hegelheimer, 2004; Pazio, 2010; Khazaei & Dastjerdi, 2011). Therefore, as a supplementary in many higher education institutions now a days blended learning environment is used for the development of vocabulary. The blended learning approach creates such an interesting learning environment that it is opposed to pure e-learning and it gives learners the opportunity of both traditional face-to-face teaching and learning environment with different kinds of technology-based instruction. It focuses on optimizing the achievement of learning objectives by applying the right learning technologies to match the right learning styles to transfer the right skills to the right person at the right time (Bielawaski and Metcalf, 2003). In order to provide a rich learning environment nowadays everyone uses a blended learning environment (Marsh, 2012). Blended learning is a student-centred approach, traditional face-to-face learning in a digital environment. Blended learning offers a solution through integration online resources and activities for learning experience Combining face-to-face communication

Digital tools and platforms enable educators to create a dynamic and interactive environment that nurtures student engagement. Blended learning offers personal learning opportunities, active participation and collaboration which are key factors of student engagement. Blended learning has relevance in different sectors.

As part of the learning process, these days' students use technology in and out of their classrooms. Days by day individuals' learning styles are changing. Concerning the students' differences and classroom instructions teachers help their students to expand their learning strategies and instruct them to develop greater flexibility in their ways of approaching language learning (Lightbown and Spada 2013). Blended learning creates interest among students for learning new techniques of education through different online tools like discussion forums, multimedia materials, and interactive learning platforms. This method of learning enhances student involvement for completing any task and to motivate for being successful in different fields. It promotes independent learning by giving students access to course materials except during normal hours and allowing them to progress at their own pace. Students feel encouraged by critical thinking, problem solving and information processing skills. Students' interaction with their friends is possible by online forums, group projects, and virtual peer interactions.

Teachers can observe and guide students while they engage, communicate, discuss, and work as a team to fulfil learning objectives. (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008).

Teachers provide various instructional materials including videos, blogs, online forums, and other digital tools like different learning apps that provide students with opportunities to practice the language outside the class. The learning environment becomes more dynamic when students are taught to use different digital learning tools in their regular classes and they learn faster than the traditional classes. Hence this study aimed at the effect and perception of blended modes of teaching and highlighted different positive aspects of the blended mode of teaching on vocabulary knowledge.

2. Literature Review

With the rapid growth of technology, one of the most common approaches that have been widely used in language learning and teaching environments is blended teaching (Butler, 2013). Day by day the interest and popularity of the blended learning approach are enhancing very rapidly. Because of its flexible approach, everyone is interested in it. There is a prediction that Blended learning will continue to grow and develop but cannot replace the traditional mode of teaching (Graham, 2006). It is in the year 2006 marked a milestone in the historical development of the term blended learning published in the Handbook of Blended Learning. The author in first chapter titled "Blended Learning System highlighted the definition, current trends, and future direction of blended learning (Graham et al., 2014).

Most of the researchers have remarked that this approach is very innovative and it has a very effective role in the enhancement of the vocabulary knowledge of the students. The researcher Zhang, Song, and Burston (2011) examined the effectiveness of blended learning in one of their vocabulary classes. In their study, they divided into two groups. In one group they instructed their learners to learn through mobile phones and in the 2nd group they instructed their learners to learn vocabulary through text materials. Later when their results were compared, their finding revealed that students can learn vocabulary more effectively via mobile phones than with paper material". Similarly, two other researchers Khazaei and Dastjerdi (2011) found that the students who attended the blended teaching approach got better results than those the traditional teaching.

The arrival of new technologies such as computers, iPods, and especially mobile devices helps learners to learn vocabulary items with full of effectiveness. As all these devices are based on wireless technology which is not restricted to a specific location (Wang, Zou, and Xing.2014). They also often support and extend collaborative informal learning among learners. Mobile apps have become very fast and efficient. They are allowing students for reaching new content in the form of digital materials, simulations, and learning games (Lindaman and Nolan, 2015). Delialioğlu, (2012) and Schober et al. (2008) stated that blended learning gives the opportunity and enables the environment for students to communicate actively with other students, which ultimately leads to communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and learning hard skills. This approach of learning builds the nature of brotherhood, cooperative learning among the peers. Online learning allows students to connect with the classroom activities at any time in any place (Nathan & Rajamanoharane, 2016). Singh and Singh (2017) reiterated that it allows students to work together and report back or

present to the class as a whole, thereby encouraging student-to-student interaction. Teachers' participation is higher in this method of learning.

Ample studies were conducted on the blended learning approach, particularly focusing on the benefits of blended learning, students' experiences and attitudes towards blended learning, and a comparison of conventional face-to-face learning, blended learning, and online learning. The results of which were highly influential for those interested in using technology-driven language learning and teaching materials. Some studies show that blended learning is more effective than traditional face-to-face learning, while others show no difference between students' performance in traditional blended learning classes. Moreover, the results of several research studies of students in higher education settings revealed that student satisfaction and learning outcomes can be higher in blended learning environments.

3. Research Questions

Teaching English Vocabulary is often challenging and often it requires a different mode of teaching methodologies. One such teaching methodology is blended learning. Hence the study aimed at the effectiveness of blended learning on English Vocabulary development. In order to fulfil the objective of the study the following three research questions are framed.

- a. "Is there any difference between the results of the First Baseline Test using the traditional mode of teaching and the Second Baseline Test using the blended learning mode of teaching?"
- b. What do students perceive towards blended learning instruction?
- c. What are the new pedagogical suggestions that can be implemented for a blended learning strategy in teaching vocabulary in English?

4. Methodology

4.1. Research participants

In order to investigate the impact of the blended learning approaches on English Verbal Knowledge a homogenous sample of 50 B.Tech. (CSE), 2nd Semester students were taken. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20.

These students were selected randomly from one of the sections of the Job Readiness Class. The Job Readiness class was having four different courses. They were such as IELTS, IELTS Verbal, Reasoning, and Aptitude. The main objective of the course was to prepare students to get Jobs. In the study IELTS Verbal Class students were taken as the participants of the study.

4.2. Instruments

The instruments that were used to collect quantitative data were the results of the 1st Baseline Test and the 2nd Baseline Test. Both tests were comprised of 20 multiple-choice questions each based on vocabulary. The vocabulary topics were Synonyms, Antonyms, One-word Substitutions, Para Jumbles, Analogy, Phrasal Verbs, and Idiomatic Expressions.

The qualitative data of the study were obtained from the semi-structured interviews, including a few free-flowing questions, conducted with the same 50 students from the same batch to identify their views on blended learning.

4.3. Procedure of the study

As per the objective of the study after completion of the course, registration for four weeks of the traditional mode of teaching was taken on different topics on vocabulary. Later to assess the students' existing vocabulary knowledge the First Baseline Test was conducted and the Second Baseline Test was conducted after the completion of four weeks blended learning teaching platform. Both tests were examined by the experienced instructor of the university. The evaluation was done according to language, clarity, appropriateness of the questions to the level of the students, and timing. Both the results were compared and the result was used as the quantitative result.

5. Findings and results

Findings based on research question 1: "Is there any difference between the results of First Baseline Test using the traditional mode of teaching and 2nd Baseline Test using the blended learning mode of teaching?"

5.1 Results of the traditional class

As per the objective of the study after completion of the enrolment of the Job Readiness Course students took IELTS Verbal Class in the traditional class mode for four weeks. The classes were full of quizzes, exercises, textual messages, and lectures. After completion of all the sessions, students were taken the First Baseline Test. Following is the result of the First Baseline Test.

Result of First Baseline Test

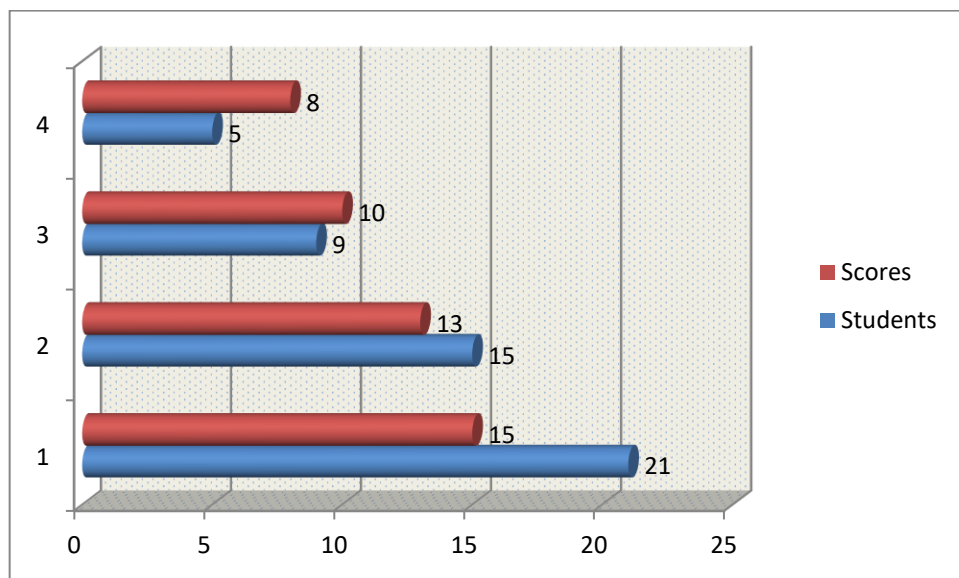


Figure 1: Result sheet of First Baseline Test

The Figure 1 exhibits the results of the First Baseline Test on the Vocabulary Knowledge of the students. It is understood that out of 50 students, 5 students scored 8, 9 students' scored 10, 15 students were 13, and 21 students scored 15 respectively.

5.1. Result of the blended learning platform

In the blended learning mode of teaching first, two weeks of classes were taken using the traditional mode of teaching, and the other two weeks of classes were taken through all the new online interesting learning tools such as Myperfectice App, Quiz let, Spelling City, Snappy words, and Padlet were used.

5.1.1. My Perfectice App

My Perfectice App allows students to study anywhere, anytime right on their own web or mobile devices. Here students could get customized practice tests and could view their detailed answer rationales, and could review their results with just a few taps. This app was covering topics like Synonyms, Antonyms, One-word Substitution, Articles, Tense, Subject-Verb Agreement, Nouns, Pronouns, Parallelism, Phrasal Verbs, Analogy, Modifiers, and Determiners etc. As the test's result was related Job Readiness Course. All students were asked to reach a certain level i.e. 5 levels. Students were asked to complete the test beyond study hours and improve their test levels. Due to this mode of practice, students were improving their scores. In the app, students were supposed to complete 15 numbers of questions to complete one set of questions and later they were getting the results with the complete explanation. Following is one such result dashboard of the Myperfectice App

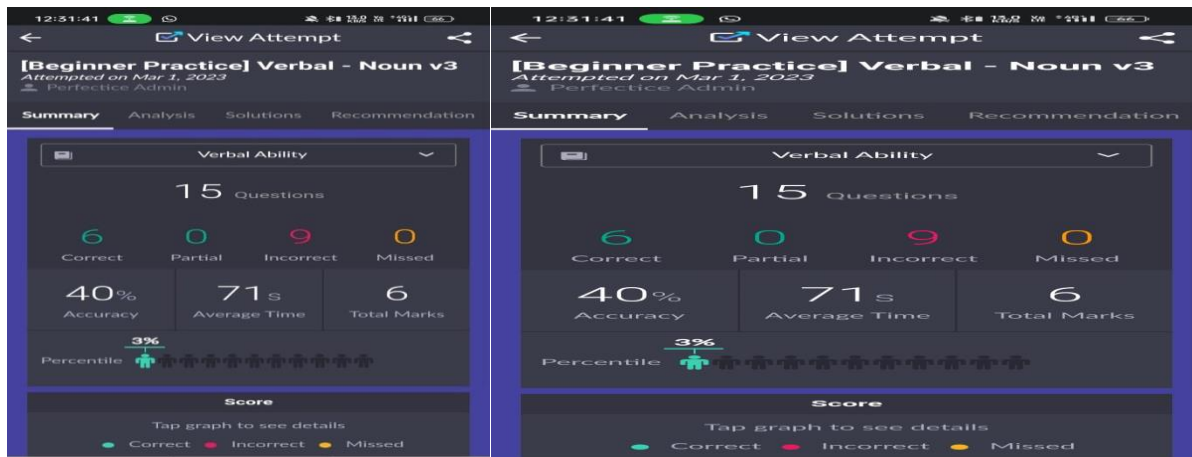


Figure 2: Result Dashboard of Myperfectice App

5.1.2. The Snappy words

This is a free online dictionary. In this dictionary, the meaning of words is given graphically. This becomes very interesting for students to learn new vocabulary. Through this student get new ideas to write content for their blogs, articles, and thesis. In the Snappy words dictionary, the meaning of the words is derived in the following visual way and this makes it interesting for the students to improve their vocabulary.

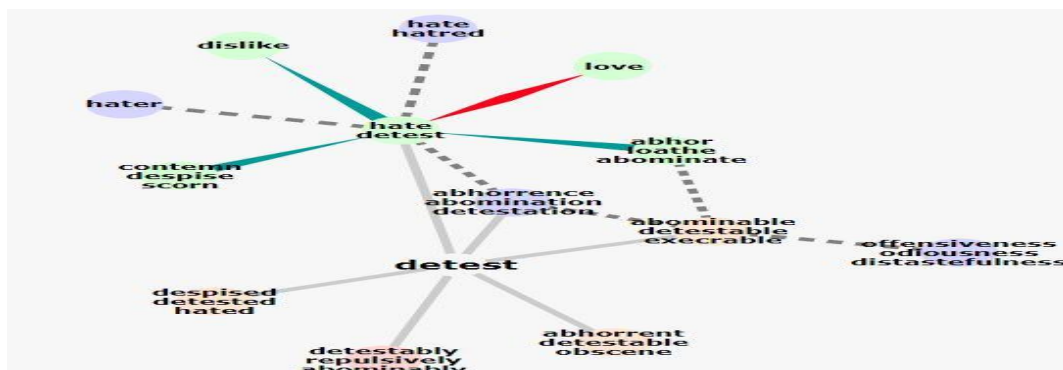


Figure 2: Visual display of the synonym of the word detest

5.1.2. Padlet as a Teaching Tool

It is called a free web-based application that provides a wall that allows posting words, pictures, and even videos that can be viewed by anyone with a link. Through this one can share and store information and one can replace the traditional use of whiteboards. It enables students to ask each other, get direct feedback, and interact with teachers. Often it can be used by teachers for activities during and after classes, such as summarizing and applying key points to lessons. In the current study, Padlet a tool was used for posting the questions. In one padlet answers to all the questions were posted and later it was discussed. Often due to the interactive approach, this tool student became engaged and interactive and they could improve their vocabulary. In fact, through this application students could gain collaborative experience and they could improve their vocabulary knowledge. The application made it easy to evaluate the answers in a single wall.

A sample of Padlet answer wall of students is given in the following Table 1.



Table 1: Padlet Answer Wall

6. Result of Second Baseline Test

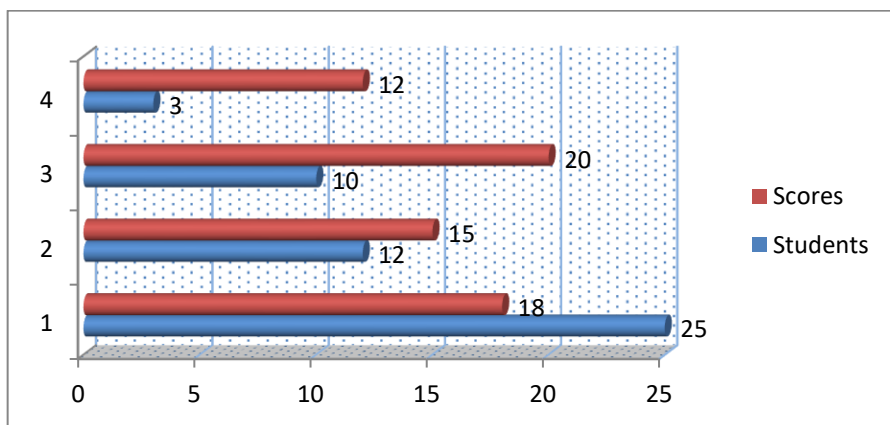


Figure3: Result of the 2nd Baseline Test

The Figure 3 depicts the result of the Second Baseline Test. According to the figure, it is understood that out of 50 students, 3 students scored 12, 10 students scored 20, 12 students scored 15 and the rest 25 students scored 18.

7. Findings based on the research question 2: “What are the students’ perceptions of blended learning instruction?”

In the study students' opinions related to blended learning were collected by conducting face-to-face interaction. The following six questions were asked to students to know about their opinion of blended learning.

- a. What were the main advantages and disadvantages of using the blended learning method in learning Vocabulary?
- b. What were some specific difficulties that you had during this blended learning mode of teaching?
- c. What do you think of using this method of learning at the university level?
- d. What is your overall attitude toward using the blended learning method?
- e. Do you prefer to use CALL (Computer Assistant Language learning) or MALL (Mobile Assistant Language Learning)?

- f. What recommendations do you make about the blended learning method?

Both positive and negative views were gathered to find the effectiveness of the study. The opinions were on the advantages and disadvantages of the blended mode of learning. 85% of the students appreciated the learning and practice of the blended learning classes. They suggested that various multimedia tools like short videos, TV series, and newspapers should be integrated to learn vocabulary online. A few students' responses were given below.

Student A: I believe at the University level blended learning should be introduced because at the University students are very much competent enough to use any digital learning tools. In fact, this platform makes us more creative, engaging, collaborative, and innovative.

Student B: I prefer blended learning instruction because it enables me to practice the vocabulary anytime and anywhere. For me, it is very interesting and engaging.

Student C: As we are much habituated to using social media platforms. Often we are engaged in the social media platform. So blended platform becomes interesting to us and we learn more actively and enthusiastically.

Student D: I prefer Mobile Assistant Language Learning instead of Computer Assistant Language Learning because MALL is very user-friendly and easy to carry anywhere.

Student E: I am not accustomed to learning vocabulary via online tools. So I take much time to do the assignment online.

Student F: I find a traditional mode of teaching more suitable than blended teaching because in traditional teaching students and teachers can see each other and students can get direct feedback from the teacher.

Student G: I find blended learning to be more challenging, because every time I need to depend upon the internet facilities, need to keep my mobile to be charged, and keep the data to be active.

8. Findings based on the research question 3: "What are the pedagogical implications of using blended learning strategy in teaching vocabulary in English?"

The study highlighted the positive aspects of blended learning instruction for English Vocabulary development. Through the blended learning approach, learning becomes more dynamic and it can give tremendous positive results on vocabulary development. Hence the study proposes to all educators to design the educational curriculum as per the blended learning approach to make the learning to be more interesting, engaging, and innovative. The study also instructs that teachers should have better knowledge of vocabulary as well as digital teaching tools. Teachers should get sufficient training to employ the blended learning instruction model effectively. No matter how efficient they are if they cannot facilitate properly their teaching will go in vain. Digital tools will be good unless and until teachers are good. Teachers should encourage students to develop their learning skills so that students will continue learning on their own even if they leave the classroom. Students should be motivated to learn new digital tools to do their own tasks. Hence motivation should be given priority over the methodologies.

9. Conclusion

Results indicated that the proposed blended learning strategy gives positive impact on Vocabulary Development. The study proves that it is a powerful option for students to work and learn independently at their own pace. Hence, it is highly recommended that curiosity and authenticity should be provoked to students while using online digital learning tools. This learning instruction could be more effective if teachers should select some selective digital tools in accordance with the student's needs and interests. If it is well-implemented students' vocabulary knowledge can be improved more in comparison to that of traditional teaching. To sum it up, this study certainly has managed to provide some inputs on the effect of blended learning on students' vocabulary development and students' motivation towards blended learning.

This study also highlights that Blended learning enhances students' vocabulary and influences them to be more motivated and autonomous learners. It caters to the need of current learners in line with the 21st century. Therefore, the study encourages teachers to implement blended learning instructions in their schools and universities.

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