

Blended Learning Approaches in English Language Teaching Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper presents the impact and effectiveness of blended learning strategies in English language teaching (ELT). The study delves into how blended learning, a combination of traditional face-to-face and online learning platforms, enhances student engagement, motivation, and communication. The study utilizes a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interviews with three experienced English language teachers. The findings reveal that blended learning provides flexible and individual learning opportunities to learners which significantly enhances their engagement and learning outcomes. However, teacher's flexibility and continued professional development are essential for the successful implementation of blended learning. The study highlights the need for institutional support to address the challenges of integrating blended learning into ELT, ultimately contributing to a more dynamic and effective teaching methodology.

Keywords: *Blended Learning, English Language Teaching, Teaching Methodology, Student Engagement*

Introduction

The rapid advancements in technology during the 21st century have significantly impacted various aspects of our lives, including education, and making technology an indispensable component of our daily life. As Klopfer et al. (2009), clearly demonstrated that technology is widespread in business and recreation arenas as well as in teaching and learning environments, including those dedicated to English language education. In discipline of teaching languages, a blended learning approach that combines offline and online learning environments is a beneficial

and effective platform. A blended approach encourages students to take charge of when and how they interact with language skills by providing a healthy balance between flexibility and convenience. It maintains a balance between completely online and traditional offline techniques. Globally, educational institutions have moved to entirely online courses in response to the COVID-19 epidemic, exposing teachers and students to new learning environments. The best of both world's digital access and face-to-face interaction are combined in blended learning, which gives a more flexible and balanced option and creates a more encouraging learning environment.

Based on my personal experiences, I have discovered that blended learning is especially beneficial for encouraging more involvement and enhancement of skills.

I have found that blended learning has completely changed my experience as a student at Kathmandu University. I am able to adjust my language learning pace to meet my needs according to the dynamic blend of face-to-face and virtual encounters. Switching to drastically online learning during the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak presented difficulties and shattered the feeling of belonging among students and teachers. However, Blended learning's flexibility to unexpected circumstances was noticeable as it demonstrated resilience. For instance, the sudden switch to entirely online education and the isolation brought on by the strict lockdowns during the epidemic were difficult for me to adapt to. When the university began providing blended learning, it allowed us to attend smaller, in-person classes along with online resources when the university started providing blended learning. The mixed approach provided us with the sense of connection that was lacking from exclusive online learning, which helped us stay engaged while adjusting to the new circumstances. Notably, Kathmandu University and several other colleges made significant progress in the field by providing a number of blended courses that improved learning's accessibility and acceptability. It demonstrates how blended learning bridges the gap between the traditional and digital domains and provides an extensive and flexible framework for teaching languages. Based on a conceptual understanding of blended learning, this research explores its importance in teaching the English language highlighting its effectiveness and impact.

The purpose of this study is to examine the various aspects of blended learning approaches in the context of teaching English, analyzing their effectiveness and language-learning implications. The primary research question that gives this study a dimension is "How do English language teachers perceive and experience the effectiveness and challenges of blended learning in their teaching practices?" This study fills a knowledge gap on the opportunities and challenges faced by ELT teachers in various educational environments, particularly in relation to blended learning. Although the literature currently in publication recognizes the increasing significance of blended learning strategies (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Zhao, 2018) little focus is placed on the various experiences of English language teachers and their process of adapting to these blended learning.

Historical Development of Blended Learning in ELT

The pedagogical approach known as blended learning which combines online and traditional physical education has changed significantly over the last few decades. Early in the 20th century, corresponding learning gained popularity and allowed students to learn distant by sending assignments and programs (Graham, 2013). As the internet grew in the late 20th century, new opportunities for integrating digital technologies into the classroom were opened. Understanding this historical background is crucial because it demonstrates how teaching approaches have evolved and how technology has been integrated into the classroom, changing the way languages are taught and learned.

Switching from traditional methods to blended approaches not only reflects technology but

also addresses the changing needs of students in an increasingly globalized society. Teachers should modify their methods as the addition of online components has increased accessibility and flexibility in language acquisition.

Early Beginnings and Evolution

The idea of blended learning gained official recognition in the 1990s when educational institutions began experimenting with integrating online components into traditional classroom environments. These early efforts were made easier by the rapid advancement of technology and the growing availability of the internet. Teachers want to enhance education and provide greater learning flexibility by utilizing these tools (Bonks & Graham, 2012). One of the first examples of blended learning in ELT was the use of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). CALL initially surfaced in the 1960s and 1970s and taught language skills using basic computer programs. However, a significant progression in CALL and more engaging and successful language learning experiences were made possible by the 1990s development of interactive applications and multimedia software (Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

Integration of Online Learning Platform

At the beginning of the new millennium learning management systems (LMS) such as Blackboard and Moodle emerged, providing organized platforms for combining online learning with traditional classroom activities. Teachers were able to develop and manage course materials, monitor student progress, and enable communication due to these platforms. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) claim that the use of LMS in ELT enabled

the combination of synchronous classroom sessions and asynchronous online activities such as discussions and quizzes.

With the emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in the early 2000s, blended learning prospects advanced even further. Through MOOCs, many participants were able to access open-access online courses, providing language learners with access to excellent global educational resources. Educational institutions started including MOOCs into their courses to raise the standard of education (Yuan & Powell, 2013).

Recent Developments and Trends

Blended learning approaches in teaching the English Language have been significantly impacted in recent years by the rise of mobile technologies and the widespread usage of smartphones. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has gained popularity due to its capacity to deliver language learning materials and facilitate communication between students and teachers from any location at any time (Kukulka-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Mobile apps and platforms have made learning languages more accessible and pleasurable.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, blended learning has become increasingly popular at educational institutions around the world. Teachers and educational institutions must adjust and include online learning tools in order to maintain educational continuity in the face of the rapid change towards online learning. This period of time showed how flexible and adaptable blended learning techniques are, proving their ability to maintain academic excellence even in the face of difficulties (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020).

Continuous development and changing technical requirements have encouraged the growth of blended learning in ELT. Beginning with the development of mail courses and CALL programs and continuing with the integration of LMS, MOOCs, and mobile technology, blended learning has completely changed the context of language teaching. As technology advances, blended learning has completely changed the context of language teaching. As technology advances, blended learning approaches will likely evolve further providing more adaptable and efficient opportunities for learning.

Pros and Cons of Blended Learning

Blending learning (BL), which combines traditional and online teaching approaches has transformed education for teachers. Rusman (2011), BL provides benefits including improved flexibility, more access to learning and the development of active teaching abilities, enabling teachers to adapt learning experiences for a range of schedules and circumstances. However, there are still challenges based on teachers' ability to motivate and engage students in meaningful ways. The complicated landscape of BL in teaching approaches is highlighted by Boulottet et al. (2015), Wong et al. (2014), and Comey (2009). These authors point out problems such as relying on web infrastructure, possible distractions during online components and maintaining high-quality interactions between teachers and students.

Because blended learning provides better teaching capacities, flexibility and accessibility, it has grown in popularity as an approach to teaching English. There are still

certain challenges to overcome, though, like reliance on online infrastructure maintaining student engagement and ensuring effective interaction between teachers and students. This study addresses the opportunities and difficulties faced by English language teachers in these changing situations as they perceive blended learning and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly.

Method

The study adopts a qualitative research design and a phenomenological perspective, the study explores the lived experiences of three English teachers with significant background in blended learning contexts. Three English teachers from the Kathmandu district (referred to as Participants A, B, and C to maintain confidentiality) participated in semi-structured interviews with me in order to gather data. For a thorough examination of the participants' viewpoints and experiences with blending learning, the data were captured and transcribed. Originally collected in Nepali, the data were transcribed and translated into English before being subjected to thematic analysis which included coding and numerous readings in order to identify significant themes and patterns. This process provides a thorough understanding of blending learning's impact and effectiveness in teaching English.

Results and Discussion

This study uses a phenomenological approach to analyze its qualitative data in order to look into the views and experiences of teachers regarding blended learning in English language teaching (ELT). This study explored English language teachers' experiences in the context of blended learning using the

phenomenological techniques. This approach enabled an in-depth understanding of each teacher's challenges related to combining traditional and online approaches. By putting assumptions aside, the phenomenological approach allowed them to focus on the reality of their experiences, presenting three main themes: teachers' problems, perspectives on effectiveness of the blended learning and pedagogical practices. This approach provides them with valuable insights into the personal experiences that shaped and influenced their blended learning.

Teacher Perspectives and Experiences

In order to assess the effectiveness of blended learning as a pedagogy for English Language Teaching (ELT), it is essential to consider the viewpoints and life experiences of teachers. Understanding how teachers use and perceive this teaching approach can help us better understand how it impacts teaching methods and learning outcomes for students.

The teachers that took part in this study had different perspectives about blended learning. Teacher A claims that blended learning was a "game changer" since it completely altered their teaching style and made learning more exciting and interesting. They observed that a broader educational experience was developed by combining digital resources with traditional teaching techniques. Research by Bonk and Graham (2012), which highlighted how blended learning can enhance learning outcomes through the integration of face to face and online approach, is in accordance with this point of view. Teacher A shared:

Blended learning completely changed my experience. A more active and involved learning environment was made possible,

and my teaching style changed entirely. The integration of digital resources into traditional teaching methods resulted in more profound educational experiences.

Her optimistic opinion on blended learning stresses how it can improve teaching methods and engage students in a learning process. Bonk and Graham's (2012) research supports this perspective by showing that integrating online and offline components can improve academic achievement and learning outcomes. Teacher B also had positive views, saying that

I realized that blended learning allows for the possibility to connect with learners in ways that traditional methods cannot. They emphasized the benefits of integrating both online and offline approaches since it increases participation and provides chances for individualized learning. My experience was totally transformed by blended learning. My teaching approach completely changed, and the learning environment became more engaged and energetic. More meaningful education into traditional methods of teaching.

Regarding the advantages of blended learning in terms of flexibility and engagement, Teacher B's perspective is consistent with studies by Garrison and Kanuka (2004). Their observation shows how integrating several methods of teaching allows for students' preferred learning styles while improving students' overall academic performance and satisfaction. However, Teacher C highlighted both the advantages and the difficulties of adapting to blended learning.

While I agreed that blended learning provides flexibility and a student-

centered approach, I also realized that integrating new technologies comes with an initial learning shape.

Teacher C's experience highlights both sides of blended learning addressing both possible drawbacks and advantages. This is in accordance with Comey's (2009) examination of the difficulties in putting blended learning into practice which emphasizes the need for ongoing support and professional development to optimize its efficiency. The teachers claim that blended learning provides an innovative approach to education by combining traditional and digital teaching methods. Positive teacher perceptions highlight how it may be applied to create dynamic, engaging learning environments that enhance academic performance and student engagement (Bonk & Graham, 2012). However, challenges like technological integration and professional development remain essential to a successful deployment (Comey, 2009).

In general, the perspectives of teachers regarding blended learning highlight its flexibility and possible advantages in enhancing teaching methods and student outcomes. Making the connection between these perspectives and existing studies provides valuable insights on how to effectively implement blended learning strategies to satisfy a range of educational objectives.

Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes

According to the participants in the research teachers, blending learning has significantly improved student engagement and learning outcomes. By integrating online and offline components, blended learning gives students

more options and methods to engage with the curriculum. This flexibility allows students to participate in interesting activities, learn at their own pace and get a more individualized education. These benefits are particularly significant while learning a language because practice and exposure to the language are crucial. As per Teacher A:

Blended learning has resulted in an interesting rise in student engagement. Interactive online activities and multimedia resources are used to keep students motivated and interested. I have noticed that students are more inclined to contribute to class discussions and turn in assignments on time.

Teacher A's statement demonstrated how well blended learning maintains students' interest and motivation. Multimedia and interactive exercises that allow different learning styles make lessons more engaging. This is consistent with research by Bonk and Graham (2012), who emphasize that integrating online and offline elements can lead to improved outcomes and increased student engagement. Teacher B stated:

It seems that the flexibility of blended learning benefits students. For those who need more time for understanding particular concepts, the ability to access materials and complete assignments at their own pace is highly beneficial. I have noticed an increase in their confidence and overall performance.

Teacher B's statement highlights how important flexibility is for blending learning. Giving students the freedom to learn at their own speed may improve their self-confidence and help in their understanding and

remembering of the material. The flexibility of blended learning supports a variety of learning requirements and improves academic achievement, according to study by Garrison and Kanuka (2004). In response, Teacher C said:

Blended learning has made it easier to monitor students' progress and provide timely feedback. I am better able to recognize students' areas of difficulty and provide more support because the online components allow for more frequent assessments and interactions.

Teacher C's experience demonstrates the value of blended learning in monitoring and supporting students' development. Meeting the individual learning needs of every student and improving learning objectives overall depend on regular assessments and timely feedback. This result supports research by Graham (2013), who discovered that mixed learning environments enable continuous assessments as well as individual feedback.

There are several significant benefits to blended learning, according to teachers' opinions on student participation and learning results. Blended learning encourages student participation by utilizing interactive exercises and multimedia. Additionally, it allows for more effective progress tracking and feedback delivery, as well as flexibility to adjust to different learning paces. Better learning outcomes and increased student satisfaction are the results of these advantages. Overcoming the challenges of technology integration and ensuring that both teachers and students have enough support and resources are crucial to achieving the full benefits of blended learning. By doing this, educational institutions can develop inclusive, more effective learning

environments that meet each student's requirements.

Challenges of Blended Learning

Although incorporating blended learning into English language teaching (ELT) has several advantages, teachers in this study found many important barriers that could hinder its effective implementation. According to the participants, these challenges are brought on by learning curves, reliance on technology and issues with student participation.

Technological Dependence

The use of technology by teachers is one of the main problems they encounter. Many teachers voiced worries about how technology problems will affect their ability to teach. In this regard, Teacher A pointed out that any technological issue might seriously hinder the learning process in areas with inconsistent internet connectivity. Participants A said:

In the beginning, it may seem difficult for teachers who are not as adept at using technology. Sometimes I find myself spending more time just figuring out how to use a new platform even when I should be more effective developing courses or assisting my studies have found that technical issues can be a significant barrier. The teaching process may be hampered on days when there is a fluctuating internet connection. The possibility of students missing out on important information can irritate me as well as them. When our tools aren't working effectively, it gets difficult to keep them interested.

Both teachers and students may become frustrated by this dependence as interruptions can result in missed teaching time and a decrease in student motivation. The need for reliable technology infrastructure is essential to the successful implementation of blended learning.

Initial Learning Curve

When incorporating new digital tools and platforms into their existing teaching strategies, teachers may encounter a difficult learning curve. There is definitely a learning curve at first when trying to use new resources in the classroom, Teacher B said, highlighting the challenges that arise during this time of change.

In the beginning, it may seem difficult for teachers who are not as adept at using technology. Sometimes I find myself spending more time just figuring out how to use a new platform even when I should be more effective developing courses or assisting my students.

This learning curve can cause teachers to feel inadequate which may show up as a lack of confidence in their ability to use technology effectively. When using new platforms, teachers may find it challenging to balance their teaching responsibilities with the demands of learning new technology which might reduce their overall effectiveness in the classroom.

Maintaining Student Engagement

Distraction during online components might make it especially difficult to engage students in a blended learning environment Engaging

students in a blended learning environment. This issue was raised by Teacher B, who said:

It can be challenging to keep students' attention, especially when our classes are provided online. When they are at home, there are several distractions such as phones, tabs on their browsers and even family members coming and leaving. Though it is not always easy, I am constantly trying to think of new and interesting ways to engage them. Making an interactive online experience that competes with such distractions takes a lot of imagination and work.

Due to the lack of direct supervision, students may become easily distracted during online sessions which reduces their motivation to fully participate. Teachers need to think of strategies to keep students interested in the material and encourage participation in a virtual environment where distractions are common.

In summary, despite the fact that blended learning has significant potential for enhancing English Language Teaching (ELT), teachers must deal with problems including dependence on technology, initial learning curves and maintaining student interest in order to create a really effective educational experience. These challenges highlight how teachers must have access to reliable technology infrastructure and ongoing professional growth in order to overcome the difficulties of integrating traditional and online pedagogies. Educational institutions that prioritize opportunities for cooperation, resource availability and ongoing training can help teachers overcome these challenges. In the end, these efforts will provide more efficient learning environments that adjust to

the particular requirements of every student, ensuring that every aspect of blended learning is satisfied in the hope of academic success (Graham, 2013). Teachers may foster a more inclusive and engaging learning environment that promotes the growth of students as well as teachers in blended learning environments by tackling these problems.

Conclusion

The findings of the study highlight how blended learning may transform the way that English language Teaching (ELT) is conducted. Blended learning which effectively integrates traditional and digital teaching methods has been shown to increase student engagement, provide flexible and personalized learning opportunities and improve overall academic outcomes. Teachers' experiences show that this approach has several facets such as improved progress tracking, immediate feedback and the development of dynamic, interactive learning environments. The study also emphasizes the challenges that must be overcome such as dependence on technology, initial learning curves and the need for continuous professional growth.

By focusing on different perspectives of English teachers and how they adapt to blended learning environments, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature. The study's findings highlight the necessity of institutional support for teachers in overcoming the challenges and gaining access to resources related to blended learning. A useful network can be established by working with peers to share resources and efficient methods in order to overcome the difficulties of this teaching approach. In order to enhance their teaching methods and more effectively address the various requirements of their students,

teachers are also encouraged to embrace a flexible and lifelong learning mindset.

Overall, the study provides a significant contribution to our understanding of approaches to blended learning in ELT teaching. This study provides a comprehensive structure for the effective integration of traditional and digital teaching approaches, with the ultimate objective of improving the quality and accessibility of teaching the English language. It does this by highlighting the experiences of teachers and the practical implications of blended learning.

The Author

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Appendices

Research Topic

Blended Learning Approaches in English Language Teaching Pedagogy

Research Question- How do English language teachers perceive and adapt to blended learning in their teaching practices?

Interview questions

1. What did you think and feel when you first started using blended learning in your teaching?
2. How has your way of planning and teaching lessons changed since you began using blended learning?
3. Which digital tools and resources do you find most helpful for blended learning?
4. How do you mix traditional classroom teaching with online teaching in your lessons?
5. Can you give examples of how blended learning has affected student participation and interest in your classes?
6. What problems have you faced with blended learning, and how did you solve them?
7. How do you check students' progress and learning in a blended learning setup?
8. How has blended learning changed your teaching methods and professional growth?
9. How do you make sure all students can use and benefit from blended learning, even if they are not good with technology?
10. What support and resources from your school or colleagues have helped you the most with blended learning?