

INTEGRATING BLENDED LEARNING IN THE ORAL PRESENTATION CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT: Blended learning is one of the recent approaches which offer some kind of independence on learning as it integrates face-to-face classroom teaching with online learning. The study aims at exploring the impact of blended learning method in teaching communicative skills to ESL learners. A mixed-method design was adopted for this study to discover the effects of blended learning approach on students' learning outcomes and their learning experience. A group of 52 Polytechnic students were chosen and placed into two groups. The experimental group received the blended learning approach while the control group received face-to-face instruction. The experimental group used MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), a free course available online as part of their learning process. The achievements between the control group and the experimental group were compared to measure the potential of the blended learning approach. Data collected and analyzed were oral presentation scores from both groups, survey and in-depth interviews. Quantitative statistics revealed that there was statistical difference between the experimental group and the control group in the use of language and understanding of content. However, there was no statistical differences in the delivery component. In addition, the qualitative findings also indicated that students displayed positive perception towards the blended learning approach. Overall, findings from this study support the use of blended learning approach as it is found to be effective in enhancing learners' communicative skills.

KEYWORDS: Blended learning, Communicative skills, MOOC, Presentation skills.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the current manifestation of Malaysia's education approach, there is a dramatic increase of internet use in education. As one of the initiatives and commitment of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education to promote lifelong learning, the blended learning approach is suggested to be implemented in the curriculum as a means to deliver the best teaching practices and learning experience for a student. The Ministry of Higher Education has taken proactive steps in drafting the new changes in the education system in line with the current development of technology in teaching and learning. Since technological development is so dynamic and futuristic, many educators and researchers believe that it is crucial for them to use technologies as a tool to facilitate students' learning towards achieving educational goals as studies have shown that the use of technologies not only can improve their learning outcomes but also their motivation to learn.

Continued growth in using web-based learning like Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is part of the Ministry of Higher Education's strategic plan to enhance the quality and receptiveness of higher education within Malaysia. Under the strategic plan, Malaysian higher education institutions participated in online courses through OpenLearning.com, a leading international MOOC and Student Learning Platform. This study is centralized on understanding the effect of implementing traditional classroom approach (face-to-face) with online learning in a communicative English classroom among Polytechnic students.

The traditional classroom which is known for its teacher-centeredness necessitates that the teacher teaches, interacts discusses, demonstrates and communicates with the students face-to-face. There are learners who feel constrained to express themselves freely in class due to shyness or lack of proficiency. In a normal traditional class routine, the requirement is that the teacher and students are needed to be in a classroom on the designated day, time and place. The teaching and learning process hours are restricted to the stipulated class schedule only, which means learners are unable to learn more outside of the classroom. For example, in a communicative English class,

students are given 3 hours of learning in a week. This shows that there are still less hours in the teaching and learning process which is not sufficient to improve students’ achievement.

E-learning (online learning) allows students to direct their own learning as they can learn anywhere at any time, given the proper equipment. According to Isayeva, et. al. (2020), the essentials of E-learning is that the students can fulfil a class task on their own at a preferred time. Also known as independent learning, students “learn consistently without a teacher” (Isaveva et.al., 2020, p.13). Likewise, according to Abubakar and Yaduma (2019) “blended learning environments provide multiple ways to access content and to demonstrate mastery” (p.12). This is also one of the reasons why we would like to conduct such study to further find out if incorporating the blended-learning approach have any impact on student learning.

However, E-learning also has its own drawbacks. The lack of proper equipment in the classroom may not support effective teaching and learning process. Students may feel bored as it requires extra effort to complete an online activity. Students may feel too overwhelmed towards a new shift in learning that will demotivate them to learn. Real authentic interaction is also limited between the teacher and students which may lead to lower attendance, thus, not achieving the learning outcomes. It is also difficult to determine whether students achieve some understanding of the topics learnt. Abubakar and Yaduma (2019, p.14) further point out that “learners with low motivation may not benefit from an online class unless they have high level of discipline”. All these constraints and limitations tend to lead to lower teaching and learning efficiency. As both the traditional classroom learning and e-learning offers strengths and limitations, thus we think that it would be better to combine both strengths of face-to-face learning with e-learning new delivery method called blended learning.

Objectives of study

The objectives of this paper are to explore the differences in students learning outcomes in the students’ oral presentation between the blended learning approach (experimental) and the traditional instructional approach (control) and to uncover the students’ perceptions of their learning experience using the blended learning approach.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study combined a mixed-method approach, using quantitative and qualitative research method to investigate the impact of blended learning in learners’ communicative skills in English. The students were divided into two groups: the experimental and control group. The experimental group used the blended learning approach while the control groups were taught using the traditional approach. The quantitative component of this study utilized a quasi-experimental design while the qualitative component of the study explored students’ learning experiences by assessing their perceptions and attitudes towards the blended learning approach. The data collected were oral presentation scores, questionnaire and interview. The sample of the study consisted of 32 participants from the control group and 27 from the experimental group. Table 1 below shows the information on the participants.

Table 1: Information on Student Data

	Experimental Group Blended learning	Control Group Traditional
Course	Communicative English	Communicative English
Topic	Products & Services	Graphs & Charts
Objective	Describe products or services related to field of studies	Describe and analyze information contained in graphs and charts
Duration	5 weeks/15 hours	5 weeks/15 hours
Assessment	Oral Presentation	Oral Presentation
Learning Approach	5 hours of online learning (MOOC) 10 hours of learning face-to-face	15 hours of face-to-face instruction

III.RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study is organized according to the quantitative findings which cover the students learning outcomes and their perception on their learning experience, as well as the qualitative findings which highlight findings on learner autonomy and improved confidence.

Quantitative analysis

Students learning outcomes

Student learning outcomes were measured based on three components which were language, content and delivery. The following are the findings of their achievements.

Table 2: Language Component

	Means	SD
Experimental	13.81	.834
Control	8.47	3.09

The experimental group showed a statistically significant larger means in the language component of their oral presentation scores than the control group. Thus, indicating that the experimental group showed obvious improvements in the language component. Overall, this implies that after the blended learning approach in the communicative English class help to enhance the participants’ language proficiency.

Table 3: Content Component

	Means	SD
Experimental	12.85	.9074
Control	8.59	3.21

Based on Table 3 above, the experimental group (n=27) had a better understanding of the content or topic of their presentation due to the blended learning approach with a relatively higher score, M = 12.85 (SD = .175). By comparison, the control group (N=32) had a numerically lower score M = 8.59 (SD=.568). The Independent t-test showed zero was not included between 95% Confidence Interval and the two-tailed significance was 0.00 which was smaller than p=.005. Therefore, we can conclude that there was a significant difference between the two groups and this supported that blended learning approach had positive impact on enhancing students’ learning gains mainly in the content component.

Table 4: Delivery Component

	Means	SD
Experimental	16.04	2.10
Control	14.72	3.08

An analysis on the participants’ score in the delivery of their presentations is shown in Table 4 above. The mean score of the experimental group was 16.04 which is slightly higher than that of the control group which was 14.72. This means that the control group made some improvement under the conventional classroom condition for the delivery component. Thus, we could say that the blended learning approach had no effect on the participants’ delivery in their presentation. This is probably due to the weakness of online learning where face-to-face instruction is limited. Learners require more exposure and time to practice delivering an oral presentation in class and so that they could enhance their skills.

Student’s perceptions of their learning experience

3 domains are found to be dominant in the findings on the participants’ perceptions.

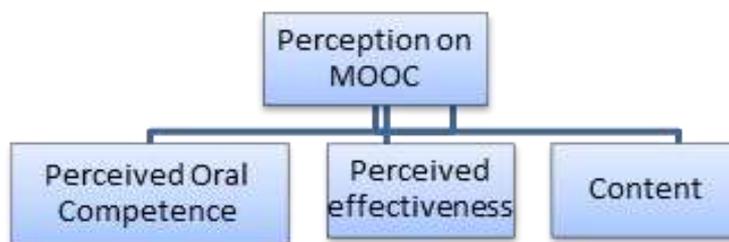


Fig. 1: Student's Perception**Perceived oral competence**

Results of the questionnaire indicate that 78% of the participants agreed that the number of online activities and lecture videos help improve their oral presentation skills. In addition, 74% found that the communicative activities to practice communicative skills that were introduced in the video were very effective in helping them improve their oral presentation skills.

Perceived effectiveness

Likewise, findings also reveal that 81% of the participants found that the lecture videos were very helpful in helping them learn the topics. As for independent learning, 62% of participants felt they were more confident to learn a topic without a formal in-class lecture. This is quite surprising as this indicated that participants were confident enough to learn on their own without face to face interaction with their teachers for a particular topic. However, 13% of the participants felt they were less confident to learn without a formal in-class lecture.

Perspective on content

As for the participants' perspectives on the content of MOOC, 85% of them agreed that the content was appropriately challenging. As for the content of the videos, 62% stated that the content was very engaging. In regards to communicative skills, 62% of the participants found that the e-notes were very effective in helping them understand the topic better. Furthermore, all participants agreed that the content they learnt in MOOC has helped them improve in their communication skills. Obviously, this shows that majority of them were confident that the content in MOOC would help them improve on their communication skills.

Qualitative analysis

Merriam (2009) described triangulation as a means to enhance the internal validity of a study. For the purpose of data analysis of this study, the process of data triangulation was done. To validate the numerical data findings of this study, a semi-structured interview was implemented to gain more understanding of the participants' views. This type of question allows the researcher the freedom to respond to emerging views of the participants (Merriam, 2009). A total of 5 students were chosen to be interviewed. The interviewees elaborated in their own words regarding their attitudes towards the implementation of using MOOC as a blended learning tool in their English class. Based on the findings generated from the interviews, the emerging themes or reasons behind the interviewees' favourable attitudes towards blended learning (MOOC) can be summarized under the following themes: learner autonomy and improved confidence.

Learner autonomy

As for autonomous learning, four participants admitted that the use of MOOC in their blended learning was a good way to promote autonomous learning as it gave the opportunity for them to explore and learn at their own pace. According to these participants, their learning experience was somewhat more flexible. They were able to control their own learning according to their own pace as it is accessible anytime at any place. As mentioned by Matukhin (2014), blended learning allows students to actively practice new skills in class through intensive communication with an instructor or other course participants. In addition, this supports the principle of blended learning that it stimulates the development of self-learning skills and data retrieval (Matukhin, 2014).

Improved confidence

The data analysis also suggested that the participants overcame their shyness and improved their confidence through the usage of interactive activities MOOC offered. The participants observed that they improved on their confidence speaking English. Two participants agreed that the content in MOOC has helped them gain a better understanding of the topic. The essence of blended learning environment is that it inspires students to gain knowledge from various resources, to apply the subject matter and gain confidence in applying the knowledge they learn in a real-world context (Bliuc et. al., 2011, Hsu, 2011 and Smyth et. al., 2012). In addition, this also supports one of the principles of blended learning which allows students to acquire new knowledge independently (Matukhin, 2014).

Discussions

Based on the statistical results, the experimental group achieved higher marks compared to the control group. The blended learning approach using interactive content such as videos, e-notes, online activities were effective as it activates and increases students' language skills and understanding. Thus, this enhances their oral presentation skills productively and efficiently. In addition, the participants expressed their satisfaction and great appreciation for and interest in using the blended learning approach in their class. Their ability to explain the content of their presentation is most likely related to the reading materials (e-notes) and quizzes available on the MOOC platform.

Furthermore, using e-learning enables them to explore and think creatively and critically. Critical thinking skills encompass the skills that foster problem solving and self-regulation (Borglum, 2016). The nature of e-learning is that it helps learners access learning materials at their own pace and time. They are able to view lecture videos repeatedly and this allows them to gain a better understanding of the topic effectively. This notion again is reflected on independent learning. According to Facione (2011), being able to learn independently, analyze, interpret information and solve problems, are valuable life skills that good critical thinking skills develop.

Another contributing factor is that the online activities in MOOC are engaging. Interactive learning materials in MOOC offers animated text, visual prompts, and audios, and records their responses. The responses push them to use the language as they read, watch and listen. This allows meaningful learning to take place as students get to do the exercises and receive instant feedback. According to Bath and Bourke (2010), the technology used in blended learning enhances the quality of effective learning as it implements engaging materials through interactivity and collaboration of users. In addition, Francis and Shannon (2013) also assert that blended learning allows student engagement and they become active learners. The delivery component of the oral presentation focuses on several criteria namely eye contact, gestures, facial expression and level of confidence. The experimental group obtained slightly higher marks in this component as compared to the control group. However, there was no significant difference in the delivery components marks for the experimental group. One possible cause of this is probably due to the limitations of online learning. The experimental group had less hours of face-to-face interaction with the teacher compared to the control group which means less hours of in-class explanations by the teacher. According to one of the participants, MOOC did not help him much in practicing his oral presentations because there was no real audience to explain it to during the online course. Teachers were not available to give feedback or comments of their practice in presentation during their time spent online. Keeping in mind, blended learning refers to a blend of different learning approaches where you have the traditional approach (face-to-face learning) and also online learning. As both the traditional classroom learning and online learning offers strengths, to compensate this limitation, the traditional classroom learning takes place whereby the teacher gives the learners the opportunity to practice their communicative skills by doing presentations, role plays and teachers may give comments and feedback on the correct way to deliver an oral presentation. According to Soliman (2014), the lack of teachers' face-to-face interaction maybe difficult for some students who feel uneasy in regards to virtual feedback.

Evidences of how blended learning affected positively towards the participants' language and content component of their oral presentation scores, show that the approach had some kind of influence on their overall mean scores. The overall mean score for the experimental group was $M=23.37$ while the control group was $M=19.84$, which provides some indication that the experimental group made significant improvements in their oral presentation as compared to the control group. Thus, the experimental group experienced greater learning gains than the control group. Based on a study conducted by Kazu and Demirkol (2014), students who had gone through the blended learning environment were more successful after the study compared to traditional classroom pedagogy. However, in terms of acquisition of delivery skills component, there was no significant difference in the scores between both groups. As mentioned earlier, the limitations of online learning are that online learning lacks teachers' actual face-to-face instruction and could also be due to students' different learning styles. In general, blended learning is used to facilitate learning, enhance pedagogy, simplify revision and increase cost effectiveness (Graham, Allen & Ure, 2005). In addition, based on a study conducted by Prefume (2014), participants of a Japanese language course did show learning gains through a flipped classroom approach which is a positive indication towards the effectiveness of blended learning approach. Using the blended learning approach provided a distinctive and effective learning environment which promotes learners' motivation, self-confidence, engagement and collaboration. Likewise, based on a study conducted by Harris (2017), a quantitative study was employed to compare language proficiency achieved by the control and experimental group. The study had positive effect towards blending learning regarding students' success in achieving proficiency in the Spanish language. This shows that the advantages of blended learning improve students' communicative competence effectively than the traditional classroom. Overall, the participants showed favourable attitude towards using MOOC as a blended learning tool to improve their communication skills as compared to the traditional teaching approach. Previous researchers found that students were satisfied with blended learning as it is an engaging way of acquiring

knowledge. The essence of improving one's competence in communication skills is to have communicative practices done in real situations whereby one or more parties are involved in exchanging information or message. A majority of the participants thought that the content in MOOC helped them improve their oral presentation skills.

In addition, half of the class also expressed that the communicative activities in MOOC were effective in improving their oral presentation skills. Based on this study, blended learning could be an effective model for these learners because of its interactivity such as forum and chat where they can have asynchronous discussions and able to share ideas and experience. This is a wonderful feature for students who are introverts as it provides the opportunity for them to interact virtually thus improve their communicative competence. In any teaching and learning pedagogy, there are positive and negative sides to it.

Nevertheless, only 3% of the participants stated that blended learning did not help in improving their language skills. The possible cause would probably be that the students were not motivated or it did not match their type of learning style. This is supported by Osgerby (2013) that reveals students' dissatisfaction with the materials in the blended learning course because they preferred face-to-face instruction. This shows that students learning preference do matter to increase their learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers implementing a blended classroom should try to identify students who require more attention and time to learn the content and provide extra assistance and support.

On another note, a majority of the participants found that the content was appropriately challenging even with some technical difficulties. They agreed that the content including videos and communicative activities were effective in helping them understand the concept or topic in improving their communicative skills. According to Guo, Kim and Rubin (2014), many factors are associated with effective videos presentations which include the usage of segmented videos, motions and visual flows and displaying enthusiasm in an informal setting.

Moreover, the ability for students to re-watch and skim through the videos added support to their understanding. Furthermore, a majority of the participants reflected that they are more confident to learn the content without a formal in-class lecture. This is probably due to the effectiveness of the content in MOOC. Generally, half of the class stated that the content was engaging and effective in helping to enhance their communication skills in English.

According to a study done by Marcus, Nur Syafiq Aqiera and Leong (2015), a common cause of oral presentation difficulties faced by Malaysian polytechnic students is the lack of confidence. In addition, another study conducted by Awan et. al. (2010) indicated that students were not confident when they were required to conduct an oral presentation because they were embarrassed with their broken English due to low English proficiency. Based on the findings, all participants revealed that their participation in the blended learning course has helped increase their confidence. For example, a participant cited that viewing lecture and peers' videos of oral presentation had increased his confidence to speak English increase his motivation to learn. Therefore, this shows that exposing students to blended learning will boost the participants' confidence to speak because it is an interactive and appealing mode of learning and it appeals to students of different learning styles.

Overall, based on findings of this study, results of the experimental group were expected to be higher as compared to the control group. This is because there are research findings which have positive effects towards students' learning outcomes. The results of this study can be compared to other similar studies relating to communicative skills. For example, in a study conducted by Harris (2017), a quantitative study was employed to compare language proficiency achieved by the control and experimental group. The experimental group which employed the blended learning approach gained more proficiency in the Spanish language. In addition, in one of the studies by Woltering, Herrler, Spitzer and Spreckelsen (2009) reveal that blended learning increased students' interest and improved their learning outcomes.

Nonetheless, results on students' delivery skills from the both groups were quite surprising. Limitations on online learning are that it provides less face-to-face interaction with the teacher therefore; students might be uncomfortable with virtual feedback. Less hours of in-class practice for oral presentation also contributes to this factor. Some participants also indicated that they prefer to learn in a traditional classroom compared to the blended learning approach. It is interesting that students revealed that in some instances because majority of the participants showed positive attitude towards the implementation of blended learning.

Therefore, the researcher has to put into consideration that risks do exist when it comes to technology-based learning. Preparing students first or giving them some orientation of blended learning would probably be best so that learners can feel ready and be more confident to start learning using that approach. In addition, identifying students' learning style too needs to be considered before employing any learning approach so that they can learn in a more meaningful way and achieve learning outcomes.

IV. CONCLUSION

Overall, we feel that the future of blended learning for second language learners is promising. Utilizing MOOC as a tool in blended learning is a valuable approach in teaching communicative skills for second language learners. Blended learning approach gives learners the opportunity to individually learn and practice input they received in the face-to-face classroom. It is hoped that further exploration and research on the impact of blended learning towards ESL learners in evaluating their communicative competence be employed at a larger scale to broaden the pedagogy used by teachers.

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