Replacing Traditional Classroom Teaching with Blended Learning: Is it Effective in Improving Business English Vocabulary?

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Abstract

As adult English language learners enrolling in the one year Business English Diploma course in the University of Colombo find it challenging to achieve the outcome of improving business English vocabulary, we explored whether different delivery modes (of face to face, online and blended) influenced this outcome achievement. Three tutors of English taught the same content to three groups of students using face-to-face, online and blended modes over 3 months in the Department of English Language Teaching. With the face to face mode continuing as a control group (n=15), the blended (n=15) and online (n=15) groups received six online modules and four quizzes on vocabulary. While the online group received materials online with no face to face instructions, the blended group received 70% of the materials online with six face to face lessons to cover up the balance 30% of the course. The control group learned only in their class rooms. While the three groups showed the performance as Blended mean score=43.07, Online mean score= 39.27, Face to face mean score =45.00 at the pre-test having sixty fill in the blank questions in dialogue completion, the course-end test showed the blended group participants to have scored significantly increased marks (mean score=51.20, t=-7.176, p=.000), compared to the other two groups (Online= 47.60, t= -5.593, p=.000, Face-to-face=50.67, t= -5.330, p=000) at the significance level p < .005. This study can have implications for teaching business English vocabulary in the context of teaching English as a second language in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Online learning, Blended learning, English as a second language, Face-to-face learning, Higher education.

Introduction

Learning Business English has become crucial for working adults in Sri Lanka at present than any other time. Although some business professionals are with great abilities and intelligence, they are usually judged in their society on how well they speak and write in English. Targeting working adults, many Universities in Sri Lanka have started offering weekend Business English courses. Many of those courses are designed to equip adult students with business communication skills and expect students to improve their business vocabulary. Most of those courses are conducted in face-to-face mode in traditional classroom settings while a few of them are conducted in fully online mode. This study investigated how effective it would be if blended mode of delivery was introduced instead of fully online or face-to-face courses in teaching business English vocabulary to adult learners in Sri Lankan University system.

Although technology aided instruction can contribute to the improvement of English as a Second Language (ESL) students' proficiency (Lizzio et al, 2002), the traditional face-to-face teaching is still reported to be able to outperform online teaching because it attracts and creates interest in students (Garson, 1998). However, according to Driscoll (2002) blended learning mode, a mode of delivery that combines online digital media with traditional classroom method can be successfully applied in adult's learning in many disciplines.

Methodology

The main objective of this study was to compare adult students' performance in using correct business vocabulary in the blended learning (BL), face to face and online modes of delivery. The setting was made at the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) at the faculty of Arts in the University of Colombo (UOC). The sample of this study consisted of 45 students, both male and female, (age: 21 to 54 years) who were randomly selected from the students who passed the placement test and registered to follow the online Diploma in Business English course for the year 2018 at the DELT, Faculty of Arts, UOC, Sri Lanka. The students were randomly assigned into three groups and instructed to complete six course modules of vocabulary in three different modes of learning, blended, face-to-face and online over three months. The online and blended learning courses were delivered using a Moodle based learning management system. The same online exercises on vocabulary were distributed in printed version to the participants in the face to face mode. The entirely online group studied the content online and they were not given instructions in a physical learning environment. BL group followed 70% of the course units online and the balance 30% in their face to face classrooms.

Study Group	Strategy utilized in teaching vocabulary		
	Course Content	Practicing materials	Assessment criteria
Online	Six modules on vocabulary learning and a lecture note on effective communication skills were uploaded to the LMS. No face to face instructions were given. Access for all materials uploaded to the LMS was granted for all participants.	Four online quizzes and six online activities on vocabulary practicing. Six online modules on writing with new vocabulary and dialogue completion. Online chatting with the tutor.	Pre and post test which included 60 questions on correct vocabulary usage. Tests were conducted in the regular classroom.
Blended	Six lectures face to face on vocabulary development, each two hours duration. LMS access was given to follow 70 percent of the course materials uploaded. The rest was to be studied in the face to face classroom.	Four online quizzes and six online activities on vocabulary practicing. Six online modules on writing with new vocabulary and dialogue completion. Online chatting with the tutor.	Pre and post test which included 60 questions on correct vocabulary usage. Tests were conducted in the regular classroom.
Face to face	Six modules on vocabulary learning were taught in the class. A lecture on effective communication skills was delivered in the face to face class. No online access was given to the participants.	Four online quizzes and six online activities on vocabulary practicing were conducted in the class using printed handouts. Six modules on writing with new vocabulary and dialogue completion were also done using printed materials in the face to face mode.	Pre and post test which included 60 questions on correct vocabulary usage. Tests were conducted in the regular classroom.

Table 1: Strategies used to teach the three groups

Three Tutors of English who have similar level of experience in teaching with the same educational qualifications were assigned to teach to three groups of students. The researcher hypothesized the same level of outcome from all three groups at the

end of the course. The data was analyzed using paired sample t test in the SPSS Version 20.0.

Results and discussion

The study results show that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post tests conducted for each group of participants (Blended mode= 8.133, Online mode=7.400, face to face mode=5.667). However, the improvement of the participants who learned business vocabulary through the mode of blended learning was the highest (Mean = 8.133) compared to their counterparts.

		Paired Differences					t		Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	BLpre - BLpost	-8.133	4.389	1.133	-10.564	-5.703	-7.176	14	.000
Pair 2	OLpre - OLpost	-7.400	5.124	1.323	-10.238	-4.562	-5.593	14	.000
Pair 3	F2Fpre - F2Fpost	-5.667	4.117	1.063	-7.947	-3.387	-5.330	14	.000

Significance level p < .005

Table 2: Paired Samples t test of the three groups

The result of this study is contradictory to the results presented by Adam et al (2015) after studying two sections of an introductory microbiology course that was taught in hybrid and traditional methods. In his study, one section was taught through a hybrid (BL) format and the other through a traditional (face to face) format. Students were randomly assigned to the two sections. Both sections were provided with identical lecture materials, in-class worksheets, in-class assessments, and extra credit opportunities; the main difference was in the way the lecture material was delivered-online for the hybrid section and in person for the traditional section. Analysis of final grades of his study revealed that students in the traditional section did significantly better than those in the hybrid section ($p<0.001$) which shows the opposite results of the present study.

When performance in the two sections of Adam's study was compared for each class year separately, the differences were only significant for second years ($p<0.001$); freshmen, juniors, and seniors did not perform differently in the hybrid versus the traditional section. An anonymous midterm survey had suggested factors are likely contributing to the overall lower success of students in the hybrid section: some students in the hybrid section had not taken lecture notes and/or use the audio component of the online lectures, suggesting minimal interaction with the lecture material for these students. However in the present study, participants in the blended group were keen on attending face to face classes while actively interacting with their peers and Tutors online.

However, one of the most recent studies conducted to see the effectiveness of using the blended mode instead of the traditional face to face mode in teaching Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education with pre-university science students in Canada (Bazelais, 2018) shows the similar results to that of the present study. It reveals that the students in the blended group perform significantly better than their counterparts.

Conclusion

The findings of the study provide evidence to support the fact that the blended mode can be successfully used to support students to improve their business English vocabulary. The results of this study will be of use to the authorities of Higher Educational Institutes including Universities that expect to commence or continue Business English courses with blended mode of delivery. In addition, through the findings of this study, the future adult students who wish to upgrade their knowledge in business English Vocabulary by following an English course in blended mode would be highly benefitted. The same study can be replicated in a different setting at a different time or for different subjects in order to compare the outcome of different pedagogies.

Raw data were generated at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka. Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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