Blended-Learning In Second Language Classroon With Reference To Reading Skill: Issues And Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Globally, due to the advancement in technology, an approach towards pedagogy and learning has changed drastically. This change has transformed pedagogy and learning process from traditional ways to modern. As a result, this has brought so many changes in the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and learners in way of their teaching and learning process. On the one hand, it has made the teaching and learning process interesting and motivating but on the other hand it has made both more challenging if not handled carefully. This paper tries to highlight the teacher-student interaction and relationship in the heterogeneous and technologically backward universities in the context of Blended-Learning. The paper will try to point out the issues and challenges of teaching reading in blended-learning in second language classroom. Literacy among teachers and students and the importance of orientation courses for teachers for maximum outcome from the Blended-Learning. Efforts will also be made to know the status of Blended-Learning in these contexts and put forward the future roadmap to overcome the problems of Blended-Learning. What are the requirements and problems encountered by teachers in these situations? What is the role of a teacher in assessing and motivating the students in a diversified classroom? How to maintain the motivation and interest of students in these contexts? Finally, the paper will also try to throw light on the importance of the relevance and validity of syllabus according to the new methods and approaches of learning as well the needs of the students.

Keywords: Blended-Learning, challenges, Heterogeneous, Literacy, Pedagogy.

Introduction

In the age of Globalization, there has been a paradigm shift in pedagogy and learning from traditional approaches to modern approaches due to the development in technology which has changed the approach of teaching and learning process. The role of a teacher and learner has also changed from teacher-centered classroom to learner-Centered classroom. These days teacher's role in the classroom has become as facilitator or guide rather than a knowledge-giver, purist or torch bearer. There is a need that learners will meet according to the demands of present world market. By exposing learners into the new ways of learning their learning becomes more fascinating as well as challenging. They experience new ways of learning which makes their learning interesting and their level of motivation also increases. As a result of all this different methods of teaching has been applied in the classroom.

The need of different learning methods like Blended-Learning is the result of academic programs, course goals, and objectives. We have recognize that internet-based technology is the key to the creation of a learning society and has an impact, both in terms of increasing pupils' opportunities to enter and remain in higher education—and quality and effectiveness related to obtaining better learning results (Herrington, Reeves, & Oliver, 2010).

The term Blended- Learning has varied definitions in different contexts. The word "blend" means a mixture or combination. 'Blended' is a conveniently flexible word that can be applied any mixture of classroom activity with online instruction, although 'blended teaching' would be a more accurate descriptor of the evolving institutional approaches to course delivery. How students really learn is more mysterious (Israelite, 2015). There are number of definitions about Blended- Learning which are as follows:

Wikipedia (2016) has defined 'blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through delivery of content and instruction via digital and online media with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace'. Bates (2015) notes that blended learning embraces a wide variety of designs, amongst which he distinguishes:

• Technology used as classroom aids (e.g. PowerPoint slides, clickers);

• Using a learning management system to support classroom teaching (e.g. for storing learning materials or for online discussions);

• Using lecture capture for flipped classrooms;

Blended learning helps in achieving the active knowledge of learning. The development of new spaces and availability of resources have been achieved through the conjugation of synchronous (face-to-face and online) and asynchronous modalities as well as b-learning methodology which, according to Hramiak (2010) "provide a stronger sense of community among students than either traditional or fully online courses". Just as there are many definitions of blended-learning, there are many reasons why blended-learning is becoming increasingly popular. Institutions of higher education are using blended instruction to improve pedagogy, increase access and the flexibility of learning environments, and improve cost-effectiveness, but the most common reason is to improve pedagogical practices [16, 20].

Blended-Learning in Language Classroom

The main problem in Indian universities which the teachers and students are facing is the heterogeneous classroom where the learners come from variety of background. India has the pluralistic society and has economic disparity, the learners who come from diversified background having great differences in their capabilities. It is very difficult for any teacher to implement any method that suits equally to the class as well as face trouble in management of the classroom. There is a huge gap as for as students efficiency and level of understanding is concerned. In this situation it becomes a great hindrance for the teachers to present their material in an effective way. But the great advantage of blended- learning is the cordial relationship between teacher and students which yields great results to create a good environment for effective learning. It has been observed that blended- learning makes students more smart and active in learning their target goals. Their goals of target learning become easier to achieve in

future. They become more confident when they are being exposed fully in Blended-Learning. Their engagement in learning process becomes more engaging if guided carefully.

Blended-learning is a great challenge for teachers in the classroom due to the insufficient knowledge of technology and training which sometimes badly effect the motivation and interest of the students. Due to digital incompetency they are unable to get maximum outcome from the course content. So, there is a need to train teachers and make them conscious about the new trends and aspects of smart pedagogy so that they can deal the classroom in the context of blended-learning situation. There should be yearly orientation courses for junior and senior teachers to update them regarding the new changes in Blended-Learning. The advantage of all this is to make teachers overcome their problems and there will be some relief for course designers for improvement in exploring the better techniques and strategies for teachers to follow in the classroom. When designing a blended course, faculty must not only consider the elements of effective adult learning and find the right blend between online and in-class activities, they must also address some of the student problems encountered when using the approach such as the lack of technology and time management skills necessary for success in a blended format (Garnham, 2006). Moreover, it is not an easy job for a teacher to handle blended learning in a less advanced technology environment or in a large classroom if not organized carefully. Weaver and Qi (2005) described how in larger classrooms teachers are forced into more lecture-based teaching where students have less opportunity to participate making it easier for students to remain anonymous. There is a need to plan and systematize the things on the part of teachers before presenting their material in the classroom. As a student of ELT at AMU, I personally observed that teachers in the classroom were unable to attract and motivate the students towards effective learning because of their limited knowledge, dependence on limited teaching methods and poor infrastructure inside the classroom. Secondly, teachers in India generally focus more on the theoretical knowledge rather than making the practical application of things. Another thing is very important that still in our country computer literacy is very low and learning through media is also criticized by the parents. Most of the institutions are less frequent in adaption of technology in their curriculum except some central universities and premium institutes like IIT and IIM. Still in our country people are hesitant to use digital sources for non academic activities like online shopping, online payment and use of smart digital cards for money transaction. This is due to the lack of computer literacy, some survey estimated that computer literacy is just around 9% in India and reach of internet is around 10%..

So, there is a need to make teachers conscious about the different aspects of blended- learning. There are several ways that faculty can blend their online and face-to-face instruction. Graham (2006) divided blends into three different categories: enabling blends that focus on convenience and accessibility, enhancing blends that augment but do not drastically change the pedagogical style and transforming blends that change the instructional delivery to an active learning model. According to Graham (2006), transforming blends require students to actively construct knowledge and engage in "…intellectual activity that was not practically possible without the technology" For blended learning there must be strong connection between offline and online activity as well as collaboration between teacher and student. It is the leaning which requires perfect blend human ability and technology. It has been observed that the teacher-student interaction in the technologically advanced classroom is more useful, interesting and

enlightening. On the other hand the traditional way of teaching where students' time and interest was going in the wrong direction and also there was no desired outcome as far as our curriculum and course goals were concerned. But using blended learning in the heterogeneous classroom enhances the opportunities of learners in different ways. It opens the opportunities for learners in making their concepts of learning clear and deep. The knowledge of their subject increases more when they get a chance to express themselves. Blended learning can be very effective in teaching oral communication to the students at the ESL context more effectively than any other approach of teaching. Using technology along with the face-to-face interaction achieves great results as far as the learners' proficiency, fluency and appropriacy in the given content. They become more smart and active in learning in the context of blended learning. In the discipline of science and social science it can be more fruitful when demonstrated in the form of technology. The students can understand the subject matter more clearly by using the technology in the classroom. For instance, the lessons biology and geography can be understood better if shown through technology.Ross and Gage (2006) believe that the hybrid approach has the best potential for improving student learning, even though hybrid courses do not fit easily into the organizational structure of higher education. So the issue is not only about the application of blended learning but a need how to organize and present it in a particular system and situation. There is a great responsibility on the part of the course designers to design a syllabus which will reflect the learners' needs and demands according to their academics and future market. Successful implementation of a hybrid approach requires that many players in addition to individual faculty members be on board including colleges, departments, support services and infrastructure. "Organizational readiness" is important for successful implementation of blended learning and institutions need to be ready to support online teaching (Kim, 2006). The syllabus should clearly specify and match with the practical aspects of learners needs in systematized and planned way. There should be no such ambiguity which leads the learners to the wrong direction. It should be designed in such a way to fulfill the needs of all the students in a diversified classroom. However, it is not always possible for a teacher to follow the guidelines and techniques of different approaches to meet the learners' needs. Sometimes teachers can use their intuitions and experiences to achieve the desired results.

Teaching Reading in Blended Classroom

In the traditional method of teaching reading, normally the teacher ask student to read aloud with some instructions (oral supplements) i.e. telling the concept before reading or giving some idea about the upcoming text but the result of reading can not be achieved through just reading aloud and mastery over structural pattern. Mere giving some tips and pe-reading instructions is burdensome approach for the learner with little scope for deep understanding of a text (cohesion and coherence) and doesn't ignite the learners' mind for social interaction and real communication. Reading is the cognitive skill and a psycholinguistics process which require some interactive and communicative mechanism because reading is a part of language skill and language learning can't take place in vacuum. It always needs interaction, communication and exchange of ideas belongs to the real world situation. Real world situation refers to the situation which learner face practically in everyday life. Reading in a second language is always stressful in the beginning it always need some additional support (stimulation) to the learner. Reading is taken into account as a process of making meaning in interaction with passages according to a

cognitive or psycholinguistic attitude (Goodman, 1996).The teaching and learning system is constantly changing due to educational technology advancement and penetration of internet facility around the world. Many researchers and educators has emphasized on the incorporation of blended learning for teaching reading and shown its benefit in second language classroom. As we know that the blended leaning is mixture of human ability and computer assisted languages learning (CALL) mingled with learner led online engagement and teacher led offline instruction. The blended learning tools made easy access to real life materials in second language classroom that gives autonomy to the students and stimulate their thought for deeper understanding. It also reduces the physical effort of the teacher but require more attention during implementation of new activities. Blended learning in the classroom widens the scope of choosing the material of their own choice and social interaction through online activities.

Reading is a crucial language skill which requires an immense attention in our syllabus at every level. The old techniques of teaching reading by reading aloud in the classrooms should be elaborated by included technology. The students should be exposed now in the blended classroom where they can develop their reading in a better way. For example, in a blended classroom students can be asked to read out the content simultaneously which they will listen from an audio or video clip. This way students can develop the speed in reading as well as the aspect of pronunciation. Another example for developing reading in a blended classroom could be to ask the students to listen the content from an audio clip. The students can be asked to give the answer to the questions as per the content in the audio which they are listening. This the best way to develop the comprehension and analytic ability of the readers.

Tools for Blended-Learning

Some common effective tools are used for blended learning are as follows:

1. Conference calls.

2. Live sessions with experts.

3. Webinars: Discussion through Google talk or Skype.

4. Watching video on You Tube.

5. Face book or twitter chat room.

6. E-Books and E-Blogs.

7. Power point presentation.

Advantages of Blended-Learning

Blended learning provides space for learning outside the classroom:

1. Learners introduced with the authentic audios and videos that develop their communicative competence more effectively.

2. It provides learning at own speed through using play, pause and revision keys of multimedia devices as well as selection of learning material of their own choice.

3. It develops sense of enquiry and provides space for comparative study by having easy access to different sources of information.

4. It makes classroom learner centered and motivates them for active participation.

5. Digital fluency increases by using blended learning.

6. It provides more space for social interaction and make different learning environment.

7. It provides scope for though provoking question.

8. It maximizes real time communication within the group of learners.

9. It gives opportunity for self learning, self discovery and deep questioning.

10. It gives global reach to the learners through online stuffs.

11. Teacher gets frequent response from the learners .

Limitations of Blended-Learning

1. Handsome budget is required for purchasing multimedia devices and it needs careful maintenance.

2. Highly motivated teachers and learners are needed for successful implementation.

3. Selection of appropriate material and management of group of learners during debate

  and discussion is challenging task for the teacher.

4. Scientific attitude is needed for implementation.

5. Need of digital fluency.

6. Availability of high speed internet infrastructure.

7. Strong dependence on technical resources.

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