

SOWMYA K.N. “ SCOPE, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF BLENDED METHOD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS.” THESIS. DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH ST. THOMAS’ COLLEGE, THRISSUR, UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT, 2019.

**SCOPE, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF BLENDED
METHOD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR
ENGINEERING STUDENTS**



**Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the award of the Doctor of Philosophy in
English Language and Literature**

Submitted by

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Findings

- Blended method is efficient for language teaching.
- Learners easily comprehend the contents while following Blended method.
- Samples of the study asserted remarkable improvement in communication competency before and after the experiment.
- There was a notable difference in communication skills of experimental group before and after the experiment.
- Technology assisted teaching is appropriate for engineering students.
- Exploring more online platforms will improve the learning habits of students.
- Along with teaching curriculum based subjects, BL can be adopted for personality development and orientation classes.
- Language learning enhances confidence level and presentation skill of students.

Suggestions for Improvement

- Training programmes for instructors have to be conducted at college level and university level to familiarise different teaching methods.
- Assessment sessions to evaluate the teaching system at the end of each academic year may be implemented.
- Arranging orientation programmes by experts will facilitate to acquire suggestions to improve.
- Forming social media groups of teachers handling same subjects may be effective to share ideas and perspectives.
- Publications of institutions such as magazines, newsletters and various literary activities should pay due attention to communication skills.

- Placement cell can play a dynamic role by conducting mock interviews and personality development classes.
- Exploring the possibilities of language laboratory will help to learn language in international standard.
- Providing internet facility for students at campus may initiate independent learning.
- Forming students club will be useful to conduct extracurricular activities thus inter personal skills can be improved.
- Engineering college library should include literary texts, magazines and newspapers and allotting library hour on weekly basis may instigate reading habit.
- Apart from language training, Blended method can be experimented in the teaching and learning of other subjects also.
- Institutions can consider Language Across the Curriculum as the educational policy which will ensure linguistic competency of all subject teachers and learners.
- English has to be the medium of instruction and interaction inside the campus.
- Appointing communication trainer will be useful to provide professional training for learners.
- Participating in interactive programmes may initiate communication competency and enthusiasm for public speaking.
- Inviting renowned academicians and former students who accomplished higher professional goals as guests for interactive sessions will motivate students.

- Arranging training sessions to improve communication skills by experts and a pre test and post test can be conducted to assess the improvement.
- College radio or similar ventures can be organised in institutions, which will be exciting and students will come up with innovative ideas.

For all the above mentioned activities, blended method can be utilised with a scientific approach and thus it will bring new dimensions in the field of ELT.

Limitations of the study

- The study being very vast, it was limited to first year engineering students.
- Two components such as online learning site Moodle and classroom teaching alone were used in blended method though other learning applications like M learning are currently in use.
- The sample size is restricted to 50 as it is the average strength of a class.

Issues encountered by the researcher

- Considerable time had to be spent to identify the problems related to communication skills and the reasons behind it.
- Variations had to be made in time framework.
- Great number of methods had to be reviewed to find the apt one.
- Action plan had to be rescheduled during the intervention.
- Making aware the corresponding college authorities regarding the relevance of implementing blended method for language teaching.

Scope for further research

The current study explores a significant aspect of technology based learning, yet a substantial area of this realm remains unexplored. For instance, in blended method, instead of online learning platforms, mobile applications or webinars can be added as a component. Plenty of instant online learning contents are available in internet but there is scope to create syllabus specific study materials both by learners and teachers. Researches in these areas may be innovative. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and LAC are the two imminent approaches in English language teaching and both focus on the link between language learning and content learning. Studies based on these concepts cater wide range as both cross the limit of language learning narrowed in language classrooms. Generally, the target group consider for research are students, professionals or learners with specific needs and groups like housewives remain unexplored. Such kind of population can be studied in future experiments.

Scope, Challenges and Prospects of Blended Method

Technological innovations are part of education and English language learning cannot stay away from the trend. Thus, possibility of the selected area for the present research is enormous. ICT is an inevitable branch in the recent education system and it is highly significant to incorporate technological elements like online learning along with classroom learning. The challenge encountered during the intervention was mainly about the attitude of engineering students regarding communication skills. Their focus is on core subjects and it was a tedious task to bring attention to communication classes and motivate to improve linguistic proficiency. Prospects of blended method have been unveiled in the study. The method proves to be an effective strategy in language

teaching for engineering students as they are familiar with technology and without distracting regular teaching hours can improve communication skill by combining online and classroom teaching.

Students and parents consider engineering degree as a trail to improve learners' career and wish their education to be significant. Communication skills help to accomplish professional goals and to excel in career. It is essential to formulate awareness among students in relation to know a language rather than know about the language. The initial concept indicates acquiring proficiency over the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, while the latter is learning grammar rules and usages without practising and it may be like learning to swim by means of various resources without having real practice in water. Learning rules and regulations of a language will refine the language use but it alone may not bring into being a good communicator. The primary concern of the research is to make the students to use the language in numerous situations.

Skills are primarily acquired through practice and it is similar to habit formation, additional regular practice will enhance communication competency. Obtaining proficiency in language skills and adept in communication is directly proportionate to practice. Though speaking is the most regularly used skill which is natural and biologically oriented than other skills, one cannot concentrate on speaking skill alone as speech without listening is an incomplete process. When considers the great impact of reading and writing in human civilisation and culture that two are also important proficiencies. All the four skills are interrelated and are given equal credence in the research. Using blended method, in both online and classroom teaching the four folded language skills are focused and more than teaching English the approach was to

facilitate communicating in English. Activities based on interaction which will be useful in real life are given more importance.

The research has attempted to find out the efficiency of both synchronous and asynchronous learning style. In direct teaching various activities to improve the four communication skills were practiced and performance of learners was evaluated thoroughly. Online activities offered more opportunity to practice learned skills and assessing improvement was also more convenient. The other areas of focus are to raise the self esteem of engineering students to communicate fluently in English and to improve the learning style. The habit of self study is also motivated during the research. Communication skills, learning habits, use of online platforms are the areas of focal point in the research. Engineering is a profession related to innovations and improvisation, though the base is technology or technicalities, communication plays a key role in professional success. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are interconnected and acquiring proficiency in communication means mastering all the four skills.

In engineering curriculum, one of the effective ways to improve communication skills is to follow Language Across Curriculum approach. As every instructor will take initiative to inculcate linguistic elements, there will be visible progress in communication level of students. In the tertiary level of learning, effort for self learning has to be motivated and in necessary situations instructor can assist learners for doing assignments or for task evaluation. According to LAC approach every class has to concentrate on linguistic aspects and vocabulary related to each subject is highlighted in the syllabus. It may help to create an impact that language has to be focused in all the areas. Technology based tools can be used to create visual impact as highlighting new or difficult vocabulary while doing power point presentation will seek learners'

immediate attention. During the intervention, it was evident that whatsapp is a common medium for interaction and students are included in group among classmates or with instructors. In addition to entertainment they use it to share notes, pass information, for discussion and to clear doubts. Social media like this will be more beneficial in language learning purpose if the interaction focuses on linguistic aspects.

LAC was made a part of the research and faculties had a positive attitude towards this approach. During the interface with other subject faculties, a discussion was initiated about how language elements can be the focal point along with subject teaching and the possibilities of implementing such kind of method. Circulating articles and journals was another successful act for developing language. As journals and articles publish recent information it will help to acquire knowledge and facilitate to have good vocabulary. During free hours students were encouraged to make use of library and read books. Online journals and e-books were also introduced. E-books provide a great opportunity to access books at low cost or occasionally free of cost. Websites like Attano which deliver e-books were initiated during the orientation. Mobile applications like adobe reader and pdf viewer help to read books and articles in both online and offline. Students were interested to carry out this act as they could access and read matter whenever they are free and wherever they go.

Moodle, which is a recognized online learning platform was introduced as an element of blended learning. Learners accessed materials uploaded in the Moodle website, which was the online tool for teaching in blended method. Digital literature was another area made familiar for the learners. Digital literature or e- literature is literary works that take advantage and capabilities of stand – alone or networked computer. Young generation wishes to correlate everything with technology and in every field, learning material are getting converted to digital format. Old archives, film,

books and other valuable materials which have to be treasured for future generation are being transferred to digital form. This kind of technology provide more opportunity to express thoughts even when they do not have pen or paper and it is easy to save and share through internet to mass media.

As an upcoming trend, even in school level, teaching is carried out with the assistance of technology and projectors, power point presentation, digital board are being widely used in classrooms. For better understanding of the concepts teachers make use of different videos and animated images. Certain measures are essential to incorporate technology in teaching and learning. Good infrastructure, knowledgeable instructors, technical experts and enthusiastic students are the factors behind successful implementation of blended method. In this study these elements are included for a flourishing result. Effectiveness of blended method influenced faculties from the corresponding colleges regarded for the research. In one such instance, a Moodle site (Fig. 5.1) was created to teach Engineering Mechanics along with classroom instruction. All the students of mechanics class were added as users to the site and notes, assignments were uploaded regularly. It was evident that conducting tests and quizzes in online were more convenient for both learners and instructor. Graphs, diagrams and other type of illustrations were used and learners could refer and download all the reference materials. Such freedom is lacking in classroom even when the teacher uses technology based projector or LCD. Feedback from students assured that blended method can be adopted for subject teaching also.

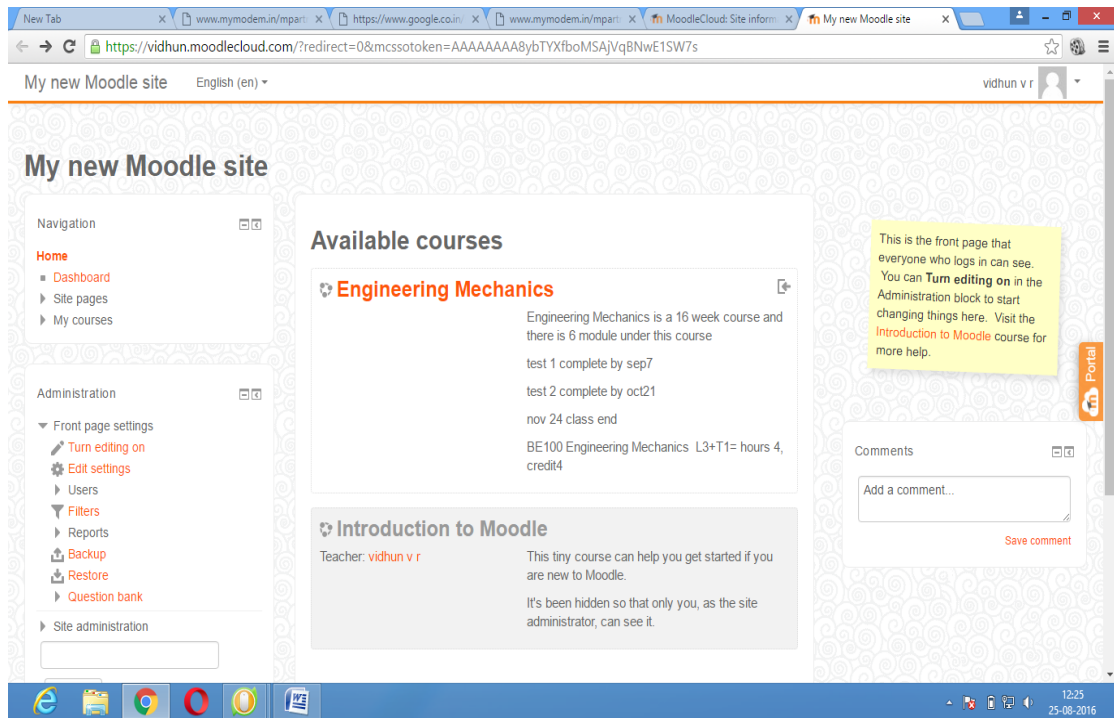


Fig. 5.1

Implementation of any teaching method demands systematic preparation and thorough background study and when the strategy proves to be effective the next step is to implement it in a larger framework. After conducting the research, the communication skill instructors were requested to maintain online interface with students to make them more acquainted with online interaction. During follow up it was evident that learners retained the proficiency and fluency acquired during the experimental stage. Interest from other teachers to interact with students through online mode and to use more technology based aids for teaching is observed as a positive sign. As the technology and equipment considered in the study are assisting regular classroom teaching, students get advantage of both online and offline learning. A hasty switch over from the traditional method to technology based teaching may not be possible and blended method can act as a transition component which incorporates both conventional and modern techniques to prepare students to achieve their career goal.

At the time, when the research was initiated, students registered under the University of Calicut were included as samples. During the intervention, engineering courses all over Kerala were brought under a single university titled Kerala Technological University (KTU). This transformation brought remarkable changes in the curriculum and the examination system. Regarding Communication skill paper, language lab is mandatory in every institution and such amends are positive notes to gain prominence for communication skills and linguistic proficiency in engineering curriculum. Teaching and learning system is keen to incorporate latest technology and current trend substantiates the findings of the research.

Recently UGC has formed regulations regarding SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) and initiated more than 2000 courses delivered by IIT or IIM professors for students to indulge in online learning. Similar to NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) KTU has started online courses for B.Tech first year students run by renowned professors and eminent scholars. These ventures at government level assures the booming of online courses and selection of combining online learning platforms with classroom teaching for English language teaching in the present research is apt in the current scenario.