

Exploring the impact of blended learning in Pakistani higher education institutions

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to investigate the impact of blended learning within Pakistan's higher education institutions. Blended learning involves incorporating occasional face-to-face sessions, typically on a monthly or weekly basis, alongside the use of e-learning tools through virtual learning environments. The primary objective of this study is to assess the benefits of implementing blended learning in higher education institutions in Pakistan.

KEYWORDS:

Blended Learning;
E-Learning Tools;
Higher Education
Institutions;
Virtual Learning
Environments;;

INTRODUCTION

At present, proficiency in the English language is imperative to tackle the challenges of the twenty-first century, especially in the context of prevailing globalization, competition among education systems, and the internationalization of professions, along with advancements in science and technology (Bonk & Graham, 2012). The ability to communicate in English opens up numerous opportunities in the professional world, underscoring the importance for universities to excel in equipping students with strong knowledge in their respective fields, coupled with proficiency in English as a universal language (McFall-McCaffery & Cook, 2016).

In the domain of Blended and Distance Education, the use of technology is essential for augmenting the teaching-learning process. According to Van den Berg, Joffe, and Porto (2016), it is crucial for higher education institutions to adopt novel experiences facilitated by ICT. This entails implementing changes in teaching methods, communication systems, and the dissemination of learning resources. Recognizing the expenses and difficulties involved, the shift is considered necessary in the present day, when information and communication technology (ICT) acts as a potent instrument for acquiring new abilities and constructing knowledge (Grant, 2015).

Advocates promote the use of the Moodle learning platform in a blended style as a way to respond to new opportunities for e-learning. This strategy seeks to foster not just the interchange of academic knowledge but also the integration of other cultures into the work

environment (Bernauer & Tomei, 2015; Harasim, 2012). By adopting a "B-Learning" model, students gain access to an organized educational system in Pakistan that fosters self-learning, cooperative learning, interpersonal communication, and personal development, all within the dynamic interplay of family, work, and study (Dias, Diniz, & Hadjileontiadis, 2014).

This study aims to investigate the influence of blended learning on the teaching and learning process for English learners in Pakistan. It specifically examines the effects on academic success and satisfaction levels among instructors and students (Ungaretti, Thompson, Miller, & Peterson, 2015). ICT in education is an undeniable fact that brings both obstacles and advantages. The promise of ICTs resides in their capacity to establish novel educational settings, providing adaptability in relation to time, place, and expenses, notably in the realm of higher education (Salinas, 2005).

Virtual education, enabled by information and communication technology (ICT), offers possibilities for revolutionary teaching methods, enabling students to acquire, share, and generate knowledge without being restricted by time or place (Hernández & Pérez, 2015). The incorporation of ICT in education necessitates novel methodologies, since these technologies have a profound influence on all facets of the instructional process (educators, learners, curriculum, media, etc.) (Miller & Doering, 2014). The Technical University of Ambato has recognized that the notion of blended learning for English language education is not aligned with society expectations in the current changing environment. This has highlighted the need to find a solution to this educational issue (Demiray & Sever, 2014).

To address these challenges, a "B-Learning Model" is proposed to transition from traditional knowledge generation to a more dynamic approach that enhances communication and interaction among teachers and students. The study, conducted with higher education students in Pakistan, evaluates the impact of the "B-Learning Model" on English language skills development, including audio, vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing. It also gauges the satisfaction levels of teachers with this methodology (Bernauer & Tomei, 2015).

The study utilizes a combination of online activities through the Virtual Platform Moodle and face-to-face meetings to create a coeducational learning environment. Through this approach, the research aims to promote learning and development among students and teachers. The evaluation involves comparing the academic performance of students in the experimental group, exposed to the "B-Learning Model," with a control group. Additionally, surveys are employed to gauge the satisfaction levels of both teachers and students at the conclusion of the application of the "B-Learning Model" in the experimental group (Bernauer & Tomei, 2015).

Our initial objective is to gauge the impact and effectiveness of implementing the "B-Learning Model" on the development or enhancement of language skills among students in the English blended format. This evaluation involves utilizing the "Mid-Cycle Test" results from both experimental and control groups. Our second objective aims to measure the perceptions of those engaged in the application of the proposed model. This assessment is conducted through surveys distributed to both students and teachers.

We are presented with a problem, and our objective is to make a meaningful contribution towards its resolution. More precisely, this task entails doing a diagnostic study of the teaching and learning process in the "blended format of DEDI." The study demonstrates a dependence on conventional elements, overlooking innovative techniques that might improve engagement, communication, motivation, and academic achievement of students. Hence, it is essential to develop a cutting-edge approach that is in sync with the present technological environment of society and caters to the specific traits and requirements of

learners. Pazos (2001) elucidates the disparity, asserting that instructional techniques often fall behind technical progress. Inspired by this recognition, we have created and executed the "B-Learning Model" as a pioneering methodology. This methodology utilizes a virtual classroom for English learning within the "Blended Learning" framework, with the objective of promoting meaningful, collaborative, and interactive learning experiences. The primary emphasis is on acquiring information about the influence of this model on academic achievement and the levels of satisfaction experienced by both instructors and students who use the model (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

The following is an exact formulation of the research problem: In the blended education program offered by the Specialized Language Department at the Technical University of Ambato, how does the implementation of the b-learning educational model influence the teaching and learning process for students who are studying English? (Kirkwood & Price, 2016). The implementation of the b-learning model aims to enhance the educational experience for students in a blended format. This involves integrating various tools and educational resources into the "Virtual Learning Environment Moodle" to facilitate meaningful, active, and collaborative learning. Additionally, it serves as a communication channel with students, fostering independent learning and overcoming geographical and time constraints.

After conducting inquiries and analyzing information, it has been observed that while there is existing research on the utilization of "B-Learning" in various contexts and knowledge areas, this particular study possesses originality within the Ecuadorian context. Despite some familiarity with b-learning in Ecuadorian universities, it is not a widely explored subject (Bonk & Graham, 2012; Dias et al., 2014). Reviewing research at the national level in Pakistan, where the proposal for implementing a Virtual Learning Environment is suggested, it remains a conceptual proposition without actual application with students. The extent to which the use of the virtual environment enhances the teaching and learning process is unknown. In contrast, this current research introduces the implementation of the "B-Learning Model" and subsequently assesses its impact on English language learning. The study also delves into experiential aspects related to the use of this methodology, encouraging further exploration. The aim is to contribute positively to results that guide teachers in utilizing virtual environments as a methodological strategy, not only for improving academic performance but also for creating a more dynamic, reflective, and interactive learning environment. This, in turn, helps students develop skills and problem-solving abilities, fostering a commitment to tasks with seriousness and respect for the betterment of the country's future (Fisher et al., 2014).

The findings of research conducted on technology-rich innovative learning environments are reflected in a study that was published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2013. This paper is included in the background information. The purpose of this program, which is being carried out by 25 nations, is to investigate the ways in which young people learn and the circumstances in which they may learn more effectively (Garrison, 2011). The research presents a set of guidelines for the development of efficient educational settings, taking into account the fact that technology is a potent tool that is an essential component of our professional lives, our personal lives, and our society. Technology has a significant role in generating systemic change in learning environment design and in effecting teaching and learning at the micro level, which results in the creation of various learning experiences. Although it is not regarded a prerequisite for learning, technology plays a critical part in shaping this transformation. According to Garrison (2011), the research also highlights the role of education to provide young people with the knowledge, abilities, and values that are essential to handle the obstacles that are brought by

an increase in connectedness. This coincides with the aim to promote openness in the education system, addressing chronic deficiencies in important parts of Ecuadorian Higher Education, including the academic, research, and technical sectors (Harasim, 2012; Kirkwood & Price, 2016).

METHOD

The research methodology centers on the implementation and evaluation of the "b-learning model" in English language courses in Pakistani higher education. The model combines online activities via the Moodle platform with weekly face-to-face meetings. Participants include students in experimental and control groups. Additionally, a survey gauges satisfaction levels of both teachers (40) and students (490), collecting feedback on the model's effectiveness. Ethical considerations ensure participant confidentiality, and the study acknowledges its specific context while emphasizing the potential for broader applicability. The methodology employs a mixed-methods approach, blending quantitative test results with qualitative survey responses to offer comprehensive insights into the model's impact.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Explanation about the "B-Learning Model"

This B-Learning Model offers the advantage of integrating:

a. Classroom Training:

This aspect allows for physical interaction, influencing participant motivation, fostering the establishment of connections, providing guidance and teacher explanations. It also offers the opportunity to address questions and engage in more complex activities than would be possible in a purely virtual setting.

b. E-learning:

This dimension involves overcoming spatial and temporal barriers, providing flexibility since the majority of course activities do not necessitate participants to convene at a specific place and time. It also enables cost reduction by eliminating the need for travel between locations, among other factors (Demiray & Sever, 2014).

A "Virtual Learning Environment Moodle" (EVA) has been used to integrate online teaching materials and activities. This EVA functions as a suite that allows for both synchronous and asynchronous interactions to take place. It is designed to assist the teaching and learning of the English language on the basis of a curriculum, with the goal of achieving the intended learning goals. It has been said by Area (2004) that educational resources are an essential component of a wide range of teaching and learning activities that span a variety of educational levels and kinds. By using the Moodle platform, students who are enrolled in the mixed format are able to obtain access to a variety of virtual tools and multimedia information, which often take the shape of self-learning resources in these types of courses. According to Area (2004), these media play a key role in distance education because they operate as a mediator for communication and interaction between professors and students. They also serve as the stage upon which educational exchanges take place.

It is important to highlight that the production of this work and the execution of numerous activities are based on constructivism. This includes the incorporation of Vygotsky's social learning theory as well as Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning.

According to the constructivist theory, knowledge is created by the learner via the use of active processes, which may be considered either external or internal. According to Diaz-Barriga and Hernandez (2001), this knowledge is not a direct reproduction of reality but rather a creation from the perspective of human beings. The idea of Ausubel places an emphasis on the fact that learners always have past knowledge, and that effective learning takes place when recently acquired information is connected to previously acquired comprehension. According to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, learning takes place when individuals engage in mediation or contact with other different people. As a result, the implementation of activities takes into consideration the prior knowledge of the students, includes activities that are relevant to the students' everyday life, and encourages group activities in which the students may connect with their classmates.

There are a number of reasons that contribute to the relevance of English language education in a mixed style with regard to the English language. In the first place, we argue that the B-Learning Model in our educational setting has a significant potential to provide students many possibilities for more active and participatory learning, which in turn helps to enhance the socialization of information. The face-to-face interactions that take place between professors and pupils on a weekly basis are demonstrably inadequate in this respect. The authors Aguaded and Cabero (2013: 212) state that a virtual workplace makes it possible for members of a group to have constant touch with one another, regardless of where they are physically located. Utilizing the tools provided by the internet allows one to circumvent limitations imposed by both time and place. Students may overcome the feelings of isolation that are associated with blended learning by using the Virtual Learning Environment Moodle, which provides a platform for students to communicate and engage with one another. Within the context of the digital world, where English is the principal language of communication.

Sangrà's words (2002) highlight the transformative role of current ICT in overcoming historical obstacles to distance education. Virtual environments permit a multitude of teaching-learning activities, fostering various mental processes related to learning. Collaborative learning, supported by Vygotsky's social learning theory, promotes interaction among students, encouraging the exchange of opinions and feedback. The emphasis on "autonomy" through Moodle underscores students' responsibility and control over their learning conditions, breaking down spatial and temporal barriers. This technology not only enhances language learning but also transforms the learning experience into a more engaging and less stressful endeavor. The envisioned outcome of implementing English language learning in this manner is to afford students in blended formats greater interaction, flexibility, and autonomy, thereby enhancing motivation and interest in learning. The goal is to serve students through the B-Learning Pedagogical Model, aligning with the specific needs of individuals in today's globalized and competitive world.

The findings of the study underscore the transformative potential of the B-Learning Model in English language education. The virtual workspace provided by Moodle facilitates continuous communication and interaction among students, overcoming the limitations of physical space and time. Collaborative learning, supported by Vygotsky's social learning theory, allows students to progress collectively through their zone of proximal development. The emphasis on autonomy in the virtual environment enhances students' control over their learning conditions, making the process more flexible and

engaging. The integration of ICT not only improves language learning outcomes but also contributes to a more enjoyable and less stressful learning experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the b-learning model emerges as a powerful tool in reshaping English language education in blended formats. The study affirms the potential of virtual environments, particularly the Moodle platform, in fostering communication, collaboration, and autonomy among students. The findings support the idea that technology, when integrated effectively, can overcome historical obstacles to distance education and enhance the quality of the learning experience. The emphasis on interaction, flexibility, and autonomy aligns with the demands of a globalized and competitive world, preparing students to succeed in diverse professional settings.

Future research in this domain should explore specific pedagogical strategies within the B-Learning Model that contribute most significantly to improved language learning outcomes. Investigating the role of teacher facilitation in virtual environments and the impact of collaborative activities on student engagement could provide valuable insights. Additionally, longitudinal studies assessing the long-term effects of the b-learning model on language proficiency and its applicability across different educational contexts would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of its potential. Furthermore, exploring the perspectives and experiences of teachers and students in-depth could offer nuanced insights into the challenges and benefits of implementing the b-learning model.

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