

# Implementing an Online Learning Platform in an English as a Second Language Context: Analyses of Blended Courses Issues and Solution

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## Abstract

Blended learning has turned into an instructive course that has an effect in the present language classrooms. It is accustomed to bring the digital world and in-class teaching together. However, some teachers are yet apprehensive about teaching language in blended learning and students can be irresponsible in managing their learning autonomy. The aim of this paper is to analyse the literature regarding the implementation of blended learning in an English as a Second Language (ESL) context. The research questions are to identify the issues and challenges in the implementation and propose possible solutions from the literature. Document analysis is used on twenty four previous studies conducted from year 2003 to 2018. Findings revealed four main issues and challenges namely teachers; students' attitude; management of the institutions; and technical support and infrastructure for blended courses to work at the targeted context. This paper found the significance of conducting needs analysis, finding solid foundation for the technical team, proposing appropriate curricula for blended courses, staff training and providing students' supportive measures as several recommendations to manage the issues in blended learning implementation. This paper assists the required parties to strategize effective actions in order to build successful blended courses in the future.

**Keywords:** Blended Learning ; ESL ; Implementation ; Limitations ; Possible Solution

## 1. Introduction

Teaching and learning is a dynamic field. During the early years, second language teaching was mainly related with the physicals of the schools such as the classrooms, the teachers, course books and examinations [1]. However, one-point delivery appears to be unfit to offer adequate commitment in second language learning. Correct decision-making, relevance, social contact and setting are several factors to encourage powerful and effective language learning [2].

In this era, technology is changing the scenario in language learning classrooms and the potentials of technology are explored to enhance the effectiveness of ESL courses [3]. The influence and development of the Internet through Web based learning or the World Wide Web has brought about new patterns and usages in improving the courses. One of the trends is the blended learning which has caught many ESL researchers' major attentions.

Blended learning supports the development of students' abilities. It promotes dynamic students' cooperation in the development and utilization of skills that they choose, combine and apply. In ESL contexts, blended learning is prescribed to work with interactive techniques [2]. By utilizing the techniques, a teacher makes the students to be responsible in their own language development and apply what they acquired in the new blended settings.

Blended learning combines face-to-face learning and online learning. It changes the conventional way of learning, which incites positive potentials to both ESL teachers and students.

Nevertheless, such change to an online domain is viewed as a test to some ESL teachers. Teachers may be challenged to select the most suitable alternatives to facilitate their students [4]. Most students, on the other hand, feel that whatever introduced in class is not interesting and do not align from the future job necessities. They generally do not see the classroom atmosphere as inspiring or supporting. They attend classes with unwilling mind, cause more disciplinary issues, or do not participate in lessons [5].

As such, through the expansion of technology, blended learning changes the students' attitudes and mentalities, and modifies the way they learn in and out of classes. For instance, blended learning assists the students to acquire knowledge easier and also encourages them to become independent students. Blended learning can help the students to achieve better outcomes, as well as really comprehending the language at a more profound level. Blended learning has additionally enable teachers to associate frequently and develop well with their students. Plus, the students can now customize their own learning [6]. Hence, ESL teachers are encouraged to rebuild the learning process and modify their classroom materials to cater to such change because the students are evolving with the digital era day by day.

This article discusses the implementation of blended learning in an ESL context. The research questions are (1) what are the issues and challenges in implementing blended learning in ESL programs? (2) what are the possible solutions to manage the difficulties?

## 2. Blended Learning in ESL

There are many different interpretations of blended learning. The idea of blended learning existed for quite a while, yet its definition was not solidly defined up until around the start of the 21st century. Right now, the utilization of the term blended learning includes joining the Internet and computerized media with built up classroom frames that require the physical co-operation of educators and students [7]. The point of having the two delivery strategies is to supplement each other. Blended learning utilizes a mix method of face-to-face and online learning exercises and has been found to increase understanding, collaboration, and association in the learning procedure [8, 9]. A blended course has anywhere between 30 to 79% of online substance conveyance with the remaining content conveyed in a non-online technique, for example, face-to-face implementation [10].

Blended learning framework is also characterized as a mix of face-to-face instruction with computer mediated direction [11]. Meanwhile, [12] portrayed blended learning as a strategy or guideline that joins online with face to face learning exercises that are coordinated in an "arranged, instructively significant" way, where a portion of the face-to-face time is supplanted by online exercises. [13] for instance, characterized blended learning as student-focused, self-managed, adaptable and multi-modular way to deal with adapting yet argued that only supplementing an up close and personal face-to-face mode with online Web-based learning is not considered as blended learning. Then again, [14] introduced the idea of 'strong' and 'weak' blends so as to demonstrate a continuum crosswise over little measures of e-Learning to huge measure of e-Learning.

Be that as it may, in spite of the numerous interpretations of blended learning, the most widely recognized definitions refer to a combination of physical classroom learning and virtual settings [15]. Accordingly, blended learning could be defined as a teaching and learning approach that incorporates Web-based teaching and learning mode and face-to-face cooperation.

## 3. Methodology

This paper is using document analysis to review previous researches on the implementation and the limitations of blended learning in an English as a Second Language (ESL) context. Secondary research is used to gather twenty-four literature of related area from the year 2003 to 2018.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Implementation of Blended Learning

The pattern of combining Internet innovation with face-to-face collaboration is related with enhanced teaching method and simpler access to collect data. Blended learning assembles groups of ESL learners and a stage for free and communicative discourse. Blended learning enlarges the scale of using the textbook and classroom exercises, where ESL students are given chances to return to exercises and tasks that are done previously, and look through their achievements that they have learnt. Blended learning also encourages ESL students to be autonomous in their own language learning and invites more time spending towards fun learning [16]. Thus, the ESL students are showing more interest and motivation. Motivation not only restricted to improved learning, but self-directed learning motivated students to have greater involvement in the language learning process.

Moreover, blended learning helps ESL learners to adapt effective ways of using materials for their own learning that will enable them to achieve higher order learning and be able to solve problems strategically. In an educational situation, the language department and staff members are inclusive in looking for approaches to use online projects to enhance professionalism, leadership improvement and the conveyance of guideline and appraisal of students' work. ESL students today are looking for approaches to self-check their work before submitting to the management. In this way, required projects and technology tools are an absolute necessity to have today at the institutions or for the ESL students to access from their home or at anywhere around the globe.

Furthermore, [17] allude to how the ESL students are in favour of blended learning. The students being upgraded digitally can expand their lessons and discussions beyond the classroom scenarios [18]. Blended learning can encourage collaborative oriented setting in ESL education. Blended learning combining technology adaptation in language teaching enables students to acquire better comprehension of the topic, and builds up their psychological and social aptitudes at a similar time.

Truth to be told, diversity is one normal scenario in a language classroom. A single class can comprise of various gender, social and cultural backgrounds and language proficiencies. Technology bolsters these differences, as there is a wide scope of digital tools that can serve diverse kinds of ESL students. Such blended courses can prepare a way for the scaffolding and collaboration efforts. They additionally suit ESL students with various adapting needs and interests [19]. Moreover, web-based learning supports trade of data, particularly for weak students who may need all the help they could get, especially during the off hours of school. All in all, given the far reaching presence of online platforms, blended learning can have positive outcomes in terms of ESL learning and in our educational settings.

### 4.2 Limitation in Blended Learning Implementation

The joint utilization of the web and face to face situations empowered the ESL teachers to stir the students' enthusiasm, to manage time, to handle course exercises adaptably, to spare time for classroom activities, to track students' progress effortlessly as well as to participate in broader cooperation with the ESL students [20].

Despite all of those, other side of the coin revealed that the ESL teachers battled with course administration, workload and struggling to make a balance between the two conditions. The execution time of a blended course requires contemplations that go past the genuine outline and requires more knowledge to create one blended course [21]. As indicated by the Oxford Gathering in [22], the time and complexity of outlining and building up a blended course and in addition of the absence of adequate expertise are referred as the several key difficulties in actualizing blended learning in ESL settings.

Administrative and management issues were additionally crucial to the blended course platforms, since any help from the management is basic to the creation and upkeep of both on the web and the face-to-face situations. The need to be familiar and comfortable with the online route and activities, consolidated with the complex nature of dealing with various discussion threads, was at first difficult and tedious for the management of institutions [23].

In terms of technological angles, it is watched that internet connection faulty has been one of the blames of the limitations for the blended learning practices [24]. Technical support is definitely

needed with a hired and functioning technical team to uphold the requirement of performing blended courses.

Another limitation was getting the ESL students to be on the same page about the new platforms. Some students were sceptical about the new approach and not used to take their language learning on their own account. Others had issues with time administration and utilizing the technology for learning. The ESL teachers needed to persistently remind the students about due dates and where to discover materials and assignments on the Internet. This also burdened the teachers to keep the students on track. Besides that, a few students would hold up until the last moment to post discussions and submit assignments and would in some cases keep running into technical issues [7].

In light of the information assembled from many researchers, one might say that the issues and challenges in actualizing blended learning could be separated into four classifications; management of institutions, teachers, students' attitude and technical support and infrastructure.

### 4.3 Possible Solutions

So as to manage the issues and difficulties recognized in executing blended learning, the researchers have offered a few arrangements or suggestions for better reception of blended learning in ESL settings. At establishment level for instance, it is proposed that a thorough needs analysis to be directed before the blended course implementation [20]. This refers to the action of investigating the management delivery and support system [20]. This step includes the find out the conditions and settings of the students, ESL teachers, administration staff, technology monitoring and access [25]. Also, to manage the technological glitches, finding a solid foundation for the technical team can help for viable and smooth conveyance of blended learning [24, 25].

The curricula for blended projects ought to be mapped out appropriately and deliberately, while enhancements ought to be clear for all stages and assessment of new projects. Blended learning projects ought to be refreshed every three-year period or less to ensure the end goal of remaining current with the requirements of work industry [26]. Teachers also have to keep in mind that obliging the new age of students is to devise learning practices that align with their learning styles and desires [27]. In any case, all ESL projects should indicate quality in their content and delivery.

Moreover, for the ESL teachers to manage the previously mentioned challenges, there are three noteworthy suggestions that were extricated from the reviewed researchers. First, the significance of staff training [24, 25]. Staff training here can refer to the arrangement of staff orientation preceding the execution programs in educational and mechanical aspects in blended learning. This is indispensable in guaranteeing effectiveness and also in re-orientating ESL teachers' behaviour and language teaching practices [25]. ESL teachers with no or limited experience in outlining for blended learning should attempt only a few methodologies initially to increase some experience that can help them in applying this approach.

Apart from that, it is important to understand the significance of the support system [20, 23]. For the ESL teachers, they will need support that can be required from different sources. For example, promoting teaching assistants and technical support that are always ready and handy, as well as co-operation from the administration itself [20]. This could decrease the ESL teachers' burden particularly in terms of time constraint and workload in blended learning program.

Next, the networking among the ESL teachers can also be of significance [20]. [27] reported that most educators do not share their teaching materials with other educators from various faculties and institutions. Teachers are urged to blend well with their associates, share thoughts and ideas with each other and working together for successful blended learning execution.

While the support system is vital for ESL teachers to manage challenges in blended learning to work, this factor is also crucial for the students [23, 24]. Without doubt, the use of technology in ESL learning is evolving significantly [28] [29]. Thus, it is considerable that a specific level of maturity and discipline is requested along the students' side to really profit by these blended programs [30]. The students could as well be given supportive measures such as a helpdesk, getting focus on the mental and well-being perspectives such as providing a counselling services, and guiding them in management skills, so that they understand their own responsibility and possible effects on their own language learning [24]. Likewise, the supportive measures can also help to expand the students' inspiration, self-confidence and self-independence [31].

## 5. Implication and Conclusion

The new age of students are equipped with advanced background of technology. Consequently, blended learning methodology can be advantageous as it will enhance ESL teaching and learning qualities and brought the ESL students closer to the vast knowledge. Blending in the technological tools with face-to-face conduction can fortify learning and give more communicative oriented ESL lessons. However, there are also limitations that can decrease the effectiveness of such blended programs. In general, the identified issues and challenges are due to four reasons i.e. 1) the management of institutions, 2) teachers, 3) students' attitude, and 4) technical support and infrastructure. Based on the reviewed researchers, it is summarised that there are several solutions that can be taken into consideration before blended learning implementation. Firstly, to conduct a thorough needs analysis, properly select a suitable blended learning model, provide staff orientation, encourage co-operation in all aspects and create a good support system for the ESL teachers and students.

It is about time that our educational system to begin changing in accordance with such progress so as to keep up with the developing requests for the ESL students and the working demands. Thus, this paper will contribute in helping ESL teachers to plan their blended lessons and for the institutions to eliminate possible deficiency towards the implementation. Students' attitude and commitment are the key elements to achieve an effective language learning process. When students can relate what they are learning in class to the real-life situations, they will become intrinsically motivated to engage. There are a number of possibilities for future investigation that can be further analysed. Future researchers may want to find recommendations in solving technical glitches during blended learning implementation as there are not many suggestions to cater this particular aspect. All in all, blended learning can offer more desirable and efficient ESL courses for the students if there are proper conductions of the blended courses.

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