

**BLENDED LEARNING AS AN ESL METHODOLOGY:
HYBRIDIZING ONLINE AND FACE-TO-FACE INSTRUCTION IN POST-COVID
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Abstract

Blended learning has emerged as a crucial approach in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching, particularly in the post-COVID educational arena. Rather than treating online and face-to-face instruction as separate ways, blended learning merges them into a cohesive pedagogical framework. This paper investigates blended learning as a methodology in ESL classrooms, adhering to theoretical perspectives and classroom-based experience. It explores how this approach promotes learner engagement, autonomy, and communicative competence. A small-scale classroom application is presented to illustrate its practical implementation. The findings signify that while students respond positively in terms of participation and independence, challenges such as maintaining continuous involvement in online components remain. The paper does argue that effective blended learning requires not only the use of technology but also careful pedagogical paradigm. It concludes that blended learning, when thoughtfully implemented, can enhance both the process and product of language learning in diverse ESL contexts.

Keywords

blended learning, ESL methodology, learner autonomy, digital pedagogy, communicative teaching

INTRODUCTION

The field of English Language Teaching has continually transformed responding to tuning to learner needs and educational contexts. Recently, this evolution has accelerated due to the growing influence of technology in education. In the blended learning context, the COVID and post-COVID period has demonstrated that integrating online platforms with classroom instruction can enhance the efficacy of ESL learning. The regular use of social media and educational applications has contributed to increased student engagement and greater learner responsibility. Leveraging teaching experience in India, the UAE, and Uzbekistan, it is evident that students have become more independent, confident, and actively involved in language use. Blended learning, therefore, does support not only language acquisition but also purposeful learner participation and development.

In university classrooms, it has been noted that traditional face-to-face approaches alone are often inadequate to fully engage learners. While in-class interaction remains essential, many students actively learn through digital platforms, accessing videos, applications, and online resources independently. This raises an important pedagogical concern: how can teaching practices reflect the realities of contemporary learning?

In this context, blended learning has emerged not as a rapid innovation but as an organic evolution in teaching practice. Initially used to supplement classroom instruction, it has gradually developed into a structured approach that synthesizes online and in-class activities in a

significant manner. In ESL education, this integration is particularly valuable, as language learning requires continuous immersion, interaction, and practice across multiple contexts. This paper examines blended learning as an ESL methodology, focusing on its theoretical foundations, practical implementation, and pedagogical implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blended learning has been widely discussed in recent educational research, though definitions vary. It is commonly comprehended as the integration of online and face-to-face instruction, allowing learners some control over time, place, and pace (Horn & Staker, 2015).

Several models of blended learning have been proposed. In my ESL classes, it is noticed that using the flipped classroom model allowed students to focus on speaking and collaboration during class, rather than passively listening to lectures. This approach is particularly relevant in ESL contexts, where communication and collaboration are central to learning. Another model, the rotation model, involves students moving between different learning modalities, including online tasks and teacher-led instruction.

Theoretically, blended learning aligns with constructivist principles, which emphasize active knowledge construction through experience. It also supports communicative language teaching, where meaningful interaction is central to language acquisition (Richards, 2015). Furthermore, blended learning environments have been found to enhance flexibility and engagement when effectively designed (Graham, 2006).

However, research also indicates that the success of blended learning depends not merely on the use of technology, but on the combination of online and classroom activities.

BLENDED LEARNING AS A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

1 Structuring the learning process

In practice, blended learning can be organized into three stages:

Pre-class (Online): Students engage with videos, readings, or vocabulary tasks before the lesson. While initial participation may vary, consistent guidance can improve engagement over time.

In-class (Face-to-Face): Classroom time is used for discussion, collaboration, and problem-solving. Prepared students tend to participate more actively and confidently.

Post-class (Online): Follow-up tasks and reflections help reinforce learning and provide additional opportunities for expression.

2 Changing roles in the classroom

Blended learning also reshapes traditional classroom roles. The teacher's role shifts from direct instruction to facilitation, guidance, and feedback. At the same time, learners are expected to take greater responsibility for their learning. While some adapt quickly, others require support in developing independent learning habits. This highlights the need to prepare learners for autonomy within blended environments.

3 Classroom application: a practical example

Blended learning was implemented in a university ESL class focusing on cross-cultural communication. Prior to the lesson, students were assigned a short video and vocabulary task. Initially, participation was limited; however, when classroom activities required prior preparation, engagement gradually increased. During the lesson, students worked in groups, discussing cultural differences and participating in role-play activities. Smaller group settings encouraged participation, particularly among quieter students. After the lesson, students

completed reflective tasks online. These reflections often demonstrated deeper thinking than in-class responses. Despite some challenges, this application highlighted the potential of blended learning to enhance engagement and participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study demonstrate that the implementation of blended learning in ESL instruction yields measurable improvements in students' overall language proficiency and engagement. Data collected from classroom observations, learner feedback, and performance assessments indicate that students exposed to a blended model show higher levels of participation compared to those in traditional face-to-face settings. In particular, the integration of online platforms allowed learners to revisit instructional materials, practice language skills repeatedly, and access authentic resources, which contributed to better comprehension and retention. The results also reveal a significant enhancement in learner autonomy. Students became more responsible for their own learning process, managing time effectively and engaging in self-directed activities such as online discussions, interactive exercises, and multimedia tasks. This shift not only improved their confidence but also fostered critical thinking and problem-solving skills in language use. Moreover, blended learning environments encouraged more personalized learning experiences, as students could progress at their own pace and focus on individual areas of difficulty.

Another important outcome relates to classroom interaction. The study found that face-to-face sessions in a blended framework were more dynamic and communicative. Since theoretical explanations were often delivered through online components, classroom time was primarily devoted to speaking activities, collaborative tasks, and real-life communication scenarios. This resulted in improved fluency and communicative competence among learners. However, the results also highlight certain limitations. Some students initially struggled with the transition to independent learning due to a lack of digital literacy or insufficient self-regulation skills. Technical issues, such as unstable internet access and limited familiarity with online tools, also affected the learning process for a small group of participants. Despite these challenges, most learners adapted over time and reported positive attitudes toward the blended approach. Overall, the results confirm that blended learning, when properly structured and supported, is an effective ESL methodology in post-COVID classrooms. It enhances not only linguistic outcomes but also learner engagement, autonomy, and adaptability to modern educational environments.

Blended learning offers flexibility and allows students to engage with materials at their own pace. It also enables more beneficial use of classroom time by prioritizing interaction over explanation.

However, challenges remain. One crucial issue is learner responsibility, as not all students are climatized to preparing independently. Additionally, blended learning requires careful planning to ensure that online and in-class components are meaningfully connected. In the post-COVID context, blended learning also reflects a significant shift in learner expectations. Students increasingly view learning as an ongoing process beyond the classroom, requiring teachers to balance guidance with independence.

CONCLUSION

Blended learning offers a practical and flexible approach to ESL teaching, but its effectiveness depends on thoughtful implementation. It is not merely a combination of online and face-to-face instruction, but a deliberate integration of both. This approach can enhance learner engagement, promote autonomy, and support language development. At the same time, it requires careful planning, teacher adaptability, and learner readiness.

Ultimately, blended learning represents not merely a combination of instructional modes, but a transformation in how language learning is experienced, constructed, and sustained in contemporary ESL classrooms.

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