

# Impact of Blended Learning in Improving English Language Skills – A View in ESL Context

N. Narayana Reddy<sup>1\*</sup> Dr. K. Madhu Murthy<sup>2</sup> Dr. V. B. Chitra<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar at JNTUA, Anantapuramu, Andhra Pradesh, India

<sup>2</sup> Senior Assistant Professor of English, SKIT, Srikalahasti, Andhra Pradesh, India

<sup>3</sup> Professor of English, JNT University College of Engineering, Anantapuramu, Andhra Pradesh, India

**Abstract – Acquiring English Language skills in traditional Classroom is very difficult for students, particularly who study English as a second language(ESL).Hence the ideal way to learn these skills effectively is to adopt Blended Learning which employs a mix of ‘face-to-face’ and ‘online learning’. In this age of Information and Communication Technology where high speed data and number of learning tools and apps are available, Blended Learning approach helps the students in learning these skills and honing them continuously. Blended Learning also removes boundaries for learning and offers virtual libraries and schools without walls (Askar, 2003; Halis, 2001). In Blended Learning, there is a scope for ‘self-learning’ which will do a major good for the learner by shedding his fears and inhibitions and help him learn at his own pace. It also provides scope for students to get inspired while watching the videos of effective communication offered by experts. Overall, Blended Learning is a trenchant method to equip ESL students with skills needed for life in the 21st century.**

**Key Words: ESL Students, ICT, Online Learning, Self-Learning, Virtual Libraries.**

-----X-----

## INTRODUCTION

The learning of any language involves the mastery of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills which are defined as LSRW. While in the first language learning speaking comes naturally by imitation, in the second language learning these skills have to be taught one by one. It is much more difficult for students with rural background who haven't got the exposure to the second language i.e. English even after years of studying it as one of their subjects. Hence using 'Blended Learning' rather than conventional 'Face-to-Face' learning may fetch desired results. Indeed, "Blended Learning employs a mix of face-to-face and online learning" (Bonk & Graham, 2012). E-learning, which is a part of blended learning, is directly beneficial to enhance the four language skills of LSRW. It motivates students to become autonomous learners and it can be described as 'anywhere– anytime & any number of students' learning. Moreover, E-learning also allows teachers to provide students with an opportunity to adapt to the digital era and equip themselves with the skills to be ready for life in the 21st century. So, the present paper aims at studying the relevance of Blended Learning (BL) in ESL context, role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in

blended learning, advantageous and drawbacks or challenges in implementing Blended learning.

## DEFINITION:

Blended Learning (BL), as mentioned earlier, is a collaborative instructional approach to improve the efficacy of learning English language skills. American Society for Training and development (ASTD ;2010) defined BL as "A learning Process integrating face-to-face and online learning aspects. It emerges by using e-learning technologies in traditional learning environment". According to Bonk and Graham (2006; 3-5), "Blended Learning is not just about using technology because it is available ; BL is about finding better ways of supporting students in achieving the learning objectives and providing them with the best possible learning and teaching experiences". BL also emerged in the educational context as a result of the a) the accessibility of computer technology in and outside the classroom, and b) The expansion of the pedagogical potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for teaching and learning (Hong & Samimy; 2010) . Bersin and Associate (2003) opines that "BL combines the advantages of face to face and

e-learning to satisfy individual differences”. So Blended Learning emerged in order to overcome the shortcomings of exclusive face to face teaching (lack of exposure, unable to reach all students etc) and online mode of teaching (becoming asocial, distraction etc.) by creating congenial learning environment.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

Blended Learning approach facilitates both traditional classroom teaching and virtual teaching which is ‘anywhere – anytime’ teaching. The instructional materials used to teach in BL are text books, interactive white boards, flash cards, power point slides, youtube videos, facebook activities, blogs etc.

### **BLENDED LEARNING – RELEVANCE TO ESL:**

Blended Learning approach is a very ideal approach for students who learn English as a Second Language (ESL). It permits the students to learn at their own pace, so they get a sense of satisfaction while learning. ESL students can learn their language effectively through BL because they learn it in practical and situational environment. Hence it inculcates an initiative attitude for learning English in ESL students, who, thereto, merely follow their teachers without thinking much of their own. This approach instills confidence and enthusiasm in the students to participate actively in the whole learning process by doing away with dull routine of listening only. As the Students continue their learning outside the classroom, they will be keen to communicate with each other which is a vital aspect of language learning. In such a scenario, teacher can take care more about providing atmosphere for practical conversations rather than preparing lesson plans. It also helps the teacher to understand his students better. When the teacher knows the students’ potentials and flaws, the task will be easy to rectify their mistakes and lead them onto a right track. Since students imitate what they have watched online, they can hone their skills better and better. Students will also learn various other things about real life situations while using language.

Blended learning enables the students to use technology for the greater good of learning the language. It also provides students a wide rapport with like minded people outside the classroom through various platforms like blogs, facebook etc. As Falk and Carlson (1995) suggest that administrators should take some serious steps to encourage and assist teachers in improving their professional level and know more about multimedia. Then only teachers can encourage the ESL students to do more with technology.

### **ROLE OF ICT IN BLENDED LEARNING:**

In the present age, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become part and parcel of our day to day life. It plays a crucial role for the development of all fields including education. Blended Learning makes use of ICTs such as online and offline videos, blogs, apps and virtual labs which will compliment F2F learning environment. ICT helps to ease the teaching- learning process and gives exposure to practical learning by reducing errors and improves quality education. With the help of ICT, students of remote areas can access the high quality classes from reputed educational institutions with minimal effort and cost. Blended Learning makes use of digital library, virtual classroom, educational blogs, webinars and expert lectures on YouTube etc. which are part of ICT- to the fullest for providing fruitful results in teaching learning process. The term technology covers a wide range of concepts such as – the internet, CD-ROMs and the use of computers as a means of communication with applications such as ‘chat’ and ‘email’ and a number of environments which enable teachers to enrich their courses such as VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments), blogs and wikis (Sharma and Barret, 2007; p.7).

With the help of ICT, Blended learning can fulfill the dreams of Swami Vivekananda that If a child can’t reach the school, the teacher should reach him. “Education systems change in order to respond to the social, political and economic challenges that societies normally experience” (Kelly, 2009). According to Bach, Haynes and Smith (2006), “The introduction of ICT in tertiary education is for the need of delivering more higher education to the global population. ICT facilitates qualitative education even in the absence of direct instruction”. Introduction of ICT in language learning may result in a) Access to vast information b) healthy communication c) great cooperation d) cost-efficiency (by reaching various multitudes of students) and e) Pedagogical development. “To be competitive in the global market, there is a growing pressure for university students to not only learn English but also develop technological skills that allow them to be successful on the world stage” (Jonassen, Howland, Moore & Marra, 2003).

### **BLENDED LEARNING – ADVANTAGES:**

Blended Learning is a perfect method to instill confidence and creativeness in students. It enriches students’ achievements and fulfills the gaps of education. “Blended Learning helps students to transfer theoretical knowledge to real life” (Osguthorpe ve Graham, 2003). It is an ideal platform for both teachers and students to bring the global knowledge to the classroom and hone their skills by using synchronous and asynchronous communication. BL provides the benefit of

Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) along with the teacher's love and human touch. Hence it inculcates an all-round development of the student. It facilitates more opportunities for communication which is a key factor for success in the modern era. As Communication takes place with the students all over the world, Blended learning brings multicultural and multidimensional approach to the learning process. It mainly imparts student centered education, so most of the time a teacher is a facilitator or a guide in the classroom.

Blended Learning enables teachers to be dynamic in their ways of teaching. It helps them to become proficient and adeptive for both F2F and ICT supported ways of teaching. Hence the teacher can play multiple roles in the class such as motivator, instructor, observer, developer etc. It is easily accessible and effective method which gets immediate feedback and a fun way of learning a language. Overall, Blended Learning promotes for the full-fledged personality of the students besides making them smart users of technology.

### **DRAWBACKS/CHALLENGES:**

There are certain drawbacks for Blended learning. Designing Blended Learning is very complicated as a "threat of an out-of-balance, discordant blend---[could] frustrate both student and teacher" (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003, p.229). Teachers need to change their mindset to be dynamic with both face to face and online mode of teaching. Learning new technology is always going to be a tough task for teachers. This work burden may result in half-heartedness in their commitment.

It is somewhat expensive to maintain. Proper infrastructure need to be established. Facilities like well-equipped computer lab, high speed internet data and projector screen besides skilled employees to maintain the above and to train the teachers initially to use the technology etc are the pre-requisites to be taken care of. Accommodating all these facilities is very expensive. Hence implementation of BL is extremely arduous.

Further, students may get distracted while using web or youtube etc. So this kind of distraction may lead them to move onto the wrong track. Hence allowing them without supervision by parents or teachers can spoil their career and life. As quoted by Osguthorpe & Graham, "An out of balance blend can frustrate students and may lead to negative impact on their studies".

Encouraging policies by law makers are crucial for successful implementation of Blended Learning. Productive integration of ICT into teaching learning process is possible only when there are helpful policies, inducements and resources.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Though there may be some drawbacks/challenges, Blended Learning is certainly an effective approach to improve English language skills. It is even more helpful in countries like India where English is learnt as either 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> language. Blended learning is one of the best options to cater to the needs of Indian education system, which is struggling to provide equal educational opportunities to its large population. In India, drop-outs and teacher-student ratio and paucity of skilled teachers have been increasing every year. Hence BL can solve the problem upto some extent. Blended Learning with its integration of ICT surely helps students acquire English language skills easily and effectively.

### **REFERENCES:**

- "Blended Learning (Staker / Horn - May 2012)" (PDF). Retrieved 2013-10-24.
- "Blended Learning: A Disruptive Innovation". Knewton.
- Bonk C.J., & Graham, C.R. (2006). The handbook of blended learning environments: Global perspectives, local designs.
- Bach, S., Haynes, P., & Smith, J. L. (2006). Online learning and teaching in higher education. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- MacDonald, J. (2008). Blended learning and online tutoring: A good practice guide. Aldershot, UK: Gower.
- Grgurović, M. (2010). Technology-enhanced blended language learning in an ESL class: A Description of a model and an application of the diffusion of Innovations theory: Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Iowa State University.
- Grgurović, M. (2011). Blended learning in an ESL Class: A case study. CALICO Journal, 29 (1), pp. 100-117.
- Lim, F.P. , 2017: An analysis of synchronous and asynchronous communication tools in e-learning. Advanced Science and Technology Letters, Vol. 143, 2017, pp.230-234, [online] at [http://onlinepresent.org/proceedings/vol143\\_2017/46.pdf](http://onlinepresent.org/proceedings/vol143_2017/46.pdf), (accessed 20 September 2017).
- Khan, I. A. (2011). Challenges of Teaching/Learning English and Management GJHSS, Volume 11(8) Version 1.0 November, Global Journals Inc. (USA).

Bonk CJ, Graham CR. The handbook of blended learning environments: Global perspectives, local designs. San Francisco: Jossey - Bass/Pfeiffer. 2006, 5.

Graziadei, W. D., Gallagher, S., Brown, R. N., and Sasiadek, J. (1997) "Building Asynchronous and Synchronous Teaching-Learning Environments: Exploring a Course/Classroom Management System Solution".  
[http://horizon.unc.edu/projects/monograph/C/D/Technological\\_Tools/Graziadei.asp](http://horizon.unc.edu/projects/monograph/C/D/Technological_Tools/Graziadei.asp)  
accessed 2 March, 2007.

Tusubira, F. & Mulira, N. (2004). "Integration of ICT in organizations: Challenges and best practice recommendations based on the experience of Makerere University and other organizations", Paper presented at the International ICT Conference Held at Hotel Africana, Kampala, Uganda. 5th to 8th September, 2004.

---

**Corresponding Author**

**N. Narayana Reddy\***

Research Scholar at JNTUA, Anantapuramu, Andhra Pradesh, India

[nalagesigari.narayana@gmail.com](mailto:nalagesigari.narayana@gmail.com)