Blended Learning as a Good Practice in ESL Courses Compared to F2F Learning and Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

Blended learning has been studied for many years. However, it is necessary to assess whether blended learning is a good practice as opposed to face-to-face and online learning. Based on the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, a questionnaire was designed to compare blended learning in seven dimensions to traditional and online learning. A total of 653 students participated in the research. Independent T-test, paired T-test and ANCOVA were conducted using SPSS. The results showed that blended learning was reported to have a higher effectiveness than traditional learning for all seven principles and a higher effectiveness than online learning for most of the principles. Learning modes had a significant effect on student perceptions on most of the principles. Gender had significant effect on student perception of all seven principles, while year of study and knowledge domain did not show significant effects on most of the principles. Possible reasons for these findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Blended Learning, Effectiveness, ESL Courses, Good Practice, Higher Education, Online Learning, Traditional Learning

INTRODUCTION

Traditional learning refers to teacher-directed learning in a setting where course implementation takes place with face-to-face interaction (Ngigi & Obura, 2019). The majority of course instruction is carried out in a classroom with an instructor present. The term online learning implies “that the learner is at a distance from the tutor or instructor, that the learner uses some form of technology to access learning materials” (Anderson, 2008, p. 16). Both traditional and online learning methods have numerous advantages and disadvantages for students. The most distinct difference between the two is their environment. Online learning is a virtual or internet-based form of education; while traditional learning is classroom-based or practical, meaning that the students can see their teacher and classmates.

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Blended learning (BL) is a hybrid of traditional F2F and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online, where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning (Colis & Moonen, 2001; Thorne, 2003). In a nutshell, it describes a variety of teaching which integrates both F2F and online delivery methods (Chew, Turner, & Jones, 2010).

At this juncture, an important question raised is whether blended learning is more effective than other learning environments. Although there is no doubt that blended learning is an option which contributes to the quality of education, access opportunities and educational process improvement (Soler, Soler & Araya, 2017), there is limited evidence that blended learning improves student learning outcomes or student preference (River, Currie, Crawford, Betihavas, & Randall, 2016).

Focusing specifically on English as a second language learning (ESL), there has been some research which studied courses in blended learning environments. Most of them are case studies using a certain technology like Moodle, for instance, Ifinedo, Pyke, and Anwar (2018) explore the effects or roles of usability factors and external support on undergraduates’ use outcomes of Moodle in a blended learning environment and found that usability factors had positive effects on students’ use outcomes, while contrary to predictions teacher and peer support did not. Tang (2013) puts forward a blended way of learning ESL based on the Moodle platform and suggests some activities of ESL blended learning. Some research had studied ESL blended learning from a general perspective, for example, Grgurovic (2011) studied an ESL course using Diffusion of Innovations theory because the theory paints a big picture of blended learning. The main findings indicate that the innovation shared common attributes with other innovations and showed that the Diffusion of Innovations theory can guide research on blended language learning. However, there is a lack of research for blended learning in ESL courses based on a theory which can provide specific perspectives. Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education is one of the options which can provide specific perspectives on the issue and has been found to be adaptable to distance education courses (Grant & Thornton, 2007). Although originally developed for traditional classroom environments, the principles have been shown to be equally effective guides in the implementation of online instruction (Babb, Stewart & Johnson, 2010; Partridge, Ponting & McCay, 2011). Crews, Wilkinson and Neill (2015) apply the Seven Principles to online course design to enhance students’ success in an online course. Their results showed that the course design strategies and what students valued matched well with the Seven Principles and provided evidence that good course design embeds the seven principles to ensure students are successful in the online learning environment. Nevertheless, there is no research studying blended learning based on seven principles theory. The research reported in this article studies blended learning in an ESL course using the seven principles, which is a new trial and provides new insights in this field of study.

In the following sections, research on the three learning modes and the theoretical basis of the paper are introduced. Research question and methods are additionally explained. Results and discussions are conducted in three aspects: 1. Comparing blended learning with traditional learning. 2. Comparing blended learning with online learning. 3. The relationship between learning modes and students’ perception of seven principles with covariate variables controlled. Finally, the conclusion and limitations are summarized in the paper. The objective of this research is to examine whether blended learning is a good practice in ESL courses compared to F2F learning and online learning based on Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Research on the Three Learning Modes**

Many of the studies looking into the three instructional environments respectively – traditional F2F learning, blended learning and full online learning – show mixed results (Nordin & Alias, 2013).
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