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English language teaching and assessment in blended learning

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of blended learning vis-à-vis face-to-face instruction. In order to achieve this aim, three research questions were raised: 1. Does the use of blended learning in English language teaching support the adoption and use of better teaching methods than those used in face-to-face instruction?, 2. Are the blended systems of assessment used during English language teaching better than those used in traditional face-to-face English classrooms?, 3. Does the use of blended systems of instruction and assessment result to better student outcomes when compared to face-to-face instruction?. The study was conducted using the case study approach which was supported by the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. The study involved two teachers, one who taught the experimental group using blended learning, and another one who taught the control group using face-to-face instruction. The results showed that the blended learning techniques were accepted by students of the experimental group much more positively than the conventional face-to-face instructional methods were. The comparative advantage of blended learning in contrast to face-to-face instruction is also supported by differences in students' performances which show that the experimental group performed better by scoring higher means and recording lower variances.

Keywords: Teaching, learning, assessment, blended, technology, approach

Introduction

Teaching and assessment are educational areas that have constantly evolved following the need to improve development and learning among students. According to Thorne (2003), blended learning has almost limitless potential because it "represents a naturally evolving process from traditional forms of teaching to a personalized and focused development path" (p.5). Blended learning is used to teach different subjects one of them being English. The process of learning English presents varied challenges for learners in varied contexts (Marsh, 2012). There are varied methods that instructors can use to teach grammar, vocabulary, speaking, reading, listening, writing, and other language skills, and according to Marsh (2012), there is no particular one way that can be used to teach students these skills.

However, there are optimal conditions for teaching the language and these include: authentic learner interactions (original, not copied, stemming from primary observation and not secondary sources), authentic learner tasks, exposure to varied language in creative ways, high levels of social interaction, adequate learning time and feedback, optimal learner guidance, relaxed atmospheres, and learner autonomy (Marsh, 2012). Marsh (2012) went on to cite that the process of attaining these optimal conditions in language teaching is a challenge. This makes blended learning important because it increases the chances of meeting these optimal conditions.

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The ability of blended learning to support these conditions is vested in its core philosophy because according to Marsh (2012):

> *"Blended learning refers to a mixing of different learning environments. The phrase has many specific meanings based upon the context in which it is used. Blended learning gives learners and teachers a potential environment to learn and teach more effectively". (p.3)*

Similar definitions have also been given by other scholars including Hofmann (2011) who stated that:

> *"A blend is using the best delivery methodologies available for a specific objective, including online, classroom-based instruction, performance support, paper-based (self-study), and formal and informal on-the-job solutions." (p.2)*

Hofmann (2011) went on to note that in most instances, blended learning is understood to mean the available technologies and how they can be used during the instructional process. However, instructors are expected to review the content to be taught, and then determine the best ways to teach the content. In other words, blended learning not only deals with the selection and use of technology, but also the incorporation of other teaching methods that support learning in the best ways. Similarly, Bersin (2004) defined blended learning as:

> *"The combination of different "media" (technologies, activities, and types of events) to create an optimum training program for a specific audience. The term "blended" means that traditional instructor-led training is being supplemented with other electronic formats." (p.15)*

These given definitions have their basis on two of the core processes of blended leaning including the process of teaching, and the process of assessing students. These processes are crucial in English teaching because the teaching processes support the accomplishment of specific learning objectives, while the assessment processes support evaluation to establish whether the set objectives were indeed accomplished. There are several studies that have been conducted to validate the effectiveness of blended learning in teaching and assessment, and some of their findings are presented in the next session.

Literature Review

Teaching

One study on English teaching using blended learning was carried out by Chatel (2002). The author conducted interviews and made observations that sought to enunciate whether blended learning which combined face-to-face instruction and technology based instruction facilitated instruction that was culturally, socially, and linguistically aligned to the needs of the students. To achieve this aim, the researcher involved eight classroom teachers and four English as an additional language (EAL) teachers. The findings of the study showed that the process of instruction was improved considerably.

Through the use of blended learning, teachers were able to ensure that the process of language instruction was aligned to the cultural, social, and linguistic needs of the students. To add to this, the study established that the students were able to collaborate through the use of technology. Moreover, the instructional process was characterized by flexibility and it supported

the development of technology skills. Students were for example able to locate English-French, and English-Spanish dictionaries using computers, which is reflective of the stated benefits. Through technology, students got opportunities to interact with the English language in its written and oral forms. They developed both vocabulary and grammar skills. Chatel (2002) concluded the blended instruction was better than face-to-face instruction because the instructional processes were improved and so were student outcomes.

A similar study to this was conducted by Gimeno-Sanz (2010). This study was conducted at the Technical University of Catalonia in Valencia, Spain and one of its targets was to establish the impact of blended learning on English teaching. The program allowed language instructors to design materials that are aligned to the students' needs by integrating audio, video, graphics, and text. The study by Gimeno-Sanz (2010) established that indeed there is a correlation between effective English teaching and the use of blended learning.

The combination of web tools, computer assisted language learning tools, and the face-to-face teaching practices resulted to higher levels of learner autonomy in the course of learning. The students were satisfied to a great extent because they were able to locate resources on their own and use them to learn English. The blended learning program implemented at the Technical University of Catalonia, Spain was also useful in improving needs-specific instruction and this in turn led to increased levels of proficiency and motivation.

The improvement in instructional processes in turn led to positive outcomes that were measured though the scores recorded by students. This is because in the years 2007/2008 and 2008/2009, 60% of the students passed the whole course and this was better than results recorded in earlier years when exclusive face-to-face instruction was in use. A similar study to those reviewed above was conducted by Zygadlo (2007) and its main aim was to establish the influence of blended learning on the acquisition of new vocabulary and in turn the development of language. In order to conduct the study, the researcher selected 46 students from a school in Izabelin, Warsaw Poland. The researcher used pretests and posttests. Before these tests were administered, the students in the experimental group were taught using blended learning with strategies such as self-study, use of computer tools, and face-to-face instruction. This researcher wanted to establish whether using blended learning promoted higher levels of student autonomy in the course of teaching than traditional face-to-face instruction.

The study by Zygadlo (2007) established that students learned better when blended learning was used, than when it was not used following the dynamism of strategies used to learn. In the study by Zygadlo (2007), the experimental group which learned new vocabulary using blended learning, performed better than the control group which was taught using face-to-face instruction only and had minimal autonomy. The results outlined by Zygadlo (2007) also showed that student autonomy was promoted and motivation was improved. Generally, these results showed that the use of blended learning improved instructional processes and made them better than those used in face-to-face instruction.

Assessment

According to Gimeno-Sanz (2010), assessment is also improved when blended learning is used. In this case study, the use of *InGenio*, which was the developed blended learning computer

application, and other blended learning strategies supported better student assessment. According to SmartPlay (2014) experts, *Ingenio* is the first American bilingual educational application containing educational games and toys for children from 3 to 8 years old. Its major benefits include innovative content and involving organization of educational activities in the form of fun games; it is durable and safe, and can be applied for both preschool and early schools studies. Assessment was in this sense improved in two ways because students got the chance to evaluate themselves and their progress, and similarly teachers found it easy to evaluate students.

Gimeno-Sanz (2010) noted that when students were learning, they continually checked their answers and corrected them in case they were wrong. Students could also request instructors to evaluate their work in the course of learning. Moreover, students got the chance to refresh exercises so that they could redo them before evaluation. This supported self-assessment and the attainment of better scores by students.

Blended learning also supported efficient language assessment because the students' progress could be established easily through progress reports that were available through assessment links (Gimeno-Sanz, 2010). Therefore both students and teachers could assess progress by accessing the reports. These are benefits that were not experienced when traditional modes of assessment that are supported in face-to-face instruction classrooms only were used.

Feedback was also an important aspect in assessment. The use of technology as part of blended learning to support feedback had positive effects on students because it complemented the feedback given to students during face-to-face instruction (Gimeno-Sanz, 2010). Students received personalized feedback because they were scored individually and they got individualized comments on areas that needed improvement (Gimeno-Sanz, 2010).

The feedback given to students was either delayed or immediate, but whichever way it was given, it ensured that students felt supported throughout the learning process. This is unlike traditional assessments which are not highly supportive of immediate feedback though they support delayed feedback in most cases.

Another case study that highlights the usefulness of blended learning in supporting language assessment was conducted by the University of Manchester (2010). The study covered diagnostic assessment in English. Non-native speakers of English were targeted for the assessment. The test given to students involved filling gaps with the correct words and completing sentences.

The results of the case study showed that the online and computerized assessment tools made it easier for instructors to establish the students' linguistic weaknesses (University of Manchester, 2010). The case study also established the importance of aligning the computerized assessment tools to the curriculum and learning objectives. The established assessment system complemented traditional assessment methods because the system "enabled people and computers to work in tandem" (University of Manchester, 2010, p. 3). The blended system of assessment was better than the non-blended system.

The combination of human input and technology as part of the blended system made language assessment and marking easier because the process was faster than those that involving exclusive human resources only. These tests also reduced the amount of time used to administer and mark tests thus making the assessment process efficient. On-screen marking was found to improve the analysis of results because similar answers could be grouped easily. It also supported faster marking and it made the processes of totaling faster.

Another benefit that the program used at the University of Manchester came with was increased levels of assessment. The tutors were able to develop more formative assessments for

their students even when they were in large groups. Moreover, the assessments were also found to be useful because they supported prospects of future curriculum improvements.

The conclusions of the case study were that the combination of computer assessment systems and human input "improves the appropriateness, effectiveness, and consistency of assessments", and that "efficient assessment processes produce pedagogic as well as institutional benefits" (University of Manchester, 2010, p. 4). A similar case study to those outlined above was conducted by Ware & O'Dowd (2008) and its aim was to evaluate the usefulness of an online assessment system in supporting peer assessment to complement assessments that are administered in face-to-face lessons. The scholars noted that peer assessment is important in settings where there are many students to a single tutor. This is because one-on-one feedback from the tutor may not always be feasible thus making the blend necessary. In such cases, instructors may use computer assisted language learning systems (CALL) to support learner assessment and feedback from peers.

In this case study, CALL assessment systems were used in two different ways to support assessment and feedback as part of complementing traditional forms of assessment. One group of students was exposed to e-tutoring, while another group of students was exposed to e-partnering. The students in the e-tutoring group were required to give feedback on any incorrect use of language while those in e-partnering were to do so only if they wished to. The study involved learners of Spanish and English at the post-secondary level. The results showed that students preferred to receive feedback through e-tutoring as opposed to e-partnering.

The authors concluded that the instructors should ensure they train students on how to give feedback during face-to-face teaching to support the effective use of blended systems of assessment. This is because peer feedback is useful in the process of assessment and in turn learning. They recommended that students should be taught how to give feedback, which would support constructive feedback when students are engaged in online activities and during face-to-face learning in the course of learning instruction.

Current Study

Methodology

Background Information. This case study investigated the use of blended learning versus the use of face-to-face instruction in teaching English. The main aim of the study was to establish whether outcomes of blended learning are better than outcomes of only face-to-face instruction. It also sought to establish whether traditional assessment is better when teaching speaking and writing or assessment systems that combine traditional assessments and blended forms of assessments are more efficient.

Research Questions. In order to verify specific elements of this research, the following research questions were made at the onset of the study:

1. Does the use of blended learning in English language teaching support the adoption and use of better teaching methods than those used in face-to-face instruction?
2. Are the blended systems of assessment used during English language teaching better than those used in traditional face-to-face English classrooms?
3. Does the use of blended systems of instruction and assessment result to better student outcomes when compared to face-to-face instruction?

Approach. The case study approach was adopted for the research. The study, which was conducted at a secondary level institution, was completed through the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data which means the mixed methods approach was applied. Woodside (2010) defines case study as "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p.1)

The case study research was selected because it is appropriate for studying human phenomena as cited by Gillham (2000). These studies support the collection of evidence because researchers collect "scientific" data (Gillham, 2000). Case studies therefore make it possible for researchers to manufacture new evidence in order to prove phenomena. The case study approach was also selected because it supports the collection of in-depth data as stated by Swanborn (2010).

Measurements and Analysis. The first set of measurements were questionnaires. Two questionnaires were developed for two groups of participants including the teachers and the students. The first questionnaire had closed ended questions and it sought to establish the teaching strategies and the assessment strategies used by the teachers.

The questionnaire had an 11-factor scale through which they used to rate their own utilization of specific teaching methods and assessment processes in relation to blended and face-to-face instruction. The second questionnaire was administered to the students and its target was to collect data on the students' levels of motivation in relation to the teaching and assessment processes used in blended and face-to-face learning. The questionnaire had 10 closed ended questions with a scale which they used to rate specific concepts. The questionnaires for the participants were developed and customized by the researcher.

The second measurement was pretest-posttest measurement on speaking and writing. The pretests and posttests supported the collection of numerical data on the performances of the students in the experimental group and those in the control group. The test had two sections, section one of the test was on speaking while section two was on writing. This allowed the researcher to compare results at more specific levels and establish whether the groups' performances were influenced by the processes of instruction and assessment that had been used. The data was analyzed using several methods.

One method was coding which was used to analyze qualitative data. Simple computations were also used to analyze quantitative data from the questionnaires. Another method was ANOVA which was used to analyze and present the results recorded by students. The analysis made it possible to establish differences in performances recorded by students in the two areas of learning that formed the focus of the developed program.

Participants and participant sampling. The study involved two groups of participants. Forty students studying in different classes but on one course made up the first participant cohort and all of them were in one high school. The participants were aged 13 to 14 and they were all English second language speakers. All the selected students had been exposed to the language within the same high schools setting. The second sample comprised 2 teachers who were responsible for teaching English to the two classrooms. Both teachers had over ten years of experience in teaching English to second language speakers of the language and both were females.

Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that selected participants had the desired characteristics. The researcher requested the school administration for collaboration in identifying potential participants. The students were then given forms to fill in order to establish

the number of years they have been learning English as a second language in classroom. This made it possible for the researcher to select students who had the desired characteristics. Ethical IRB approval was also granted from the university board of the researcher.

Procedure. The first step involved seeking consent from the children's parents, their teachers, and assent from the students. The parents and the teachers were required to fill up consent forms. Informal discussions were held with the children to establish whether they were comfortable with the idea of taking part in the study. The process of data collection was completed in several steps.

The students were randomly assigned to two groups. One of the groups was the experimental group while the other one was the control group. Two teachers were involved in the study and used the school curriculum to come up with the learning program for the study. The topics covered were speaking and reading. The learning program was developed by the two teachers collaboratively through reference to the high school curriculum for EAL learners which the students were being taught at the time of the study. The students were therefore taught the same content in different ways.

After the identification and development of learning content, the students in both groups (each group's number was 20) were given the same pretest on the topics. The pretest was followed by for a week's instruction. The experimental group was taught using blended learning strategies including online learning, computer assisted language learning tools, face-to-face instruction, performance support, self-study, and formal and informal on-scene solutions, while the control group was taught using face-to-face instruction only. After the four weeks period of instruction, the students were given the posttest. The posttest made it possible for the instructors to collect quantitative data on the students' performances and compare them with the pretest scores.

The collected data was then analyzed. The posttests were followed by questionnaire administration. The teachers were given their questionnaires first following the completion of students' post tests. This was followed by administration of the students' questionnaire. Both teachers and students filled up the questionnaires in the school's computer room through computer software to support easier and faster completion of the data collection process.

Results

Below are tables presenting the results collected from questionnaires that were completed by teachers and students.

The results presented in the tables show that the teachers assigned to the control and experimental groups gave students different materials, and used different teaching methods depending on the type of learning selected. Blended learning strategies included both distance learning elements and face-to-face educational elements, while face-to-face control group performed only face-to-face instructional activities. The teaching strategies/methods and assessment strategies included: individual work, pair work, group work, use of culturally responsive materials, social context alignment, self-assessment, immediate feedback, delayed feedback, and personal feedback. Most of the ratings by the control group fell under the "moderately supported/used" category, which means that students were moderately motivated and involved within the control period.

Table 1

Teaching and Assessment: Results from Scale: Control Group Teacher Responses

	Not supported/used	**Moderately supported/Used**	**Not sure**	**Highly supported/used**	**Extensively supported/used**
Teaching					
Individual work	-	-	-	✓	--
Pair Work	✓		-		-
Group Work	-	✓	-	-	-
Culturally responsive materials	-	✓	-	-	-
Alignment to the social context	-	✓	-	-	-
Alignment to linguistic needs	-	-	-	-	✓
Assessment					
Student self-assessment	-	✓	-	-	-
Frequent student assessment	-	✓	-	-	-
Immediate feedback		✓	-		-
Delayed Feedback	-		-	✓	-
Personal feedback	-	✓	-	-	-
Total Rating	**1**	**7**	**0**	**2**	**1**

The discussed category has been marked 7 out of 11 times which is equivalent to 64%. On the other hand, the experimental group rated the use of the blended learning teaching and assessment strategies highly; 8 out of 11 ratings which represent 73% of the total ratings were "highly supported/ used". The students' responses also indicated that the experimental group had higher levels of motivation than the control group. 109 responses out of the 200 collected for different prompts presented to students in relation to teaching and assessment indicated that the control group generally had "slight motivation". This is equivalent to around 55% of the student population. On the other hand, the results for the experimental group show that 103 responses out of the 200 collected fell under the category of "high motivation". This is equivalent to 52% of the experimental group cohort.

Table 2

Teaching and Assessment: Results from Scales: Experimental Group Teacher Responses

	Not supported/used	**Moderately supported/Used**	**Not sure**	**Highly supported/used**	**Extensively supported/used**
Teaching					
Individual work	-	-	-	✓	-
Pair Work	-	-	-	✓	-
Group Work		✓	-		-
Culturally responsive materials	-	-	-	✓	-
Alignment to the social context	-	-	-	✓	-
Alignment to linguistic needs	-	-	-	✓	-
Assessment					
Student self-assessment	-	-	-	-	✓
Frequent student assessment	-	-	-	✓	-
Immediate feedback	-	-	-	✓	-
Delayed Feedback	-	✓	-		-
Personal feedback	-	-	-	✓	-
Total	**-**	**2**	**-**	**8**	**1**

Table 3

Teaching and Assessment: Results from Scales: Students: Control Group

Teaching					
	Not Really	**Slightly**	**Not sure**	**Highly**	**Extremely/ Extensively**
I felt excited to be in the lesson	1	12	2	5	-
I participated in the lesson	-	14	-	4	2
I felt free to ask questions during the lesson	3	13	-	3	1
I could relate the teaching methods to my culture and language	10	9	-	1	-
I could relate the learning activities to my social context	4	13	1	2	-
The learning environment was appealing and attractive	-	17	-	3	-
Assessment					
The teacher allowed me to assess my work during the lesson	6	14	-	-	-
I received immediate feedback in the course of learning	14	6	-	-	-
I received delayed feedback in the course of learning	-	-	-	20	-
I received personalized feedback from the teacher	8	11	-	1	-
Total	**46**	**109**	**3**	**39**	**3**

Table 4

Teaching and Assessment: Results from Scales: Students: Control Group

Teaching					
	Not Really	**Moderately**	**Not sure**	**Highly**	**Extremely/ Extensively**
I felt excited to be in the lesson	-	6	-	11	3
I participated in the lesson	-	3	-	13	4
I felt free to ask questions during the lesson	2	2	-	12	4
I could relate the teaching methods to my culture and language	-	3	-	15	2
I could relate the learning activities to my social context	-	4	1	11	4
The learning environment was appealing and attractive	-	3	-	3	14
Assessment					
The teacher allowed me to assess my work during the lesson	-	5	-	10	5
I received immediate feedback in the course of learning	-	3	-	10	7
I received delayed feedback in the course of learning	-	12	-	8	-
I received personalized feedback from the teacher	-	-	-	10	10
Total	**2**	**41**	**1**	**103**	**53**

Student Performance

The students were given pretests and posttests which were useful in determining the effectiveness of instructional processes in the blended learning, and face-to-face classrooms. Tables 5 outlines the students' results.

Table 5

Results for the pretest and the posttest for the Experimental and the Control Groups

Pretest Results			
Speaking		**Writing**	
Face-to-face Mean (out of 50)	**Blended learning Mean (out of 50)**	**Face-to-face Mean (out of 50)**	**Blended learning Mean (out of 50)**
28.8 (Var = 3.1)	27.1 (Var = 3.1)	32.8 (Var = 3.7)	33.6 (Var = 4.2)
Posttest Results			
Speaking		**Writing**	
Face-to-face Mean (out of 50)	**Blended learning Mean (out of 50)**	**Face-to-face Mean (out of 50)**	**Blended learning Mean (out of 50)**
41.4 (Var = 2.1)	44.2 (Var = 1.4)	40.9 (Var = 2.4)	45.7 (Var = 1.3)

Note: Var = Variance

The tables above represent the results of the pretest and the posttest scores that the students attained for the two sections of the test including speaking and writing. The results show that after instruction, both groups improved in both areas. Even so, the experimental group had higher scores in both areas. Another notable trend from the figures is the reduction in variances recorded by the two groups.

The blended learning group also had lower variances than the face-to-face instruction group. The experimental group had recorded a lower mean in speaking which was 27.1 out of 50, the equivalent of 54%, in the pretest while the control group scored 27.1 out of 50 which is equivalent to 58%. The posttests depict improvements in both groups with the blended learning group showing higher levels of improvement. Posttest scores show that the face-to-face group scored 41.1 out of 50, which is equivalent to 82% while the blended learning group scored 44.2 out of 50 which is equivalent to 88%. Similarly, the face-to-face instruction group had a writing pretest score which was 32.8 out of 50 which translates to 66% and a posttest score of 40.9 which translates to 82%. The blended learning group scored 33.6 out of 50 which translates to 67% in the pretest, and 45.7 which translates to 91% in the posttest.

Discussion

According to Stockwell (2002), improved instruction and better assessment are some of the benefits of blended instruction. This is supported by the findings of this study which have confirmed that the processes of learning and assessment are improved as a result of using blended instruction. The results of this study are similar to those of the case studies reviewed earlier. The study by Chatel (2002) which was reviewed earlier reported improved instruction.

This is because the students were taught using materials that were linguistically relevant to them therefore their needs were met. The study by Chatel (2002) also recorded improved student collaboration. These are effects that were also recorded in this study when the experimental and control group findings were recorded.

The study by Gimeno-Sanz (2010) also reported improvements in instruction as a result of using the blended learning approach. This was evidenced by improved student performance. Similarly, this study established that the positive influence of blended learning on the instructional process led to better student performance. Though all students in both groups performed better in the posttests, there were significant statistical differences in the mean scores of the experimental and control group with the former performing better in general. A similar finding was reported by Zygadlo (2007) in the case study conducted in Poland. The assessment improvements recorded in case studies reviewed are also evident in this research. They reflect higher effectiveness in blended learning compared to face-to-face instruction.

This case study also recorded findings that are similar to those of the study by the University of Manchester (2010). Though in the current study the pretests and posttests were not diagnostic in nature like the tests used in the case study by the University of Manchester (2010), the findings are similar because both studies recorded improvements in efficiency. Ware and O'Dowd (2008) touched on differences in feedback and this was recorded in this study. The students and teachers reported higher levels of feedback (especially immediate feedback) in the experimental group than in the control group. Even so, the control group in this case experiences higher levels of delayed feedback.

Recommendations

One of the recommendations is that teacher training should be improved to ensure instructors are conversant with the use of blended learning approaches in classrooms. For example, Sugar, Crawley & Fine (2004) cited that teachers' decisions to use technology are partially determined by their knowledge and skills. Teachers who do not integrate technology in their classrooms cite lack of knowledge as a main reason for not doing so.

The study conducted by these researchers reported that only one-third of the teachers were either "very well prepared" or "well prepared" to integrate technology in their classrooms. Similar findings were also reported in the studies by Rizza (2000) and Saglam & Sert (2012) who cited ICT knowledge is crucial in determining the integration of technology. This integration has been proven to be useful, and as such, it is necessary for proper teacher training (Stacey & Gerbic, 2009). This will increase the likelihood of technology integration and in turn improve instruction and assessment. The same applies to training on strategies such as online instruction, classroom-based instruction, performance support, paper-based learning and best practices in integration.

In close relation to the recommendation above is the concept of professional development at the in-service level. While teacher training programs focus on the pre-service level of development, professional development at the in-service level will be useful in ensuring teachers who are already practicing adopt positive attitudes towards blended learning and that they use blended learning it in the best possible ways. This means that there should be better plans and increased support for professional development which supports continual learning.

The technologies and other teaching strategies used in classroom settings are constantly evolving. It is important for teachers to learn how to use new technologies in ways that support

the realization of maximum benefits for all stakeholders. Laborda & Royo (2007) claimed there is need for language instructors to use the latest computer technology, software and the latest internet technology. Professional development will also assist teachers to adopt attitudes that support the use of blended learning systems in English language instruction. Laborda & Royo (2007, p. 321) cited that through systematic training, teachers will understand the benefits of blended learning and how to use them.

It is also recommended that more schools adopt blended learning as a major instructional strategy. This study has established that blended learning supports better instruction and improved assessment in English language teaching. However, not all learning institutions have fully embraced blended learning in English teaching and those that have adopted it are not necessarily utilizing it to the maximum levels. As such, it is necessary for institutional leaders to review the current use of blended leaning in English teaching to establish whether the levels of adoption and use are optimal.

Future Research

There are opportunities for further research. Conducting further research in this area will support more effective development of blended learning strategies and in turn improve outcomes of blended learning. One important area that can be researched relates to intervening factors that define the learning process and in turn learning outcomes.

In this case study, even though most of the students in the experimental group performed better than those who were in the control group after the posttest, some of the scores showed that some students in the control group outperformed those in the experimental group. There is therefore need to research further the specific elements that may work as intervening factors in determining the effectiveness of blended learning and how the negative influences can be countered. Further research can also be conducted to establish the particular benefits of instruction and assessment in blended learning to the process of curriculum development.

There is minimal research in that area considering the recent adoption of blended learning in classrooms. Conducting such research will ensure that schools maximally utilize results collected in relation to blended learning. Research in that area will be instrumental in supporting long-term improvements in the use of blended systems and in the curriculums to which students are exposed.

Limitations of the Study

This study is undeniably useful in highlighting the differences that using blended learning can bring about in English learning, it however has several limitations. The first limitation lies in the use of a case study. Cassell and Symon (2004) stated that one major limitation of case studies is linked to the generalizability of the findings.

The findings cannot be generalized to expansive areas or to other learning institutions because the results are specific to the selected institution. This case study involved participants from one school who had specific characteristics, therefore that limits the extent to which the results can be transferred to similar situations. The study is also limited because it was conducted by a single researcher. According to Cassell and Symon (2004), studies conducted by single researchers may be biased because they make interpretations without involving other parties. In

the presented case, it was aimed to overcome this challenge by combining different data collection measurements and different types of data.

The data was collected using questionnaires and the pretest-posttest experimental design. Therefore data collection was not biased especially because the students' performances remained objective and complemented the information collected through questionnaires. These data collection measurements supported the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. Collecting quantitative data about students' performances was useful in fine-tuning conclusions on the interconnections between instructional and assessment processes. The collection of quantitative data limited the extent to which bias could influence the results.

Another limitation is the possibility of variations in the selected cohort following differences in previous exposure. Though the sampling process was developed to ensure that the group was as homogenous as possible, there is a possibility that the students have had different instructional and non-instructional experiences that influenced learning. These experiences may have worked as intervening variables in defining student learning and in turn performance. Even so, threats to internal validity were reduced through the selection of students with closely related characteristics.

Conclusion

In consideration of the quantitative and qualitative data reported in this study, it is feasible to conclude that the use of blended learning supports better instruction and assessment than traditional face-to-face instruction only in English teaching. The results are indicative of the need for instructors to use blended learning to support English language teaching and learning. English language teachers should work collaboratively to come up with blended learning programs that support improved instruction and assessment. This will not only support language learning but also other areas of learning because English is a language that is used for instruction in other subjects.

Students need to learn how to express themselves using English. The usefulness of blended systems in language learning is therefore useful to other areas by extension. Though blended learning is useful for language learning as established by this study, it is important for instructors to come up with blended learning programs that are aligned to the context of use as suggested by Bonk & Graham (2005). These scholars noted that there are endless opportunities for developing blended systems for instruction within different contexts. English language teachers should ensure that they leverage on each opportunity that supports the development and use of blended learning.

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