

## DOES THE MODE OF TEACHING AFFECT LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL?

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### ABSTRACT

Many undergraduates enrolling in the English intensive course at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the University of Sri Jayewardenepura find it challenging to achieve the outcome of improving English writing skills expected of them. In this study, we explored whether different delivery modes (face to face, online and blended) influenced their outcome achievement. Three tutors of English taught the same content to three groups of students using face-to-face, online and blended modes over two months in the Department of English Language Teaching in the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. With the face to face mode continuing as a control group (n=20), the blended (n=20) and online (n=20) groups received six online modules and four quizzes on writing. While the online group received all lessons and quizzes online with no face to face instructions, the blended group received 70% of the course materials online with six face to face lessons to cover up the balance 30% of the course modules. The control group too received the same writing learning lesson materials and practiced these only in their face to face classes. While the three groups showed the performance as Blended mean score=42.75, Online mean score=39.35, Face to face mean score =43.95 at the pre-test having sixty fill in the blank questions in dialogue completion, the course-end test (of sixty fill in the blank questions in a similar dialogue completion exercise) showed the blended group participants to have scored significantly increased marks (mean score=50.85,  $t=-9.181$ ,  $p=.000$ ), compared to their counterparts (Online mean score=46.10,  $t=-5.465$ ,  $p=.000$ , Face to face mean score =49.05,  $t=-6.144$ ,  $p=.000$ ) at the significance level of  $p < .005$ . This study, with further confirmatory evidence, can have implications for teaching English writing in the context of teaching English as a second language in higher education.

**Keywords:** undergraduates, English language teaching, blended learning, humanities and social sciences

### INTRODUCTION

Although technology aided instruction can contribute to the improvement of English as a Second Language (ESL) students' proficiency (Lizzio et al, 2002), the traditional face-to-face teaching is still reported to be able to outperform online teaching because it attracts and creates interest in students (Garson, 1998). However, according to Driscoll (2002) blended learning mode, a mode of delivery that combines online digital media with traditional classroom method can be successfully applied in adult's learning in many disciplines.

A recent study conducted to see the effectiveness of using the blended mode instead of the traditional face to face mode in teaching Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education with pre-university science students in Canada (Bazelais et al, 2018) reveals that the students in the blended group perform significantly better than their counterparts.

Enhancing English writing skills has become crucial for undergraduates in Humanities and

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Social Sciences in Sri Lanka at present than any other time as many courses are conducted in the medium of English in local universities. With the intension of improving English writing skills of the undergraduates in Sri Lanka almost all universities conduct English Intensive courses. However, all those courses are conducted in face-to-face mode in traditional classroom settings. This study investigated how effective it would be if blended mode of delivery was introduced instead of fully online or face-to-face courses in teaching English writing to undergraduates who learn English as a Second Language in Sri Lankan University system.

The main objective of this study was to explore which mode of delivery, face-to-face, online or blended, supports most in developing English writing skills of the undergraduates in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the University of Sri Jayawardenepura in Sri Lanka.

## METHODOLOGY

The setting of this study was made at the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the University of Sri Jayawardenepura in Sri Lanka. The sample of this study consisted of 60 students, both male and female, (age: 21 to 22 years) who were randomly selected from the students who entered to the faculty in the year 2018. In the study, only one variable, the mode of delivery was considered among the factors affecting improving English writing skills, while holding all the other factors constant.

Since good writing is reflected by the use of correct grammar, the study explored how well the participants use English grammar in their writing assignments.

the students were randomly assigned into three groups and instructed to complete six course modules of English writing in three different modes of learning, blended, face-to-face and online over three months (refer Table 1).

**Table 1.** Strategies used to improve speaking skills of the three groups

Study Group	Strategy utilized in teaching English grammar for writing		
	Course Content	Practicing materials	Assessment criteria
Online	Six modules on grammar and a lecture note on effective communication skills were uploaded to the LMS. No face to face instructions were given. All course materials were uploaded to the LMS in the format of animated pictures.	Four online quizzes and six online activities on writing practicing. Six online modules on writing with dialogue completion.	Pre and posttest which included 60 questions on correct grammar usage. Tests were conducted in the regular classroom.

Blended	Six lectures face to face on grammar, each two hours duration. LMS access was given to follow 70 percent of the course materials uploaded. The rest was to be studied in the face to face classroom.	Four online quizzes and six online activities on writing practicing. Six online modules on writing with dialogue completion. Online chatting with the tutor.	Pre and posttest which included 60 questions on correct grammar usage. Tests were conducted in the regular classroom.
Face to face	Six modules on grammar were taught using printed version of the modules in the class. A lecture on effective communication skills was delivered in the face to face class. No online access was given to the participants.	Four online quizzes and six online activities on writing practice were conducted in the class using printed handouts. Six modules on writing exercises with dialogue completion were also done using printed materials in the face to face mode.	Pre and posttest which included 60 questions on correct grammar usage. Tests were conducted in the regular classroom.

The online and blended learning courses were delivered using a Moodle based Learning Management System (LMS). The same online exercises on grammar were distributed in printed version to the participants in the face to face mode. The entirely online group studied the content online and they were not given instructions in a physical learning environment. BL group followed 70% of the course units online and the balance 30% in their face to face classrooms.

Three Tutors of English who have similar level of experience in teaching with the same educational qualifications were assigned to teach to three groups of students. The researcher hypothesized the same level of outcome from all three groups at the end of the course. The data was analyzed using paired sample t test in the SPSS Version 22.0.

## DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Paired t Test was utilized to compare the pre-test scores of the blended group (BLpre) with the post test scores of the same group (BLpost), the pre-test scores of the online group (OLpre) with the post-test scores of the same group (OLpost) and the pre-test scores of the face to face group (F2Fpre) with the post-test scores of the same (F2Fpost).

The study results revealed that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post tests conducted for each group of participants (Blended mode= 8.100, Online mode=6.750, face to face mode=5.100). However, the improvement of the participants who learned business vocabulary through the mode of blended learning was the highest (Mean =

8.100) compared to their counterparts.

**Table 2:** Paired Samples to Test results comparing vocabulary learning performance of blended, online and face to face groups.

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	BLpre - BLpost	-8.100	3.946	.882	-9.947	-6.253	-9.181	19	.000
Pair 2	OLpre - OLpost	-6.750	5.524	1.235	-9.335	-4.165	-5.465	19	.000
Pair 3	F2Fpre - F2Fpost	-5.100	3.712	.830	-6.837	-3.363	-6.144	19	.000

Significance level  $p < .005$

The result of this study is contradictory to the results presented by Adam et al (2015) after studying two sections of an introductory microbiology course that was taught in hybrid and traditional methods. In his study, one section was taught through a hybrid (BL) format and the other through a traditional (face to face) format. Students were randomly assigned to the two sections. Both sections were provided with identical lecture materials, in-class worksheets, in-class assessments, and extra credit opportunities; the main difference was in the way the lecture material was delivered-online for the hybrid section and in person for the traditional section. Analysis of final grades of his study revealed that students in the traditional section did significantly better than those in the hybrid section ( $p < 0.001$ ) which shows the opposite results of the present study.

When performance in the two sections of Adam's study was compared for each class year separately, the differences were only significant for second years ( $p < 0.001$ ); freshmen, juniors, and seniors did not perform differently in the hybrid versus the traditional section. An anonymous midterm survey had suggested factors are likely contributing to the overall lower success of students in the hybrid section: some students in the hybrid section had not taken lecture notes and/or use the audio component of the online lectures, suggesting minimal interaction with the lecture material for these students. However, in the present study, participants in the blended group were keen on attending face to face classes while actively interacting with their peers and Tutors online.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that the blended mode can be successfully used to support business professionals to improve their English-writing skills which supports Vygotsky's (1978) Social Cultural theory that sees learning as a complex phenomenon that is best achieved in a collaborative environment. The findings of the study provide evidence to prove the fact that the blended mode can be successfully used to support students to improve their English writing skills. The results of this study will be of use to the authorities of Higher Educational Institutes including Universities that conduct English intensive courses. In addition, through the findings of this study, the future students who wish to upgrade their knowledge in grammar by following an English course in blended mode would be highly benefitted. The same study can be replicated in a different setting at a different time or for different subjects in order to compare the outcome of different pedagogies. Raw data were generated at the University of Sri Jayawardenepura in Sri Lanka. Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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