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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BLENDED LEARNING AND CONVENTIONAL TEACHING APPROACHES IN ENHANCING READING COMPREHENSION AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

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Abstract
The study is not only intended to investigate the effect of blended learning on the reading comprehension of the learners but also to check the disposition of the students to the mode of instruction. The quasi-experimental type of research design was used because it needed to explore the effectiveness of blended learning (BL). Sixty Pakistani Secondary-level students were used as a sample that was divided into two groups, control and experimental. The two months that would be spent teaching the control group would be taught using the traditional teaching method and the experimental group would be taught using the blended learning strategy that included the use of conventional classroom teaching and mobile application to understand how to read comprehensively. A Reading Comprehension Test (has been conducted as pretest and posttest) and a Student Attitude Assessment Questionnaire were the instruments to gather data. The gathered quantitative data were broken down with independent sample t-tests and descriptive statistics and was executed with the help of the SPSS software. The posttest data were able to reveal that the blended learning was significantly having a positive impact on reading comprehension of the students. In addition, the responses to the questions administered showed that the students of the experimental group also formed the positive attitude towards the blended learning.
Keywords: *Blended Learning, Reading Comprehension, Comparative Study, Experimental Research*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language concept; this can be defined as the classification of sounds, signs and words that can be used by human beings in passing a message within a certain society or region. All the known languages have four basic competences which include speaking, listening, reading and writing. These are the abilities that are intertwined in a manner that would make individuals decode and well-meaning communicate with one another at various circumstances. One of them is the reading comprehension and it has a dominant position in their company because it is one of the most crucial factors of the overall language proficiency. It not only helps in the process of learning in the same language, but it also adds to the learning of other academic subjects. Put simply, reading comprehension might be referred to as possessing the knowledge regarding how to read and understand the written text by the learner. The possibility to master the skills of reading in the first and the second language is regarded as one of the largest purposes of learning.

The first one is the concept of literacy which is one of the main competencies in the life of literate society. It assists people to manage the daily activities associated with the cognition of official papers and documents, contracts, and written dialogues and be engaged in the social and academic life. Moreover, reading and writing skills are significant to the improvement and development of the states

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because the level of preservation and sharing of knowledge largely depends on the written communication. The issue of reading comprehension has never been placed against this importance in the language teaching / learning domain.

Blended Learning (BL) is not a unique approach to teaching, it is merely an approach which brings the traditional classroom instruction in a combination with the digital or mobile-based learning. This integration means that the learners will be privileged to exploit the utilization of the use of technology and face-to-face communication. The most significant one because in blended learning, students are able to re-read and re-read lessons on their own speed of learning and in the process, they can clarify on issues that they may have not well learnt in classroom learning. It is a study which has established that this can be applied to enhance reading comprehension abilities of the students compared to the traditional approaches of instruction.

Technology use has revolutionized the field of language teaching to a large extent. The modern tools are widely applied to service the learning process to mobile applications, computers and internet. Learners have also been introduced to various types of apps such as Busuu, Babbel, Duolingo, FluentU, and Memrise that have helped them learn languages and make it engaging. The paper has adopted a mobile application that has been specifically designed to help in understanding reading as a blended learning strategy to understand the texts better by the learners.

2. Problem Statement

The current day learning environment has seen the incorporation of the technology in the olden day modes of learning or teaching the acquisition gaining ground in the attainment of the contemporary day educational aspirations. This level of integration is difficult to acquire even in developing economies such as Pakistan because of the unavailability of financial resources and technological equipment. One can assume that reading comprehension is one of the most important spheres of language acquisition, and the specified skill is to be trained to guarantee academic achievements. The students in Pakistan are however the beneficiaries of their brethren in the developed countries as regards English reading.

The conventional methods of education do not usually have the capacity to meet the demands of the diverse students. Most of the learners need to work harder and have more exposure to learning content that would not easily be accessible in a normal classroom setup. The blended learning is a possible solution in the sense that the students can access the learning content more than once with the aid of digital technology which enhances their learning. This paper will focus on the comparative analysis of the effectiveness of the traditional teaching on one side and blended learning on the other side in an endeavor to make the best choice that will be adopted to facilitate reading comprehension at the secondary level.

Research Objectives

The above goals are to be achieved in this study:

To determine the impacts of blended learning on the reading comprehension skill of the students.

To describe the disposition of the students to the blended learning in reading comprehension.

Research Questions

The research questions will be to respond to the following questions in the present study:

Do the post-test scores of the study group taught using the blended learning approach differ significantly in comparison to the traditional approach of teaching the students?

What are the attitudes and perceptions of the students regarding blended learning in reading comprehension?

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Research Significance

The present literature recognizes the dearth of research that would fill various gaps in the field of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) as a sign that further research will be mandatory. Though studies related to reading comprehension have been carried out in Pakistan in terms of e-learning, minimal studies have been carried out regarding the impact of blended learning in the secondary level especially in areas like Kasur.

This proposed study is important because it tries to fill such a gap by offering empirical support on whether the blended learning is effective in enhancing reading comprehension. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be applied by the teachers to determine the most effective teaching methodologies and help the students to realize greater learning outcomes. It also can be a practical model on how technology can be accommodated to teach language in resource constrained learning institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Characteristic of literature review is that it is a systematic and formal description of what is out there in terms of studies and research of a particular topic. It entails presentation, comparison and assessment of the past studies with the view of establishing a theoretical grounding of the emergent studies. With this, the scholars will be in a position to understand what has been left out in the prevailing knowledge and what their research is important. Otherwise stated, literature review does not only state what has already been covered but gives clues on what is to be investigated further. The literature that can be relevant to the current research would be included in the following section.

The literature discussion is divided into three big categories that are: (1) reading comprehension, (2) blended learning, and (3) the prior studies regarding blended learning and reading comprehension.

2.1 Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension can only be talked about when a person reaches the point of appreciating what reading is. It is a common conviction that reading is the process through which individuals make a meaning out of a written text. The main aim of the language proficiencies is to equip the learners with the ability to extract the meaning and comprehend messages in a context. These competencies involve reading comprehension because it is among the key competencies in language development and achievement in different subjects. The comprehension of reading can be explained as the level of comprehension of a reader concerning what ideas and intent the writer had but these ideas and intentions were not clearly expressed. It is a dynamic mode of thinking which assumes the involvement of the prior knowledge of the reader, meaning of the text and context in which the text is framed. One cannot comprehend by simply understanding words but perceiving more in the text than meanings and relation. English language learning context is a process that entails skill and knowledge acquisition that are fundamental in reading English material properly. The empirical research issue of the present paper is the reading comprehension improvement with the help of a blended learning meaning the usage of multi modes of learning.

2.2 Blended Learning

Blended learning is an educational procedure that presupposes the incorporation of digital-based instructional technology and traditional physical teaching. It involves incorporation of information and communication technology (ICT) in the traditional classroom instruction methods to make the learning more adaptable and more efficient. The practice is a considerable change in the teaching style since it involves the most desirable qualities of the conventional and contemporary methods of teaching.

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The learning and teaching process in the traditional classroom occurs simultaneously and the teacher as well as the students are physically accessible and interact. E-learning, in its turn, is more of a learner-centered learning where students are in control of both access and management of learning materials, which is asynchronous in nature. The blended learning is a mixture of these two modes and hence the students are the benefactors of both the face-to-face instruction and the application of the independent learning using technology.

Also, one has to include that blended learning lacks a universal definition, and various researchers use different definitions of blended learning. Nevertheless, it is well known that it entails planned incorporation of electronic devices and conventional pedagogy in an endeavor to improve the learning results to the greatest extent possible. Online content in blended learning set up will be utilized to complement the in-classroom learning and give students additional time to work through the material.

2.3 Historical Investigations of Blended Learning.

Various research work has been carried to establish the meaning of blended learning in the acquisition of reading comprehension skills. As an illustration, one of the studies that were conducted on English as Foreign Language (EFL) students in Iran entailed a quasi experimental research design that had two groups, one of them being the control group, which taught in a conventional manner, and the other one being the experimental group, which taught in blended learning. The results arrived at the conclusion that the students taught by the blended approach registered gigantic gains in their reading proficiency as compared to the students taught by the traditional means.

Likewise, the effect of blended learning on the reading comprehension was analyzed at the level of the university EFL learners, in another study. They were grouped into two in which the experimental group was supported with the aid of classroom instructions and the online learning and control group which was taught in the traditional way only. The resultant posttest showed a positive influence of blended learning on reading comprehension of students. In the second article, the efficacy of a blended learning strategy was studied in large proportions among elementary school students (English learners and non-English learners). It was revealed that the two groups had enhanced their reading performance and a significant decrease in difficulty of reading was noticed which supports the usage of blended learning in other groups of learners. Also, the effect of blended learning was discovered to be favorable to academic reading and was also validated by the experimental study that was made on a smaller sample of students. As per the pretest- posttest control group design, the study concluded that there existed enormous differences in the performance of the students who had been taught based on the blended learning and those students who had been taught based on traditional methods. The conclusion was supported by a statistical analysis in which it was demonstrated that reading achievement is the result of blended learning.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology can be viewed as a system or a guide that a researcher will adhere to so as to have a research done in a way that is capable of offering valid, accurate and respondent to research purposes. It gives the nature of information that will be retrieved, source of the information and how the information is to be collected and analyzed. The existing research design that was used to investigate the influence of blended learning (BL) on the reading comprehension of the students was a quasi-experimental research design. A total of 60 Pakistani students and secondary level students were used as the sample and divided into two homogeneous groups, namely control group and experimental group. The time of two months was also related to the fact that the control group was taught with the help of the conventional teaching tools. On the other hand, experimental group was trained by utilizing a blended learning that assumed the application of a specially designed mobile application that was utilized to

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access and comprehend the comprehension in addition to the standard training in the classroom. Two significant research instruments were used to collect the data. The latter was a Reading Comprehension Test (RCT) or a pre-test and post-test to which the learners were administered to identify the performance of students prior to the intervention and following the intervention. The second instrument was a Student Attitude Assessment Questionnaire (SAAQ) which was employed in the determination of perceptions and attitude of learners towards blended learning.

The quantitative data that was collected was analyzed using statistical tools such as independent sample t-tests and descriptive statistics. The data was analyzed using the SPSS software to bring out the relevant and logical meaning of data.

3.1 Results and Findings

The answer to the research questions was given by an experimental process and the data was gathered with the assistance of research instruments applied. The reading comprehension test (RCT) was used to measure the performance of the students in both control and experimental group as a pre-test and an after test. In addition to this, only subjects who were used on experimental group were retained and used to administer Student Attitude Assessment Questionnaire (SAAQ) to establish their feelings towards blended learning.

3.2 Pre-test Results

Comparison of the scores of the pre-test in relation to the control group and the experimental group was done using independent samples t-test. The reason behind this was in need to make a conclusion whether there was a significant difference between the two groups before the treatment of the intervention. The outcome of the pre-test statistic is shown below.

Table.1: Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental Group	30	19.63	3.917	.715
	Control Group	30	17.20	3.010	.550

Judging by the results, which were provided in Table 1, it can be concluded that there was no significant difference between the mean score during the experiment condition(M = 19.63, SD = 3.917) and the control condition(M = 17.20, SD = 3.010) during the pre-test. The value of independent samples t-test t(58) = 2.69, p =0.004 may be used to prove this fact.

Pretest Equal variances not assumed Equal variances assumed.

The findings are given in Table 1 and the p-value of the Independent Samples Test which was acquired in Table 2 proving that there was no difference in the mean scores of the groups of students. This implies that, before the students were subjected to the instructional treatment; there was hardly any disparity in the level of reading proficiency in the students regardless of the two categories recorded.

3.3 Post-test Results

The first question of the research was subjected to pre-test and post-test exposure on the participants. The data was obtained using the independent samples t-test, which was conducted with the help of SPSS software in order to use these tests.

Table.2: Group statistics for difference between the two groups on the post-test

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test	Experimental Group	30	26.17	2.730	.498
	Control Group	30	20.10	1.729	.316

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According to the results presented in Table 2, it can be noted that there was a statistically significant difference between the post-test results of the experimental (M = 26.17, SD = 2.73) and the control group (M = 20.10, SD = 1.72). The fact that the independent samples t-test value, t(58) = 10.28 and significant value, 0.000 is significant indicates that the difference between the two groups is strong and significant.

Table.3: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	9.386	.003	10.282	58	.000	6.067	.590	4.886	7.248
	Equal variances not assumed			10.282	49.039	.000	6.067	.590	4.881	7.252

The results obtained show that the blending learning has a direct effect on reading comprehension. Specifically, study findings revealed that the learning process implemented on a blended learning model proved to be very effective concerning reading comprehension among the learners in the secondary level.

3.4 Attitude of the Learners towards BL

The second part of SAAQ contained fifteen items responded by participants of the experimental group on a 5-point Likert scale. The analysis of findings shows the attitude of students towards BL in reading comprehension.

Table.4: Descriptive Statistics of students' attitude towards BL in reading comprehension

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Applying mobile phone application in learning improved my reading	3.77	.774
2. The technique of BL encouraged me to learn English reading	3.70	.837
3. I am in favour of using smartphones applications for development of	3.93	1.081
4. Applying BL in English reading comprehension made me like	3.83	1.053
5. I found the syllabus of English easier when applying BL in learning	3.97	1.129
6. Applying Mobile phone application for English reading	4.50	1.075

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7. I want to take part in such BL process again for English reading	3.60	.932
8. The use of mobile phone application for reading comprehension saved	2.63	1.159
9. All lectures of English reading comprehension should be supported by	3.47	.730
10. BL material of reading comprehension is more engaging than F2F.	4.77	.504
11. I prefer mobile devices to be used for development of reading	3.57	1.104
12. The use of mobile devices can increase flexibility of access to	4.80	.610
13. With mobile devices for reading comprehension I need less guidance	2.47	1.008
14. Use of BL in English reading comprehension motivates me.	3.50	.777
15. Every student can use the mobile phone application easily for the	2.33	.959
Valid N (listwise)	30	

Table 5 will be used to describe the attitudes of the students towards implementing the blended learning (BL) to reading comprehension elaborately. The findings indicate that the highest score of 4.53 was recorded under the lowest score of 2.13. The mean of the results gathered was 3.65 and the standard deviation 0.57. Such findings indicate a mean response of thirty participants who took part in the experimental group that had a positive and favorable perception of using blended learning to improve their comprehension skills as regards reading.

Table .5: Overall Means and Standard Deviation of Students' Attitude to BL in reading

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall Mean	30	2.13	4.53	3.6556	.57538
Valid N (listwise)	30				

4 Discussion on the Effects of BL on Reading Comprehension

The results of pretest were also compared with the experimental and the control groups and as it was observed, there was no great difference between reading comprehension ability of the students in experimental and control groups in the first stage. The findings of post-test results, however, revealed the positivity and significance of the fact blended learning (BL) had on the performance of students. In identifying the conclusion that the participants who used the BL method were scoring better than the participants who were taught using the traditional method of teaching, the statistical analysis involving t-test was applied. To be more specific, the respondents that were offered a blended learning showed a significant improvement in reading comprehension when compared to the students that were taught through the use of traditional methods and the use of technology was not introduced.

Overall, the results of the provided study are associated with the conclusions reached by the multitude of other studies that were conducted in a different environment. This notwithstanding, though, there are some similarities, despite the fact that there are also differences, in as far as, this research is nearly similar to other researches conducted in the earlier times. The majority of the research on the subject,

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however, is decipherable by the reality that there was a supposition that blended learning is positively involved in the comprehension of reading, at any level of study, and in a diverse range of circumstances exclusively. The studies that produced varied results may be counted as less such as in the example of the age and gender factor study by Khechine et al., (2014), which states that the variables are contributing factors to the performance of the learners.

4.1 Attitude of students towards BL in Reading Discussion.

The overall result of the comparison of the responses given by the students is quite favorable attitude towards the application of the blended learning, particularly, the one that can be introduced with the assistance of the mobile app to read comprehension. The students observe that the practices and materials applied by the BL are more appealing and energetic compared to the face to face learning and the usual course content. They also believed that they will be able to get better reading strategy through such strategy.

Of the fifteen questions present in the Students Attitude Assessment Questionnaire (SAAQ), it is possible to single out such items, which were responded to strongly. The highest score was 6, 10 and 12 and this means that the students liked the learning process involving the use of the mobile applications and they felt that the learning process was more interactive than the normal process. In addition, the use of the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) was considered to be flexible and less cumbersome since it makes the contents of learning available to the learners at their own convenience.

The highest score of 8 and 13, on the other hand, was the two scores of strong disagreement. Such reactions suggest that, there were learners who found blended learning time consuming as opposed to the classroom learning. Moreover, the students perceived the applicability of the teacher instructions, teacher support in this case is very significant to the teacher to enhance the learning outcome. The fact that the stance by Al Zumor et al. (2013) presupposes that students can act better and feel less tense under the guidance of teachers supports the argument.

4.2 Future Research Suggestions.

The provided study was a pilot work which was conducted in one of the Pakistani districts, District Kasur and which was expected to improve the reading comprehension of students of the secondary grade with the assistance of a mixed-based learning approach on the premises of the mobile application. However, despite the fact that the study was rather concerned with the comprehension reading, there are also identical technological applications in marketing other language skills.

Offline mobile application plan was used in the experiment, and it developed several reading sub-skills, this included vocabulary understanding in the context, inference, Scimming, scanning, finding central points and conclusion. However, the variety of mobile applications and MALL resources which can be used is rather broad and may help to achieve other reading skills like comparing and contrasting, logical thinking, and correlating previously learned knowledge. The future researchers can use the tools in the future to come up with more detailed findings.

Since the current study presupposed the quasi-experimental design, the upcoming would be based on the qualitative approach to understand more about the experiences and challenges learners will be forced to address. Furthermore, the issue as the application of technology in reading comprehension in Pakistani scenario (access, digital literacy, and infrastructure) must also be considered in more specifics. Bax (2003) argues that in the very near future, there is a high likelihood that not only would the technology be fully utilized in the language learning setting, but also that there will be more research in the field.

5. Conclusion

The part of the study was not only to become acquainted with the implications of blended learning on the reading understanding of the learners but also to determine their perception regarding the application

of blended learning. The simplest of the language skills is the ability to comprehend reading and this should be accorded the necessary attention in the learning institutions. The findings of the research indicate that the learning outcome with the use of technology tools in traditional teaching method is better compared to the traditional teaching method.

Blended learning not only provides reading proficiency of the students, but also to make the learning exercise interesting and accessible as well. The use of BL would be effective in the case of Pakistan where the students would be experiencing an issue in developing the reading comprehension skills. The post-test scores were such in that one could tell that the students of the experimental group scored higher in terms of the mark scores in comparison with the students of the control group. The attitude analysis of my student was also positive in relation to the blended learning.

Besides, BL allows the learner the liberty to learn at his/her time, place, and pace and also to readily access the learning resources and provide the feedback as soon as possible. It is a combination of two types of learning of e-learning and classroom education hence making it more comprehensive.

Generally, the study has revealed that Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is successful in a blended learning system. The mix of the two learning styles is largely justified by the positive outcome of the progress of the performance and the attitudes of the students to apply the strategy in teaching the aspect of the reading comprehension in the high school.

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