MANAGEMENT & ACCOUNTING REVIEW

C O N T E N T S

English Language Self-Efficacy in a Blending Learning Environment

Suthagar Narasuman[a] and Zalina Mohd Zamri[b]
[a]Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA
[b]Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Ipoh, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to look at the effect of blended learning (BL) on the respondents' English as a second language (ESL) self-efficacy. The respondents in this study were subjected to a pre and post study survey on ESL self-efficacy in a BL environment. Between the surveys was an eight week period during which the respondents' formal ESL lessons were conducted using the blended learning approach. The study utilised both quantitative and qualitative data. Data from the pre and post-test surveys were analysed to ascertain the respondents' attitude towards blended learning and their self-efficacy in ESL. The results of this study revealed that blended learning had a positive influence on the diploma level respondents' self-efficacy in ESL learning. They believe that blended learning had helped improve their listening skills (74.4%), speaking skills (68.3%), reading skills (92.7%), writing skills (56.1%) and grammar (59.8%).

Keywords*: English language; self-efficacy*

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INTRODUCTION

Advancements in information technology and multimedia, have modernised instructing and learning methods from the customary traditional learning techniques that comprise memorising factual information from lecture notes and static one-way lectures and on to more current, intuitive and dynamic learning approaches through, e-learning and blended learning. Teachers are currently faced with the challenge of preparing respondents' for the new millennium, where the world needs respondents' with a high degree of cognitive flexibility and life-long learning skills (Aldalalah & Gasaymeh, 2014). Blended learning (BL) or hybrid learning is hailed as an avant-garde method of teaching, designed to accommodate these new challenges. From a pedagogical perspective E-Learning and blended learning are the products of higher education practitioners interested in merging ICT and pedagogy as part of an effort in enhancing respondents' self-efficacy. Generally, blended learning (BL) uses various scheduled timeframe combinations of conventional face to face classroom session and online learning. In other words BL enables traditional classroom learning in parallel with an E-Learning environment (Azizan, 2010). BL combines the better of two models that is conventional learning and E-learning. It uses a blend of numerous teaching strategies, such as, up close and personal communication, individual learning and online communication. In BL, learners will have the capability to acquire social communication skills and improve their competence and confidence. BL also offers effective learning conditions to enhance learners' critical thinking. Azizan (2010) stressed that BL also offers numerous other advantages to teachers such as flexibility, cost and time saving. These benefits are the reason why the BL approach is widely accepted by respondents' and educators alike especially in higher education institutions.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Determine if there is an improvement in the respondents' self-efficacy in English language learning in a BL environment.

2. Identify the challenges encountered by the respondents when using BL in their English language learning.

3. Identify the support mechanisms needed to improve respondents' English language learning experiences in a BL environment.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. Is there any improvement in the respondents' English language learning self-efficacy in a blended learning environment?

2. Identify the challenges the respondents' encounterwhen using BL in their English anguage learning?

3. What are the support mechanisms needed to improve the respondents English language learning experience in a blended learning environment?

Blended Learning In Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

In Malaysia, BL initially began under the Ninth Malaysia Plan, in which the Malaysian government had highlighted the necessity for local higher education institutions to deliver productive and talented human capital for the nation (Economic Planning Unit, 2006). Subsequently the Ministry of Education felt that in order to accomplish this goal, Malaysian higher education needs to integrate information and information communication technology (ICT) in their courses and this prompted higher education institutions in Malaysia to formulate and implement e-learning programmes in their courses as an option along-side traditional teaching and learning approaches. In spite of all the advantages, there are also many downsides of e-learning that demand to be investigated so as to enhance the viability of e-learning. To overcome these drawbacks associated with e-learning, some institutions of higher learning in Malaysia began to gradually utilize BL as they moved from absolute e-learning to a combination of traditional and e-learning approach (Bunyarit, 2006).

BL has been characterized as a teaching and learning model that combines both the traditional classroom approach with an e-learning approach. BL can likewise be described as the integration of e-learning

tools such as virtual learning environments with the conventional learning environment. BL has not only combined different digital media but also emphasised on the significance of the respondents' learning outcomes when planning, creating and delivering BL. Some of the earliest studies refer to BL as a separate subdivision of the E-learning domain. While contemporary studies refer to BL as a fastidious mix of conventional and online learning experience (Garrison D. R., 2008). The latter description is the favoured choice of definition to be practised in this exploration since it both acknowledges the significance of interactive activities and communication between respondents' and the lecturer and the role of IT in boosting the whole learning experience.

BL is different from traditional pedagogy as it is significantly impacted by constructivist and student centred pedagogical approaches. Constructivism depicts the growth of knowledge through learning as a process of creating meanings in relation to the context and the environment in which the learning takes place. Constructivist believe that a learner's understanding of a subject is rooted in the experience of that individual. The pre-existing knowledge is brought together from diverse areas of understanding and reassembled into knowledge structures that can be utilised to understand and create new meanings for the new situation presented. This process of knowledge construction by imposing meaning to learning experiences reflects the core of the constructivist epistemology. BL embraces moderate constructivist approaches in its pedagogical model which is also based on active and problem-based learning. BL's greatest strength lies in its capacity to focus on the learner rather than the design of the learning believes that for respondents' learning to be successful, it must contain genuine experience of the world and the reflection on that authentic experience will produce the intended ways of representing it and this believe is parallel with the constructivist view of effective learning. The usage of the internet and technology in English language learning, better known by its moniker Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is nothing new at all. In fact, ICT has been used extensively in language learning since it started in the 1960s (Larsen, 2012). Even though ICT has been used quite frequently in English language learning, there are still very few studies on BL and self-efficacy in learning the English language.

Respondents' Self-Efficacy In Learning English In A Blended Learning Environment

Bandura (1993) defined self-efficacy as the belief in one's abilities to arrange and implement the required task according to appropriate situations. According to him, self-efficacy not only dictates how people think and feel but also determines their life choices, motivation, resilience, stress and depression. Self-efficacy is entrenched within Bandura's social cognitive theory where self-efficacy is viewed as a modal value of self-examination affecting behaviour, exertion and perseverance when going up against difficulties and authority of that behaviour (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy is not looking at one's skills, but in one's ability. Self-efficacy influences straightforwardly on whether the person works in a strategic or erratic manner as well as whether the person is optimistic or pessimistic (Bandura, 2006). Bandura also elucidated that individuals learn new behaviours through seeing social examples and the ramifications of their deeds. This viewpoint is likewise shared by BL where it emphasizes on using genuine situations so that the pupils can learn what is right and fitting according to the general public around them especially when learning another language. The theoretical framework of this research is based on the self-efficacy theory of Bandura (1993) and further bolstered by the constructivist learning theory of Vygotsky (1978). Both Vygotsky and Bandura believed that learning takes place when there is a change in the individual consciousness based upon their interaction with their surroundings and BL provides the environment that encourages the respondents' participation in class which leads to an increase in self-efficacy for the respondents'.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The respondents in this research are eighty two semester two respondents' undertaking a diploma programme in management and multimedia at a local college. Their programme includes compulsory attendance for English language proficiency classes. Data collection was done using two sets of surveys. A pre-test and a post-test on Self-Efficacy in Learning English in a BL Environment. The pre-test survey items were adapted from the General Self-efficacy Scale (GSES) (Ralf Schwarzer, 1992). Part I of the

survey was instrumental in gathering demographic details such as gender and age and in Part 2, there are ten Likert-type questions that focussed on the respondents' self-efficacy in learning English. The post-test survey questionnaire consisted of an adapted scale from the General Self-efficacy Scale (GSES) as well as Abdul Wahed Q. Al Zumor's (2013) inventory on the respondents' perception of BL. The survey consisted of 4 parts. Part 1 gleaned demographic details, Part 2, gathered data on the respondents' self-efficacy in learning English. Part 1 and Part 2 of the post-test survey were identical to the pre-test survey. While Part 3 of the post-test survey had eight Likert-type questions centred on the effects of BL on the respondents' English language learning. Finally Part 4 of the survey contained three open-ended queries to gather qualitative data on the advantages, limitations and recommendations regarding BL.

A pilot study was carried out prior to the main study on 30 respondents' who were recruited via convenience sampling. After the pilot study, the pre-test survey questionnaires were administered to 82 respondents' undertaking a Diploma programme. Following the pre-test survey, the respondents were subjected to 8 weeks of English Language lessons in a BL environment. Respondents' were subjected to 3 hours of face-to face traditional classrooms with the lecturer and 4 to 7 hours per week of non-face-to face learning through websites, blogs and other reference materials given by the lecturer. After the 8th week respondents were administered, the post-test survey. Quantitative data was analysed and tabulated in the form of percentage, mean score (M), and standard deviation (SD). Qualitative data was analysed according to the inductive qualitative approach which involves analysing the data with little or no predetermined or established theory, structure or framework and uses the actual data itself to deduce the structure of the analysis.

FINDINGS

RQ 1: Is there any improvement in the respondents' English language learning Self-Efficacy after BL was implemented?

In the pre-test survey, respondents' assessed their self-efficacy for having the capacity to solve their English study problems if they try hard

enough as (M=4.00) while in the post-test survey, this increased to (M=4.06). This indicates that there is an improvement (M=0.06) in the respondents' English language learning self-efficacy.

The same respondents' likewise evaluated their self-efficacy as high for being able to solve their English study issues if they invest the necessary effort. In the pre-test survey the mean was (M=3.76) and in the post-test survey, it expanded (M=0.16) to (M=3.95). This finding further authenticates that the respondents' are confident that they are able to solve any English language problems if they put the necessary effort and time in it. In the pre-test survey, the respondents' appraised their self-efficacy as high for being able to find solutions when they encountered difficulties in their English study (M=3.50) and it increased (M=0.16) to (M=3.66) in the post-test survey. They additionally ranked their self-efficacy in the pre-test survey for being calm when confronting troubles as (M=3.23) and in the post-test survey, it demonstrated an increase of (M=0.35) to (M=3.58).

In addition, these respondents also appraised their self-efficacy as high when they can find ways to get what they need (M=3.77) in the post study, an expansion of (M=0.14) from (M=3.63) in the pre-test survey. The same respondents' also stated (M=3.68) that they can find solutions when confronted with problems in their English language learning in the post-test survey, thus an increase of (M=0.12) from (M=3.56) in the pre-test survey. These results further solidified the findings that the respondents' possess strong self-confidence and abilities to find solutions to resolve their English language study problems. These participants also positioned their self-efficacy as high when they can discover ways to get what they need (M=3.77) in the post-test survey, an increase of (M=0.14) from (M=3.63) in the pre-test survey. The same respondents' also additionally stated (M=3.68) in the post-test survey that they can find solutions when confronted with problems in their English language learning, thus an expansion of (M=0.12) from (M=3.56) in the pre-test survey. These ratings are testimony that BL motivates the respondents' to be more self-reliant in their English language learning.

In general, the average mean for respondents' self-efficacy in the post review (M=3.62) is higher than the pre review (M=3.56). There is an increase of (M=0.06) in the respondents' English self-efficacy after BL was executed.

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It can be assumed that there was a slight improvement in the respondents' English self-efficacy. These increases in the respondents' self-efficacy in the English language additionally impacted their abilities to accomplish their objectives in the English language (M=3.60) in the post-test survey, an increment of (M=0.22) from (M=3.38) in the pre-test survey. In view of this, we can conclude that the respondents' self-efficacy in the English language affected their goals to excel in the English language.

However, not all of the respondents' self-efficacy items recorded a mean expansion. There are some situations where it actually declined. One such case is when the respondents of these surveys ranked their confidence as the lowest when dealing with unexpected events (M=3.13) in the post-test survey, a decrease of (M=-0.26) from (M=3.39) in the pre-test questionnaire. The same scenario also happens when the respondents' rated their self-efficacy as low when handling unexpected situations (M=3.45) in the post-test survey, a decrease of (M=-0.21) from (M=3.66) recorded in the pre-test survey. Furthermore, the same participants also positioned their self-efficacy as low for being able to handle whatever comes their way (M=3.35) in the post-test survey, a reduction of (M=-0.17) from (M=3.52) reported in the pre-test survey. This result unmistakably shows that the respondents had low self-efficacy in their abilities in coping and managing spontaneous events or situations in their English language learning. One possible explanation to this is that the respondents' are not inclined to speak English in spontaneous situations because they are afraid that they will make errors and be ridiculed by their friends.

In the post-test survey, the respondents were also asked about which area of their English language learning had improved the most after BL was actualized. Table 1 indicates that a majority of the respondents that is 92.7% believed that BL helped boost their reading skills. This high rating in reading can be attributed to the manner in which BL is practiced whereby most of the subject content is posted online (Abdul Wahed Q. Al Zumor, 2013). But this type of reading might differ with reading as a set of skills, for example, previewing, scanning, skimming and etc. While 74.4% of those who answered the questionnaire indicated that they believed BL helped improve their listening skills, pronunciation and spelling, almost two-thirds of the participants (68.3%) responded that BL has improved their speaking skills and 69.5% of them also believed that BL had improved their English language vocabulary.

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What is intriguing in this data is that when asked whether BL helped develop their writing skills, 56.1% of the respondents' concurred with the statement and 59.8% of the respondents believed that BL helped to improve their grammar. The low rating that writing and grammar received in the respondents' post-test survey may be attributed to the lack of exercises and practice during the BL intervention. These pupils believe that the exercises on writing and grammar given to them during the 8 weeks of study is not sufficient enough. These respondents' may still believe that one way to learn English is through grammar drill exercises, memorizing sample essays and reading of text given to them.

Table 1: Areas of English Language Learning that had Improved Due to BL

Language Area	Agree (%)	Not Sure (%)	Disagree (%)
I feel that blended learning helps me to boost my listening skills.	74.4	18.9	6.7
I feel that blended learning helps me to develop my speaking skills.	68.3	30.5	1.2
I feel that blended learning helps me to boost my reading skills.	92.7	7.3	0.0
I feel that blended learning helps me to develop my writing skills	56.1	43.9	0.0
I feel that blended learning helps me to improve my pronunciation.	74.4	24.4	1.2
I feel that blended learning helps me to boost my spelling.	74.4	25.6	0.0
I feel that blended learning helps me to refine my grammar	59.8	40.2	0.0
I feel that blended learning helps me to develop my vocabulary.	69.5	28.0	2.5

Having now presented the available quantitative data relevant to this question we turn to the qualitative data that was gathered. These data was derived from a detailed analysis of the respondents' written comments on three items in the post-test survey. The respondents' responses to these open-ended questions helped the researchers identify four distinct themes. The four broad ideas which emerged from the analysis are English language learning self-efficacy, methodology, accessibility and technical problems.

Respondents' English Language Learning Self-efficacy:

"In my opinion, the advantages of BL is it helps me to develop my speaking skills. It also helps me in my writing, spelling, grammar and reading skill."

"Can improve my writing, learning and speaking skills."

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These written responses from the post-test survey showed that the respondents' believed that after the implementation of BL in their English language learning, their overall English language proficiency had improved. 97.6% (N=82) of them wrote that their English language proficiency had improved. This finding is consistent with the quantitative data obtained above which indicated an increase of (M=0.06) in the respondents' English language learning self-efficacy after BL was implemented. This result shows that respondents' generally have a positive view of using BL in English language learning and thus it also improved their learning outcomes.

Methodology

"We can finish the syllabus faster and we can do more exercises and revision.' "Easy to understand"

The above written remarks obtained from the post-test survey demonstrated that the pupils found it is easier to learn English when English was taught using BL. To them, learning English through BL was more interesting and fun than learning English in a traditional or conventional classroom.

Accessibility and cost saving

"...Even if we cannot catch up, there is a link to study again.' "...can catch up if we missed out"

These positive comments indicate that the respondents' can access their English instructional materials anywhere and anytime (Bunyarit, 2006). In addition, the respondents' also do not need to use their textbooks in their English language learning. All the subject content can be uploaded onto the internet and it provides convenient and economical access for both respondents' and instructors (Bunyarit, 2006).

RQ 2: Identify the challenges the respondents' encountered when using BL in their English Language Learning?

There is some negative feedback indicating concerns or challenges respondents' had when using BL in their English language learning:

Accessibility

"Low internet access makes it hard for me to find information."
"The internet connection weak and slow"

72.0% of them responded that the internet is slow. This indicates that bandwidth capacity and connectivity issues play a major role in the success of English language learning using BL (Abdul Wahed Q. Al Zumor, 2013). Problems regarding low bandwidth capacity and poor connectivity make assessing the internet and the subject content slow for the respondents' and consequently, it makes the respondents' bored and frustrated in the classroom (Abdul Wahed Q. Al Zumor, 2013).

Sructural problems

"Classroom is too small.'
"Classroom too cramped."

Another primary hindrance identified in this study are the structural problems such as the lack of language labs and small classrooms (Hannah, 2013). The first obstacle to the success of BL is the internet connectivity and the second are the structural problems such as lack of language labs and small classrooms.

RQ 3: What are the support mechanisms needed to improve the respondents English language learning experience in a blended learning environment?

From the written responses to the open-ended questions, these are some suggestions given by the respondents' regarding support mechanisms:

Accessibility

"Upgrade the internet" "Free WiFi"

From the written response in the post-test survey, 64.6% of the respondents wrote that they want the college to improve or upgrade internet connectivity.

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Structural problems

"Provide a language laboratory with good internet connection."
"Bigger classroom."

While 24.4% of the participants wrote that they want the college to improve the structural facilities, such as, bigger classroom and setting up language laboratories that are equipped with a higher bandwidth.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The outcome of this survey, has demonstrated that there was some improvement in the respondents' English language learning self-efficacy in a BL context. Comparisons of the pre and post intervention survey data shows an increase in the pupils' confidence; they are able to solve any English language problem if they put the necessary effort and time into it. These findings suggest that BL has improved the respondents' self-efficacy and ability to resolve their English language learning problems. As a result they are more autonomous and interested in learning the language. In addition to becoming independent learners, they are also able to adapt their learning needs and find information online by themselves. These findings further support the theory that the BL approach to teaching is in line with the social constructivist framework that encourages the formation and acceleration of learning through positive involvement with respondents' and inadvertently improves student self-efficacy and motivation (Zimmerman, 2008). Surprisingly, the post intervention survey data revealed that the respondents' had low confidence in their ability to cope and manage impromptu events or sites in the process of learning the English language. One possible explanation to this is that the respondents' are not prepared to speak English in a spontaneous setting because they were afraid of making mistakes in the language and being ridiculed by their friends. These fears of making mistakes probably resulted from learning in a behaviourist setting which emphasis on so called "correct" answers.

The second question in this inquiry was to investigate the obstacles to the success of learning English in a BL environment. The first main obstacle is the internet connectivity and the second are the structural problems such

as lack of language labs and small classrooms. Past studies have observed the importance of internet connectivity and accessibility in the success of using BL in English language scholarship. According to Bunyarit (2006), BL depends on the internet to deliver the subject content to the target respondents', therefore problems such as low internet bandwidth and poor or no connectivity will produce frustration and ennui among the pupils. Out of the nine statements in his study, internet connectivity and technical problems are rated the highest. The third question in this research is to identify the support mechanisms needed to improve their BL experience in English language learning. From the findings of this study, there are two main support mechanisms needed to improve the respondents' experience in their English language learning. This first support mechanism is to improve the internet connectivity and the second is to improve the existing infrastructure or facilities at their institution. This result demonstrated that as a whole the respondents' were happy with this new mode of learning for giving them an opportunity to learn the English language at their own pace, but the slow internet connection cannot be ignored, which suggest the need for upgrading the existing facilities.

CONCLUSION

The current research highlights the importance of encouraging and advancing the use of BL in English language learning especially in higher education establishments in Malaysia. According to Embi (2011), only 8.7% of lecturers used 80% of BL in their instruction. Hopefully this study will be a useful guide to higher education policy makers and planners to introduce and implement BL in higher education teaching in general and English language proficiency classes in particular. A revised English language syllabus that is based on constructivist pedagogy would encourage learners to become independent, and this will be in line with the current trends in language learning. Further to this, policy makers and planners of higher education institutions should also focus on growing and improving teaching strategies, in particular, the blended learning strategy in order to heighten students self-efficacy. Based on this research, there are two fields of vexation that need to be looked into. The first is the internet connectivity and the second is the infrastructure of the institutions themselves. In order for BL to be successful, planners and policy makers of higher education

institutions in Malaysia should address the issue of internet connectivity as well as improve the existing infrastructure to cope with the needs of BL.

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