CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN BLENDED LEARNING IN RELATION TO ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS AMONG BSED- ENGLISH STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study shows the relationship between the challenges encountered in blended learning in the key aspects of interaction and motivation, learning materials, and the quality of English communication instruction in relation to oral communication skills such as extemporaneous speaking, storytelling, and oral picture description. The study's primary purpose is to demonstrate how challenges encountered in blended learning affect English communication proficiency. Forty-two respondents officially enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English for the school year 2020-21 at the University of Bohol-Teachers College were randomly sampled with a +/-5% margin error at a 95% interval using a quantitative-correlational modified survey questionnaire. The survey

tool underwent face validity using Cronbach's Alpha and pretested to ten respondents who were given thirty minutes to answer. Furthermore, findings revealed no significant relationship between the challenges encountered by the respondents and their oral communication proficiency. Thus, challenges encountered in blended learning did not affect the teaching and learning of oral communication in English. Finally, this recommends that academic administrators and teachers carefully review the English modules to promote an interactive teaching-learning process in English communication. It further recommends that students have a written daily plan to avoid mingling with school and household responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

The global health crisis caused by COVID-19 marked a radical change in all learning institutions nationwide in providing continuous, relevant, quality education. Many schools experience different struggles and difficulties in coping with the new learning mode's needs and demands. Deschacht and Goeman (2015) cited that blended learning worsens adult learners' persistence, increasing dropouts and less positively impacting course passing rates. Teaching and learning oral communication may end up struggling to land better-paying jobs. As stated by Draffan and Rainger (2013), challenges in blended learning also occur when teachers lack approaches. It is vital to apply various approaches to motivate students to develop their skills through their performance tasks. However, if the teacher uses a one-sided approach, students are expected to experience challenges, especially in blended learning. Molina (2021) claimed that challenges encountered by teachers are problems that will affect the teacher's performance in handling the students and their educational responsibility. Therefore, Abisoye (2017) claimed that challenges encountered can cause a specific effect on someone's life. In an educational setup, the students are the ones who are prone to be affected and will experience negativity in their life.

On the other hand, there are gaps in the literature on continuing teaching students amidst pandemics through blended learning. Less published local research on blended learning since its adoption and implementation drive the researchers to conduct the study. With this, it determines whether the challenges encountered by the students have significantly correlated to their performance in oral communication proficiency.

This study helps researchers who are future educators to have an overview of what will be the challenges that need to be encountered and solved in an online class setting. This study guides researchers to discover ways to deliver appropriate lessons to develop students' oral communication proficiency using the quality of English communication. Moreover, this determines whether the challenges encountered by the students have significantly correlated to their performance in oral communication proficiency. The findings would shed light

on the student's proficiency level in blended learning. Finally, the result of this study would become a point of reference to improve the areas of blended learning implementation.

The researchers carefully presented and discussed relevant articles and research to support and lay the foundation for this study—the model's blended learning theory and how oral communication courses are taught. Blended learning requires offline and online learning; hence, it is also known as a "mixed learning modality." The framework discussed here focuses on utilizing blended learning platforms (online and offline) for synchronous learning.

The "Uses and Gratification Theory" of McLeod and Becker (1981) is one of the conversation theories which explains why humans revealed themselves to a definite form of media. It points out that media or platform users take an active function and are purpose-oriented in understanding and incorporating media into their respective lives. In other words, using Google Classroom to deliver learning content in oral communication to students has become salient and indispensable for many. In blended learning, teachers and students in the oral communication course have used and taken advantage of this platform. It has become their fundamental means of interacting, teaching, and learning. Hence, this platform is convenient and satiates the needs of the teachers and students. Another theory that would elucidate the role of media and platforms in blended learning is the "Media System Dependency Theory" of DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1976). This theory emphasizes an inward connection between media, the audience, and a vast social framework. Additionally, the media used in blended learning is prepared to rely on the target audience to accomplish its objectives by utilizing its media power.

The experiential Learning Theory of David Kolb (1984) states that knowledge is created and established through the transformation of experiences. In other words, the learners have to gain substantial experience as a basis for them to reflect, think, and engage. But students' learning and engagement in hands-on activities can affect how interaction and motivation, learning materials, and the quality of English communication instruction are delivered. Constructivism underpins the importance of the role of experiences. According to this theory, human beings actively gain knowledge, and their experiences determine reality. In other words, truth is defined by the experience of the learners. Thus, oral communication teachers need to provide the students with relevant, appropriate, valid learning experiences and real-life activities to avoid encountering challenges in interacting and delivering English instruction.

Additionally, teaching and learning oral communication to the students in blended learning has gauged how much the learners show and become independent and responsible for their learning. Sometimes, the teacher would leave the students engaging in learning activities for them to undertake without close contact and supervision. The assumption above is supported by Lev Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In teaching

oral communication, there are times when students are left in charge of their learning activities without close contact and supervision. In this sense, students are afforded time to become independent learners and apply what they already know to complete the learning tasks and activities. The abovementioned theories become the paradigms of what is now called Outcomes-Based Education (OBE).

The importance of education in the country has been highly underscored on a legal basis. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicates that quality education improves sustainable development in key areas, such as increasing quality of life, access to comprehensive learning, and the mechanism for innovative solutions to problems.

The CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 4, series of 2020, on its general guidelines regarding flexible learning, stated that all HEIs are expected to offer and deploy available flexible learning and other alternative delivery modes instead of residential learning (face-to-face modality). Furthermore, Executive Order (EO) No. 210, 2003, was signed into law. The enacted legal provision expresses that the English language shall be used as the medium of instruction in the educational system. It aims to enhance the learners' knowledge, skills, and ability in the language.

The provisions of the law outlined above are also consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As stated in Goal 4 of the SDGs, "excellent education strengthens the foundation for advancing sustainable development in a variety of critical areas, including increased living quality, access to comprehensive learning, and support for innovative solutions to problems."

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) encourages every HEI academic practice freedom. The Minimum Essential Learning Competencies (MELCS) from the said Commission shall not be omitted as part of the learning content. Each HEI has its unique approach to blended learning.

Three key areas have been categorized in this study. Firstly, challenges encountered are problems that will affect the teacher's performance. In an educational setup, the students are the ones who are prone to be affected and will experience negativity. Secondly, interaction and motivation are essential to achieving online and blended learning goals. Facilitating students' learning processes requires more encouragement to do well in the blended learning environment. Fostering effective learning climate change creates new strategies to motivate students. Thirdly, the learning materials in blended learning enable the student to access the materials from anywhere. Learning materials are an essential factor in pedagogy, wherein they help the teaching process be more effective and engaging. Lastly, the quality of English communication instruction is a big difference between traditional and online learning, so teachers must develop strategies to provide quality instruction. Teachers need to give clear instructions through an online platform to create a quality learning environment. Students are also given oral communication

opportunities to demonstrate their learning and skill.

Because of oral communication skills every human being is believed to have oral communication skills. The life of every human being will never be valuable and significant without this skill. In connection to the students' lives, oral communication is needed to improve their academics and ensure their future. Also, if there is human interaction, there is a development in oral communication. Students are also given oral communication opportunities to demonstrate their learning and skill. These oral communication activities would train the learners to develop their communication skills: extemporaneous speaking, oral picture description, and storytelling. The first is extemporaneous speech which can help develop the student's oral communication skills. Second is the oral picture description which provides teachers with materials for discussion and supports students with the knowledge they need. The last one is storytelling, wherein early learning can be shaped by storytelling and can potentially change our intellect's essence.

Blended learning has grown in popularity and significance in delivering instruction and the entire classroom organization, especially during the pandemic. According to Alammary, Sheard, and Carbone (2014), its importance and demand as an effective modality can never be overstated since blended learning becomes instrumental in addressing the diverse student population and learning needs while providing the learners as well as the teachers a vast array of learning opportunities such as adding value to the learning environment and accessing teaching-learning resources.

UBlended Learning. The University of Bohol's approaches to blended learning have addressed the mandates from the CHED. The school has designed three learning delivery preferences for tertiary education: Flexi Learning 1, Flexi Learning 2, and Flexi Learning 3.

Challenges Encountered. Institutional support is a way of encouraging faculties to adopt the blended learning situation. The instructor's confidence to deliver their lessons to the students is one of the advantages of having a successful teaching and learning process. According to Graham, Allen, and Ure (2003), challenges are encountered by adapting the new learning strategy and positive feedback. Also, as Draffan and Rainger (2013) stated, challenges in blended learning also occur when teachers lack approaches. It is vital to apply various approaches to motivate students to develop their skills through their performance tasks. However, if the teacher uses a one-sided approach, students are expected to experience challenges, especially in blended learning.

Oral Communication Skills. Every individual is believed to have their skills. According to Rahman (2010), one thing also stands as an essential skill in oral communication. The life of every human being will never be valuable and significant without this skill. Hence, oral communication skill is a lifetime and priceless treasure a person could have. In connection to the students' lives, oral communication is needed to improve their academics and ensure their future.

The researchers present the inclusion of reviews of other research and scholarly works related to the problem under study to strengthen their study on oral communication skills and challenges encountered in blended learning.

Alammary et al. (2014) further explain that the confusion about blended learning results in different understandings of the teachers in higher education, leading to diverse design approaches. Consequently, this has become one of higher learning institutions' primary and critical concerns. Also, Otto (2018) revealed that virtual mobility and digital storytelling were implemented through constructive alignment. The study showed that while students embraced the option of virtual mobility and digital storytelling, they still value face-to-face interaction. Additionally, it emphasized that blended learning had no adverse influence on students' virtual mobility or digital storytelling.

The study by Inceoglu (2019) titled "Exploring the Effects of Instruction on L2 French Learner Pronunciation, Accentedness, Comprehensibility, and Fluency an Online Classroom Study" claimed that oral picture description was not affected by the challenges encountered in blended learning. The study further stated that there were many ways to perform and improve the skill in the oral picture description; however, technology as a tool for blended learning was not affected, and no relationship at all. It is confirmed by Hamdan et al. (2021), in their study on "University Students' Interaction, Internet Self-Efficacy, Self-Regulation and Satisfaction with Online Education During Pandemic Crises of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2)," stressed that there were notable differences in students' level of satisfaction based on their educational level, college type, and marital status. Moreover, the result further signified that students had various needs and satisfaction based on their academic level regarding online learning.

The theories mentioned above become the paradigms in teaching and learning oral communication in English under the tenet of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE).

The primary objective of this present research undertaking is to assess the students' challenges encountered in blended in relation to oral communication skills who are taking up Bachelor of Secondary Education majors in English (BSEd-English). The study further aims to propose relevant and viable recommendations.

The researchers are convinced that this present study would benefit the university in improving blended learning delivery.

Administration. The study's findings would give the University of Bohol administration a clearer perspective on the adoption and implementation of the blended learning modality adopted by the school upon cancellation of residential learning (face-to-face learning) due to health threats and risks.

English Teachers. The result of the study aids the faculty members handling English courses to assess their effectiveness as teachers in enhancing the English language skills of the learners, including oral communication skills and their utilization of the blended learning modality in the delivery of the

learning content.

Students. This present research helps the students check their oral communication competence while ascertaining their challenges in blended learning. By then, they can take strides to adjust to the new normal of class delivery and exert more effort to acquire the necessary skills and proficiency in English, especially in oral communication.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a quantitative-correlational design using a modified survey questionnaire drawn from published studies. The following questions are taken from a published tool by Persis Dineen Rodrigues entitled "The Impact of Online Learning in the Development of Speaking Skills." The study locale is the University of Bohol, specifically the Teachers College, which is one of the departments of the said university. This Higher Education Institution (HEI) was established in 1949 as Rafael Palma College and has existed for seventy-five years. The College has offered different programs in education. During Academic Year 2020-2021, College 40 had a total population of four hundred thirty-one (431), with forty-two officially enrolled in the BSEd-English program. With the researchers' exemption, all students formally enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English (BSEd-English) program for the School Year 2020-2021 serve as the study's respondents. These are the first to fourth-year BSEd-English students of the Teachers College of the University of Bohol, for which a total of 42 students are enrolled. A random sample of 38 respondents was chosen with a +/- 5% margin error at a 95% confidence interval.

The research instrument consists of three main parts. The first part of the tool discloses the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, and year level. The second part shows challenges encountered by the respondents in blended learning in the three key areas: interaction and motivation, learning materials, and quality of English communication instruction. Finally, the third part of the instrument reveals the proficiency level of the student-respondents in oral communication gauged in three oral communication activities: extemporaneous speaking, oral picture description, and storytelling. The consideration of the selection of these oral communication activities is premised on the fact that these skill activities are basics or fundamentals in an English course. To objectively score the respondents' performance in the three oral activities, the following criteria are used, which are taken from the rubric: Extemporaneous Speech Rubric - J3C838: RCampus website, and are deliberately used by teachers handling English courses.

After seeking permission from the author-researcher of the tool to be employed, the researchers secure approval from the academic authorities in the university. The team will conduct the study after obtaining the Vice President's approval for Academics and the Dean of the Teachers College. A schedule

for the conduct of the study is set. The test handling is done when all the prior approval is secured. The researchers have sought assistance from some teachers handling English courses to conduct the three oral communication activities through online platforms. The researchers prepare the topics and pictures needed for the oral communication activities and ask the teachers to conduct such tests using the criteria and the prepared learning materials. The oral communication tests are conducted through virtual meetings (Google meetings) during the English classes of the students and the teachers.

The survey questionnaire contains items on the challenges encountered. The researchers used the Google form and sent the questionnaire link to the research respondents. The researchers have considerably considered some contingency plans other than the Google link. The survey questionnaire can also be sent through the respondents' university email or uploaded to their messenger. Finally, retrieval of data and scores succeeds.

The survey tool underwent face validity as it pretested to ten respondents who were given thirty minutes to answer. Results were subjected to Cronbach's alpha to test their reliability. Apart from the pilot testing (pretesting), the research instrument underwent perusal and comprehensive review from the panel of experts. These experts include the research adviser who is an English coordinator, the research college dean, and the members of the review ethics committee to ensure that the conduct of the study shall neither cause derogation nor harm to those involved in the study. The respondents are provided with a consent form, and they fill it out to affirm their participation. Hence, they are assured of the confidentiality of the responses and information divulged in the study.

Considering the ethical standards of research, the researchers explain the possible outcome of the study to the respondents. In addition, the letter of consent is also secured from the research respondents themselves. They further explained that their participation in the study was voluntary. They can stop at any point if they feel their rights are violated. After gathering the data, the researchers arrange a debriefing session if the respondents have adverse effects as an aftermath of the study. In doing so, the researchers leave the contact details of the leader. Moreover, they are assured of complete data anonymity from handling, processing, and archiving.

All letters intended for the concerned authorities and the respondents are prepared and transmitted for proper securing of approval of the conduct of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents' Challenges Encountered in Blended Learning in Relation to Oral Communication Proficiency

Variables	Spearman's Rank Test Value	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Level of Challenges Encountered and Extemporaneous Speaking	.070	.676	Failed to reject the null hypothesis	There is no significant relationship between the variables.
Level of Challenges Encountered and Storytelling	-.022	.895	Failed to reject the null hypothesis	There is no significant relationship between the variables
Level of Challenges Encountered and Oral Picture Description	.065	.700	Failed to reject the null hypothesis	There is no significant relationship between the variables

The findings revealed that challenges encountered had no significant relationship to extemporaneous speaking, having a P-value of .676, storytelling gaining the P-value of .895, and oral picture description attaining the P-value of .700 greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, challenges encountered cannot be the basis for oral communication proficiency.

The results mentioned above were disputed by the study of Al-Qahtani, A. A. Y., & Higgins (2013). They stated that students who received blended mode training performed better than those who received face-to-face instruction because pupils were not afraid to express themselves during extemporaneous speaking. They tended to generate many ideas because the fear of public speaking had been eliminated due to the pandemic. On the contrary, the study by Otto, D. (2018) revealed that virtual mobility and digital storytelling were implemented through constructive alignment. The study showed that while students embraced the option of virtual mobility and digital storytelling, they still value face-to-face interaction.

Additionally, it emphasized that blended learning had no adverse influence on students' virtual mobility or digital storytelling. On the other hand, the study by Inceoglu (2019) titled "Exploring the Effects of Instruction on L2 French Learner Pronunciation, Accentedness, Comprehensibility, and

Fluency an Online Classroom Study" claimed that oral picture description was not affected by the challenges encountered in blended learning. The study further stated that there were many ways to perform and improve the skill in the oral picture description; however, using technology as a tool for blended learning was not affected, and no relationship at all. Lavalle and Briesmaster (2017) discovered that introducing visual descriptions into classroom activities enhanced students' communication skills, which increased overall involvement. With the advancement of educational technologies in blended learning, traditional teaching and learning methods are strengthened by using new image description methodologies. In addition, the study of Hasanah, Hasanah, and Malik (2020) states that blended learning was successful because it affected students' critical thinking and communication abilities. This finding also relates that blended learning significantly improved and influenced students' communication abilities.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the study shows that the respondents faced blended learning challenges related to interaction, motivation factors, learning materials, and, perhaps, the quality of English communication instruction; nonetheless, no significant statistical correlations could be made between these problems and the respondents' oral communication proficiency. Among other activities, the respondents were rated as satisfactory in extemporaneous speaking, storytelling, and oral picture description, whereby most of the ratings fell into the very good category. These results imply that blended learning challenges do exist; however, they do not greatly impede the attainment of relevant oral communication skills. The respondents very much overcame these challenges to meet proficiency expectations in these activities.

In summary, it exemplifies that despite the challenges posed by blended learning, learner competencies must be nurtured using appropriate teaching strategies. Moving forward, it will be imperative to conduct further research on the determinants of learner success in blended learning as a way of improving current teaching approaches and student outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations are put forward. Academic administrators are advised to review English modules carefully and make modifications to strengthen the interactive teaching and learning processes with clear and structured lesson concepts that could engage and enable students to grasp the specifics involved in the process. Teachers are encouraged to vary the online learning activities given to students with appropriate guidance, fostering the development of higher-order thinking skills such as analytical, critical, and creative skills.

A synergistic environment for learning will be created by way of consistent and open communication through social media. It is equally important for teachers to adopt secure online platforms to discourage academic dishonesty and uphold the integrity of student work. For students, creating a schedule of priorities for maintaining a healthy balance between schoolwork and household chores will bring in effective time management and a little bit of practice in patience, more so when dealing with technical hitches like bad internet connection. Further, students are advised to observe netiquette by practicing academic honesty throughout the learning process. Finally, this study presents a launching pad to further examine more emerging challenges in the area of blended learning and its effect on oral communication proficiency. Their study could focus on how online learning could get better in matters such as interaction, motivation, learning materials, and teaching of English communication, hence contributing to advancement in developing further effective strategies in blended learning.

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