

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF 50-50 BLENDED  
LEARNING METHOD ON TEACHING READING  
SKILLS IN ESL CLASSROOM**

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**Abstract**

This study is about using blended learning approach in teaching Secondary school students reading skills. The term blended learning means the students learn both from traditional activities in the classroom and from technology based program and instructions creating a blended learning environment for students can become very challenging for a teacher ,using this approach of teaching is very important because it provides instructions that match students skills, it expands learning times it prepares them for real life ,and teachers focus on Human interaction and the most important thing is that this method of teaching considered the way our children learn because they learn many things from using YouTube and they are involved in blended learning in all aspects of their lives, they search the web for information on music they create their own videos and interact with another on liner. We must teach the way they learn. Blended learning is increasingly used to describe the way e-learning is being combined with traditional classroom methods and independent study to create new teaching methodology .Blended learning is an education program that combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student with some elements of student control over time, place, path and Pac. There are various models available but the researchers have prepared a new method l that incorporates the advantages of technology along with other audio and visual aids as well as traditional face-to-face teaching. The model gives equal weight age to both the methods and maintains a balance, thus overcoming some limitations of online and offline teaching.

This study aims at preparing a method for blended learning that gives equal weights to traditional face-to-face and technology based method and to implement a new method, then to study the effectiveness on teaching reading skills in secondary school classes.

**Key words:** blended Learning, reading Skills, secondary Schools, technology, method

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### **Introduction**

Every ESL classroom necessarily has an atmosphere of a fear of the English language regarding every language skill, particularly reading skill. Students do not mind reading silently, yet, they are not confident about the pronunciation and meaning of each and every word that they read. It is generally observed that very little time is devoted specifically for the development of reading skill. Students are expected to practice reading on their own. However, the inability to understand the meaning of the text, unfamiliarity with the words and their pronunciation cause lack of interest and students avoid reading texts even silently. The process of reading the foreign language English happens to be tedious, one has to struggle with it and one ends up blank about the content.

Insufficient time spent in the classrooms in developing reading skills, use of traditional methods and random texts are some of the reasons that affect the development of reading skills in English as a second language. In order to handle the situation, teachers can devote more time for reading skill, provide selective content that suits the age group of students and which they find interesting and change the method of teaching reading skill. One way of making classroom teaching interesting is to introduce technology. However, extensive use of technology cannot lead to the desired results; it has its limitations. The aim of this study is to develop a model for promoting the reading skill of students using Blended Learning method in the ESL classroom. Blended Learning implies constant shifts between the traditional method and innovative method using technology. According to Martin and Keith, the 'blend' concerned is "the mixing of e-learning and traditional forms of learning."

### **Aims**

- To prepare a method for blended learning that gives equal weight age to traditional face-to-face method and technology based method.
- To implement the new model.
- To study its effectiveness on teaching reading skills in secondary schools classes.

### **Hypotheses**

There is significant change in the mean of scores of pre-test and post-test after implementation of the new Blended Learning Method.

Null hypothesis:

There is no significant change in the mean of scores of pre-test and post-test after implementation of the new Blended learning model.

### **Need and importance of research:**

The researchers felt that in the existing models, the emphasis lay either too much on the teacher or too much on technology. Most of the models work well with older children. The teacher wanted a model that would suit the students at

secondary schools. The researchers also wanted something not too expensive and a model that would fetch tangible and quick results.

The researchers were aware that one cannot ignore technology completely in modern times. Students also look for innovative methods using technology. The best way is to integrate the advantages of technology and control its ill-effects. The new model conceptualized by the researchers is suitable for teaching reading skill in elementary classes to ESL students.

### **Review of Related Studies and Theoretical Background**

#### **Review of Related Studies**

Recently, the American Society for Training and Development identified blended learning as one of the top ten trends to emerge in the knowledge delivery industry in 2003 (Rooney, 2003). EMERITA BAÑADOS developed a model for students in Chile "A Blended-learning Pedagogical Model for Teaching and Learning EFL Successfully through an Online Interactive Multimedia Environment." The model is a combination of face-to-face traditional learning and independent engagement of students with readymade software. The results showed a substantial improvement in the student's language skills. It showed high satisfaction level among students and teachers.

Claire Whittaker traces the origin of the term 'Blended Learning' and how it emerged in the corporate world and was eventually adopted in ELT. The writer states that only 45% of classroom activities Blended Learning in ELT are technology based and the remaining 55% are face-to-face. Singh and Reed (2001) identified four benefits of Blended Learning. The most significant one that applies to the ELT classroom is improved learning effectiveness. Osguthorpe and Graham's (2003) suggested six reasons: pedagogical richness; access to knowledge; social interaction; personal agency, control and choice, cost effectiveness; and ease of revision. Sharma and Barrett (2007) also believe that cost, convenience and being able to work in your own time and at your own pace, the reasons they cite for blended learning being employed in the business world, are also applicable to language teaching.

With reference to ELT, Sharma (2007) suggests 'for blended learning to be effective the two component parts should be integrated with the technology complementing and not replacing the efforts of the teacher'. Dudeney and Hockly (2007: 138-139) refer to a blended learning course where 75 per cent is delivered online and 25 per cent face-to-face in their list of three possible course designs for online learning in language learning environments. Besides, several researchers have developed numerous models of Blended Learning. The common element in all the models is the combination of traditional classroom teaching and use of technology in one form or another, with slight variations and proportions in the use of technological devices. While some contain the use of language laboratories, some use computers, some display content on a TV screen and majority use software.

### **Concept of Blended Learning**

Blended Learning is a fine blend of traditional teaching-learning method and use of technology. In recent years, there has been a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered education. Technology supports and promotes self-learning, thus keeping the learner at the centre of the learning process. In the traditional method, the teacher is at the centre. The teacher has complete control of the classroom situation. The teacher decides how to teach, what to teach, when to teach and whom to teach. The teacher uses certain methods and strategies for instructing learners. The teacher has knowledge and expertise in the concerned subject. The learners gain knowledge from experienced teachers. This method has been in vogue for the past hundreds of years. However, changing trends, progress in technology and research in education have given a different direction to the teaching-learning process. The role of teacher has changed. The teacher is expected to be a facilitator who creates an appropriate learning situation in the classroom and fosters self-learning of the learners.

The teachers can use a number of aids or instructional materials for facilitating learning. Nowadays, technology is easily available. Using digital instruments and hand-held devices in the classroom is an innovative and unconventional means of imparting knowledge or developing skills of students. However, use of technology alone can be dangerous. Learners are often carried away by the technological wonders. There is no control over students and they can misuse technology. They do not know exactly the objectives of a learning session so they may fail to achieve the objectives.

On the other hand, traditional method is mechanical and tedious. There is little scope to make the act of reading engaging and interesting in a traditional classroom. To overcome the drawbacks of both the traditional method and use of technology, the researcher decided to use the Blended Method for developing the reading skill of students learning English as a second language. Blended Method combines the traditional Method and use of technology alternatively. Blended learning combines the social nature of the classroom with the self-paced environment available in a web-based setting (Clark 2001).

### **Challenges in Blended Learning**

There are technological challenges in this method. Something can go wrong with the technological devices. Teachers have limited know-how and may fail to repair instruments. Well-trained technical staff must be around continuously in case of emergencies.

In order to adopt technology, the participants, both teachers and students must have an open mind. According to Al Harbi, "A student's attitude toward e-learning is the most important factor in determining a student's intention to use e-learning." Over enthusiasm for use of technology can lead to overuse of technology even when it is not necessary. Some degree of training is essential on the part of teachers. Orientation programmes can solve this problem. The teachers must be made aware of the change in their role from instructor to

facilitator well in advance. Maintaining control over students is also a challenge, otherwise, students can 'get lost in cyberspace' as opined by Jennifer Hoffman.

### **Reading skill**

Reading is an important language skill that lies at the centre of literacy. It forms the basic ability required for gaining knowledge and information independently. Reading ability is a valuable tool in the hands of a scholar that opens up the portals of knowledge. ESL learners face maximum difficulties in developing reading skills. They have an apprehension about the pronunciation of English words. Real reading does not comprise of mere reading of words and sentences. In order to appreciate, judge and evaluate content, readers must be able to read between the lines. ESL students often fail to understand the meaning because they cannot read easily in sense groups. They are not sure where to take pauses so that the meaning is clear.

Reading skill includes a number of sub-skills. Beginning with mastery over alphabet, learners proceed to vocabulary, then sentences. The words must be read with correct pronunciation. Word stress and sentence stress also contribute to meaning. Intonation is another aspect. Interpretation of the text and understanding the meaning are the last steps. One has to maintain a proper speed while reading and take pauses at appropriate junctures, failing which the meaning is distorted. Reading skill can be complemented by teaching students to use the dictionary so that students can read independently.

The nature of reading is multi-faceted. Difficulty is also posed by the alphabetical writing system in English. The spelling system becomes complicated because there is no one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. One letter represents more than one sound and several letters or clusters represent the same sound. Reading requires a lot of practice. In an ESL classroom, teachers do give opportunities to students to read aloud. However, students become conscious and avoid loud reading. Model reading helps to improve reading skill but a teacher cannot conduct model reading of the same content repeatedly. Lack of time also prevents students from getting sufficient practice. Gnawali (2005) states that it is teacher who improves his/her English in highly teacher-centered classroom but not the learners. Moreover, they are not even clear about the purpose of teaching reading text. Generally, they believe that they need to teach reading text simply because it is given in textbook and is going to be asked in examination. Ahmad (2006) states, "They (teachers) said that passing exam were more important than spending time on extra reading" (p.70).

Certain physical habits have to be developed for reading. One has to read from top to bottom and left to right of a page. One must sit in a comfortable posture. The distance from the eyes to the page has to be maintained. Sub-vocalization and unnecessary movement of body parts while reading are considered as bad habits of reading. Effective reading implies understanding more content in least time. "Reading is useful for language acquisition...the more they read, the better they get. Reading also has a positive effect on students' vocabulary knowledge, on their spelling and their writing" (Harmer, 2007, p.99).

Students need some degree of privacy to develop reading skill. This can be afforded with the use of technology. The students can listen to model reading any number of times. If they practice pronunciation, they can get immediate feedback.

**Models of Blended Learning**

There are various models of blended learning: the Rotation Model, the Flex Model, the Self-Blend Model, and the Enriched-Virtual Model.

The Rotation model is convenient and simple; however, it relies more on the teacher and less on technology.

In the Flex model, there is heavy dependability on technology with the teacher working as a facilitator. It is more useful in higher classes than in elementary classes.

The Self-Blend model is meant for giving students information beyond what is included in the syllabus. It is like extensive reading. It gives students additional information about topics. In the Enriched Virtual model, students engage in study sessions from various locations across the globe. It is just the opposite of the traditional model. Communication is on the monitor screen. The students can see the face of the teacher and vice versa. They can ask questions and get answers, but all activities take place online.

**Procedures**

**Research design:**

The present study design consists of two tests pre-test and post-test.

Pre-test and post-test design

Pre-test (T-1)	Treatment variable (X) Blended Learning Programme	Post test (T-2)
Mean of T-1	Teaching with 50-50 blended learning programme	Mean of post-test

**Population:**

The population of the study consist of the secondary schools in Baghdad governorate Al-Rusafa.

50 students studying English as a second language in secondary school .

**Sample:**

The purposive sampling method is used for selecting the sample.

The sample consists of 20 students studying in Grade II from Sumer Secondary school for Girls. A reading test was conducted in the class consisting of 40 students out of which 20 students were selected. It was made sure that all

selected students could recognize letters and read 2 to 4 letter words. In this way, a uniform level was maintained in the sample.

### **Research Method**

The method consists of 2 phases and 4 cycles, 2 in each phase.

### **Assumption**

- Reading is an essential language skill that forms the basis of scholarship.
- Students who learn English as a second language find it difficult to master reading skill.

### **Phase I: Cycle -I**

The development of reading skill in English as a second language begins at the elementary stage. This is the right time to use effective methods in the classroom. Hence, 20 students from Grade II from Sumer Secondary School in Baghdad were selected for this study. All the students had started learning English in the previous Grade that is Grade I. They were all familiar with the small and capital letters in English and could read simple words and sentences in English. The researcher selected a simple story for reading. The researcher also made a list of key words in the story.

In the first cycle, the students read the key words. The researcher noted down the correct and incorrect pronunciation in tabular form.

### **Phase -I: Cycle-II**

The researcher prepared an audio CD. The first part contained an audio clip of the key words. The students listened to the pronunciation of each word as it was written on the blackboard by the teacher, one by one. The teacher showed a picture or situation and explained the meaning of the word. A time pause was maintained after each word so that the students could practice the pronunciation. A test was conducted and the scores were recorded by the researcher.

### **Phase II: Cycle -I**

Each student read the story aloud and the performance was recorded with regard to correct pauses, stress and fluency. This was followed by a model reading of the whole story by the teacher. Then the teacher read each sentence one by one and explained it.

This was followed by the teacher reading each sentence and explaining it. Immediately, the same sentence was displayed on a PowerPoint slide along with the audio clip and image. Once again, the teacher read the next sentence and explained it. The same process continued till the end of the story.

The model reading was done keeping in mind the speed, pronunciation, pauses and fluency.

The teacher asked questions while going through the story, to check the attention of the students and assessing what they had achieved. For example:

1. How much did the man pay for the ass?
2. Where did both the men want to stand?
3. Why could they not stand in the ass's shadow?
4. What happened while they were fighting?
5. Where did the shadow go?

**Data collection and Data analysis**

Sr. No.	Pre-test Scores X-1	Post-test Scores X-2	Difference (X2 -X1)	X	X <sup>2</sup>
1	4	9	5	-1	1
2	6	10	4	0	0
3	5	10	5	-1	1
4	4	9	5	-1	1
5	7	8	1	3	9
6	7	9	2	2	4
7	2	10	8	-4	16
8	4	10	6	-2	4
9	3	9	6	-2	4
10	5	8	3	1	1
11	5	8	3	1	1
12	4	8	4	0	0
13	6	10	4	0	0
14	7	10	3	1	1
15	10	12	2	2	4

16	8	10	2	2	4
17	9	11	2	2	4
18	3	9	6	-2	4
19	5	9	4	0	0
20	6	11	5 Total= 80 80/20=4	-1	1 $\sum x^2 = 60$

SD = 0.4

t = 10

The critical value of t at 0.01 level of confidence is 2.86

t-cal = 10

t-table = 2.86

Therefore – 10 > 2.86

Hence, there is significant difference between the mean of scores of pre-test and post-test.

Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is rejected.

The Hypothesis is accepted.

### **The Results**

There is vast difference in the performance of scores in pre-test and post-test. This shows positive improvement in the performance of students after implementing the blended learning model. Students who had no confidence regarding many of the key words became sure about their pronunciations and also understood the meanings.

#### **Phase II: Cycle I**

The following table shows the performance of students before implementation of the Blended Learning Model:

No. /name of student	Correct pauses	Stress and intonation	fluency
1			
2	√		
3	√		
4		√	
5	√		√
6			
7			√
8	√		
9	√	√	
10	√	√	
11	√		
12			√
13			
14	√		
15			
16		√	√
17			
18			
19	√	√	
20	√		√

Only 10 students read in sense groups by taking correct pauses.( 50%)

Only 5 students followed stress and intonation.( 25%)

Only 5 students read with a steady speed and displayed fluency. (25%)

The following table shows the achievement of students in reading the story:

No. /name of student	Correct pauses	Stress and intonation	fluency
1	√	√	
2	√	√	
3	√	√	
4		√	√
5	√	√	√
6	√	√	
7	√	√	√
8	√	√	
9	√	√	
10	√	√	
11	√		
12	√	√	√
13		√	
14	√	√	
15	√		
16	√	√	√
17	√	√	√
18	√	√	
19	√	√	
20	√	√	√

**Observations:**

50% students read the story with correct pauses, stress, intonation and fluency.

10% students failed to take correct pauses.

5% students did not follow stress and intonation while reading the story.

25% students were unable to read with fluency. L

Most of the students seemed to think that reading without stopping is considered to be a characteristic of good reading. They did not take any pauses. After listening carefully to the model reading students understood the importance of appropriate pauses to convey meaning while reading.

Although some students were aware of intonation and tried to use varied tones especially in the dialogue part of the story, most students seemed to lack awareness of intonation. Neither word stress nor sentence stress was observed in any of the students. Those who followed stresses seemed to do it naturally and unconsciously.

Some students already possessed a good degree of fluency. Even after the model reading, many students failed to attain fluency.

**Cycle –III**

In the third cycle of this model that takes place after the teaching session is over, the students are given time to listen to the key words and model reading of the story as many times as they request. This ensures the fixation of pronunciation of words, stress and intonation patterns.

**DISCUSSION**

In this model, an audio clip was used, slides were prepared, pictures were displayed and the teacher explained the meaning and also read the story. Hence, it was a blend of technological audio and visual devices as well as face-to-face learning with the teacher controlling the situation. Thus, the model consists of 50% technology and 50% traditional method. This can also be considered as 100% technology and 100% traditional method. Every word or sentence was first explained in the traditional way followed by technology-based method.

In previous researches in Blended Learning, we mostly come across readymade software. The teacher cannot adjust or make changes in the software, which many students find difficult. Some find it too easy. The teacher is well-aware of the performance level of the students in the class. This model allows the teacher the freedom to prepare a programme as per the age-group, interests and level of the students in reading skill.

This programme allows sufficient and equal scope for the use of technology and the traditional method. Although technology is used, the teacher controls the situation in the classroom so that students cannot misuse technology or learn in an unguided way. Since no hand held devices are provided for each student, this

risk is further decreased. A common screen and audio clip are used for all the students.

Technology including the audio-visual presentation keeps the students engaged. To confirm the attention of the students, the teachers can ask questions for formative assessment from time to time. At the end of the lesson, the teacher can also tell a few students to read the story aloud to the whole class.

### **CONCLUSION**

Blended Learning implies a blend of technology and face-to-face learning, conducted with the intention of taking advantage of both the methods. Blended Learning makes sense economically and instructionally. ( In previous models, the researchers varied the blend percentage randomly. Some used 75% online teaching, this minimizing the role of the teacher to 25%. In others, the balance tilted with 45% online and 55 % traditional method. In this model, the researcher has given equal importance to both methods. It enabled the researcher to take complete advantage of both methods and also helped to overcome some drawbacks of online teaching. Interest of students was sustained by stimulus variation caused by constant shifts from audio clip to visual image to teacher.

This model enables teachers to track the progress of students conveniently by preparing a fool proof rubric. The results are reliable. Thorne( 2003) claims that Blended Learning could be one of the most important educational advances in the century.

According to Christina Cavage, students and teachers benefit equally from Blended learning.

#### **Advantages for teachers:**

The teachers can prepare the slides, pictures and audio clips once and use them repeatedly. The teachers get some relief in the classroom and can pay individual attention to students. Some load of teaching is shed off when technology is used as a support. The teachers are able to retain their importance in the classroom. Class control and management become easy. The objectives of the lesson are fulfilled at the end.

The technology used in this model is simple and not very complicated. It is easy to arrange for and easy to use. It is not expensive like readymade software. The teacher can prepare the necessary content to suit the students.

#### **Advantages for students:**

The students find the method interesting. They need not be conscious while reading because their voice is recorded in the machine. They get enough scope for practice and drilling in the third cycle of the model. According to Shari Rios (2014), "The key idea behind blended learning is that students have some control over time, pace, path, and place. Allowing students to take some control of their learning increases their motivation to learn and allows them the time needed to work through the material."

They get a sense of satisfaction when they are able to read and understand a story properly. They develop confidence regarding pronunciation of words. They get an opportunity to learn independently to some extent, yet they know that they are on the right track because the method is constantly monitored by the teacher.

In the true sense, this model does not replace the teacher but complements the role of the teacher.

The benefits of the Blended learning model used in this study can be summarized as follows:

- It sustains the interest of students.
- It keeps them engaged actively in the learning process.
- It ensures improvement in reading skills.
- It can be adapted to suit any class and level.
- It blends various types of instructional materials like audio, visuals, chart and pictures, PowerPoint slides.
- It complements the teacher's efforts and brings about the best results.
- It gives equal weight age to technology and traditional face-to-face method.
- It gives a clear rubric to evaluate the achievement of students.
- It is not very expensive.
- It is easy and convenient to use.
- It saves time.
- The model also allows for formative and process evaluation.
- It provides sufficient practice and drilling to students.
- Students enjoy some degree of freedom and independent learning experience.

#### **Suggestions and recommendations**

Similar model can be developed for higher classes. Models can also be developed for other language skills, grammar, teaching of vocabulary etc. it is possible to develop models in which students work in groups or pairs. Models that allow interaction between students and teachers and among students are also possible. Interaction with technology is something that the current generation needs to be accustomed to. This objective can be fulfilled by developing different kinds of models for ESL classrooms.

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**Appendix (1) The Story**

**The Ass and its Shadow**

A man hired an ass from another man. He paid him twenty rupees to lend him the ass for the day. It was a very hot day, and both men wanted to stand in the ass's shadow, so that they might be cool. But there was only room for one of them. "Go away," said the man who had hired the ass. "Go away! It is my shadow today. I have hired the ass."

"You hired the ass," said the owner, "but you did not hire his shadow. It is my shadow." They went on, the hirer saying one thing and the owner saying the other. Then they began to fight, and while they were fighting one of them happened to hit the ass. Then the ass ran away. And it took its shadow with it!