

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO BLENDED LEARNING IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM AT A JAPANESE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

As trends change and society evolves and student learning styles change over time other forms of learning need to be explored. This article shows how the use of technology in the classroom can be used to effectively improve classroom performance as it can enhance student performance and can take place in various ways. Using blended learning as a pedagogical tool can lead to higher grades and lower absenteeism, as seen in a case study. This is later also implemented in another class with further blended learning (using a combination of teacher pedagogy and technology) leading to further success. While technology should be considered in various disciplines, the focus in this article is in a English as a Foreign Language setting at a Japanese university.

There are various ways to approach a class, and each class is unique. Often as educators, it is only after struggling with classes that other newer approaches to the class are undertaken. After all if the vast majority of the class is underperforming or failing, there is a fundamental problem somewhere. Blended Learning (also known as Hybrid Learning) is defined as a teaching that has students using a combination of face to face teaching along with “an appropriate use of technology” (Sharma & Barrett 2007). This is namely the technique of technology-assisted learning (most often computer assisted learning) in addition to teacher based instruction. Younger students are open to new technology and are sometimes referred to as technology ‘natives’, while the older generation are referred to as technology ‘immigrants’. (Dudley & Hockly 2007) Therefore, the younger students should be naturally inclined to adopt technology into the classroom. So, as technology has become more accessible in terms of cost and availability and ability, the use of it as a pedagogical tool has given options that have opened up to educators at an amazing rate over the past two decades. This is even though blended learning is not a new form of teaching (Dudeny & Hokly 2007). This growth in low cost and accessible technology has allowed numerous options for classroom adaptation not dreamed of in past generations or even half a generation ago.

Students at a technical university such as Osaka Electro-communication University are not English majors and many find learning English challenging, particularly if it is taught in a conventional (communicative) sense. This conventional sense includes face-to-face learning and learning within the classroom with plenty of output from the language learners in student-student settings (including pair work and group work). (Ur 2001) More traditionally, this type of language pedagogy was often referred to as ‘theme based

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learning' with the use of various skills, most importantly: automaticity, meaningful learning, intrinsic motivation and communicative competence. (Brown 2001) However, when blended learning is instituted there is a variety of teaching techniques that are available and most of those students who are more reticent would naturally be more agreeable and comfortable using technology. With most higher education campuses now wired with technology that allows blended learning it is something that many faculty can use. One might argue that blending learning is a teaching methodology whose time has come.

As earlier stated, when teaching English in an English as a Foreign Language (or, EFL), the common route to teaching is often via traditional group work, pair work as well as testing, or, in other words, a communicative approach to language learning. This communicative approach has become very popularized in recent decades. (Brown 1995) It is a far cry from the grammar based approach that was popular in the early part of the last century. This move away from grammar-based teaching towards a communicative based teaching has been dramatic, but has been known to be quite effective in many situations. (Brown 1995, Ur 2001) However, more often than not, as with all generations what works in one generation may not be as effective in the next generation. An example of this was the backlash against grammar translation type of English lessons that took place in the 1970s. Up until that time educators were namely those who had learned in the prewar period. Those educators were quite used to a pedagogical approach that allowed learners to read, copy, translate as well as memorize. The postwar generation, baby boomers, grew up with television as well as travel and a much different environment to those in the earlier part of the century. Being more social beings they pushed the types of learning towards various kinds however the biggest and most successful was the communicative approach.(Oblinger 2003, Brown 2001)

However, there seems to be a further change as historically, the Post baby boom generation known as Generation X were seemingly content to follow along with this, however as the generations change (and we're now in generation Y) (Oblinger 2003), the time might be right for further changes in pedagogical approaches taken at educational institutions. This new generation is sometimes known as the millennial generation. Consider that most first-year students cannot remember a time without computers or even cell phones. This is something that must be considered for curriculum development with pedagogical implications for both educators as well as students.

What these changes usually mean is that the students are not only familiar but very comfortable with technology and technological changes that they have witnessed (more so, one might assume, than the educators). For the most part these Generation Y students are very comfortable in this technology and find it motivating to use it in different learning situations. This motivation comes from within, and intrinsic motivation is the longest lasting, most effective form and therefore the one that most educators should strive towards. Intrinsic motivation can only be effective if the student finds themselves motivated from within. (Brown 2001, Ur 2001) What that requires educators to do is to look to see what motivates the students. Often in this generation what motivates the millennial generation is that they tend to live for the present, they respond to clear and

consistent expectations. While this is true, it is often instructors (who are from a different generation) who set the class and class learning styles. (Oblinger 2003) Therefore, new research has shown that the pedagogical aspects of traditional learning does not fit well with this generation, however blended learning does.(Bershin 2004, Heinz 2008, Palmer October 17, 2009)

CASE STUDY

When teaching English, therefore, the communicative approach at Universities is not always the most effective. This was after the first semester when I noticed a markedly increase in the students motivation, quality of output and overall performance when they were given the option to give presentations using PowerPoint. A seemingly low-level English class of students performed much higher once they were allowed free access to technology, were able to get in groups and do research on their own along with their group members. This level of performance was a dramatic turn from the earlier classes which were the traditional communicative approach. Students who may have been at or near failing suddenly had much higher grades with the PowerPoint presentations that they were able to put together. The normally reticent class became quite animated every time we went to the computer room and they were able to do research on their own, draw graphics and write reports in English. The project was to research various rain forest countries and give a detailed report on the country. As the groups went through the exercises the amount of output in the second language, English, was dramatically higher than it had been previously in over 50% of the class. Students who were participating in this class showed a diverse set of skills that were mostly centered around the computer. When comparing grades in the first half of that semester to grades in the second half of that semester it would appear that there were approximately 36% of the students who were at or near failing when the project commenced. In addition to that, approximately a further 22% who are doing quite poorly (with grades between 60 and 70%). After the students had completed their PowerPoint presentation and written up there class report, which was based on the PowerPoint presentation (see the example below) and they included the presentation, the number of failing students went down to zero. Most of the students were doing much better and there are only 18% who could be considered doing poorly. However, because of the importance of the term project, which was the rain forest research, no students failed the course.

There were three separate communication classes that data is available for from the first semester at Osaka Electro-Communication University. The data for the grades and attendance were from the first half of the semester (seven classes) that had used traditional classroom teaching methodologies. The data for the second set of grades and attendance were for the second half of the spring semester (again, seven classes) and were the results of the class work after computer technology learning had been implemented.

CLASS 1:18 Students, CLASS 2: 26 Students, CLASS 3:18 Students

GRADES AT THE FIRST-HALF OF SPRING SEMESTER (MID TERM GRADE)

36% of the class at failing grades (below 60%)

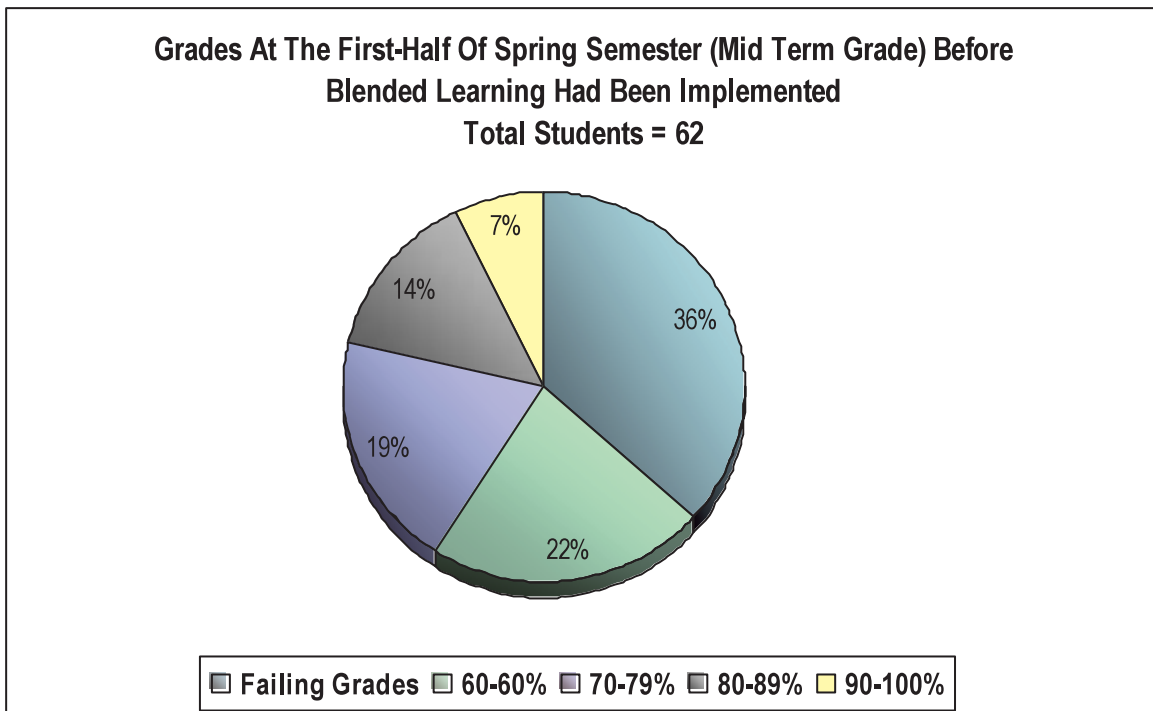
22% of the class at 60-69%

19% of the class at 70-79%

14% of the class at 80-89%

7% of the class at 90-100%

Absenteeism at an average of 17% per week.



GRADES AT THE SECOND-HALF OF SPRING SEMESTER (FINAL GRADE)

0% of the class at failing grades (below 60%)

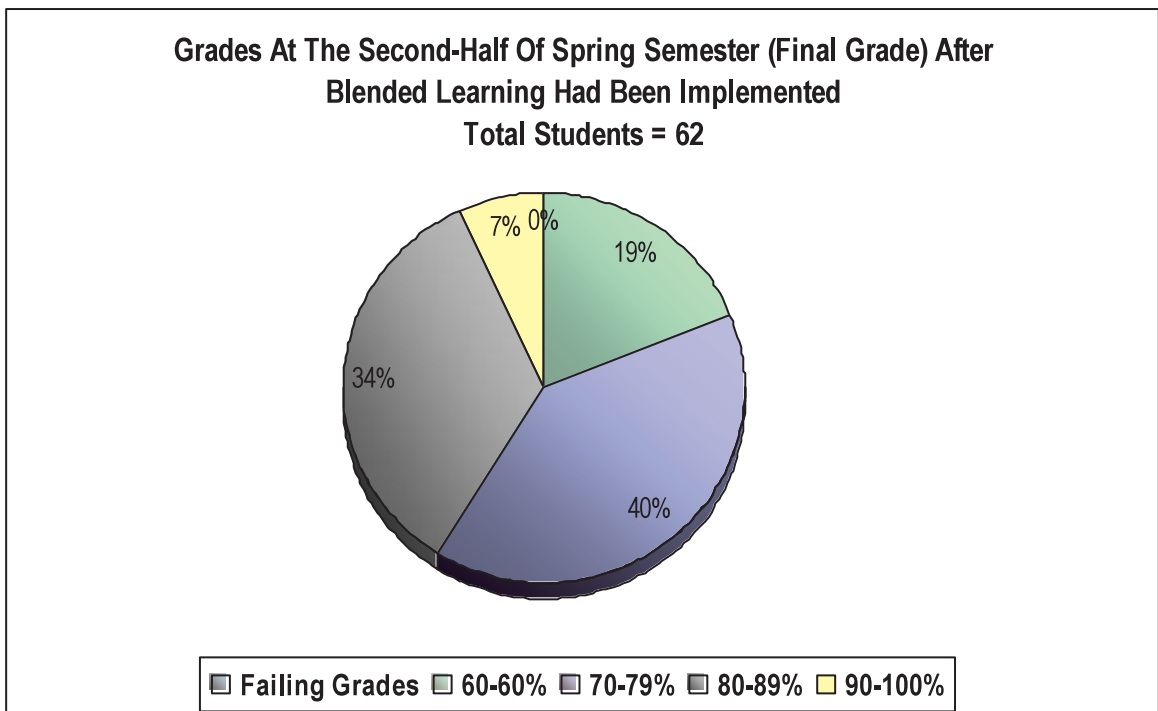
19% of the class at 60-69%

40% of the class at 70-79%

34% of the class at 80-89%

7% of the class at 90-100%

Absenteeism at an average of 5% per week.



So, based on the class grades and lower absenteeism, the program was a success in the spring semester of 2009. There was a real danger of a high failure rate by the middle of the semester before the technology was implemented.

About Indonesia

インドネシアについて

H08### Shinya S
H08### Naohumi H
H08### Matui K

SLIDE 2

What kind of country?

- Name of a country
Republic of Indonesia
- Capital
Jakarta
- Language
Bahasa Indonesia

↓ National flag



National emblem→



SLIDE 8

Cause of a decrease of tropical forests

- **Deforestation of export wood**
 - Upswing in exports
- **Deforestation of raw material**
 - Paper • Pulp
- **Illegal logging**



SLIDE 14

The government and business: a match

- So , log exports are prohibited and natural forests being cut down are also prohibited and so on.
- These measures have been taken up.



CONCLUSIONS

The effectiveness of blended learning is best illustrated through an example that one recent class I had at the Electro-communication University and the English communication classes. As a unique case study in the English communication 1,3/2,4 class I implemented a blended learning curriculum for the students in the second half of the semester. A similar situation occurred in the second semester of 2009-10. In this situation I was fortunate enough to be able to get introduced to the only truly hybrid blended learning course on the market today. This course is the i-Zone (myzonelab) from Pearson-Longman Asia ELT, written by Roger Palmer and Graeme Todd. (Palmer & Todd 2009) This course comes with a variety of materials including video clips, games, pop-up boxes, and in class materials, avatars and software that records voices for playback. This is all supplemented with measurable testing that is done online. The online support comes in a variety of forms. Interestingly, if someone were to walk in the room and see a student playing a game, they might get the wrong idea. However, it's not so much the method as the result that really counts. (Palmer Oct. 17, 2009, Palmer Dec.12 2009) So, if students find word games an easy way to learn vocabulary or more inclination to study, then that will keep their intrinsic motivation high and allow them to complete the tasks that have been assigned. After all, the most important thing is that the students are able to learn and to retain that memory. (Ur 2001) Blended learning has been extremely effective in the classes I tried it with, and it also tends to motivate students in other ways as well (as observed by the quality and quantity of work that was done inside and outside of the class).

NEW

iZone

Expand your lessons beyond the classroom!

myzonelab 1

HOME | STUDY PLAN | GRADEBOOK

My Course | My Study Plan

Welcome, Vikram!

You are working in Vikram Munagala's My...

iZone 1
Interactive English
online and in class

iZone 2
Interactive English
online and in class

iZone 3
Interactive English
online and in class

iZone 4
Interactive English
online and in class

**blended
Print-Digital
course**

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As technology grows, the options open for educators in all faculties expands along with it. However, it is more than just the options that must be considered. It is also, I would argue, what motivates the learner that is omnipotent in achieving success. How learners learn changes as society changes and therefore, it is up to educators and the institutions of learning to allow students to learn with the style that is best suited to them. So, instead of brushing aside or avoiding these technological changes and opportunities, they are changes that should be considered for the classroom and if at all possible embraced.

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