IMPLEMENTATION OF BLENDED TEACHING APPROACH IN IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS OF TECHNICAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Technology in the present scenario has taken a shape that changed the platform every sector in a unique way, providing better results, accessibility and creation of resources for the next generation. English language has become an important and integral part which acts as a bridge tocollaborate and learn most sought after skills globally. Teaching writing in Indian scenario has been a tough task for language teachers as most of the educational institutions prepare students toperform well in the exams rather than improving student's writing and speaking skills because ofthe large-sized classrooms. In this scenario Blended teaching learning approach will be useful forlanguage teachers to increase the student's participation in the activities and access their performance to provide better learning opportunities to the technical students. The availability of Internet facilities in the institutions and accessibility of teaching learning platforms made the possibility to teach writing skills in Blended mode in Language classroom with more effectiveness that improves the writing skills of technical students. Students active participation in traditional face to face classes will be followed by well-designed activities will enhance the learning experience and better understanding of writing expository texts in language class room. There are 20 first year B.Tech Engineering students participating in the project. They are taught three classes per week for Communicative English course offered by the Institute. This paper discuss the possibilities and implications of adopting Blended approach in teaching writing skillsto encouraged active student participation and its effectiveness in improving confidence instudents.

KEYWORDS:

Introduction

In recent years technical advancement and the availability of Internet has been increased a lot and Education sector is not an exception to it. The use of technology in the pandemic situation has taken a new turn, as most of the educational institutions adopted innovative methods to be in touch with the students to continue teaching learning process. The adaptation of such application is huge that it occupied certainly a great place in the present society. Teachers adapted themselves to virtual platforms and used them effectively to create awareness among the young learners in improving their abilities. The Internet availability brings a new approach of learning that shift from traditional face to face method to virtual one creating better learning opportunitiesto learners. The blend of traditional and virtual learning methods will be a useful tool for language teaching as it provides use of additional resources for creating better awareness in teaching writing skills in technical students. Engineering students put more focus on learning speaking skills as they are used for performing well in job selection process on the other hand learning writing skills are ignored as students takes it as secondary and less used skill.

Writing skills considered one the most important skills of language learning. The blendedlearning method is implemented as a small pilot project in a class of 20 students its main focus on strengthening the writing skills of students creating tasks that engage students after the offlineclass. The course offered to them in the first year Communicative English is taught four classes aweek. The blended approach is used in a practical way in a progressive way for better implementation.

Similar concepts in the teaching learning approaches

There many teaching learning approaches which are similar to Blended mode such as Distance learning, e-learning, and online learning.

Distance learning is method of education where the physical presence of students is not necessary in the classroom. Teachers and students are divided by physical space and learning process will take place in a remote manner by understanding the concepts reading the learning material.

Online learning is a method that depends on the computers connected to Internet. In this approach the learning responsibility lies on learner and teachers mere act as facilitator or mentor to guide students in learning.

E-learning involves more supportive learning material available in the form of CD-ROMs,DVDs, TVs. This method of learning can take place inside or outside classroom.

Blended learning approach is a method which involves combination of different learning environments that is a blend of face-to-face and self-directed online approaches. This methodwill allow learners to learn at their convenient with the pace needed but time-bound.

Teaching writing skills to Technical students

Writing skill considered one of the important aspects of language expression. Writing is considered difficult task for many students as they are unable to express their ideas in written mode. Writing tasks such as assignments makes students feel bored as it lead to decline ofinterest in actively participating in learning process. The writing task becomes a tough job in the relatively big classes where teacher cannot put attention on individual student's writing skills. In order to motivate student's active participation in such case Blended mode is the best alternative teachers could use in the class rooms.

SMART SOCIETYTM

Use of Blended mode in improving writing skills of students

Nicenet is a free online virtual classroom that may be accessed at www.nicenet.org. It is a useful site where group members can exchange knowledge, ask questions, and receive more assistance from their fellow group members. It combines a bulletin board and an email-like computer- mediated conferencing system. It is a secure classroom that can only be entered using a unique code. Nicenet provides a few services that are comparable to actual in-person classroom activities. Particularly useful for written communication like Conferencing, scheduling, sharing the document, instant messaging, and link sharing are some of them.

Conferencing

This function works much like a "discussion board," enables a class to conduct an onlinediscussion (using text). It enables teachers to assign themes for class conferences or to let students come up with their own themes. Students respond to the themes with remarks that can be read aloud by everyone in the class at once. Members of the group can respond to others themes or give reply to the entire group or as an individual member.

Scheduling

This function is exactly like the classroom bulletin board where teachers can display their schedules and other important information. It is quite useful in posting assignments and scheduleupdates.

Document Exchange

With the help of this feature, instructors and students may post their writing on the website for the benefit of the entire class, such as essays or short tales. In this section, students can post thier tasks, which can subsequently be reviewed by peers or graded by the teacher, and offer ideas for improvement. No HTML is required for this feature.

Personal Messaging

This feature is similar to the way traditional e-mail works, in this teacher can communicate with students individually or to the entire class or can create class groups to assign task for the students. Teachers can privately respond to the postings of students and give feedback on tasks.It is useful for students to team up for the task to discuss and complete it with mutual co- operation.

Link Exchange

Students, professors, and anyone in the class can use this feature to upload links to relevant online resources and organize them into topic categories. Practically speaking, this function may be utilized as a "library" of web page links for activities.

Drive by Google

Google is the most popular communications organization and it is providing its services in the whole world with unique products and best net-working facilities. Google drive is cloud storage system which enables students to store documents and multi-media files such as photos, videos and other files. Given that it provides fifteen gigabytes (GB) of free storage space, it is one of the most well-known cloud storage services out there right now. It provides users with a wide range of functionality, including the ability to upload and sync files, create files, convert documents share content, collaborate on projects, and more. However, just the sharing and cooperating element used in our class's writing instruction will be discussed in this section.

Exchange of files

Students and/or professors in the class may easily share files using this function. They may let others see and even modify a file they shared from their Google Drive. They have the option of sharing a file with a small or large group of individuals. When sharing a document with a small group of users, collaborators are required to sign in with a Google account in order to see or modify the document. Students will not require a Google account to access a file when sharing with a wider group or making it public. Members of the class may also share a secure link to any file in their Google Drive in addition to the method already discussed. For each file that a member wants to share, a stable link functions like a personal web address. This method is especially useful for sending things that are too big to attach to an email, such as music or video files. Students may also distribute a material by publishing the secure link to a public website. A member can access the file by clicking the link.

Working together on files

Real-time collaboration is made possible by this feature, which enables several users to edit the same document. Members will always have the option to provide co-editors or other group members the ability to modify and update any Google Drive files they share. By making it simpler to connect with the co-editors or group members and to identify which changes havebeen made and by whom, Google Drive provides numerous capabilities that improve cooperation.

Online activities conducted using the above tools

Here are some examples of online exercises used in our writing workshops on Google Drive and Nicenet. Several illustrations of online activities using Nicenet:

Introduction of Oneself

In the "conferencing" room, students introduce themselves and share views on the observations of their classmates. As an alternative, students may interview their classmates in the actual classroom and then, using Nicenet in the "conferencing" room, introduce them to the rest of the class. Then, the classmates are required to visit Nicenet, verify the authenticity of what has been written about them, and provide the author with ideas for corrections. Based on what has been written about class participants, the teacher provides comments to the class the following week, either in physical class or in a Nicenet class.

Conferencing and Posting of Assignments

Students are required to upload writing tasks on a weekly basis in the "conferencing" area. All uploaded texts (paragraphs) should be reviewed by the rest of the class, who should then analyse the error and remark on at least three of the posted texts. The instructor then provides comments to the class either in person or online.

General instruction for posting the assignment

The final expository essay assignment is posted by the teacher. Students are required to take a virtual visit to at least two well-known locations in other nations before producing an essay. Students are required to carefully examine and monitor websites that they have agreed to view ingroups of three. Different websites must be visited by each group

Each group must discuss the outcomes of their expedition and provide a maximum 20-minute online group presentation in video format after the visit. The class participants' shared Google Drive account should be used to upload the group presentation. The remaining students in the class must access Google Drive to take part in the presentation. They must then ask the speakers questions and discuss their answers in the "conferencing" room. Students are required to producean individual draught of an essay based on their experiences during the expedition once the presentation and discussion are over. The document should go through peer review to receive feedback, comments, or peer correction from the designated readers. Therefore, the authorshould polish their work before submitting it to the teacher to post in the Google Drive

Applications for documents, spreadsheets, presentations, forms, and drawing tools are available in Google Drive. We utilize Google Docs, a word processing programme, as one of the applications in Google Drive. Users may collaborate live with other users while creating and editing documents online. The usage of Google Docs for file sharing and group collaboration is demonstrated in the examples below

Group Sign up

We may ask kids to join up for groups online using Google Docs. When obliged to complete an assignment in groups, the group members will work as a cohesive unit on a conversation in a group or an online visit to the websites. A Doc form file with spaces for each student's number, name, and group name must be provided by the teacher. The students must fill out the online form with their names and student ID numbers.

Sign up for Website Addresses

It is also feasible for the teacher to assign various assignments to various groups using Google Docs. For instance, each group should register at least two well-known internet addresses before to participating in a virtual visit.

Peer-review Partner Sign up

Students are requested to join up one to two partners on a Google Form form to work on reading or evaluating each other's draughts and provide suggestions on writers' efforts. To pick who they will work with, students must consult with one another.

Peer-review and Collaborative Editing

The first draught of each student's essay must be uploaded to Google Drive so that partners can review it and provide any necessary corrections or comments. The partner(s) can modify and remark on the essay draughts using the transition words and comment tools. With the use of Google Chat room features, the parties can also collaborate to update a text. Before submitting the essay to the teacher as the final version, the author must study the essay that has been reviewed by his or her partner(s) and decide whether to agree or disagree with a specific adjustment or piece of feedback. The essay will be organized into an e-book that the students canaccess once the teacher has given the class feedback in the actual class.

Online Presentation

Allowing users to publish videos is one of Google Drive's key uses. With this capability, studentscan share their online presentation with the class as a whole. Before publishing online presentations, groups of students are required to complete a virtual field trip, talk about their experiences, write a report using PowerPoint, and then present it in videos.

Recommendations

The following points can be described based on student comments and observations of the teacher.

a) The blended learning strategy is successfully implemented in the class, allowing the online activities to support the in-person activities in the learning process. The combination of in-personand online learning activities increases student engagement. Although our class is the first to use this innovative blended learning method, many good things occurred as students learned to write,particularly in terms of engagement, understanding, and active conversation.

b) Using technology and the internet to teach writing has increased student engagement and helped foster productive teamwork.

c) Using the internet and technology in the classroom helps pupils learn the material better, creating expositional writing. It is because there are several opportunities for kids to learn using written, spoken, and visual media that are suitable for their requirements. 949\sst The 61st TEFLIN International Conference, UNS Solo 2014

d) Technology and online activities seem to encourage students to participate actively in debates on a particular subject, while online conversations encourage hesitant students to do so.

e) Online peer-review and peer-correction to teach students how to think critically and work together in real-time online.

f) Students who have learned writing mechanics through written, spoken, and visual media may communicate more effectively and clearly.

. **Conclusion**

The use of blended learning has proven to be a successful strategy for raising student engagement and comprehension in writing programs. It encourages pupils to actively participate in conversations and practices higher order thinking. It may be claimed that Google Drive and Nicenet are useful tools for helping pupils develop their writing abilities. They are highly helpfulin building teamwork abilities that promote collaborative work. They serve as convenient repositories for assignments and projects. The entire body of written work might become collective property, making it possible for students to revisit it and draw inspiration for future works.

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