| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Enhancing IELTS Speaking Skills through Blended Learning: A Pedagogical Action Research

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| **ABSTRACT**

To assess how a blended learning approach might improve students' IELTS speaking competency, this study used pedagogical action research. Traditional teaching methods in IELTS classes often ran into problems with little practice chances, inadequate feedback, and a lack of group and interaction experiences for students. The individuals' speaking skills showed a significant increase, as seen by the pre- and post-test findings. Most participants had positive things to say about the integration of blended learning into the environment, which raised satisfaction, engagement, and interaction levels. However, problems with asynchronous online feedback surfaced, suggesting that there is a need for improvement. This study emphasizes how crucial blended learning is for solving the shortcomings of traditional teaching strategies. It offers insightful details on how blended learning may encourage participation and provide comprehensive feedback systems, which would eventually improve IELTS speaking skills.

1. Introduction

Oral communication ability is essential for language acquisition, particularly for assessments such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Being able to speak English effectively is crucial for language learners since it's not only a tool for conversation but also for reaching academic and professional objectives. An important factor in assessing a candidate's language ability, coherence, and communication efficiency on the IELTS is their performance in the speaking section.

On the other hand, there are instances in which oral communication skills cannot be sufficiently developed and assessed using the conventional teaching approaches used in IELTS training. One recurrent problem in speaking classes is the limited amount of time given to students for meaningful practice, reflection, and engagement. Students' growth and unhappiness are hampered by a lack of chances for them to interact critically with classmates and instructors, share ideas, and get thorough feedback. Moreover, a significant obstacle to creating a nurturing learning atmosphere that improves spoken English proficiency is the deficiency of a strong feeling of community and communication among IELTS learners.

Blended learning is one pedagogical strategy for language instruction that could help with these problems. Blended learning, a cutting-edge solution to the shortcomings of traditional teaching methods, combines online and in-person training. Blended learning aims to provide a complete and dynamic learning experience that goes beyond the walls of the traditional classroom via the use of digital platforms and online activities. Using online tools and resources creates a more personalized and comprehensive learning environment by enabling students to actively participate, interact at different times, and access more learning materials.

The aim of this study is to investigate blended learning with a focus on improving speaking abilities for the IELTS. The main objective is to create and execute a unified IELTS speaking curriculum inside an actual IELTS classroom. The purpose of this course is to assess how well the blended learning strategy may improve students' IELTS speaking performance as well as the overall effectiveness of the course. Furthermore, the study aims to ascertain the degree of satisfaction that students have with the influence that the course has had on their speaking skills.

This research aims to shed light on the possibilities of cutting-edge teaching strategies by examining blended learning within the context of IELTS speaking abilities. The objective is to address the deficiencies seen in conventional teaching methods, providing a means of enhancing both language competency and the IELTS learning process as a whole.

2. Methodology

The project uses a pedagogical action research technique in order to actively contribute to enhancing instructional tactics and academic results specifically relevant to IELTS speaking abilities. This technique includes a thorough assessment of teaching and learning approaches in order to improve the efficacy of the blended learning model in an in-person IELTS speaking session.

The IELTS speaking course employs a blended learning strategy that combines conventional face-to-face teaching with online learning components. Every two weeks, the course's participants gather in person for two hours in a real classroom. All of the remaining course tasks must be completed fully online on a specific platform. The online components contain a range of educational activities, including interactive exercises, audio recording projects, and discussion forums pertaining to IELTS speaking subjects.

The study's participants are thirty English Language Teaching (ELT) students enrolled in a 16-week IELTS course at Dong Nai Technology University. The course length provides enough opportunity to thoroughly investigate the efficacy of the blended learning approach in improving IELTS speaking abilities over a prolonged timeframe. The primary emphasis of the research is on the thoughts and experiences of the participants, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of their performance gains and satisfaction levels.

Methods for gathering data provide several ways to get a profound understanding. Among the techniques used are pre- and post-tests, participant satisfaction surveys, standardized open-ended interviews, and classroom observations. The objective of the surveys and interviews is to gather the subjective viewpoints, personal accounts, and satisfaction levels of the participants about the blended learning environment and its impact on their IELTS speaking proficiency. While classroom observations provide qualitative information on the dynamics of in-person interactions, pre- and post-test results offer quantitative assessments of increases in speaking skills.

Using the theme analysis approach, qualitative data gathered from observations and interviews is analyzed. Finding recurrent themes, patterns, and viewpoints among the participants is made easier by the analysis. This analytical process entails meticulously encoding and classifying qualitative data in order to derive significant insights. Because observational notes and interviews are unstructured, it is possible to analyze participant experiences in the blended learning environment in great detail.

Quantitative information obtained from surveys and pre- and post-tests is subjected to statistical analysis. ANOVA, paired-sample t-tests, and descriptive statistics are some statistical techniques that may be used to assess speaking skill changes before and after the implementation of the blended learning course. These quantitative evaluations provide verifiable proof of the intervention's success in improving students' speaking IELTS scores.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative analytical methods offers a comprehensive comprehension of the several facets of the blended learning approach used in IELTS speaking preparation. By analyzing data from many sources, this study aims to provide reliable conclusions and insights on the efficacy of blended learning approaches in improving language education results.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Enhancement in verbal proficiency

Participants' IELTS speaking ability improved statistically significantly after completing the blended learning course, according to an examination of the study's pre- and post-test data. Speaking abilities significantly improved, as shown by the quantitative analysis of the test results, proving the efficacy of the combined strategy. Participants' language proficiency, including vocabulary, fluency, coherence, and command of the language, significantly improved after the training. This eloquently illustrates the useful benefits of the instructional intervention.

3.2 Levels of satisfaction among participants

The blended learning environment received generally positive comments from participant satisfaction surveys and interviews. Most students gave the course structure excellent marks for appreciation. The participants expressed a strong appreciation for the opportunity to get feedback from professors and other students via online platforms, indicating a preference for an all-encompassing approach over traditional methods. Attendees reported increased engagement, stronger relationships with teachers and classmates, and a stronger sense of community inside the classroom.

3.3 The Influence of Feedback on Student Performance

The teachers' advice was much valued and thought to be very helpful in helping students with their speaking assignments and providing helpful critiques. However, peer review was not without its challenges, as a number of participants expressed dissatisfaction with apparent shortcomings in the caliber and scope of the criticism. Insufficient peer feedback impeded some students' learning process, underscoring the need to enhance the peer review protocols within the context of blended learning. On the other hand, the act of analyzing other people's recordings improved introspective learning and helped individuals become better at self-assessment.

3.4 Difficulties encountered throughout the execution process

Numerous barriers to blended learning implementation were found in the study. The fact that online reviews are asynchronous was a significant issue. Realizing all of the potential benefits of collaborative learning proved to be difficult due to flaws in the online platform's peer-to-peer response mechanisms. These challenges were made worse by technical issues and sporadic internet access, which affected how quickly comments could be sent and received.

3.5 Discussion and Implications

The results show how blended learning has a great deal of potential to enhance language instruction, especially speaking competence. The observed statistically significant increase in speaking scores is consistent with prior research highlighting the advantages of technology-enhanced learning settings. Though essential for in-depth learning, peer feedback is complicated and subtle, requiring careful organization and supervision to guarantee its efficacy.

The study's findings demonstrate the significance of feedback in helping students develop their speaking abilities. Although the instructor's opinion was generally well received, the peer feedback techniques still need improvement. If successful tactics are used to teach students how to provide constructive criticism and encourage meaningful interactions on online platforms, peer feedback may be improved and have a bigger influence on learning outcomes.

Compared to previous research, our results highlight the significance of a thorough approach to blended learning. In order to fully use its advantages, technical issues need to be resolved, and feedback mechanisms need to be deployed as successfully as possible. The study's emphasis on peer interactions as a means of collaborative learning is consistent with theoretical frameworks that encourage socio-constructivist learning.

The findings indicate that blended learning may be able to get around some of the drawbacks of conventional teaching strategies and improve students' speaking performance on the IELTS. Despite the difficulties, the high satisfaction ratings and performance gains demonstrate the promise of this teaching strategy. Technology advancements and improvements in peer review processes are critical to maximizing blended learning's effectiveness in language training.

4. Conclusion

The results of the research demonstrate how blended learning might improve students' speaking on the IELTS. The findings showed a considerable improvement in speaking ability, as seen by the large increase in participants' pre- and post-test scores. This improvement verifies the blended learning strategy's efficacy and shows that it may enhance language acquisition, particularly speaking competence.

The participants' level of satisfaction with the mixed learning environment was also revealed by the survey. Despite their initial reservations, students expressed gratitude and joy for the greater engagement made available via blended learning. Online resources were thought to be highly helpful for receiving feedback from instructors and peers. Notwithstanding, certain concerns were observed, mostly pertaining to the caliber and promptness of the virtual input furnished by peers, implying that further iterations would need refinement.

Blended learning is beneficial for IELTS speaking sessions since it improves student participation, interaction, and the overall learning experience. This model successfully addresses the drawbacks of conventional teaching methods by providing an all-

encompassing approach that combines face-to-face interactions with virtual instruction, creating a more immersive learning environment.

In the future, researchers may focus on improving online feedback systems in blended learning settings. One strategy to address these concerns and increase the efficacy of this approach is to enhance the quality and promptness of peer input. Expanding the scope of the research to include a more heterogeneous group of participants from other educational environments might provide valuable insights into the suitability and flexibility of blended learning within multilingual environments.

In conclusion, this research shows the significant impact of blended learning on enhancing speaking abilities on the IELTS. Combining in-person and online learning improves communication skills and creates a livelier, more interesting, and more fulfilling learning environment. There is potential for significant innovation and advancement in language learning via the investigation and creation of blended learning strategies as technology develops. This may adjust to the shifting requirements of language learners in various contexts.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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