

## **Role of Blended Learning in Enhancing Classroom Engagement of Students – An Empirical Study an Empirical Study with Special Reference to Sri Lanka**

MAM Sameem

Department of English, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, Oluvil  
risameem@seu.ac.lk

### **ABSTRACT**

Education is the pillar of success. Education and knowledge are very essential to achieve success in life. The tradition of education is the same all over the world but the method of learning is becoming advanced day by day, with the help of new inventions or new thinking laid out by the experts. In the present phase of an educational environment, blended learning has become one of the most significant and popular methods of learning. However, not all educational institutes have adopted the method of blended learning in their institutions. Some of the educational institutions are still lagging in adopting this method. Sri Lanka is one of those countries that is lagging in establishing blended learning in the classroom. With the help of the advancement in technology, it has been easier to establish the blended method of learning. Blended learning plays an important role in the engagement of the students. The present paper is empirical in nature in which a sample of 189 respondents was taken from academic institutions of Sri-Lanka. T-test was applied to analyse the data.

**Keywords:** Education, Blended, Classroom, Institution, Learning

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is considered to be an important aspect of life. Gaining knowledge should be made the priority as learning has no age. In the last 10 years, the method of blended learning has taken up as a popular method of learning in the field of education. The advantages of blended learning are: it helps in the growth of concentration of the student in the classroom and also helps in the growth of engagement in the classroom. There are various stages of education starting from the pre-school level of education to the elementary level of education to the secondary stage of education and finally the higher level of education. All these levels of educations have different methods of teaching and have different intensities of engagement of students in the classroom. However, in all the stages of education, the teacher helps the students to get more engaged in the classroom activities and help the students to build up the confidence level among themselves. Blended learning has been described as a method of studying where it is done through the help of technologies (Edward, Asirvatham, & Johar, 2018).

Blended learning can be categorized into the use of technology through a virtual mode of teaching and as well as the use of technology while face-to-face teaching in a physical classroom. This

method of teaching not only helps in the engagement of the student in a classroom but also helps the students to gain interest in the classroom. Technology is developing day by day and the advancement of technology has helped in the development of various other fields and making it easier for everyone to access the internet. All over the globe various educational institutions have adopted this method of learning and has made it easier for the students as well the teachers to have an interactive class(Dang, 2016).

This method of learning is different from the traditional method of learning but it does not change the importance of education in a person's life. Unfortunately, even after the availability of so many options of learning still, many countries lag in the present era who have not successfully adopted the new methods of learning. Certain educational institutions still follow the traditional method of learning which does not encourage the students to show their interest in learning. The blended method of learning has not only made it easier for the students who can go to school but it has also helped those students who are incapable such as handicapped students, students with various personality disorders or physical problems can also learn through the blended method of education. Sri Lanka is one of the countries that is still lagging in adapting the blended method of learning. A change in the educational institutions from time to time encourages more students to join the institution and it also helps the students to know about various methods of learning in their tenure. Although every situation comes with various problems there has been a planned solution to overcome these problems(Arshed, et.al, 2018).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Learning has become an important aspect of life and it is very essential to learn something at every phase of life. Education is a process that helps a person learn about various aspects of life. It also helps a person to achieve success in life and also to enhance their brain. Traditional education is still in process in the present era but it comes with different methods of learning. The blended method of learning is a great initiative to increase the growth of qualitative learning. Initially, the concept of education was available however, there was not so much encouragement because the process of education was restricted only towards bookish knowledge. Gradually, the methods of teaching enhanced with the advancement of technology. In the present era of educational methods, imposing technologies in educational institutions has become a necessity. The countries which are more advanced than other countries in the matter of advancement of technologies are generally the ones who come up with innovations in enhancing the methods of learning. The duties of the other countries are to adopt these changes in the educational system and impose them into their universities to help the student go through the same process like other students in other countries. The investment in technology for educational learning has become a necessity in the present days because it comes up with great advantages that helps in the engagement of the students in the classroom as well as in the outer world(Rashida, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, the blended method of learning is completely dependent upon the process of technology. The more advanced the technology the more it gets easier to successfully adopt the blended method of learning. It can be categorized into virtual mode and physical mode. Virtual mode is that process of e-learning where the students who are facing any kind of physical disabilities have the opportunity to learn by sitting in their comfort zone. These students are also given the utmost

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importance as compared to the students who are involved in physical learning. On the other hand, physical learning is something that involves the e-learning process but the students have to be physically present in the classroom. Apart from these the students who are in rural areas or who are unable to afford any educational institutions also have an access to the blended method of learning that helps them to learn about various things and it also gives them a choice to study whatever the subject matter they want to study. In the traditional method of learning when the teachers were asked many questions, it used to get difficult for the teachers to instantly come up with the answers(Gaye, et.al, 2011).

Confidence is required for a student to achieve success in the future. It also helps in the development of personality which not only helps them get engaged in the classroom activities but also in the outer world. With the help of the e-learning process, the teacher is not restricted to only bookish knowledge and it also enhances student engagement in the classroom. As per the various research papers, it has been observed that the method of e-learning also helps in the development of a personality and at the same time, it also helps in enhancing communication skills. It encourages the students to come up with different ideas and talk about them in the class and with the help of the blended method of learning the student can deliver a virtual presentation regarding the topic(Weerawardane, 2018).

The majority of the countries have already adopted the method of blended system of education which is a process that helps in enhancing the quality of the education among the students. There still lag various countries who ate failing miserably or are not aware of the blended method of learning. However, it is a challenging process for everyone. The government faces challenges in adopting the method because the government has to focus on every field in a country and has to invest accordingly. Similarly, a teacher also has to face various challenges, especially the teachers who are quite old to learn the new process of teaching. The investment which is required in the blended method of learning is huge and sometimes due to the financial crisis, the government fails to impose this process of learning. Apart from these the students also have to face challenges such as changing methods of learning and it becomes difficult for the students to adjust to the new educational environment. Adjusting to the new educational environment sometimes becomes a failure for both the students as well as the teachers. The adaptation of the blended method of learning completely depends upon the strategies taken by the government and the educational institutions, the adaptation by the students as well as the teachers, the right amount of investment made for adopting this process, the fair use of the blended method of learning, etc(Borstorff, & Lowe, 2007).

The traditional method of learning only consists of paper and pen which sometimes makes it boring for the students and it results in a lack of interest of students towards learning. The method of learning through technologies such as the blended method of learning consists of various options which help students to learn in a different process. Sri Lanka is a developing country in the world. The majority of the population of this country is categorized under lower middle income depending upon their annual income. The growth of the country is comparatively slow than in other countries. The government has to focus on the different challenges and the outcomes which may arise when investing in the blended method of learning. E-learning is an advanced method of learning in the modern world but it also requires a lot of investment. Generally, the people of Sri Lanka have lower

income and it becomes a challenging factor for government to impose this educational system. Moreover, the government also has to take care of the profits arising out of this education system. The blended method of learning was designed to make it convenient for both the students as well as the teachers to have an interactive class(Arunatilake, & Jayawardena, 2008).

This method of learning in the classroom mainly focuses on the interaction between the teachers and the students, the characteristic of a student while learning about something in the class, and also on the structure of institutions. The method of blended learning also helps to motivate the students at all levels of education to be more active in a classroom. With the help of technology, it gets easier for the teachers, and at the same time, the teachers have more options for delivering the knowledge to the students in the classroom. Although this system is very advanced but becomes a challenging factor for those teachers who are more comfortable in adopting the traditional method of teaching. However, there has always been a positive reaction towards the idea of the blended method of the educational system. It is of great benefit when it comes to a higher level of education. The higher level of education comprises universities or colleges which require knowledge outside the modules to understand the concept. This method of learning makes it easier for the students to understand the concept at a wider range and it also helps the teachers to deliver the lecture with instant virtual examples(DeLone, & McLean, 2003).

The technology helps in enhancing the quality of the education system. The advancement of technology not only helps in the innovations of a new system but also helps in the development of those innovations in the future which benefits the people of country. However, the adoption of method or policies completely depends upon the strategies of the government because a country is under the controls of the government. The blended method of educational system provides a different teaching style in the field of education. The technology not only helps in the advancement of the teaching or learning style but it also helps in other activities such as evaluation process, developing of courses for the students, etc. It also helps the students to fetch grades in the examination and can approach to the faculties in case of any doubts through the method of technology. Anything with the help of technology has a huge advantage and it is very easy to access. The blended method of learning also depends upon the socio-economic factors of a country while establishing the educational institutions of a country. Sri Lanka comprises a mixed government which makes it difficult for the country to impose the e-learning method in educational institutions. However, the majority of the students have approached the e-learning method and when the country fails to implement it in the domestic country itself, the students migrate to other countries in search of a better quality of education. There are various types of blended methods of learning and the most convenient method can be implemented in an educational institution as per the recommendations of the students and the teachers(Arunatilake, & de Silva, 2004).

## **Objectives**

1. To know the role of blended learning in enhancing the engagement of students in the classroom in the higher education institutions of Sri Lanka.
2. To know how blended learning helps students to be engaged in classroom learning in Sri Lanka.

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**Methodology**

Present study is exploratory in nature. A survey method was used to collect the primary data from the respondents, for which a structured questionnaire was developed and used to validate the hypothesis of this study. A sample of 189 respondents has been considered. The sampling method was purposive sampling. Mean and t-test applied to find out appropriate results of the study.

**Findings of the Study**

Table 1 shows the number of Male respondents were 51.85% and Female respondents were 48.15%. Regarding the age group, respondents who are below 35 years is 36.51%, those between 35-45 years are 28.04% and above 45 years are 35.45%. With reference to the level of respondents it was found that 40.21% were lecturers, 46.56% were senior and 13.22% were associate professors or professors.

**Table1 Demographic profile of the respondents**

Variables	Number of respondents	%age
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	98	51.85%
Female	91	48.15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age</b>		
Below 35 years	69	36.51%
35 to 45 years	53	28.04%
Above 45 Years	67	35.45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>100%</b>
Lecturer	76	40.21%
Sr. Lecturer	88	46.56%
Associate and Professors	<b>25</b>	13.22%

**Table 2 Role of Blended learning in enhancing classroom engagement of students**

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
1.	Blended learning increases the interests of students	4.10
2.	It keeps students focused for longer time	4.29
3.	It enables students to learn at their own pace	3.88
4.	Increased interaction between teachers and students	4.01
5.	It provides flexibility of time to suit teacher as well as students	4.22
6.	Reviewing of videos and provided material before the start of the lesson give more understanding of the topic to the students	4.19
7.	Feedback session help students to clear their doubts and they feel free to talk to teachers	4.00
8.	Students become self-driven and responsible as they track their individual achievements	3.91
9.	Students learn variety of activities and can apply them in their life	4.00
10.	It prepares students for the future as it offers a multitude of real-world skills	4.39

Table 2 shows the Mean value for the statements with reference to the “Role of Blended learning in enhancing classroom engagement of students,” the highest mean value of 4.39 is recorded by the statement “It prepares students for the future as it offers a multitude of real-world skills.” The second highest mean value of 4.29 is received by statement “It keeps students focused for longer time.” It is found to be time flexible, thus the statement “It provides flexibility of time to suit teacher as well as students” has recorded the third highest score of 4.22, statement “Reviewing of videos and provided material before the start of the lesson give more understanding of the topic to the students” has got the mean score of 4.19. Mean value of 4.10 is recorded by statement “Blended learning increases the interests of students,” blended learning increases the interest “Increased interaction between teachers and students” the men score is 4.01. Two statements record the mean value of 4.00, “Feedback session help students to clear their doubts and they feel free to talk to teachers” and “Students learn variety of activities and can apply them in their life.” Statement “Students become self-driven and responsible as they track their individual achievements” has the mean score of 3.91, and the last statement “It enables students to learn at their own pace” scores the mean value of 3.88.

**Table 3 Role of Blended learning in enhancing classroom engagement of students**

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>t Value</b>	<b>Sig</b>
1.	Blended learning increases the interests of students	4.10	9.985	0.000
2.	It keeps students focused for longer time	4.29	18.326	0.000
3.	It enables students to learn at their own pace	3.66	2.271	0.012

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4.	Increased interaction between teachers and students	4.01	7.467	0.000
5.	It provides flexibility of time to suit teacher as well as students	4.22	8.296	0.000
6.	Reviewing of videos and provided material before the start of the lesson give more understanding of the topic to the students	4.19	9.608	0.000
7.	Feedback session help students to clear their doubts and they feel free to talk to teachers	4.00	8.187	0.000
8.	Students become self-driven and responsible as they track their individual achievements	3.91	6.555	0.000
9.	Students learn variety of activities and can apply them in their life	4.00	6.995	0.000
10.	It prepares students for the future as it offers a multitude of real-world skills	4.39	11.710	0.000

Table 3 shows that all the above statements with reference to the Role of Blended learning in enhancing classroom engagement of students are found to be significant, as the t-value for all the statements are positive and significance value is less than 0.05.

## CONCLUSION

Education should be given utmost priority from the beginning in life. Everyone has the right to learn and be successful in their lives. It is the responsibility of the government of a country to provide the various available opportunities to the students at their early stage of learning. Sri Lanka is a developing country as it comprises the majority of lower-middle-income people. Although, a country can be developed if it provides better education to the students at their early stage and then it further helps in the development of the country. Technological advancement is helping in the development of other fields across the globe, starting from educational policies to economic policies, almost everything is somehow related to the advancement of the technologies. The blended method of learning is an encouraging method of getting engaged in the classroom and it also helps in gaining the interest of the students toward classroom activities. Apart from these the student also gets opportunities to explore new activities and it enhances their mind to come up with various creativities. However, Sri Lanka is looking into establishing a new method of blended learning to enhance its educational institutions and also to help the students build up their bright future(Nawaz, et.al, 2015). “Mean” and “t-test” been applied to identify the Role of Blended learning in enhancing classroom engagement of students.

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