RESEARCHARTICLE

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF BLENDED LEARNING USING EXTEMPORE AND DEBATE TECHNIQUE TO ENHANCE ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS OF GRADE SIX STUDENTS: A STUDY IN TRASHIGANG MIDDLE SECONDAY SCHOOL

[1,*]Kesang Wangchuk and [2]NimaDorji

[1]Bachelor of Education, Master in Leadership and Management. Principal at Trashigang Middle Secondary School; [2]Bachelor of Education in English and Geography. Master in Development Practice. Teacher Resource Coordinator at Trashigang Middle Secondary School Trashigang Middle Secondary School, Trashigang, Bhutan

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the impact of blended learning on students' speaking skills of EFL learners through debate and extempore technique. The study used quasi-experiment which consisted of pre-observation, intervention and post observation. The total of 20 girls and 22 boys studying in grade 6 has participated in the study. The control group received traditional methods of instructions in English session whereas the experimental group received blended learning in special classroom. Both the groups were tested for their speaking skills before and after the intervention. The experimental groups were taught using blended learning strategies. The finding of this study has shown that blended learning has positive impact in students' English speaking skills. Further, the study has also shown that both debate and extempore technique helps in enhancing students' English Speaking Skills. Therefore, the study recommend the teachers in the field to use blended learning to enhance students' speaking skills.The study also recommend English language teachers to use other technique and find out how blended learning can be incorporated to enhance students' learning. However, the study is limited to one school and the findings of this study cannot be generalized.

INTRODUCTION

In an era of internationalization and globalization, English has become one of the universal communication tools that connects people (Shih, 2010). Though English is a second language for Bhutanese, Royal Education Council, highest decision making body in developing curriculum has considered English as one of the major subject across all grades. Therefore, students from grade PP-XII in Bhutan are required to pass both in summative and formative assessment in English subject in order to promote to next level. Moreover, Shih (2010) also pointed out that due to the globalization of commerce and education, the ability to speak a second language has become an important skill in workplaces worldwide. In line with this, to pursue the academic journey in higher grades in native English speaking countries, Bhutanese students have to get through English language test. Therefore, this study aims to find out the strategies to enhance students' English speaking skills and to investigate the effect of blended learning in improving English speaking.

*Corresponding author: *Kesang Wangchuk,*
Bachelor of Education, Master in Leadership and Management.
Principal at Trashigang Middle Secondary School.

Problem Statement: English is regarded as one of the most important subject in Bhutan.The English language is used as medium of instruction for subjects like science, arts, mathematics and information technology. Since many subjects are taught and learn in English, students should be competent in English. However, students often fail to answer the questions as they do not understand and comprehend thelanguage though they understand the concept well. In Bhutan, from pre-primary till tertiary education, students are taught English. Moreover, the government and private employer in the country also demands fluent English speaking graduates. In line with this, graduates who opt to do further studies in other countries should pass in English Language test conducted by native English speaking countries. Though blended learning was practiced in developed countries more than 10 years now, it is new to Bhutan as online learning and digital learning is new to schools in Bhutan. Many schools in Bhutan still do not have good internet connection and ICT facilities. However, Royal Government of Bhutan aimed to have good ICT classroom and proper internet connections through Digital Drukyul Flagship Programme by the end of 12[th]five-year plan. Therefore, to address and help some of the problem above, researcher aim to investigate use of blended learning to enhance English speaking skills for grade six students.

Objective of the study: Due to the rapid development of information and technology, it has enabled the development in the teaching and learning process. Many developing nation has shifted their education system from traditional to blended learning. Bhutan is no exception. After launching internet and television and internet on June 2nd 1999, Bhutan has moved forward in digitalizing the education system. Further, it was during the covid-19 pandemic, the schools in Bhutan followed online teaching and learning for almost 6 months. Therefore, researchers aim to find out importance of blended learning to enhance English speaking skills.

Research questions

The researcher aims to answers following questions.

- What are the technique that can be blended to enhance students English speaking skills?
- How does blended learning enhance students English speaking skills?
- How does debate and extempore technique improves speaking skills for EFL students?
- Which technique is better to blend, debate or extempore?

Literature Review

Blended Learning: According to Graham (2006) blended learning systems combine face to face instruction with computer mediated instructions. He also stated that blended learning emphasizes the central role of computer based technologies. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) also indicated that blended combines both types of learning as traditional classroom lecture and online learning are used in the teaching and learning process. In addition, Lalima and Dangwal (2017) stated that blended learning is an innovative concept that embraces the advantages of both traditional teaching in the classroom and ICT supported learning including both offline learning and online learning.

According to Graham (2006), the blended learning happens at different levels given below:

- Activity level: It included both face to face and computer mediated elements.
- Course level: Blending at this level is one of the most common ways to blend. Course level blend involves combining distinct face to face and computer mediated activities.
- Program level: Blending at a program level often entails one of two models - a model in which the participants choose a mix between face to face courses and online courses or one in which the combination between the two is prescribed by the program.
- Institutional level: Some institutions are committed to blend face to face and computer mediated instruction. Many organizations besides institutions of higher education are making models of blended learning at an institutional level.

Though there are different levels where blended learnings can be done, Graham (2006) also pointed out that teachers and students determines the nature of the blend. The learner can often choose the blend at the levels of institutional and program. While the blend at the course and an activity level is said to be prescribed by the teacher.

English speaking skills: English speaking skills is very much important for interaction amongst people across the world as it is international means of communication (Asakereh & Dehghannezhad, 2015). Further, Lumbangaol and Mazali (2020) stated that speaking skills can help students communicate their opinions, feelings, and expressions without being limited in different languages, cultures, and countries. However, Arung (2016) pointed out that, though English speaking is important, the students' ability in speaking English is low. He stated that it is caused by several factors such as the elements of speaking like vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and fluency that must be mastered by students in order to be good English speaker. Therefore, for EFL students, it is very important that language teachers must find the means to enhance their communication skills.

English speaking skills enhancement through debate and extempore speech: According to Arungand Jumardin(2016), debate is an appropriate technique to improve students speaking skill for the students. Further, he added that students have opportunity to practice speaking skills and have active involvement in debate. However, he pointed out that students need to cooperate and defend their team so that they become more active to speak in classroom. Similarly, Somjai and Jansem (2015) stated that debate educates students with responsibility, encourages creativity, deepens friendships and strengthens the rapport with the teacher. The ability to speak freely also improves when students practice debate because they take part in conversations as they are debating. Moreover, Lumbangaol and Mazali (2020) had found out that debate technique had improved students' speaking ability in making questions and giving explanations. In line this this, Somjai and Jansem (2015) said that debate is a challenging and highly rewarding activity for those who involved. According to Deepa S (2012) extempore assists students not only in thinking on their feet but also in voicing their creative ideas with precision. Moreover, Assaf and Yunus (2021) pointed out that extemporaneous speech has a positive influence on students speaking abilities. They found out that extempore has helped students to organize the thoughts, expand vocabulary, and improve their grammar and pronunciation needed for their speeches.

Importance of blended learning in speaking skills: According to Ehsanifard, Ghapanchi and Afsharrad (2004) has found out that blended learning engages learners more than traditional learning does. Their study revealed that the learners who received blended instruction outperformed the control group in both oral proficiency and engagement. Further, Pramila and Thomas (2019) conducted a research to measure the impact of Blended Learning on English as a foreign language students' oral communication skills. They founded that the blended learning if implemented on a regular basis results in a definite and steady progress in the speaking skills of the students. Moreover, Rachmijati, Anggraeni and Apriliyanti (2019) has also found out that use of blended learning through YouTube media improve students' speaking skills. Banditvilai (2016) stated that blended learning allows students to develop and practice English language skills outside the classroom at anytime and anyplace they choose, as long as they have access to an Internet connection. In addition, it permits them to repeat lessons without judgment or pressure.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and methods: For this study, quasi-experiment was used. In quasi-experiments, the researcher uses both control and experimental group. The researchers has randomly assign participants to the groups. This is mainly done as per the convenient of a teacher to teach in the class. The researchers also interviewed 10 students before the pre-test to check student's prior knowledge on debate and extempore. Interview was used as an additional data information for further validation of the study.

Research participants: The sample consisted of two sections of grade six students studying in Trashigang Middle Secondary School, Trashigang District. The researchers selected one section as experimental group and the other as the control group. The number of students participated in the study were shown below in Table 1

Table 1. Number of student participants

Grade	Girls	Boys	Total
Six (A-Experimental group)	9	13	21
Six (B-Control group)	11	9	20
Total students	20	22	42

Research instrument: To fulfil the research objectives, for qualitative data, researchers designed the interview questions (Appendix-A) was used during the pre-test to understand students prior knowledge on debate and extempore speech.The intention was to get additional information whether students have understood the concept of debate and extempore speech from power point presentation and video clips. For quantitative data, students are made to participate in debate and extempore speeches. The test was administered using rubrics and observation were used (Appendix B).

Procedure: The researchers got approval letter from Teacher Professional and Support Division (TPSD), Ministry of Education, Bhutan. The researchers also collected consent from both students and school principal. The intervention lasted for 12 period of 40 minutes over 2 months (April 1, 2021-June 4, 2021). The difference between the experimental and control groups was created using special classroom with the former and conventional instructions with the latter. The school has one room allocated as special classroom with proper internet connection, projector and computers. The students in experimental group can share link and videos through telegram, weChat, whatApp or any other social media for extra information after the school. The procedure of action research conducted are as follows:

The pre-test: Planned and developed questionnaire for both pre-test and post-test.The pre-test was conducted for both the groups, experimental and controlled group (Appendix A and B). To test the students' speaking skills, the rubrics was adopted from Pramila and Thomas (2019). The detail of the rubrics is mentioned below.

Intervention Phase: The intervention was done for both the groups, however, traditional method of teaching (lectured-method) was used for control group and blended learning was used for experimental group. During the intervention phase, the teacher explained about how to debate and how to prepare for extempore speech. However, groups' intervention was done in different settings. For experimental group, students were shown with video and online learning has taken place in special classroom in the school.

The post-test: The post-test was conducted for both the group to study the impact of blended learning. The data were analyzed and evaluated to find out how far the strategy has solved the problem. Further, for experimental group, children were also made to discuss in social media forum such as WeChat, telegram and facebook.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data were collected through interview and from the rubrics maintained for debate and extempore speech. The interview questionnaire was used for the two purposes, to find out students' concept and knowledge on debate and extempore. It is also to find out the speaking skills during pre-test and post-test. The rubrics was used by the researchers to test and mark the speaking skills of the students. The same rubrics was used for extempore and debate.

Pre-test and post-test from extempore speech: Students' interviews were recorded, coded and transcribed. The following are the result from pre-test and post-test. The score of extempore and debate were shown separately. The short classroom interview was conducted to check student's prior knowledge on extempore speech. The study found out that few students have idea and concept on extempore speech. However, study also found out that only 10 out of 41 students participated once in extempore speech competition. Further, students had limited knowledge on extempore. This was evident from the students' interview from the question, *what is extempore speech to you? and, what is the most important things you need to keep in your mind when you participate in extempore?*

We pick up the topic and speak to everyone. We should not be scared and always be prepared. (S36)

Extempore is like picking the topic and talking. (41)

I think extempore speech is just a regular speech. Before speaking, we need to think twice. We must be intelligent enough for the given topic (S7). As students have limited knowledge on extempore, in the intervention phase, the experimental group were taught speaking skills tips, uses of language and how to use intonation through power-point slides, you-tube videos and other English language learning websites. However, control group are taught through traditional face to face teaching, by giving some notes on the board. The Table 3 and Table 4 shows the debate scores of the participants. The results from the pre-test showed that there was no difference in the means of control and experimental group with 50.95 and 49.75. However, after the intervention through blended learning strategies, it was found that the experimental group has mean of 75.2 and control group with 70.9. It indicated that students were learning well through blended learning strategies than the traditional mode.

Pre-test and post-test from debate: From the students' interview, it was found that students also had limited knowledge. Moreover, researchers observed that students speaking skills was found poor with lots of grammatical error and pronunciation.

However, study found out that few students have good knowledge on debate but finding difficult to speak and explain. This was evident from the interview as:

Debate is arguing about the question, say wrong or right. (S1) Debate is the thing where two or more groups talk on a single subject. They could be for the motion or against the motion. (S10)

debate, debating skills, uses of language through power-point slides, you-tube videos and other English language learning websites. However, control group are taught through traditional face to face teaching, by giving some notes on the board. For debate, students were divided into group of two in both experimental and control group. 10 students were assigned as to go for the motion and 10 students who oppose the points. In both experimental and control group, 1 student was assigned as moderator.

Table 1. IELTS band descriptors from 0 to 5

Name of the student:……………………………………………………….

Band	Fluency	Lexical resources	Correct use of Grammar and accuracy	Pronunciation
5	• maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and /or slow speech to keep going • may over-use certain connectives and discourse markers • produces simple speech fluently, but more complex communication causes fluency problems	• Manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility • attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success	• produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy • uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems	• shows all positive features of Band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 6
4	• Cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction. • link basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some breakdowns in coherence	• is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice • rarely attempts paraphrase	• produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences but subordinate structures are rare • errors are frequent and may lead to misunderstanding	• uses a limited range of pronunciation features • attempts to control features but lapses are frequent • mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener
3	• Speaks with long pauses • has limited ability to link simple sentences • gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey basic message	• uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information • has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics	• attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorized utterances • makes numerous errors except in memorized expressions	• shows some of the features of Band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 4
2	• pauses lengthily before most words • little communication possible	• only produces isolated words or memorized utterances	• cannot produce basic sentence forms	• speech is often unintelligible
1	• no ratable language as students did not speak properly.			
0	• does not attend			

Debate of people talk and challenge to win (S11)

For the question, *have you ever participated in debate,* 17 out of 41 students has mentioned that they did participated once in other subject. For the question, what are the important thing they need to keep in mind while debating, many students agreed that speaking skills and confidence are important. This was evident from students responds:

Table 2. Conversion of speaking skills

Aspect	Score	Multiplying factor
Fluency and Coherence	5	×5
Lexical Resource	5	×5
Grammar and accuracy	5	×5
Pronunciation	5	×5
Total	25	100

We need skills to talk and understanding. When we participate we need confidence, speaking, listening and eye contact. (S20) The important thing is we should not be ashamed, we should tell the pronunciation correctly. (S16). We should remember what they said and focus on everyone (S2). During intervention phase, the experimental group were taught how to

Students were made to speak for 3 minutes. For the pre-test, students were directly given the topic to debate without intervention. It was found out that students speaking skills was not good enough. The Table 5 and Table 6 showed the test score of pre-test and post-test score of debate. The Table 5 indicated that control group and experimental group has no difference in the score during debate. The table showed that blended learning has greater impact over traditional method of teaching and learning. In the post test, the average mean of control group is 67.1 whereas experimental group has 73.5 which indicated that blended learning helps students to enhance their English speaking skills. The findings of the study indicated that experimental group has performed well in extempore as well as debate than the control group. It showed that blending learning has positive impact towards enhancing students speaking skills. Guangying (2014) also pointed out that blended learning is effective in promoting teacher and student initiative and in enhancing learner autonomy. Further, it was supported by Albiladi and Alshareef (2019) that blended learning helps to develop language skills, enhance the English learning environment, and promote students' motivation toward learning the language. Through the pre-test and post-test result, it was observed that experimental group has outperformed control group in both extempore and debate.

This indicate that the students speaking skills improve better through blended learning than the traditional mode of teaching and learning. During the pre-test, there is no significant difference in the mean score of both debate and extempore speech. However, with the treatment and intervention, researchers observed that experimental groups are doing well. The findings showed that there was no difference in the means of control and experimental group in post-test and pre-test for two different technique.

Table 3. Descriptive statistic of pre-test

	N	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Standard deviation
Control group	21	80	40	50.95	12.90
Experimental group	21	75	30	49.76	13.36

Table 4. Descriptive statistic of post-test

	N	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Standard deviation
Control group	21	90	55	70.9	9.4
Experimental group	21	90	60	75.2	8.7

Table 5. Descriptive statistic of pre-test (Debate)

	N	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Standard deviation
Control group	21	75	45	56.6	9.1
Experimental	21	75	45	56.1	9.06

Table 6. Descriptive statistic of post-test (Debate)

	N	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Standard deviation
Control group	21	90	55	67.1	9.5
Experimental	21	95	55	73.5	10.5

It indicated that both extempore and debate technique can be blended and helped in enhancing EFL students speaking skills.

Conclusion

The study used quasi-experiments to find out blended learning strategies using debate and extempore technique to enhance students English speaking skills. The pre-data was collected in the month of April, 2021. The researchers intervene about 120 minutes in a week for 2 months through blending learning strategies for experimental group. A traditional face to face teaching was used for control group. The post data was collected on July, 2021. The findings of the study revealed that blended learning helps students to improve their speaking skills. Further, it also showed that debate and extempore technique are equally important to improve students English speaking skills.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are made through the findings of this study for further studies.

- Blended learning can be used to enhance English Speaking Skills incorporating debate and extempore techniques.

- To explore and use techniques other than debate and extempore technique in blended learning strategies to enhance EFL student's speaking skills.
- To use debate and extempore techniques in other grades with more number of students.

Limitation

The findings of this study is subjected to one school and cannot be generalized. Moreover, the researchers were also not the native English native speakers and future researchers are recommended to do further research in different levels of grades.

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Appendix A

This interview questionnaire was used before the pre-test to get the information and student's conceptual understanding of debate and extempore speech.

Part-I-Debate

1. What do you understand by 'Debate'?
2. Have you ever "participated" in debate? When?
3. What are the important things you need to keep in your mind when you participate in debate?

Part-II-Extempore speech

1. What is extempore speech to you?
2. Have you "ever" participated in extempore speech?
3. What are the important things you need to keep in your mind when you participate in debate?

Appendix B

The following topics are used for extempore speech. The students were given total of 4 minutes, 1 minute for preparation and 3 minutest to speak.

1.Best day of my life	2.School life
3.Flower	4.Talk about student life
5.Picnic	6.If I am principal of this school
7.Teacher	8.My favorite book
9.If I win lottery, what will I do?	10.Good things about me
11.My favorite sports	12.Value of time
13.Why I thank my parents	14.Importance of forest
15.Importance of hard work	16.What you have to do during covid-19 period
17.Water	18.Waste management
19.Examination	20.Love
21.Technologies and its impact	22.Education
23.Good students	24.Teacher

Debate topics

1. Health is more important than the wealth.
2. Town life is better than village life

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