BLENDED LEARNING MODULE: INVESTIGATING ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN TEACHING EXPOSITORY WRITING SKILLS AT SECONDARY STAGE

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ABSTRACT

The major aims of this experimental study were to develop and validate Blended Learning Module (BLM) in teaching expository writing skills to students studying English at grade 9. The researcher applied experimental method with pre-test and post-test equivalent group design to carry out this study. The study revealed that the students taught with BLM performed significantly better than the students taught with text-book material on post-test. It was inferred that the better performance of both high and low achievers was the result of active learning, self-paced, individualised and pair activities, support of computer technology that enhanced engagement and motivation of the students in the learning process. It is recommended that English teachers are required to be trained to develop and apply BLM in teaching English.

Keywords: *Blended Learning, Expository writing skill, English*

INTRODUCTION

English language is widely spoken across the world, and one out of five people speaks English on the planet Earth. It is the language of science and technology, literature and arts, medicine and pharmacy, computer and communication, and medium of instruction in many developing and developed countries of the world (Armana, 2011). According to Baron (2002), use of English as a second language and lingual franca has significantly increased all around the world for academic, research and business purposes. Competency in writing skills plays an important role in academic success and getting high grades. Writing is one of the most important discoveries of human history that has contributed to maintain record of theories, beliefs and agreements. In Pakistan, as a teacher, the researcher has observed that the students have to face problems when they have been asked to write on unseen topics and practice different forms of writing skills.

They have not been taught to practice and develop writing skills at secondary stage in logical, rational and constructive way. Teachers in Pakistan use Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in teaching of writing skills to students enrolled at secondary level, and teaching learning process by and large is teacher centred (Behlol & Anwer, 2011; Shaheen, 2015). Latest developments in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have revolutionised the pedagogical practices in English language

teaching. It (ICT) has placed educational activities of schools, colleges and universities outside classroom and liberated it from continuous teachers' presence(Mendieta Aguilar, 2012).

According to Behlol & Anwer (2011), in response to latest developments, the educationists and teacher educators developed and practiced some student centred methods of learning English language that provides greater autonomy and flexibility to learners for practicing and learning in multidimensional settings and situations. Second language learning with the BLM is a latest and significant development in the battery of English language teaching methods and practices in the developed and developing countries of the world (Vandermolen, 2010). It juxtaposes latest instructional techniques and pedagogical practices that includes online, web-based learning and face-to-face teaching (Smith & Kurthen, 2007). Teaching learning process based on BLM has a room for individual differences in respect to high, low and average achievers, and also flexible in respect to timing (Shaheen, 2015).Use of BLM has dramatically changed the role of teachers and learners for practicing English language skills (Donnelly, 2010). Literature on BLM also indicates that its use in higher education is on the rise, and it has the strength to raise the quality of education. Woltering, Herrler, Spitzer, and Spreckelsen (2009) argued:

Ultimately all courses in higher education will be blended.....In coming decade blended learning will fully take place of traditional learning. The institutions will be differentiated not by the existence of the blended learning approach but by the quality of blend and where these institutions fall in blended learning spectrum. (p.167)

According to Keshta and Harb (2013), the percentage of online and Face to Face (FTF) learning material in different forms of blended learning varies, that originated different formats of BLM such as *web enhanced, blended, hybrid and fully on line learning*. Mueen (1992) investigated the use of BL approach for secondary school teachers for strengthening their competencies, and the results indicated that'll environment and implementation of technology in teacher training improved the performance of teachers significantly and helped them to effectively learn the use of technology in classrooms.

Objectives of the Study

- ➢ To develop a sample of blended learning module for teaching expository writing skills to students studying English at grade 9
- ➢ To investigate the effectiveness of blended learning module by conducting lessons with the students studying English at grade 9

> ➢ To compare the performance of high and low achievers taught with the blended leaning module and the traditional learning materials at grade 9 in English subject

Hypothesis of the Study

The hypotheses of the study were:

> ➢ There is no significant difference between the mean scores of students taught with the BLM and the traditional learning materials in teaching expository writing skills on post-test.
> ➢ There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the HA taught with the BLM and the traditional learning material in teaching expository writing skills on post-test.
> ➢ There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the LA taught with the BLM and the traditional learning materials in teaching expository writing skills on post-test.
> ➢ There is no significant difference of group formation effect on high and LA of experimental and control groups on post-test.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Paradigm and Design of the study

The positivist paradigm was considered useful to check the effectiveness of BLM in teaching expository writing skills.In positivist approach knowledge obtained through empirical way is reliable, and the researcher is unbiased. The major focus is on quantifiable observations and statistical analysis. Moreover, it is supported by the deductive approach, and according toTashakkori and Teddlie (2010), it is based on the belief that the world is objective and observable phenomenon of things, processes and actions that work coherent and controlled way.

Experimental method with pre-test post-test designed was applied to conduct this study. This design is appropriate to tests hypotheses about cause and effect relationship. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2011), "experimental research is the most valid approach to the solution of practical, theoretical educational problems, and the advancement of education as a science"(p. 298).The effectiveness of BLM for teaching expository writing skills was checked by teaching lessons to students at grade 9. The experimental and control groups were formulated by random assignments of subjects applying matching technique. Learning material contained two types of learning resource: BLM and the traditional learning materials (Grammar textbook, slides) were

used for teaching of English. Comparison of pre-test and post-test scores determined the validity of the developed BLM. According to Gay, Mills & Airasian (2011), random assignments of the subjects in the experimental and control groups, and presence of control group helped to control internal and external validity threats to the experiment.

Population and sample of the study

Male students studying English at grade 9 in public secondary schools of Punjab Government in Rawalpindi district were the population of the study. The schools follow 2007 curriculum prescribed by the National Ministry of Education. Purposive and random sampling techniques were applied to select the subjects. Justification for the selection of school through purposive sampling technique was that principal allowed to conduct the study and the adjustment of the students in the control and experimental groups. In this way, it fulfilled the requirements of the equalization of the groups to conduct this study. The required number of the students and two teachers of equal qualification, experience were also available in the school.

Table 2.1: Students' Sample

Group	Whole group	HA	LA
Experimental Group	30	Above mean	Below mean
Control Group	30	Above mean	Below mean

Learning material and methods of teaching

Reading materials, lesson plans and worksheets, power point presentations were designed as a learning material for control group.Al Fiky (2011)model of BLM was followed to design the material for the experimental group. It is consisting on five stages which are; *analysis, design, production, implementation and evaluation*. Rationale for adoption of the Al Fiky model was that it can be applied in public schools of Pakistan as far as computer facilities and competency of the teachers are concerned. Five stages of the model are adjusted to the design of BLM. The content of the module and learning tasks were designed from simple to complex level. The teacher who worked with the control group was trained to use Grammar Translation and Direct Method of teaching. By and large the mode of the teaching learning process was teacher centred with the control group. The teacher who worked with the experimental group got training to carry out the activities with the experimental group. FTF and online activities were used to achieve objectives of BLM. While designing activities, it was ensured that both medium of

activities support one another rather than overlapping. The teacher assigned to experimental group was trained to work with students following student centred approach (facilitator, moderator, organiser, planner, actor and motivator).

Instruments of the study and data analysis

Pre-test that was also used as a post-test was the instrument of the study**.** It was used to measure the performance of the students at the end of the experiment, and also at the beginning of the experiment to establish the significance difference and effectiveness of BLM. Test was constructed by the researcher and validated by the experts. The tests consisted of completion items, multiple choice items, descriptive writing and short questions. The items of the test focus on the two sub-skills of expository writing. Time allotted for each test was 20 minutes and total score of each test was 20.Split half method was applied to measure the reliability that was found 0.86. Validity of the tests was checked by matching the test items with the specific objectives of the module and getting opinions of English language experts to modify, adjust and rephrase the items.

The experiment continued for 18 working days consuming 36 hours. Pre-test, post-test scores were the data of the study. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was applied to compute descriptive and inferential analysis. Independent sample *t*-tests were applied to measure the significance of difference at (*a*-0.05) level between the mean scores of both groups. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to examine the effects of treatment on high and LA of both groups. Students above the mean were considered as HAs and below the mean were LAs. The HA and LA were divided on the basis of scores from pre-tests.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Collected data was analysed under the following table to test the hypotheses:

Table 1 Difference between the mean scores of students taught with the BLM and the traditional learning materials in teaching expository writing skills on pre test

Group	N	M	SD	SE $_M$	DF	MD	SE $_D$	T	p-value
Exp.	30	16.70	12.39	2.36	58	.67	3.13	.254	.928
Con.	30	16.65	11.79	2.25					

The mean score of the experimental group was found 16.70 whereas the mean score of control group was 16.65. The SDs was 12.39 and 11.79 respectively. The standard errors of the means were found 2.36 and 2.25 respectively. This analysis was used as a baseline data to find out the significant difference at (α = 0.05) between the two groups on pre-

test. Independent sample t-test was used to measure the significance of difference. The degree of freedom was found 58 and the difference between mean scores of the two groups was .67 on 0.05 levels. The difference between standard errors of the means was 3.13. The p value was .928 on ($\alpha = 0.05$) level which was highly insignificant. Therefore, it was established that there was no significance difference between the mean scores of both groups.

Table 2 Difference between the mean scores of the HAs taught with the BLM and the traditional learning material in teaching expository writing skills on pre test

Group	N	M	SD	SE $_M$	DF	MD	SE $_D$	T	p-value
Exp.	15	56.22	6. 54	1.77					
Con.	15	56.11	6.23	1.65	28	1.25	2.48	.416	.654

The mean score of the HAs of the experimental group was found 56.22 whereas the mean score of HAs of the control group was 56.11. The SDs were 6.54 and 6.23 respectively. The standard errors of the means were found 1.77and 1.65 respectively. This analysis was used as a baseline data for application of t test to examine the results of HA of control and experimental group on pre-test. The degree of freedom was found 28 and the difference between means of the two groups was 1.25 on 0.05 levels. The difference between standard errors of the means was 2.48.The p value was .654 on ($\alpha = 0.05$) level which was highly insignificant. Therefore, it was established that there was no significance difference between the mean scores of the HAs of the control and experimental groups on pre-test.

Table 3 Difference between the mean scores of the LAs taught with the BLM and the traditional learning materials in teaching expository writing skills on pre test

Group	N	M	SD	SE $_M$	DF	MD	SE $_D$	T	p-value
Exp.	15	32.43	5.53	.166					
Con.	15	31.71	5.21	.168	28	.314	2.33	.093	.923

The mean score of the LAs of the experimental group was found 32.43whereas the mean score of LAs of the control group was 31.71. The standard deviations were 5.53 and 5.21 respectively. The standard errors of the means were found .166 and .168 respectively. This analysis was used as a baseline data for application of t test to examine the results of LAs of control and experimental group on pre-test. The degree of freedom was found 28 and the difference between means of the two groups' was.314 on 0.05 levels. The difference between standard errors of the means was 2.33.The p value was .923 on ($\alpha = 0.05$) level which was highly insignificant. Therefore, it was established that there was no

significance difference between the mean scores of the LAs of the control and experimental groups on pre-test.

Table 4 Difference between the mean scores students of taught with the BLM and the traditional learning materials in teaching expository writing skills on post test

Group	N	M	SD	SE $_M$	DF	MD	SE $_D$	T	p-value
Exp.	30	68.38	12.08	2.42					
Con.	30	57.31	11.09	2.66	58	12.08	3.61	3.35	.003

The mean score of the experimental group was found 68.38 whereas the mean score of control group was 57.31. The standard deviations were 12.08 and 11.09 respectively. The standard errors of the means were found 2.42and 2.66 respectively. This analysis was used as a baseline data for application of t test to examine the significant difference at (α = 0.05) between the two groups on post-test. The degree of freedom was found 58 and the difference between means of the two groups was 12.08 on 0.05 levels. The difference between standard errors of the means was 3.61. The p value was .003on (α = 0.05) level which was highly significant. Therefore, it was established that there was a significance difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups and it was found that the achievements of the experimental groups were significantly higher than the achievements of control group on post-test.

The research studies conducted by Behlol (2009); Shaheen (2015) also revealed that students who were taught through BLM, produced better results and higher achievements than their counterparts who learned through traditional FTF method. The higher achievement of the experimental group established the validity of the developed BLM and it was inferred that the difficulty level, the readability and the subject matter of designed module was up to the level of B.Ed. (Hons.) students.

Table 5 Difference between the mean scores of the HAs taught with the BLM and the traditional learning material in teaching expository writing skills on post-test

Group	N	M	SD	SE $_M$	DF	MD	SE $_D$	T	p-value
Exp.	15	80.40	8.84	2.47					
Con.	15	68.38	9.14	2.28	28	11.9	3.55	3.74	.002

The mean score of the HAs of the experimental group was found 80.40 whereas the mean score of HAs of the control group was 68.38. The standard deviations were 8.84 and 9.14 respectively. The standard errors of the means were found 2.47 and 2.28 respectively. This analysis was used as a baseline data for application of t test to examine the results of HAs of control and experimental groups on post-test. The degree of freedom was found

28 and the difference between means of the two groups was 11.9 on 0.05 levels. The difference between standard errors of the means was 3.55. The p value was .002 on (α = 0.05) level which was highly significant. Therefore, it was established that there was a significance difference between the mean scores of the HAs of the control and experimental groups and it was found that the achievements of the HAs of the experimental group was significantly higher than the achievements of control group on post-test.

The higher achievement of the experimental group established the validity of the developed BLM and it was concluded that the difficulty level, the readability and the subject matter of designed module was up to the level students. According to Ali (2005); Behlol (2009); Shaheen (2015), module based learning material is equally beneficial for HAs that allow them to proceed at their own pace.

Table 6 Difference between the mean scores of the LA taught with the BLM and the traditional learning materials in teaching expository writing skills on post-test

Group	N	M	SD	SE $_M$	DF	MD	SE $_D$	T	p-value
Exp.	15	57.51	6.75	1.27					
Con.	15	46.87	9.67	1.64	28	11.24	2.62	3.54	.003

The mean score of the LAs of the experimental group was found 57.51whereas the mean score of LAs of the control group was 46.87. The standard deviations were 6.57and 9.67 respectively. The standard errors of the means were found 1.27 and 1.64 respectively. This analysis was used as a baseline data for application of t test to examine the results of LAs of control and experimental group on post-test. The degree of freedom was found 28 and the difference between means of the two groups was 11.24 on 0.05 levels. The difference between standard errors of the means was 2.62. The p value was .003 on (α = 0.05) level which was highly significant. Therefore, it was established that there was a significance difference between the mean scores of the LAs of the control and experimental groups and the achievements of the LAs of the experimental group was found significantly higher than the achievements of control group on post-test.

The higher achievement of the LAs of the experimental group established the validity of the developed BLM and it provided space to share and speed up the learning process with the interaction of HAs in group and pair work activities. According to Ali (2005); Behlol, 2009), module based learning material is equally beneficial for LAs that allow them to proceed at their own pace.

Table 7 Difference of group formation effect on high and LA of experimental and control groups
       on pre-test

Source of Variation	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Experimental group. Control group	6.68	1	6.68	.152	.679
Low achievers. High achievers	6120.22	1	6120.22	137.99	.000.
Interaction	2.99	1	2.99	.076	.766
Error	2399.86	56	2399.86		
Corrected total	8498.88	59			

The results of the above table indicate that the p value acquired from both the sources of
variations: between and within the subjects of experimental and control groups, was
insignificant. The obtained p value was .679 at 0.05 level whereas the p value of LAs and
HAs was found .000 on 0.05 level. The p value of interaction effect was .766 on 0.05
levels. The results indicated that the performance of HA of experimental group was found
equal to the performance of HAs in the control group. Similarly, the performance of LAs
of the experimental group was equal to the performance of the LAs in the control group.
Therefore, it was found that there was no significant difference between treatments
effects of LAs and HAs on pre-test. It was revealed that the significant difference
between LAs and HAs of control and experimental group does not exist. The
appropriateness of data was established by the analysis to find out the differences
between the performances of control and experimental group to determine the validity of
the developed blended learning module.

Table 8 Difference of group formation effect on high and LAs of experimental and control groups
       on post-test

Source of Variation	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Experimental group. Control group	1898.067	1	1898.067	25.98	.000
Low achievers. High achievers	7388.22	1	7388.22	102.99	.000.
Interaction	9.92	1	9.92	.176	.666
Error	4110.26	56	70.89		
Corrected total	13378.88	59			

The results of the above table indicate that the p value acquired from both the sources of
variations: between and within the subjects of experimental and control groups, was
highly significant. Obtained p value was .000 at 0.05 levels whereas the p value of LAs
and HAs was found .000 on 0.05 levels. The p value of interaction effect was .666 on

0.05 levels. The results indicated that the performance of HAs of experimental group was found significantly better than the performance of HAs in the control group. Similarly, the performance of LAs of the experimental group was found significantly better than the performance of the LAs in the control group. Therefore, it was established that there was a significant difference between treatments effects of LAs and HAs on post-test unit2. It was revealed that the performance of the low and high achievers of the experimental group was highly significant.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion
The research was conducted to investigate effectiveness of BLM in teaching expository writing skills to students enrolled at grade 9 in public schools of Punjab Education Department in district Rawalpindi. The researcher observed the performance of students placed in the experimental and control groups taught with BLM and traditional material (Grammar textbook). The performance of the students taught with BLM was better than the students taught with traditional material. It is inferred from the results that BLM provided opportunity to students to interact with the learning material as an independent learner, and use of technology engaged the students as an active learner in learning expository writing skills as compared to the control group taught with traditional learning material. The results of the study were also verified by the previous studies conducted by (Al Fiky, 2011; Behlol, 2009; Shaheen, 2015).

On post-test, the higher achievement of the experimental group substantiated the validity of the developed BLM and it was inferred that the difficulty level, readability and subject matter of designed module was up to the level of students. It facilitated the students of the experimental group to perform better on expository writing tasks as compared to the students in the control group. The findings were also in agreement with previous research studies conducted by (Al Fiky, 2011; Behlol, 2009; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Keshta & Harb, 2013; Shaheen, 2015) that revealed the effectiveness of BLM on the achievement of English writing skills. On the other hand, findings of the study conducted by Zimmerman (1997) contradicted the results of the this study which revealed that there was no significant difference between the achievement level of control and experimental groups.

Self-paced activities of BLM provided opportunity to HAs to move according to their own pace in learning expository writing skills. They also excelled on the post-test as compared to the students in the control group. This result was also in agreement to the studies conducted by (Behlol, 2009; Shaheen, 2015) that revealed that HAs were not kept waiting at the expense of the slow pace of LAs. BLM fulfilled the requirements of HAs

such as making quick decision, applying what is learnt in new situations, increased interaction with the educational materials, developing problem solving skills, enhancing self-evaluation tools, improving informational search and giving training opportunities which are not found in the traditional material.

The difference between the mean scores in learning expository writing skills of the LAs on post-test was also found significant. The High and LAs helped one another on group and pair work activities in a safe learning atmosphere, free from threat and criticism. They give voice to their learning problems without any threat and fear on-line learning tasks. Therefore, it was inferred from the better performance of LAs that the developed BLM was very effective in motivating and inspiring shy and LAs. Individual and independent learning tasks provided space to average and low ability students to participate in learning according to their capabilities. They were able to correct their mistakes by discussing with HAs in groups on internet as well as in classroom. The study conducted by Behlol and Anwer (2011) also validates the results of the study.

Conclusion

Students of the experimental group continuously evaluated and assessed themselves on the writing tasks by the use of feedback that has developed and promoted self-learning habits. They corrected their mistakes in classroom as well as working online at Google Community through peer-review technique. It is revealed that BLM was supportive in developing collaborative, process-oriented and logical way of learning expository writing skills. It is concluded that the proposed BLM used in teaching expository writing skills has a significant impact on the achievements of the students of grade 9. The study established that the BLM is effective, constructive and motivating method and material for teaching English at grade 9. It may enhance learning of English as well as other subjects, and also broaden the teaching *'space'* outside the walls of the classrooms. However, there is a need of some more studies to verify the results by controlling some other variables such as gender, socio-economic status, and level of intelligence on different subjects.

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