

ENHANCING UNDERGRADUATE SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH A BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH

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The present study investigates the effectiveness of the Blended Learning approach combined with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles in developing undergraduate students' speaking skills in Sri Lanka. CLT emphasizes meaningful communication and interaction during the process of language learning, and blended learning is an approach that combines traditional face-to-face mode of instruction with online modes of learning. A mixed-method research design was followed, involving quantitative and qualitative data collection. Further, pre- and post-speaking test marks were used for the quantitative data collection, and the tests were conducted for 50 undergraduates from the University of Kelaniya to measure their speaking proficiency. The undergraduates were divided into two groups, which consisted of 25 participants per group. The traditional teaching method was used for the control group, and the blended learning approach and CLT followed the experimental group. The qualitative data was obtained from published and unpublished articles and semi-structured interviews with 10 ESL lecturers on their perceptions of how this blended learning approach enhanced speaking skills among the students. Moreover, classroom observations were conducted for an entire month to explore the progression of the experimentation group. The results showed that the proposed blended learning approach with CLT principles remarkably improved undergraduate students' speaking ability, and they had positive attitudes towards the new learning method in the Sri Lankan university context. The two modes of instruction, including face-to-face and online, facilitated the acquisition of plenty of authentic practice opportunities and feedback by the learners where they have improved their communicative skills. The interviews of the lecturers further supported this approach. They stressed that such an approach has immense potential in increasing the engagement, motivation of the students, and overall development of the language skills. In conclusion, it can be mentioned that the results obtained from this study will contribute to the literature on language teaching methodologies and blended learning. Hence, it is expected that integrating CLT and blended learning can be useful in higher educational settings in developing speaking skills. In addition, further research is needed to test the effectiveness of this approach and to see its applicability in diverse language learning contexts.

Keywords: Blended learning, communicative Language Teaching (CLT), speaking skills, university context

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