

Investigating the Integration of Blended Learning Tools to Provide Formative Feedback on Students' Writing in Secondary level ELT Textbooks in Sri Lanka

RATP Rajapaksha^{1#}, KJAVO Jayakody², and NM Ranasinghe³

¹General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka

²General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka

³General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka

<38-bte-0018@kdu.ac.lk>

Abstract— *Blended learning is an educational model which makes use of both traditional face-to-face classroom settings and online learning environment. Blended learning approach provides more freedom to adjust the learning process according to learner needs. With the advancement of modern technology, blended learning uses a variety of new ways that can optimize the maximum benefits of traditional teaching methods. In the English Language Teaching (ELT) field, blended learning can be successfully used in several ways in teaching and when giving formative feedback. Formative feedback is an ongoing process which makes learners reflect on their own work and evaluate their learning and providing formative feedback on students' writing drafts increases their confidence and develop better writing practices. This study aims to analyze a secondary English language textbook to determine the extent to which it incorporates blended learning aspects to provide formative feedback on writing. The study also aims to provide suggestions on effectively integrating blended learning aspects and formative feedback into textbooks. The methodology employed in this study involves a textbook analysis which carefully examined the content of the material. Various aspects of blended learning, such as the inclusion of online resources, interactive activities, multimedia materials, and opportunities for self-directed learning, are examined. Also, the analysis identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook in relation to formative feedback aspect and highlights areas where improvements can be made. Such suggestions are based on best practices and emerging trends in blended learning pedagogy and they provide practical guidance to educators.*

Keywords— **ELT, Blended learning, Formative feedback, Textbook**

I. INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, blended learning has become an umbrella term in the field of education. According to Graham (2006), blended learning is “a learning system which combines face-to-face instruction with computer-

mediated instruction” (p. 05). This approach is also known as “hybrid learning”. Garrison & Kanuka (2004) define blended learning as “the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (p. 96). The blended learning approach is widely used in educational contexts and has become more popular as a result of the COVID -19 pandemic and it is used in some Sri Lankan universities and educational institutions too. This approach serves distinctively in the education field due to the convenience of its implementation. It is believed to enhance learner engagement and help them to achieve their learning goals easily.

In blended learning, learners can be exposed to both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. Synchronous learning refers to the teaching and learning that happens where learners are learning in a real-time classroom setting and it can be either a face-to-face setting or a virtual platform such as web conferencing on Zoom/Teams (Bower et al., 2015). Asynchronous learning is where learning happens outside the class time, and learners can learn from anywhere and anytime. There is no real-time classroom, and all the content needed is already made available for learners (Martin & Oyarzun, 2017). Combined synchronous and asynchronous learning features maximize the benefits of learning in a blended learning approach. For example, asynchronous option provides the learners an opportunity to work on their own (e.g., researching, collecting information, and writing individually), which increases their critical thinking ability, creativity, and autonomy. It also makes learners ready for the synchronous class. In the synchronous class, they can discuss/share what they have learned, which increases their critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Chou, 2002).

II. USE OF ONLINE TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

According to Kaya (2015) integrating a Virtual Language Environment (VLE) into the English language teaching procedure maximizes the benefits of learning conditions

from the constructivist perspective. Integration of different kinds of activities on the VLE or other online platforms allows students to develop different skills (Castañeda & Arcila, 2012). Castañeda & Arcila (2012, p.78) note that "...activities designed to be used with technology can provide students interactivity and, at the same time, can enhance critical thinking, creative thinking, research skills, and social skills." A VLE can self-directed learning content available on other platforms such as YouTube, Quizlet, and Duolingo. Tools such as DingTalk, Hangouts Meet, Teams, Skype, WeChat Work, Padlet, WhatsApp, and Zoom also can be integrated into the VLE.

Since most of the online resources in Internet content are based on the genre of text and students' materials and activities are done online, there is always a strong element of reading practice. There are vast resources of varied, interesting material on many different levels of language, and it is only up to teachers to make use of it for the benefit of their learners in order to develop their reading comprehension. In order to incorporate the technology into teaching plans, language teachers are seeking innovative teaching methods and have become increasingly interested in recent developments in modern technology which support the diversity in language learning methods and the vast amount of information linked by hypertext on the Web. It is invaluable, especially for self-regulated learners and they are given the freedom to encourage in "manage the learning process independently and to explore linked pieces of information nonsequentially on the basis of their personal preferences and needs" (Son, 1998: p. 121). Most of the Internet sites with various audio materials, online Text-to-Speech (TTS) software, and readymade or teacher-prepared audio exercises contribute to developing pronunciation awareness and skills of the learners and it is very useful for both teachers and learners in a language classroom. When creating pronunciation practice materials, the most common teaching method used in prevalent language education begins with sound discrimination and articulation, moves on to longer complex phrases, and concludes with communicative tasks or dialogues which are intended to practice language production in a target discourse. (Krajka, 2007). Making a quick search on a search engine can provide teachers and learners with class syllabi from primary school to university level with lecture notes, homework tasks (and answers), assessments, questionnaires, and video lectures which are available for free. It seems that the usefulness of online tools and resources may also promote the dissemination of high-quality materials for free and contribute to equalising the field for those who have been underprivileged till now in terms of education. Having a proper awareness of online tools and resources may even lead to greater competency towards learners and teachers in creating inclusive learning environments in their language classrooms. Teachers need

knowledge and competence regarding online tools and resource possibilities in order to encourage learners' decisions about the most suitable technological tool and resource. Not only that, but teachers should also be able to fulfil learners' needs and accessibility requirements of the online tools and resources that they use in their language learning classrooms.

III. IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

Despite the increasing popularity and integration of blended ELT classrooms in Sri Lanka, there is a notable lack of comprehensive research exploring the effectiveness and implementation of using blended learning to promote formative feedback specifically focused on writing skills in the English language curriculum in Sri Lanka. While numerous studies have investigated the impact of blended learning approaches and formative feedback in various educational contexts, there remains a lack of empirical research that specifically addresses how a blended ELT classroom environment promotes the utilization of formative feedback strategies in order to enhance students' writing proficiency. Also, there is a lack of research on its effective integration within the school curriculum for secondary-level students in Sri Lanka, particularly in the context of blended ELT classrooms. This research gap hinders the development of evidence-based pedagogical practices and may limit the potential for optimizing language learning outcomes in this specific context (Pushpakumara, 2022). This research gap has been formed due to the lack of knowledge about effectively developing and integrating formative feedback techniques into the blended ELT curriculum to meet the specific requirements, language proficiency levels, and cultural identities of secondary-level students in Sri Lanka. There is also a lack of research into the difficulties and opportunities that teachers encounter when implementing formative feedback on writing in a blended learning environment. Therefore, a deeper investigation into the curriculum design, lesson delivery, and learning outcomes of providing formative feedback on writing within the framework of a blended ELT classroom in Sri Lanka is empowered to inform educators and policymakers to improve the quality of English language education in the secondary level of schools in the country (Indrarathne & McCulloch, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the most appropriate formative feedback approaches, digital tools, and instructional strategies that are compatible with the national curriculum and meet the specific learner needs in blended ELT classrooms in secondary education in Sri Lanka.

A comprehensive study done by Gunawardana (2015) presented valuable insights into Sri Lankan government school English language textbooks. According to this study, Teacher's Guides available for the primary level

English textbooks encourage teachers to give feedback on students' performances but it does not encourage teachers to use blended learning tools in the process of giving feedback. Not only when giving feedback, but also the study examined that primary level English textbooks does not encourage any use of blended learning tools in the process of language teaching and learning.

Many studies in this area have been done based on the higher education field (Karunanayaka et al., 2021; Liyanagunawardena et al., 2014) and there is a lack of studies that have been published on the topic of blended learning integration in the secondary level textbooks in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, the study aims to address the following research questions.

- A. *How well grade 7 English language textbook incorporate strategies for blended learning and formative feedback on students' writing?*
- B. What are the suggestions for integrating formative feedback on writing in the school curriculum for secondary-level students in the blended ELT classroom in Sri Lanka?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized textbook analysis in order to obtain data which systematically analysed the content and instructional design. Using this systematic analysis, the study has analysed Grade 7 English Pupils' Book, Workbook, and Teacher's Guide, focusing on their content and pedagogical strategies in order to address the research questions. Additionally, a thorough content analysis has been done through conducting a keyword search on the selected materials.

V. FINDINGS

The study has utilized textbook analysis in order to obtain data. Using this systematic analysis, the study has analysed Grade 7 English Pupils' Book (Education Publications Department, 2019), Workbook (Education Publications Department, 2020), and Teacher's Guide (National Institute of Education, 2016). The Pupils' book contains ten units and among them, the study has focused on the writing activities in Units 2, 3, and 6 where some writing activities are found. The title of the pupils' book unit 2 is "Friends Indeed" and activity 3 is a poster designing activity. According to the activity instructions, it encourages students to collaboratively work with their peers but it does not encourage peer feedback or the use of online tools. Activity 6 of unit 3 titled "Pleasure" is about constructing a story according to the given clues. This activity enhances the creativity of the learners but it does not encourage any peer feedback or use of online

resources. Unit 6, activity 4, "Better Safe Than Sorry" is about formal letter writing and it does not indicate giving any peer feedback or use of online tools as in other writing activities mentioned above. The research findings also found that there is not any aspect of formative feedback or use of online tools in the grade 7 English Workbook.

The study has also analysed the Teacher's Guide of grade 7 English syllabus to see even if teachers are given any instructions on providing formative feedback. But the Teacher's Guide also does not provide any tips related to formative feedback or using online tools. A keyword search was conducted on the Teacher's guide and the terms such as "feedback, blended learning, and online tools" did not appear even on one occasion. The analysis highlights that these concepts have not been taken into consideration in preparing ELT materials for grade 7 students. Guide in order to address the research questions.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Effective integration of formative feedback and the use of blended tools in the curriculum at the secondary level can provide students with valuable insights into their writing strengths and areas for improvement. In order to effectively integrate blended learning strategies to provide formative feedback into secondary level textbooks, curriculum developers should consider inculcating the following suggestions.

When designing the curriculum for secondary-level students, syllabus designers can utilize a system which allows learners to track their learning progress by entering their scores. In order to implement this, the Teacher's Guide should instruct teachers to give scores for activities in pupils' book. In the pupils' book, there are some activities in which students need to listen to audio clips and then answer the questions. Although there are such activities, teachers are not provided with a DVD which includes the audio files. So, as a suggestion, the teacher's guide should come with a DVD including audio files and the audio files also should share among class students by the teacher. Teachers can use cloud uploading web tools for this purpose. The pupils' book should include online assessments, quizzes, and exercises which students need to use computers in order to complete. For this, teachers need to allocate one English period in a week to be held in the computer lab in school to make students use the computers to do the activities. Such activities can design using web tools such as Padlet, Write & Improve, and Kaizena in order to provide immediate feedback for students right after they have completed the task.

It is also really important to inculcate activities that encourage students to provide feedback to their peers. Curriculum developers can include tasks where students

need to review and provide constructive feedback on their peers' work. As mentioned above, for such tasks students can use web tools in order to provide feedback. Also, teachers should be given a comprehensive guide on how to provide formative feedback in a blended classroom effectively. The guidelines should include strategies and techniques for personalized feedback using digital tools, error correction, and encouraging students to reflect on their learning process. Providing feedback will help students understand their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, the feedback rubrics should be included in the pupils' book as well as in the Teachers' Guide with detailed explanations. Due to these rubrics being used by grade 7 students, they need to be simple to comprehend.

By utilizing online platforms that support writing activities will facilitate teachers in providing constructive feedback and correcting written assignments of students. In order to successfully implement this, the Teachers' Guide should include guidelines on how to effectively use online tools for this purpose and also the guide should provide links for teachers that can be used to give feedback. Not only that, in order to provide feedback on learners' speaking tasks, teachers can record the feedback and send it to learners in a blended classroom and this enables teachers to assess learners' pronunciation and speaking skills while providing personalized feedback. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate listening and speaking tasks into secondary level curriculum which can be completed using online tools. While doing such activities, learners may feel less motivated to use online tools to complete the task. For this, the Teachers' Guide should provide tips for teachers to make students interested towards the tasks and make them successfully use online tools.

IV. Encouraging Peer Feedback in a Secondary Level Blended Classroom

According to study findings, grade 7 English pupils' book does not encourage the use of online tools to provide peer feedback. Due to this reason, teachers can implement the following strategies to encourage peer feedback in a secondary level classroom.

In order to help students to understand the purpose and structure in the process of peer feedback, teachers can provide clear guidelines and expectations for giving and receiving feedback. They can also provide secondary level students with specific criteria or rubrics to assess their peers' work. Another strategy is to incorporate peer feedback into collaborative activities where students have the opportunity to provide feedback. Moreover, teachers can model effective feedback techniques in order to facilitate peer feedback. Also, integrating online platforms such as Padlet, Write & Improve, and Kaizena can enhance the convenience of peer feedback in a blended classroom.

Such tools enable students to provide feedback asynchronously, allowing them for flexible and increased participation. As blended learning continues to evolve, incorporating peer feedback strategies empowers students and prepares them for success in both their academic and professional lives. These strategies should be included in the Teachers' Guide with detailed explanations on how to successfully implement them.

These suggestions and strategies can be utilized in order to effectively integrate the use of blended learning and formative feedback techniques in secondary level ELT classrooms in Sri Lanka.

VII. CONCLUSION

Blended learning environments are necessary for innovative teaching and learning. With the advancement of technological development, various web tools have emerged that help both teachers and students. Some web tools help teachers to provide effective formative feedback on learners' written work. Using such tools, not only teachers but also students will get the opportunity to provide feedback. Automated feedback tools such as Write & Improve facilitate learner autonomy and help with learners' ongoing progress in their language learning. Also, teachers can maintain a portfolio based on learners' written performances which helps teachers to monitor learner progress. The use of online tools in secondary level ELT classrooms offers the potential for interactive and engaging feedback methods, enhancing student motivation, and participation. Inculcating appropriate suggestions and strategies on the use of blended learning tools will be influential in the development of secondary level ELT field in Sri Lanka.

REFERENCES

- Bower, M., Dalgarno, B., Kennedy, G. E., Lee, M. J., & Kenney, J. (2015) Design and implementation factors in blended synchronous learning environments: Outcomes from a cross-case analysis. *Computers & Education*, 86, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2015.03.006>
- Castañeda, J.E., & Arcila, F.C. (2012) Through teachers' eyes: the use of virtual classrooms in ELT. *HOW, A Colombian Journal for Teachers of English*, 19(1), 76-92. <https://www.howjournalcolombia.org/index.php/how/article/view/39>
- Chou, C. C. (2002) A comparative content analysis of student interaction in synchronous and asynchronous learning networks. *Proceedings of the 35th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Big Island, HI, USA*, 1795-1803. <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2002.994093>
- Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004) Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *The internet and higher education*, 7(2), 95-105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2004.02.001>

Graham, C. R. (2006) Blended Learning Systems: Definition, Current Trends, and Future Directions, in C. J. Bonk & C. R. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of blended learning: Global perspectives, local designs*, Pfeiffer, pp. 3-21.

Gunawardana, A. A. (2015). A Critical Evaluation of Sri Lankan Government School Textbooks. Lambert Academic Publishing.

Indrarathne, B., & McCulloch, S. (2022) *English language teaching, learning and assessment in Sri Lanka: Policies and practices in the school education system, ELT learning and assessment in Sri Lanka*, British Council, Sri Lanka. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/2022-04/ELT%20learning%20and%20assessment%20in%20Sri%20Lanka_April%202022_new2.pdf

Karunanayaka, S. P., Weerakoon, W. M. S., Wijesekera, H. D., Nawarathna, N. M. R. K., Ramathass, P., & Weerasinghe, M. D. B. P. (2021). Towards Digital Thinking and Practices: Experiences of Sri Lankan Teachers and Students. *Open Praxis*, 13(4), 365-377. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.485439132626202>

Kaya, H. (2015) Blending technology with constructivism: Implications for an ELT classroom. *Teaching English with Technology*, 15(1), 3-13. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1140571>

Krajka, J. (2007). English Language Teaching in the Internet-Assisted Environment—Issues in the Use of the WEB as a Teaching Medium. Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press.

Liyanagunawardena, T. R., Adams, A. A., Rassool, N., & Williams, S. A. (2014) Blended learning in distance education: Sri Lankan perspective. *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT)*, 10(1), 55-69. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/147446/>

Martin, F., & Oyarzun, B. (2017) Distance learning, in R.E. West (Ed.), *Foundations of Learning and Instructional Design Technology*, EdTech Books, pp. 743-767. <https://doi.org/10.59668/3>

Pushpakumara, P. B. S. L. (2022) Peer-assessment: Sri Lankan English as a Second Language Teachers' Perception. *Journal of Management, Social Sciences and Humanities*, 3(1), 91-101.

Son, J. B. (1998). Understanding Hypertext: A Discussion for TEFL. *English Teaching*, 53, 113-124.



exploration by participating in both local and international research conferences. Thashmira Rajapaksha possesses a keen interest in contributing to the field of TESOL through extensive research endeavours.

Oshadhi Jayakody is currently enrolled as a third-year undergraduate in BA in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at General Sir Jhon Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka. She consistently demonstrates a strong work ethic and a genuine passion for learning. She fascinates by various



subjects, particularly English language learning and teaching, Inclusive teaching practices, and research methods. Moreover, she is poised to significantly impact her academic and personal endeavours.

Nethmi Ranasinghe is a final year undergraduate of BA in Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka. She delights for engage in research work and is willing to contribute to both local and international research projects. She devotes herself to the field of TESOL and observes opportunities for research work to explore new knowledge and contribute to the field.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Thashmira Rajapaksha is an undergraduate student pursuing a BA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages degree program at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka. With a passion for research, he actively engages in various research

projects. He has demonstrated his enthusiasm for academic