Impact of Blended Instruction on Reading Comprehension for Urdu Language Students

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the present study was to look into what happened when a certain strategy was used with mixed learning strategies like blended learning module with a certain group of people, which is an educational technique that integrates online and conventional instructional methods, often used in the domains of language education for native speakers, non-native speakers, and those studying language as a foreign language. This study looked at whether or not a mixed approach to education may improve students' reading skills in the classroom. The results of this study suggest that students' reading skills in Urdu as a local language might benefit greatly from the use of blended learning.

Keywords: Language learning; Urdu; oral competencies; blended learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are four skills in every language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The third of four skills is reading. After developing their speaking and listening skills, learners were ready to read the assigned text. Comprehensive reading is necessary to build a mental image of the words, phrases, and grammatical constructions of a language. Understanding and interpreting written language, drawing meaning from it, and making sense of the data offered in a paragraph or document, all are aspects of reading comprehension. It is a fundamental skill in education and daily life. It enables individuals to gain knowledge, communicate well, and engage with wide-ranging written materials in books and articles. At the human level, Individual differences in reading comprehension issues can be attributed to things like age, prior reading experience, linguistic ability, and cognitive capabilities. Language aspects like Vocabulary, Complex Sentence Structures, Inference, Background Knowledge, Attention Span, Reading Speed, Motivation, and Interest etc can attributed to challenges in reading comprehension. These issues can be tackled by employing appropriate technologies and innovative practices. The blended instructional approach is an emerging way to maximize the result of instruction. It is more effective than the traditional method, [1,2]. This kind of environment found significant improvement in reading proficiency, Alnoori and Obaid, Ghazizadeh and Fatemipour [3]. There is enough study on reading comprehension in the English language, but not nearly enough on reading comprehension in the Urdu language. The current study is a little attempt to demonstrate the significance of blended instruction for improving the reading comprehension of Urdu language learners.

1.1 Introduction to Blended Learning

A method of teaching known as "blended learning" that mixes the more conventional in-person instruction received in a classroom setting with the more modern online e-learning strategies. Blended learning means different things to different people (need-based). It is an instructional move and putting some online format to instructions. Scholars [4,5,6] tried to define it as integrating virtual learning with elements of face-to-face teaching. Garrison & Vaughan, [7] called it a "thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences".

Renowned scholar of blended scholar Graham [8], defined it as a mixture of face-to-face instructor-led and self-paced online learning. The purpose is to maximize the potential of the learning experience by combining the beneficial aspects of the two different methodologies. Learners benefit from this paradigm because it combines the advantages of online learning, such as instant, individualized feedback and flexibility, with the advantages of face-to-face education, such as social connection and engagement. The particular mix might vary, with some classes giving more online components than others; nonetheless, the essential component is the planned integration of both venues in order to encourage and improve learning and Teaching in the classroom.

Blended learning is not an entirely unique concept, but it has evolved through time. with the integration of technology within the field of education. During its first phases, blended learning included the integration of traditional classroom materials, such as books, with supplementary resources in the form of audio or video cassettes. With the advent and increasing accessibility of the internet, online resources have assumed a more prominent position in the realm of education.

The early 2000s saw a notable transition with the emergence of Learning Management Systems (LMS) like as Blackboard and Moodle, which experienced a surge in popularity. These platforms facilitated the provision of educational materials, exams, and feedback inside a digital environment by educators. With the progression of technology, including the emergence of smartphones and more interactive online platforms, the convergence of offline and online learning has become more cohesive and interconnected. In the Oxford Dictionary, the description of BL is *"A style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media as well as traditional face-to-face teaching."* Opinions on what constitutes a successful blended approach to education are all over the map. The Sloan Consortium, which published a study on the benefits and prospects of blended education, described hybrid courses, which effectively combine online components with conventional in-person class activities in a deliberate and educationally beneficial way that *"integrate online with traditional face-to-face class activities in a planned, pedagogically valuable manner."* There may be varying perspectives among educators on the criteria for

determining what constitutes "pedagogically valuable.

So, we can say that "Blended learning, as the term suggests means using both conventional classroom teaching techniques and modern forms of electronic communication to achieve instructional goals. This integration of in-person and online instruction aims to "make learning more unified, individual, and adaptable for students."

2. URDU LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

The process of language acquisition in India is characterized by its intricate and diverse nature, mostly owing to the extensive linguistic variety present within the nation. India is the domicile of 22 languages and Urdu is one of them that have been officially recognized, along with a multitude of dialects. It is a normal occurrence for many individuals in India to acquire multilingual or even trilingual proficiency throughout their upbringing. Furthermore, the acquisition of an extra language as a second language (L2) or third language (L3) is prevalent, especially inside formal educational environments.

Urdu, a language with strong ties to the cultural and historical fabric of India, can trace its roots back to the Indian subcontinent. Urdu, being the official language of Pakistan and one of the 22 officially recognized languages in India, has a distinct position and exhibits distinctive dynamics in terms of its acquisition within the Indian context. The Utilization of Urdu as a Secondary Language in India. The historical and cultural significance of Urdu lies in its development within the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the Delhi area. This language has evolved through assimilating vocabulary from several linguistic sources, such as Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic. Many schools teach Urdu, particularly in Muslim-majority areas. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Telangana, Karnataka etc. have Urdu-medium schools. It is provided as a second or third language elsewhere. Urdu poetry and prose (like ghazals) are famous. Many Indians, regardless of religion or geography, study Urdu to access its immense literary resources. Non-native speakers acquire Urdu to better connect with Urdu-speaking populations for commercial, social, and inter-community weddings.

3. READING COMPREHENSION

As stated by Anderson [9], the act of reading encompasses a dynamic and proficient process in which individuals actively interact with written materials to derive significance from the intended information. Several models have been presented, and they may be categorized into three primary classifications: bottom-up, top-down, and interactive. The development of precise and fluent speaking skills is crucial for Urdu learners as it significantly impacts their total proficiency in the foreign language (Goh, 2007). Reading has prioritised comprehension because students are exposed to a variety of languages, which encourages them to respond and identify the text's overt and hidden meaning of the text. Krashen [10] emphasised the importance of understandable input. Researchers concentrated on the significance of the mental process that transforms input into intake. Comprehending the text while implies the construction of meaning, inferring a written message, decision to hold, skimming for the main ideas, and scanning the text for main information. Moreover, it has been shown to have a positive correlation with Academic accomplishment in one's studies and or one's career (Saunders & O'Brien, 2006). We can further clarify what is reading skill.

Vocabulary and structural knowledge of the concerned language are important indicators of reading ability, with a second language Urdu. Formal structure knowledge of the Urdu language enhances readers' comprehension ability by enhancing text organization and structure of the Urdu language. Automatic recognition of central ideas and sense of words abilities are crucial for fluent reading, according to cognitive and educational scientists. The subject matter, which comprises subject knowledge, improves text comprehension for Urdu language reading. Synthesis, understanding and assessment abilities are crucial for reading and are intimately linked to listening and speaking activities. Metacognitive skills and cognitive processes like attention, language knowledge, information synthesis, memory, perception, and problem-solving are essential to enhance.

It is important for educators to prioritize reading activities as the central emphasis throughout the process of developing reading abilities. In a more precise manner, it is recommended that educators prioritize reading as the fundamental ability to be emphasized for educational growth. Subsequently, they should integrate supplementary skills and information within the framework of reading teaching to enhance its effectiveness.

3.1 Blended Learning and Oral Language Skills

When it comes to learning a new language, blended learning has been shown to be very successful because it has:

a) **Available Diverse Resources:** Learners can access a variety of resources, from traditional textbooks to online videos, podcasts, and interactive exercises. For instance, a student might attend a regular class to learn grammar and then practice listening skills using online platforms like Duolingo or Babbel.
b) **Self-paced Learning:** Online components offer students the flexibility to learn at their own pace, revisiting challenging topics or advancing quickly through familiar ones. This can be particularly useful in language learning where students often vary in their proficiency levels.
c) **Interactive Engagement:** Online platforms can offer interactive exercises, quizzes, and games that make language learning more engaging. Tools like Rosetta Stone use image-word association games to improve vocabulary retention.
d) **Global Interaction:** One of the unique benefits for language learners is the ability to interact with native speakers or other learners from around the world. Platforms like Tandem or HelloTalk connect learners for language exchange, allowing them to practice their conversation skills in real time.

e) **Immediate Feedback:** Digital platforms can provide instant feedback, helping language learners correct their mistakes in real time. This immediate reinforcement aids in cementing the correct language use.

Finally, blended learning makes use of the best features of both analogue and digital instructional approaches. In the context of language learning, it offers learners a rich tapestry of resources and experiences, making the journey of language acquisition more engaging, flexible, and effective.

4. HOW TO IMPROVE URDU LANGUAGE READING COMPETENCIES THROUGH BLENDED LEARNING

The reading skills of Urdu language students need to be improved in a number of ways, that specifically address the acquisition of vocabulary, comprehension skills, fluency, and the unique problems posed by the Urdu script. The following is a selection of effective tactics and strategies. And especially blended learning, which merges online digital resources with traditional classroom methods, offers a plethora of possibilities to enhance Urdu language learners' reading competencies. Here's how you can use blended learning for this purpose:

4.1 Digital Learning Platforms

Use platforms that offer structured Urdu language courses. These platforms often have reading modules, quizzes, interactive exercises, and progress tracking.

Overall Best App to Learn Urdu	Pimsleur
Best Beginner **Urdu App**	Mondly
Best App to Practice **Listening**	UrduPod101
Best App for **Urdu Tutors**	italki
Best App to Find **Native Speakers**	Preply
Best Urdu **Vocabulary App**	Memrise
Best App to Learn Urdu for **Free**	Learn Urdu Free
Best Urdu App with a **Structured Course**	Mango Languages
Best App to Learn Urdu **Writing**	Learn To Write Urdu

Fig. 1. Some online platform to learn Urdu online
Source: https://www.langoly.com/urdu-learning-apps/

4.2 E-Books and Digital Libraries

Provide access to online Urdu books catering to different proficiency levels. Highlighting tools and in-built dictionaries can aid in vocabulary building.

a) Lucknow Digital Library
b) 32,000 Urdu Books "Digital Library of India".
c) Punjab-e-Library
d) Urdu E-Library and Urdu Digital Library, NCPUL
e) Urdu Books | Rekhta, rekhta.org
f) Books Library | Online Book Database | eBooks
g) bookslibrary.net
h) Gufhtugu - Urdu Books Library on the App Store - Apple

4.3 Interactive Apps

Leverage language learning apps that emphasize reading. These apps often gamify the learning process, making it engaging and fun. These apps are categorized in different heads. Some major heads are discussed here. Online Language Exchange: Platforms like "Tandem" or "Hello Talk" allow learners to interact with native speakers. They can read and interpret written messages, enhancing their reading skills in real-world contexts. Video Content: Use Urdu videos with subtitles. Watching and reading simultaneously can enhance understanding and contextualize vocabulary. Online Reading Comprehension Quizzes: Post-reading sessions, direct students to online quizzes. Immediate feedback can help in pinpointing areas of improvement. Discussion Forums and Online Communities: Engage learners in online forums where they can discuss stories or articles they've read, ask questions, and share insights Online Literary Circles: Use platforms like Zoom or Google Meet to organize group reading sessions where learners can read out loud, discuss interpretations, and ask questions. Digital Flashcards: Platforms like Quizlet or Anki allow learners to create their own digital flashcards. These can be shared among peers, promoting collaborative learning. Podcasts & Audiobooks: Urdu podcasts or audiobooks can be integrated into lessons. Learners can first listen to the content, then read the transcript, comparing comprehension. Feedback through Digital Portfolios: Ask students to maintain a digital portfolio of their readings. This could be blog entries, summaries, or reflections. Provide feedback directly on the platform. In-class activities Based on Online Content are another thing in a blended setting. It Start in-class sessions by discussing a digital content piece that students were assigned to read. In-person discussions can clarify doubts and deepen comprehension. Under this type of blended environment, three steps have to be taken: Simulations and Role-Playing Games: Online platforms offer simulations that can be tailored to reading exercises. For instance, a game might require reading clues in Urdu to solve a mystery. Virtual Reality (VR) Experiences: For advanced learners, VR can immerse them in an Urdu-speaking environment, with signs, books, and newspapers to read, making the experience dynamic and contextual. Consistent Tracking and Assessment: Use Learning Management Systems (LMS) to track students' reading progress, administer tests, and provide feedback. By seamlessly integrating these online and offline strategies, blended learning can offer Urdu language learners diverse and dynamic opportunities to hone their reading competencies. It's crucial, however, to ensure that the digital resources are appropriately levelled and relevant to the learners' needs.

5. CONCLUSION

The use of blended learning has been associated with a rise in student motivation and engagement of Urdu reading competencies. The integration of traditional and digital educational methods fosters an atmosphere that promotes communication among Urdu language learners both in and out of the classroom. Numerous researches have shown that this instructional approach facilitates the learning of reading language skills and enhances student engagement and interaction. In conclusion, empirical evidence indicates that the educational experience and outcomes of people learning to read Urdu might be improved by the use of blended learning approaches. Urdu language learners often exhibit favourable opinions and attitudes towards integrated learning as a teaching method for the Urdu language. These positive viewpoints arise from several sources, such as enhancing students' linguistic abilities in interactive and engaging environments, facilitating the learning process, and offering possibilities for autonomous Urdu language study.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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