

Blended Learning: An Effective Tool to Teach Presentation Skills

Sonu Joseph, Akkara Sherine

Abstract: Higher education in the past decade in India has been trying to evolve into a world of actual real time learning wherein institutions have been encouraged to delve into practicing new teaching paradigms and methodologies. This transformation comes in the wake of the end consumer of technical institutions: the industry, wanting a more creative, innovative, thinking, strongly communicative workforce. Therefore, looking for a more individualistic, change-oriented and opinionated individual. The age old method of lecture or face to face interaction does not become irrelevant but needs to be in semblance with the present environment of learning and teaching. In today's world technology has a definitive part in the lives of students be it in the classroom or outside therefore the teaching plans need to have technology and learners need to be adept in them for technology based skill is a valid and mandatory industry skill (Pearson & Thomas, 2002). In coming years as learners and the faculty are going to use and create a semblance of technology it is bound to grow more in the classroom as learning tools. (Dahlstrom, Walker, & Dziuban, 2013). The paper is a study on engineering students following the strict timeline of the academic calendar, to deduce if it is an achievable target to develop student interest and level up their performance in a sustained and consistent way.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Teaching-Learning Process, Skill Development, Presentation, Speaking.

I. THE CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE OF INDIA

India in most relatable and undisputed terms can be described as a land of byzantine semblance of ethnic diversity, religions, customs, philosophy, art and culture, political currents. With these inherent layered complexities India has evolved its hierarchy in social, economical, academic, geo-political frame. Into the seventh decade of her independence the chasm of economic division is mammoth. Rousseau in 1754 wrote of two kinds of inequality in human society one that is bearing to the physical aspects for which not much can be done as it is taken care of by nature and the second aspect is that of social standing, wealth, uber lifestyles, special privileges owing to the above mentioned, (Rousseau: On the Origin of Inequality: First Part 1754). B.G. Tilak in an article published in the year 1980 wrote about the inequality that stems from economic division directly affects the educational opportunities and growth of a student. The same thought was again propagated by Manas

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Chakravarty in an online article "Not only do vast numbers of young Indians face a dearth of decent jobs, it now turns out that many of them are unemployable too". That's the stark message from the Annual Status of Education Report (The Class Divide in the Indian Education System, 2018)

The quality of education presented and received has always been questioned be it curriculum, medium of instruction, content or content delivery. It is paramount that we comprehend this background for this research paper as higher education institutions providing technical education become a converging base where these divergent classes meet with their inherent intrinsic complexities associated with learning. The medium of instruction in most of the higher education technical institutions is English which for most of the students is a second language and according to Sharma. R Teaching english language in India has lost its momentum and the result can be seen in the performance of students be it K12 or graduates they are neither able to present all the four key skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking appropriately. The reason may be the importance is given grammar and only grammar while the more creative content is left to students and their choice.

These learners from various regional educational and socio-economic backgrounds converge in centres of higher education to teach them English becomes a herculean task as every learner will have their own learning pace, performance orientation and a variant language background knowledge. Aspiring Minds, a company that focuses on assessing student employability, after having surveyed 55,000 students in 2011 found that not even 3% were employable directly without further training by information technology (IT) companies. They also said that about 78% of those surveyed struggled in the English language. (British Council, 2012) Learners with professional degrees have difficulty communicating in English. The syllabus provides only a set of platitudinous "grammatical structures with a few stereotyped drilling activities." This might cater to their writing and reading need but they have no developmental use in speaking or listening skills. World Bank study revealed that those who can speak English fluently in India are likely to get 34% more wages than those who cannot. It makes English a decisive factor

The value of Technical courses offered and completed is when the learner is able to get employment and perform well in the related industry, therefore employability and skills associated with employability also have been incorporated in tailor made courses as requested by the industry when designing the curriculum.

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Teaching English in centres of higher education have posed some persistent problems; a] resistant and lackadaisical learning attitude and behaviour of students towards English, b] inadequacy of thought and creativity in assignments, c] absence of participation in classroom activities, d] late or no submission of assignments, e] the range and the trend of improvement among the consistent and non consistent performers is exponential.

The experiment enlisted in this paper was a study conducted on learners of third year who were being offered a course in an engineering college. The constant change in learning needs, the above mentioned problems and the industry based curriculum framework all needed more than traditional teaching methods. Therefore the idea of introducing blended learning into the classroom and to gauge the performance pattern and trends that will evolve eventually.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

When discussing the learning patterns and creating a blueprint for teaching students it becomes paramount to understand the philosophies and theories that has created education into the present system of hierarchy. These theories have substantiated, elucidated that learning is a complex individual process and every learner tries to find a mean path in the system he is involved in and gain understanding.

Fifty years of experience have taught us that knowledge does not result from a mere recording of observation without a structuring activity on the part of the subject. [...]. Knowledge proceeds from action, and all action that is repeated or generalized through application to new objects engenders by this very fact a 'scheme', that is a kind of practical concept (Piaget, 1980, p. 23).

Vygotsky (1978) states: "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals." (p57).

On the basis of the best information now available, it seems reasonable to suppose that a child cannot help constructing a particular sort of transformational grammar to account for the data presented to him, any more than he can control his perception of solid objects or his attention to line and angle. Thus it may well be that the general features of language structure reflect, not so much the course of one's experience, but rather the general character of one's capacity to acquire knowledge-in the traditional sense, one's innate ideas and innate principles. (Noam Chomsky, 1965)

"To Piaget, the child is by itself constructing meaning and structure from its own action on the surroundings. To Vygotsky, language and all other knowledge and skills are developed in the dialogue between the child and the surroundings, while to Chomsky the child is born with a certain ability to acquire language and meaning." (Rosenbaum, 2012)

The works of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Chomsky have

debated and formulated their own ideas about learning and language. Even though each of them presented a different view on the subject on thinking, learning and language acquisition they acceded to some issues like:

a. that concepts are more fundamental than language

b. that thinking is a cognitive process that encompasses more than language - that language is only important for this process for two reasons: i) to make the process or results conscious. ii) to make it possible to transfer the results to other people or to paper. (Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini, 1980)

In the introduction of this paper it has already been stated that social conditions predominantly affect the learners in terms of learning curve as well as performance. But if these learners from varied backgrounds are put together then learning will happen more cohesively. According to Vygotskij, learning can only take place in what he called zo-ped 'the zone of proximal development', that is on the borders of what the learner already can and knows (Vygotsky, 1934). These zones will overlap conditionally in peer groups, and as students involve themselves with each other in the ambit of a classroom 'the zone of proximal development' will move. When discussing the learning patterns and creating a blueprint for teaching students it becomes paramount to understand the philosophies and theories that has created education into the present system of hierarchy. These theories have substantiated, elucidated that learning is a complex individual process and every learner tries to find a mean path in the system he is involved in and gain understanding.

According to Piaget his work in the field of education has shown him that observations recordings will not bear fruit without a planned lesson or activity for the learner or the object being studied. A scheme is created which can be enforced as a concept and it is this concept that can be called knowledge which a learner performs and is able to repeat and use it in ways and methods in his daily activities. (Piaget, 1980, p. 23).

Vygotsky (1978) states The development of the child is double faceted in terms of function and comes twice, one is at the social level and the other is at a personal level. The social level happens between people-interpsychological and then inward or personal that is intrapsychological. These functions are employed in paying individual attention, reason and memory and constitution of perceptions.

The consistent experiments to understand how language is formulated in the mind of a learner has yielded results that tell us beyond reasonable doubt that a child is quick at formulating grammatical structures and understands their transformational aspect on the knowledge that is given to him just as he sees and creates the lines and angular references of the objects. Therefore, according to Noam Chomsky the aspects of language structures take into account the capacity and the capability of the learner to learn and assimilate knowledge and present it inherent ideas and principles. (Noam Chomsky, 1965)

According to Piaget the child has intrinsic capacity to evolve meaning and structure from his own actions and surroundings. Vygotsky puts forth that notion of language learning and all other



knowledge skills are drawn up through a through discourse between the child and the ambience and according to Chomsky child has the innate ability to acquire language and meaning. (Rosenbaum, 2012)

The works of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Chomsky have debated and formulated their own ideas about learning and language. Even though each of them presented a different view on the subject on thinking, learning and language acquisition they acceded to some issues like:

- a. that beliefs and thoughts are more fundamental than language
- b. that thinking an intellectual process and encircles more than language and language is only important for two reasons: i) to ascertain results or to create a paradigm. ii) to relay information to people or express it on paper. (Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini, 1980)

In the introduction of this paper it has already been stated that social conditions predominantly affect the learners in terms of learning curve as well as performance. But if these learners from varied backgrounds are put together then learning will happen more cohesively. According to Vygotskij, learning takes place in what he called zo-ped the zone of proximal development, that hinges on the fact that the learners' previous knowledge and what he is able to attain. (Vygotsky, 1934). These zones will overlap conditionally in peer groups, and as students involve themselves with each other in the ambit of a classroom 'the zone of proximal development' will move along more effectively than the learner trying to do it all by himself.

A. The tool called e- learning

Christopher Palm has stated that "eLearning shouldn't be a casual joy ride on a Sunday afternoon with the cruise control engaged. The sole purpose of eLearning is to teach."E-Learning is a component of the comprehensive term Technology based Learning (TBL) which includes internet, intranet, any form of broadcast or podcasts. The most common electronic tools presently used are various apps for collaboration and social networking websites, wikis, vlogs, multimedia instructions, webinars etc.

Therefore, in the present scenario of educational ambience face to face instruction provides only one view of the teacher in the classroom and within the time frame of academic schedule the knowledge imparted would be limited. The benefits of introducing technology in higher education as discussed by Koller et al 2008 and in an article published in elearningindustry.com 2018 are:

- Innovative Pedagogical Strategies To Make Learning Sustained.
- Scenario- based learning.
- Story-based learning
- Guided exploration
- Simulation-based learning
- Game-based learning
- Making Just-In-Time learning Acquisition possible thereby making learning not dependent on books, classroom or teacher rather the concept of anywhere anytime.
- Tracking learning results for better performance and

motivation.

- Streamlined, effective and timely dissemination of content and knowledge (Joseph, 2012)

B. Blended Learning: Deriving a mean path

In the article "In the definition of Blended Learning" the blogger states, that is is difficult to define hybrid or blended learning for it varies from educator to educator. In a report on the merits and potential of blended education, the Sloan Consortium defined hybrid courses as those that **"integrate online with traditional face-to-face class activities in a planned, pedagogically valuable manner."** The term "pedagogically valuable," will certainly have educators disagree for the resource point is huge and determining its value will depend on the educator, but the essence is clear: Hybrid education uses online technology not as a supplement, but transform and improve the learning process. (TeachThought 2018)

This is most useful when we gauge the interest of the students and their learning perceptiveness and in accordance to this we are able to modulate our teaching paradigms.

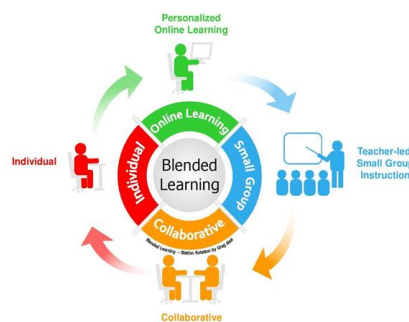


Fig.1 An Overview of Blended Learning (Blended Learning |St. Aloysius Gonzaga School.)

C. Four Elements of Blended Learning

Four Elements of Blended Learning Graham (2006) has suggested that we can describe the elements of blended, online, and face to face learning across four key dimensions: Time, Fidelity, Space, and Humanness. The comprehension of these four key factors can help teachers across learning forums to maintain focus and use various learning stratagems in the classroom for student groups that are varied with varied learning capacities. This will not only help with the consistent issues that are faced in classroom with different and unique learning and ethnic backgrounds but merge these differences into a more reasonable resourceful and focussed class.

These key elements exist in traditional teaching method but become more important when some control of time, space is to be in complete control of the learner thus maintaining a very democratic ambience of teaching.

Time: It is a challenge to keep the allocation of time and decide as to how many hours the student is going to be online and will be able to complete the full course structure. It is therefore very important that the teacher fully emphasis the importance of time in the purview of completion of understanding the content fulfilling the assignment requirements.

Fidelity: Within the construct of fidelity, Graham (2006) suggests a continuum ranging from “High” (i.e., instructional experiences that engage all of the senses) to “Low” (i.e. learning experiences that are entirely text-based). The acknowledgement on the factor that the instructional material to be presented to the learners need to have high standards both academically and in presentation so that the experience of the learner is to learn and perform and the outcome needs to be at the higher level. The plethora of devices, content, skills that are presented to the students outside the classroom are innumerable. For a teacher the bar has been set very high for the material needs not only to be academically supreme but even the presentation has to be that of capturing interest. This is a challenge to which educationist across the globe need to rise if we need to suffice the needs of the present generation of learners.

Higher education cannot remain evasive today about learning measures. The exposure that the students are receiving in terms of apps games videos augmented reality is simply scintillating. Whether we like it or not the teachers need to engage students at the same level. Learning today does not need to be a juggernaut principle rather it needs to be broken down into learnable pieces. It is entirely possible to create visually attractive and interactive teaching tools that are engaging and also drive students toward the accomplishment of identified learning outcomes.

Space. The element of space is created and understood in aspects of being real F2F (i.e., “Live”), a mixed reality of F2F/online, and totally online (i.e., “Totally Virtual). The face to face environment and the online environment seem to create an arena of distorted notion that of high touch and hi-tech for face to face and online environment. This idea is and overstated assumption. The key is the faculty and the focus is learning. Therefore the approachability of the faculty to create a relatable and tangible environment is undiluted. Be it face to face or online the faculty should make every effort to build relationships and connections with the students Therefore the more tangible, real and approachable deal comes from the teacher wherein technology still remains a tool.

Humanness. The final element in Graham’s F2F/online continua is humanness. The continuum is configured to distinguish between learning experiences that are delivered by a human (i.e., a faculty member) from those that are delivered by a machine (i.e., computer). Again, there is a subtle stereotype embedded within this continuum. The debate that follows this continuum is online teaching does not have the features of connectivity, humanity and a level of warmth, care and concern are missing. It is paramount to understand that’s the knowledge base the content and the delivery all of that is well planned by the faculty so be it face to face interaction for online teaching module will always have a teacher’s keen focus. The selection of topic, explanation delivery, understanding the feedback, reactions, observations of the learners will all be the work of a teacher, it is here that computer online learning becomes the most effective tool to make students interested and partake in the learning process. (Garner and Oke, Blended Learning: Theoretical Foundations, 2015)

It is validated strongly in classrooms wherein extrinsic motivation plays a key part and an individualistic approach can and is created by sharing, appreciation, validation discussions, opinions, feedback by a teacher in the classroom.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. The Research Design

“There is no longer a four-walled classroom,” says Dr Cecilia Gorla, of Nottingham University’s Language Centre. “Teaching and learning now extends beyond that.”

The advancement of technology has clearly reiterated that the classes can no longer be text-books and teachers they have to grow and include the dynamic development and paradigms associated with learning to evolve a student culture that will thrive in the work environment of jobs where creativity, ingenuity and innovation is expected.

Presentation Skill was a topic that was included in the curriculum after the industry stressed on the point that the engineers joining the industry should be able to talk explain and assert their ideas in the most formidable challenging and invigorative format. Therefore to conduct the study the four key elements of Time, Fidelity, Space and Humanness were kept in mind and the academic pattern semblance was adhered to for a seamless and actual learning experience. The key skills to develop were public speaking and content creation (writing skills).

B. Need Analysis Questionnaire

The plan of action was to first understand the needs of the students who were part of the present educational framework and how they wanted the knowledge to be imparted. Therefore a need analysis questionnaire was prepared which had questions to the family and academic background of the students as well as it sought precise information regarding the content material they wanted to study to what the modalities of teaching that should be included for them in the classroom.

C. Content Creation

Based on the result analysis and grouping the industry requirements resources and content was created for the students. Detailed assignment activities and time schedule and the online time framework were also worked on during the planning stage.

D. In-Class Website

It was clearly comprehended that the student will be spending time online therefore a website that will give them clear option to all the relevant information with regard to the assignments, submission dates, performance appraisals, activities, group changes and class communication. It would be one stop information centre.

E. Video Recording Classroom Sessions

This was to help the teacher understand post the classroom session on how the class was conducted. The idea was to comprehend the effectiveness of the session and taking proactive measures to create a climate of change and improvement.

F. Assessing The Speaking Skill

Speaking is a complex activity that has varied aspects involved that would make an effective and genuine communication. It is important

to precisely assess speaking on the enlisted prerogatives. We can then develop frameworks to evaluate them. Below is a list of the things that speakers need to be able to do in order to communicate effectively.

- Phonological features
- Rules of Language at the word, phrase and sentence level.
- Paralinguistic Components.
- Communicative functions.
- Social Relevance. (British Council, 2008)

The above mentioned points broadly mark a universal approach to testing speaking skills. Keeping in mind this broad spectrum of assessment a speaking assessment rubric was created to mark students and to help them perform at basic intermediate and advanced levels. Comprehending the compositional makeup of a classroom in Indian institutions, the learning, comprehension, expression and utterance of the second language is diversified. The key challenge then becomes the first step that will introduce them to the level they need to be in terms of language usage and performance and set benchmarks to attain in future.

A large survey of teachers' testing experience found 'there is evidence that most [teachers] prefer to use informal and flexible approaches which can be adapted to different student populations' (Brindley, 1989: 31). On these lines itself the plan to assess was created for the sole purpose of blended learning is to provide learning in whichever method feasible, if that means face to face, using online resources, peer study, individualistic approach all of this can change the attitude and give results then an attempt should be made to create an effective testing system that consciously considers the socio-economic and ethnic as well as academic background.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Need analysis Questionnaire : The need analysis questionnaire was prepared on the principle of Likert scale and provided to 420 engineering students of Hindustan University, it was an online form given to their personal mail. The questionnaire was divided into two where the first part included demographic questions of the participants. The second part involved questions on language and speaking skills and their need and expectation from the teachers, online study material, and markings.

The questionnaire provided expected and some unexpected data with regard to language learning and teaching. The students participating were mostly from state board and their medium of instruction was English. 70 % of students agreed that English was important when it came to being a part of the higher education community and in the near future.

The graphic data that follows gives us a glimpse of the expectations and opinions of the participants about English language and the key areas that they wish to develop and the teaching methodology and digital learning that they are willing to be a part of while in the classroom.

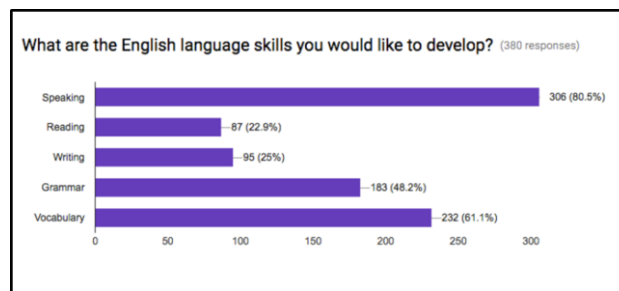


Fig. 2 Need analysis for English language skill

Based on these and more questions the research and topic were designed and fine tuned to fit the learning outcomes and expectations.

The Presentation skill development design included four speaking activities for one semester. Sixty participants included students of bio and chemical engineering and two sections of civil engineering who were partaking in the experiment. The students were given three speaking activities based on which they would be created in classroom sessions. These activities were divided into three categories of basic intermediate and advanced level where in the students had to perform and only then would they be able to go to the next level.

The first activity was Self- Introduction where they had to speak about themselves for a minute. The students were asked to come and speak while they were being recorded during the session. The performance of the students was not satisfactory. So the teacher explained the prerequisites of self introduction and how it should be presented within the time frame of one minute. The students were then asked to practice and record self introduction on their phones and the edited version to be sent for a second marking. In each of the class there was a marked improvement in the performance of the participants.

The next activity was in between intermediate and advanced level where in the students were asked to narrate their life story through pictures "My Life In Pictures" using a PowerPoint presentation. This activity involved creativity, innovative thinking and intermediate and advanced level of writing and speaking skills. The students were given a time frame of one week to prepare the presentation and they were put into groups and each group had to see that the submission of the task was done on time if any member failed to submit the task on time or copied material from each other the whole group would not be marked for the activity. This activity the concept of flipped classroom was used and the students were asked to prepare the presentations in the classroom and if they had any difficulty they could approach the faculty to improve and improvise the material. The students were also asked to record the speaking practice of the presentation so that they could work on improving the skill.

The last activity was Video Impressions where in the students were given 5 TedX videos from which they had to choose one video and describe why did they appreciate the video and the time frame for the talk had to be 5 to 10 minutes. This activity was in the category of advance level All the participants were expected to listen and comprehend the talk and give reasons and justifications for selecting a particular topic. this activity not

Blended Learning: An Effective Tool to Teach Presentation Skills

only analysed that thinking and reasoning capacity but also work on their listening, speaking and writing skills.

The graphic representation of the growth of each class with each activity clearly proves that the blended learning approach instilled change and improved the overall performance of the students.

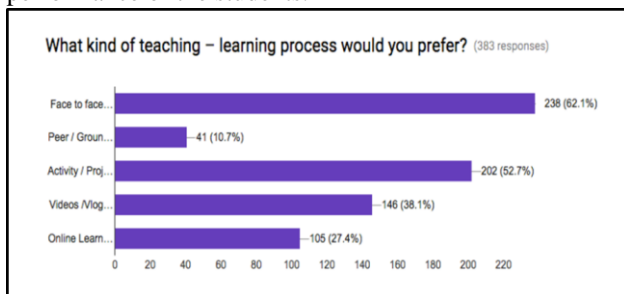


Fig.3 Need analysis for teaching learning process

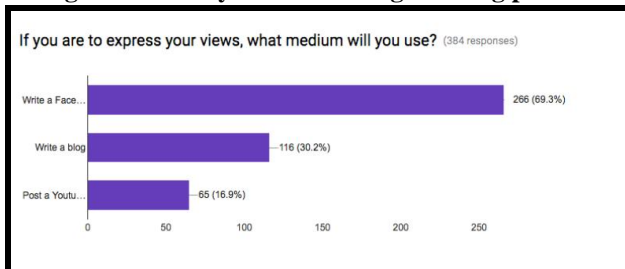


Fig. 4. Need analysis of electronic medium for expression

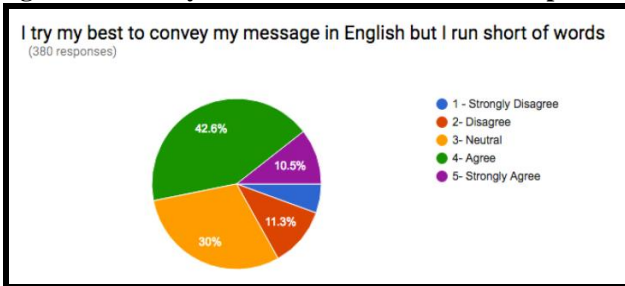


Fig. 5 Need analysis for content enhancement

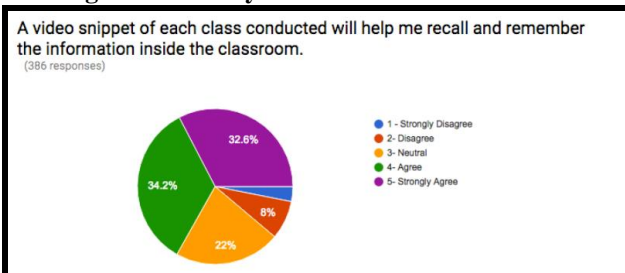


Fig. 6 Need analysis for retention

Figure 9 : Mean Value of marks Obtained By Civil 5 A,B and Chemical Bio-Tech Engineering

the consistent growth that has been attained by each section. Though in overall performance we are able to see that Civil 5 A has achieved the maximum in terms of number of students gaining marks in the range of 75 -100. In figure 9 we see there is a clear dip in performance of Chemical and Bio-tech engineering in the activity of My Life In Pictures this is due to two main reasons, firstly there was a strong resistance from the class when they realized that they were being put in the experimental group and would be paired with other students and marked according to the performance and task submissions. Secondly the group mainly consisted of students from regional background who had difficulty in expressing their thoughts in public. Yet the students were able

to bring their performance in the last activity to the range of 80-100. This graph clearly portrays that blended learning mixed with constant motivation can drive students to learn better and faster, grow in confidence, perform without inhibition and become a source of motivation for others.

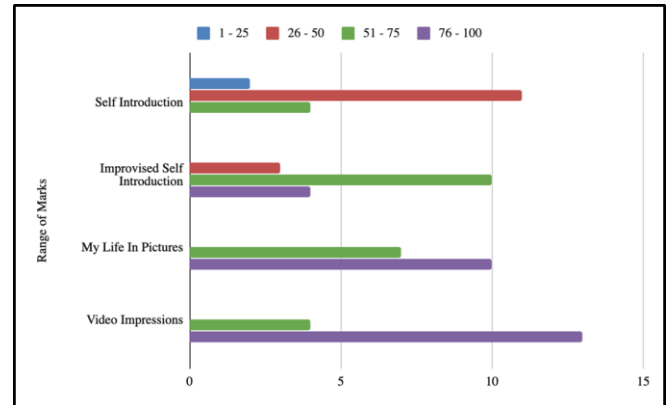


Fig. 7 Frequency Distribution of Civil Engineering 5 A

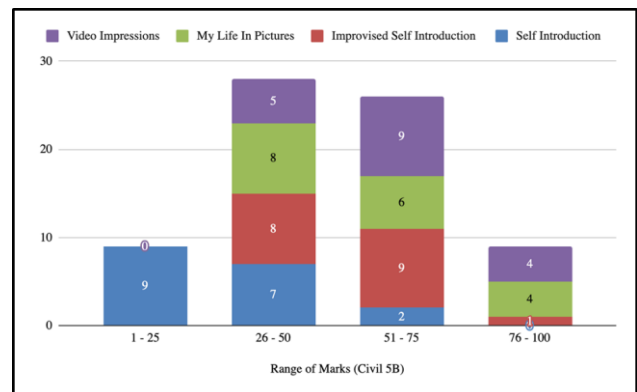


Fig.8 Frequency Distribution of Civil Engineering 5 B

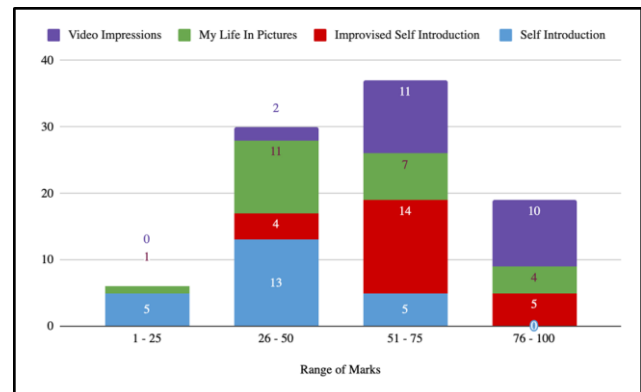


Fig. 9 Frequency Distribution of Chemical and Bio-tech Engineering

The total data of all the three sections of engineering as shown in Figure 9 clearly entails

Though in overall performance we are able to see that Civil 5 A has achieved the maximum in terms of number of students gaining marks in the range of 75 -100. In figure 9 we see there is a clear dip in performance of Chemical and Bio-tech engineering in the activity of My Life in Pictures this is due to two main reasons, firstly there was a strong resistance from the class when they realized that they were being put in the experimental group and would be paired with other students and marked according to the

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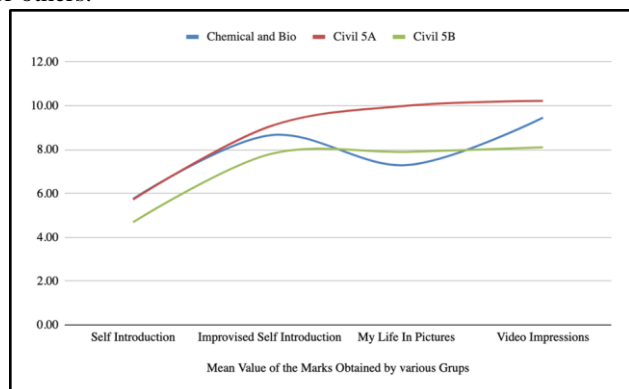


Fig. 10 Mean Value of marks Obtained by Civil 5 A, B and Chemical Bio-Tech Engineering

V. CONCLUSION

“Learning is a relatively permanent change in a person’s knowledge or behavior due to experience. This definition has three components: 1) the duration of the change is long-term rather than short-term; 2) the locus of the change is the content and structure of knowledge in memory or the behavior of the learner; 3) the cause of the change is the learner’s experience in the environment rather than fatigue, motivation, drugs, physical condition or physiologic intervention.”

–From Learning in Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Richard E. Mayer

The ambit of the work that was created to solve pertinent issues of learning, absenteeism, lack of commitment to completion of assignments, lack of participation even when in the class among students of third year engineering. The show of passive aggressive rebellion clearly made teaching and learning negligible. Therefore it was strongly felt that students need to take their learning more seriously and to achieve this thought it was important to change all those elements that were hampering the consistent growth of learning among students.

The first step to achieve this was to make learners active members in the creation of content and teaching methodology. Consistent feedback, understanding their needs, Providing technological support all create an ambiance of learning thus nurturing students towards high performance for their own growth.

The concept of blended learning works best if it is planned and proactive measures are taken to look into the problems that a teacher will encounter therefore the course design needs to be formidable in terms of adjustments and working on the four key elements of time, fidelity, space and humanness.

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Blended Learning: An Effective Tool to Teach Presentation Skills

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AUTHORS PROFILE



Sonu Joseph Presently I am working as Assistant Professor in the Department of English. Ten years as a high school teacher and Ten years as Assistant Professor has given me insights and perspective of how education is in its age of metamorphosis. My research interests have both shaped and been shaped by my recent teaching experiences. I believe my interdisciplinary

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