

CUSTOMIZING BLENDED ENGLISH LEARNING FOR MODERN DISTANCE LEARNERS: AN ANTHROGOGIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The historical journey of English language education in Sri Lanka is a convincing narrative and English language education continues to play a vital role in Sri Lankan academia, particularly in Open Distance Learning (ODL). In this backdrop, the establishment of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) in 1980, enabling the masses to access English language education, was a significant milestone in higher education. At the onset, OUSL relied heavily on traditional face-to-face teaching and printed material, administered through its network of regional and study centres.

The 2009 National Policy on Education stressed the importance of English competence for 21st-century demands. Globalization and technological advancements further underline the necessity of English proficiency. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to online education, prompting a reassessment of English language education in ODL. This transition presents challenges and opportunities, especially for learners without access to traditional universities. Thus, institutions like the OUSL must offer English Language programmes to meet national demand and adjust their delivery methods accordingly.

In this context, the present study emphasizes the significance of an anthrologic approach to English language education in ODL. The research aims to investigate a sample English language course and identify the desirable features of an ideal online course. It finally proposes a customised course design that aligns with the contemporary ODL concept, embracing the principles of adult education also known as anthrology.

The paper attempts to examine the historical context, existing literature, and the rationale behind adopting an anthrologic approach in English language education within ODL. As such, the research proposes an online course adopting a student-centred, anthrologic teaching approach that establishes a healthy relationship between teaching and learning. Thus, by acknowledging the changing dynamics of education and promoting appropriate reform, this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on optimizing English language education in the evolving ODL educational landscape of Sri Lanka..

Key words: *Anthrology, Open Distance Learning, English language education, online teaching/learning*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The historical backdrop of English in Sri Lanka is a fascinating narrative. From 1815 to 1956, English served as the official language during the colonial period. Surprisingly, even after Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, English retained its status as the official language. However, a pivotal moment occurred in 1956 with the enactment of the 'Sinhala-only' Act, which designated Sinhala as the sole official language, effectively sidelining English. A subsequent constitutional amendment in 1988 elevated Tamil to the status of an official language while positioning English as a 'link language.' As it stands today, Sri Lanka recognizes two official languages, Sinhala and Tamil. These languages are integral to public sector documents, media, government operations, and higher education.

In line with the National Policy on Education of 2009, Sri Lanka's education system places a strong emphasis on student-centred learning, fostering independent thinking that leads to new knowledge and innovation. As it states, the government acknowledges the necessity of equipping students with competence in the English language, essential for navigating the global workforce and the technologically driven 21st century (Coperahewa, 2009)

The concept of distance education was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1976, marked by the establishment of the Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education (SLIDE). SLIDE aimed to offer tertiary education in fields like Mathematics, Science, Management, and Technical Studies to learners who faced barriers to accessing traditional higher education institutions, often due to socio-economic factors. Despite the expansion of conventional universities, the demand for higher education persisted, prompting the creation of the Open University.

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) was founded under the provisions of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978, fully operational by 1980 under Ordinance No. 3 of 1980. The OUSL absorbed the responsibilities of the External Services Agency (ESA) and SLIDE. Initially, the institution conducted academic programmes through two boards of study: the Board of Study for Management, Science, and Technology, and the Board of Management for Humanities and Social Sciences. These boards were supported by various resources, including the Library, Audio-Visual Section, Computer Unit, Printing Press, and regional and study centres administered by the Regional Education Service.

While these initiatives aimed to enhance English Language Education in Sri Lanka, the OUSL's predominant approach, prior to the

pandemic, leaned toward conventional face-to-face teaching and printed materials, facilitated by regional and study centres across the island.

However, as observed by Raheem (2014), contemporary language teaching trends have shifted towards authentic language usage, with technology integration becoming a cornerstone of 21st-century education. The challenges associated with distance education in serving a widespread student population demand enhanced outreach. Satharasinghe (2012) highlighted the substantial demands distance education places on students, urging the need for self-learning and the adoption of innovative, interactive, and experimental learning methods.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on higher education, leading to an increased reliance on online learning and technology-based education worldwide. This shift has presented both challenges and opportunities for both English language educators and learners. Despite the benefits of online education, there is still a significant gap in meeting the needs of learners and empowering them with the use of language beyond proficiency, ensuring a chance for those denied access to tertiary education through the conventional higher education system. This may be due to several factors, including massive student numbers enrolled for English language courses and

economic difficulties that prevent access to higher education.

1.1 Objective of the Research

In this evolving context, the importance of a fully-fledged online course, designed to meet the current economic status of Sri Lanka using an anthropologic approach to English Language Education in the ODL system, cannot be understated. As such the current research aims to examine an existing English language programme offered by the OUSL, investigate the desirable features of an ideal online English language programme and design a course to suit the contemporary ODL concept adopting an anthropologic approach.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Under this section, we delve into research on adult education theories and the development of online courses tailored for adult learners in a blended format. Given the diverse background of Open University students in terms of economic status, social circumstances, age, cognitive abilities and educational qualifications, customization of online courses with anthropologic features becomes imperative. Our aim is to pinpoint the most suitable theories and methodologies that cater to the Sri Lankan adult OD learner.

It is not possible to apply a single theory of learning to all adults. Over the past century, various models, principles, theories, and explanations have been developed in literature, which together constitute the knowledge base of adult learning. The more familiar adult educators are with this knowledge base, the more effective and responsive their practice can be to the needs of adult learners. Andragogy, Self-Directed Learning, and Transformational Learning are three major adult learning theories.

Andragogy, popularized by Knowles (1980), emphasizes that adults move from dependency to self-directedness, draw on life experiences, learn when assuming new roles, are problem-centred, and are motivated by internal factors. Knowles (1984) suggests that effective adult education involves creating a cooperative learning climate, assessing specific needs and interests, developing objectives based on learner characteristics, collaborating on methods and resources, and evaluating and adjusting the learning experience. However, andragogy has been criticized for being "culture blind," (Brookfield, 2003), as it may not consider cultural variations in valuing the teacher as the primary source of knowledge. Effective adult instruction should explain reasons for learning, focus on tasks over memorization, involve problem-solving, and be immediately applicable to real-life situations.

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is a process in which individuals take the initiative to plan, carry out, and evaluate their own learning experiences without the help of others (Knowles, 1975).

Approximately 70% of adult learning is self-directed (Cross, 1981), with approximately 90% of adults engaging in at least one self-directed learning project annually (Tough, 1978). SDL involves learners making decisions about content, methods, resources, and evaluation. It is an informal process typically occurring outside the classroom, allowing learning to be incorporated into daily routines at the learner's convenience. SDL requires individuals to take responsibility for their learning by determining needs, setting goals, identifying resources, implementing plans, and evaluating outcomes.

SDL can be challenging for adults with low-level literacy skills, lacking independence, confidence, motivation, or resources. Not all learners prefer the self-directed option, and many who engage in SDL also participate in more formal educational programmes. Teachers in adult education settings can facilitate SDL by helping learners conduct self-assessments, identify starting points for projects, match resources and methods to learning goals, negotiate learning contracts, acquire decision-making and self-evaluation strategies, develop positive attitudes and independence, and reflect on their learning.

Teachers can also encourage and support learners throughout the process, offering various options for successful learning outcomes.

Transformative learning (TL) is described as a process that changes the way individuals think about themselves and their world, involving a shift in consciousness. It often results in a changed perspective or worldview. For example, English language learners often report a shift in their view of U.S. culture and their view of themselves as they gain confidence communicating in a new language (King, 2000 as cited in Corley, 2011). Freire (2000), as cited in Corley (2011) believes that teaching and learning should be emancipatory, achieved through a problem-posing approach in discussions that challenge and transform thinking. Mezirow (2000) as cited in Corley, (2011) views TL as a rational process, involving reflection and discourse that lead to a shift in assumptions and worldview. Critics argue that Mezirow's theory is hyper-rational and neglects factors like race, class, gender, and historical context.

The theories above discuss the favourable elements that should shape anthropogenic learning models. The proposed course model intends to incorporate these features to harmonise with ODL in Sri Lanka.

Shree (2022) argues against the concept of scaffolding in the context of adult learners with disabilities or cognitive and affective issues. She emphasizes that human beings, unlike buildings, are dynamic and thinking entities with problem-solving capabilities. The cognitive and affective domains are intangible and assumptive, making traditional scaffolding techniques potentially restrictive rather than constructive. She further contends that humans, equipped with their own problem-solving devices, do not need scaffolds; instead, learning is about negotiating and handling problems based on individual knowledge and cultural capital. Shree (2022) criticizes the teacher-centric nature of scaffolding, suggesting that it reduces learners to inanimate structures and emphasizing that humans require support in the form of ladders, wheelchairs, or ramps when needed, and the learning process involves negotiation and problem handling, not rigid structures. The decision in teaching and learning practices should align with problem-solving, handling, or enhancing, recognizing that problems are not always uniform.

More than 50 years ago, Knowles criticized adult education for being tied to traditional child-focused education methods. He proposed five principles characterizing adult learning (Knowles, 1984 as cited in Shree, 2022): self-concept, adult learner experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn. To address

gender bias in the term "andragogy," Trott (1991) suggested "anthrogogy," emphasizing a more humane approach applicable to all humans (Trott, 1991 as cited in Shree, 2022).

In adult learning, concepts from Vygotsky, Halliday, and Bruner have been integrated. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), initially developed for children, has been extended to adult education. Similarly, Bruner's three modes of thinking concern children learning how to mean and learn (Bruner, 1966). More importantly, the notion of scaffolding (Bruner, 1978), which is used very widely in the context of adult education, was an expansion of the work done with a preschooler to enable block reconstruction (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976 as cited in Shree, 2022).

The translation of high-level attributes mentioned in educational policies into specific and practical teaching modalities, especially in the context of teacher education, proves to be quite challenging. While certain tasks are suggested as a means to address this issue, they often remain pedagogical and lack explicit guidance on implementation in the adult classroom. Therefore, there is a need for more clarity in translating educational ideals into practical approaches for adult teaching and learning. Recognising the enduring pedagogical aspects within anthrologic learning environments, our intention is to replace the current partially

pedagogical model with a fully anthrological course model.

Research conducted concerning online learning of the English language reveals several interesting aspects.

A study conducted at a Thai university by Kuama & Intharaksa (2016) explored the suitability of online learning for English language students. They examined the online learning strategies of 346 students in a compulsory online English course, categorizing them as successful or unsuccessful based on final evaluation performance. Results indicated significant differences in strategies and perceptions of online learning between the two groups, with a low-level correlation between strategy use, affection for online learning, and learning outcomes. Successful learners demonstrated advanced metacognitive and cognitive skills, while higher motivation distinguished their perception of online learning. Resource management strategies showed no significant impact on learning outcomes. The study underscores the need for a shift towards student-centered online learning environments and highlights challenges including cognitive demands, autonomous learning responsibility, technology familiarity, and time constraints. This research offers insights relevant to addressing similar challenges in the post-COVID educational landscape, particularly in Sri Lanka.

Wu (2022) presents a refined English course development model and a multidimensional course recommendation algorithm in China. The model integrates online teaching platforms and evaluates learner interaction, course attributes, and content effectiveness to meet diverse student needs. Experiments show the model outperforms existing methods, fostering a student-centered approach and enhancing teaching-learning relationships. Prompted by the pandemic's impact on education, the study responds to the global shift towards online teaching and innovative reforms. Its relevance extends to Sri Lanka's present-day education environment, offering a framework for English teaching reform in open and distance learning.

Blended learning is a commonly adopted strategy in open and distance education. According to Dos (2014), the online component of a blended course needs very careful planning and preparation. The content must be planned before and prepared according to the needs of the students, the capacity of the institutions and the subject matter.

Adult learners in the ODL system prefer blended or online delivery due to multiple causes. An analysis of the influencing factors of absenteeism among the students of English for academic purposes at the OUSL revealed that introducing a blended method would facilitate minimising the problem of non-

attendance while catering to the learning needs of ODL students under the present circumstances the world is facing (Abeysekera & Wijesinghe, 2020).

Further, a study conducted on a programme offered by the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) of OUSL aimed to examine the perspectives of teachers, students, and observers on the effectiveness of online lessons and assessments. The study indicated that training on the use of technology in online lesson delivery, catering to learners through smaller groups, and maintaining learners' interest by using audiovisual learning resources would further enhance online course delivery (Abeysekera & Wijesinghe, 2021).

Building on the insights gained from prior research on the utilization of online and blended methods in English language teaching, we have tailored the new course model to offer a customised anthropogenic learning experience to OUSL learners, acknowledging their distinct characteristics.

3. MAJOR ARGUMENTS ALONG WITH THE SUPPORTING LITERATURE

As indicated through the literature review, past research on ODL contexts pinpoints the necessity of tailor-made online study programmes designed to match with the requirements of the Sri Lankan

adult learner. Thus, through the present research, an attempt is made to compare an existing model of an online course offered to English as a Second Language (ESL) students of the OUSL with a model of a fully-fledged blended course and design a course which best suits the current requirements. This is accomplished by adopting a conceptual research design which compares alternative approaches in order to reach significant and innovative perceptions.

At the Open University, teaching is carried out in the distance education mode and the learners are required to take responsibility for their own learning. Teaching/learning at the Open University is a combination of many elements which require their active participation. This includes reading material provided in the soft/hard copy form, engaging with activities and discussions, attending day schools face to face/online, conducting research, using library resources and preparing for and taking part in evaluations face-to-face/online.

3.1 Methodology

The Diploma in English Language and Literature, conducted by the Department of Language Studies, is a thirty (30) credit programme of one (1) year's duration which consists of six courses including language and literature components. Several prerequisites are considered as entry criteria for the programme. Direct entry is offered to applicants

who have completed either the Advanced Certificate in English for Business and Professional Communication - Stage II or the Certificate in Professional English offered by the OUSL with specified grades, while those with other qualifications such as 3 passes at the

G.C.E. Advanced Level or completion of any foundation level course offered by the OUSL are required to pass the Selection Test for the Diploma in English and Literature.

In line with the OUSL policy, students who enrol the programme have diverse educational, social, geographical, and professional backgrounds. Thus, the competency level of the student cohort of the programme in terms of computer literacy and the English language is varied. Moreover, due to the flexible and wide entry criteria, students who come from informal educational backgrounds as well as mainstream formal education are allowed registration for the programme. Being a heterogeneous population, a majority of them are females within the age range of 18 to 80 years.

Advanced Grammar and Communication Skills, on which the current research is focused, is one of the language courses consisting of 5 credits. A total of 13-day schools are conducted for this course primarily online, recordings of which are uploaded on the Learning Management System (LMS). In addition, course material in the soft

copy format and audio/video material are uploaded on the LMS as learning resources. The assessment component of the course consists of 2 continuous assessments in the form of presentations and classroom tests in a mix of online and onsite modes, and 1 onsite final examination.

Thus, a comprehensive analysis of the online features of the present course will be conducted to comprehend how it can be transformed into a completely developed effective and efficient online course. In this process, a comparison is conducted between the features of the current course and those of an online plus course to determine a customised anthropogenic learning path that aligns with the needs of the adult learners at OUSL.

3.2 Analysis of the Existing Course Structure

An analysis of the existing course revealed the presence of certain features within various sections of the LMS. The course information section includes the student handbook with information on the entire programme, a course timetable and the detailed course structure.

The course structure provides comprehensive information such as the course unit breakdown, the duration of day school sessions for each unit and resource persons conducting day schools.

Furthermore, specific content of continuous assessment and final assessment are informed within this section.

Updated information on course schedules such as postponement of day schools and classroom activities as well as homework assignments are uploaded under announcements in the LMS.

Furthermore, unit-wise lesson material and YouTube links to watch A/V material related to lessons are available under lesson material and learning resources.

In separate sections marked Zoom resources and day schools, links to join the online day schools and recorded videos of the day schools are uploaded. Additionally, information regarding continuous assessments such as group lists for group assignments and Google Forms to collect information about students taking part in assignments are found in the sections labelled Continuous Assessment 1 and 2, while past papers are uploaded in the section marked Assessments and Exams.

Thus, upon analyzing the current course structure, it is apparent that while it does contain the basic components of an online course, such as lessons delivered through the Zoom application and material made available in the soft copy format, there is room for improvement by incorporating crucial elements of a meticulously

crafted and productive online course. Keeping this objective in mind, a structure of a tailor-made online course for adult OD learners is proposed.

Pre-Course Phase					
No	Proposed Course Features	Information gathered/Expected outcome	Currently existent(E) /non-existent (NE)	Features to be incorporated/ revised /removed/transformed into online	Mode
1	Survey questionnaire	Prior exposure to content Identification of learning types	NE	To be incorporated	Online
2	Activities	Prior exposure to content Identification of learning types	NE	To be incorporated	Online

Course Delivery					
Advance Organiz	General Information on the Programme (ODL, entry requirements, duration, credit rating, PLOs, course content, teaching, course material, workload, evaluation criteria, certification, administrative details, regulations and policies, timetable, resource pool)	Familiarisation with details of the programme	E	To be revised	Online
	Course Information (credit rating, CLOs, schedule-units covered on a given date in teaching and assessments)	Familiarisation with details of the course	E	To be revised	

Course Content	Unit 1 – 5. Each unit consists of an Introduction and Intended Learning Outcomes.				
	A unit contains several sessions.				
	Session – Each session consists of an introduction, the lesson, self-assessment activities, answer key/feedback and a summary.	Familiarization of students with varied modes of interaction, i.e. listening, speaking, writing and review of grammar for effective communication in academic, corporate and social environments.	E	} To be transformed into online	Online
	Unit 1- Sessions 5		E		
	Unit 2- Sessions 4		E		
	Unit 3- Sessions 2		NE	} To be transformed into online	
	Unit 4- Sessions 2		NE		
Unit 5- Session 1	NE				
Total number of sessions for the course – 14					

AV Material	Day school PPt slides	Unit 1 – 5	E	To be revised	Online
	Day school recordings				
	Audio Visual Course Material	To develop the sub-skills of speaking such as expressing opinions, negotiating, suggestions, asking for and giving directions	NE	To be incorporated	Online
	Examples:				
	Sample video of a presentation				
	Video of a formal group discussion				
	Audio clip of a dialogue asking for directions				

Recommended Resources	YouTube videos, E-books, Printed books, Online Activities Examples : Unit 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYcTuh0VTqQ Unit 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNcrdVml4hU Unit 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ8G_uh2flk . E-book: Murphy, R. (2019) English Grammar in Use; Cambridge university Press Printed book: Kumari, J. (2019). Communications Skills: Towards better Writing; New Age International Publishers Site: https://elt.oup.com/student/practicegrammar/advanced/a_testzone/?cc=global&selLanguage=en	Reiterate the importance of the correct usage of grammar. Familiarisation of students with a model conversation for expressing opinion. Exposing students to sample conversations in asking for and giving directions. Facilitate students to refer to e-books on grammar. Recommend to students who wish to refer to printed books on communication skills in English. Provide opportunities for students to practice grammar exercises online.	E NE } }	To be revised To be incorporated	Online
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Group Discussions	<p>Writing</p> <p>Group discussions are to be conducted on the LMS.</p>	Developing Advance Communication Skills in Writing	NE	To be incorporated	Online
	<p>Group Presentation</p> <p>Students are grouped and topics are allocated. They present themselves for an online discussion on an assigned day before the 2nd CA.</p>	Developing Presentation Skills	E	-	
Quizzes	Self-Assessment Quiz Activities for practice.	Acquiring practicing skills	NE	To be incorporated	Online
Assessments & Feedback	<p>Continuous Assessment 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Question Paper ➤ Individual written feedback with grade 	To provide feedback for formative assessments	E	To be revised	Onsite
	<p>Continuous Assessment 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Group Presentations (synchronous) ➤ Oral feedback with grade by a panel of examiners 				
	<p>Final Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Question Paper with a listening component ➤ Only the grade is provided 	To assess the level of competency	E	--	

Post Course Phase					
1	Reflective Journal (Categorised information)	Feedback (Qualitative)	NE	To be incorporated	Online
2	Survey questionnaire for students Focus Group Interviews for Teachers	Feedback (Quantitative/Qualitative)	NE	To be incorporated	Online
3	Way Forward Results of the post-course survey will be utilised for further improvement of the course.	To improve the effectiveness of the course	NE	To be implemented	

3.3.1 Pre-Course Phase

This is a completely new component included in the proposed course structure. As the name suggests, this phase begins as soon as students register and connect to the LMS. It is a strategic use of time before the official start of the course.

During this phase, online surveys will be conducted through Google Forms to gather essential information about the students' learning styles, educational backgrounds, and prior exposure to online learning. This information will help us tailor our approach and better meet the diverse needs of our student body.

In this phase, a self-evaluation will be conducted to assist learners in assessing their current competencies. This process will also enable the

teacher to identify the language benchmark bands for each learner at the start of the course. These benchmarks are integral to the certification or accreditation process, as the courses are structured to establish specific proficiency levels (benchmarks).

The Pre-Course Phase also presents an opportunity for students to dive into the course content before the official start date. Through carefully curated activities, we aim to provide students with a head start, allowing them to familiarize themselves with the course material and explore the various features of our online platform. This proactive approach aims to maximize engagement and ensure a seamless transition into the course.

This phase is designed to provide a comprehensive and student-centric learning experience that empowers our learners with the essential skills and knowledge to embark on their anthropogenic academic journey with confidence to achieve their goals.

3.3.2 Course Delivery Phase

It has been identified that this section of the course, mostly existent in a basic form at present, requires major revision or, at times, fresh additions. The current course, as previously explained, has been designed as a fallback option to onsite delivery, at a time when online education was thrust upon the teaching/learning arena during the recent pandemic. However, the futility of offering a half-baked online academic course has dawned upon the practitioners and the policymakers during the aftermath of the pandemic. As a result, an effort is being made to deliver the course featuring all components of a tailor-made online course utilizing an anthropogenic approach. This phase includes several subsections through which a multitude of information is transmitted to learners.

3.3.2.1 Advance Organizer

This is the introduction initially to the programme and secondly, the specific course. This encompasses various essential details concerning the open distance education system. It includes comprehensive information about the course structure, delivery methods,

associated materials, and the administrative entities responsible for different facets of the course. While some details, such as course codes are available in the student handbook, additional information, such as regulations and policies tailored to adult learners at OUSL, will be provided. Upholding transparency and ensuring learner empowerment, certain legal documents related to examinations, such as sections of the Examination Manual, will also be included. Furthermore, while the details of the resource pool with their credentials and fields of expertise will provide adult learners with much-needed awareness, the detailed course schedule will better prepare them for the workload and help them with time management. This approach aims to empower learners with the necessary information, fostering a sense of responsibility for their learning journey.

3.3.2.2 Course Content

Currently, the digital version of the printed course book is uploaded in the form of several units. Though the printed book has been designed according to distance teaching house styles, it lacks certain elements specific to the online teaching mode. As such, it is necessary to transfer this content into an online teaching mode, which will enable the learner to log in to the LMS and directly engage with the course with minimum on-site intervention. It is expected that such a self-explanatory and self-accessible course will

benefit the independent adult learner.

3.3.2.3 A/V Material

To facilitate the online learner further, audio-visual material exclusively created to enhance the development of specific sub-skills will be provided. It is expected that the incorporation of such material will facilitate, specifically the visual auditory learner. However, taking into consideration the diversity of the adult student population, provision will be made to provide transcriptions of the dialogues and monologues in the videos for hearing-impaired students while verbal instructions and descriptions will be provided for visually impaired students. Furthermore, students will be encouraged to use the PPT slides and recordings of the online teaching sessions uploaded on the LMS as revision material.

3.3.2.4 Recommended Resources

Details of several additional resources will be uploaded in the LMS, which are expected to be referred by students for extra information. These would be in various forms, such as links for YouTube video clips and online activities, e-book chapters, references to printed books, etc. The students would be recommended to utilize these resources as and when required, once again encouraging the adult learner to take on responsibility for his/her learning.

3.3.2.5 Group Discussions

Group discussions, specifically on writing and presentation skills, will be conducted through the LMS. For the discussion on writing, students will be assigned topics in groups and the group members will carry out the discussion online, dividing the tasks among themselves. The teacher will join the discussion as a facilitator at predetermined time slots.

One of the CAs for the course is based on group presentations. In preparation for the CA, students will initially work on topics assigned to groups before the live online discussion. At the CA preparatory discussion forum, their problems, doubts, and challenges will be discussed in the presence of the teacher. The main purpose of this discussion is to provide opportunities for improvement through feedback by the teacher and peers before the actual CA.

3.3.2.6 Quizzes

A series of quizzes, complete with answers and feedback comments, will be designed by teachers and uploaded on the LMS. This new feature will provide opportunities for students to practice the skills taught through the course with minimum interference from the teacher. Furthermore, it will allow the students to realize whether they have understood the lessons taught in class, giving them the chance to

correct their own mistakes and prepare for the final evaluation.

3.3.2.7 Assessments and Feedback

Formative assessments are conducted in both online and on-site modes while summative assessments are held on-site. The formative assessments will encompass detailed feedback comments aiming for improvement before the summative assessments. The final grades achieved are informed to the students on the completion of the summative assessments.

At both online and on-site evaluations, steps will be taken to facilitate differently abled students as required, on request. These include extra time for those with writing speed issues, examination papers transcribed in braille for visually impaired students and such answer scripts assessed by examiners with the subject knowledge to avoid errors made at the time of transcription.

3.3.3 Post-Course Phase

This is again a freshly introduced feature in the proposed course structure. As part of the ongoing development and improvement of the course, several strategies are implemented in this phase. Students will be encouraged to maintain a reflective journal to receive useful and uniform data, the information will be categorized to reflect on their

learning journey, the challenges they faced, and the insights they gained. Furthermore, self-evaluation, similar to the one given at the Pre-Course Phase, will be made available with the intention of providing an opportunity for students to gauge the level of advancement they have gained through the course. This personal reflection promotes a deeper understanding of oneself and contributes to ongoing personal growth and development.

Additionally, a survey questionnaire will be administered to students to gather feedback on various aspects of their course experience. This feedback is invaluable, as it provides insight into students' perspectives and allows us to make targeted improvements and enhancements to future iterations of the course.

Focus group interviews will be conducted with teachers to gather their perspectives on the course delivery and effectiveness. Engaging teachers in discussions provides valuable feedback on teaching methodologies, challenges faced, and areas for improvement from an instructor's standpoint.

At the end of the course, we can outline a clear plan to move forward based on the insights gained from student surveys, teacher interviews, and other feedback mechanisms. This proactive approach would ensure that the course evolves to meet the evolving needs of learners. The findings from the pre-course survey and the post-course survey

would confirm future course enhancements and refinements.

As denoted by the arguments presented in the preceding section, the average adult OUSL student learning through the ODL system needs the fulfilment of specific requirements for his/her journey of learning to be a rewarding experience. However, the present learning context with online day schools and soft copies of course material gives rise to a situation where the experience is not as conducive or effective as expected. This fact is confirmed by the poor attendance at online day schools, disinterest shown in engaging with the PDF version of course material and reluctance to attend onsite evaluations due to the high cost of travel. Moreover, irregular online attendance due to unstable power supply and internet connections, inability to invest in suitable learning devices and migration for employment are additional factors related to the present economic status of Sri Lanka, which affects the middle-class student population. As such, in keeping with the anthropogenic principles, the proposed online course model strives to improve the present context by providing a learning environment suitable to the unique OUSL student population.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The study examines the need for a tailored online study programme for

adult learners at the OUSL through a comparison between an existing online course model and a proposed blended learning approach. The existing Diploma in English Language and Literature programme at OUSL serves a diverse student body, varying in computer literacy and English language proficiency. The current course structure includes online day schools, course materials, and assessments, but lacks certain elements essential for an effective online learning experience.

The proposed course structure introduces a pre-course phase for student orientation and self-assessment, followed by a comprehensive course delivery phase with enhanced features such as an advanced organizer, multimedia materials, recommended resources, class discussions, quizzes, and assessments with feedback mechanisms. Additionally, a post-course phase facilitates reflection, feedback collection, and planning for course improvements.

The study identifies challenges faced by OUSL students, including poor online attendance, disinterest in course materials, and reluctance to attend onsite day schools and evaluations due to economic constraints. The proposed model aims to address these challenges and create a more conducive learning environment for ODL students.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical importance of crafting online courses tailored

precisely to the unique needs of adult learners at OUSL. The proposed model presents a meticulously structured approach to online learning, seamlessly integrating various components to amplify engagement, bolster learning outcomes, and ultimately elevate overall student satisfaction. By incorporating synchronous learning with asynchronous online tutoring and offering on-demand tutor clinics, the course content and self-assessment feedback aim to promote anthropogenicity among independent learners.

Furthermore, the integration of diverse feedback mechanisms, including sample answers, personalized or group feedback, automated responses, and constructive peer critique, serves as a cornerstone for continuous improvement strategies. This adaptive approach ensures the model remains responsive to the dynamic needs of learners, thereby enhancing the quality of distance education at OUSL.

Moreover, by bolstering learner support services and implementing sustainable evaluation methods such as proctored examinations for OUSL overseas students, the proposed model seeks to empower students regardless of their geographical location. This initiative includes provisions for allocating funds for online facilitators, thus ensuring equitable access to reliable educational resources.

As a remedial measure for potential plagiarism, certain steps will have to be introduced in the proposed model. This could be on the lines of incorporating online plagiarism detection software within the Learning Management System (LMS), thereby upholding academic integrity and fostering a culture of originality.

Additionally, leveraging the strength of OUSL's regional centres, equipped with computer labs, proves instrumental in bridging the digital divide. These centres offer a lifeline to lower-middle-class students, granting them access to online courses and assessments, reducing the financial burden of investment on personal technological devices. It is believed that through these strategic investments and leveraging existing resources, OUSL will be able to create an inclusive learning environment conducive to the success of all learners.

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