From Digital Prep to Analytical Thinking: Assessment of Pre-Class Digital Resources as a Blended Learning Tool in Literary Discussions and Essay Writing – Case Study of Second and Third Year Students at Ghardaia University

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ABSTRACT: *Traditional literature education generally underperforms in bringing about students' full engagement in ways that trigger their critical and analytical thinking skills crucial for written analyses. However, blending digital resources with traditional expository teaching has improved literature education. This research investigates the impact of pre-class digital materials on the confidence and preparedness of learners in engaging in in-class discussions as well as their critical thinking for written analyses. First, through a literature review, the paper examines the interconnection of blended learning, learner-centeredness, and critical and analytical thinking for essay writing. This study conducted both a survey and classroom observations on a sample of second- and third-year student at Ghardaia university. The work uses a mix-methods approach, quantitative and qualitative data interpretation. The results indicate that pre-class digital materials enhance learner-centeredness, and confidence and preparedness to in-class discussions as well as cultivate analytical and critical thinking crucial for essay writing. Furthermore, this study concludes with pre-, during-, and post-class recommendations for more interactive and analytical literature classes.*
KEYWORDS: critical thinking, analytical thinking, blended learning, learner-centeredness

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Introduction

Traditionally, literature education has been governed by teacher-centeredness and expository teaching methods, where lectures predominantly drive the learning process. Those methods are, with no doubt, effective in conveying foundational knowledge. However, they generally underperform in bringing about students' full engagement in ways that trigger their critical and analytical thinking skills crucial for written analyses. It is in this regard where the concept of blended learning has gained its significance as it promises to foster learner-centeredness and encourages their engagement in literature classes. Sahni (2019) has found that integrating technology promotes autonomous learning and enhances students' engagement and that blended learning is not only an approach to enhance lectures but also a transformation in our vision and our way to approach the learning and the teaching processes. Furthermore, Jain (2012) finds that using ICT helps learners in their comprehension of the literary text, maximizes their engagement and boots their motivation.

In the context of digital pedagogy characterized by the rise of digital tools in education, precisely in literature education, the question that arises is to which extent pre-class digital materials can effectively prepare students for in-class discussions and contribute to the development of their analytical writing abilities. This study seeks to explore the impact of pre-class digital resources, such as book summary videos, historical context visual explanations, and curated quote documents, on second- and third-year university students at Ghardaia University.

Essentially, this work addresses two main research questions. Firstly, to what extent do pre-class digital resources (such as book summary videos, historical context visuals, and curated quote documents) impact students' preparedness for in-class discussions? Secondly, what role do digital resources play in enhancing students' analytical thinking and their ability to write coherent and well-supported analytical essays?

Literature Review

1. Blended learning in literature class and learner-centeredness

Combining pre-class digital materials with in-person discussions in literature classes makes literature learning more engaging and flexible to the learners. Sahni (2016) concluded that the use ICT tools during a literature class is very effective, supportive and adaptable to the learners' interests and needs. Similarly, Elley (2015) examined the efficiency of using the blended learning method in a literature class. She concluded that blended learning balanced the responsibility of the learning process to both the teacher and student rendering it more learner-centerered. Furthermore, Taha and Ming (2014) concluded that the online system which included graphics and videos of short stories and novels significantly improved learners' self-efficacy and control of learning.

2. Learner-centeredness and critical and analytical thinking

Involving learners in the learning process, and prompting them to engage in in-person literary discussions in which they encounter different points of view helps them build a critical and an analytical thinking sense for them to evaluate and compare ideas to be able to defend their interpretations. Haftador et al (2023) argue that encouraging learner-centeredness through blended learning improves learners' critical thinking in terms of both disposition and skills. Accordingly, Ibarra and Cárdenas (2024) found that engaging learners emotionally and cognitively through blended learning encourages them to ask reflective questions at class, and go in deeper levels of analysis and synthesis which fostered their critical and analytical thinking. Also, Ibarra and Cárdenas's study suggests making learners the center of the learning process through problem based learning and in-class discussions provides them with a clear context and purpose of their learning which motivates and engages them as well as increases their critical and analytical thinking skills.

3. Critical and analytical thinking and essay writing

For learners to reach the stage of compounding their own written analyses, they must have first developed their critical and analytical thinking skills to be able to form reasoned arguments. Accordingly, Ahmadpour and Khaaste (2017) conclude that critical thinking skills enable learners to select useful information, and integrate personal understanding and values to create meaning and ultimately construct argumentative essays. Furthermore, Aziz et al (2023) prove that blended learning positively engages learners in the learning process and provides them with the ability to examine and interpret a topic which enhances the critical and analytical thinking skills of learners to be able to create complex ideas.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of pre-class digital materials in enhancing student engagement, preparedness for in-class discussions, and ultimately analytical writing skills. The methodology is designed to assess both students' perceptions of the digital resources and the measurable impact on their preparedness for in-person discussions. What is more, this study employs classroom observations to assess students' critical and analytical thinking skills following their exposure to pre-class digital materials and in-person discussions to produce analytical essays.

Data Collection

To explore the impact of pre-class digital resources on students' preparedness and performance, the study conducted a survey, complemented by classroom observations.

Firstly, the survey was used to collect data from the students after they had engaged with the pre-class digital materials and participated in in-class activities. The survey included a mix of MCQs and open-ended questions that allowed for both quantitative data and qualitative feedback on students' experiences with the materials. The survey questions were designed to address many aspects such as perceived usefulness of the pre-class materials in understanding the literary work dealt with, the nature of the preferred material whether book summary videos, historical context visuals, or curated quote documents. The survey also examined the level of confident and preparedness to contributing to discussions after engaging with pre-class digital materials, and the effectiveness of the blended learning method in their understanding the course materials.

Secondly, classroom observations were conducted to assess how pre-class materials guided students' critical and analytical thinking evident in their in-class discussions as well as in their essay writing. These observations were carried out during all literature classes of the first semester.

The finding obtained by the survey are summarized as follows

Questions	Answer 1	Answer 2	Answer 3
How helpful are the pre-class videos in understanding the book?	Not helpful 22.2 %	Moderately Helpful 22.2 %	Extremely helpful 50 %

How do you feel about in-class discussions after engaging with digital materials?	I feel confident and prepared 50 %	Somewhat confident and prepared 44.4%	neither confident nor prepared 5.6 %
Which part of the pre-class resources do you find most useful? (check all that's applicable)	Book animation videos 50 %	Literary movement / Historical context video 55.6 %	Quotes document 33.3 %
How does your experience in this blended literature class (with digital materials and in-class discussions) compare to traditional literature classes that rely solely on in-person instruction?	Blended learning is more effective 66.7 %	traditional classes are effective 0%	Both equally effective 33.3 %

Table 1. Perceived Usefulness of the Pre-Class Materials

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations conclude that the pre-class digital materials stand as a foundation and a starting point that guides learners initially understanding of the literary work and its context. Classroom observations also perceived a tangible confidence and preparedness for in-person discussions. These pre-class digital materials worked as a pathway to critical literary analysis. It was also observed that quotes documents not only were deeply analyzed by led the discussions. Finally, a critical sense in written arguments was also observed because students felt confident in their grasp of the whole picture of the literary analysis.

Results and Discussions

The findings of this study compliments the existing research in this regard as well as provide valuable new insights.

The findings suggest that pre-class digital materials, particularly animation videos of the literary work as well as videos on literary movements and historical context, play a significant role in improving learners' comprehension and engagement because pre-class digital materials familiarize the learners with the foundational concepts allowing for more reflective questions as well as deep analytical discussions at class. This aligns with the research by O'Flaherty & Phillips (2015) which emphasizes that pre-class learning design helps with the learners' exposure to concepts complimenting the Knowledge Integration Theory allowing learners to build better connections with in-class learning. Likewise, Qays et al (2022) says that literature students in the blended learning group outperformed those in the traditional leaning one in term of developing knowledge in English literature. Accordingly, Güzer and Caner (2014) reported, based on their thorough literature review, the effectiveness of blended learning on interaction, participation, and critical thinking skill.

Moreover, this study shows that the majority of learners felt prepared and confident in engaging and participating in in-person discussions following their pre-class digital learning. That is because pre-class digital resources help learners visualize abstract concepts like themes, symbols, and motifs…etc. Pre-class materials also situate the literary work in a visual representation of literary movements and the author's

biographical background which acts like a pathway that leads in-person discussions. This supports the study by Xiao and Adnan (2022) which proves that pre-class digital resources stimulate learners' confidence, interaction, and interest and make for a positive learning performance and experience. Similarly, this study also agrees with a study by Khodabakhshi et all (2021) which agrees that learners become more prepared when they are taught before class which makes them confident engaging in in-class activities. Equally, Bergmann and Sams (2012) accentuate that learners who are exposed to pre-class materials are more likely going to contribute to discussions and clarify misconceptions.

Additionally, this study shows that in-person discussions and interpretations following the pre-class learning deepens their grasps of the overall literary analysis which develops their critical and analytical thinking skills because it provides them with a space where they analyze texts, express opinions, evaluate ideas, defend interpretations, and build arguments as well as allow for writing practice and peer review. This compliments the study by Aziz et al (2023) stating that combining pre-class learning such as videos with immersive in-class learning helps develop analytical thinking skills. Also, Khodabakhshi et all (2021) who sees that learners' preparedness due to the pre-class learning allows for more meaningful interactions and collaborations during practical in-class activities. These findings also agree with Kawinkoonlasate et all (2019) stating that engagement with pre-class preparation leads to deeper and more meaningful classroom participation and discussions which increases problem-solving and analytical thinking skills.

Furthermore, the in-person setting not only promotes critical analysis and interpretations of quotes documents but also it provides a space for writing analytical essays. This compliments the study by Ibarra and Cárdenas (2024) who emphasize that pre-class materials drove learners to deeper levels of analysis and critical thinking and better application of the learned knowledge. Furthermore, Mokhtar et al (2020) suggest that classroom discussions and debates develop learners' thinking abilities and help them write well-supported argumentative essays.

Also, the findings of this study conclude that blended learning in literature classes achieved by the use of pre-class digital resources encourages not only critical thinking but also learner-centeredness and self-paced learning. This agrees with the findings by Xiao and Adnan (2022) which conclude that in-class setting where learners applied knowledge acquired from their pre-class learning fostered student autonomy, encouraged learner-centeredness by allowing students to take control of the development of their cognitive skills through discussions. Likewise, Strayer (2012) saw that blended learning refined learners understanding thanks to peer discussions where learners reported that they developed confidence, adaptability, and their critical thinking to effectively apply their acquired knowledge. Also, Akib et al (2025) confirm that blended learning fosters critical thinking as well as independent learning, learner autonomy, and learner-centeredness. The finding also aligns with Prince (2004) who argues that active learning cultivates critical thinking.

Additionally, this study also noted learners' preference to videos and visual pre-class digital material as opposed to text documents. This note also aligns with Khodabakhshi et al (2021) who found that learners who were assigned videos performed better than those with online textbook readings.

As a final note, this study highlights learners' preference to blended learning approach in literature classes over traditional in-person lecturing which reinforces the effectiveness of blended learning. This also aligns with Adnan (2017) who concluded that learners prefer blended learning as it is flexible since it promotes pace learning.

Conclusion

In light of this study and the aforementioned results and discussion, this conclusion aims to re-envision literature education by offering practical recommendations grounded in both the strengths and shortcomings of this study.

First, pre-class digital materials, particularly animation videos of the literary work and videos on literary movements and historical context, improve learners' comprehension and engagement, and familiarize them with the theoretical concepts to more deep analytical discussions at class.

Second, pre-class digital learning foster learners' preparedness and confidence in engaging and participating in in-person discussions because they not only expose the learners to theoretical concepts but also help them visualize abstract concepts like themes, literary movements, and the author's biography which lead in-class discussions.

Third, this study also noted learners' preference to videos and visual pre-class digital material as opposed to text documents.

Fourth, in-class discussions, led by printed quotes documents, following the pre-class learning develops their critical and analytical thinking skills because it provides them with a space where they analyze texts documents, express opinions, evaluate ideas, defend interpretations, and build arguments.

Fifth, the in-class setting not only promotes critical and analytical thinking but also provides a space for writing analytical essays and peer review.

Sixth, the use of pre-class digital resources as a blended learning tool encourages not only critical thinking but also learner-centeredness and self-paced learning.

Also, this study highlights learners' preference to blended learning approach in literature classes over traditional in-person lecturing which reinforces the effectiveness of blended learning.

As a final note, for post-class activities, it is recommended to use more interactive digital materials and activities such as model analysis tasks, in which learner correct a written essay.

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