

Accelerated Business English Performance through Blended Learning: a Case Study with Technology-mediated Coaching

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Abstract

Combining online self-directed study with face-to-face instruction is a popular technique in adult English language instruction (Coryell and Chlup, 2007). Although the research on blended learning in ESL is growing, we know little about the effectiveness of different kinds of blended programs for producing accelerated gains in Business English. This case study addresses two questions currently unanswered in the literature: can an intensive blended program with a range of learning modalities help adults significantly improve Business English proficiency in less than a year? Second, can a completely online blended program, in which human instruction is technology-mediated, also produce significant gains in business English proficiency? Twenty-one adult Japanese professionals (14 men) employed at a large, multi-national technology company participated in either a full-time (34.5 hours per week), immersive blended learning program (n = 6), or a part-time (4.5 hours per week), entirely online blended program (n = 15). Both programs included self-directed study with an online business English curriculum and twice-weekly coaching with an experienced English language teacher, delivered via telephone or VoIP. The full-time program also included traditional face-to-face classroom instruction and in-person, small group projects, and individual presentations. Twenty participants took a standard assessment of business English at the beginning of the program and again after seven months. Although individual compliance with the programs varied, test scores for the full-time group increased by an average of 50%, and scores for the part-time group increased by 9-12%. This case study shows that an intensive blended program consisting of an integrated online curriculum, distance coaching, and in-person instruction can be effective at producing large language performance gains with relative speed. It also provides evidence that a completely technology-mediated blended program, with no face-to-face instruction, can also produce significant improvements in Business English.