The Impact of Blended Learning in a Lower Primary Education: in the Case of the Second Chance (SC) Education Program in Emanuel Development Association (EDA)-Ethiopia

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Abstract: The purpose of this action research project was to determine if teaching with a blended learning approach increases student engagement in Second Chance (SC) primary school classrooms. Participants were nine to fourteen-year-olds with individualized education plans and general education in a full-day school program. Students came from a wide variety of backgrounds and different socio-economic backgrounds. Quantitative data was collected through observation by recording which students were actively engaged, passively engaged, disengaged, or disruptive in small group self-learning for ten months a year, seven hours a day, and six days a week. Qualitative data were collected through observations by the teacher/facilitators and para-educator, interviews with students, and journal notes. The SC classes run for ten months, teaching 25 students per class with an intensive calendar to be determined in consultation with the parents of the children. The teaching/learning process employs interactive learner-centered methods with an emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy. Learning progress will be assessed through continuous assessment and reinforcement measures. On the other hand, social and emotional learning is fully applied to the cognitive development of the children to perform better academically and ensure soft skills, such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, and communication skills. After completing the SC condensed curriculum, students will seat for a standardized placement test prepared and administered by the local government education sector to determine appropriate grades. For example, the placement test clearly determines the grade level of the students. According to the assessment report the students were promoted to grade three, or four based on the assessment results. However, the traditional classes should follow the yearly promotion method from grade one, two, three, and four approaches. According to (Weir and Knight, 2004), while the economics of education encompasses both theoretical and applied aspects, applied work has become more and more important over time. Being Ethiopian is a developing nation the effectiveness of the Second Chance program completing grade three or four in ten months of teaching could practically justify the economics of education to address the majority of out-of-school children in Ethiopia. This article is a descriptive analysis of an innovative blended learning Second Chance education program and also aims to contribute to the discussion and literature on the changing Taxonomy of Education and developing learning models that could help students engage with their learning in deeper, more interactive, flexible, social, and contextual ways. Learning is disseminated in the classroom by using locally available teaching aid materials and TV, and radio that makes the program hybrid and blended learning. The blended learning models provide supplementarily and augmented education for those with time and access opportunity disadvantages. The teaching approach not only supports the teaching of 21st-century skills but also offers tools for both the fast assessment process and remedial education. Moreover, the teaching-learning process is multiple, integrated, diversified, interactive, and learner-centered teaching approach increases students' engagement and improves their academic performance of students. The approach is also activity-based, flexible, social, and contextual to make learning real. The foundational beliefs of conventional instruction hinge on uniformity, a community tradition, transition qualification and

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compliance to requirements relating to schooling, and percentage of in-person attendance with cohort. Although blended learning is taking place by using locally available teaching aid materials, where the school dropout students from 9 to 14 years old who came from different life skills experiences. Students are more encouraged and motivated to learn by practices in the class. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the teaching and learning process in the classrooms and out of the classroom. The project is successful and replicated by the government schools in the above-mentioned regions. The SC program runs for ten months and is intended to address out-of-school children in the school system through standardized placement tests prepared and administered by the local government education sector to determine appropriate grades, for example, grade three, or four to which the children be promoted, based on the assessment results.   According to the report, more than 90% of the SC students transferred to grade four after the ten months of intervention in the target schools.

Keywords: listening comprehension, audio, video, captioned video

Introduction

In 2016, the United Nations launched the bold and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across multiple sectors, among this education is Target no. 4 which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. According to a study deduced that primary education wastage is still the bottleneck in Ethiopia and difficult to achieve the goal set at the end of the sustainable development goal (2030). Strong intervention should be implemented to mitigate factors associated with primary education wastage in different regions of Ethiopia. According to SDG (2030), agenda, the study confirms that the cumulative primary wastage for (2013-2017) was rated as 58 %, and the trends of wastage exacerbated starting from grade 5 and the worst at grade 8 where wastage was recorded as 80% at the turning point of primary education (Donnenfeld et al., 2017) and (MoE 2010a).On the other hand, the teaching landscape is rapidly changing, both at higher education and primary levels. The technological rise of the 21st-century and widespread integration of those technologies into our society, combined with access to digital technology at the primary education level by using different locally available teaching and learning aid materials take advantage to prepare facilitators/teachers and students themselves to ensure interactive learning in the classroom in the form of hybrid approach (Pamarthi et al, 2019 & Linton, 2018). Our children and their following generations are already and will continue to grow up in a world that's a stark reminder of how rapidly the human civilization has changed, based on the environment we exist. Moreover,society and the world where high technologies in the developed nations access information about the real dynamic world we exist. However, this article portrays low or no technologies, in the developing nations based on context are more comfortable using locally available and affordable materials that could be prepared by teachers and facilitators to replace most digital technologies (Al Qudah, 2018 & Cooney et al, 2000). Emmanuel Development Association (EDA) is the Ethiopian NGO that piloted the Second Chance (SC) Education program in three regions in Ethiopia using a hybrid and blended learning approach for the out-of-school children from 9 to 14 years of age groups in the school system. Learning is disseminated in the classroom through TV, and radio in addition to locally available teaching-learning materials that make the program hybrid and blended learning. The Second Chance education program ensures the Social and Emotional Learning activities to develop the students cognitive and that will also contribute to their future academic success and the s and soft skills of the students in the teaching and learning process in the classroom and out of the classroom to avoid the adverse effects on academic.

The SC and blended learning models provide supplementarily and augmented education for those with time and access opportunity disadvantages. After the completion of ten months, the students attend the placement exam by the local government to measure the competencies of students to assign to the appropriate grade levels. According to (EDA Report, 2021), over 90% of the Second Chance (SC) students transferred to grade 4 and the remaining to grade 3 in government schools after ten months of SC education program as per the level of their competencies.

What Is Blended Learning?

Griffin portrays blended learning as a mixture of learning methods that incorporate multiple teaching models to make learning real. Blended learning is a natural development of the growing accessibility of hybrid learning, with teachers and students engaging in activities-based learning methodology. A blended learning approach ensures that the learner is engaged and driving his or her individual learning experience (Griffin, I. (2014). This approach also helps cater to the individual needs of the learner, most students have unique learning styles and a blended approach is more likely to cater to those needs than a traditional and conventional classroom teaching experience (Christen's Institute Organization). Moreover, blended learning is meant to increase learners' levels of knowledge construction, teamwork skills and productivity, analytical skills, and critical thinking through peer discussion, application, and reflection to the context of Instructional Objectives and innovative extension of education. The advantages include differentiated instruction, scaffolded instruction and direction (to the reading assignment, discussion activity in the classroom by students, etc), feedback and rubrics, and individual students having control over the learning, time, and motivation (Kendra Cherry, (n.d).and Bruner, 1955).

What Makes the Second Chance (SC) and Blended Learning Different from the Conventional Teaching Approach?

Second Chance (SC) classes are learning platforms catering to the learning needs of out-of-school children who have been excluded by the education sector due to various reasons including poverty.   The second chance classes operate in tandem with nearby conventional primary schools that are expected to subsume the children at the end of the year.   The SC classes recruit children between the ages of 9 and 14 with clear criteria which include, children never been to school, children from poor families who are unable to cover indirect costs of education, single-parent children, girls, and children with disability. Teachers/facilitators will be recruited from within the community who are graduated from high schools and given induction as well as refresher training. SC children are adapted to student-centered teaching and learning methodology and learning is taking place through locally available teaching aid materials and   TV and local Radio. Students are more encouraged and motivated to learn by practice in the classroom. The role of the teacher is to facilitate teaching and learning in the classroom and out of the classroom (Dreambox Learning, 2013).

The SC classes run for ten months, teaching 25 students per class with an intensive calendar to be determined in consultation with the parents of the children.   The teaching/learning process employs interactive learner-centered methods with an emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy. Learning progress will be assessed through continuous assessment and reinforcement measures. After completing the SC condensed curriculum, students will seat for a standardized placement test prepared and administered by the local government

education sector to determine appropriate grades, for example, grade three, or four to which the children be promoted, based on the assessment results. However, the traditional classes should follow the yearly promotion method from grades one, two, three, and four approaches (TCI, 2021 & Imbriale, 2013).

Blended learning in the SC program is important because it breaks down the traditional walls of teaching, ones that don't work for all students, and now with access to present-day technologies and resources, we can tailor the learning experience for each student. Blended learning also offers flexible time frames that can be personalized to each person, offering them the ability to learn at their own pace (Eric, 2020). The advantages of blended learning for teachers and students ensure significant success to achieve the teaching objectives in the SC education program. The strategy of teaching-learning is multiple activities, integrated, diversified, interactive, learner-centered teaching approach that increases students' engagement and improves the students' academic performance. Teaching is less expensive to deliver, more affordable and saves time. The teaching-learning strategy offers flexibility in terms of availability. In other words, blended learning enables the student to access the materials from anywhere at any time while enjoying the benefits of face-to-face support and instruction (Tucker, Wycoff, & Green, 2017 & Jachin, & Usagawa, 2017).

One advantage of blended learning in the Second Chance education program is the aspect of having personalized learning in the classroom for students. Teachers can make playlists and activities based on the student's needs. The students can go down their path at their own pace in whatever place in the classroom they want (Kazakoff, Macaruso, & Hook, (2018). The teaching-learning strategy increases student interest. When different activities are integrated into school lessons, learners are more likely to be interested in, focused on, and excited about the subjects they are studying. Subjects that might be monotonous for some – like math and science, while also increasing information retention. In the Second Chance education program, the teaching methodology keeps students focused for a longer time. The engagement and interaction with the resources keep students focused for longer periods than they would be with books or paper resources, this engagement also helps develop learning through exploration and research. Students become self-driven and responsible, tracking their achievements, which helps develop the ability to find the resources or get the help they need, self-advocating so they can reach their goals. Moreover, the approach instills a sense of 'student ownership over learning' which can be a powerful force propelling learning. Due to the flexibility of the SC blended learning and the ability to access different local media, resources allow students to learn at their own pace, meaning a teacher can help speed up the facilitation of the learning process. Facilitators can rapidly analyze, review and give feedback on student work, which gives the facilitators the ability to tailor the teaching methods and feedback for each student while improving time efficiency. Researchers agree that the teaching strategy prepares students for the future multitude of real-world skills, that directly translate into life skills, from the existing context and environment they are in (Vender et al. 2012).

According to a World Bank report, the conventional school programs, for out-of-school children (OOSC) were for three to four years of teaching program. In fact, the economic cost of OOSC tends to be the highest. In countries that have experienced slow growth over the past decade, suggesting that enrolling out-of-school children and providing them with quality education methodology such as the SC program could contribute to national economic convergence, reducing economic inequality between and within the country. Implementing the SC program for ten months with the condensed curriculum that justifies cost-effectiveness, and the

economics of education helps to reduce public spending and able to enroll many of the OOSC in primary school. Furthermore, the teaching and learning will also replicate the same in the public schools for economic gain and low-cost education achieving universal primary education in the country (World Bank 2009).

Strategy to Strengthen SC

As a strategy, the SC education program involves mothers supporting their children. Being a mother is one of the most important roles a woman can ever play. Mothers play a huge role in their children's lives, caring for them, loving them, teaching them, and so much more. The way a child develops can be largely attributed to the role that their parents and caregivers play in their children's development and learning. As mentioned above, the majority of the second chance students are coming from poor families who are mostly unable to cover the indirect costs of education (in Ethiopia, education is said to be free as there is no school fee, however, there are some indirect costs such as buying school uniform, learning materials to their students and opportunity cost of sending a child to school). Unless it is addressed, the chance of these children quitting their education will be high (Kristina, 2020, & Güzer, & Caner, 2014).

To mitigate this challenge, the SC program organizes mothers of the SC class students in groups as a Self-Help Group (SHG) intending to empower them economically, socially, and emotionally, thereby enabling them to support their children's education. The SHG project provides mothers with integrated literacy lessons, and entrepreneurship and business management skills training accompanied by small startup capital injection. Throughout the program, mothers will be encouraged to save, use banks or microfinance, and access credit services so that they could strengthen their businesses. Furthermore, the project encourages and assist mothers to engage in value-adding businesses so that businesses of different group link either vertically or horizontally and grow together.   As this is a year schools are operating with the threat of COVID- 19, mothers' groups are encouraged to be engaged in businesses that contribute to the prevention of the pandemic – such as the production of face masks, detergents, hand sanitizers, and hand washing equipment. The whole purpose of engaging mothers in this program is to enable them to provide a balanced diet to their children and family as well as continue supporting their children's education. Studies have shown that A mother plays multiple roles in a child's development, as she is a teacher in every aspect of a child's developmental growth – social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and independent (Persky and   McLaughlin, 2017).

Primary School Capacity Strengthening

Second Chance also pays attention to strengthening government primary schools that are the recipient of SC class students in the subsequent year. The ultimate purpose of the SC program in EDA is not to want to see dropping out of children after joining conventional schools due to several pushing factors. To minimize the threat of students' dropout, the SC program trains linked school teachers in the handling of children, student-centered learning methods as well as establishing and implementing an early warning system to prevent school dropout. Moreover, EDA and its donors have strengthened the collaborative and mutually benefiting experience sharing among SC classes and conventional schools. To this end, most SC classes are housed by conventional schools to make the interface and experience sharing smooth and easy to replicate the same in the school system to scale up (Jachin, & Usagawa, 2017).

Pre-school Program

The Second Chance program also extends technical and material support to the preschool children organized in each of the link schools with the aim of enabling the pre-school program to adopt child-friendly pre-schooling. Several studies including MoE reports revealed that most pre-school classes are managed by untrained teachers and given very little attention. To curb this situation, EDA has provided relevant capacity strengthening training to the teachers, providing some basic materials to make the classroom as conducive as possible. The rapidly changing landscapes should be a marker to show that teaching methods need to evolve to keep up with the times and incorporate integrated technologies into the learning modal, these technologies aren't going to go away, they'll continue to be integrated into our society and it's time to embrace them for the advantages they bring.

Government Adopted SC classes (GASCC)

EDA has established strong cooperation and partnership with both the Federal and regional government education offices to adopt the second chance model in the conventional school system. To this end, it has been assisting the sector to develop relevant curricular materials for second chance classes, training government education personnel in SC program management, and ensuring the SC model is recognized by policy and planning documents of the minister of education (MoE) as well as regional education Bureau (REBs). On top of all these, district education offices and primary schools have been trying to implement SC classes within their school system. The government adopted the SC program as one of the education programs and developed a policy to implement blended learning across all the government schools as a conventional schools program to give additional opportunities to marginalized out-of-school children in the community in a cost-effective manner. To ensure suitability the role of EDA is to provide technical support to their government-adopted SC classes.

Conclusion

In the SC education program blended learning aims at contributing to the changing Taxonomy of Education and developing learning models that could help students engage with their learning in deeper, more interactive, flexible, social, and contextual ways. The blended learning models provide supplementarily and augmented education for those with time and access opportunity disadvantages. The teaching approach not only supports the teaching of 21st-century skills but offers tools for both fast assessment processes and remedial education. The approach is interactive, activity-based, flexible, social, and contextual to make learning real. Learning is disseminated in the classroom through TV, and radio in addition to locally available teaching-learning materials could make the program hybrid and blended learning. The blended learning models provide supplementarily and augmented education for those with time and access opportunity disadvantages. The foundational beliefs of conventional instruction hinge on uniformity, a community tradition, transition qualification and compliance to requirements relating to schooling, and percentage of in-person attendance with cohort (Dreambox, 2013). However, blended learning is taking place by using locally available teaching aid materials, that the school dropout students from 9 to 14 years old who came from different life skills experiences. Students are more encouraged and motivated to learn by practices in the class. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the teaching and learning process in the classrooms and out of the classroom.

All students no matter their age learn differently and teaching methods should reflect this, by designing teaching programs in a way that reaches visual, auditory, and kinetic learners alike. With the heavy integration of different locally available teaching aid materials, the teaching and learning improved teaching, information retention, engagement, responsibility, and enjoyment. Students never outgrow their learning styles, meaning blended learning is more important than ever, no matter what the industry is, from schools to corporations, from all walks of life (Stephen, 2012). Student engagement in SC is a key component of a classroom. Without it, the classroom cannot run effectively or efficiently. The Second Chance education program ensures the Social and Emotional Learning activities among students to cognitive development and that will also contribute to developing to take leadership tasks and soft skills of the students in the teaching and learning process in the classroom to avoid the adverse effect of academics (Berman, S., with Chaffee, S., & Sarmiento, J. (2018). Teachers are finding their classroom dynamics are changing. They have more diversity amongst their students academically, socially, and behaviorally. With all these changes, teachers have been searching for a tool to help them. As they have been searching for a solution to help increase their students' engagement during lessons and activities, the learning has begun to show its' positive effect on student engagement. Blended learning provides an avenue for teachers to individualize their students' learning. With it, they can provide more lessons that are tailored to their student's needs and offer teachers a way to help capture every student's attention. It also gives students the ability to choose what they want to work on first, for how long, and where they want to complete their work. Blended learning is teaching responsibility to students and giving them a voice in their education. Incorporating the technology piece opens up an opportunity for students to participate without the anxiety of speaking in front of the class. After the completion of ten months, the SC students attend the placement exam by the local government education office. According to (EDA Report, 2021), over 90% of the Second Chance (SC) students transferred to grade 4 and the remaining to grade 3 in government schools. The project is successful and replicated by the government schools in different regions.

Teachers can use a variety of models within blended learning, like station rotation, lab rotation, flex model, etc. With the perfect combination of blended learning models, blended learning can even work for early childhood classrooms. Teachers have the flexibility to choose the design that would best work for their classroom. In the case of this teacher-researcher, a modified version of the station rotation model worked best for her young students. They were able to rotate freely among the small group activities presented and if they did not want to go to one of them, they were not forced to. Based on the findings of this action research project, implementing blended learning into small group learning time helped increase student engagement. Other research conducted by Al Mosawi and Wali (2015), Chai (2017), Fisher et al. (2018), and Henrie et al. (2015) have shown the same results, blended learning is helping increase student engagement as well as student achievement and overall student happiness. With knowledge from research and professional developments, blended learning can be effectively implemented in all classrooms. Teachers will need to take a step back and give some control over their students. Blended learning will not be the fix for student engagement, but it is somewhere to start when all other options have been exhausted. The traditional and conventional lower primary school programs, for out-of-school children (OOSC), were for three to four years of the teaching program. The economic cost of OOSC tends to be the highest in the conventional teaching and learning process. In countries that have experienced slow growth over the past decade, suggesting that enrolling out-of-school children and

providing them with quality education methodology such as the SC program could contribute to national economic convergence, reducing economic inequality between and within the country. Implementing the SC program for ten months in the hybrid blended teaching model with the condensed curriculum, will reduce public spending and help to enroll many of the OOSC in primary school in collaboration with the government education system.

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