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BLENDED LEARNING MODELS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

PĂSTAE OANA-MARIA, associate professor PhD

"Constantin Brâncuşi" University of Târgu-Jiu

Abstract:

The radical change in our teaching delivery has forced us to leap into the world of virtual learning and find new solutions in the way we teach in order to improve the students' experience during the pandemic. Over the past few years, education has seen the rise of a hybrid method of learning called blended learning that combines traditional face-to-face approach with tech-powered e-learning education, a mix of multimedia technology, video streaming, virtual classrooms, voicemail, email and conference calls etc. Even before Covid-19, there were universities that provided higher education degrees through blended learning or online learning which allow students to work at their own pace while having teachers on hand.

Graham (2006) identifies six reasons that an instructor, trainer or learner might choose to design or use a blended learning system: pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost-effectiveness and ease of revision.

Blended learning is a mix of different learning environments such as face-to-face, e-learning and self-education brought together to meet the learning objectives. Hundreds of universities around the world use blended learning which weaves together the traditional classroom with the power of eliminating the boundaries of time and place. Blended learning is more effective because it is global reach, saves money and develops students' communication and critical thinking.

This article aims at showing that blended learning can offer the opportunities and flexibility necessary for the future of education.

Keywords: *Blended learning, virtual environment, critical thinking, hybrid learning*

Introduction

Education is constantly changing and developing, and in recent years the rising interest in e-learning has expanded and shifted its focus so that many educational institutions are now concerned with blended learning programs.

The needs and expectations of learners are constantly changing and, increasingly, they expect technology-rich and flexible learning opportunities. In addition, many other learners are working in the context of increased work and time pressures, and so demand a shift in balance from face-to-face education to ones that involve a more flexible blend of face-to-face and e-learning activities.

The development of e-learning and, more recently, blended learning, is located in changes in work and society. Theorists such as Eriksen (2001) and Virilio (2000) argue that society today is characterized by the acceleration and compression of time and space. Eriksen (2001) characterizes this in terms of 'fast time' and 'slow time'.

'Fast time' is linked to the rise in information and communications technology, resulting in increased access to information at ever increasing speeds. One consequence of 'fast time' is that it creates a demand for more flexible approaches to learning and teaching.

What is blended learning?

The term 'blended learning' was first used by Cooney et. al. (2000), then it was introduced by Sharma and Barrett (2007) in business, after that it was employed in higher education by MacDonald (2006) and lastly entered into the field of language teaching and learning. The term 'blended learning' has risen in popularity from around 2000. It is described as a holistic approach to learning that involves a blend of different approaches, e.g. face-to-face and e-learning, the use of different technology-based tools, or the blending of classroom-based and work-based learning.

In higher education the term has been defined as: "a combination of technology and classroom instruction in a flexible approach to learning that recognizes the benefits of delivering some training and assessment online but also uses other modes to make up a complete training programme which can improve learning outcomes and/or save costs." (Banados, 2006, p. 534).

Stracke (2007, p. 57) defines the term as "a language course which combines a face-to-face (F2F) classroom component with an appropriate use of technology."

The first using and defining manual in academic teaching and continuing education appears evidently in 2006, *The Handbook of de Blended Learning: Global perspectives, Local Design* (Bonk & Graham, 2006).

Tomlinson & Whittaker (2013) argue that blended learning is more common in professional development, tertiary education and recently in ELT (English Learning Teaching).

This term is used differently: 'hybrid or mixed learning' in Stracke (2007); 'e-learning' in Shepard (2005) and 'b-learning' in Banados (2006).

Figure 1. Overview of blended learning

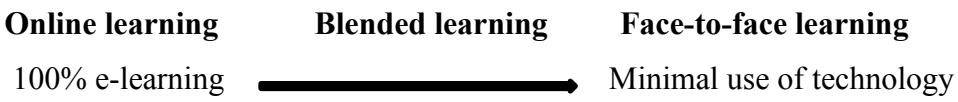
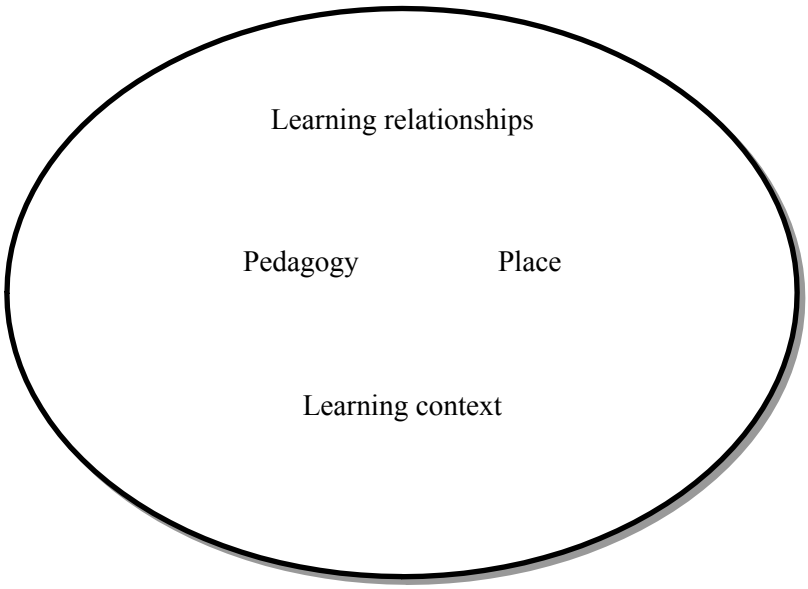


Figure 2. The landscape of blended learning



Over the past few years, education has seen the rise of a hybrid method of learning that combines a traditional face-to-face approach with tech-powered e-learning education.

Blended learning is a mix of multimedia technology; video streaming; virtual classrooms; voicemail, email and conference calls and online text animation. What we combine is instructional modalities, instructional methods, online and face-to-face instruction. Graham (2003) identifies six reasons that an instructor, trainer or learner might choose to design or use a blended learning system: pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost-effectiveness and ease of revision.

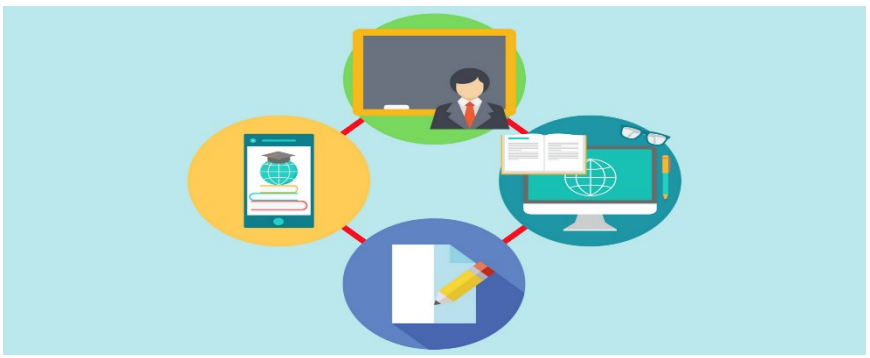
Blended versus hybrid learning

Both types of learning involve a mix of in-person and online learning, but in hybrid learning, the in-person learners and the online learners are different individuals.

Picture 1- Hybrid learning**.** Source: www.viewsonic.com

While in blended learning, the same individuals learn both in person and online.

Picture 2- Blended learning. Source: www.edugals.com



Virtual communication tools and learning activities

There are two types of tools used in the blended learning approach: asynchronous and synchronous tools. The first generation of virtual communication tools included:

-Asynchronous tools: audio files, discussion lists or e-lists, e-mail, news digests.

-Synchronous tools: chat, conferencing, instant messaging, video conferencing.

-Social networking software: instant messaging and phone calls, podcasts, social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, My Space), video clips (YouTube, virtual tours, weblogs), wikis.

-E-learning systems: virtual learning environments, conferencing systems.

-Mobile learning or m-learning**.**

Blended learning programs can include a diverse mixture of activities that enable learners to achieve their learning goals and outcomes, activities that may be used both online and offline and that involve cognitive processes such as creating, problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making and evaluation.

Gilly Salmon (2002) provides a helpful overview of e-learning activities, which she calls 'e-tivities' that can be done both in the classroom and online**:** audiovisual presentations, brainstorming or wordstorming, debates, demonstrations, discussion groups, icebreakers, problem-based learning, group projects, quizzes, reflective practice, role-play, simulations and work-based project**s.**

The notion 'BL' is based on constructivist theories about learning that are represented by Jean Piaget, John Dewey, L. S. Vygotsky and Heinze.

The theory of learning relevant to the blended learning approach is a learner-centred pedagogy and the learner is actively involved in the learning process, learning is based on real-life and authentic situations and it is a social process. It is linked to the concept of deep and surface approaches to learning. Some examples: inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning (PBL), project-based learning -independently or as part of a group, cooperative and collaborative group learning, communities of practice.

The learner-centred strategy in which learners engage in tasks, that have been specially designed, help them to improve their skill or understanding by reflecting, with the help of facilitators, coaches or mentors. This strategy can be deployed face-to-face, one-to-one, through computer-based case studies, games and simulations or through project work. E-learning can support a wide variety of different tools and techniques. Here are some models of blended learning which can help university teachers to offer student-centred learning and to promote skills such as communication, information literacy, creativity and collaboration and to develop the ability to use digital technologies.

The rotation model

It is one of the most common models of blended learning and includes four different varieties: station rotation is a type of blended learning which allows students to rotate through stations on a fixed schedule, where at least one of the stations is an online learning station; lab rotation is very similar to station rotation, except that students fulfill the online learning part of instruction in a computer lab; flipped classroom is a model where students listen to a lecture in class and do homework at home. Students in flipped classes watch a short lecture video online and come into the classroom to complete activities, such as group work, projects, or other exercises.

The blended face-to-face class is based in the classroom, although a significant amount of classroom time has been replaced by online activities. Seat time is required for this model, and online activities are used to supplement the in-person class. Reading, quizzes, or other assessments are done online, at home. This model allows students and faculty to share more high-value instructional time because class time is used for higher-order learning activities, like discussions and group projects.

The blended online class is the inverse of the blended face-to-face class because the class is mostly conducted online, but there are some required in-person activities, such as lectures or labs.

The self-blend model is a program-level model and is familiar to many college students. Learners are enrolled in a school but take online courses in addition to their traditional face-to-face courses and are not guided by a faculty member but they can choose which courses to take online and which in person.

The blended MOOC is a form of flipped classroom using in-person meetings to supplement a massive open online course and offering access to MOOC materials outside of class and then having in-class activities and discussions.

The Flex model lets students move on fluid schedules among learning activities according to their needs.

The Enriched Virtual model is an alternative to full-time online model and allows students to complete the majority of coursework online at home, but also having face-to-face learning sessions with a teacher.

This is a snapshot of the blended learning models that exist in higher education right now but I am sure more models of hybrid instruction have already arisen. Blended learning will expand due to its effective pedagogical practices and the evolution of future technology. Graham (2006) stated that blended learning would have a great role in the future and it would be dominated by the distributed learning environments.

Conclusions

We live in a world in which technology has evolved and has increasingly become an integral part of our lives. Technology is nowadays used to bring experts at a distance into the classroom, creating a simultaneous face-to-face and CM experience.

We are interested in creating more effective learning experiences and increasing access and flexibility and that is why our learning system should provide a blend of both face-to-face and blended experiences. Neither the computer nor the World Wide Web is meant to replace instructors but with the "Z generation" we should know that technology motivates learners.

Effective learning activities are those that mobilize, engage and enable these learners to develop their knowledge and skills.

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