

Theoretical Perspective of *Blended Learning* in English Language Teaching and Learning Scenario

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Abstract: *Digital products as computers, tablets and smart phones are obsessed by a majority of learners. There are plenty of methods used by the educators to make the English language teaching and learning process effective. One of such method is blended learning. Blended learning embodies an educational environment for much of the world where computers and the Internet are willingly obtainable. The present paper focuses the theoretical perspective of Blended Learning in the classroom scenario. The paper also examines what are the benefits of using such method in the language classroom.*

Keywords: ELT, Assessment, Approach, Feedback, Learning autonomy, Strategies, Communication

1. Introduction

A methodology deals with different theories about nature of language and how languages are learnt. Technology has brought a drastic change in education. Technological innovations are expanding the range of possible solutions that can improve teaching and learning inputs, processes, and outcomes. Information and communication technologies offer a possibility to apply new learning and teaching practices. These theories are based on a set of assumptions which deal with linguistic and psychological factors that are accepted at large for the acquisition of languages. Such effective method is blended learning.

Blended learning is a precise methodology to language teaching in which a student partially learns through online delivery of instruction and content. In blended learning the student will have nearly control over time, place, path and/or pace. Their time spent acquiring and studying can partially be online, outside the classroom and at a time decided by the contributors. This means that the classroom as a field for learning may be prolonged through the use of digital learning platforms and digital communication tools. Such method of learning also points to the time spent at school when the lessons establish a blend of digital learning and face-to-face learning. The use of objects in the digital world may expand learning and encourage students in their learning of English language and English literature. In addition to an old-fashioned classroom delivery online teaching and learning will open up for more elasticity and may inspire the learners to seek more information on their own and endure their learning process. The teachers may facilitate this process.

To boost students to learn more – a digital start may increase their interest and open their eyes for the subject. The virtual reality and the students' understanding may be more used by the educators. Many of the students are well trained in digital knowledge. Digital products as computers, tablets and smartphones are obsessed by a majority of learners. Therefore, there seems to be a noteworthy prospective in a pedagogical use of digital artefacts in the educational sector. Technologies seem to influence our use and understanding and how we are socialized through taking part in communicative activities. Educators need to appropriate

relevant technology from a social and relational perspective (Lund, 2003).

Procter defined blended learning as “the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning” (in Yilmaz-Soylu, 2016). In addition, Bielawski and Metcalf (2003) defined blended learning as follows:

Blended learning focuses on optimizing achievement of learning objectives by applying the right learning technologies to match the right learning styles to transfer the right skills to the right person at the right time. (Metcalf, 2003)

This definition is based on the following values:

- 1) Blended learning emphasizes on accomplishing objectives efficiently.
- 2) Blended learning ought to provide to all learning styles.
- 3) Blended learning should be grounded on learners' needs.
- 4) Blended learning should be obtainable to learners when they need it: “The most effective learning strategy is Just-What-I-need, just-in-time.

The theory of blended learning has been everywhere for a long time, nonetheless its language was not definitely established until around the beginning of the 21st century. Graham (2006) defined “blended learning systems” as learning systems that “combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction.” (Poon: 1) enhances that the aim of the two delivery methods is to complement each other. Presently, the use of the term “blended learning” includes uniting Internet and digital media with recognized classroom forms that need the physical presence of teacher and students. The theory of blended learning models includes instructor-delivered content, e-learning, webinars, conference calls, live or online sessions with teachers, and other media and events, for example, Facebook, e-mail, chat rooms, blogs, podcasting, Twitter, YouTube, Skype and web boards. Pankin et al. at MIT define blended learning as:

Structured opportunities to learn, which use more than one learning or training method, inside or outside the classroom. This definition includes different learning or instructional methods (lecture, discussion, guided practice,

reading, games, case study, simulation), different delivery methods (live classroom or computer mediated) and different scheduling (synchronous or asynchronous) ... (Banditvilai.220)

We can identify a range of tools and technologies that can be used in building effective learning surroundings for blended learning, namely: (1) technologies in the classroom that are generally used in face to-face learning situations, such as PowerPoint, interactive whiteboards and audience response systems; (2) virtual communication tools that allow users to involve in deliberations and activities over the internet, counting audio files, discussion boards, e-lists, discussion groups, chat or conferencing, email, news groups, polling, questionnaires, web forms and videoconferencing; (3) social-networking software, now comprehensively used by students and staff in their personal life, and suitable more predominant in the context of learning and teaching, such as instant messaging and phone calls, podcasts, social-networking sites, video clips, virtual worlds, weblogs and wikis; (4) e-learning systems, that is, online settings that bring together a range of tools to support e-learning, such as VLEs, conferencing systems, group collaboration software and group sites; (5) mobile learning using mobile phones, laptops and tablet PCs.

Blended learning embodies an educational environment for much of the world where computers and the Internet are willingly obtainable. It syndicates self-study with valued face-to-face interaction with a teacher.

The blended learning development may offer new vision in communication and learning and enlarges the limits of the traditional classroom. The concept Blended learning has no clear definition. Most educators and writers reflect it a blend of face-to face learning and online learning or rather a combination of a physical and a virtual learning environment. Blended learning appears to be a developing tendency in higher education and has caught my interest as one method to growth and boost students in their learning process. Teachers have always engaged in different forms of blending and added new information and knowledge to what students already know through various learning activities and through a mixture of theory and practice. Teachers are usually most skilled in face-to-face teaching and learning and have a specific insight in how their students may enhance their learning. If teachers are equally trained in the digitally instructional teaching and learning they will be able to choose and combine the more traditional way of learning with digital learning and choose the best from each educational arena.

Traditional classrooms are teacher-centered but in e-learning we do everything by ourselves. Students observed this e-learning program as a cooperative tool for them to learn English. E-learning also inspires learners to work independently as each student can work on different tasks at their own pace within the “integrated learning environment” (Soliman, 2014). In other words, advanced learners would be able to work faster and finish more activities than beginner learners. (Nedeva&Dimova, 2010). In addition, it should be pointed out that students at all levels of English

ability were further tested by the e-learning tasks because the lessons were not identical to the classroom lessons but similar to them.

The practice of blended learning may open up for a transformative procedure to advantage the learners in accomplishing a more meaningful learning experience. Technology gives both teachers and learners more elasticity and less dependence on fixed classroom hours and school attendance is very understandable. The significance of contrasting synchronicity and asynchronicity and communication through text and human presence may of course be observed as just another form of difference in learning. However, this new flexibility in a learning environment with a possibly constant enhancement opens up not only for more difference but also for more engaged and committed learners in a learning atmosphere that links the life world of the students to the education institutions. Through a blended learning atmosphere, it may be easier to involve learners in replication and discourse created through social, reasoning and teaching presences. A blended atmosphere increases the students’ learning through more social and collaborative activities (Ramsey. 2003). The regions of proximal development (Vygotsky. 1978) are triggered through this type of working atmosphere. This may help more students to engage themselves on various levels of learning and promote their interest in learning.

To focus on new ideas and intervention is an important part of blended learning. An introduction of blended learning is dependent on autonomous teachers who are able to choose to introduce their students to a new technological mix of methods. The teachers must be inspired and prepared to add online learning to face-to-face learning, something that also involves sufficient pedagogical and technological vision and support. A pedagogically driven model will justify the different blended elements through the course outcomes and the need of the students. To use technology in EFL classrooms should be encouraged by pedagogical details to add further value to the teaching and improve learning for the students.

A blended learning course is potentially greater than the sum of its parts, and positive learning outcomes are most apparent when clear roles are assigned to the teacher and to the technology (Sharma & Barrett.7).

Procter defined blended learning as “the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning” (in Yilmaz-Soylu, 2008, p. 26). In addition, Bielawski and Metcalf (2003) defined blended learning as follows: “Blended learning focuses on optimizing achievement of learning objectives by applying the right learning technologies to match the right learning styles to transfer the right skills to the right person at the right time.” This definition is based on the following principles: (Metcalf, 2003)

- 1) Blended learning focuses on achieving objectives effectively.
- 2) Blended learning should cater to all learning styles.
- 3) Blended learning should be based on learners’ needs.
- 4) Blended learning should be available to learners when they need it:

“The most effective learning strategy is Just-What-I-need, just-in-time. “Blended Learning extends teaching and learning beyond the classroom walls and includes two types of interaction: face-to-face interaction and web-based interaction. The latter can be either synchronous or asynchronous. The term synchronous “is frequently used to describe live training online- real time interaction between an instructor and remote students” (Metcalf, 2003). The term asynchronous means “instruction is just-in-time, when you need it” (Metcalf, 2003).

The implication of this study stops from the idea that knowing students' visions and sentiments helps teachers evaluate the teaching-learning process. Yilmaz-Soylu states, "The degree of learners' expectations, satisfaction, opinions or views on courses has played an important role in evaluating the effectiveness of learning processes" (Yilmaz-Soylu, 2017). Moreover, “When students perceive their experience as enjoyable, satisfying, and personally fulfilling, they tend to interact more, which results in enhanced learning” (Esani, 2017).

2. Conclusion

Blended learning is an appreciated notion that can be used to more effectively achieve teaching goals. It allows students to develop and practice English language skills outside the classroom at anytime and anywhere they pick, as long as they have access to an Internet connection. In addition, it authorizes them to recap lessons without judgment or burden. The established improvement of student learning documented in this study validates this type of blended-learning. The addition of e-learning to classroom teaching provides students with opportunities for independent learning and a regionalized transfer of knowledge.

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