THE EFFECTS OF BLENDED LEARNING IN TEFL

Angela CĂLĂRAŞ, *Lecturer,*
Alecu Russo Balti State University
angela.calaras@usarb.md

Abstract: The given article dwells on the concept of blended learning as an innovative learning model that effectively combines face-to-face and online learning formats. It is an attempt to show different linguists' approaches to define the term "blended learning" and distinguish it from other learning models.

The work also highlights the advantages and disadvantages of blended learning in the educational process.

Keywords: blended learning, face-to-face learning, on-line learning, innovative approach, traditional format, collaborative learning, constructive learning, and computer-assisted learning.

According to recent researches the active use of information and communication technologies that promote a more efficient learning is a current trend in language education inside educational institutions. Blended learning is one of the most efficient methods for mastering the growth of linguistic and non-linguistic abilities that are adapted to each student's needs among the numerous models of educational engagement.

Linguistic literature proves that nowadays, the term "blended learning" is much talked about and there is not a precise, agreed-upon description of this term. Consequently, many scholars have different approaches to define this term. Thus, a famous researcher Trapp (2006) defines blended learning as a *combination of multiple approaches to pedagogy or teaching, e.g. self-paced, collaborative, tutor-supported learning or traditional classroom teaching.* In his opinion *blended learning often refers specifically to the provision or use of resources which combine e-learning with other educational resources.* (Trapp, 2006, p.39)

According to Graham blended learning is *a combination of the traditional concept of classroom learning and new learning methods using technology*. This learning method is often used by educators for students who learn both online and offline. Graham also remarked that blended learning is a form of learning that combines different teaching methods, forms of material delivery and multimedia formats into a single learning method (Graham, 2007).

Albrecht argues that blended learning is *a combination of a traditional form of classroom learning with web activity, when part of the time allocated to classroom classes is replaced by work on the Internet (*Albrecht, 2006).

In Lalima's opinion blended learning is *a new idea that combines the benefits of conventional classroom teaching with the use of technology in education, including both offline and online learning. It enables collaborative learning, constructive learning, and computer-assisted learning.* However, the scholar considers that implementing blended learning requires considerable effort, a positive attitude, sufficient funding, and motivated teachers and students. Because it involves various teaching methods, it is complex and challenging to organize (Lalima, 2017).

Thus, we can deduce that the purpose of this approach is to allow the student to study at a convenient time which frees him from the restrictions associated with the location of the educational institution. It can be said that in this way a student can acquire knowledge from anywhere in the world where the Internet is available.

After a thorough reading of linguistic recourses, we come to the conclusion that blended learning is an innovative and dynamic educational approach that seamlessly integrates the best aspects of traditional classroom teaching with online and digital resources, resulting in a comprehensive, flexible, and personalized learning experience. This approach uses the power of technology to enhance and extend the reach of education, while still maintaining the value of face-to-face interaction and collaboration.

Yet, it should be remarked that though blended learning is considered a new method of presenting information, in fact it is just an evolution of the old idea of blending different teaching techniques that teachers have been using for a long time. Although the concept of blended learning is not new, the development of modern technologies and access to online learning possibilities have made it especially topical nowadays.

Linguistic literature proves that the roots of blended learning can be traced back to the innovative teachings of Sir Isaac Pitman, who introduced the concept of distance learning in 1840. According to his teaching method students were sent postcards with abbreviated texts, which had to be filled out and sent back for correction, evaluation and feedback (Philips, 1998).

A remarkable scholar Spector emphasized that with the development of communication technologies and their increasing use, educational institutions have begun to actively apply distance learning. In the linguist's opinion this made it possible to overcome spatial constraints and provide students with flexible learning opportunities that were previously unavailable due to time or other constraints (Spector, 2008).

The further investigations in the field show that with the integration of various methods, including the *Internet, audio, video simulation and individual training with the help of an instructor,* blended learning has become popular since 2002. It is obvious that this time coincided with the revolutionary progress in the field of the film industry and videoconferencing technologies, which gave teachers the opportunity to create blended lessons and benefit from the use of the latest technologies in order to hold lectures, record and download different online webinars, conduct online working hours, access interactive courses, as well as use online libraries and knowledge assessment tools, including assignments, quizzes and exams (Trapp, 2006).

Garrison and Kanuka affirm that between 2003 and 2006, the concept of blended learning became more defined and precise. Scholars explained *blended learning as the purposeful integration of online and offline learning, combining independent, collective, structured and unstructured approaches to learning* (Garrison, Kanuka, 2004, p.98). Another supporters of this innovative approach think that modern progress in technologies combining face-to-face and online learning has led to an update of the definition of blended learning. Thus, they claim that the term *"blended learning" is now referred to as a type of teaching that blends traditional classroom techniques with online resources or online participation* (Staker, Horn, 2012).

Modern practice proves that education is no longer limited to either an institution or a clear arrangement of classes thanks to the development and dissemination of educational technologies. There is a large number of technologies that permit flexibility in the distribution of education, regardless of the time, place and methods of study.

Dwelling on the multitude of teaching methods researchers consider that there should be made a clear difference between them. Thus, Acheampong claims that *face-to-face learning* is a mode of delivery where course content and learning material is taught to a learner or

group of learners in person. Examples of such events are classes, seminars, workshops and conferences where all participants gather in one room for face-to-face training. According to the scholar the idea of *hybrid learning* is to combine the possibilities of online learning and the flexibility of distance learning or learning outside the classroom with the advantages of traditional face-to-face classroom learning (Acheampong, 2023). While Halverson, Graham, Spring and Drysdale consider that *hybrid learning is a vast and constantly evolving field of design and research that combines classroom teaching methods and online forms of learning* (Halverson et al., 2012).

Judging by the above mentioned, it is obvious that the concept of blended learning is based *on the integration and combination of traditional and online technologies.* This way assumes the replacement of some traditional training sessions with different forms of interaction in an electronic environment, which complements and improves the learning process. Consequently, we can remark that a more effective and adaptable learning system that can adjust students' demands and learning preferences is developed.

As different studies show, a blend of conventional and online teaching strategies using hybrid and blended forms of instruction is the best approach for successful teaching. Bobrova says that if in the *hybrid learning format*, students are divided into two groups: those who attend face-to-face classes and those who join them online via video conferencing, then *blended learning* combines face-to-face instruction with online activities, but not always in synchronous mode. In the scholar's opinion it is utterly vital to comprehend the differences between these formats, which include the ratio of online to face-to-face activities (Bobrova, 2020).

Educators affirm that *a blended learning format implies a consistent change of activity modes for all participants where they move from one learning environment to another. Thus*, after a full-time lecture, learners can watch a video on the topic and perform exercises online, while in a hybrid learning environment, online participants and full-time students work in parallel at the same time. After a thorough investigation of the issue, researchers consider that "blended learning" evokes a variety of ideas about how the process of learning and assimilation of knowledge is performed. Presently, educational institutions increasingly include courses using multimedia platforms, especially the blended learning method (Acheampong, 2023).

Speaking about the effects of blended learning in the teaching process, it should be remarked that it has both *advantages* as well as *disadvantages.* According to researchers blended learning is considered an environment that permits learners to get the best result if it is properly organized. Morgan and Young who are great supporters of this approach, *describe blended learning environments as environments in which users can use the best of both worlds(*Morgan, 2002). From other scholars' points of view such as Gedik, Kiran, and Ozden, *blended learning is the most common way of learning, due to its flexibility.* In contrast to the assumption that all students need the same information and skill development simultaneously and in the same way, blended learning allows for different teaching methods, teaching approaches, as well as student grouping and placement (Gedik et al., 2012). Voci assumes that the benefits of blended learning include savings in tuition and staff costs as well as cost savings for the student, since there is no need to attend an educational institution and spend money on a trip *(Voci, 2001).* According to Graziano blended learning is not only a modern and effective method of teaching, but also a real skill development methodology for teachers as it offers amazing opportunities to use various online tools and resources for differentiated learning (Graziano, 2016). Another positive effect of the online part of the blended course is the constant access to the course management system. Jeffrey thinks that this system serves as a kind of repository of content resources and ratings, which guarantees

fast and continuous communication. Thus, it is evident that teachers can effectively organize their work and maximize the potential of each student (Jeffrey, 2014).

And it is worth mentioning that in a classroom where technology-based blended learning is used, students are given the opportunity to exercise greater autonomy and independence to succeed. Scholars say that it is especially important for those who face stigmatization due to differences in learning, as the use of technology helps to normalize the learning process and reduces anxiety.

Although blended learning has advantages, it also has several disadvantages. Thus, Leite affirms that *technical problems can be the cause of shortcomings, as the experience of blended learning strongly depends on the reliability, ease of use and relevance of the tools and resources used. This means that creating courses and disciplines on virtual platforms may face difficulties, such as problems in using the chosen platform and managing the time of students and teachers* (Lalima, 2017). According to Shengjian teachers must put in a lot of work to understand how to build and implement various ways of material delivery for blended learning. Additionally, they must be able to design innovative teaching and learning methods that follow the curriculum using multimedia technologies. *And sometimes, having too many instructional resources might result in a loss of time and effort* (Lalima, 2017). Another researcher remarks that blended learning may face other challenges, such as the *effectiveness of group work in an online environment*. The use of e-learning platforms may require more time than traditional methods, and cause the need for new financial investments to support these platforms. In addition, there may be problems with managing groups and coordinating their work in a virtual environment, which may also require additional efforts and resources (Medina, 2018). And finally, the requirement for the Internet is one of the main issues with the implementation of a blended learning strategy in the educational process. It is clear that modern workstations and high-speed connection are necessary for successful information sessions. In addition, the teacher must have sufficient technical skills and resources, as well as strive to make classes interactive so that students do not lose attention, as can happen in a traditional classroom (Trapp, 2006).

As our world is constantly changing making people more energetic and mobile, who strive to get quick results without sacrificing convenience and comfort, it is obvious that blended learning is becoming an increasingly popular choice which allows learners to maintain a high quality of education and use the best aspects of online and offline formats, while remaining flexible and convenient

In conclusion it can be stated that blended learning requires teachers to use different types of learning materials and strategies. In order to make their lessons more interactive, effective and engaging, teachers should try to supplement the lessons with free resources from the Internet, online discussion groups, educational resources and other materials while preparing for classes or exams. We can conclude that blended learning is an effective teaching technique that can enhance language instruction by delivering a better learning environment. We can suppose that since technology continues to advance and online learning platforms become more sophisticated, blended learning may gradually replace conventional teaching methods. However, it is essential for teachers to constantly research and implement blended learning strategies in order to be aware of the latest advancements and best practices in the field.

References:
Acheampong J. (2023). The Impact of COVID-19 on Students' Academic Performance. *Cogent education*, no. 1, pp. 1-13.
Bobrova, S. (2020). Actual Problems of Blended Learning in the System of Higher Education. *The World of Science, Culture, Education*, no. 4, pp. 192-194.

Garrison D., Kanuka H. (2004). Blended Learning: Uncovering Its Transformative Potential in Higher Education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, no. 7, pp. 95-105.

Gedik N. et al. (2012). The Optimum Blend: Affordances and Challenges of Blended Learning for Students. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, no. 3, pp. 102-117.

Graham C. R., Dziuban. C. (2007). Blended Learning Environments. *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology*, pp. 269-276.

Halverson L. et al. (2012). An Analysis of High Impact Scholarship and Publication Trends in Blended Learning. *Distance Education*, no. 33, pp. 381-413.

Jeffrey L. M. et al. (2014). Blended learning: How Teachers Balance the Blend of Online and Classroom Components. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, no. 13, pp. 121-140.

Lalima Kiran L. D. (2017*).* Blended Learning: An Innovative Approach. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, no. 5, pp. 129-136.

Medina L. C. (2018). Blended learning: Deficits and Prospects in Higher Education. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, no. 1, pp. 42-56.

Morgan K.R. (2002). *Blended Learning: A Strategic Action Plan for a New Campus.* Seminole: University Press of Florida.

Staker H., Horn M. B. (2012). *Classifying K-12 Blended Learning*. Mountain View: Innosight Institute

Spector J. M. (2008). Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology. *Educational Technology & Society*, no. 13, pp. 260-263.

Trapp S. (2006). *Blended Learning Concepts- A Short Overview.* Crete: CEUR Workshop Proceedings.

Voci E., Young K. (2001). Blended Learning Working in a Leadership Development Programme. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, no. 33, pp. 157-161.

traditional way, i.e. by means of the spoken and written language. On the other hand, with