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СУМСЬКИЙ ДЕРЖАВНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ
Навчально-науковий інститут бізнес-технологій «УАБС»
Кафедра іноземних мов

Інститут вищої освіти НАПН України
Київський університет імені Бориса Грінченка
Донбаський державний педагогічний університет
Українська асоціація когнітивної лінгвістики і поетики
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ЯКІСНА МОВНА ОСВІТА У СУЧАСНОМУ ГЛОБАЛІЗОВАНОМУ СВІТІ: ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ, ВИКЛИКИ, ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ

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Krasulia A.
Sumy State University

BLENDED LEARNING:
ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Language education refers to the process and practice of acquiring a second/foreign language. It primarily is a branch of applied linguistics, however can be considered an interdisciplinary field. Increasing globalization has created a great need for people in the workforce who can communicate in multiple languages.

There are *four main learning categories* for language education:

- communicative competencies,
- proficiencies,
- cross-cultural experiences
- multiple literacies.

Language education may take place as a general school subject or in a specialized language school. There are many *approaches, methods, and techniques (strategies)* of teaching languages.

One of the teaching strategies that has been a major growth point in the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry over the last ten years is **blended learning**. It combines *face-to-face teaching with distance education*, either computer-based or web-based.

Blended learning is an education program (formal or non-formal) that combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace. While students still attend "brick-and-mortar" schools with a teacher present, in-person classroom practices are combined with computer-mediated activities regarding content and delivery. Blended learning is also used in professional development and training settings.

A lack of consensus on a definition of blended learning has led to difficulties in research on its effectiveness in the classroom. Blended learning is also *highly context-dependent* and therefore a universal conception of it is hard to come by.

"Blended learning" is sometimes used interchangeably in research literature as **"personalized learning"**, **"differentiated instruction"**, **"hybrid learning", "technology-mediated instruction", "web-enhanced**

instruction", "mixed-mode instruction". The concepts behind blended learning first developed in the 1960s, the formal terminology to describe it did not take its current form until the late 1990s. In 2006, the term became more concrete with the publication of the first Handbook of Blended Learning by Bonk and Graham.

There are distinct blended learning models suggested by some researchers and educational think-tanks. These **models** include:

Face-to-face driver – where the teacher drives the instruction and augments with digital tools.

Rotation – students cycle through a schedule of independent online study and face-to-face classroom time.

Flex – most of the curriculum is delivered via a digital platform and teachers are available for face-to-face consultation and support.

Labs – all of the curriculum is delivered via a digital platform but in a consistent physical location. Students usually take traditional classes in this model as well.

Self-blend – students choose to augment their traditional learning with online course work.

Online driver – students complete an entire course through an online platform with possible teacher check-ins. All curriculum and teaching is delivered via a digital platform and face-to-face meetings are scheduled or made available if necessary.

Flipped classroom is a more recent coinage. Students are expected to watch lectures online at home, and do homework while they are in class.

It is important to note that even blended learning models can be blended together and many implementations use some, many, or even all of these as dimensions of larger blended learning strategy. These models, for the most part, are not mutually exclusive.

There are many components that can comprise a blended learning model, including *instructor-delivered content, e-learning, webinars, conference calls, live or online sessions with instructors, and other media and events, for example, Facebook, e-mail, chat rooms, blogs, podcasting, Twitter, YouTube, Skype and web boards.*

Advantages of blended learning:

• Blended instruction is reportedly more effective than purely face-to-face or purely online classes.

• Blended learning methods can also result in high levels of student achievement more effective than face-to-face learning.

- By using a combination of digital instruction and one-on-one face time, students can work on their own with new concepts which frees teachers up to circulate and support individual students who may need individualized attention.
- Rather than playing to the lowest common denominator – as they would in a traditional classroom – teachers can now streamline their instruction to help all students reach their full potential.
- Blended learning facilitates a simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experience for university students.
- The use of information and communication technologies has been found to improve student attitudes towards learning.
- By incorporating IT into class projects, communication between lecturers and part-time students has improved, and students were able to better evaluate their understanding of course material via the use of computer-based qualitative and quantitative assessment modules.
- Blended learning also has the potential to reduce educational expenses, and lower costs by putting classrooms in the online space and it essentially replaces pricey textbooks with electronic devices.
- Blended learning gives the opportunity for data collection and customization of instruction and assessment as two major benefits of this approach. It includes software that automatically collects student data and measures academic progress, providing teachers, students and parents detailed students' data (e.g. Stuudium in Estonia). Often, tests are automatically scored, providing instantaneous feedback. Student logins and work times are also measured to ensure accountability.
- Schools with blended learning programs may also choose to reallocate resources to boost student achievement outcomes.
- Students with special talents or interests outside of the available curricula use educational technology to advance their skills or exceed grade restrictions.
- Blended learning allows for personalized education, replacing the model where a teacher stands in front of the classroom and everyone is expected to stay at the same pace. It allows students to work at their own pace, making sure they fully understand new concepts before moving on.
- A classroom environment that incorporates blended learning naturally requires learners to demonstrate more autonomy, self-regulation, and independence in order to succeed.
- This virtual learning environment helps connect professors with students without physically being present, thus making this a 'virtual café'.

The advantages of blended learning are dependent on the quality of the programs being implemented. Some indicators of excellent blended learning programs are *facilitating student learning, communicating ideas effectively, demonstrating an interest in learning, organizing effectively, showing respect for students, and assessing progress fairly.*

Disadvantages of blended learning:

- Unless successfully planned and executed, blended learning could have disadvantages in technical aspects since it has *a strong dependence on the technical resources* or tools with which the blended learning experience is delivered. These tools need to be reliable, easy to use, and up to date, for them to have a meaningful impact on the learning experience.

- *IT literacy* can serve as a significant barrier for students attempting to get access to the course materials, making the availability of high-quality technical support paramount.

- Other aspects of blended learning that can be challenging is *group work* because of difficulties with management in an online setting.

- Reportedly the *use of lecture recording technologies* can result in students falling behind on the materials. In a study performed across four different universities, it was found that only half of the students watched the lecture videos on a regular basis, and nearly 40% of students watched several weeks' worth of videos in one sitting.

- From an educator's perspective, most recently, it has been noted that *providing effective feedback is more time-consuming* (and therefore more expensive) when electronic media are used, in comparison to traditional (e.g. paper-based) assessments.

- *Using e-learning platforms* can be more time consuming than traditional methods and can also come with new costs as e-learning platforms and service providers may charge user fees to educators.

- Another critical issue is *access to network infrastructure*. Although the digital divide is narrowing as the Internet becomes more pervasive, many students do not have pervasive and ubiquitous access to the Internet – even in their classrooms. Any attempt to incorporate blended learning strategies into an organization's pedagogical strategy needs to account for this. This is why learning centers are built with good Wi-Fi connections to make sure this issue is addressed.

Ultimately, our goal as educators goes far beyond achieving success in the classroom. We want to see our students become lifelong learners who will bring new ideas and innovation to their future careers. Great success often comes from great collaborations, so it is exciting to see how

educational technology (EduTech) is giving both students and teachers more opportunities to network through the use of collaborative tools such as Google Docs, online calendars, and virtual workrooms. Plus, Skype, email, and even texting allow us to stay in touch with our students and meet other colleagues from around the world. As EduTech continues to grow and develop, students and educators alike are sure to reap the benefits as long as effective pedagogy remains at the center of education.

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Lavrysh Yu.E.
National Technical University of Ukraine
"Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic University"

PEER ASSESSMENT IN ESP

In order to develop the skills and competences required in a professional environment, university students have to reflect on their own role in the learning process. The traditional methods of assessment do not assess reflective thinking, critical thinking, and problem solving skills.

Taking into consideration the students training for their professional career, we have to accept the necessity to teach them the basics of measuring quality and providing incentives. From this point of view, the assessment turns into an act of informing critical judgement. There is a substantial evidence for this statement in surveys of scholars world-wide.