



BLENDDED LEARNING IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Barotaliyeva Muyassar Murodali qizi

The Second-Year Student of TerSU, Faculty of Foreign Philology

A B S T R A C T

At present, there is a prime focus on the fields of knowledge in which citizens acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for effective communication, e.g. on the teaching of foreign languages and ICT. Nevertheless, to combine and exploit both areas effectively, one (in this case a teacher) has to employ an appropriate methodology. Probably, the most suitable approach to the teaching of foreign languages with the help of ICT nowadays seems to be the so-called blended learning. Blended learning enables to use many different forms and methods in foreign language teaching. On-line courses leave room for any inclusion of many listening texts and video files. In order to facilitate the language study to students a lot of on-line courses of professional English, courses of area studies of English speaking countries, courses of professional German, courses for translators, written business English course and others have been prepared. These courses are based on tutors' and students' needs, students' knowledge, on teachers' long term experience, and of course on the positive attitude of ICT students (and not only of them) to modern technologies. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to emphasise the importance of blended learning for the teaching of foreign languages.

K E Y W O R D S

foreign language teaching; ICT; foreign languages; teaching; blended learning; synchronous teaching; asynchronous teaching.

Introduction

I have observed the use of the most modern methods of teaching at the Faculty of Informatics and Management of the University of Hradec Kralove recently. E-learning undoubtedly counts among such methodological ways. The faculty teachers have been producing their own on-line courses since 1998. At the very beginning, there were first of all the ICT teachers, who promoted this form of teaching, others followed later, finally also the language tutors joined in. To use e-learning methods is sometimes quite complicated for them, because foreign language teaching without a face-to-face contact and the possibility of oral communication with a tutor is hardly imaginable. In every case, a foreign language teaching requires some conversation, authentic listening, team work, group work etc. In spite of that also the foreign language teachers decided to make use of the e-learning method and started to create their own on-line courses, which they frequently use in a form of blended learning. A great many of on-line language courses supporting both full-time and combined form of studies were created at the Department of Applied Linguistics. I perceive blended learning as a combined teaching – as a combination of standard face-to-face teaching with e-learning. Current theories see two basic types of teaching which can be combined in blended learning – a synchronous and asynchronous teaching. The

synchronous teaching proceeds in a real time, in which all participants accept the presented experience simultaneously and they can react mutually. The asynchronous teaching is usually applied in different times to different students. They can choose the pace and the way of accepting experience, but they cannot react mutually in a real time.

As Mothejzikova states, there is a prime focus on the fields of knowledge in which citizens acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for effective communication, i.e. on the teaching of foreign languages and ICT. Thus, one might combine and exploit both fields in the so-called blended learning. As Frydrychova Klimova points out, the term blended learning has become extremely fashionable nowadays, particularly in corporate and higher education settings. In this paper, following Littlejohn & Pegler, blended learning is perceived as an integration of face-to face teaching and learning methods with on-line approaches. In general, blended learning is about a mixture of instructional modalities (i.e. onsite, web-based and self-paced learning), delivery media (e.g. the Internet, classroom sessions, web-based courses, CD-ROMs, video, books, or PowerPoint slides), instructional methods (i.e. face-to face or technology-based sessions), and web-based technologies, both synchronous and asynchronous (e.g. chat rooms, wikis, virtual classrooms, conferencing tools, blogs, textbooks or on-line courses). The choice of a blend is usually determined by several factors: the nature of the course content and instructional goals, student characteristics and learning preferences, instructor experience and teaching style, online resources and others. And as Graham states, learners and teachers work together to improve the quality of learning and teaching; the ultimate aim of blended learning being to provide realistic practical opportunities for learners and teachers to make learning independent, useful, sustainable and ever growing.

Blended learning enables to use many different forms and methods in foreign language teaching. On-line courses leave room for any inclusion of many listening texts and video files. This makes possible – partially at least – to substitute communication with a native speaker. On-line courses are also an outstanding motivating means supporting every educational process, the foreign language teaching inclusive. Blended learning used in a foreign language teaching is an example of a very progressive and useful way. Students like the on-line courses very much. The possibility to choose place and time for study is appreciated very highly. And just the on-line courses give the students such a possibility. They are not bound to a constant lesson, nevertheless, owing the face-to-face teaching, they have a certain opportunity of consulting and communicating with their teacher all the time. We consider the teaching by means of blended learning as very suitable, but we still remember that in any foreign language teaching the teacher is irreplaceable.

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