

# CÁC YẾU TỐ CẦN CÂN NHẮC KHI THIẾT KẾ CHƯƠNG TRÌNH HỌC TIẾNG ANH THEO HÌNH THỨC KẾT HỢP

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*Bài viết tổng hợp và phân tích các yếu tố cần cân nhắc khi thiết kế chương trình học tiếng Anh theo hình thức kết hợp (blended learning). Chúng tôi cho rằng một mô hình học kết hợp được thiết kế rõ ràng là điều kiện quan trọng để chương trình được thực hiện thành công. Mô hình học kết hợp nên phát huy được thế mạnh và giúp hai hình thức học trực tuyến và trực tiếp bổ sung cho nhau. Ngoài ra, những phương pháp giảng dạy áp dụng cho mô hình học kết hợp cần tương thích với việc học chủ động trong một môi trường có tính tương tác cao. Thiết kế mô hình học kết hợp cần đảm bảo nâng cao khả năng tương tác của giáo viên và người học, phát triển học liệu theo hướng giúp thúc đẩy hợp tác và tương tác, cũng như phù hợp với tổ hợp các phương pháp giảng dạy khác nhau. Vai trò đa dạng của người dạy và người học cũng là một yếu tố cần cân nhắc khi thiết kế mô hình học kết hợp. Cuối cùng, mô hình học kết hợp cần được thiết kế trên tinh thần các hình thức hỗ trợ được duy trì liên tục trong quá trình triển khai.*

**Từ khóa:** *học ngôn ngữ kết hợp, thiết kế, triển khai, tích hợp, tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ/tiếng Anh như ngôn ngữ thứ hai.*

*This paper aims to review important factors that should be considered in designing a blended language learning (BLL) programme in EFL/ESL context. We suggest that a clearly designed BLL model is crucial for an effective BLL program. The model should incorporate synthesis and complementarity of face-to-face and online modes. In addition, pedagogical preparation for the BLL model should correspond to an active and integrated learning format in an interactive learning environment. The design should enhance multi-level of interaction among teachers and learners, develop learning resources that promote collaboration and interaction, and enable the use of a repertoire of teaching methods. Different roles of teacher and learner should also be taken into consideration when designing a BLL model. Lastly, it is important to include ongoing support during the implementation.*

**Keywords:** *blended language learning, design, implementation, integration, EFL/ESL.*

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## **FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION IN DESIGNING A BLENDED LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAM**

### **1. Introduction**

Learning languages through computer-assisted instruction is a common trend in language education. Computer technology is especially considered a means to optimise the process of language teaching and learning outcomes. On the other hand, rather than viewing online media as a tool to facilitate the teaching and learning process, blended learning (BL) focuses on the replacement of traditional classroom teaching by an online learning component and the interaction between the two elements. In the domain of foreign language teaching, the term ‘blended language learning’ (BLL) refers to the adoption of traditional face-to-face instruction blended with online activities. However, the replacement is not just limited to adding a number of online activities to a face-to-face course. A well-built blended course should embed a variety of important elements. In this paper we will discuss a number of factors that make for an effective blended language learning course.

### **2. Definition of blended language learning**

BLL is not a new concept. In fact, blended provision has been employed in BLL programmes for more than 20 years (Nicolson, Murphy, and Southgate, 2011). However, the concept of BLL has been interpreted in a variety of ways. BLL can be viewed either in terms of percentage,

that is the substitution of face-to-face instruction time with online learning activities (for example, 65 percent online and 35 percent face-to-face) (Dudeney and Hockly, 2007), or in terms of space where both modalities are distributed in a single physical location (Hinkelman and Gruba, 2012). The third view of the concept refers to an integration of face-to-face and online components of the CALL mode. This focuses on the level of integration of the two types of learning while the type of blend can vary, which include web-based/online activities or ICT complementing face-to-face tasks (Sharma and Barrett, 2007), learners’ self-study phases at a computer and traditional face-to-face classroom learning (Stracke, 2007a). In this paper, we use the term BLL referring to a “thoughtful integration” (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004, p. 96) of face-to-face and online components of the CALL mode with the use of ICT in relation to language teaching and learning (Tomlinson and Whittaker, 2013). This definition is adopted because it stresses design efforts needed for the implementation of BLL.

### **3. Factors for consideration**

There are a number of theories that suggest a crucial component building for an effective BLL course design. However, in this paper, our consideration mainly focuses on Neumeier’s (2005) framework for BLL design implementation since it

can help language educators to find an appropriate combination that provides the optimal basis for language learning and teaching (Neumeier, 2005). Our discussion, therefore, will focus on seven main factors, namely BLL mode, level of integration and complementarity of the blend, distribution of content, materials, teaching methods, roles of teacher and learner, and support.

### **Mode**

The two main components in BLL include face-to-face and CALL modalities (Neumeier, 2005). Tomlinson and Whittaker (2013) add 'other modes' such as self-study that takes place in self-access centres situated in the same locations as the classrooms and computer rooms. It is advised that BLL designers or practitioners should work out a lead mode based on the needs of the learners and teachers and available capabilities, and secondly on the requirements of a curriculum. Neumeier (2005) argues that focusing on one mode can act as a means of "creating and communicating the instructional clarity" (p.167), and learners spend most of the time working in this mode. A designation of the lead mode in the BLL environment provides a straightforward layout of the learning objectives, the organization of learning, and the individual activities of all participants taking part in the learning process. Graham (2006) emphasizes the face-to-face component since students place a great deal of focus on this element. The face-to-face lead mode model, for

instance, could be a design in which the face-to-face lead mode regulates the pacing of a course. This model ensures that learners cover a core material before follow-up activities that they could then complete at their own pace on the computers or on self-study phase. In this case, tasks conducted in the computer or self-study mode supplement the syllabus and provide learners with control practice and extended activities. Likewise, face-to-face can be used for group activities and presentation of important content, while research, discussion, reflection, and project work can be done individually online. However, even when the lead mode is face-to-face, it is crucial that the online portion of the course is essential rather than supplemental. Thus, getting the balance right in terms of how the modes integrated is significant (Tomlinson and Whittaker, 2013).

### **Level of integration and complementarity of the blend**

Level of integration refers to the amount of flexibility it can offer to individual learners. According to Neumeier (2005), one aspect of this flexibility is the opportunity to let students decide whether they consider online activities worth engaging in or not. The use of learning materials or communication channels can be made optional or obligatory, thus some modes within a particular BLL environment can show a high level of integration (obligatory use) or low level of integration (optional use).

The integration of the two components in the BLL context has received attention of many researchers. The message from empirical research suggests that a good blend greatly depends on the complementarity of the two modalities, which is the aspect that Sharma and Barrett (2007) emphasize as important in their guidelines and principles of BLL. The contents of the modes should therefore link to a relatively high degree. Empirical research has found both positive and negative results in this domain. It is evident in the literature that there exists a lack of integration between CALL and face-to-face modes (Chenoweth, Ushida, & Murday, 2006; Stracke, 2007a), or unparalleled distribution of learning content (Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain, and Youngs, 1999). These could lead to student dissatisfaction and drop-out of the course. Other research has found a positive result. For example, the two modes were well integrated in the model of Grgurović (2011). The components of the blend included an LMS (Learning Management System) closely combined with face-to-face classroom learning. Online materials strictly followed the structure of a textbook used in the face-to-face classroom. The students were able to study the same content either in the classrooms or in the LMS at their convenience. As a result, students were more autonomous and responsible for their own learning as the two modalities provided learner flexibility and the contents were well supported.

The different results call for a need of how to successfully integrate different components of the blend. Marsh (2012) emphasizes that it is crucial to find out ingredients of the blend to complement each other so that the teachers “do not end up teaching two parallel but unconnected courses” (Kaleta, Skibba, and Joosten, 2007, p. 128). BLL designers, therefore, should think carefully about the integration of online and face-to-face contents and how the two modes will support each other. A BLL program needs unity and continuity even if it is taught in different modes and in different locations.

### **Distribution of content**

One of the crucial elements in designing a BLL model is the consideration of how learning content should be distributed and how objectives of a course should be assigned. Neumeier (2005) suggests that learning content can be delivered in parallel or isolated manners. Parallel distribution would allow a certain language skill to be incorporated and practised in both modes while isolated incorporation of skills would “exclusively be acquired within one of the major modes” (p. 171). It is crucial to decide what content is delivered face-to-face and what via the CALL mode. For example, in an academic writing blended course (Eydelman, 2013), the writing lessons are delivered in a parallel manner. Specifically, in weekly face-to-face sessions, students read and discuss a variety of materials, and are provided with a series of activities and exercises to help

improve different aspects of writing and language. Also, they need to brainstorm and prepare for their essay outline. In the self-study period at home, the students discuss what they have written with their peers. The students then have to post their work in progress or complete ones in the Wiki hosted by PBWorks one day at least before a face-to-face session for peer and teacher feedback. Students revise their work based on the comments from their friends and teacher. In the study of Neumeier (2005), the distribution of content is isolated. The preparation for speaking practice and the teaching of factual knowledge are mostly restricted to web-based self-access learning while the practice of speaking skills is dealt with only face-to-face. A recommended option for the arrangement of content is to develop online activities that can best follow-up or support classroom activities, or vice versa.

### **Materials**

Marsh (2012) emphasizes that the choice of materials is critical. Thus, developing pedagogically sound learning materials is another matter for consideration to ensure an effective BLL course. Bärenfänger (2005) clarifies three different concepts: learning by distributing, learning by interacting, and learning by collaborating. These concepts relate to the degree of interactivity and complexity of the learning resources. Of the three concepts, the learning by distributing does not ensure sound interactive learning materials because it is teacher-centred. In

this approach teachers choose and provide learning materials for the learners even though it is also possible that students collect and upload materials. In this case, communication/interaction and collaboration do not take place online but in the face-to-face classroom. Online components such as LMS or CMS (Course Management System) serve only as platforms to collect, store and distribute learning materials. On the other hand, the concepts of learning by interacting and learning by collaborating allow teachers more flexibility in creating coordinated learning materials. There is an interlock of content and organization in which the teaching and learning setting consists of face-to-face and online phases. Learning resources and administrative information are available on a learning platform. In the virtual learning environment (e.g. an LMS) not only resources are stored, but activities are implemented to encourage and support the interaction between the learners. Learners can use the online phase for collaboration and cooperation, interacting with each other and also with teachers. It is recommended that learning materials in the two modes should be designed in an integrated way which promote collaboration and interaction among the learning subjects.

### **Teaching methods**

In BLL environment, the teaching methods and the procedure of language teaching are diverse (Klippel, 2002; Neumeier, 2005; Shebansky, 2018). With various learning situations in the two

modes, teachers have an opportunity to combine a wide variety of methods and approaches or use them in a new way to meet the needs of their learners. Specifically, older methods like grammar translation method, audio-lingual, communicative language teaching can be combined with newer ones such as community language learning, collaborative learning, task-based learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning. In terms of pedagogy, BLL is potential to provide more effective and interactive teaching practices and reduce dependence on teacher lecturing (Badawi, 2009; Shebansky, 2018). For the face-to-face mode, creating an interactive learning environment is not a big issue. However, for the online mode, teaching methods depend much on the instructional approach: synchronous or asynchronous instructions. In synchronous instruction, teachers adopt tools and online instructional methods that support real-time learning and discussion. In this case, the online mode closely replicates a traditional face-to-face mode with real-time interaction between the teacher and the learners. On the other hand, in asynchronous instruction, learners can access materials, view pre-recorded lectures, and collaborate with teachers and peers on their own schedules. In this type of instruction, interaction might be delayed, and features like class size and teacher preference for teaching methods can influence which tools to be used. Therefore, teachers need to be flexible in

choosing appropriate teaching methods that maximize the effectiveness of learning in the BLL environment.

### **Roles of teacher and learner**

The success of a blended language learning course is strongly dependent on teacher and learner preparation for their new roles. According to Neumeier (2005), learners should be encouraged to take up new roles in the BLL environment, but they need time to adapt to a more active learning approach. In addition, the type of interaction and the use of technology greatly influence the roles of teacher and learner, especially in the online mode of the learning environment. With a combination of face-to-face and online teaching modes, a teacher plays multiple roles (Bjekić, Krneta, and Milošević, 2010; Marsh, 2012):

- *a creator* who devises learning contents
- *a designer* who creates instructional and learning materials
- *a planner* who prepares teaching activities that integrate goals and outcomes of online and face-to-face modes and procedures to monitor learners' achievement
- *a manager* who organizes learners' activities and communication channels
- *an administrator* who supports the management of the course by keeping records and checking enrollments, reporting learners' progresses or learning problems

- *an instructor* who teaches to develop students' language skills and directs the learning process

- *a moderator* who mediates between contents and learners in the learning process

- *a facilitator* who intervenes as a content expert, supports learners in learning activities and help them use appropriate learning strategies

- *a supervisor* who monitors learners' progress and problem solving

- *an evaluator* who creates procedures to monitor learner achievement, assesses learners' knowledge and performance, and evaluates teaching contents and procedures

- *a counsellor* who supports learners both in face-to-face and online modes

- *a resource provider* who identifies and locates resources to support learning

In a BLL environment, many characteristics of the teacher's roles remain unchanged in comparison to the traditional roles. However, teachers play a variety of roles because their activities involve both face-to-face and online modes of teaching and learning. The switch from one role to another can be immediate and dynamic, which requires teachers to be very open and flexible.

Similarly, a diverse scope of roles is applied to learners, such as knowledge recipients, partners, participants, explorers, presenters, hosts, critics, reviewers, peer assessors, or self-assessors. In practice,

their roles move around the process of co-constructing knowledge and developing skills. Some important roles of learners in a blended environment were highlighted by Marsh (2012):

- *Planners* who use the course plan to manage their independent study time

- *Autonomous learners* who work independently, make decision, take responsibility, monitor progress, and review their study plan regularly

- *Work collaborators* who interact with other members of the class in project-type activities

- *Reviewers and self-correctors* who, after receiving immediate automatically marked results from the online system, review and consolidate their learning

It is notable that their new roles require learners to have a great level of autonomy in the learning process. For example, learners might have to change from a relatively passive role as knowledge recipients in a highly structured lecture to that of active collaborators in a problem-solving task. Teachers play a crucial role in enhancing learner autonomy because their beliefs, perceptions and professional development have great impacts on the development of learner autonomy in language learning contexts (Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012; Egel, 2009; Feryok, 2013; Smith and Ushioda, 2009; Stracke, 2012; Zhuang, 2010). Therefore, clear communication between teachers and learners is needed to ensure learners understand and play their roles as expected.

### Support

It is suggested that learners in any BLL program require academic, affective, and technical support (Marsh, 2012). In terms of academic difficulties, it is very potential for teachers to use the online mode to support learners. Academic support is usually provided by teachers in form of immediate answers to arising questions in face-to-face mode or via emails, forums, web chat in the online mode where learner-learner interaction and group interaction are supported (Bojović, 2017). In addition, learners who have little time to support each other in the face-to-face mode might find more opportunities to support each other in the blend when they have the online mode as another channel of communication (Hughes, 2007; Yorke, 2004). With the introduction of support activities in both modes of learning, academic support does not come from teachers alone. In fact, a sense of community and peer support is created, and this sense encourages learners to ask about issues they find difficult (Marsh, 2012).

Regarding affective support, when learners are remote, online communication provides an effective means of drawing learners together to develop a sense of community. According to Yorke (2004), learners who have a sense of belonging to a community are more likely to maintain their learning than those who feel isolated. Increasing learner engagement with teachers and peer learners can develop this sense. Likewise,

Díaz and Entonado (2009) noted that the important role of teachers in blended learning is to engage learners in the learning process by encouraging their interaction. This should be done in both modes of learning through teacher arrangement of pre-designed activities that require learners to work collaboratively.

Technical support is another important element for consideration when implementing BLL. This type of support should be provided to both teachers and learners to help them feel comfortable when undergoing BLL, a new and challenging experience (Marsh, 2012; Stracke, 2007b). Technical literacy is a critical issue, especially for teachers and learners who need to gain access and interact with course materials and with each other. The availability of professional technical support is required to ensure stable access and proper interaction. Therefore, it is also important to separate the role of teacher as online tutor from the role of technical support (Sharma and Barret, 2007). By doing so, teachers do not have to deal with technical problems so they can spend more time supporting learning.

### Conclusion

In short, an effective blended language program requires a well-balanced integration of face-to-face and online modes. The paper has highlighted a number of elements that construct an appropriate BLL design. It is crucial to maximize the potential of the different



teaching modes for a more effective blend. In addition, designers of a BLL program need to take into consideration how the two modes complement each other and how contents are distributed. Also, the selection and use of learning materials in BLL context should enable teachers and learners to interact, communicate and collaborate. Furthermore, teachers should employ various teaching methods to accommodate different modes used in the blended model. In addition, a BLL course requires a multiple of roles for both teachers and learners. Therefore, they should be ready to switch away from the traditional roles and act a wide variety of new roles. It would be ideal if the roles are described clearly in the design so as to help teachers take up their own roles and assign appropriate roles to the learners. Lastly, the design should comprise a clear plan for academic, affective, and technical support for both teachers and learners.

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