

BLENDED TEACHING AS A PILLAR FOR ACHIEVING QUALITY IN EDUCATION IN THE NEW ERA

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ABSTRACT

Teaching foreign languages in general and English in particular, in the time of technological development in the new context of the pandemic, requires that educators should keep hand in hand with the recent innovations and make use of the technological means either in the way of training teachers or in the ordinary classes for school and university learners. This is clearly noticed in online learning and distance learning as well as the intensive integration of Internet and technology in teaching and learning processes.

The West has already experienced distance learning and considered it an alternative to face to face teaching methods. This proved to have lots of advantages and many scholars considered online teaching an alternative to the traditional methods. On another hand, many educators point out to the drawbacks of online education and considered the teaching learning process as a human activity that necessitates interaction within the context of human to human communication. Between these two views arose a third opinion calling for “blended teaching” as a compromise wherein teachers and learners interact in the real classroom context with a strong emphasis on the presence of technology in the educational process.

“Blended teaching” is considered a style wherein technology should function complementarily with the teacher in order to provide high quality instruction and practice. The focal point of “Blended Teaching” is basically about the ability of relating online materials to real classes in order to make more effective teaching.

KEYWORDS: *Teaching, Learning, Education, Online, Distance, Technology, Quality*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, learners started to communicate in a direct, inexpensive, and convenient way with other learners or with speakers of the target language 24 hours a day either from school or at home or in the work through Internet. Here it is claimed that online communication dates back to the late 1960s when “US researchers first developed protocols that allowed the sending and receiving of messages via computers” (Hafner & Lyon. 1969: 61). The ARPANET launched in 1969 evolved into the Internet in the early 20th century and later in the 1980s, online communication became possible in education.

The world has witnessed a subtle technological revolution in all the fields of life. And the expansion of the digital technology as well as the World Wide Web have made people’s life and services easier especially as far as information is

concerned. Technology has become a powerful feature of the 20th and 21st century and it has managed to break the frontiers between countries by imposing a new language, that of the computer and the internet, which changed the world into a small town governed by information.

Education has also benefited from this technological revolution especially with the development of the digital technology which gave birth to the so-called E-learning which, in fact, not only managed to go beyond the time and space hindrances of the teaching/learning process; but also contributed in creating new markets and prospects as well as new investigating opportunities that the traditional teaching system couldn't create or even reach.

Online learning or electronic learning refers to the new trend of Education wherein learners no longer get lessons in the traditional way; the face to face system of education. Rather, teaching became technology based and lectures are given overseas using the most developed means including computers, tablets and smartphones etc.

E-Learning is a natural result of the technological revolution especially with the development of the digital system. It has witnessed a tremendous growth in the last few years especially for distance learning, adult education, as well as technical or business education. Besides, the world conditions since the beginning of 2019 with the outbreak of the Pandemic COVID 19, made distance learning not only a choice but a solution. Almost all over the world schools closed their doors but education did not stop thanks to technology and online teaching solutions adopted by many governments.

E- Learning differs from the traditional way of teaching/learning in the sense that it is based on learning online which implies learning through electronic devices including computers, tablets, smart phones and of course the internet. The use of the computer in e-learning implies the inclusion of this new method under the realm of CALL (computer assisted language learning) or CBI (computer based instruction) or TELL (technology enhanced language learning) or CMC (computer mediated communication)

A Brief History of Technology & Language Teaching

Most of the recent studies of language teaching methodologies tend to consider the 1980s as a starting point for the integration of using technology in language learning especially with the development of the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL henceforth) system. In fact every type of language teaching has had its own technologies to support it.

Starting from the grammar translation method to the communicative approach. teachers of language have been using different means and tools in order to transmit their messages to the learners at different levels. First the blackboard has been a basic means used from the time of the grammar translation and the audio-lingual method wherein teachers used to explain the grammatical rules and the students do the translations. During that time of teacher-based classrooms, with the one-way transmission of information method, the blackboard was a very useful and suitable means for language teaching.

Later, other tools such as the over-head projectors, the audiotapes, and language labs as well as the computer software programs supplemented the blackboard. As Barson & Debski claim, "Though CALL has developed gradually over the last 30 years; this development can be categorized in terms of three somewhat distinct phases... Behavioristic CALL, Communicative CALL, and Integrative CALL" (1996: 50)

So what are the different phases of CALL? How did it develop? How did these phases relate to each other in a gradual way? What are the roles technological devices were assumed to play during each phase of CALL?

Behavioristic Call

Shift in perspectives on language learning/teaching have paralleled developments in technology from the main frame to the personal to the networked computers. Charles Crook posited three "metaphors" of computer –based education activities "a tutorial metaphor (the computer as a tutor), a construction metaphor (the computer as a pupil), and a tool box metaphor (computer as a tool)" (1994: 32)

Since the 1950s and till the 70s, when the behavioristic theory of language teaching was dominating, CALL was introduced in the field of language teaching in the course of the repetitive language drills known as "Drill and practice" pejoratively known as "Drill and kill". Drill and practice courseware is based on the model of the computer as "Tutor". The computer was considered as a vehicle for delivering instructional material to students.

Mainframe computers were at first seen as the taskmaster programs, they were designed to provide immediate positive or negative feedback to learners on the formal accuracy of the learners' responses in the sense that repeated drills on the same material was essential to learning. The computer, being a machine, is never bored from repetition and it provides objective (non-judgmental) feedback. The computer was very convenient in presenting material on an individualized basis. The PLATO hardware that includes vocabulary drills, brief grammar explanation and drills, translation tests was one of the most sophisticated of these tutoring systems then.

These drill programs were criticized in the point that they provoked no excitement among teachers and learners. Moreover they proved to be unsophisticated because they were allowing only one acceptable response per item. These factors, hand in hand with the drawbacks of the behavioristic approach namely its inability to present authentic communication, led to think about more sophisticated personal computers and thus a second generation of CALL came into existence.

Communicative CALL

During the 70s and the early 80s, Krashen language acquisition theory, as well as the growth in socio-linguistics led to a great focus on the role of meaning and communication in language learning. With the emergence of the cognitive approaches to language learning, CALL, itself, shifted emphasis from the structures to the learners. Learners were assumed to "construct new knowledge through exploring "micro-worlds" which provide opportunities for problem-solving and hypothesis-testing which allow the learners to utilize their existing knowledge to develop new understandings" (Richards 1990: 97). Computers were seen as devices to be controlled by the learners rather than (them) controlling learners.

Communicative CALL focuses more on using forms rather than the forms themselves. It tries to teach grammar implicitly and allow students to generate original sentences instead of manipulating pre-fabricated language. Communicative CALL neither judges students nor does it evaluate them. The strongest point of communicative CALL is that it is flexible to a variety of students' responses and it allows using language in a natural context.

Always within the communicative CALL, a socio-cognitive approach to the use of the computer was based on the shift from the learners' interaction with computers to interaction with other humans via the computer. Warschauer states this as follows "the basis for this new approach to CALL lies in both theoretical and technological developments. Theoretically, there has been the boarder emphasis on meaningful interaction in authentic discourse communication. Technologically, there has been the development of computer networking, which allows the computer to be used as a vehicle for interactive human communication" (2000: 112). Communicative CALL aimed at " helping students develop their own mental models through the use of the target language" (Paul Gruba 2004: 49) and the activities for

communicative CALL include "describe photographs, give directions, or express an opinion..." (Ibid). Programs for paced learning; text construction and language games are among the programs developed during this period.

Like in the behavioristic call, the computer was a "knower of the right answer" but it was also considered a "stimulus" and the role of the computer is not to have students discover the right answer; rather it is to stimulate their discussion, writing or critical thinking.

Communicative CALL phase did not differ totally from the behavioristic CALL; rather it served as a bridge to the third phase of CALL which is to a great extent integrative.

Integrative CALL

By the end of the 1980s, critics pointed out that the computer was being used in an ad hoc and disconnected fashion and thus "finds itself making a greater contribution to marginal rather than central elements of the language teaching process" (Kenning & Kenning 1990: 14). Therefore many educators started to look for new methods to teach in integrative ways and that necessitated a paralleled development in CALL. Warschauer (1996a) referred to this third phase as Integrative CALL to refer to the efforts at developing models that would integrate various aspects of language learning.

Integrative CALL emerged with the objective "to make full use of networked computers as a means to engage learners in meaningful, large-scale collaborative activities" (Debski 2000, Warschauer & Kern 2000). It was based on two technological developments of the decade: Multimedia computers and the Internet.

On the one hand, multimedia computers, exemplified by CD ROMs at that time, allowed a variety of media: texts, graphics, sound, and videos... They provided a "massive storehouse of recorded realia" (Pusak & Otto 1997: 12). Multimedia was very successful in providing support to different learning styles of language learners by "deploring different neuro-systems in learning through its reliance on sound, color, animation etc." (Hanson-Smith 1997: 61)

Multimedia entails hypermedia: all multimedia resources are linked together and the learner can navigate his own path himself. Hypermedia has a lot of advantages in the sense that it creates more authentic environment for learning (it integrates listening and seeing as well); in other words; with hypermedia, skills are easily integrated and this facilitates focus on meaning rather than form as Warschauer explains: hypermedia "allows for easy integration of the skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking, authentic learning experiments, student control over their learning and a focus on the content. Hypermedia also creates an environment for the exploration of vast amounts of information, experimentation and discovery" (Warschauer In Underwood 1998: 79).

In the field of second and foreign language learning, the technological development has allowed learners to communicate with other learners and native speakers in direct and cheap manners with flexibility in time and space.

According to Warschauer online Communication or Computer Mediated Communication implies reading, writing and communicating via networked computers and it encompasses three categories:

- Synchronous computer-mediated communication, whereby people communicate in real time via chat or discussion software, with all participants at their computers at the same time.
- Asynchronous computer-mediated communication, whereby people communicate in a delayed fashion by computers, e.g. by emails; and some programs such as MOOs that allow people all over the world to interact simultaneously by typing at their keyboard

- The reading and writing of online documents via the Internet

Moreover, it was a step to one-to-many communication instead of only one- to- one communication. Students could browse and search through limitless fields using the World Wide Web in order to locate and access to authentic materials (magazines, newspapers, articles, short videos, movie reviews...) They could also use the net to share and publish their texts or materials.

Students in LA PAZ MEXICO made a great use of Internet then when they searched the web to find articles in their areas of research; they read and studied these articles, then wrote their own drafts online. Later the teachers critiqued the drafts online and created electronic links to pages of appropriate explanation to which students would refer in order to re edit their articles. When published, they could receive comments and feedback from over the world about them.

Computers become a medium of global communication and a source of limitless authentic materials. As mentioned before, the computer is a toolbox or “workhorse” in the sense that programs do not necessarily provide any language material, rather they empower the learners to use and understand the language. For instance, word processor, power point, spelling and grammar checkers...

"Syllabus" was the main distinction between communicative CALL and integrative CALL: "Syllabus in communicative CALL is likely to be discrete and related to a set of curricular guidelines that have been defined in advance of learner needs" (corbel 1999: 29) whereas syllabus in integrative CALL "represents a dynamic blue print where learning occurs through accidents generated by project" (Barson 1999: 11)

To sum up, the theoretical perspectives in CALL including the roles computers are assumed to play can be summarized in the following table:

Key aspects of theoretical perspectives in CALL

| | Structural CALL (1970s–1980s) | Communicative CALL (1980s–1990s) | Integrative CALL (twenty-first century) |
|---|--|--|---|
| Role of the computer | Information carrier; as a "tutor" | Hybridization; as a "pupil" | Unified information management system; as a "toolbox" |
| Technology focus | Materials delivery | Cognitive augmentation | Group orchestration |
| Theory of learning | Behaviorist | Information processing theory; cognitive constructivist learning | Sociocultural theories of learning |
| Model and process of instruction | Programmed instruction; assimilation | Interactive, discovery-based learning; interaction | Collaborative learning; "intra-action" |
| View of second language acquisition | Structural (a formal system) | Cognitive (a mentally constructed system) | Socio-cognitive (developed in social interaction) |
| Dominant approaches to second language teaching | Grammatical translation & audiolingual | Communicative language teaching | Content based, specific purposes |
| Learner status | Dependent | Independent | Collaborative |
| Principal use of computers in CALL | Drill and practice | Communicative exercises | Authentic discourse |
| Principal learning objective of CALL | Accuracy | And fluency | And agency |
| Primary research concern | Instructional efficiency, instructional competence | Instructional transfer, learner proficiency | Instruction as enacted practice, task "cohesivity" |

Source: Based on Winitz (2004), with Cook (1994), Krashen (1984), Ellis (1994)

Figure 1

Online Teaching as a Solution in the Context of Changing Goals of Language Education

The technological revolution had affected many sides of the human life from the simplest processes to the most complicated acts. Education has been one of these fields which was strongly and quickly affected by the these changes because of many reasons: first the position of science was highly praised namely that the traditional methods of thinking failed to face the new challenges in the educational fields because of the huge amount of information that became available. Hence, it was necessary to reconsider the teaching methods and techniques in order to prepare the students to acquire the new knowledge in the highest quality and shortest amount of time possible. Second the problem of overpopulation growth and the overcrowded classes: it was necessary to consider the social and mental abilities and

variations among the different learners.

Simultaneously with these changes, the teacher, who used to be the only source of knowledge, gradually started to lose domination and utter control of the teaching / learning process. Many aspects of "self-learning" developed and more and more sources of knowledge became available including books, references, encyclopedia, CD ROMs, and of course Online learning.

In fact, lots of papers and documents were written praising Online learning and talking about the positive points of this new way of learning in the sense that it is a useful, practical, modern style of learning in general and language learning in particular. But the advantages of online learning and using technology in the language classroom in general can be interpreted in the light of the changing goals of language education and the changing conditions in postindustrial society. Lately, modern language education objectives have not only been limited to teaching learners the rules of grammar, but also; and principally, to helping them gain apprenticeship into new discourse communities. This can only be achieved through creating natural, authentic, and meaningful interaction. Learning Online or using technology in learning a language is the best means to achieve that goal of international communication. "By using new technologies in the language classroom, we can better prepare students for the kind of international cross-cultural interactions which are increasingly required for success in academic, vocational, or personal life " (Warschauer & Meskill 2000: 7).

The capacity of evoking communication makes online learning very attractive for learning languages. Much more attraction and motivation towards learning language is due to the development of online learning. Online learning presents authentic material, and this is very beneficial for learning because learners would lose interest unless they feel that what they are learning is relevant to their lives. Students need to feel safe and comfortable in their classroom; if students are not comfortable, they may learn something short term but it will not be acquired. (Krashen 1982) Online learning can be an alternative for learners who are more comfortable within individual learning. Online learning allows the students to keep up to date with the recent information because it is based on providing students with authentic materials: basically almost all the information and activities are reality based ones. Therefore, they are appealing and attracting students.

If CALL presents the same material, in the same way and the same analysis of performance, online learning provides a multitude of presentations and a wide range of content suitable to different learning styles and strategies. Incorporating pictures from English speaking culture, music and drama in English, power point presentations that include these tools evokes the feeling, in learners, that English is not only a weird way of speaking and writing in their textbooks; but rather it is a communicative tool in the level of big proportions of people in other parts of the world.

Inside the same class, There's a variety of learning styles and strategies: some students learn visually, while others learn by listening or by movements. Some students prefer to work individually while others prefer group work... Henceforth, it is necessary to include all these styles and gear lessons toward the various types of learners. Such task is getting much easier through the use of technology simply because the use of different media in the classroom inherently offers more visual, aural and kinetic stimuli. Moreover, students can learn through simulation: students can see their pronunciation level or learn how to pronounce through seeing the mouth, tongue, or lips' shape and thus try to imitate in order to ameliorate their way of articulating words. Thus with online learning, students are offered the opportunity to learn spontaneously and according to their own pace without any complexes. Moreover it provides a sort of responsibility to the learners because they, learners, can easily see their results as well as their learning history, progress conditions, results visually in graph or percentages. It is also a good way for providing feedback because teachers; on the basis of their

learners' results, can offer materials, which are suitable to each individual learner.

Online learning can be a good solution to substitute the shortage in the human resources in the field of education through the so-called "virtual classes" which start to become popular in many countries in different degrees. Besides, the training courses for teachers can be done easily and with the least number of instructors. Moreover, the computer is not merely a teaching tool, rather it makes the teacher's role less and less difficult and provides him with extra-time to check for various activities and better teaching methods and techniques,

Despite all the advantages and benefits a learner can get from learning online, still many researchers are cautious about it. They claim that there are many drawbacks and demerits of learning online. In fact, one of the most urgent questions that should be asked is whether or not technologies truly "work"? That is to say, do technologies really promote language learning? This leads to inquire also about the demerits of online learning. Thus we can find almost for every positive point mentioned earlier a negative point. These negative points of e-learning can be divided into two categories: human and non-human factors.

On the one hand, the multiplicity of styles and contents provided by Internet use can be one of the short comings of the new medium, and this puts forward the famous question whether students do, in fact, make the best use of hypertext and hypermedia material offered by the online learning. Garrett (1991: 93-94) stated this problematic in a set of questions that he summarized as follows: "if learners have access to a lot of data regarding something they need to know an unspecified amount about reference materials or related bodies of more or less directly relevant information, far more can realistically be accessed, what do they in fact look up? Do they know what they need to look for? How do they make use of it? In the long run, do they perhaps learn as much from browsing, in what might seem to us an inefficient or purposeless way, as from directed explorations? How freely does what kind of student at what level of learning browse or explore? Do learners get lost moving around in an infinitely complex set of related data? What kind of student gets lost under what circumstances? What kind of lesson structure or visual clues tend to prevent them from getting lost"

These questions, in fact, represent challenges to the use of online learning environments for language learning. The same opinion was strongly stressed by Harmer when saying, "though there are wonders and marvels a-plenty on the Internet, there is a lot of rubbish too, and worse" (2003: 33)

On the other hand, problems related to the issues of hardware and scheduling can be a hedge to the success of online learning. Sometimes language labs are unavailable; also the malfunctioning of software and/or hardware can spoil all the teachers' efforts, namely that some computer programs are not yet intelligent enough to be truly interactive: they cannot diagnose students' problems with pronunciation, syntax, or usage... Other financial problems can be summarized in the high cost of computers and Internet connection in many countries as well as the hardware cost, lack of quality software etc.

Another human factor related to both the learners and the teachers is that students may not have the prerequisites computer skills that would guarantee success in this type of learning. Teachers' problem can be summarized in Singhal's statement that "lack of training and familiarity on part of the teachers can make it difficult to implement the Internet in the language classroom". (1997: 112)

Generally a pure online course remains always incomplete and can never substitute a normal class wherein students share the feeling of learning with each other and with the teacher as well. Learners can get a lot of information and knowledge in an online class or even in a video- conference course but they can never feel that they are learning since the classroom represents an interactive context between the instructor and the learners; and within this context learning takes place. That is

what we have all experienced as teachers with our students in the distance courses during the school years 2019- 2020 and the beginning of the 2020- 2021. Online courses may ensure that teaching takes place but cannot determine whether learning happens or not. This is justified by the importance of the Para-linguistic factors that affect the learning process.

Online and face-to face methods: a step towards “blended teaching”

As we have mentioned, the computer and other technological devices have become a characteristic of this age and the language of the future. But these machines remain useless unless they receive the instructions from the man through what is known as “artificial intelligence”. In this case the machines start to think and distinguish the forms, letters and codes transmitted to them by the man. Therefore, both the machine and the man are interdependent in the sense that the power of the computer for example lies in its speed and preciseness while the human’s power is in his intelligence. The relationship between these two vital constituents can be complementary if each side provides the other with its strength. The output, then, would be characterized with speed and intelligence.

Many people were suspicious about the relationship between man and the computer thinking that this latter may substitute the man. But in fact, in the same way the integration of the machine in the industrial revolution resulted in increasing man’s power and capacity; the integration of the computer in many fields such as statistics and calculations would certainly increase the human being’s intelligence.

The field of education is not an exception of this interdependent relationship between the man and the machine. Learning, on the one hand is basically a human faculty; and the teacher’s role is very compulsory and can never be replaced by a machine. On the other hand, technology and media are of great importance and help to the teacher in his class. And despite the disadvantages and dangers of online learning mentioned in the previous chapter, it remains a very useful means of language learning provided that some conditions and guidelines are followed in order to ensure success of that experience. Teachers in general should carefully and clearly trace their goals in order to organize the appropriate activities that would fulfill these goals. They should also provide students with handouts, training sessions, pair-work and direct assistance as means to support them and prevent them from being lost between links and hypertexts...

The computer, and the smartphone, as examples, are among the most useful technology means that would facilitate the role for both the learner and the teacher. But “ part of the effectiveness of teaching and learning with technology is due to the computer’s ability to perform tasks that are difficult or impossible to do without technology” (Windeschtil 1998: 54). Thus computers can free the learner from doing some tedious tasks such as sorting and storing information; rather, they would concentrate on higher order tasks. The computer can also transfer information from tables to graphs or equations. Moreover, it can easily manipulate texts and images etc. Besides, the web in service to the learner is less a transformer of data or processor of symbol systems; it’s more a conduit to other people’s information. Thousands of computers all over the world function as websites with pages that can be accessed by anyone connected to the web. Yet these means can be very destructive if not conducted in a healthy way especially that these pages and texts have hyperlinks wherein a learner may be lost as we mentioned before.

The history of CALL showed that the computer could serve a variety of uses for language teaching: tutor, stimulus, toolbox, or a medium to global communication and a source of authentic materials. But as Garrett pointed out "the use of the computer does not constitute a method" rather; it is a "medium in which a variety of methods, approaches, and pedagogical philosophies may be implemented"(1991: 75).

Therefore, in order to avoid these negative aspects of e-learning and to make the best use of technology in our teaching, it is better not to reject any of the aspects of the teaching / learning process namely the teacher. In other words, technology in general can be included in the traditional classroom system and both the teacher and the computer work together in order to teach the learners more effectively. The teacher can provide a very effective and useful guidance to the learners in order to get the best side of these technological facilities. The teacher's main role in online activities is to help students develop their own learning strategies as Warschauer (1996) argues: "teachers must learn to become a "guide on the stage" rather than a "sage on the stage"."

So there is a sort of interdependence between the teacher and the computer, as a technological mean. This is what theory defines as "blended learning", "mixed teaching", "hybrid teaching" etc.

Blended teaching has become a necessity especially with the big socio-economic changes schools and universities are undergoing: society is in a continuous evolution; which in turn calls for an evolution in the educational fields. Nowadays many schools have the minimum basic computer equipment and learners are technologically oriented. Learners are no longer the receptive minds that come to school in order to know; rather they become participants in the courses. Moreover, great interest in Life Long Learning is growing among learners. All these factors push the educational system to come more and more flexible and appeal to the different students' needs and expectations. Blended learner fits very well for these conditions in the sense that it is learner-centered rather than the ordinary classes that are basically teacher-centered. Moreover it is able to cover the variety of levels.

Blended teaching is the teaching style that combines online and face-to-face approaches. That is, teaching inside a classroom by resorting to elements of online learning. We can even consider blended teaching an online teaching that is processed in a classroom in the presence and with the guidance of a teacher. In a hybrid course a significant portion of online activities are brought to the classroom and are done under the supervision of a teacher. The objective is of course to benefit from the best features of both classroom context and online facilities in order to develop active independent learners who are taking part in the ongoing of the lesson. Class seat time will be reduced since student are assigned tasks to do and are no longer receptive of the information, rather they become seeker for it: students browse and check for the information themselves through the net and thus they will learn how to manage the learning as well as the search time. By embedding human interaction with technology facilities in learning programs, educators exploit the media effectiveness to aid learning through blending face –to-face experiences with both synchronous and asynchronous online tools and methods in an appropriate mix.

The focal point of blended teaching is the ability of relating online materials to real classes in order to make more effective teaching. Success of blended teaching depends, to a great extent, on how much the teacher is able to relate the material available with his real class in cooperative and complementary ways with the aim of giving effective lessons.

The fact of mixing in itself is not an absurd process; rather teachers should be very alert and decide what to mix with what and how. There must be the so-called in philosophy "epistemological rupture" which means rejecting the negative side of the both parts and trying to fit the positive points in order to fit the objective of teaching. Teachers should make sure how online activities would make their teaching more effective and raise students motivation more and more with the less costs and efforts: for instance minimizing the T.T.T (teacher talking time) and maximizing the S.T.T (students' talking time) and interaction.

The educators' role in blended learning is much more a mentor rather than a teacher / lecturer. The teachers' role in a hybrid course is a much more an organizer and facilitator of the learning process. Collis & Moonen "suggest that the key role of the instructor is becoming those of activity planning, monitoring, and quality control" (2001: 101)

Thus in order to blend a course, for instance, a teacher may start his lesson by making his students check one or two of their friends journal online and make any comments briefly as a warm up activity. Or they can conduct a brief discussion (usually called 5 minutes activities) about the recent issues and exchange opinions about topics of their interest such as Sports, Incidents, University life, Political issues, newest discoveries, their problems with learning, their hobbies and favorite singer or actor. Then the teacher starts the lesson by introducing the main activity.

Take for example, reading as a skill: the teacher first asks two or three general questions in advance about the main topic of reading, students at home check for material related to it then when they come to the class a brief discussion between the students according to their findings and share the information they got. Quickly the teacher does the skimming and scanning tasks on the basis of what is in the textbook. If there are any grammatical structures to be thought, after being introduced by the teacher, students are referred to a homepage or a web site for structures. The students in pairs, in groups or individually do some exercises online. They can be referred to a crossword puzzle in order to recapitulate and practice the vocabulary covered in the whole unit or chapter. Finally, students may be assigned a follow up activity or exercise to check at home from the net, they may be asked to work in groups about a special topic and give small presentations every time to their colleagues either orally or by using power point slides etc.

The teacher is always there as a guide and mentor to follow and check the way students are working and encourage them to take charge of their own learning and help them to learn at their own pace.

We can always notice that the presence of the teacher as a monitor is encouraged and the time of learning is extended since half of the tasks turn to become as assignments and homework. And learners are given some freedom with responsibility on their learning. Moreover, competition between students will remarkably rise since every student will try to bring something different from the others.

Nevertheless, blended teaching is not very easy as it seems at the first glance; it is a difficult task especially for the teacher who should work constantly in order to check for the appropriate material and try to adapt it to the courses and the objectives of his lessons. Also there is a great need for the teacher to construct classroom homepages as a way of making material including a set of information needed in a certain time for certain students with certain levels. But these homepages need to be updated every time according to the improvement of study. Moreover, a considerable level of technical knowledge from the part of the teacher and students is compulsory as well as continuous training to keep with the innovations in the technical field. Of course a minimum background of technical support and budget should be provided to the teachers willing to integrate technology in their classes and blend their traditional courses with online activities.

Experience in many countries has proved that these difficulties have and will never be an obstacle in front of blended teaching. What is needed is only a certain amount of devotion and will: teachers should convince themselves that blending their teaching is a gradual process and with the minimum equipment teachers and learners would reach the goal provided that their objectives are clearly stated from the beginning.

Thus, even if computers, smartphones and the net are still restricted to a small fraction of population in the world, the wide spread of internet and the use of computers in education in general and in English language teaching in particular

is increasing in a remarkable way. Yet the use of computers in language teaching is still varying according to contexts. Computers are used as referential tools: students are required, in some contexts, to conduct tasks and project works wherein they can use the computers connected to the net or only the encyclopedia available on CD ROMs as well as the ELT dictionaries which sometimes offer not only definitions but also spoken pronunciation of words as well as practice exercises and activities. In other contexts, computers are already being used for teaching and testing: many software packages are available for language learning and they “offer the students the chance to study conversations and texts, to do grammar and vocabulary exercises, and even to listen to texts and record their own voices” (Harmer 2003: 147)

Teaching is an art and using technology is a part of this artistic talent; there are no restricted rules or patterns to be followed by whoever is wishing to blend his teaching and make use of technology. Using some software as a supplement to the teachers’ work in the classroom is only an attempt of blending language teaching. If the teacher wants to vary his techniques and benefit from the facilities and multiplicity of technology he can benefit from using the computer either connected to the web or disconnected in many ways according to his objectives and the tasks he intends to teach. The web can be a very useful means to encourage communication; teachers can encourage learners to communicate through the Internet either in a one-to-one partnership where individual students from different locations share and discuss interesting ideas and opinions about a variety of issues such as: how do they save the environment, literacy in their countries, problems of youngsters... Or it can be conducted in wide area research collaborations, which include entire classes in collaborative projects that encourage schools across the country to collect the data locally and sent it to the central website for compilation and, as Windschitl proposes “Students can then access to shared data base to download selected data for analysis” (1998: 29)

Finally, technology: to use or not to use? That is the question”. It’s true that digital revolution has changed the late 20th century’s world and made of it a small town. E-learning and online communication “represent the most important development in human communication and cognition since the development of the printing press” (Harnad 1991: 15). And education itself is no longer that traditional as it used to be relying on a teacher owning knowledge and transmitting it to the learners in a classroom with the blackboard as the one and only tool. Education has become of the fields that benefit and make use of the newest technological development. But still we should not forget that there are so many parts of the world where access to computer is difficult and in some African continents there are millions of people who have never contacted the computer even in picture and the Internet is impossible. In fact, this portion of society may represent a majority sometimes and it should not be underestimated.

Therefore, even if the American writer Theodore Roszak’s argument that putting computers in schools is an unwise investigation and a bad use of money would seem a bit extreme and a sort of exaggeration, still it is difficult to argue against it especially with the opinion saying that: “there are about as many kids born computer-proficient as there are born piano-proficient or poetry-proficient. It is mere folklore that all children born since 1980 have mutated into brilliant computer-users” (T. Roszak 1996:14) The dilemma is really clear and as language educators we may be lost between the two opinions.

Today’s “computer freaks” can be the hope of technology and foreign language learning but they should not be left with the computer alone in order to learn the language since the computer is no more than a machine. Learning has always been a human feature; therefore the teacher’s role if implemented by technological devises in a context where learners are already familiar with using computers and other technology media, the result will certainly be encouraging and

effective learning will take place too. To these children we are hopeful and with them may English language learning become much more technology based. And to those who are still lagging behind and have not yet access to the world of technology, it's time to be given a small part of our interest and, for sure, they may prove to do well with these devices. It is a matter of opportunity more than ability.

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