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THE ROLE OF BLENDED LEARNING IN ACHIEVING THE OPTIMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The teaching landscape is rapidly changing, the technological rise of the 21st century and widespread integration of those technologies into our society, combined with access to the internet has integrally changed teaching in just a few years. Blended learning is a natural development to the growing accessibility of eLearning, online resources and the continued need for a human component in the learning experience. A blended learning approach ensures that the learner is engaged and driving his or her individual learning experience. This approach also helps cater to the individual needs of the learner, most students have unique learning styles and a blended approach is more likely to cater to those needs than a traditional classroom teaching experience.

CONTENTS

I.INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the role of blended learning in achieving the optimal learning environment. It provides an overview of blended learning definitions and models, and includes some examples of blended learning activities and projects conducted in learning and teaching sphere.

We live in a connected world with unparalleled access to a vast array of online information and experiences. Our children are growing up in a world where excitement and opportunities are just a screen touch away. For many educators and trainers, a blended learning approach provides innovative educational solutions through an effective mix of traditional classroom teaching with mobile learning and online activities. But what is "Blended Learning" and what does it mean for students, teachers, parents, school principals? How do we harness these resources to enrich the educational experiences for our students? How do we tap into this knowledge bank to provide relevant education and vocational training experiences for our youth? Can we use this connectivity to build online communities for isolated students and adults in rural and remote areas? Does this technology have the potential to overcome disabilities and provide equality of educational opportunity for all? Can we use blended learning approaches to deliver professional development to all our teachers and school administrators? Can traditional assessment tools be used with blended learning? Will a blended learning approach require extra resources to be provided by schools and/or the education system? Will parents be convinced their children are receiving a „proper" education? Since 2010, the release of the Ultranet, a secure site for managing learning and collaboration between students, teachers and parents available to all Victorian Government schools, has placed a greater imperative for teachers to optimise blended learning opportunities in teaching and learning and maximise the potential for the

online learning it provides.In you will find definitions of blended learning and descriptions of blended learning environments, and case studies from blended learning activities; research findings about the advantages and benefits of a blended learning approaches and some of the challenges to be faced when implementing blended learning.

Modern English is exceptionally rich in homonymous words and word-forms. It is held that languages where short words abound have more homonyms than those where longer words are prevalent. Therefore it is sometimes suggested that abundance of homonyms in Modern English is to be accounted for by the monosyllabic structure of the commonly used English words.

The theme of my graduation paper is: "The role of blended learning in achieving the optimal learning environment". This qualification work can be characterized by the following:

If we pay attention the actuality of this work caused by several important points. We seem to say that the appearance of blended learning is one of the main trends in development of Modern English, especially in its colloquial layer, which, in its turn at high degree is supported by development of modern informational technologies and simplification of alive speech. So the significance of our work can be proved by the following reasons:

- Being informed about blended learning.
- Some approaches of blended learning among students
- The role of blended learning
- Creating the optimal learning environment
- The role of blended learning in achieving the optimal learning environment
- The exploration of blended learning and its differentiations and similarities

The aim of the qualification work:

- To show the significance of the problem for those who want to brush up their English.
- To teach the problem of homonyms to young English learners.
- To analyze, study, and sum up all the possible changes happened in the studied branch of linguistics for the past fifty years.
- To mention all the major linguists' opinions concerning the subject studied.

Additionally, there are some factors and importances of blended learning among students. So, the main aim of my graduation work is to have knowledge about the blended learning in students mind.

The tasks of the work can be concluded in the following items:

a) My graduation paper could serve as a good source of learning English by young teachers at schools and colleges.

b) Learners and teachers could find a lot of interesting information for themselves.

c) Learners who want to increase their ability in English language can use this graduation work efficiently.

Exploration level of the work

There are so many language specialists who have been working on the theme of the blended learning and in this graduation paper you can study a lot of definitions and researches on the blended learning. Especially, here is explained the role of the blended learning in achieving the optimal learning environment. If we say about the methods of scientific approaches used in our work we can mention that the method of typological analyses was used.

The graduation work is concluded in including the description of explaining the advantages and disadvantages of the role of the blended learning in achieving the optimal learning environment.

If speak about the structure of the final qualification work there are following structures in it:

The work is mainly included three major parts: introduction, main part

(3 chapters) and conclusion. Each part has its subdivision onto the specific thematically items. There are two points in the introductory part: the first item tells about the general content of the work while the other gives us the general explanation of the blended learning. The main part bears three chapters itself which, in their turn, are subdivided onto several specific items. The first chapter it explains different explanations and different definitions of blended learning. Here is analyzed all explanations of what the blended learning itself. The first chapter is also included the role of the blended learning and its formats. The second chapter shows learning outcomes, changes in student practices, behaviors, and attitudes, teacher factors, community and expert involvement – intercultural and cultural opportunities. The third item explains an overview of the optimal learning environment, some approaches to create the optimal learning environment, the role of blended learning in achieving the optimal learning environment. In conclusion part, here are collected all rules, facts and thoughts of language specialists, and according to these resources the qualification work is summarized. At the end of the graduaton work there is also given bibliography.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. To investigate about the theme, I tried to learn and look through internet sources because the topic is a new style to use during the lesson, and also I studied a lot of topic-related books, articles on blended learning and optimal learning environment written by linguistics and others. What helped me to search and find the correlated books was the back-up by my scientific supervisor and the university librarian who gave me the list of authors and books which were dedicated to my topic. In addition to them, I myself tried to learn every detail of the topic. And I studied many books, you can see them, here: Friesen, Norm (2012). "Report:Defining Blended Learning", "Enhancing Students' Language Skills through Blended Learning" Electronic Journal of E-Learning, "Blended Learning: A Disruptive Innovation" by Knewton, Strauss, Valerie "Three fears about blended learning" "The Washington Post", "Blended course design: A synthesis of best practices", Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, Lothridge, Karen; et al. (2013). "Blended learning: efficient, timely, and cost effective". Journal for Forensic Sciences, Oliver M, Trigwell K (2005). "Can 'Blended Learning' Be Redeemed?" Martyn, Margie - "The hybrid online model: Good practice".

These books helped me to have general information the role of blended learning and creating optimal environment in the class. Not these books gave main idea but also they helped me to understand the deepest meaning of the topic.

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF BLENDED LEARNING

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, face-to-face 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 in the same breath as "personalized learning" and differentiated instruction.

The terms "blended learning", "hybrid learning", "technology-mediated instruction", "web-enhanced instruction", and "mixed-mode instruction" are often used interchangeably in research literature. Although 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. One of the earliest uses of the term appears in a 1999 press release, in which the Interactive Learning Centers, an Atlanta-based education business, announced a change of name to EPIC Learning. The release mentions that "The Company currently operates 220 on-line courses, but will begin offering its Internet courseware using the company's Blended Learning methodology." The term "blended learning" was initially vague, encompassing a wide variety of technologies and pedagogical methods in varying combinations (some making no use of technology whatsoever). In 2006, the term became more concrete with the publication of the first *Handbook of Blended*

Learning by Bonk and Graham. Graham challenged the breadth and ambiguity of the term's definition, and defined "blended learning systems" as learning systems that "combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction". In a report titled "Defining Blended Learning", researcher Norm Friesen suggests that, in its current form, blended learning "designates the range of possibilities presented by combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical co-presence of teacher and students". Blended learning is being recognised as a solution to the perceived weaknesses in both traditional learning and e-learning. This paper discusses the opportunities provided by blended learning, in comparison with both traditional and e-learning, and the dimensions that must be considered in order to create the best blend. The review shows that blended learning is not a new concept, but that it exists in many different forms and is prevalent in most classroom practices. The most used definition indicates that blended learning merges traditional classroom teaching with elearning activities; and the strength of blended learning is not limited to its potential to overcome the disadvantages of e-learning or traditional learning, but in the blend itself. The 'ingredients' of the blends are compared, leading to a discussion of the factors that must be considered by educational institutions when selecting appropriate and effective teaching practices. All students no matter their age learn differently and teaching methods should reflect this, by designing teaching programmes in a way that reaches visual, auditory and kinetic learners alike. With the heavy integration of technologies we'll be able to improve teaching, information retention, engagement, responsibility and enjoyment. Students never outgrow their learning styles, meaning blended learning is more important than ever, no matter what the industry is, from schools to corporations, in all walks of life.

Technology-based training emerged as an alternative to instructor-led training in the 1960s on mainframes and mini-computers. The major advantage that blended learning offers is scale, whereas one instructor can only teach so many people. One example is PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations), a system developed by the University of Illinois and Control Data. PLATO in particular had a long history of innovations and offered coursework from elementary to the college level. Main frame-based training had a number of interface limitations that gave way to satellite-based live video in the 1970s. The advantage here was serving people who were not as computer literate. The major challenge was the expense required to make this work. In the early 1990s, CD-ROMs emerged as a dominant form of providing technology-based learning as bandwidth through 56k modems weren't able to support very high quality sound and video. The limitation to CD-ROMs was tracking completion of coursework, so learning management systems emerged as a way to facilitate progress tracking. The aviation industry used this heavily to track how well one did on courses, how much time was spent, and where someone left off. AICC, Aviation Industry Computer-Based Training Committee, was formed in 1988 and companies such as Boeing used CD-ROMs to provide training for personnel. Modern blended learning is delivered online, although CD-ROMs could feasibly still be used if a learning management system meets an institution's standards. Some examples of channels through which online blending learning can be delivered include webcasting (synchronous and asynchronous) and online video (live and recorded). Solutions such as Khan Academy have been used in classrooms to serve as platforms for blended learning.

There is little consensus on the definition of blended learning. Some academic studies have suggested it is a redundant term. However,

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.

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".

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." Proponents of blended learning argue that incorporating the "asynchronous Internet communication technology" into higher education courses serves to "facilitate a simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experience". This incorporation is a major contributor to student satisfaction and success in such courses. The use of information and communication technologies have been found to improve student attitudes towards learning. By incorporating information technology 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".

It is challenging to find a widely accepted definition of blended learning, and even more difficult to find a core set of literature on blended learning methodologies. In general, training approaches can be located on a continuum that runs from traditional, face-to-face class meetings to totally online courses that have no direct interpersonal contact. Blended learning is generally acknowledged as falling somewhere between these two extremes, incorporating elements of each.

Blended learning also have the potential to reduce educational expenses, although some dispute that blended learning is inherently less expensive than traditional classroom learning. Blended learning can lower costs by putting classrooms in the online space and it essentially replaces pricey textbooks with electronic devices that students often bring themselves to class. E-textbooks, which can be accessed digitally,

may also help to drive down textbook budgets. Proponents of blended learning cite the opportunity for data collection and customization of instruction and assessment as two major benefits of this approach. Blended learning often includes software that automatically collects student data and measures academic progress, providing teachers, students and parents detailed students data. Our children, and their following generations are already and will continue to grow up in a world that's a stark reminder of how rapidly the human civilization has changed, a society and world where smartphones and tablets are widespread, affordable, and replacing most computers and laptops. The rapidly changing landscapes should be a marker to show that teaching methods need to evolve to keep up with the times and incorporate integrated technologies into the learning modal, these technologies aren't going to go away, they'll continue to be integrated into our society and it's time to embrace them for the advantages they bring. We've provided a definition of blended learning in the past. Blended Learning is a mixture of learning methods that incorporate multiple teaching modals. Most frequently e-Learning and traditional face-to-face learning. 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. "Blended learning 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. If teachers offer a form of initial program orientation before introducing blended learning strategies, it can better prepare students to feel confident navigating the different components and developing a stronger sense of independence.

Those who use blended approaches base their pedagogy on the assumption that there are inherent benefits in face-to-face interaction (both among learners and instructor) as well as the understanding that there are some inherent advantages to using online methods in their teaching. Thus the aim of those using blended learning approaches is to find a harmonious balance between online access to knowledge and face-to-face human interaction.

Some online institutions connect students with instructors via web conference technology to form a digital classroom. These institutions borrow many of the technologies that have popularized online courses at the university level. Some advantages of blended learning, particularly at a Kindergarten to grade 12 level of education, can be found under the general concept of educational technology. It is also one of the most effective ways for personalized learning at scale. Blended learning supports the use of standards as a way to manage quality and ease of use. This includes multiple kinds of standards: interoperability standards like the SIF specification from A4L or the Learning Tools Interoperability specification from IMS Global Consortium or academic standards like state standards and Common Core State Standards, which encourage integration of technology into a variety of subjects.

A learning management system, or federation of systems, helps develop a better feel for an online community where discussions can be held to better aid students. This virtual learning environment helps connect professors with students without physically being present, thus making this a 'virtual cafe'. Many schools use this online tool for online

classes, classwork, question & answer forums, and other school related work. Blended learning yielded positive results from the online community. Such results were compared and showed similar results from that of Alcoholics Anonymous and Weight Watchers.

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".

The term blended learning originated in the business world in connection with corporate training , then was employed in higher education and lastly it appeared in language teaching and learning. It is difficult to say exactly when the term became commonplace in ELT although I suggest that it coincided with the publication of Sharma and Barrett's book Blended Learning in 2007. Although I had first heard the term in late 2003, the publication of this book cemented its place in ELT in my mind.

There is some debate as to whether it was simply the term that was coined in

corporate training, rather than the actual approach to teaching and/or learning, with Oliver and Trigwell arguing that it was simply the term. Masie, in Bonk and Graham, appears to agree with this by boldly stating that 'all learning is blended learning'. In the same article, Masie goes on to state that '…blended learning has always been a major part of the landscape of training, learning and instruction' and encourages us to think back to our college days when the pedagogical approach involved a number of different teaching strategies.

Personally I feel that the adoption of the term symbolises a change in what is being blended nowadays, as it signifies the inclusion of

computer technology providing online or offline activities and materials in the mix, rather than implying this is a wholly new approach to teaching and learning.

Despite its widespread use in corporate training, higher education and latterly the field of ELT, many claim that the term blended learning is difficult to define the difficulty arising because consensus has not been reached on one definitive definition. Furthermore, the term itself has not been fully adopted in these three settings, where it is at times referred to as 'hybrid or mixed learning In relation to ELT, Dudeney and Hockly also use percentages to differentiate between online courses, blended language learning courses, and face-to-face language learning courses with additional online materials. Despite these perceived differences I would argue that many of the terms are synonymous and that in ELT 'blended learning' is the term most commonly used to refer to any combination of face-to-face teaching with computer technology (online and offline activities/materials).

From a corporate perspective, Singh and Reed describe blended learning as being 'a learning program where more than one delivery mode is being used with the objective of optimizing the learning outcome and cost of program delivery'.

They do not expand on what the delivery modes are in their definition, yet a more explicit definition from Valiathan suggests they may include 'face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning, and self-paced learning'. Reid-Young (n.d.) also provides us with a set of delivery modes which differ slightly from Valiathan's and 'may range from classroom sessions to mentoring arrangements or the support of a subject matter expert in the same office or area.'

With reference to blended learning in higher education, it has been defined as: a combination of technology and classroom instruction in a flexible approach to learning that recognises the benefits of delivering

some training and assessment online but also uses other modes to make up a complete training programme which can improve learning outcomes and/or save costs'.

Here the lead modes are identified as technology and classroom instruction, although interestingly the 'other modes' are not specified. This reference to 'other modes' is of personal interest as the blend I helped redesign had three modes, face-to-face, computer, and self-study that took place in self-access centres situated in the same building as the classrooms and computer rooms, which in my opinion is atypical of most blends described in ELT. Similar definitions to Banados's are given by de Gregorio-Godeo and MacDonald.

Unlike the definitions found for blended learning in corporate training and higher education those provided in relation to language teaching and learning seem rather succinct. For example, describes blended learning in relation to her study as being 'a combination of face-to-face (FtF) and computer assisted learning (CAL) in a single teaching and learning environment'. Stracke offers an almost identical definition in her study into why learners leave blended learning courses (for further details on this study see section below entitled 'Why a good blend is important'): 'blended language learning (BLL) – a particular learning and teaching environment, that combines face-to-face (f2f) and computer assisted language learning (CALL). In this instance, the "blend" consisted of learners' independent selfstudy phases at a computer, with a CD-ROM, and traditional f2f classroom learning.'

Dudeney and Hockly and Sharma and Barrett who to ELT practitioners are probably the most widely recognised authors on the topic, provide remarkably similar definitions to Neumeier and Stracke with the only slight difference concerning the reference to the CAL(L) mode. Sharma and Barrett substitute it with 'technology': 'Blended learning refers to a language course which combines a face-to-face (F2F)

classroom component with an appropriate use of technology. The term technology covers a wide range of recent technologies, such as the Internet, CD-ROMs and interactive whiteboards'. Dudeney and Hockly also avoid using the term CAL(L) and substitute it with 'online' delivery instead: '[Blended learning] is a mixture of online and face-to-face course delivery'. However, they go on to widen this description by stating that 'in some situations the digital element is done offline with a CD-ROM'.

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. This has further implications for the educator and in how much online resources need to be revealed to the student but also ensure it is at the right level for the intended student.

Bonk and his colleagues concluded in a survey of higher education that respondents expected a dramatic rise in the use of blended learning approaches. In an earlier survey, Arabasz and Baker revealed that 80% of all higher education institutions offered blended learning courses. One would imagine that figure to be near to 100% in 2012. According to

Garrison and Vaughan, “underlying this data is the increasing awareness that blended learning approaches and designs can significantly enhance the learning experience”. Albrecht reports high student satisfaction with blended learning, and others have reported faculty satisfaction. This is also consistent with a study by Bourne and Seaman , who found that the primary interest in blended learning is to benefit the educational process. They report that blended learning is seen as a way of combining the best of face-to-face and online learning. Garrison and Vaughan suggest that “the need to provide more engaged learning experiences is at the core of the interest in blended learning” and it is no longer a matter of choosing between “conventional faceto-face and online learning”. The use of blended learning clearly relates to changes in higher education from tutor-centred approaches to a focus on learners. Typical examples of tutor-centred learning and teaching activities include didactic lectures and also traditional computer-aided learning packages. There are a range of reasons why academics develop programmes incorporating blended learning, but a crucial one is to encourage interactivity and the active participation of learners. In comparison to many other disciplines, English studies has always encouraged such participation through the use of the seminar as a key mode of delivery. This may explain why academic teachers of English have not always seen blended learning as a priority. However, the online learning blended learning face-to-face learning 100% e-learning minimal use of technology 5 points of blended learning is not to replace the seminar, but to provide other forms of interaction that can work alongside and enhance work done in the classroom. This is perhaps particularly important at a time when higher tuition fees are changing the way in which we see student education. Blended learning also offers an opportunity to address questions from students and parents about key issues such as group sizes and contact

time, while allowing us to reflect on and develop our own practice as academic teachers.

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

THE ROLE OF BLENDED LEARNING AND IT IS DEFINED

Education is no longer just about putting pen to paper and memorizing facts. Today, innovative educators in both higher education and corporate learning & development are improving learning through technology, as evidenced by the rapid adoption of technology-assisted teaching methods and blended learning models.

Blended learning (also known as hybrid learning) is a method of teaching that integrates technology and digital media with traditional instructor-led classroom activities, giving students more flexibility to customize their learning experiences.

Although there are 4 basic models of blended learning, the possibilities are endless when it comes to the ways in which instructional technologies can be blended into a teacher's pedagogical approach. The flipped classroom, for example, is one type of blended learning model in which students view lecture material prior to class, then spend class time engaging in exercises under the supervision of the teacher.

In general, blended learning refers to the following:

1. Some learning happens online in a format where the student has control over the path and pace at which they engage with content.

2. Some learning happens in an instructor-led classroom.

3. Online and in-person learning is complementary, creating a truly integrated learning environment.

We can identify a range of tools and technologies that can be used in constructing effective learning environments for blended learning, namely: (a) technologies in the classroom that are commonly used in faceto-face learning situations, such as PowerPoint, interactive whiteboards and audience response systems; (b) virtual communication tools that enable users to engage in discussions and activities over the internet, including audio files, discussion boards, e-lists, discussion

groups, chat or conferencing, email, news groups, polling, questionnaires, web forms and videoconferencing; (c) social-networking software, now extensively used by students and staff in their personal life, and becoming more prevalent in the context of learning and teaching, such as instant messaging and phone calls, podcasts, social-networking sites, video clips, virtual worlds, weblogs and wikis; (d) e-learning systems, that is, online environments that bring together a range of tools to support e-learning, such as VLEs, conferencing systems, group collaboration software and group sites; (e) mobile learning using mobile phones, laptops and tablet PCs.

Nowadays, most teachers and students use blended learning methodologies. However, many are unaware that they are using them. In our opinion, the starting point for devising any efficient teaching technique or methodology must be by considering learners' perspectives. Students often express the desire for more direct contact with academic staff, and this may not always easily be fulfilled by electronic means. As Alexander and Boud argue, "learning does not occur in isolation. The extent to which we are motivated to learn depends as much on the context of learning as it does on intrinsic interest in the object of study. An [online] experience without feedback and reflection is a somewhat empty experience". An example of blended learning methodology would be an integrated combination of technology-based materials and face-toface sessions to present content to students. The tutor might teach an introductory seminar, and then proceed with follow-up materials online, making use of blogs, virtual learning environments, or social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter. The JISC study In Their Words describes what uses and expectations learners have for learning and teaching with technology. Many academics teaching English studies already use online discussion in various forms. This was a significant component of a simple blended learning 'redesign' of a core module on

Romantic-period literature at the University of Leeds. The team-taught module was delivered by two weekly lectures to a large cohort of students and a 50-minute weekly seminar to groups of around ten students. The tutor was responsible for five seminar groups and decided to build in more time for reflection and discussion using blended learning. For example, in advance of a seminar covering some sonnets by Charlotte Smith, he set up a discussion board on the VLE with a 'thread' for each sonnet. In addition to their normal reading, students prepared for the seminar by writing an analysis of at least one sonnet and posting it online. Other students, and in some cases the tutor, responded to the analyses. This meant that all the sonnets were discussed, which would have been impossible within the seminar, and also that ideas were shared across different seminar groups. Other activities used include blogging on topics related to the module, and the construction over the semester, by around 50 students, of a wiki that provided a glossary of key terms and allusions. These activities entailed a little extra work for the tutor and students, but it seems to have enhanced their experience of the module. Questionnaire scores were noticeably higher than on previous occasions when he had taught the module, and a number of students commented positively on the online component. The tutor is keen to build on this experiment, but believes that in order to ensure full student participation in the activities, and so that they take the time to respond to each other, it may be necessary to assess the online component in some way. This is not necessarily easy to do, especially as the module is taught by a number of seminar tutors with 6 different ways of teaching.

The power of blended learning methods lies in their ability to improve the student experience. Studies have shown "blended learning" reduces failure rates, improves learning, and boosts engagement. Blended learning combines the best aspects of face-to-face teaching and

online instruction in ways that enable students to learn at their own pace. For example, a student in a blended learning course who masters a concept earlier than his peers can move on without having to wait, and conversely, a student who needs more time is not forced to move forward before fully grasping the subject. It is proving to be a scalable learning model that simply works for diverse populations of students.

C. BLENDED LEARNING FORMATS

Format is the overall layout of a document or spreadsheet. For example, the formatting of text on many English documents is aligned to the left of a page. With respect to text, a user could change its format to bold. In a spreadsheet a user may change the format of a cell to be a different number format (e.g., currency, percentage, date, etc.).

Some blended learning practitioners worry about the appropriate allocation of
time between traditional face-to-face teaching and learning, and extending
learning beyond the classroom walls with mobile and online technologies.
The actual percentage of time allocated or the blending of the different activities and approaches is not important. What is important is finding the
right mix or blend that serves each student's needs.

In Victorian schools, blended learning comes in many guises although each
application has the essential ingredients of classroom delivery plus mobile
learning and web content with the added inclusion of interaction with community members and other subject matter experts plus opportunities for
sharing and learning with peers.

In essence, there is a blending of flexible teaching and learning approaches
that include student-teacher, student-student, student-community interactions
and feedback.

Blended learning is a term increasingly used to describe the way e-learning is being combined with traditional classroom methods and independent study to create a new, hybrid teaching methodology. It represents a much greater change in basic technique than simply adding computers to classrooms; it represents, in many cases, a fundamental change in the way teachers and students approach the learning experience. It has already produced an offshoot – the flipped classroom – that has quickly become a distinct approach of its own.

No single, reliable definition of blended learning exists, or even a universal agreement on the term itself. Many use terms like hybrid**,** mixed**,** or integrative to describe the same trend. But the trend is significant. In 2000 an estimated 45,000 K-12 students took an online course, but almost a decade later more than 3 million took courses that way, many of them using computers in the schools themselves.

A learning model in three parts:

a) There is a general consensus among education innovators that blended learning has three primary components:

b) In-person classroom activities facilitated by a trained educator.

c) Online learning materials, often including pre-recorded lectures given by that same instructor.

d) Structured independent study time guided by the material in the lectures and skills developed during the classroom experience.

A course created in a blended learning model uses the classroom time for activities that benefit the most from direct interaction.

Traditional education (especially at the college level) tends to place an emphasis on delivering material by way of a lecture, while in a blended learning model lectures can be videotaped ahead of time so the student can watch on their own time. The classroom time is more likely to be for structured exercises that emphasize the application of the curriculum to solve problems or work through tasks.

An individual semester of blended learning may emphasize classroom time at the beginning, then gradually increase the amount of work that students do online or during independent study. Many argue that class discussion boards, for example, are far more useful if the participants have met face-to-face first.

The "flipped" classroom, a more recent coinage, refers to classes that are structured almost exclusively around a reversal of expectations for lectures and homework. Students are expected to watch lectures online at home, and do homework while they are in class.

Blended learning redefining teaching roles in some situations, the move to blended learning has inspired educators to redefine traditional roles. The word "facilitator" has emerged as an alternative to "teacher," bringing with it a slightly different focus. The facilitator places an emphasis on empowering students with the skills and knowledge required to make the most of the online material and independent study time, guiding students toward the most meaningful experience possible. Facilitators focus on four key areas:

A)Development of online and offline course content.

B)Facilitation of communication with and among students, including the pedagogy of communicating content online without the contextual clues students would get in person.

C)Guiding the learning experience of individual students, and customizing material wherever possible to strengthen the learning experience.

D)Assessment and grading, not unlike the expectations for teachers within the traditional framework.

By putting an emphasis on learning through supervised activities, blended learning has proven to be very adaptable to what some corporations are calling blended training. Trainers can shift their focus from the delivery of knowledge to its application, and companies spend less flying trainers around to oversee all instruction in person.

D. THE ROLE OF BLENDED LEARNING IN ACHIEVING THE OPTIMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

One of key trends to acquire foreign language competences through blended learning has led to the fundamental issue: how to make this education form most useful. There is a wide variety of models to organize blended learning at university foreign language courses. The choice of blended learning models depends on the learning environment, general purposes and traditionsin foreign language teaching.Considering blended learning in certain foreign language teaching (FLT) contexts, there is a pressing need to rethink issues such as interaction types and their intensity in the electronic environment compared to the interaction in the traditional classroom. These differences are crucial for group workorganization and collaboration of all subjects of the educational process. The focus of this researchis the social interaction in the group work in the blended learning environment, its types and intensity levels, because it is a challenge for the teacher to design a thoughtful blended learning course which is based not only on a non-human but also human and social interaction.

In recent years the concept of blended learning is actively discussed. In modern pedagogical literature three main environment types to deliver education are described: online and distance learning, face-to-face (F2F) in the traditional classroomand F2F online learning and live virtual classroom. F2F learning in the traditional classroom means that students and the teacher (instructor) are in one place at this time. Synchronous F2F in a live virtual classroom implies that students and the teacher work together simultaneously but in different places. Synchronous delivery online creates a sense of a virtual community. It means that everyone has to be at the computer at this time. It requires that students should coordinate with the instructor and classmates to plana schedule to be available at a prescribed time. An asynchronous

environment delivers education in non-real-time. The most common interaction type in the e-learning environment is asynchronous. Students participate in an asynchronousactivity at convenient time.

When the delivery environment is no longer purely synchronous or asynchronous we could say that it is the blended learning environment. There are many interpretations of this term, but all of them summarize the understanding of blended learning, or what is also referred to as hybrid learning, that is understood as a combination of multiple learning approaches.Driscoll & Carliner mention that blended learning integrates both offline and online interaction methods, so it can present material through an asynchronous format as well as through a synchronous one.

According to Malcevschi, Maestri, Marmiroli blended learning is the combination of multiple approaches to learning. These methods may also include a mixture of face-to-face classrooms, self paced learning and online classrooms. Boddy, Detellier, Duarte et al. define blended learning as a combination of bestonline and face-to-face instructions to improve outcomes and increase access in a cost-effective way. Blended learning is the "thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experience with online learning experiences".

We agree that this educational approach is important today because it has unchallengeable advantages in comparison with the traditional classroom or online distance learning in their pure form. Boddy, Detellier, Duarte et al. in the Report of the E-Learning Working Group pointout the following benefits of blended learning:

- Students gain a positive experience and attitude towards technology-mediated teaching and learning;
- It supports different styles of learning;
- It fosters improved learning outcomes and increases interaction quality among learners, between students and instructors, as

well as with outside experts and communities, and the variety of learning resources;

- It creates flexibility and provides greatertime to reflect in online discussions;
- It provides a more dynamic and interactive learning environment which results in a higher level of engagement;
- It highlights the importance of the instructional design for optimal learning outcomes;
- It provides an opportunity to a fundamental redesignof teaching and learning approaches to realize increased effectiveness, convenience and efficiency;
- It provides better ways to address multiple needs oflearners and learning styles, as well as a strong pedagogical foundation for engaged and sustained learning.

Blended learning integrates both learning programs in different formatsto achieve a common goal andsynchronous and asynchronous (multimedia, online) learningactivities. There are numerous possibilities to combine synchronous and asynchronous delivery environments and interaction methods. The purposes and uses of foreign languages can be very diverse, but regardless of the reason for learning foreign languages have something to offer everyone. In Standards for Foreign Language Learning (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) five goal areas that encompass all of these reasons are pointed out:

Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities - the five C's of foreign language education. All C's are important for FLT, but communication is at the heart of the language learning, no matter whether the communication takes place face-to-face, in writing, or across centuriesthrough the reading of literature.

One of targeted competencies in FLT as the base for the efficient interaction and communication is social competence, which includes personal, interpersonal and intercultural competences and covers all forms of behaviour that give help individuals to participate effectively and constructively in social and working life, particularly in increasingly diverse societies, as well as to resolve conflicts, if it is necessary. This is also one of key competences in the life-long-learning concept.

It is important for blended learning course designers and teachers to keep in mind that the social competencedevelopment in the blended learning environment has somedifferences in comparison with the traditional classroom. Technological, didactic, methodological resources of blended learning facilitate the development of social competence, but not all teachers are able to take advantages of this potential. New skills and competencies (such as good communication skills, independent learning, ethics/responsibility, teamwork, flexibility, thinking skills and critical literacies, knowledge navigation, IT-skills embedded in the subject are required in the present day society and it plays an important role in their development. According to Bates and Sangra, one of the core competencies required in nearly all subject domains, and more specifically in different occupations and professions, is embedded digital literacy, i.e. the ability to use information and communications technologies in ways that are specificto a particular knowledge or occupational domain. This trend has led to changes in technology, methods, means and forms of FLT and the learning process.

One of highly effective ways of social competence development in FLTis team-work in blended learning, including online-collaborations and different strategies of group work.Group work, on

the contrary, is a condition for efficient communication, interaction in FLT, therefore for the efficient social competence development.

Group work (including pair work) is increasingly used inforeign language university courses as the instructional focus has shifted from teaching discreet aspects of language, such as grammar and vocabulary, to developing students' social competence. In group work students can have ample opportunities to interact with each other in a foreign language in natural ways, that is likely to develop their social competence. In these circumstances, students benefit from recognizing overall success of the group and from observing the success of its individual members. They claim that cooperative group work can enhance learning outcomes, communication skills, learning motivation, and psychological health.

The social competence development in a virtual environment has advantages both in asynchronous and synchronous delivery environments. Klink mentions that blended learning allows designers to adapt the learning content to needs of different educational levels in student groups. Further she describes the benefits of different delivery environments. However, flexibility of virtual asynchronous environment gives the access to the teaching material, on the Web or in computer conference discussions, it can take place at any time and from any location with an Internet. In blended learning students, who can demonstrate mastery of the prerequisite content, can skip the online part and pass directly to the classroom section. Those who are not good at the content can learn it at any time, without other students nearby, who already know the material and express theirfrustration with these beginners.

In FLT the context itis important that students should have time to reflect: rather than to react immediately, asynchronous systems give students time to think over ideas, formulated in a foreign language,

check references, go back to previous messages and take the amount of time to prepare a comment. In this way they contribute more successfully to the corporate group results.

On the other hand, the synchronous environment promotes the group synergism. The instantaneous interaction with itsopportunity to convey tone and nuance helps develop group cohesion and the sense of being a part of the learning

community. Synchronous systems provide quick feedback to ideas, support consensus and decision-making in group.

The interaction is a crucial concept in a learning environment and makes the environment interactive. The word interactivity is used in a variety of ways. The meaning – interaction between two or more people – is not the only one. It would be useful if the word 'interactivity' were reserved for educational situations in which human responses – either vocal or written – referred to previous human responses. The educational value of any specific interactive session could then be seen in terms of the degree to which each statement is built on previous ones.

In blended learning several ingredients can be mixed together. The decision as to which ingredients to use may be influenced by factors such as:

a) Audience: "the biggest danger in any 'e' or blended solution project is becoming focused on technology /creativity, and not the audience". Therefore the characteristics of the target learner must be understood in order to design the most effective delivery options in achieving the learning objective. As Singh & Reed note this needs to consider:

- Base knowledge – how uniform is the knowledge that they are bringing to the learning program?

- Preferred learning styles – whilst individual learning styles may vary, groups of learners may share learning styles preferences; for example designers are visual thinkers.
- Location – is the audience centralized or distributed?
- Motivation – what is the level of effort, inconvenience or cost the learners are willing to incur in order to obtain the learning you are offering?

b) Content: Danchak (2004) said "choosing what to present is as important as how it is presented", not all content may be optimally presented using the same delivery mechanism – therefore different parts of the material will require different modes of delivery. Course developers need to consider which parts of the program can be taught online, using which technology, and which assessment

mode is most suitable. This might work best through co-operative endeavour.

c) Learning outcomes: In using any learning method, the learning outcomes have to be determined clearly showing how each of the employed learning method can support achieving each of the learning outcomes.

d) Context: Specify the unique circumstances and conditions that surround the educational process that need to be considered.

e) Financial: Analysis of both the content development and delivery costs could play a significant role in the deciding the delivery options.

g) Infrastructure: The available bandwidth network connections and PCs specifications will affect the choice of the technology used in the learning

process.

Following is a suggestion of the possible ingredients of the blend:

a) Mixing online learning with face-to-face teaching: This is the most popular meaning of blended learning. As Singh said "the original use of the phrase “blended learning” was often associated with simply linking traditional

classroom training to e-learning activities."

b) Mixing Media: Here several types of media are mixed such as video, TV, and animations to achieve the learning outcomes.

c) Mixed contexts: As indicated by Oliver & Trigwell,"Implicit in some of the definitions is the idea that what may need to be blended are the different physical contexts within learning takes place." This is what is currently happing in Al-Madrasa (Secondary and high school) in Riyadh, each subject has a special class or lab and students move around these rooms according to their time table.

d) Mixed Pedagogies (Theories of Learning): Driscoll, suggested in the definitions of blended learning "that the mix consists of ‘pedagogical approaches’ such as constructivism, behaviorism, and cognitivism. Actual blended learning would involve students learning through experiencing variation in aspects of what it is that they are studying (their object of study). So in looking at relations between learning theories and blended learning, we must start from the position that many students may not experience the learning environment as one that is blended in ways similar to the way intended by the ‘instructional designer’.

e) Mixed Learning Objectives: Another definition of blended learning involves blending different kinds of intended learning outcome. Driscoll mentioned blending skill-driven, attitude-driven and competency-driven learning.

f) Blending self-paced and live, collaborative learning: Collaboration learning involves groups working together to solving

problems, in sharing and clarifying ideas as well as periods of individual endeavour

g) Blending structured and unstructured learning.

h) Blending Custom content with off-the –shelf content.

i) Blending learning practice and performance support.

From this it can be seen that blended learning has evolved to encompass many dimensions with overlapping attributes. Since there are several combinations of the ingredients; the question is what are the "Right" ingredients for creating the most effective blended program? These relate to the following issues:

1- Institutional: e.g. organizational, administrative, academic affairs, and student services.

2- Pedagogical: the content that has to be delivered, learner needs, and learning objectives.

3- Technological: issues include creating a learning environment and the tools to deliver the learning program.

4- Interface design: the user interface of each element.

5- Evaluation: the usability of a blended learning program.

6- Management: such as the infrastructure and logistics in managing multiple delivery types.

7- Resource support: with the practicality of organizing and making available different types of resources.

8- Ethical issues: such as equal opportunity, cultural diversity and nationality should be addressed. If students are known to have preferred learning styles, or to learn easier under different circumstances.

When one is designing a course that is delivered in a blended learning environment, different types of interactionscan be included.

Further interaction intensity levels and their correlation with the above mentioned aspects of the pedagogical course designand delivery

environments will be described. We distinguish low, intermediate and high interaction intensity
levels:

1. At the low intensity level participants of the blendedlearning course do not interact synchronously or asynchronously but they use the content to interact indirectly with each other without any interference into the communication behaviour of other participants under or without teacher guidance. Students choose topics, texts, exercises and activities to practice foreign language skills in theassigned news sites, keep blogs, work with glossaries, make up a searchable bank relating to a group work aim, create wikis, etc. They deal here mostly with the non-human interaction.

2. The intermediate level incorporates elements of social and technological interactions so it includes nonhuman and human interaction features. Students interact asynchronously, but they react on the interactive manipulations of other participants with the coursevirtual content and get feedback asynchronously.

Emphasis is put on student participation in collaborativeactivities with peers in both F2F and online interactions. Students are expected totake a more active part by expressing their ideas and communicating with group members. The activities which can be used for effective group work in online-collaboration are forums, online discussions when the teacher and students can post messages to each other, and keep track of individual discussions.

3. A high interaction intensity level involves the immediate communication. The interaction occurs synchronously in the form of instant messaging, conference calls, video conferences, communication with guest experts or asynchronously as student-led discussions, group student presentations, project collaboration forums, participation on threaded discussions, group collaborative video/web analyses etc. To

participate effectively in the interaction at this level students must have advanced foreign language level.

Although blended learning is not a new concept, the ingredients of the blend are new. In the past, these have been limited to physical classroom formats (lectures, labs, etc), books or handouts. However, today these can be supplemented by opportunities provided by IT. Blended learning represents a real opportunity to create learning experiences that can provide the right learning at the right time, in the right place and at the right level, for each and every individual, not just at work, but in schools, and universities. It can also be truly universal, crossing global boundaries and bringing groups of learners together through different cultures and time zones. In this context blended learning could become one of the most significant developments of the 21st century. Although the term ‘blended learning’ has gained popularity in recent years as a description of particular forms of teaching with technology, it remains ill defined. Within this section, some of the most popular definitions will be identified. Collis and Moonen (2001) defined blended learning as "a hybrid of traditional face-to-face and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online, and where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning. Blended learning is thus a flexible approach to course design that supports the blending of different times and places for learning, offering some of the conveniences of fully online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact." This is the most usable definition nowadays.

III. RESEARCH PLAN

A. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1. THE GOAL

The research projects completed by the schools described herein and in other INPD supported projects have shown that blended learning approaches
enhance learning outcomes through:

a) inclusion of more differentiated/personalised instruction
b) increased access to resources, experts and learning opportunities
c) more authentic and student driven tasks being incorporated into the
curriculum
d) higher student engagement
e) greater opportunities for collaboration (especially beyond the classroom and involving the wider school community)
f) exposure to a wide range of Web 2.0 technologies and acquisition of
contemporary literacy skills
g) better access to infrastructure and, anytime, anywhere learning.

The projects in these blended learning trials offered greater options for
personalisation of study and put students in control of their own learning.
Students were able to vary their pace of learning, drawing on as few or as
many resources as necessary, choosing tasks/resources that best suited their
learning styles and level of prior knowledge. Students could use teacher created vodcasts to review class work, practise their knowledge of a text by

playing their aligned online games, and demonstrate knowledge of principles
by recounting their own understanding of the topics through claymation storytelling.

Blended learning approaches allowed students to shine in competencies other than the traditional literacies, as leaders, ICT technical experts, cultural
experts, resource managers, and negotiators. They also acquired new literacies of online protocols (cybersafety), intercultural understanding through
exposure to global connections, and constructing/synthesising knowledge
from non-linear content.

As a result, students became more informed, more resourceful and
constructed their own learning paths, ultimately producing better work outputs.
Increased system knowledge of how to use and integrate ICTs into better
teaching and learning practices raised expectations and outcomes for students.

Access to infrastructure assisted both teachers and students to achieve better outcomes through flexible access to content instruction and experts.
It enabled their work to expand beyond the classroom boundaries and provided students with the means to document and reflect on their learning,
and share and validate their learnings through their personal networks. By

using such tools as digital portfolios, films, and games they were able to create evidence that demonstrated deeper conceptual understanding, enquiry and knowledge.

Students became better connected to their learning environments both in school and beyond the school. This included teachers, coaches, peers and community experts, locally and globally.

The portability of ICT devices and the ease of sharing the learning outputs via a range of online options extended learning opportunities well beyond the classroom walls through online conferencing, blogging, forums and discussion boards. Students tended to produce more considered projects when their work was likely to be shared or viewed by parents, experts and their peers.

Social networking, mobile technology and digital literacy are part of their regular, everyday lives and we are doing them an injustice if we don't include it in our daily teaching. Greater student engagement and motivation for completing tasks were observed. This has been attributed to familiarity with technologies already used by students outside the classroom and the novelty of some of the ICTs used in blended learning. As an example, online games were used successfully in exploring character roles and narratives with boys studying Year 9 English who previously showed little interest in reading books.

Collaborative tools (virtual conferencing), social networking (e.g.SuperClubsPLUS) and gaming were especially popular. The

breadth of learning tasks that ICTs can accommodate also contributed to higher levels of student engagement. In one example, students could test their knowledge through quizzes, acquire new knowledge through games and reflect on their learning by producing their own podcasts all on the one device, the iPod. Students began to control the construction of knowledge as there was less dependence on traditional instruction and more self-driven tasks were allocated. Students changed their behaviors to become more reflective, collegial and collaborative (engaging in peer coaching and team activities) and far more accepting of peer review and external feedback. Engaging in more reflective and self-monitoring tasks also enhanced their understanding.

Changes to the teacher-student relationship were also noticed when students were empowered to act as leaders, coaches, mentors and technical experts. Teachers were freed from having to understand the technologies, so spent less time on technical instruction and more time supporting learning. According to Dewar and Whittington differences have been identified as to why the corporate sector and academic sector introduced blended learning solutions. For the corporate sector the results from an online survey reported by Sparrow in Dewar and Whittington list the following reasons: ability to match learning styles (80 per cent); individually tailored solutions (70 per cent); improve the learning rate (62 per cent); exploit the investments they have already made in re-usable training resources (59 per cent); shortage of time to use purely classroom events (57 per cent). They do not elaborate on the content of this list, nor provide evidence that any of the reasons given are actually valid and not purely assumptions, for example. improving the learning rate. There are commonalities between the above list and that of Singh and Reed. They identified four benefits to using a blended learning solution a couple of years before the above study was conducted, which were: improved learning effectiveness; extending the

reach; optimising development cost and time; optimising business results (reduces travel costs and learning objectives are obtained quicker). Sharma and Barrett also refer to the cost-saving element of blended learning with reference to the business world, as work time is not sacrificed for training and furthermore travel costs are negated. In addition to cost savings they also emphasise the 'convenience' of blended learning courses as students can study when they want, at the speed they want. It would appear that cost saving was an important driver for change in the move towards blended learning in the business world and we will see the same is also true in the academic sector.

With regard to the academic sector both Dewar and Whittington and Graham cite Osguthorpe and Graham's six suggested reasons: pedagogical richness; access to knowledge; social interaction; personal agency (i.e. learner control and choice); cost effectiveness; and ease of revision. Interestingly the term 'pedagogical richness' is used rather than 'pedagogical effectiveness'. Presumably what is meant by the phrase is the variety of different pedagogical approaches that can be incorporated in a blend, rather than if they are effective or not. Marsh also mention the use of a blended learning solution to reduce costs in higher education, as well as improving the teaching of large groups. Likewise, MacDonald refers to ever expanding classroom numbers as well as 'changes in student demography …a growth in part-time study' as reasons for incorporating 'online media'.

Sharpe et al. found from their review of blended e-learning in the tertiary sector that 'although the rationales for blended e-learning were highly contextualised and specific to each institution they included: flexibility of provision, supporting diversity, enhancing the campus experience, operating in a global context and efficiency'. Nicolson et al. reiterate Sharpe et al.'s findings regarding flexibility as they claim that, in a UK context in particular, there is a demand for flexible

learning opportunities that has been driven by social, cultural, economic and political changes.

Graham and Graham et al., as quoted in Stracke, have condensed these lists down to three main reasons in higher education which are: improved pedagogy; increased access/exibility; and increased cost effectiveness. Improved pedagogy is often cited as a reason for implementing a blended learning approach yet most authors do not expand on the subject. Indeed the phrase 'pedagogy before technology' has been used by some reflective practitioners to stress the need to adopt technology for pedagogical reasons and because it adds value to the teaching rather than simply as an add-on. Improved pedagogy is also claimed with reference to blended learning in ELT although once again little appears to have been written on the subject apart from such general statements as: 'blended learning seeks to combine the best of the taught element of a course with the benefits of technology, so that, the argument goes, better learning outcomes can be achieved'. In a different publication Sharma and Barrett are slightly more explicit and say 'we will assume that you have decided to incorporate technology into a language course for a pedagogical reason, and by doing so, you are adding value to the teaching'. Sharma and Barrett also believe that cost, convenience and being able to work in your own time and at your own pace, the reasons they cite for blended learning being employed in the business world, are also applicable to language teaching. Based on my experience I have to question Sharma and Barrett's belief that cost effectiveness is a valid reason for employing blended learning in ELT because the initial financial outlay for hardware and software is usually prohibitively expensive, without counting the ongoing maintenance, replacement and upgrading costs.

Admittedly though, this will depend on the design of the blend and context as learners may be expected to use their own computers

rather than having them provided. Interestingly, in a later publication Hockly does not repeat the reasons given by Sharma and Barrett for employing blended learning in ELT but provides us with three additional ones:

■ Learners' expectations – learners nowadays expect technology to be integrated into their language classes, (although I believe this to be highly context dependent).

■ Flexibility – learners expect to be able to fit learning into their busy lives, especially professional adults and university students.

■ Ministry of Education (or similar) directives – in some contexts teachers are expected to offer blended learning options.

Once the initial decision has been taken to employ a blended learning approach then the next stage is to determine the blend itself and according to Reid-Young (n.d.) and with reference to the business world there are a multitude of models to choose from.

Ultimately this means that there is '…no single optimal mix. What configuration is best can only be determined relative to whatever goals and constraints are presented in a given situation' (Shaw and Igneri, 2006: 3). Graham (2004) also makes this point, stressing the 'infinite' number of design solutions and their context dependency. This latter point is particularly important as to my mind the context is all, and a thorough analysis of it is vital, as is identifying your drivers for change before developing a blend.This variety of options can both pose problems and provide opportunities for course designers. Rossett et al. (2003) exemplify this by quoting part of a conversation overheard at a conference in which a delegate, who accepts blended learning as a concept, questions what to blend and how to blend. The authors offer three guidelines to consider for achieving successfully blended combinations: stability and urgency (how long will the course content be valid for and how long do the course

planners have to develop the course?); touches and cost (are face-to-face sessions necessary or will technology alone be sufficient and how much are people or organisations willing to invest in terms of time and money?); learning resources and experience (will the learning resources endure the test of time or will they quickly become redundant and how will the learners work, e.g. alone, at home, at work?). Valiathan (2002) identifies three models, as opposed to guidelines, that have emerged from the business world namely: skills-driven, attitude-driven and competency-driven learning. Reid-Young (n.d) provides us with three more 'typical' examples: course model, reference-based learning and pre-assessment model.

There is no apparent overlap between the models, and as with the guidelines they do not appear to have an immediate bearing on language learning and teaching. Dewar and Whittington (2004) reviewed Valiathan's (2002) model along with two others in their literature review, but ultimately preferred Hocutt's (2001) ideas on blended learning. Rather than identifying the individual components of a blended learning model, Hocutt (2001) takes a different perspective and proposes four ways in which the components should interact with each other. Dewar and Whittington (2004: 10) list these as:

1. blended learning components have a mutual awareness of each other

2. components are consistent in language, style and technique

3. components need to be appropriately redundant; (which I interpret to mean they can be optional or compulsory)

4. components have to seamlessly transition from one component to another.

Graham, like Reid-Young above, also refers to 'course level' blending, (in addition to activity level, programme level and institutional level), claiming it to be one of the most frequently used.

However, the definition given is slightly different to that of Reid – Young in that it entails a combination of distinct F2F and CM [computer-mediated] activities. Reid – Young suggests that the students only meet for face-to-face sessions if it possible. Both authors though credit it with being commonly used in universities. According to Graham's definition of a course model this would appear to me to be the most commonly used model in ELT too.

There are six major issues that Graham believes a course designer should consider prior to designing a blended learning course:

1. The role of live interaction – how necessary is the face-to-face component of the course? Certainly in ELT it would seem fair to say students place a great deal of emphasis on this element of the course and that it is vital.

2. The role of learner choice and self-regulation – how much guidance should the students be given when it comes to choosing the type of blended learning course they participate in, in particular in relation to university courses?

3. Models for support and training – how to support and train the instructors and students in a blended learning environment plus provide technological support.

4. Finding balance between innovation and production – and how to do so in a cost effective way.

5. Cultural adaptation – should the materials be adapted to suit local audiences?

6. Dealing with the digital divide – can affordable blended learning models be developed to accommodate those at the bottom of the socio-economic spectrum?

Research outcomes from Victorian blended learning projects reinforce current thinking that the positive impact of ICT on student learning outcomes is strongly linked to improved pedagogy and course

design, especially the development of more authentic, student–centered learning tasks.

With reference to ELT, Sharma suggests ‘for blended learning to be effective the two component parts should be integrated with the technology complementing and not replacing the efforts of the teacher’. In the same article Sharma provides us with five practical examples of how to follow the guidelines at lesson level:

1. A teacher prepares their students for giving a presentation firstly by discussing the topic, then by allowing them to practise fixed phrases using a CD-ROM, then by watching a video on presentations, before finally they prepare and deliver their own.

2. Using a class wiki (a website on which the pages can be edited by the users, e.g. Wikipedia).

3. Creating a podcast (a computer audio file).

4. Downloading Moodle software (a platform) to support a virtual learning

environment (VLE).

5. Setting up a blog (an online diary).

To achieve a ‘principled approach’ to blended learning Sharma and Barrett suggest the following four guiding principles:

1. Firstly, they advise you to ‘separate the role of the teacher and the role of technology’ as the roles are not interchangeable, but they are complementary.

2. Secondly, ‘teach in a principled way’ using means that best suit the learners’ needs, i.e. pedagogically driven.

3. Thirdly, ‘use technology to complement and enhance F2F teaching’ meaning that the two modes should complement each other, and which seems to suggest that face-to-face is exclusively the lead mode.

4. Lastly, ‘It’s not so much the program, more what you do with it.

To illustrate this final statement three examples of how to use a CD-ROM are given, from an individual using it alone at home, to follow up practice in self-study or at home after a class, to actually using it in class as part of a presentation. Dudeney and Hockly refer to a blended learning course where 75 per cent is delivered online and 25 per cent face-to-face in their list of three possible course designs for online learning in language learning environments:

■ A 100 per cent online language learning course, where the course is not unlike a coursebook online.

■ A blended language learning course, where 75 per cent is delivered online and 25 per cent face-to-face.

■ A face-to-face language learning course with additional online materials, where online tools are used to support and extend face-to-face lessons.

Personally, I question how helpful it is to define the terms using percentages as I believe these figures can vary widely from those given yet still the course could be defined as a blended learning course. Moreover, I would refer to their third example as a blended learning course too, with the difference being that the face-to-face mode is the lead mode in that blend. This, it could be argued, highlights the difficulty of defining blended learning that was referred to earlier in this chapter. Prior to designing the three online learning courses listed above Dudeney and Hockly recommend that the designer answers a series of questions which operate rather like a checklist. These are categorised under five headings: delivery mode, task design and materials, learners, teachers/tutors, assessment and evaluation.

Banados provides us with an extremely informative study into a working model of blended learning used to teach English in the

Universidad de Concepción (UdeC), Chile, which considers the design at course level rather than lesson level.

Two of the reasons for employing a blended approach that are given above are improved learning effectiveness and cost effectiveness, but how effective really is blended learning? And in what ways is it effective? According to Dewar and Whittington there is a good deal less literature on the effectiveness of blended learning than there is defining it and suggesting how to implement it. They state that 'There is some anecdotal evidence about how well participants liked blended learning and many articles outlining the costs saving associated with integrating technology. There is also a growing literature base about the learning outcomes achieved through using various types of technology. The biggest challenge is finding studies that specifically address blended learning, as opposed to the use of technology alone. In the context of higher education, Dziuban et al. found that their blended learning courses had 'the potential to increase student learning outcomes while lowering attrition rates in comparison with equivalent fully online courses' and that blended learning results 'in success and attrition rates [were] comparable to the face-to-face modality for all ethnicities.' A study conducted by Harker and Koutsantoni also found that 'the blended learning mode was much more effective in student retention' than the distance learning mode on their English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme, 'whilst students' achievement levels were similar in both groups' as were their satisfaction rates.

A number of studies investigate learners' attitudes towards blended learning. Leakey and Ranchoux found that 'the students in large measure found the blended CALL experience a positive and motivating one and tended towards preferring [this approach] to the traditional classroom based learning.' Brett's results showed 'strongly

favourable attitudes; that learners believed they could learn effectively from multimedia and that it delivered a high quality independent learning experience.' Lin also found that the majority of Taiwanese EFL learners had a positive attitude towards the use of multimedia resources in their language programme, appreciating, in particular, opportunities to practice and extend their language abilities by surfing the internet, to take laboratory-based listening tests via a test analyzer, and to record and save their own writing and to make use of multimedia resources for developing their reading skills'.

2. THE OBJECTIVES

In response to the question 'Is the TELL [technology-enhanced language learning] course an effective curricular design for achieving second language development?' Adair-Hauck et al. found that 'after carefully monitoring and assessing language skills in listening, speaking, writing and cultural knowledge, we recognise that the TELL course was indeed effective in helping our students learn French. Its strength in this particular instructional context appeared to be in writing and its weakness in speaking.' Contrary to their findings regarding speaking, Banados's results indicated 'a remarkable improvement in speaking skills' in addition to 'important improvements in all the skills, especially in listening, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar' in a study carried out with students on an English programme in a Chilean University. Little more appears to have been published on the effectiveness of blended learning since Dewar and Whittington (2004) noted the lack of literature on the subject. A number of studies have been conducted on learners' attitudes, concluding that they are positive towards the integration of CALL or multimedia. At tertiary level evidence indicates that blended learning may improve student retention rates. However, there is little evidence available to suggest that blended

learning is pedagogically effective even though ‘improved pedagogy’ is often cited as a reason for blending. This leaves me questioning if this is a primary consideration for many of the educational providers for adopting a blended approach especially at tertiary level and maybe increasingly so in the EFL sector, or if flexibility and cost, to provide a competitive edge in a global market, are the real drivers for change.

Clearly more studies to investigate the pedagogical effectiveness of blended learning in ELT are required that provide us with empirical rather than impressionistic evidence in its favour. However, Salaberry cautions that ‘a healthy dose of scepticism about the pedagogical effectiveness of many current technological tools appears to be well justified if one considers the perhaps overly enthusiastic reaction to previous technological breakthroughs’ such as language labs, cassette recorders, and computer-assisted instruction. Getting the blend right is important as ultimately it can affect student retention, as Stracke’s study revealed. The results indicated that students left the blended learning course they were attending for three main reasons:

■ ‘a perceived lack of support and connection/complementarity between the f2f and computer-assisted components of the “blend”

■ a perceived lack of usage of the paper medium for reading and writing

■ and the rejection of the computer as a medium of language learning’

Two out of the three of these reasons Stracke gives are referred to in other articles on blended learning. The ‘complementarity’ aspect is one that Sharma and Barrett emphasise as being important in their guidelines and principles for blended learning. It certainly heavily

influenced the design of my blend, resulting in the content of the three modes being linked to a relatively high degree either by grammar, vocabulary or topic. Also Banados found that students preferred face-to-face to online learning, so designed her course accordingly. This was also true in my context which meant that the face-to-face mode was the 'lead' mode in the blend. This would seem to indicate that getting the balance right in terms of the percentage of time spent on each of the modes, and the way they are integrated, is significant. Regardless of the variety of suggested models, guidelines and frameworks authors seem to be united in the belief that 'determining the right blend isn't easy or to be taken lightly'. This is a sentiment shared by both Sharma and Neumeier. There are also words of warning from Sharma and Barrett that 'a blended learning course run without a principled approach may be seen as an "eclectic" blending together of course components, and can end up as rather a mish-mash … learners may suffer "the worst of both worlds"'. Graham also notes that a blended learning course can also be comprised of the least effective modes just as easily as the most effective modes, although this is rarely acknowledged. Studies conducted into how best to integrate technology into the curriculum appear to confirm the viewpoints in the preceding paragraph. For example Gillespie and McKee's study concluded that 'CALL – and other technology – should not be brought in piecemeal, but be part of a structured learning environment'. A similar study conducted by Adair-Hauck et al. also proposed that their results 'may be interpreted that it is both feasible and desirable to integrate in principled ways TELL activities into the language learning curriculum'.

Later studies continue to reach the same conclusion. Yang summarised a study into web-based research projects at university level by observing that 'computer learning networks have the potential to

empower students in welldesigned learning environments'. The implication being that effective implementation of technology is not accomplished just as an 'add-on' to existing tools, it must be synergised into the language learning environment with the support of surrounding educational systems'. Articles by Lin and Fujieda and Matsuura also reiterate the importance of integration and Sharpe and Oliver warn against treating technology as a 'bolt-on'.

However, 'there is, of course, no single perfect blend – the concept is grounded on the notion of flexibility' and must surely be largely context dependent. Furthermore, developing a blend is an iterative process according to Beetham and Sharpe who believe that 'effective designs will evolve only through cycles of practice, evaluation and reflection'. Rossett et al. stress that 'there's no cookbook for blends' and state, with reference to the business world, that 'the topic cries out for empirical research'. In relation to ELT Neumeier supports this statement and emphasises that 'further research is needed in order to enhance the quality of blended learning environments'. Westbrook concurs, as to his mind most of the research on blended learning has been carried out in the tertiary sector and therefore there is a 'huge deficit in terms of research on using blended learning by individuals or small language schools'. It is therefore envisaged that the case studies in this publication will inform professional practice and enhance the theory of blended learning course design in ELT by adding to the rather limited current knowledge base.

B. METHODS

As I have talked about effective practices for teachers and administrators, I really wanted to shift the focus on what the best environment is for student learning. If we are to have students become leaders and grow within our classrooms, they have to be in an environment that creates that.

There have been points in my own childhood where I feared the teacher and didn't feel safe or cared for. The belief at that time may have been that if I "feared" the teacher, I would listen and respect their wishes. The fact was, when I felt unsafe was the time that I caused the most issues in a classroom. A mutual respect between teacher and student must be created to ensure that there is an opportunity for optimal learning.

Here are some key conditions that I believe must be created for students to give them the best opportunity for learning (in no particular order):

1. Kids need to feel safe – This is the most important factor for students to not only succeed, but to also excel. Safety is not only that they do not worry about being emotionally or physically hurt by those that they share their space with, but also that their ideas will also be valued. The environment is safe to make mistakes, share thoughts, and know that their ideas will not be attacked or ridiculed. I have seen students cower under these conditions and it could not only affect them in their current classroom, but could very well stay with them long past the time in that environment. Trust must be apparent for students to succeed.

2. Students are cared for as people first – A child will not succeed in the classroom if they are starving. They will also not do well if they are dealing with tragedy in their lives. Take care of them and show them that you care about their personal well being. Ask them

about their day, talk to them what is important about their lives, and find out what is important to them. We always need to teach kids FIRST then curriculum.

3. Opportunities for fun – This is a no-brainer. If you enjoy what you do, have a sense of humour, and can laugh in your environment, you will do better and enjoy what you do. This has been proven over and over again, and it is essential that we can learn to laugh at ourselves, and with our students. I do not want to work in an environment where I do not enjoy what I do and kids are not the same. Staff are encouraged to allow students to use Ipods in the classroom to not just connect with the outside world, but to also just let kids listen to music while they work. For many people (including me), music engages the spirit and helps people to perform better as they are less distracted. Allowing students to use them responsibly in the classroom while respecting the learning of their peers is just one way we can create a better environment for students to learn.

4. Ideas and opinions are valued – I have heard some crazy ideas from students and I have talked to them about these ideas. I have listened to them and talked to them about their thoughts. Those same students have also come up with some pretty amazing ideas after that. If I would have simply scoffed and ignored them because of what they shared with me the first time, they would have never come back. Even the most famous inventors have failed before but we have to show students that even when they fall short, it is all a part of the learning process.

5. Opportunities for individualized learning – Kids need to have the opportunity to show their understanding in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them. Having one way to get to the same destination is not fair and is not differentiating learning for each child. Students also take different lengths of time for their learning, but

if they get to the same level of understanding eventually, you have gave them the opportunity to be successful.

6. Understand their knowledge and guide them to further their learning – What do students know about what they are learning? What is the knowledge they need to build a solid base to move forward? I do not believe that "marks" are the best basis for this because they do not give any feedback for growth. As teachers, it is our responsibility to give strategies to improve learning and help them further their own learning.

7. Student as a leader in the classroom – To be a leader does not mean that students are the most popular. It simply can mean that they have the opportunity to show leadership in areas they excel and are passionate in. We have to help students find out where they are leaders and give them opportunities to exhibit this. As an educator who has worked extensively with technology integration, I have seen students lead ME in this area several times over the years. I appreciate learning at all times, even if it is from a child. Not only will students appreciate that they have taught their teacher something, they will go out of their way to further their own learning to ensure that it happens again. Do your best to find opportunities for ALL students to exhibit leadership in different areas of the classroom.

8. Opportunities for all to reflect – Even as I write this blog post, I know that I am improving my learning and putting my ideas together. Time has to be given to students where they can self-assess their learning and put their ideas together. This could easily be done in a journal, blog, through music or art, or through just having conversations with others. It is not the avenue that is important, but the opportunity. Find time in the busy school day to let students reflect on what they are learning. The time spent now will be well worth the dividends in the future.

Through writing this post, I realized that this is not JUST an environment that we should try to create for our students, but for all those that we work with. People are more engaged in their work if they have all of the opportunities listed above (and probably more) and will ultimately move their practice forward. It is essential as administrators that we not only work to provide these opportunities for our students, but also for our staff. The optimal learning environmentcan be implemented in classrooms, workplaces, and even at home. Do your best to create this for everyone and you will be amazed at how people flourish.

C. THE PROCEDURE

However, a rapidly expanding body of research on the conditions of learning suggests that physical, social and organizational environments in which teaching and learning processes take place have a more central role than previously acknowledged. As the evidence gathered for this report asserts, the design and management of learning spaces is fundamental to the achievement of positive learning outcomes as well as to the health and well-being of learners. Simply put, good learning environments foster quality learning, and bad learning environments do not. This exhaustive review of the literature on learning environments aims to provide all those who wish to fulfil the promise of EFA with evidence-based suggestions for creating and sustaining 'good' learning environments. Whether applied to formal schooling, alternative learning, or non-formal education contexts, the reflections and findings contained herein offer a rich and varied knowledge base for policy makers, educators and communities to develop strengthened policies and actions that meet local needs in the creation and maintenance of enabling places to learn. Background In today's world, education systems must constantly evolve in order to effectively respond to the rapidly changing demands of the societies they serve. Innovations in curricula, methodologies, materials and technologies may require major changes in the design and organization of the environments in which they are housed. Innovations can be relatively simple and inexpensive, such as re-arranging schedules and seating patterns to allow additional time and space for guided group practice or collaborative problem solving. In a school garden environment, community members skilled in traditional methods can be invited to participate as mentors and teachers at a relatively minimal cost. In another example, teachers, school managers, parents and learners may respond to the increasing occurrence of verbal abuse and physical violence by collaborating to develop a viable policy

for constructive school discipline. In yet another, university researchers can engage with teachers to design assessment tools to measure learners' perceptions of teacher and peer stereotyping based on gender, ethnicity or economic status in their classrooms and schools. To reach a common understanding of how both the physical and social dimensions of learning environments affect the quality of learning processes, an exploration of the relationship between place and process is needed. To understand this relationship, the following questions must be answered: How does one define 'a place to learn'? Why is it that children learn more effectively when there is a clear connection between the place of learning and the world in which they live? How can the different elements of learning environments be assessed in relation to local, national and international definitions of quality? On a broader scale, educational systems undergoing reconstruction or reform may opt to undertake a radically different approach to the way schools are designed, managed and resourced in support of new visions and goals. Other systems may focus on achieving a more equitable distribution of resources in the wake of reports pinpointing clear discrepancies in the provision of basic facilities In brief, the environment consists of those conditions that promote, or hinder, stimulate or inhibit, the characteristic activities of a living being. —John Dewey –10– and services, such as access to drinking water and toilets. In either case, the effectiveness of an intervention or on-going change can only be sustained if it is subject to a process of assessment, reflection and incremental improvement. Thus, this review aims to raise awareness of the complete range of possible tools and methods to measure and improve places to learn. To further inspire and motivate those responsible for bringing learning environments to life, it also covers a wide range of research on innovations at various stages of planning and implementation.

Reports of self-efficacy have been shown to be linked to productivity and influence people's actions in the workplace. When teachers envisage effective teaching as a skill that can be acquired, this feeling of self-efficacy can help them better analyse and solve problems. Conversely, those teachers confronting a low feeling of self-efficacy can experience self-doubt and become preoccupied with evaluative concerns if efforts proved unsuccessful. Classroom climate not only has been shown to affect student outcomes and attainment but is a prominent policy issue in a number of countries and regions. The actions of students within classrooms and the creation of a safe and productive learning environment are important for many schools and can be a challenging dimension of teachers' work. For example, TALIS finds that one teacher in four in most countries loses at least 30% of lesson time to disruptive student behaviour or administrative tasks, and some teachers lose more than half. Furthermore, across countries, 60% of teachers are in schools whose school principal reports that classroom disturbances hinder learning. In all countries this is a problem in a relatively high proportion of schools and poses a significant challenge for effective teaching.

On the first day of 7th grade, I walked into a new school and was greeted by one of the strangest sights I had seen in my young life. Where I had expected classrooms, there were none. The whole top floor of the school was one giant open space with only bookcases and felt covered dividers to signify where one "classroom" ended and another began. While it looked interesting, however, it soon became clear that this open classroom concept was not the most practical of design ideas. Simply put, the noise from tens of students and several teachers speaking at once was greatly

distracting and definitely not conducive to proper learning. Within just a few years, walls between classrooms were once again erected.

Looking back now, however, I realize that at the very least, our school district was pushing boundaries and exhibiting a desire to implement a new type of learning environment that at the time was thought to be more beneficial to students than the status quo.

Nowadays, so much more is known about the importance of an intelligently and thoughtfully designed learning environment. It is widely acceped that where children learn is just as important as what they learn. Extensive research in a wide variety of fields and disciplines including psychology, physiology, ergonomics, architecture and interior design, has shown an indisputable connection between the design of the physical learning environment and the academic achievement of the students.

Two alternative views of teaching emphasise, on the one hand, the teacher's role in transmitting knowledge and providing correct solutions, and on the other, the teacher's role as a facilitator of active learning by students who seek out solutions for themselves. Comparing teacher beliefs with classroom disciplinary climate, the analysis found that in Hungary, Italy, Korea, Poland and Slovenia, teachers with "constructivist" beliefs that regard students as active participants in the process of acquiring knowledge are more likely to report positive classroom disciplinary climate. In contrast, teachers who favour the "direct transmission" of knowledge are more likely to report a negative classroom disciplinary climate in the seven countries where there is a detectable net effect, Korea, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain). The choice of competing teacher beliefs is a particularly significant issue for Korea, Poland, and Slovenia, where both of the above effects were observed. Teacher co-operation tended not to be

strongly associated with classroom disciplinary climate, but in just under half of the countries teachers who engaged in more progressive forms of collaboration such as team teaching were more likely to feel more effective.

Experts agree that a learning environment that is designed to be both cognitively and physiologically impactful will naturally provide students with the motivation to be active participants in their own learning process. This, in turn, will benefit the students throughout their school years and well into whatever career path they chose to pursue. Dr Ellen Pruyneis, a learning consultant in the Ashridge Centre for Research in Executive Development states that it is imperative to "pay attention to the features of the learning environment. When an individual is engaged in a memorable learning experience, they encode the features of the learning environment, as well as what they are learning, in the neural pathways of their brain".

D. DATA ANALYSIS

Therefore, we can fairly extrapolate that a classroom that is properly designed: comfortable, uncluttered, easily maneuverable, stimulating yet relaxed, memorable in a positive way, actually helps students to better retain information and even to retrieve that information years later simply by envisioning the classroom it was learnt in!

So, what are the most important design points to take into consideration to create such an impactful environment? Modular desk hubs, customized learning stations and integrated technology and ergonomically sound furniture are now the ideal classroom components. Today's most effective learning spaces are all about

actively involving the student via functionality, adaptability and comfort. According to experts in the education field, they are also about supporting and encouraging students' various learning styles and strengths.

As online learning takes over education, a new approach to K12 learning is emerging in classrooms across the world. Blended learning integrates face-to-face instruction with digital education to give rise to a powerful learning experience. It calls for a significant departure from the two individual methods and constitutes a fundamental re-orientation of teaching practices.

Blended learning offers immense advantages to students – they stand to benefit from the structured practices of the classroom while learning at their own pace, owing to the adaptive and personalized nature of online learning.

Educators must then focus on developing blended learning courses that can effectively merge these two techniques to create informative and interactive learning environments.

Building an effective blended learning classroom requires careful planning and preparation. The following best practices are helpful in creating a successful blended classroom environment.

1. A Comprehensive Learning Management System

A comprehensive Learning Management System (LMS) is a prerequisite for creating an immersive learning environment. It should serve as a central repository of information –course material, assignments, web resources, etc.– open for access and use to all students.

It also acts as a simple system to assess student progress through assignments, etc. A good LMS offers flexibility, ease of use, and unhindered accessibility. It should also make it easy for both students and educators to access, streamline, and track course-related information.

2. A Well-Defined Course Outline

At the very outset, teachers must prepare a definite course outline to guide learners – they must lay out course content and structure and the tools to be employed for instruction. The course outline should include course resources, objectives, assignment details, assessments, and their grading percentage.

Teachers must also clearly define the parts of the material that would be covered online and those that would form part of classroom meetings. They must also clearly state hardware and software requirements.

A well-defined course outline helps students keep track of their learning, a necessity in a course that promotes independent learning. The teacher can use the outline to keep track of course progress and pace.

A suitable assessment strategy will help teachers identify improvement areas and work on them to achieve improved learning outcomes. Educators must also plan suitable assessment strategies to create a holistic blended learning program. Determining the optimal strategy to test learning outcomes and tracking course progress is essential – they have the option of conducting online quizzes, in-class objective or subjective assignments, classroom discussions etc.

3. Clear Learning Objectives

Teachers must identify and define clear learning objectives to help students understand what they can expect from a course. An effective blended learning classroom mandates a definite understanding of course goals before educators start creating content. The objectives serve as a roadmap, helping everyone understand where learning is headed and the topics that need to be covered to successfully achieve course objectives.

There should be adequate clarity in establishing how to 'blend' online with the established methods of teaching. To determine course objectives, teachers must identify the skills that the learners should

develop during the course; the information to be included; and the types of training tools and activities that form part of the course.

4. Consistent Aesthetics

Imagine a Learning Management System with constantly shifting elements and changing layouts. Not only would this result in a great deal of confusion, it would also obstruct smooth learning. Thus, consistent aesthetics imperative to bringing about focus and concentration in students.

The basic structure and layout of the LMS should be consistent with adequate visual and graphic elements to aid understanding. There should be uniformity in terms of the format of videos, assignments, games, etc., helping learners navigate through the course material without getting confused. This goes on to boost the overall readability and student engagement.

5. Good Communication

Effective communication between the teacher and students needs to be established to achieve improved learning outcomes in a blended learning program. There should be an adequate exchange of queries and feedback with regular classroom discussions. Teachers can provide their contact information and encourage students to communicate in case of queries and concerns to establish a favorable rapport. Toward the end of a course, they can also engage learners in live or online surveys, evaluations, and opinions on the quality of the course and its delivery.

Providing regular and constructive feedback is an important element of effective communication. By opening up lines of communication, teachers can indicate the availability of a perennial support system.

6. A Well-Trained Teacher

A blended learning course necessitates the proper teacher training to facilitate optimal learning. They must understand student needs and

accordingly design courses. Effective blended-learning professional training must include instructional approaches that are based on understanding student perspectives. By encouraging teachers to experience blended learning as learners, they receive the first-hand experience that's required to create relevant and interactive content for students.

Since blended classrooms can be difficult to plan and manage, teachers must also be trained in management strategies tailored for such classrooms. They must be well-versed with the technology required to execute blended learning, and thus need training on software and hardware management as well.There can be no denying the fact that online learning is here to stay. The importance of blended classrooms in this context becomes clear. In a hyper-connected world, both physical and virtual learning spaces matter. Educators must catch up with this trend and help students succeed through an effective blended learning approach.

Achieving this optimum learning environment can only come through the cooperation of school boards, administrators, principals and teachers working together with architects and interior designers who specialize in school settings. From tweaking and maximizing existing classrooms, to designing an entire school from scratch, it is imperative that all parties collaborate to make the most of budget, space and specific requirements. Achieving this may take some hard work, but Imagine students walking into a classroom of your design feeling like they have just been handed an invitation to a magical space that allows them to excel according to their own capabilities, to interact with both teachers and fellow students as opposed to simply being lectured at and to be active and willing participants in their own lifetime learning process!

IV. DATA COLLECTION

Blended learning, also known as hybrid, mixed mode, flexible or distributed learning, is gaining acceptance and being adopted throughout higher education. In this chapter, a review of the literature on blended learning is presented using the Sloan Consortium's Five Pillars quality framework for online asynchronous learning networks. Evidence is mixed as to whether blended learning is truly a unique learning environment or just a simple combination of traditional face to face and online instructional approaches. The early research indicates that blended learning can be as successful as either online or face to face instruction; however, there is a great need for more study on its effectiveness.

According to the Sloan-C framework, faculty satisfaction factors include administrative and technical support, quality control, institutional rewards, research opportunities, accessto new populations of students and participation in interactive learning communities. In much of the research, faculty satisfaction seems to be tied to two things: choice and preparedness. Faculty who are required rather than choose to teach online or blended learning are often more reluctant to redesign courses. Recent research also dispels the notion that core faculty do not teach online. Faculty who are given the instructional support and the preparation time to learn how to teach online indicate they are more satisfied with their online teaching experience. In addition, there appears to be no difference in the level of faculty satisfaction regardless of whether faculty teach fully online courses or blended courses. Case study research from faculty also points to high levels of satisfaction when faculty feel that their teaching strategies have impacted students positively. Evidence proves that meeting students' needs for flexibility and multiple learning styles through using blended learning strategies also increase faculty satisfaction.

Table 1. Blended Learning Pedagogies

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUE	DESCRIPTION	REFERENCE
Case study	Real-time business class	Theroux& Kilbane (2005)
Small group	Set up online groups & blended groups	Schweizer et al. (2003)
Discussion Critical Thinking	Discussion used to promote critical thinking from students in teacher education Coded discussion to show evidence of higher order thinking Add instructional variety	King (2002) Meyer (2003) Cottrell & Robinson (2003)
Self assessment	Allows online tests and homework	Boyle, Sibley (2004)
Simulation	Graphical representation of material	Cameron (2003)
Role playing	Students must adopt role and respond in classroom	Bonk and Dennen(1999)
Learn by doing	Instructional design	Chrestensen (2003)

Observation of the groups

Student satisfaction

If online learning technologies are being used, should student services like orientation, access to online technology support, online library access or online academic support such as tutoring or writing help, which are highly recommended for fully online students, be available? Again the answers will depend on the make up of the students participating in blended learning. Most of the research thus far on blended has not included studies on student services. The best practices gathered on the value of student services in student satisfaction come from both traditional face to face and fully online programs. In both modalities, we know that only certain students will need services and support. The real question is providing choices for support face to face or online. The nature of the students who enroll in the courses or programs should be considered when making those decisions. There is a growing trend that many student services are offering online support to all students regardless of location. Libraries are converting many card, book, and microform services to electronic database systems which allow all students online access. More and more evidence is surfacing that online tutoring services, once exclusively offered to distance students, are being maximized so they can be offered to most students.

Another recommendation for online learning environments is for students to feel as though they are part of a community. The nature of the community role varies and has different names including communities of learning, inquiry, and practice. Students take on different roles in these communities. There is disagreement as to whether community should be required or only offered to those students interested. Community-building techniques include establishing open student communities (lounges, cafes), allowing chat or discussion boards for sharing

information, establishing the same access to services and advice, and providing online student mentors or peers. Online mentors and tutors are often very useful to students who are just starting out, and they serve a role of being an intermediary for faculty and academic support units.

An individual education for every student

Learning by Design is an education approach that gives students control over what they learn and when – and encourages them to come up with creative ways of expressing what they have learned. If, for example, the class is learning about the solar system, students begin by brainstorming what they already know, as well as what they want to know.

Learning by Design means quite a shift in the teacher's role and most teachers need to be trained in the new style of working. The teacher spends much less time talking in front of the class. Instead, they act as facilitators, regulating the questions the student will answer, pointing them towards useful resources, guiding them in their work, keeping them on track and making sure they push themselves. This gives the teacher more time to tailor the education to each child. If a teacher notices that a child is struggling – or needs to be pushed further – they can step in, offering one-on-one tuition, giving the students extra study materials or adjusting their group task to better suit their needs.

Using videos in class

Many teachers would like to reduce the amount of talking they do in class to a minimum. This gives their students more opportunity to be active in class time, and gives the teacher more time to spend talking to and helping individual students. One answer is video. Often made by teachers, there are thousands of educational videos online, covering almost any subject from specific maths theories to ancient history. All you need to do is find the video, embed it (or just a link to it) into your learning platform, and ask your students to watch the video at home.

They can watch the video to prepare before the class (watching it as many times as they need in order to understand it) and you can use your class time to discuss the video and complete exercises that practice the theory.

Using webcams for revision

Letting students loose with webcams can aid the revision process – and take the weight off your shoulders. Blended learning gives you plenty of opportunities to encourage your students to get creative. Here's one way that you can engage their imaginations and simplify the revision process by using webcams. As you lead up to the end of term exam, divide your students into groups and ask each group to make a video that recaps a certain topic from the course. When all the videos have been completed, you can either show them in class or ask your students to watch them at home and give comments on a discussion forum. In this way, the videos become part of the shared resources of the class - and everyone can watch them as they revise. Also, as the students know the videos will be reviewed by their classmates, they often work harder to make them right. Of course, you don't have to restrict your students to making videos. You can ask your students to create songs, presentations, photo stories or even animations.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The latest evidence shows that almost 55% of all institutions offer at least one blended course while 64% offer at least one online course. This single statistic masks considerable variability among different types of institutions; however, for all levels of education, the percentage of schools offering at least one online course is larger than those offering at least one blended course. Of particular interest is the extent to which institutions that provide a particular type of offering in a face-to-face setting also provide the same type of offering in a blended setting. In other words, what proportion of institutions that offer a particular type of face-to-face course or program also provide a blended version of the same type of offering? The following analysis examines the penetration rate for online offerings by course type, program type, and program discipline.

Face-to-face, Online, and Blended Course Offerings:

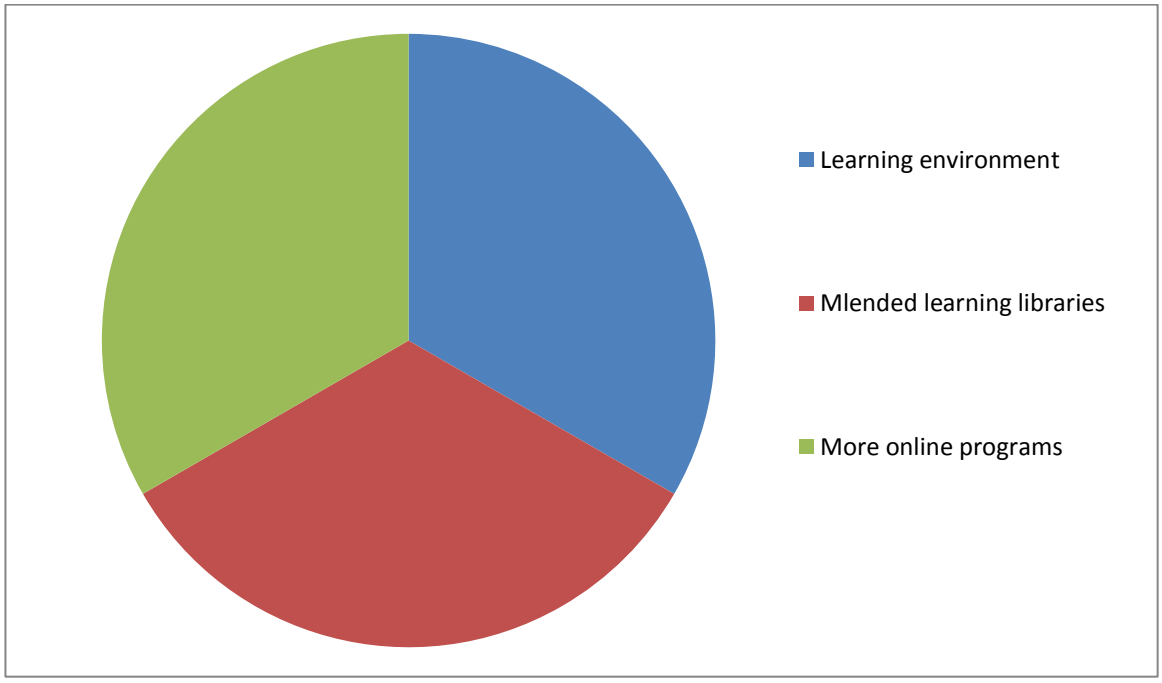
	Face-to-face	online	blended
Undergraduate level	88.5%	55.3%	45.9%
Graduate level	39.7%	25.9%	21.9%
Continuing education	38.6%	21.7%	11.3%

Examining the respective online and blended penetration rates by type of school shows online penetration rates are about 20% higher than blended penetration rates at the undergraduate level and about 13% higher at the graduate level. For Continuing Education courses, online penetration rates are almost double those for blended courses.

As is stated above, student satisfaction is essential while they are learning. Because it plays main role to have a motivation on them. As we see we can not say that while students study they need all blended

learning libraries, learning environment, more online programs. They all interactive means that always help students in an interactive way.

Diagram 1. It shows what fills students satisfaction.



This diagram shows that they all 3 types are needible for creating good learning and teaching environment. They always come together in the process of the lesson and increase students learning motivation and their knowledge on the subject. They wor as a system if there is no one of them then this sytem will break and it doesn't help. So teachers should try to use them in interactively for being their lessons clearly and being attractive and effectively. It is important to consider how online and blended learning can be incorporated into an organization. It should not be an either/or but rather a supplement to other types of training and learning. For an industry devoted to developing others, sometimes great divides can develop between different functions or disciplines.

There are so many ways in which you can develop your own skill setto enable you to help others. The very nature of blended learning is based on the traditional ways that people have always learnt. There are the underpinning skills of effective communication, observing, questioning, listening and giving feedback, but there are also a range of other online techniques that provide a richness and depth of knowledge that was not possible with some traditional methods. As you grow in

knowledge you can help a learner to take the steps along their road to fulfilling their potential, and everyone involved in supporting learners should be aspiring to match the learning to the learning style. What blended learning provides us with is the opportunity to review very carefully our learning provision and to design solutions that play to the strength of each medium. It shouldn't become a 'war'–'My classroom training is better than your distance learning package, my coaching is better than your online learning package. 'Blended learning presents us with a real opportunity to both analyse what exists and revisit our provision; it also may challenge our assumptions about how learning can be delivered.

VI. FINAL REFLECTIONS

The research reveals great potential for introducing new instructional strategies/techniques. Faculty will use these strategies to offer students even more ways to achieve successful course outcomes. For faculty to be innovative and improve blended learning, they will need access to reliable technologies. Technology support, pedagogical support, and faculty time to plan and execute and exchange ideas with other faculty will be critical for success. Students and faculty require similar levels of infrastructure and technological support. Students also perceive that they are better connected, that they can manage their courses better, and that learning improves when technology is added to courses. There are strategic institutional considerations for the access and cost effectiveness pillars. Institutions must decide whether to support access to blended learning for all students or target it to particular students. According to most campus computing or information technology surveys of higher education, the technology support structures are in place for blended learning. While technology can always be improved, the existing hardware and software is capable of doing an effective job.

Institutional support on pedagogical techniques can likely be expanded. From a cost effectiveness perspective, it is clear that maximizing resources, maximizing investment (or minimizing costs) while achieving better outcomes is a strategic question. Research mainly from fully online ALNs suggests that to get the most from an investment like blended learning, institutions need to apply more business-like principles and strategically plan for successful implementation.

The opportunity of thoughtful combination of three delivery environments such as F2F synchronous in the traditional classroom (same time/same place), F2F synchronous as a live virtual classroom (same time/different place) and asynchronous (different time/different

place) gives blended learning advantages in comparison with pure traditional or distance learning environment.

Group work as a pedagogical form used in FLT has a beneficial effect on the development of the social competence which is one of important competences in the modern world. Due to its technological, didactic and methodological resources the blended learning can facilitate the development of social competence.

There are two main types of interaction in FLT in the blended learning environment: human and non-human, which have an influence on the pedagogical design of blended learning courses.

The interaction in the virtual environment occurs on different intensity bases which can be divided into three levels (low, intermediate and high). Each level supposes using of specific instructional strategies and students activities of blended learning. Though a high interaction intensity level confers an advanced foreign language level and creates a sense of authentic communication, the previous levels are important for communicative skills in a foreign language too/as well.

Technological and pedagogic advances have given rise to many 'ingredients', which can be included in the blend. A broad definition is therefore needed, which includes a determination of the ingredients of the blend, the media, the context (place and time), the pedagogies, the learning objectives and the teaching practices. Focusing on the incidence where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning. Blended learning is thus a flexible approach to course design that supports the blending of different
times and places for learning, offering some of the conveniences of fully online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact. As well as maximizing the benefits of traditional and e-learning

methods, blended learning can be used to accommodate different learning styles and preferences.

Therefore, organizations must use a blend of learning approaches to provide the right content, in the right format, to the right people at the right time. This review has illustrated the complexity of blended learning and number of choices available to individual educationalists, authorities, service providers, curriculum designers and content providers. Rather than adopt a technology – led
approach, a more holistic policy is required to develop an optimum delivery mechanism. Therefore, a further investigation and innovation plan should be conducted in order to examine the student's success rates using blended learning in comparison with traditional and e-learning.

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IX. APPENDIX

Appendix№1

Date: 10.03.18

Form: 2^{V}

Student: Amanov S.

Teacher of the class: Asrorova N.

Methodist: Niyazova D.

Theme: Winter!

Aim of the lesson: to teach pupils how to say the names which are used in winter.

Equipment: Textbook “Kid’s English 2”, flashcards, pictures, posters, computer etc.

Composition of the lesson:

1.Organizational moment – 2 minute

2. Warming-up (repeating the poem) – 5 minutes

3. Checking the homework (Homework 2. Matching the cakes) – 10 minutes

4.Working in the class – 20 minutes

Activity 1. Group work. Look, listen and repeat - 5 minutes

Activity 2. Group work. Find and match - 5 minutes

Activity 3. Individual work. Look and say - 5 minutes

Activity 4. Pair work. Say and find - 5 minutes

5. Strengthening (making sentences) - 5 minutes

6. Homework (homework 1. Finding the pairs) – 1 minutes

7. Assessment (marking the pupils according to their readiness for the homework and participation during the lesson) – 1 minutes

8. Ending of the lesson – 1 minutes

Step	Name of step	Time	Teacher	Pupil	Blackboard
1 .	Organisational Moment	3 minutes	Good morning, pupils. Take your seats, please. Who is on duty today? What is the weather like today? What day is it today? What date	Good morning, teacher. The weather is cloudy. Today is Thursday. Today is the 15th of February.	The 10th of may, Saturday.
2 .	Warmer	5 minutes	All right. Please, pay attention, dear pupils. Who has ever been to any art galleries before? What season do you	Pupils answer the questions: -I like winter. -i like summer! - I love winter	
3 .	Checking the homework	6 minutes	Now let's check up your hometask. Last lesson we had a grammar theme: Past simple tense. Your hometask was to write six sentences i	The pupil will answer the question: past simple tense is used when speak about what we did in the past.	For example: 1) I went to shopping yesterday. 2) Munisa watched a film. 3)Rahmon played footba
4 .	Working in the class	10 minutes	Well, our new theme is "Art galleries around the world". The teacher gives some information about the topic. Today we are also going	Pupils listen to their teacher attentively.	Theme: Art galleries around the world. S+was/we The room was
5 .	Exercise 1	5 minutes	Take the handout 1 and do the exercise. There are some sentences with a word omitted. You should fill in the gaps using the words give	Pupils will do the exercise	Handout 1.
6 .	Exercise 2	5 minutes	Now it is turn to handout 2. It is matching. Please, do this exercise, too.	Pupils will do the exercise	Handout 2.
7 .	Strengthening	5 minutes	Let's review what we have learnt. Now I will ask some questions from the handout 1. You say the translations of the words I will cite		
8 .	Homework	2 minutes	Your hometask is to do the exercise 4 on page 45. Here you should do the exercise in written form.		Exercise on page
9 .	Assessment	3 minutes	Now it is turn to mark you according to your activities, participation during the lesson. Bring your notebooks, please.		
10.	Ending of the lesson	1 minute	The lesson is over, see you, bye. You are free.		Good bye!!!

Appendix№2

Paper-based Assessment (Self-Directed Learning): One month prior to the start of training, all employees were required to complete a paper-based assessment to determine their computer skill level. The results were tabulated and the learners were divided into two groups: beginner and intermediate.

Classroom Learning: The employees identified for the beginner group were required to attend a two-hour instructor-led course, Introduction to Computers, to have hands-on practice and individualized feedback. The training facilities at each location will be outfitted with computers for the training. Classroom Learning: The beginner group attended another two-hour instructor-led course to learn how to use the LMS to launch a course and create learning plans.

On-line Tutorial (Self-Directed Learning): The intermediate, more computer-savvy learners, were trained to use the LMS to launch a course and create learning plans via an on-line tutorial, which they could access at their own convenience.

Workbook & On-line Practice (Self-Directed Learning): For a period of three weeks after the classroom training for beginners or WBT for

intermediates was complete, employees were given a workbook for followup activities and access to the training site of the LMS, to practice using the
system at their leisure.

Social Networking: After the training, a group space was created to have
on-line discussions regarding issues users were encountering.

Job Aids/Knowledge Library: As employees began to use the new LMS, job
aids were posted on the internal Wiki to help remind employees how to use
the LMS.

Appendix№3

More effective use of classroom time

Blended learning enables teachers to make better use of the limited time they have with their students. By moving some traditional classroom activities into the online world, you end up spending less time talking in front of the class and more time working with individual students.

Easier differentiation

With more time to work with individual students in class, teachers find they can better differentiate their teaching to suit individual needs, answering student questions and giving individual feedback. Many online resources also differentiate automatically: math exercises can be set to get progressively harder the more answers a student gets right, for example.

More active students

Blended models such as the flipped classroom use online videos and resources to prepare students before they come to class. This way, the students have already learned the theory and can use the classroom time to put that theory into practice. In this model, the classroom teacher takes the role of guide and mentor.

More creativity for students

There are thousands of online resources that enable students to create videos, animations, podcasts and new media. This gives your students new ways to engage with the work and express what they have learned. Stronger students can also do extra work online to show their knowledge and understanding of a subject without taking up your valuable class time

Better prepared students

When the online work is done to prepare students in advance (in the flipped classroom model, for example), students arrive in class better

prepared. This often means they are more engaged in the topic from the start.

Less paperwork

Many teachers' desks and briefcases are full of student papers that need to be marked and returned. The grades and feedback also need to be logged in the students gradebook or report card. Online learning platforms digitize many assignments, so your marking can be done online (from school or at home).