

THE ROLE OF HYBRID EDUCATION IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract: The term hybrid learning, also known as blended learning, has been now commonly used, particularly in corporate and higher education settings. The term itself is quite difficult to define since it is used in diverse ways by different people. Therefore, the article aims to explore the current perception of the concept of hybrid learning with respect to the research conducted in this area and to describe its methodology such as a thoughtful integration of face-to-face and fully online instructional components; innovative use of technology; reconceptualization of the learning paradigm; or sustained assessment and evaluation of blended learning. In addition, the authors of this article focus, both theoretically and practically, on its role in the teaching of foreign languages and its added value in this process.

Keywords: hybrid learning; concept; methodology; foreign language teaching.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term hybrid learning has been now commonly used, particularly in corporate and higher education settings. The term itself is quite difficult to define since it is used in diverse ways by different people. Overall, there exist the three most common meanings for hybrid learning (cf. Whitelock & Jelfs, 2003): 1. the integration of traditional learning with web-based online approaches; 2. the combination of media and tools (e.g. textbooks) employed in e-learning environments; and 3. the combination of a number of teaching and learning approaches irrespective of the technology used (Driscoll, 2002).

The authors of this chapter suggest following Littlejohn & Pegler (2007) who perceive hybrid learning as an integration of face-to-face teaching and learning methods with online approaches. In general, hybrid learning is about a mixture of instructional modalities (i.e. onsite, web-based and self-paced learning), delivery media (e.g. the Internet, classroom sessions, web-based courses, CD-ROMs, video, books, or PowerPoint slides), instructional methods (i.e. face-to-face or technology-based sessions), and web-based technologies, both synchronous and asynchronous (e.g. chat rooms, wikis, virtual classrooms, conferencing tools, blogs, textbooks or online courses). The choice of a blend is usually determined by several factors: the nature of the course content and learning goals, student characteristics and learning preferences, teacher's experience and teaching style, or online resources (cf. Dziuban, Hartman & Moskal, 2005).

II. THE VALUE OF HYBRID EDUCATION

Based on the literature review (Graham, 2005; or Khan, 2005), there have been identified four main principles of the hybrid learning methodology so far: 1) a thoughtful integration of face-to-face and fully online instructional components; 2) innovative use of technology; 3) reconceptualization of the learning paradigm; and 4) sustained assessment and evaluation of hybrid learning.

1. The first principle attempts to enrich the benefits of both environments and successfully meet the diverse students' needs and preferences.
2. The second principle means that any technology should be applied in a pedagogically appropriate way and used for creating and maintaining socially situated and highly interactive learning (Vaughan, 2007).
3. The third principle tries to incorporate new emerging pedagogies and learning theories such as constructivism or activity theory (Activity theory, n.d.), together with the new challenging roles of students and teachers in the process of acquiring knowledge and its understanding.
4. The fourth principle of the hybrid learning methodology should ensure the quality and effectiveness of education.

The main reasons why hybrid learning should be employed in teaching is as follows: 1) it contributes to pedagogy because it supports more interactive strategies, not only face-to-face teaching (Graham et al, 2003); 2) it thus encourages collaborative learning; students or educators can work together on some projects from anywhere and at any time (Bruffee, 1993); 3) it deepens intercultural awareness since it puts together researchers, educators, and students from anywhere in the world; 4) it reduces costs of teaching and learning since students do not have to undertake so many frequent travels to complete their education (Graham et al., 2003); and 5) it might match student's learning style although there is no clear consensus on this issue (Coffield, 2004; Gregorc, 1979; Hubackova & Semradova, 2013; Poulouva & Simonova, 2012).

However, there are also drawbacks of hybrid learning (see, for example, Cech & Klimova, 2003). Hybrid learning is time-consuming and demanding in terms of creating materials and preparation and evaluation. Furthermore, both students and teachers sometimes have limited knowledge regarding the use of technology, and technical glitches are liable to happen at any moment. Finally, students' study skills are often not sufficiently developed to enable them to benefit maximally from hybrid learning.

In addition, the hybrid learning approach as described above requires an independent learner and a teacher who supports and encourages him in such learning. Thus, the roles of both learner and teacher are changing. In fact, the current paradigm sees teaching and learning as social processes where the students are active co-constructors of knowledge with their teachers. The teacher is becoming a facilitator, mediator, mentor or a coach. Wheeler (2009) has listed seven skills that blended learning instructors/teachers should possess:

- they should be able to support and encourage learners;
- they should not be afraid to take risks with new technologies;
- they should be able to transfer good teaching skills into online contexts;
- they should be good communicators in any medium;
- they should be non-conformists;
- they should thrive in a culture of change;
- they should have the ability to see the big picture.

III. HYBRID LEARNING IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Hybrid learning has also become one of the successful learning strategies in the acquiring of a second language. In fact, hybrid learning has been a major growth point in the English language teaching industry over the last ten years.

As Mothejzikova (2005/2006, p. 131) states, there is a prime focus on the fields of knowledge in which citizens acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for effective communication, i.e. on the teaching of foreign languages and information and communication technologies. Therefore, hybrid learning in the teaching of foreign languages is sometimes defined as a combination of traditional, face-to-face teaching and computer assisted language learning (CALL). In connection with hybrid learning, Vesela (2012) speaks about the term blended CALL which she explains as language teaching/learning with the help of various technological means in combination with traditional classroom instruction. Dziuban, Hartman & Moskal (2005) define hybrid learning in the EFL (English as a foreign language) setting more broadly. According to them, blended learning is a pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment.

According to De Praeter (2008), a classic example of using the blended learning approach is a course of English as a second language where the teacher decides that all audio-based activities (listening comprehension and oral comprehension) will take place in the classroom while all written text-based activities will take place online (reading comprehension and essay writing). Similarly, Frydrychova Klimova (2012) provides an example of an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) hybrid course on Academic Writing taught at the Faculty of Informatics and Management in Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic, where the teacher decides that all written assignments, such as essays, will be submitted via the online course and similarly, self-study of further reference reading will be done online. In the follow-up face-to-face class the teacher and the students will discuss particular difficulties or goals connected with their online work and the teacher also clarifies any errors students may have made in their assignments.

In addition, based on the definitions described in section 2, Harmer (2012) understands hybrid learning as an approach in which students get some of the input from material such as a coursebook, and then expand on it with material and websites on the internet. Thus, for example, if students read or listen to a text about some famous personality, they can go to the internet and see what else they can find in the way of extra information or video clips.

Moreover, if their coursebook has a companion website, the students can go there and find a range of extra texts, exercises, references and activities.

Thus, the added value of hybrid learning in the EFL settings course might be as follows:

- online learning can allow access to target language culture through the use of Youtube videos, meaningful situational videos, chat rooms or videoconferencing; these tools enable the EFL students to have more access to native speakers, but also to interact and collaborate with their foreign peers;
- language is about communication and through exploiting the above mentioned tools students are more often exposed to the target language than in the traditional language classes; and if they are appropriately motivated, they might be enthusiastic to practise the language frequently outside the traditional settings;
- using the Internet can help students to improve their key language skills, particularly the skills of listening, reading, and writing;
- the web-based materials or CD ROMs components give students a chance to revisit lectures or seminars; and
- the more frequent teacher's feedback means that students are able to practise the language more often and are able to avoid repeating their previous errors.

IV. CONCLUSION

Hybrid inevitably contributes to the compensation for the various deficiencies in the EFL settings such as a lack of high frequency of exposure, a lack of exposure to the target language community or adopting inadequate learning strategies. Therefore, hybrid learning can be a solution to a number of problems. However, one must always bear in

mind the purpose of using this approach and the learner's needs. As Brown (1987, p. 13) says: Every learner is unique. Every teacher is unique. And every learner-teacher relationship is unique.

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