Blended Learning in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language: An Educational Challenge

Aprendizaje mixto en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera: un reto educacional

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Blended Learning has become one of the most common ways to teach EFL (English as a Foreign Language) due to its double component, which integrates Face-to-Face classes with virtual learning in order to offer students a wide range of materials and resources organized in a methodological way. Over the years, teachers and students have changed the way this educational process is seen because new technologies have been implemented and teachers have to propose new ways of working to display materials that complement EFL Face-to-Face classes. However, the implementation of a Blended Course must have a pedagogical foundation for each setting where it is planned in order to be developed. This article seeks to present some integrative components of Blended Learning and how they have been applied in several researches done in different contexts as well as to present some considerations to keep in mind when designing, implementing and evaluating this model. Besides, it encourages teachers to reflect upon Blended Learning (BL) as a potential and different way to approach learning EFL, taking advantage of all the emerging pedagogical tools.

Key words: Blended Learning, Face-to-Face classes, methodology, pedagogical foundation, virtual learning

El aprendizaje mixto (Blended Learning) se ha convertido en una de las formas más comunes en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, debido a su doble componente, el cual integra clases presenciales con aprendizaje virtual, con el propósito de ofrecer a los estudiantes una amplia variedad de materiales y recursos organizados de forma metodológica. A través de los años, los docentes y estudiantes han cambiado la forma de ver el proceso educativo, ya que las nuevas tecnologías han sido implementadas y los profesores deben proponer y trabajar en nuevas maneras de presentar los materiales para complementar las clases de inglés presenciales. Sin embargo, la implementación de un curso mixto

(Blended Learning) debe tener una base pedagógica para cada contexto donde se planea desarrollar. Este artículo busca mostrar algunos componentes integrativos del aprendizaje mixto y cómo éstos han sido aplicados en varias investigaciones, realizadas en diferentes contextos y algunas consideraciones para tener presente cuando se diseña, implementa y evalúa este modelo. Además, éste artículo hace reflexionar a los profesores acerca del aprendizaje mixto como una manera potencial y diferente de lograr el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera, teniendo en cuenta todas las herramientas pedagógicas emergentes.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje mixto, aprendizaje virtual, clases presenciales, fundamento pedagógico, metodología

Introduction

The education process is a daily challenge for many students and teachers. Mostly, they are participants of a "game" where they assume different roles; for instance, EFL teachers must be facilitators who help students to go through different stages during the learning of a foreign Language (FL) and get them aware of the importance of the resources around them to learn a foreign language. That is to say, there is not only printed material but also a wide range of technological resources, thanks to the invention of the Internet and technological devices used all over the world to complement Face-to-Face classes. These are virtual resources such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, emails, websites, video links, iPods, third screen devices, etc., which strengthen foreign language learning. However, the FL teacher must organize all the technological resources in a methodological way to make them work for students in their learning process. When introducing Blended Learning (BL) courses, it is important to consider, among other things, the students' needs and preferences, their foreign language level, and educational background. Those aspects demand a clear model of Blended Learning.

This paper displays an integrative perception of Blended Learning –how it is conceived from different research experiences– and presents some important considerations regarding this pedagogical model. It starts with some accounts for a Blended Learning model proposed by Khan (2005) comprised of 8 aspects: pedagogical, technological, interface design, institutional, ethical, resource support, management and evaluation. After defining what BL means and implies, we outline some previous research done in different countries regarding BL. Then, we provide some crucial aspects in BL. At the end, we draw some conclusions and reflect upon the implications and further research on Blended Learning in EFL.
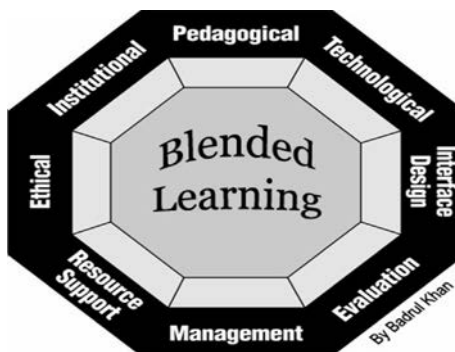
A Blended Learning Model

To address the issue of Blended Learning (BL), we need to refer to some definitions proposed for this kind of process. Albrecht (2006, p. 2) states that "BL is bringing together Face-to-Face classroom instruction with web-based activity." Similarly, Bersin (2004, p. 8)

affirms that "Blended Learning is the combination of different training media (technologies, activities, and types of events) to create an optimum training program for a specific audience." Besides, as stated by Bender (2003, p.6), "research shows that through BL, students become far more active in their own learning, feeling more technologically empowered and able to learn anywhere and anytime in the manner that best suits their lifestyle."

Considering the previous aspects, in many educational settings BL is a tool available to students in order for them to go beyond the classroom and work on different interactive activities as an extension of the direct teaching classes. Through all the technological resources they have around them, students can learn about different subjects and cultures, surf the internet and utilize technological devices they have access to, such as iPods, ipads, laptops, Mp3s and Mp4s, among others. However, students are invaded by a great deal of information from different sources. Thus, they get confused and do not know what to see first, which hinders the appropriate use of the virtual material that might contribute to their English learning process.

Therefore, EFL teachers have the challenge of planning virtual learning environments that are appealing to their students. This will help them "organize" their EFL learning process and complement Face-to-Face classes or the other way around, for they can use the virtual platform autonomously to get prepared for the Face-to-Face classes. In this way, FL teachers are in charge of the methodological planning of Blended Courses which could be used to empower the EFL learners.

Although there are several models with which to organize a Blended Course, we consider the following model suggested by Khan (2005):

Figure 1. The Blended Learning Model (Khan, 2005)

When planning Blended Courses, it is important to take into account all the aspects involved in them. The institutional aspect is the first element teachers have to consider since it depends on the institutional policies about the curriculum, the layout of the material, and the administration and financial area. On the one hand, teachers and students have no access or a very restricted one to technological resources, and the amount of computers is very limited or the bandwidth does not work properly; these EFL teachers and students have to adapt the scarce tools they work with and plan courses that partially meet the course needs. On the other hand, some EFL teachers are given useful technological devices, but they are not given enough training to use these tools and that is why the devices are often misused. Thus, the previous issues highlight the importance of considering institutional aspects in the implementation of a Blended Learning model.

The second component, the technological one, is the main consideration when teachers plan both the offline and online activities. Teachers need to have a wide range of technological resources in order to attract their students' attention: If the Face-to-Face classes and the virtual ones are not challenging, students might feel bored or frustrated. It is necessary to display topics and exercises which are appealing to them.

The third variable to bear in mind is the pedagogical component, which no doubt is the most important one in these hybrid courses. If teachers have a methodological plan to organize both their Face-to-Face classes and the online aspect, it will lead the language learners to succeed in their learning process and obtain better results since they properly organize both components. According to Dudeney and Hockly (2007), it is important to keep in mind some considerations regarding the pedagogical implementation, such as the delivery mode, task design, materials, learners' and teachers' roles, tutors, assessment and evaluation:

- Delivery mode: teachers and curriculum planners must consider what percentage of the course will be Face-to-Face or online components, and how and which materials are going to be delivered using a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment), Internet groups, email, etc. (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007).

- Task design and Materials: Blended Learning teachers must specify the kind of materials, if they are tailor-made or existing tools from the Internet. Besides, it is important that English teachers, planning Blended Courses, provide their students with a wide range of online and Face-to-Face activities appealing to their students and based on a needs analysis done at the beginning of the course.

- Teachers-Students: They are both the main participants in the EFL teaching and learning processes. When planning BL courses, it is necessary to bear in mind students' and teachers' familiarity with technology and the roles of both in Face-to-Face and virtual classes. It is important to consider how much guidance students need from teachers, and students' previous knowledge. Besides, according to Núñez

and Téllez (2009, p. 172) "the teaching process is vital in the search for developing materials that satisfy students' learning objectives and styles, preferences, and expectations." When students find the appropriate resources and the teachers provide them according to the students' needs, the learners are able to solve their doubts and answer their own questions. These aspects can foster autonomy because the students might monitor their learning process, establishing their learning strategies and taking charge of their own way to acquire knowledge. To sum up, the students demand meaningful materials according to their needs in order to achieve their tasks.

- Assessment and Evaluation: Teachers and curriculum planners must decide if the course is planned to implement formative and summative assessment.

The fourth component is the interface design that entails the different ways teachers can display online and offline material by choosing the design and activity for each unit. To keep improving the virtual and Face-to-Face aspects of a class, it is necessary to evaluate them constantly in order to check which are appropriate and which are not, taking into account students' needs and preferences, the institutional policies and curriculum guidelines for teaching EFL. In this aspect, teachers must create coherency among the institutional curriculum, the EFL curriculum and how Blended Learning is conceived. BL can be applied to different kinds of courses offered by the institution through curricular platforms defined by Ariza (2004) as the basic principles underlying the construction and implementation of a curriculum.

The fifth component is management. It is important to have all the LMS (Learning Management System) ready to work and to train students to deal with this system: How to log in, how to work on the different assignments and, of course, apply learning strategies suitable to virtual environments. Moreover, resource support is recommended for a Blended Course so that students can surf the net and have links to different web sources around the world. Finally, the ethical aspect must be kept in mind in any educational setting i.e. to treat students equally and help those who need more support from teachers during the learning process. This aspect also deals with a very common issue: Some students create fake identities on the Internet or have others work on their assignments. For this reason, EFL teachers must promote autonomy by guiding students' learning process, bringing technology into the classroom and creating an authentic complement between the face-to-face environment and the virtual one.

Why Blended Learning as a Pedagogical Model in the EFL Classroom?

Bearing in mind a holistic perception of Blended Learning, as proposed by Khan (2005), the next step is the implementation and piloting of the Blended Course to see whether or not

it works for a specific EFL learning environment. Some research experiences done on BL show the impact of this model for students and teachers by contributing to the EFL learning process as follows:

Al-Jarf (2007) developed some research with freshman students at the College of Languages and Translation in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He stresses that "in addition to the Face-to-Face classes the students of the experimental group enrolled in a course with Nicenet. At the end of this study, the researcher concluded that online instruction raised the good and average student's reading performance and the performance of the lowest-performing students as well." (p. 9).

Another study (Liang & Bonk, 2009) involved thirty-five engineering students in a Freshman English class at a university in Taiwan. They had a traditional curriculum with textbooks, objectives and exams. Additionally, they implemented a website with supplementary readings and writing topics: The goal was to prepare the students for academic reading, writing and communication.

Research conducted by Bañados (2006) implemented a Blended Learning pedagogical model that included learners' work with English Online, online monitoring, Face-to-Face classes and conversation classes with native speakers of English at Universidad de Concepción, Chile. The results obtained with the pilot group showed a substantial improvement in the students' language skills.

Clavijo, Hine and Quintero's (2008) pedagogical practice took place in Bogotá with a group of 17 teacher trainees in Colombia and a group of 24 senior high school students in Canada. The two groups used a forum platform to explore topics about local culture, music and natural disasters. At the end the authors concluded that "this learning community has promoted collaborative language learning and democratic participation on the part of the students." (Clavijo et al, 2008, p. 233)

Brudermann (2010) proposes the creation and implementation of an online pedagogical assistant as a Blended Learning device for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students. In this study, carried out in a university in Paris, the researcher created this pedagogical assistant based on the typology of problems. This is an action research project in which the researcher provided students with an environment open to a diversification of learning strategies for the students as well as various forms of help. The researcher made some changes in this pedagogical assistant and located the help strategically throughout the website. The results showed that the students improved their skills in ESP, recognized their mistakes in English and corrected them by using the "online pedagogical assistant".

Murray (2008) reports on a series of research studies developed in Australia regarding the use of technologies in ESL and EFL environments. According to this author, "most of the

research has been qualitative, including data collection methods such as ethnography in the workplace, focus groups with learners, interviews with teachers, observations of learners, analyses of e-technology texts, and collaborative action research projects conducted by teachers across Australia" (p. 28). At the end of the research studies, the participants reflected upon the transformative role ICT should have, conceiving ICT as tool and ICT as a tutor. According to Murray (2008, p. 28) "ICT as tool falls into three categories: tools that help learners organise, tools that facilitate communication and tools that provide information". On the other hand, argues Murray, ICT as a tutor is based on one set of instructions for CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) called ICALL (intelligent CALL) that focuses on how to provide learners with self-paced, auto-correcting activities. At the end, the author stressed how ICT could be moved from being a marginal contributor to language learning toward being part of transformative learning.

Yamauchi (2009) reports on how a Japanese University instructor taught a multi-skills course entitled "Computer communication" comprised of 19 students who were expected to learn research and presentation methods by using English, internet and computers. The model used was Blended Learning. One of the objectives for this course was to help students use technology and learn to organize information and look for better ways to express meaning in English. At the end of the article, the author accounts for the students' improvements in their performance of various technology enhanced tasks. However, she did not provide an explanation in terms of mastering the English language and assessment.

There is another action research project (Liang & Bonk, 2009) that took place in Taiwan which was aimed at acquiring English as a foreign language focused on Blended Learning in order to encourage teachers to develop several strategies to implement and evaluate the teaching and learning process. This project supported its framework in three important aspects: textual, social and technological interaction following certain stages such as objectives, techniques and strategies, tools and resources, organization of activities and the process of evaluation. The authors concluded that the combinations of BL are well adapted in EFL classes. In conclusion, it is important to recognize that when students have the chance to use different virtual tools, they are able to create significant interactions especially with technology because they can take advantage of the available resources in many ways.

Furthermore, Miyazoe's (2008) comparative study, carried out at a university in Tokyo, provided her classes with two courses: one was focused on ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and another based on EAP (English for Academic Purposes). The two courses were based on the same instructional design and LMS usage for comparative purposes. This study concluded with positive outcomes because there was a high usability of Moodle over Blackboard. It means that when students use more technology their online participation increases and they were motivated using the Blended Course instead of traditional learning.

This research is meaningful for this article because it encourages the authors to keep including technology as a complementary part of the Face-to-Face classes. Many times students do not feel motivated enough to learn English as a foreign language because they think it is a hard process. When students use technology they might enjoy it a lot.

One of the settings where Blended Learning has been adopted is Universidad Nacional, with a programme called ALEX (Programa de Aprendizaje Autónomo de Lenguas Extranjeras [Program of Autonomous Learning of Foreign Languages]). This research project, developed by Cantor (2009), was carried out with four groups of ALEX students. The Blended Course implemented was undergoing a piloting stage. Most of the material was delivered online and the students were given face to face meetings to ask questions about the platform, the contents and the oral practice of the language. In general, the aim of this project was to have the students participate in discussion boards about the changes faced by the university and their own learning processes. This research has both quantitative and qualitative data: For the quantitative part, the students were asked to answer a survey about their perceptions; it showed that the students knew how to use the technological tools but they perceived a lack of guidance on the teacher's part; they also said that the use of a foreign language in a Blended Course reduces the vocabulary available with which to write; besides, the development of autonomy was always rewarded with points, which does not promote a real autonomy for the students.

As evidenced in the previous studies, some EFL teachers have used the technological tools to help students expand their dedication to the lessons and explore different resources to learn a foreign language. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight how the Face-to-Face classes and the virtual environment interact. In the studies presented, EFL teachers pointed out why Blended Learning could be used as a pedagogical model in the EFL classroom where students can explore different topics and chat with native speakers, as evidenced in the study done by Bañados (2006), and share cultural aspects and complement both the virtual and the Face-to-Face environments, as shown in the research by Clavijo et al (2008). The researchers expressed that through the use of a Blended Learning model, students improved their foreign language skills. However, it is important to keep in mind students' insights because although they stated they improved their learning process, they agreed that they needed more teachers' guidance and interaction among them, which are crucial elements in a Blended Learning model.

Blended Learning can also be implemented through several perspectives and with different objectives; for example, the study done by Brudermann (2010) about the pedagogical assistant based on a typology of problems makes teachers think about the design of this kind of Blended Learning courses to help students overcome difficulties in terms of language and the use of technologies based on a needs analysis of their common errors and

mistakes. This tool would be called ICT as a tutor that leads students to interpret and manage their own learning process by working on specific exercises. On the other hand, BL can be used in English for Specific Purposes courses as in the research called Integrating Internet technology into the EFL classroom: In a case study by Yamauchi (2009), in a course called "computer communication", students were asked to create some materials and organize the information for their presentations. This research presents teachers a different focus from where they can implement Blended Learning, taking into account different fields. In this way, students can use English skills and computer literacy to speak or write about a specific topic in an area. Moreover, researchers can try different learning and pedagogical strategies and share these experiences among a community as in Murray's (2008) study in which teachers come together in order to speak about their research on the integration of technology as regards ESL and EFL learning. This is a relevant study because the research done by teachers must be spread to help others to know and interpret how online learning and Blended Learning could be models from which teachers can make a difference and help students during this process by promoting autonomous learning and independent work. In general, most EFL teachers and students' insights in these studies show how BL has contributed to the improvement of EFL learning and teaching processes.

Challenges of Blended Learning for EFL Teachers and Students

The implementation of BL requires keeping in mind several considerations like the octagon proposed by Khan (2005, see Figure 1). Although there is no thing like a "magic formula" to apply Blended Learning in general, we think that the following aspects are crucial to analyze and reflect upon the decision of using technology in the EFL classroom as a complement to Face-to-Face classes:

Appropriateness. It is important to analyze and reflect on the decision of using technology in the EFL classroom; it must not be just because we are surrounded by a lot of technological tools. That is to say, due to the availability of technology that teachers have nowadays, they use it even though in some cases they do not know how to use it or if they do, it is without a learning focus in mind.

Considering the context. Every teaching and learning situation is different: Educational contexts display specific characteristics, although they are subject to change because of the emerging teaching methodologies and resources EFL teachers can take advantage of. For example, in some institutions, students might be reluctant to use technology because they do not have enough training and in other contexts the technological resources are scarce. However, all the participants involved in the process of Blended Learning- institution policy makers, teachers, students, curriculum makers, and technicians,

among others, must be aware of the resources, the training and the pedagogical strategies and methodologies with which they plan to work with BL.

Designing a needs analysis. After the decision of implementing BL as one of the focal points of the curriculum, a needs analysis is required in order to analyze who our students are and what their preferences and learning styles are. As stated by Berwick (1989), there are different kinds of unit designs based on needs analysis you can create: body of knowledge, specific competences, social activities and problems, feelings and attitudes, and needs and interests of the learners. Teachers choose the kind of analysis that is required, taking into account their students and curricular policies.

Managing Face-to-Face and virtual learning. A Blended Learning model involves a face to face component and a virtual one. For this reason, the components must be connected and have clear goals and objectives from the beginning of the course. Teachers must avoid creating two different courses, with no connection. Some activities are better or more appropriate to be worked in the Face-to-Face classes while others are more enriching in the virtual part of the course.

Looking for training and support. Some teachers and students claim to be technophobic or avoid using technology because it seems to be difficult and time consuming. However, in this globalized world, where the exchanging of cultures and information prevail, teachers, students and policy makers need to rethink how technology can be integrated into the EFL classroom in such a way that technology becomes a means to an end. In order to reach this goal, teachers require getting enough training in terms of technological literacy and methodological tools to create a BL course. Furthermore, teachers need support to handle problems regarding technology so that they can help their students when these issues emerge.

Sharing experiences. EFL teachers are the main participants involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of BL courses. Occasionally, they get impressed and overwhelmed by the wide range of resources they have to teach in EFL; they want to implement technology and sometimes they give more importance to technology than they do to the English language learning process.

It is important to know how other EFL teachers are implementing technology with which to teach English, not only concerning workmates, but also to sign up for becoming part of communities of teachers around the world and learning what the advantages and disadvantages are that this model has and get or provide new ideas on BL.

EFL learning comes first. Even though teachers have a lot of resources to plan, design, implement and deliver their Blended Courses, the most important aspect is to facilitate EFL learning and reach specific goals and objectives to be accomplished at the end of the process.

EFL learning comes first over the possible distraction of resources teachers have available. Materials are just pedagogical tools that need to be organized pedagogically.

Learning to handle problems. Many teachers are used to teaching without technology and, somehow, their practices are "easier" or less complex for them. However, the emerging methodologies to approach teaching and learning encourage them to change their practices, reflecting and evaluating courses permanently. Changing our minds implies not only advantages for EFL teachers and learners but also challenges. In a BL course, most of these issues are related to technology because it requires training and exploration. ESL teachers who decide to implement BL courses must be ready to help students deal with it. Teachers must somehow be technicians when it comes to the use of technology in the EFL classroom. In terms of language learning, it is very useful to create a typology of problems and frequent asked questions (FAQs) for students to analyze their own difficulties and work on exercises to overcome them as proposed by Bruderman (2010)

Re-adjusting the Blended Course. EFL teachers' desire is to have all the materials ready before courses start, including activities that promote the development of the four skills, the statement of objectives, goals and competences that students are required to reach. However, teachers have to make some changes during the implementation because of unexpected situations; for example, when activities are very complex for students in terms of language and application of the activity itself. On the other hand, it is necessary to listen to students' proposals and the evaluation and feedback they provide to improve EFL courses and make these courses more appealing to them.

Helping students to be autonomous learners. Being an autonomous learner does not happen overnight, but demands working systematically in a process. The learning of a foreign language demands practice and developing not only cognitive but metacognitive strategies that enable students to become aware of their weaknesses and strengths and what strategies help them learn. In this recognition of what works or does not for a learner, the EFL teachers' intervention in order to help students recognize these aspects is crucial since the teachers are their guides through their learning process and that is important for reminding students that "practice makes perfect."

Being creative and resourceful. Students expect you to be creative and not only use appealing resources but to change them and get students to explore English through different learning experiences while drawing on the different learning styles. Teachers must avoid being monotonous in their practice and try new things in terms of EFL learning. This could be accomplished by using a BL model.

Evaluation of the Blended Learning experience. Blended Courses in EFL learning need permanent evaluation. Teachers should take into account not only their own views but

other teachers' opinions and the feedback given by students in order to make some improvements in future implementations of BL courses.

Keeping it real. Teachers must rely on the resources they have in their institutions to implement a BL course and base such a course on curricular policies, but the most important aspects to keep in mind are students' real needs and expectations.

As this article is implies, EFL teachers and students play a crucial role in the implementation of BL and are required to handle the present and emerging challenges. BL is not a new model in EFL teaching; however, very often technology becomes an issue because of its changeable and evolving nature. Many EFL students are very technologically literate, which requires teachers to be up-to-date in this field and draw on their students' preferences. Even teachers must learn from their students.

Another challenge that is very noticeable nowadays is the process of planning and implementing this model. BL is not a "new fashion" in teaching EFL but a systematic and well-planned model with which teachers have to go beyond the classroom setting. Nevertheless, both components, the virtual and Face-to-Face must work as complements to one another. Eventually, learning English online will be more widely used, but it needs effort from teachers to plan carefully, and from students to take advantage of the present and emerging technologies to learn English.

Even though some teachers and students are technophobic, it is enriching for them to approach technology and realize it is a matter of permanent practice. The Internet has a wide range of tools; nevertheless, it is the EFL teachers' job to organize the EFL learning process and guide students through their learning. How this virtual component interacts with Face-to-Face classes is a crucial factor that needs more consideration from teachers and learners. In general, BL leads EFL teachers and students to work cooperatively and construct knowledge in different communities of EFL learning without any geographic boundaries; in other words, it makes teachers and students consider EFL learning as an alternative way to foster both teaching and learning.

Conclusions

Blended Learning is the integration of Face-to-Face classes with a virtual component where students have a practice opportunity to go beyond what is taught in the classroom. So far, the research done on this field has shown that this hybrid learning offers students a lot of materials, resources, offline and online activities, the integration of what they learn in the classroom with what they learn on their own through the use of a virtual platform. Additionally, one of the most highlighted aspects is the fact that students can develop autonomy towards the English learning process. Thus, EFL teachers can guide students

during the process and also give them extra activities to complete on their own; in this way, they are freer to choose what to see in a lesson at their own pace.

Another benefit that a Blended Course provides is the technological literacy students get through the use of virtual resources. Likewise, they can explore their topics in depth, look for information in English on the Internet, and reinforce their learning process through websites related to EFL learning with a wide range of exercises. Moreover, they can peruse different databases and blogs to contact people around the world, chat with other students and learning communities, construct cooperative learning environments, and organize their own virtual learning environment, among other benefits.

Most of the studies that have been carried out on Blended Learning courses are featured presenting the positive and negative aspects of this form of teaching-learning processes. On the one hand, they share similarities related to how useful a Blended Course could be when it is well-planned. That means taking into account students' needs and interests, and the environment in which the course is going to be implemented while integrating the set of aspects proposed by Khan (2005) in the octagonal framework such as the pedagogical, technological, institutional, and ethical issues together with resource support, interface design and evaluation. On the other hand, a Blended Course must be implemented gradually since it takes time for students to become familiar with emerging technologies.

An EFL Blended Course requires a carefully organized methodology. Therefore, students must be trained first in how to use the technological devices and then be guided through the EFL process and all the virtual and printed tools they have available to improve their English command. It is also important to train them on how to use these tools strategically since it is noticeable that some students do not know how to use them effectively. For this reason, the EFL teacher must clearly explain every stage and characteristic of the virtual platform and how it works.

Acknowledging that a Blended Course implies a Face-to-Face component, the next step is to show students how it complements the virtual component, and let them know the learning goals they are expected to reach at the end of the course. Therefore, Blended Courses have become a creative way to experience foreign language learning processes; however, it is important that EFL teachers take into consideration pedagogical and methodological strategies to make the BL course useful and appealing to students.

Although technological tools constitute a wide and useful help for teachers to design their Blended Courses and encourage students to master their English level in a more autonomous environment, it is necessary to bear in mind that learning EFL must be the teacher's focus because, occasionally, technology is just seen as something useful for drilling or to have fun with, but without any pedagogical and learning purpose. Technology does not

solve the methodological and learning problem teachers and students go through thus it is the EFL teachers' responsibility when it comes to the creation of coherent BL courses.

In addition, students need to be given extensions of the Face-to-Face courses in which they develop skills at their own pace with the guidance of a teacher. All in all, designing and implementing a Blended Course takes time. Likewise, having EFL teachers go through each activity very carefully and see how these interrelate with one another is even more demanding in terms of time. Many methodological issues and strategies need to be addressed in the implementation of a BC to help students become successful and more independent learners.

Further research needs to be done in creating, implementing and evaluating different kinds of interfaces that can be more appealing and appropriate to learners. That is to say, researchers could propose different kinds of display materials with which students might feel an identity and can give their own contributions since every learner is a different world and possesses different learning styles, beliefs and attitudes that need to be addressed in a Blended Learning model course.

One of the main issues when implementing BL is impersonation. Some research could be done regarding strategies and tools on how to avoid it.

Another suggestion for further research concerns how we could get to know our students and their cognitive processes through analyzing and interpreting the several identities they assume, take or create by using technological tools and understanding how different students' behavior in Face-to-Face classes is compared to their behavior in the online environment.

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