

**BEYOND FACE-TO-FACE CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION
LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION THROUGH “BLENDED-LEARNING” AND “FLIPPED
CLASSROOM” STRATEGIES AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF ASUNCIÓN**

Valentina Canese Caballero¹

ABSTRACT

The consolidation of the web technology and the advance of the so-called web 2.0 present especially relevant aspects to the teaching of languages as an essential tool in people's communication. Blended learning and flipped classroom models have become particularly relevant in higher education, especially in the area of foreign languages, as they allow university instructors to emphasize critical thinking skills, to analyze and evaluate materials as well as to create new materials in which students may synthesize what they have learned and present their arguments. The purpose of this article is to present the results of a qualitative case study on the implementation of blended learning and flipped classroom strategies in several subjects of the English Language Bachelor's Program at the National University of Asunción. The data collected includes interviews, questionnaires and the work done by the students within a free virtual platform. Qualitative content analysis strategies were used which, included the most recurrent strategies that instructors appealed to, as well as an analysis of the proposed activities. This analysis found that despite the difficulties in infrastructure and access to technology at the university premises, students are receptive to the use of the virtual learning platform to complement the face-to-face classes. Also, instructors who use the combination of face-to-face and virtual work find that in addition to the administrative advantages provided by the tools, it is possible to extend students' work beyond the classroom, enhance communication, student participation, collaborative learning, and have a more dynamic and relevant process of learning and evaluation. In conclusion, the use of blended learning and flipped classroom strategies provides university foreign language instructors with the opportunity to focus on higher-level critical thinking skills by allowing students to work on these skills in a collaborative and consistent manner and to reflect on their own learning through a process-based assessment. Thus, researchers and instructors are encouraged to continue experimenting with the use of technologies as they emerge so that learning is relevant, critical and adapted to changing times.

KEYWORDS

Blended learning, flipped classroom, foreign languages.

¹ Instituto Superior de Lenguas. Universidad Nacional de Asunción. Paraguay. Correo electrónico: vcanese@fil.una.py

MÁS ALLÁ DE LA ENSEÑANZA PRESENCIAL EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE IDIOMAS EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR A TRAVÉS DE ESTRATEGIAS DE “BLENDED-LEARNING” Y “FLIPPED CLASSROOM” EN LA UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE ASUNCIÓN

RESUMEN

La consolidación de la tecnología de la web y el avance de la llamada web 2.0 presentan aspectos especialmente relevantes para la enseñanza de idiomas como herramienta esencial en la comunicación de las personas. El aprendizaje combinado y los modelos de aula invertida han cobrado especial relevancia en la enseñanza superior, sobre todo en el ámbito de las lenguas extranjeras, ya que permiten a los docentes universitarios hacer hincapié en la capacidad de pensamiento crítico, analizar y evaluar materiales, así como crear nuevos materiales en los que los estudiantes pueden sintetizar lo que han aprendido y presentar sus argumentos. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar los resultados de un estudio de caso cualitativo sobre la implementación de estrategias de aprendizaje combinado y de aula invertida en varias asignaturas del Programa de Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa de la Universidad Nacional de Asunción. Los datos recogidos incluyen entrevistas, cuestionarios y el trabajo realizado por los estudiantes dentro de una plataforma virtual gratuita. Se utilizaron estrategias cualitativas de análisis de contenido que incluyeron las estrategias más recurrentes que utilizaron los docentes, así como un análisis de las actividades propuestas. En ese análisis se comprobó que, a pesar de las dificultades de infraestructura y acceso a la tecnología en los locales de la universidad, los estudiantes son receptivos al uso de la plataforma de aprendizaje virtual para complementar las clases presenciales. Además, los docentes que utilizan la combinación de trabajo presencial y virtual descubren que, además de las ventajas administrativas que ofrecen estas herramientas, es posible extender el trabajo de los estudiantes más allá del aula, mejorar la comunicación, la participación de los estudiantes, el aprendizaje colaborativo y tener un proceso de aprendizaje y evaluación más dinámico y relevante. En conclusión, la utilización de estrategias de aprendizaje combinado y de aula invertida ofrece a los docentes universitarios de lenguas extranjeras la oportunidad de centrarse en las aptitudes de pensamiento crítico de nivel superior, permitiendo a los estudiantes trabajar en esas aptitudes de manera colaborativa y coherente así como reflexionar sobre su propio aprendizaje mediante una evaluación basada en el proceso. Así, se alienta a los investigadores y docentes a que sigan experimentando con el uso de las tecnologías a medida que vayan surgiendo, a fin de que el aprendizaje sea pertinente, crítico y adaptado a los tiempos cambiantes.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Aprendizaje combinado, aula invertida, idiomas extranjeros.

INTRODUCTION

The consolidation of information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially the advancement of the so-called web 2.0, has enhanced the role that they are acquiring in education. Likewise, these advances and changes in the nature of the internet have highlighted the need to analyze the role they play in the development of competences and in the reconceptualization of classrooms since learning takes place in both physical and virtual spaces. They present aspects that are especially relevant to language teaching as a fundamental element in people's communication since they provide actors with ample opportunities to communicate (Toro & Joshi, 2012; Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009).

Veletsianos (2016) debates the concept of “emerging phenomena” and distinguishes between technologies and emerging practices that arise from technological advances, emphasizing the political, cultural and economic contexts that surround them. On the other hand, according to Laurillard (2013), although digital technologies for learning are in their infancy, they are increasingly incorporated into education, although fully understanding and exploiting their potential will still take a long time. Duță and Martínez-Rivera (2015) highlight the importance of the use of new technologies in university education since they offer teachers the possibility of incorporating collaborative work that allows students to become more deeply involved in their learning.

In response to the challenges presented in higher education, the blended learning and flipped classroom models have taken on special relevance, particularly in the area of foreign languages (Lee & Lee, 2007; Pedra & de Lama, 2013; Tomlinson & Whittaker, 2013; Lee, Lim & Kim, 2017), since they can significantly improve students' learning experience (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Wang, 2010; Nazarenko, 2015). The first has been defined by Horn and Staker (2011) as something that happens whenever learning occurs, at least in part in a supervised physical space and in part through the internet with elements controlled by the student. On the other hand, the second is defined as a type of blended learning where students must complete a preliminary online learning in preparation for a structured learning activity in the classroom with their peers and teachers (Reidsema, Hadgraft & Kavanagh, 2017). In these modalities, university teachers have the opportunity to strengthen critical thinking skills (Capone, De Caterina & Mazza, 2017; Willis, 2017) since they allow collaboration, exchange and action as well as a focus on analysis, evaluation and creation of new materials so that students can solve problems, synthesize what they have learned and present their arguments (Lo & Hew, 2017).

Considering the use of blended learning in foreign language settings, several authors discuss the advantages, challenges or limitations and suggest strategies for improvement (Bañados, 2006; Apala & Florez, 2011; Kocoglu, Ozek & Kesli, 2011; Al Zumor, et al., 2013; Nanclares & Rodríguez, 2016; Ju, 2018). Some of the advantages include that it provides an effective environment for meta-cognitive and social strategies allowing online and offline collaboration. Moreover, it enables the use of different forms and methods, the inclusion of different type of media giving access to native speaker input which motivates students (Hubackova, Semradova & Klimova, 2011; Hubackova & Semradova, 2016; Isiguzel, 2014). On the other hand, its limitations or challenges include technical difficulties and student or teacher lack of training which lead to the suggestion that access and training be provided to all members of the community. Similarly, the flipped classroom model of blended learning may provide increased opportunities for learning through an active and effective environment (Basal, 2015; Nouri, 2016; O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015).

Thus, as these models become more popular, research in this area becomes increasingly imperative (Halverson et al., 2017). Along the same lines, Porter et al. (2016) conclude that having innovative or pioneering teachers on staff facilitates development and promotion efforts. Therefore, Laurillard et al. (2013) argue that in order to adopt, adapt and experiment with these models, a supportive environment is necessary for teachers to apply good practices with technology. Through a qualitative case study approach, the present study aims at analyzing the use of blended learning and flipped classroom strategies by university instructors in the face-to-face modality of various subjects in the English Department at the National University of Asunción .

METHODS

Following Yin (2017), a case study approach was used for this study . The case in question corresponds to the Degree in English Language from the National University of Asunción. It has been offered for over fifty years and its main purpose is to train professionals in the English language who are specialized in teaching and translation. The career lasts four years and in each course students take from seven to nine subjects related to linguistics, literature, language teaching and translation. The teaching staff is made up of twenty-seven English language professionals with various skills in the use of technology. In total, there are more than one hundred students enrolled in the different courses offered .

This work includes data from interviews, questionnaires and the work carried out by the students within a free virtual platform used by instructors. For the collection of qualitative data, phenomenological interviews were carried out following the method presented by Seidman (2006). They help to gain a greater perspective on the point of view and the vision of the interviewees. The activities and work carried out by the students correspond to a school year in the subjects of the degree program in which the instructors use a free virtual platform as pedagogical support in the classroom.

For the analysis of the data, qualitative content analysis strategies were used, describing the levels of adoption of blended learning presented by Graham, Woodfield and Harrison (2013): (1) knowledge / exploration, (2) early adoption / implementation, and (3) mature growth / implementation. In addition, the most common uses, activities and strategies were analyzed according to Bloom's taxonomy for the digital age (Churches, 2008), which classifies learning activities according to the levels of development of critical thinking in this way: 1. remembering (searches, lists, schemes); 2. understanding (advanced searches, annotations, comments, categorizations); 3. applying (install, operate, share, edit); 4. analyzing (link and tag); 5. evaluating (review, moderate and collaborate); 6. creating (produce, publish and wiki).

RESULTS

After analyzing the data from questionnaires and interviews with students, it was found that despite the difficulties related to infrastructure and internet access at the university premises, they are receptive to the use of the virtual learning platform to complement face-to-face classes. They indicated that the platform helps them stay organized with their tasks and know what is expected from them in the subjects in which the platform is used. They indicated that even when it bothers them because they receive constant notifications, the tool is useful, especially if the instructor forgets to give some instruction in class, they can use the platform and send a notification through it. Similarly, students find that they can communicate through the platform whenever they have concerns without having to wait for the next class. Another advantage

pointed out by the students is that it serves as a virtual repository in the cloud for their work and in this way if something happens to their assignments, they can retrieve them from the site. In addition, for some it is more practical to have all the materials in their electronic devices than to carry a lot of papers.

An obstacle indicated by students is internet connectivity, since it is still limited and most of the time it is the responsibility of the students who have to use their own private internet plans to access the tools available online. On the other hand, the students also indicated that the use of the platform depends a lot on the use that the teachers give to it. They express that teachers often use the platform to share material that is not used in classes or that in some cases they replace face-to-face classes, which they consider inappropriate. They also highlighted that teachers often do not realize the advantages that using a platform as a support tool can bring them and that they do not believe that it is a matter of age since there are young teachers who do not use it. In the following paragraphs, the analysis of the use that teachers make of technology and virtual platforms as pedagogical support for their subjects is presented.

It was evidenced that the different instructors are at various levels of implementation. Since the use of the platform is optional, more than half of the instructors do not use it, using email or other types of support to facilitate materials and assignments for students. Out of the teachers who use the platform, half of them are at the knowledge/exploration level, using it mainly to share materials with students by uploading them on the platform. A small number of instructors use it at the early adoption / implementation level, including some activities provided by the platform such as tasks carried out in the form of documents and using it to communicate with students through announcements or news. Some of them, despite having undergone several trainings and having been offered support from the coordination, indicated that their use is not very intuitive and that it would be good to have computer support within the department. Others stated that they would like to use the platform in a more complete way but arguing lack of time they do not do it. Only two of the instructors are at level 4 (mature growth/implementation), taking advantage of a wide variety of tools available through the platform, in addition to using it to communicate with their students.

Subjects that use the platform only as a repository of materials were not included in the activity analysis. Considering the activities presented by the teachers at the implementation and growth levels, the analysis shows that they used some blended learning and flipped classroom strategies. In some cases, students were asked to read materials or watch videos in preparation for an activity they would do in the classroom. In some cases this was presented through the platform and in other cases it was provided in a word processor format so that students work offline in the classroom and deliver their assignment in various ways to the instructor (handwritten, photo, or processed by computer or other device). For example, in one activity the students had to watch a video, read an article and then present a written reflection in the forum opened for this purpose. Subsequently, a debate was held in the classroom where the different points of view were compared and discussed. This activity was again extended in the forum where students could comment in writing on the reflections posted by their classmates.

Teachers in the growth stage who use this combination of face-to-face and virtual classwork find that in addition to the administrative advantages provided by the tools, it is possible to extend work time with students and have more fluid communication focused on the objectives of the subject in question. In addition, the methodologies incorporated through the blended and flipped models allow students to participate more actively in the classes, as well as collaborative work

where they have to create shared documents, presentations with voice and videos synthesizing the ideas presented in the study materials. For example, students can access audiovisual and written materials through the platform or do research online and then make a video synthesizing the ideas studied. These videos can be shown in the classroom or shared through the platform where peers can answer questions asked by students or make comments on different aspects of the work, both in content and form.

The activities carried out by these teachers included those corresponding to all levels of critical thinking of Bloom's taxonomy for the digital age presented by Churches (2008), including proofs, reflections, debates, case studies, digital presentations, digital portfolios, wikis and tutorial videos (Table 1). As it can be seen, the automated verification tests available through the platform were used for the recall ability. For the ability to understand, personal reflections were used as well as individual tasks where students had to answer questions related to the comprehension and understanding of the materials. For the ability to apply, case studies and digital presentations shared through the platform in forums or tasks were used. For the ability to analyze, reflections and debates were also used where students had to analyze the different components of a situation or theory. These were given both in person and virtual through the platform as in the example presented above.

Table 1. Activities carried out through the Platform according to the levels of critical thinking (Churches, 2008). Source: self made.

Remember	Understand	Apply
Verification tests	Reflections	Case studies, digital presentations
Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Reflections and debates	Digital portfolios	Wikis, Videos

Regarding the ability to assess, students were presented with tasks where they were to conduct assessments of the material, peers and their own performance. Through the use of platform, it was possible to compile a digital portfolio where the work done was evaluated and a reflection made. Finally, for the ability to create, the combination of work in class and through the platform allowed students to present the results of their learning in various ways that included the production of short videos and the creation of wiki pages, where they collaboratively presented the results of their research on different aspects of the subject. It was found, therefore, that the incorporation of these strategies allows both teachers and students a constant formative evaluation and a record of student's performance that make evaluation a more dynamic and relevant process for student's learning. This is because students can access grades and comments about their work at all times through the platform.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the results of this work, it can be concluded that despite the fact that many teachers in the institution still do not use technology in a regular basis taking advantage of all the tools available through free use platforms, the use of blended learning and flipped classroom strategies provide students and teachers who use them with the opportunity to focus on a wide range of critical thinking skills. These types of strategies allow students to work on these skills collaboratively and constantly, as well as to reflect on their own learning through process-based evaluation and permanent feedback. Both teachers and students find the use of this type of activities and the use of technology as something useful and profitable since it provides not only a virtual space where materials and tasks are stored safely, but also a space where learning can take place, complementing the work done in the classroom.

Taking into account the changing paradigms in higher education, which are changing to incorporate online learning and collaborative models, the emerging pedagogies which create new challenges (Caird & Lane, 2015), and blended learning models which have the potential to transform students' learning experiences, while university instructors still have difficulties in incorporating them into their practices (Davis & Fill, 2007), it is important for researchers and instructors to reconsider their pedagogical practices and continue experimenting with the use of emergent technologies in such a way that learning is relevant, critical and adapted to the ever-changing times. In this way, a bridge can be created between the technologies that we have available and the ambitions that we have for higher education (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013). As educational technology is not neutral, in order to reach its potential, an expansive use of it should be promoted, leading to its empowerment (Selwyn, 2007).

REFERENCES

- Al Zumor, A. W. Q., Al Refaai, I. K., Eddin, E. A. B., & Al-Rahman, F. H. A. (2013). EFL Students' Perceptions of a Blended Learning Environment: Advantages, Limitations and Suggestions for Improvement. *English Language Teaching*, 6(10), 95-110.
- Alpala, C. A. O., & Flórez, E. E. R. (2011). Blended learning in the teaching of English as a foreign language: An educational challenge. *HOW*, 18(1), 154-168.
- Bañados, E. (2006). A blended-learning pedagogical model for teaching and learning EFL successfully through an online interactive multimedia environment. *CALICO journal*, 533-550.
- Basal, A. (2015). The implementation of a flipped classroom in foreign language teaching. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 16(4), 28-37.
- Beetham, H., & Sharpe, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Rethinking pedagogy for a digital age: Designing for*

- 21st century learning*. routledge.
- Capone, R., De Caterina, P., & Mazza, G. (2017). Blended Learning, Flipped Classroom and Virtual Environment: Challenges and Opportunities for the 21st Century Students. *Proceedings of EDULEARN 2017, Barcelona*.
- Caird, S., & Lane, A. (2015). Conceptualizing the role of information and communication technologies in the design of higher education teaching models used in the UK. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 46(1), 58-70.
- Davis, H. C., & Fill, K. (2007). Embedding blended learning in a university's teaching culture: Experiences and reflections. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 38(5), 817-828.
- Duță, N., & Martínez-Rivera, O. (2015). Between theory and practice: the importance of ICT in Higher Education as a tool for collaborative learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 180, 1466-1473.
- Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2008). *Blended learning in higher education: Framework, principles, and guidelines*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Graham, C. R., Woodfield, W., & Harrison, J. B. (2013). A framework for institutional adoption and implementation of blended learning in higher education. *The internet and higher education*, 18, 4-14.
- Greenhow, C., Robelia, B., & Hughes, J. E. (2009). Learning, teaching, and scholarship in a digital age: Web 2.0 and classroom research: What path should we take now ?. *Educational researcher*, 38(4), 246-259.
- Halverson L. R., Spring KJ, Huyett S., Henrie CR, Graham CR (2017) Blended Learning Research in Higher Education and K-12 Settings. In: Spector M., Lockee B., Childress M. (eds) Learning, Design, and Technology. Springer, Cham
- Horn, M. B., & Staker, H. (2011). The rise of K-12 blended learning. *Innosight institute*, 5.
- Hubackova, S., Semradova, I., & Klimova, B. F. (2011). Blended learning in a foreign language teaching. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 28, 281-285.
- Hubackova, S., & Semradova, I. (2016). Evaluation of blended learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 217, 551-557.
- Isiguzel, B. (2014). The Blended Learning Environment on the Foreign Language Learning Process: A Balance for Motivation and Achievement. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 15(3), 108-121.
- Ju, S. Y. (2018). Perceptions and practices of blended learning in foreign language teaching at USIM. *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*, 12(1), 170-176.
- Kocoglu, Z., Ozek, Y., & Kesli, Y. (2011). Blended learning: Investigating its potential in an English language teacher training program. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 27(7).
- Laurillard, D. (2013). *Teaching as a design science: Building pedagogical patterns for learning and technology*. Routledge.
- Laurillard, D., Charlton, P., Craft, B., Dimakopoulos, D., Ljubojevic, D., Magoulas, G., ... & Whittlestone, K. (2013). A constructionist learning environment for teachers to model learning designs. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 29(1), 15-30.
- Lee, J., Lim, C., & Kim, H. (2017). Development of an instructional design model for flipped learning in higher education. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 65(2), 427-453.
- Lo, C. K., & Hew, KF (2017). A critical review of flipped classroom challenges in K-12 education: possible solutions and recommendations for future research. *Research and Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning*, 12(1), 4.
- Nanclares, N. H., & Rodríguez, M. P. (2016). Students' Satisfaction with a Blended Instructional Design: The Potential of " Flipped Classroom" in Higher Education. *Journal of Interactive*

- Media in Education*, 2016(1).
- Nazarenko, A. L. (2015). Blended learning vs traditional learning: What works?(a case study research). *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 200, 77-82.
- Nouri, J. (2016). The flipped classroom: for active, effective and increased learning—especially for low achievers. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 13(1), 33.
- O'Flaherty, J., & Phillips, C. (2015). The use of flipped classrooms in higher education: A scoping review. *The internet and higher education*, 25, 85-95.
- Pedra, M. G., & de Lama, M. T. M. (2013). Can blended learning aid foreign language learning?. *Language Learning in Higher Education*, 3(1), 127-149.
- Porter, W. W., Graham, CR, Bodily, RG, & Sandberg, DS (2016). A qualitative analysis of institutional drivers and barriers to blended learning adoption in higher education. *The internet and Higher education*, 28, 17-27.
- Reidsema, C., Hadgraft, R., & Kavanagh, L. (2017). Introduction to the Flipped Classroom. In *The Flipped Classroom* (pp. 3-14). Springer, Singapore.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. Teachers College Press.
- Selwyn, N. (2007). The use of computer technology in university teaching and learning: a critical perspective. *Journal of computer assisted learning*, 23(2), 83-94.
- Tomlinson, B., & Whittaker, C. (2013). *Blended learning in English language teaching*. London: British Council.
- Toro, U., & Joshi, M. (2012). ICT in higher education: Review of Literature from the Period 2004-2011. *International Journal of Innovation, Management and Technology*, 3(1), 20-23.
- Veletsianos, G. (2016). The defining characteristics of emerging technologies and emerging practices in digital education. *Emergence and innovation in digital learning: Foundations and applications*, 3-16.
- Wang, M. J. (2010). Online collaboration and offline interaction between students using asynchronous tools in blended learning. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 26(6).
- Willis, L. D. (2017). Implications for Pedagogy: Flipping the Classroom to Engage Pre-service Teachers. In *The Flipped Classroom* (pp. 273-287). Springer, Singapore.
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sagepublications.