BLENDED LEARNING AND FLIPPED CLASSROOM AS EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO TEACHING ENGLISH IN HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly changed the organization of the educational process and created new opportunities for foreign language teaching. Blended learning and the flipped classroom model are among the approaches that combine traditional face-to-face instruction with technology-supported learning. These approaches are particularly relevant to heterogeneous English language classes, where students differ in language proficiency, learning pace, motivation, previous educational experience, and preferred learning strategies. This article examines the pedagogical potential of blended learning and flipped classroom approaches in English language teaching, with particular attention to student differences in heterogeneous groups. The study is based on an analysis of recent scholarly literature concerning blended learning, flipped learning, student engagement, and foreign language education. The findings indicate that technology-supported instruction can provide additional opportunities for individualized learning, repeated practice, collaboration, and active classroom interaction. At the same time, successful implementation requires careful instructional design, appropriate digital resources, teacher support, and consideration of students' access to technology and levels of digital competence. The article argues that the effectiveness of blended and flipped learning depends not simply on the introduction of technology but on the quality of pedagogical decisions surrounding its use.

Keywords: blended learning, flipped classroom, English language teaching, heterogeneous classes, individual differences, digital learning, student engagement, differentiated instruction.

Introduction

The contemporary educational environment is characterized by rapid technological development, increasing access to digital resources, and changing expectations concerning the organization of teaching and learning. Foreign language education has been particularly influenced by these developments because language learning requires continuous interaction, access to authentic materials, communication, practice, and feedback. Traditional classroom instruction remains important, but digital technologies make it possible to extend learning beyond the physical classroom and provide students with additional opportunities for independent study.

One of the approaches that has received considerable attention in recent educational research is **blended learning**. In general terms, blended learning combines face-to-face instruction with online learning activities. However, it should not be understood simply as

placing digital materials on an educational platform. Researchers emphasize that blended learning involves the purposeful integration of different learning environments and pedagogical methods. A review of research on blended learning in higher education found that the concept has been used in different ways and that its effectiveness depends considerably on how the combination of online and face-to-face elements is designed.

A closely related approach is the **flipped classroom**. In a flipped classroom, some instructional content traditionally presented during classroom time is provided to students before the lesson, often through videos, presentations, readings, or interactive digital materials. Classroom time can then be used for communication, collaborative activities, problem solving, discussion, feedback, and practical language use. A recent meta-analysis of college English learning found a positive moderate effect of flipped classroom instruction on English learning outcomes, although the effectiveness varied according to instructional design characteristics.

The relevance of these approaches becomes especially clear in **heterogeneous classes**. In a heterogeneous English class, students may have different levels of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speaking ability, reading comprehension, motivation, and previous exposure to English. Students may also differ in their preferred learning strategies, confidence, learning speed, and access to technological resources. Consequently, applying exactly the same teaching procedure and expecting identical results from every learner can be problematic.

The purpose of this article is therefore to examine how blended learning and flipped classroom approaches can contribute to effective English language teaching in heterogeneous classes. Particular attention is given to individual differences, differentiated instruction, student engagement, teacher roles, technological requirements, and potential challenges.

1. The Concept of Blended Learning in English Language Teaching

Blended learning has become an important area of educational research because it offers opportunities to combine the advantages of face-to-face and online instruction. Traditional classroom teaching provides direct communication between teachers and students, immediate feedback, social interaction, and opportunities for spontaneous communication. Online learning, in contrast, can provide flexibility, access to multimedia materials, opportunities for repetition, and individualized learning.

The central principle of blended learning is therefore **pedagogical integration** rather than technological substitution. Technology should serve clearly defined educational purposes. For example, an English teacher may use an online platform to provide vocabulary exercises before class, while classroom time can be devoted to speaking practice. Similarly, students may watch a short grammar explanation at home and then complete communicative tasks in class.

Research demonstrates that blended learning does not automatically produce better learning outcomes simply because technology is present. A systematic review of blended learning in higher education found that replacing part of classroom time with online learning could produce learning outcomes comparable to conventional instruction, suggesting that the design of the learning experience is more important than the simple presence of technology.

This principle is especially important in foreign language education. Language learning requires the development of several interconnected skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and intercultural competence. Digital resources can

support some of these areas effectively, but students still need meaningful human interaction and opportunities to use language communicatively.

For example, a blended English course may be organized in the following way:

Learning stage	Possible activity
Before class	Video lesson, vocabulary practice, reading
Beginning of class	Short review and diagnostic questions
Main classroom activity	Pair and group communication
Practice	Role-play, problem solving, discussion
Feedback	Teacher and peer feedback
After class	Online exercises and reflection
Assessment	Quiz, writing task or speaking assignment

Such organization allows teachers to move repetitive or information-delivery activities outside the classroom and devote classroom time to activities requiring interaction.

2. Flipped Classroom as a Form of Blended Learning

The flipped classroom can be considered one particular model of blended learning. Its main characteristic is the redistribution of learning activities between the home and classroom environments.

In a conventional classroom, the teacher often explains new material first and students complete exercises afterward. In a flipped classroom, students may encounter the basic material before class through videos, texts, presentations, or interactive activities. Classroom time is subsequently used for applying and developing this knowledge.

The approach became widely known through the work of teachers who began recording instructional materials for students to study outside regular class time. Since then, flipped learning has been examined in many educational contexts.

Importantly, flipping a classroom does not simply mean giving students videos to watch. The pre-class material needs to be connected directly to the classroom activities. If students watch a grammar video at home and then spend the entire classroom period listening to another grammar explanation, the potential advantages of the flipped model are reduced.

In English language teaching, the flipped model can be especially useful because classroom time can be redirected toward **language production**. For example, students can study the rules and examples of a particular grammatical structure before class. During the lesson, instead of spending most of the time explaining the rule, the teacher can organize speaking activities in which students have to use the structure in realistic situations.

A 2023 meta-analysis focusing specifically on college English learning analyzed 24 studies involving 2,526 participants. It reported a moderate positive overall effect of flipped classroom instruction on English learning achievement. The authors also found that factors such as opportunities for review, learning management systems, and constructivist instructional models were related to effectiveness.

Discussion

The reviewed literature indicates that blended and flipped learning should not be understood as universal replacements for traditional teaching. Instead, they are instructional

frameworks that can be particularly useful when their components are carefully aligned with learning objectives.

The evidence is also more nuanced than the simple claim that "technology improves learning." For example, a systematic review of blended learning with reduced classroom time found broadly comparable learning outcomes between blended and conventional instruction despite substantial reductions in classroom time. At the same time, research specifically focused on college English and flipped learning has reported positive effects. These findings are not necessarily contradictory: they indicate that effectiveness depends on the particular model, subject, learners, activities, and implementation conditions.

Conclusion

Blended learning and the flipped classroom model offer promising approaches to teaching English in heterogeneous classes, where learners differ in their language proficiency, learning styles, motivation, and educational backgrounds. By combining face-to-face instruction with digital learning opportunities, blended learning can provide greater flexibility and enable students to access learning materials according to their individual needs and pace. At the same time, the flipped classroom model changes the traditional organization of instruction by moving the initial presentation of new material outside the classroom and using classroom time for interaction, practice, problem-solving, and communicative activities

The integration of these approaches can contribute to a more learner-centered and inclusive English language learning environment. Digital resources, video lessons, online exercises, and interactive platforms allow teachers to provide differentiated materials and support students with different levels of proficiency. In-class activities, meanwhile, can focus on speaking, collaboration, feedback, and practical application of language knowledge. Such an organization may increase students' engagement and create more opportunities for meaningful communication in English.

However, the effectiveness of blended and flipped learning depends on careful instructional planning. Teachers need to select appropriate digital materials, provide clear instructions, monitor students' progress, and ensure that learners have sufficient access to technology. In heterogeneous classes, it is also important to maintain a balance between independent online learning and teacher-guided classroom activities. Therefore, technology should not replace the teacher but should function as a tool for differentiation, interaction, and pedagogical support.

Overall, blended learning and flipped classroom approaches can be effectively used to address the diverse needs of English language learners. Their successful implementation requires appropriate methodology, well-designed learning materials, continuous assessment, and active teacher-student interaction. When these conditions are met, the two approaches can contribute to a flexible, interactive, and inclusive learning environment that supports the development of students' communicative competence and autonomous learning skills.

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