

TEACHING ENGLISH IN A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract.

The article analyzes the prospects and challenges of teaching English in a blended learning environment. The purpose of the article is to show the specific challenges of teaching English in a blended learning environment and to offer prospects for their solution. The study uses general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison, as well as case study and content analysis methods, which allow us to take an in-depth look at the current state of English language teaching, identify the main trends and problems related to the integration of traditional and distance learning. The results of the study showed that blended learning, which is a synthesis of online and face-to-face classes, has gained particular importance during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and military conflicts. This system has proved to be flexible, although it has revealed several weaknesses in the process of teaching English.

INTRODUCTION

The article is devoted to the analysis of prospects and challenges of teaching English in conditions of mixed education. The purpose of the article is to show the specific challenges of teaching English, which are inherent in the conditions of mixed learning, and to offer prospects for their solution. The research uses general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison, as well as case study and content analysis methods, which make it possible to deeply consider the current state of English language teaching, to identify the main trends and problems associated with the integration of traditional and remote forms of education.

The results of the study showed that blended learning, which is a synthesis of online and face-to-face classes, has gained particular importance during periods of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and military conflicts. This system proved to be flexible, although it revealed several weaknesses in the process of teaching English. For example, the online modality sometimes fails to effectively cover all the nuances of writing, speaking, and oral communication skills. Also, deep understanding of the text and auditory perception often require personal contact.

Cultural characteristics, improvisation in speech and emotional expressiveness, transmitted through intonation and facial expressions, can be lost in the virtual space. However, students and teachers have shown impressive adaptability, with many even preferring blended learning to learn English. To improve the process of learning English, an integrated approach is needed, which includes the active participation of students, teachers and the entire educational system. It is important to provide psychological support, use unified technologies, develop personalized training plans and develop emotional intelligence.

The integration of game elements and real-time feedback systems can also significantly increase the effectiveness of the educational process. Blended learning opens up significant perspectives for English language teaching, promoting greater adaptability and innovation. By recognizing the existing limitations and developing ways to overcome them, this model can offer effective, flexible and affordable educational solutions that are important in a fast-moving world. The practical significance of the work lies in the development of recommendations for the effective combination of different approaches to learning, taking into account the psychological, technological and methodological aspects of blended learning.

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1. Prospects of teaching English in a blended learning environment

Prospects of teaching English in a blended learning environment are difficult to overestimate. After the protracted COVID-19 pandemic, which was complicated by the war with Russia, Ukraine faced unique challenges in the field of education, where the study of the English language is becoming more and more relevant. The war displaced millions of people, causing a sharp increase in the need for English skills among those seeking employment and life opportunities abroad. This situation emphasized the importance of distance education and necessitated a rapid transition to blended learning.

Blended learning, which combines online interaction and offline education, is a ray of hope amid these challenges. The practice of distance education during the pandemic did not justify its effectiveness, and therefore most educational institutions chose a blended form of education, which allows for continuity of education when traditional classes are unavailable due to military actions (threats) or a crisis in the field of health care. Although this form of education solved the primary problems of organizing the educational process, it left a number of obstacles that prevent this process from being effective.

Despite these obstacles, surveys show that there is a growing recognition and preference for blended learning in English-language education among Ukrainian students. The resilience and adaptability demonstrated by both students and teachers indicate a gradual shift in educational paradigms. Pupils begin to realize that learning is more the responsibility of the student, not the teacher, and therefore a mixed form of education allows to devote more time to learning, to use it more effectively and to apply different approaches to the educational process.

At the same time, a number of specific problems remain in the process of teaching English, which will be described in detail in this study. The current situation requires the joint efforts of students, teachers, educational institutions and the Ministry of Education to use the full potential of blended learning.

When implemented strategically, blended learning can offer reliable solutions, paving the way for a sustainable education system in Ukraine. This system can meet the current need for English language proficiency while being able to adapt to future challenges, ultimately reflecting a dynamic and forward-looking approach to education in times of crisis.

Review of the latest scientific research and publications. Prospects and challenges of teaching English in the conditions of mixed education have already been the subject of many studies by both foreign and domestic scientists. The foreign experience of mixed education is presented in the works of such scientists as B. Tomlinson and C. Whittaker [19], as well as C.R. Tucker, T. Wycoff, and G.T. Green [20]. The authors show various methods and technological aspects of the organization of such training in advanced educational institutions of the world.

The relevance of the problem of learning foreign languages in the conditions of distance education is confirmed by a number of scientific works of domestic scientists [1]. The experience of using blended learning was reviewed in detail by O. Bezlyudny, V. Bezlyudny and others in English language classes at institutions of higher pedagogical education [2]. Theoretical analysis of blended learning and its implementation strategy in higher educational institutions was presented by K.L. Bugaichuk [3]. Aspects of the use of the blended learning model in teaching foreign languages were highlighted in the abstracts of reports at the Kyiv National University of Trade and Economics [4].

Further analysis of the theory and practice of blended learning can be found in the works of V.M. Kukhareenko and others [6]. Features of mixed training in war conditions were revealed by I.Yu. Lydanivska [7]. A. Melnyk considered the peculiarities of mixed learning in teaching English for students of philological majors [8].

In general, research in the field of blended learning has been actively conducted in recent years, but the number of works specifically devoted to the teaching of English in the context of blended learning remains limited. Considering the importance of the English language in the context of further European integration of Ukraine, such thematic highly specialized study is of great importance. Therefore, current research in the field of blended learning of the English language can be considered extremely relevant and have significant scientific value.

The purpose of the article is to show the specific challenges of teaching English, which are inherent in the conditions of mixed learning, and to offer prospects for their solution.

The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed huge changes across all sectors, with education facing some of the most dramatic and complex transitions around the

world. Blended learning, driven by public health considerations and social distancing measures, has quickly transformed from an additional educational model to a primary means of learning. This model, which combines traditional face-to-face and online learning, has demonstrated resilience and flexibility in the face of adverse circumstances. It was successfully tested in various institutions of secondary and higher education around the world [14, 15].

In Ukraine, the implementation of blended learning was further accelerated by the war with Russia, which added complexity and urgency to the education sector. The war that has been ongoing since 2014 has destroyed traditional education systems in many areas, making the need for adaptive and sustainable forms of education even more critical [9].

At the initial stage, this sudden shift caused significant challenges. Both students and teachers had to navigate new technologies and adapt non-traditional methods of communication and learning: via the Internet. Lack of training time and resources made this transition difficult, especially for older teachers who had significant challenges with digital competence. However, over time, stability emerged: teachers introduced innovations, families adapted to new learning conditions, and students found their footing in this new educational landscape [3].

Remarkably, despite these challenges, or perhaps because of the adaptability they required, blended learning has begun to demonstrate its potential. According to the survey [2], the vast majority of students in Ukraine believe that the blended learning method is more favorable for learning a foreign language than traditional methods. This finding is monumental because it not only reflects the successful adaptation of blended learning in a dual crisis environment, but also suggests the potential long-term benefits of this educational approach.

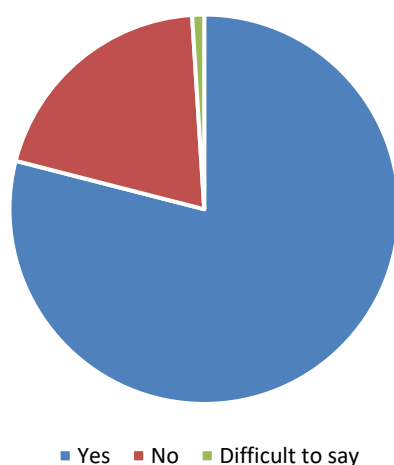


Fig. 1. Is blended learning effective in learning English?
Respondents' answers in % [2]

According to the data, 79 out of 100 students believe that blended learning has made learning a foreign language easier. This response is overwhelming and highlights the effectiveness of combining online and face-to-face learning. The opinion of 20 students is less clear-cut, perhaps reflecting individual preferences or experiences regarding the quality and implementation of blended learning programs. Only 1 in 100 students felt that blended learning did not make language learning easier, an exception that reinforces the overall positive assessment.

These survey results demonstrate the adaptability and resilience of students in the face of adverse circumstances. They also highlight the potential of blended learning not only to respond to immediate problems, but also to improve long-term methods and approaches to foreign language teaching. Thus, the transition, catalyzed by unprecedented global political and national crises, could lead to an educational reform that will go into the future and change the landscape of foreign language learning for the better.

The success of blended learning (BL) in teaching English in challenging times is evident, but it has also revealed several unresolved issues. The blended environment, while it can be adapted, reveals certain disadvantages that teachers and students, their parents and teachers continue to struggle with.

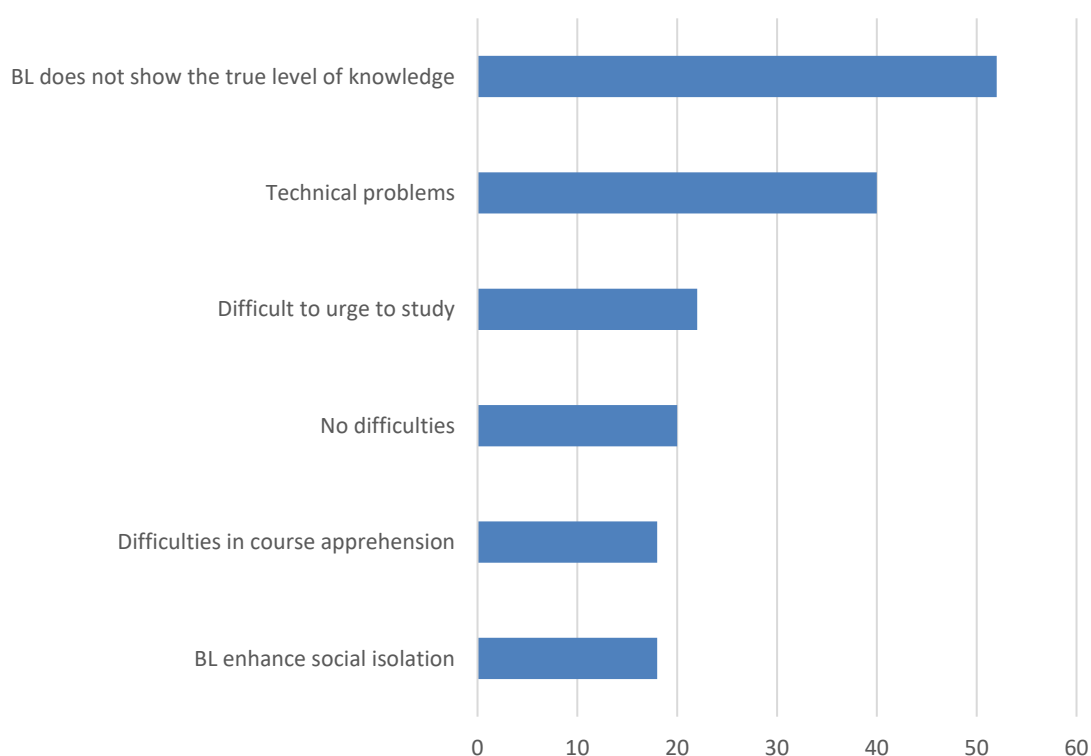


Fig. 2. Problems of learning English in conditions of blended learning (BL), respondents' answers in %

A significant concern, expressed by 52% of students, is that the QA may not accurately reflect the actual level of knowledge. This may be due to limitations in the types of assessment that can be conducted online, problems in monitoring academic integrity, or the difficulty of measuring interactive skills such as speaking and listening in a digital environment. As a rule, a testing system is used to evaluate students, which is not justified for teaching foreign languages. As a result, there is a feeling that the SAT may not fully reflect the student's true ability or progress in learning English.

Technical problems, indicated by 40% of respondents, are another serious barrier. Despite the development of technology, not all students have continuous access to reliable devices and the Internet. In addition, technical failures and software limitations can disrupt the learning process, resulting in lost learning time and reduced student engagement.

Recruiting students is another problem, which was pointed out by 22% of participants. NL requires a higher level of self-motivation and discipline from students, and without the physical presence of a teacher, it can be difficult to encourage sustained participation and effort. Educators must be inventive in their approach, using interactive and dynamic content to capture and hold students' interest.

20% of students do not experience any difficulties with online teaching, which indicates that a significant minority of students made the transition without much difficulty. This may indicate a natural fit for the self-directed learning style favored by distance learning, or simply better personal or technical training that lends itself well to the demands of distance learning.

18% have difficulty understanding the course material. This may be due to the lack of prompt feedback and clarification that is usually provided in a traditional classroom. TL often requires students to work through the material independently, and any misunderstandings can deepen if not resolved quickly.

The same percentage of students, 18%, also believes that SEN increases social isolation. Lack of personal interaction with teachers and peers can lead to feelings of alienation and isolation. This is a common problem of blended and distance learning that still has not found an effective solution. Although online forums and live classes can mitigate this problem to some extent, the spontaneity and richness of face-to-face social interaction is difficult to replicate in a virtual environment.

Other problems include the following general problems of blended learning:

1. The psychological challenges of blended learning can arise from the need to adapt to two different environments: online and offline. This can create

a sense of instability and insecurity among students. In addition, some students may feel isolated when they learn online, especially if they do not have the opportunity to communicate with classmates or the instructor in real time.

2. A person-centered approach in blended learning can be difficult to achieve due to the large number of students and limited online communication opportunities. Taking into account the individual needs, learning pace and learning style of each student becomes a challenge.

3. Emotional intelligence plays an important role in language learning, because communication always has an emotional aspect. In a virtual environment, it can be difficult to identify and respond to the emotional needs of students, which can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction with learning.

4. Feedback delays do not allow me to work quickly and flexibly in the remote part of mixed learning. Fast feedback is important for language learning because it helps students to correct their mistakes in time [3].

These challenges highlight the need for continued innovation in blended learning. Solutions may include improved assessment methods that more accurately determine language proficiency, improved technology support for students, strategies to increase engagement, and better communication channels to reduce feelings of isolation.

One more thing that should not be missed in this discussion is the use of interactive environment. Secondary schools as well as higher educational establishments in Ukraine can be connected to different interactive platforms but the effectiveness of each one is highly to overestimate.

Modern education is impossible without the use of an interactive environment, which destroys restrictions on access to educational services and provides the opportunity to teach and learn from anywhere in the world [5]. This is extremely important, especially in the modern conditions of the war in Ukraine. The use of the Microsoft 365 interactive environment in the educational process of higher education institutions facilitates the educational process, makes it interesting for both students and teachers, and also opens up opportunities that are even difficult to apply when learning offline [10].

First of all, it is necessary to highlight the organizational component of the educational process: attendance sheets, which record each student's attendance at classes and his participation in the meeting; student evaluation, which allows the teacher to see the full picture of the group's grades, as well as to send each individual his or her scores. It is extremely important to be able to add various files: educational literature, methodical recommendations, textbooks, work programs, evaluation criteria, etc. All this makes the

educational process more constructive and gives the student the opportunity to use this material as needed and at a time that is convenient for him.

The Task option is quite simple, clear and easy to use. It provides an opportunity for all students, even those who for various reasons were not able to attend classes, to see and quickly understand the given task, the terms of its completion, evaluation criteria, and the teacher, in turn, gives the opportunity to quickly see the number of passed papers, who and in what time did you submit the assignment, late or not, and then check to send feedback and the number of points individually and with explanations (if necessary).

An important option is the ability to record classes. This option is very important for lecture classes, but also audio recordings of practical classes will help the student to absorb the atmosphere of the class and quickly understand the material of the previous classes.

It should also be noted that the specifics of using the capabilities of Office 365, in general, and the Teams application, in particular, for conducting practical classes in a foreign language is of primary importance. Foreign language classes at higher educational establishments primarily involve communicative practice: dialogic and monologue speech, practice of presentation skills, discussion, brainstorming, etc.

Notwithstanding, the ability to create separate rooms in Teams to prepare for role-playing tasks, the one to use a screen demonstration function and make a presentation, to write obscure words and phrases and even sentences in the chat, to add various files from your computer and to send links to audio and video materials, etc. are the essential instruments to be used in everyday practice. It would be good to be able to use audio and video materials in class, but the Internet does not always provide such an opportunity, and the quality of such tasks needs to be better.

Various applications of Office 365 [10] are interesting to use and sometimes necessary. For instant feedback, to check the material that has just been taught or to be repeated, it is quite appropriate to create, in a hurry, a test or a text task and interview the listeners directly in the lesson and set points to increase the motivation of students and emphasize the gaps in the material covered. One such application is the Forms application.

Using the Teams application in Office 365 helps with exams and assessments. An important opportunity is to provide and fix a certain period of time for the completion of the final task. The option to cancel or allow late delivery, fix the time of sending and the ability to quickly adjust the given parameters is convenient.

The prospects for using the Microsoft 365 interactive environment are quite interesting and, it is believed, will be more sophisticated over the time. For example, now, sometimes, it takes a long time to log out of one account, in one faculty, and instantly switch to another one, in another faculty. Not very convenient is the impossibility of seeing a single calendar for teachers working in different faculties. This would greatly simplify the situation of a quick change of faculty spaces in conditions of heavy workload or the need to replace teachers of the department. At this stage, it is also not very convenient to generate students' grades and send them in private messages only those marks that apply to them.

In general, using Microsoft 365 is a convenient, reliable and high-quality provision of educational services. Another thing is the ability to use all the functions and options of this product. Therefore, regular training of teachers, internships, improvement of skills is an urgent need in the modern educational process.

When teaching foreign languages online, foreign language teachers at universities all over the world prefer Zoom (a cloud-based video conferencing platform that can be used for video conferencing, audio conferencing, webinars, meeting recordings and chat), Google Meet (a video calling service developed by Google) and Teams (a platform for teamwork in Office 365 from Microsoft). The biggest advantage of the Zoom platform is the ability to divide the group into subgroups in several rooms, which is very appropriate for practicing communication in a foreign language.

As for Google Meet, the main advantage of this application is that neither the teacher nor the student needs to register additionally. It is enough to have an account on the Google network. This application works well both on a PC and on a phone or tablet. Microsoft Teams is a single app that has chats, video calls, meetings, files, tasks, and calendar in one place. In face-to-face teaching of foreign languages, teachers actively use the Google classroom platform, where students can find the necessary materials from the previous lesson, download the completed task for the teacher to check, and complete an online test. This platform is widely used in Ukrainian secondary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic and currently at the period of full-scale war. Learners of different ages has quickly become familiar with this particular platform due to its convenience and simplicity in everyday use.

Classroom instruction should be prioritized and they can include whole-class teacher instruction, individual student work, and collaborative group instruction. Online learning can be individual or group, but it involves students

using online programs and resources. Blended learning is not intended to replace the teacher, but, on the contrary, to deepen and expand the learning process. The key idea behind blended learning is that students have some control over time, pace, trajectory, and place.

Students are allowed to take control over their learning, which increases their motivation to study and allows them to find the time they need to study the material.

For online students, blended or hybrid learning is a type of learning environment that combines «synchronous» and «asynchronous» learning. Synchronous learning means that students and teachers meet simultaneously online using a virtual learning platform such as Zoom or Teams. This kind of learning is often called «real-time» learning.

Asynchronous learning, in its turn, does not involve meetings with the teacher at a certain time; students work autonomously and complete tasks within the deadline set by the teacher. Completed work is submitted electronically. For example, some online courses do not require meeting with your coach at a specific time, but provide all the incentives to work independently on the tasks at your own pace. Coaches provide feedback, but not face-to-face, and not in real time. That is exceptionally important during the periods of long and exhausting lockdowns and blackouts, in emergency situations, etc. The learning of this kind gives equal opportunities to all the students without depending on the unforeseen circumstances.

2. Challenges of teaching English in a blended learning environment

The challenges of using blended learning in the teaching of foreign language as a second language is under investigation of a lot of contemporary scholars. S.H. Merza examines the works regarding blended education challenges as a technology-improved pedagogical instrument that combines face-to-face and e-learning instructional tasks to develop English skills, including its applications in coaching English as a new language [17]. Besides, the researcher emphasizes that blended learning enables students to become engaged and autonomous in knowledge development instead of acting as a passive observer [17]. This is considered to be of primary importance and should always be in the view of the teacher.

It is difficult to object to the idea that «Blended and hybrid learning grow in popularity and utility as time goes on and circumstances call for new forms of teaching. But with them arrive challenges as the importance of new educational technology for blended classrooms grows as well [12]». This very thing can be

considered to be as one of the challenges that definitely should be under consideration and further implementation. Buying and using the Right Classroom Technology in present situation is quite costly, on the one hand, but on the other, that should necessarily be done as the efficiency and the quality of education will improve significantly. Visual aids and interactive boards are able to stimulate better memorizing and activating of the material which is very important from the educational point of view. Moreover, the use of these devices makes the process of learning conscious, motivating and exciting which encourage the learners to study.

The transition to blended learning (BL) has emphasized the adaptability and resourcefulness of both students and teachers. However, like any other educational paradigm shift, it also brought with it a number of challenges. To ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of learning English in such environments, a systematic approach based on cooperation becomes important. Solving the problems that have arisen requires the involvement of all interested parties: students, teachers, parents, educational institutions and the entire education system.

Creating an enabling ecosystem that promotes communication, personalization and engagement is essential. For example, psychological challenges can be mitigated by developing a sense of community through virtual meetings and forums, as well as providing support and counseling from psychologists. The issue of managing various technologies can be simplified by creating a single portal for accessing resources and offering training on the use of these technologies [7].

The need for a person-oriented approach can be addressed through the development of individual curricula and the implementation of adaptive technologies that take into account the unique learning trajectories of each student. Emotional intelligence, which is key to maintaining student engagement and interpersonal skills in a virtual environment, can be developed through video communication tools and focused learning.

Self-motivation, which is often a problem in self-directed learning scenarios, can be enhanced by incorporating elements of gamification into the learning process and designing tasks that are linked to real-world applications, thereby making learning more engaging and tied to solving real-life problems. The problem of delayed feedback, which can slow down the pace of learning and demotivate students, can be solved by using automated testing that provides instant feedback, combined with regular interactive sessions with teachers.

By recognizing and proactively addressing these challenges, the educational landscape can evolve to not only meet the needs caused by urgent crises, such as global pandemics or conflicts, but also to create a more robust, engaging and personalized learning experience for students. Table 1 below outlines these challenges in the BL environment, particularly for English language learning, and offers viable solutions that point the way to improving the learning process and outcomes in such dynamic environments.

Table 1

Challenges of learning English in blended learning and ways to solve them

Challenges	Possible solutions
Psychological challenges	- Community formation (online meetings, forums) - Psychological support and counselling - After-class meetings and the formation of the general interest meetings
Technologies	- Single portal for resource access - Technology use trainings - Common agreements with other teachers regarding the use of the same technologies within the one single educational establishment
Personal-oriented approach	- Individual curricula - Adaptive technologies
Emotional Intellect	- Video-communication for emotional recognition - Emotional intellect development trainings
Self-motivation	- Gamification of the educational process - True-to-life tasks and situation models - Extracurricular time management training
Feedback delay	- Automated testing for the immediate feedback - Regular sessions with a tutor

Mastering the English language in the context of blended learning is associated with a number of complex tasks, each of which requires special attention to accurately measure the student's competence. Assessing English language learning goes beyond just vocabulary and grammar; it involves a comprehensive assessment of various competencies that are important for real language acquisition. These competencies include articulating complex ideas in essay writing, subtleties of pronunciation and accent, fluency in conversational skills, and depth of listening comprehension.

Writing an essay is a critical component of language acquisition and involves more than stringing together grammatically correct sentences. It requires students to demonstrate their ability to build arguments, express ideas coherently and use language accurately. In the context of blended learning, traditional essay assessment must be adapted to explore students' depth of thinking and their ability to persuade effectively without the use of computers. The problem became especially relevant with the advent of artificial intelligence, which in seconds can compose an essay that will answer all the teacher's questions and be well-constructed [1].

Pronunciation and intonation are also key in language learning, but these elements are notoriously difficult to assess in a distance learning environment. Nuances of speech, such as intonation and emphasis, play an important role in effective communication and are often lost without audio or video recordings [1].

Conversational fluency, which includes the ability to conduct a spontaneous dialogue, navigate idiomatic expressions and respond to cues in real time, becomes more difficult during distance learning. Lack of direct interaction reduces students' opportunities to practice impromptu speaking and receive immediate feedback on their speaking skills [4].

Listening comprehension is another problem. Assessing a learner's ability to understand spoken English in real time is difficult, especially when learners cannot pause or replay the audio to pick up on nuances or confirm understanding [4].

Reading and interpreting complex texts present their own unique set of challenges. They require students not only to understand the literal meaning, but also to understand the subtext and nuances, which are not easy to recognize with the help of distance assessment methods [1].

The cultural references and idioms required for full language immersion require understanding of context and usage. In a blended learning setting, assessing a student's level of knowledge in this area can be difficult due to the lack of cultural immersion that a traditional classroom can provide.

Spontaneous use of language – the ability to communicate effectively in unpredictable circumstances – is an important skill that is difficult to measure without direct and dynamic interaction.

Emotional tone, intonation, and nonverbal communication cues such as gestures and facial expressions are integral to effective communication. Distance learning platforms can limit the ability to assess these competencies because they often rely heavily on written communication.

These challenges highlight the complexity of teaching and assessing English in a blended learning environment. Table 2 examines these competencies in detail, which gives an idea of the subtleties associated with their assessment, as well as the need for innovative solutions to accurately determine the level of student mastery of these competencies.

Table 2

Directions for evaluating student competencies in mixed education [8]

Competence	Distance Assessment (platform)	Face-to-face Assessment
Writing an Essay	Tasks via Moodle (automatic check\correction)	Discussion of the main ideas and the structure with the teacher.
Pronunciation and Accent	Audio-recordings via Skype (feedback)	Direct corrections of the pronunciation by the teacher.
Speech Fluency	Group conferences via Zoom	Unprepared speech on the unprepared topic.
Listening Comprehension	Audio-tests via Moodle	Discussion with the teacher of audio recordings and their content.
Reading of Complicated Texts	Reading tasks via Moodle	Reading Comprehension discussion and analysis of its understanding by the student.
Cultural References and Idioms	Video dialogues via Skype or Zoom	Clarification of the idioms and cultural references.
Spontaneous\ Immediate Use of the Language	Group discussion via Zoom	On-the-spot dialogue and the immediate reaction on the unexpected situations.
Emotional Tone and Intonation in Speaking	Audio-Video connection via Skype	Exercises on translating the emotional state by means of language and teacher's analysis.

Assessing students' English proficiency in blended learning poses unique challenges that are addressed differently in online and traditional environments. When it comes to writing essays, platforms like Moodle make it easy to submit and automatically check assignments, simplifying the initial grading process. However, these systems may not fully take into account the nuances of

argumentation and style, and this is where personal discussions with the teacher become invaluable, allowing for a deeper exploration of the main ideas and structural coherence of student works.

Evaluating pronunciation and accent requires careful attention; audio recordings sent via platforms such as Skype allow for remote feedback, but finer nuances are often best corrected in person, when the instructor can offer immediate and precise corrections.

Spoken language is developed through group video conferencing on platforms such as Zoom, which simulate real-time interaction, although it is in the unpredictable dynamics of classroom conversation that students truly hone their impromptu speaking skills.

Listening comprehension is tested using audio quizzes on Moodle, but these may lack the context of a full conversation, and this gap is filled by discussion of the recordings with the instructor, who can challenge the student with follow-up questions and ensure understanding.

Depth of understanding of complex texts is another competency that is initially assessed through online word problems, but further benefits from the detailed discussion that is possible in face-to-face interaction, which allows the teacher to check the student's understanding and provide clarification as needed.

For cultural references and idioms, video chats on platforms such as Skype or Zoom can provide context and examples of practical use, but the subtleties of these expressions often require classroom discussion to fully understand their meaning and appropriate usage.

The spontaneity of language use that is an integral part of language fluency can be simulated through group discussions on Zoom, but is best conveyed in spontaneous dialogues and reactions to unforeseen scenarios in a physical classroom where immediate use of language is required.

Finally, conveying emotional tone and intonation in speech is difficult to assess with digital means. Audio and video communication helps, but the full range of expressiveness is best observed and corrected in person, when the teacher can guide students in the nuances of tone to accurately reflect different emotional states.

Blended learning in English language learning combines the versatility of distance learning with the irreplaceable value of face-to-face interaction. Despite the proliferation of online platforms that offer extensive resources for self-study and interactive learning, nuances of language learning such as pronunciation, cultural proficiency, and emotional expression benefit greatly

from face-to-face guidance. Immediate feedback and personalized attention from a teacher in a physical classroom setting are unparalleled, especially for complex language issues [9].

Distance learning, however, has proven to be an effective means of developing certain language skills. For example, reading comprehension and written communication can be honed using online modules, allowing students to learn at their own pace. Moreover, asynchronous discussions and assignments allow students to think deeply about language use and language structure.

It should be highlighted that some scholars emphasize that «the blended learning benefited the EFL students by supporting their writing skills and encouraging them to search online» [13]. These skills can hardly be overestimated. Writing has always been problematic for the majority of students. Having classes online gives more opportunities to master writing skills and to make learners practice in writing. While studying online, all communication should be in the written form and in English despite the common native language for the teacher and the learner. This is the constant way of improving writing and at the same time giving the teacher an opportunity to check and correct the mistakes just-in-time and make the learning and teaching processes continue after the classroom hours which leads to uninterrupted learning and is very motivating for the students.

Searching necessary information online should also be named as a very helpful and a must-have skill. The students must be able to search online and find the information they require, single out the key issues and then generalize the messages read.

However, spontaneous language use and conversational fluency often require a dynamic classroom environment where instant verbal exchange and non-verbal cues play a crucial role in language learning. The balance between distance and face-to-face learning must be strategically aligned with learning objectives, ensuring that while technology may facilitate certain aspects of language learning, the essence of communication – human interaction – remains at the heart of English education. Thus, the hybrid approach not only meets the logistical requirements of modern education, but also respects the social nature of language learning.

The Covid-19 pandemic has completely changed our lives and the mode of education not only in Ukraine but also all over the world. It gave the teachers a challenge to implement new methods and approaches to the process of education which seemed disused and unrecognized before. At a time, all

Ukrainian teachers faced the challenge to switch into teaching online and this undoubtedly led to a number of difficulties. Needless to say that remote teaching was a challenge for not only for the majority of Ukrainian teachers but also their colleagues worldwide. Thus, the teachers encountered lots of problems in their work. It goes without saying that teachers are in great need of life-long training and support in how to teach online as well as having clear guidelines from the authorities concerned.

The survey published by the British Council [16] summarizes the common concerns expressed by the teachers. Keeping up students' motivation, class management, poor internet connection or no access to the internet, preparing learners for the exams, fears about cheating, lack of proper equipment for both teachers and learners, advice on planning the lessons or task design for distance learning, longer preparation time are among them [16].

The first thing to be understood is that although there are a lot of similarities between face-to-face and online lessons, the delivery is different, the interactions between learners, learners and teachers are different too. Therefore, online learning as well as teaching is much more intense for everybody.

Well-planned and well-thought lesson can be the first step to a successful lesson [18]. It needs a lot of preparation from the teacher (preparation of slides, pictures with captions, concise pieces of information for the Google document, for example, to provoke and encourage the participation of learners and the discussion, as a result). The apparent advantage of online teaching is the ability to put grammar tables, texts and even to switch the video on at the lesson. To develop speaking skills, for example, it is very important to offer the format which enables students to interact with each other, which is capable of giving the students an opportunity to participate in the discussions freely and easily. Time management is also extremely important at the online lesson as time flies differently at the offline and online lesson. One more thing which should be noted is that students may seem to be more relaxed and unmotivated working online. In this case, firstly, it becomes essential for a teacher to increase students' engagement and participation percentage. Secondly, a teacher needs to elaborate effective assessment management which is clear, transparent and understandable for the learners. Thirdly, in case technology fails, it is necessary to have in mind Plan B.

To be able to implement the above-mentioned options, teachers need support (including the technical one) and constant interaction with the colleagues. Teachers should be given the opportunity to raise awareness, to

share teaching methods with the colleagues through meetings (including online ones), to develop materials for online education specifically. Contemporary students thanks to online education, in particular, have easy accessibility to the teachers through discussion forums, chats, messages and social media. In its turn, teachers are able to make classroom sessions more interactive and as a result provide easy accessibility to additional resources by uploading assignments, tests, quizzes and questionnaires. It means that curricula, syllabi, unit and lesson plans have to be adjusted not only to work face-to-face, but also to interactive learning with a fast and easy access to news, textbooks, magazines and journals from anywhere via mobile apps, as well.

A lot of scholars are discussing the insufficient quality of contemporary education [11]. Professor of Harvard University, Derek Bok, for example, states that nowadays many undergraduates do not feel that the material conveyed in their readings and lectures have much relevance to their lives [13]. The students do not seem to have a clear vision of the proper application of knowledge they have possessed.

A lot of people are currently arguing that online education can contribute to the process of lowering the quality of education. However, if we look at this question from another angle, learners and students and even schoolchildren can benefit from online education greatly. They are commencing using the technology (and devices, in particular) purposefully, not only to entertain themselves but also to research, investigate, drill and improve the acquired knowledge and skills.

It should be mentioned that success of online education greatly depends on the desire to teach, on the one hand, and to learn, on the other. Both parties of the educational process should be highly motivated and interested in achieving the best possible result.

Under conditions of blended learning the role of a teacher, who turns out to be a facilitator in the educational process, is hard to overestimate. Those are, people who organize a collective discussion so that all students get maximally involved, and problems are solved quickly and efficiently. Therefore, the main goal of teachers is not to evaluate students on the exam, but to actively interact with them, monitor progress and help if necessary. Thus, teachers cease to be mere observers and take on the role of mentors.

Digitalization has become an important trend in modern Ukrainian education that will definitely stay with us for a long time. This phenomenon includes not only the transition to distance learning, but also the increasing role of mobile technologies and the creation of a digital environment for students who attend classes.

Another important point is the creation of an adaptive environment for students.

They allow all the participants of the educational process to create the most individual learning path that takes into account the student's cognitive characteristics, his ways of perceiving information and the initial level of preparation, and encourage children to hurry to the lesson with interest.

It should be noted that an important place in the distance learning system belongs to the independent work of students. Under current conditions in our country this aspect demands detailed and elaborated investigation as well as all the tools and mechanisms which can be directed to the encouragement and motivation of the students.

Therefore, special attention should be paid to the organization of students' independent work. The role and function of a teacher is to help the learner to arrange his time and efforts as well as to direct student's abilities to achieve the best possible and fruitful results. Not only is the time management which matters at this stage but also skills to work over huge layers of material and the ability to prioritize.

Distance learning is characterized by the fact that the student receives knowledge in a remote format through the use of electronic devices. Such training, of course, has both advantages and disadvantages. For example, the advantage is that a student can learn anywhere at any time using gadgets, but at the same time motivation to learn, engagement and communication efficiency may decrease. All these tasks can be solved by a platform for distance learning at school.

Indeed, now teachers have to be very flexible and quickly react to a change in the situation: here we were studying at school, and next week one student or an entire class goes into self-isolation. It is important that a child who is studying from home for various reasons does not feel deprived or excluded from the process. If children in the class write a test, then students in self-isolation can also do it. But before such a test, it is very important to talk about all the rules: for example, the rule of the camera being turned on, the rule of not opening additional pages in the browser.

During the period of self-isolation of different children, the teacher must keep in touch with the students' families and clearly know how the child is feeling – whether he is sick or simply a contact person and can fully study in parallel with the rest of the class. One more very important aspect here is studying in the shelter for quite a long period of time. It goes without saying that the safe place should be well-equipped, refurbished and spacious enough to

provide additional stimulus for the learners to learn and for the teachers to teach at maximum capacity.

The teacher in this situation is constantly searching for ways to optimize and intensify the educational process in order to develop the professional foreign language communicative competence of the students. Traditional teaching of a foreign language never took place without additional audio and visual aids, role-playing and didactic games, training grammar exercises, etc., which were widely used in various types of speech activities (listening, speaking, reading and writing), as well as trainings, projects, webinars and extracurricular activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Blended learning – an educational model that combines online and traditional face-to-face learning – has proven especially valuable during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic and military operations. Despite its adaptability, this model creates certain problems in the field of English language learning. It is difficult for online platforms to fully capture the subtleties of writing, pronunciation and spoken language. Aural comprehension and in-depth analysis of texts also cannot be achieved without the benefit of personal interaction

In addition, the nuances of cultural idioms, spontaneous language use, and emotional depth conveyed through intonation and nonverbal cues are often blurred in virtual environments. However, the resilience of students and teachers has been remarkable: most of them have adapted to blended learning and even prefer this approach to learning English.

A comprehensive approach involving students, teachers and the educational system is needed to solve the problems of English language teaching. Psychological support, unified technological platforms, individual training plans and the development of emotional intelligence are key factors. The implementation of gamification and real-time feedback mechanisms can also significantly improve the learning process.

Hence, blended learning has enormous potential for English language learning, fostering adaptability and innovation. By recognizing its limitations and developing strategies for improvement, blended learning can offer robust, flexible and inclusive educational pathways that are critical to a rapidly evolving global landscape.

Online modality sometimes fails to effectively cover all the nuances of writing, pronunciation, and oral communication skills. Also, deep text

comprehension and listening comprehension often require face-to-face contact. Cultural peculiarities, improvisation in speech, and emotional expressiveness conveyed through intonation and facial expressions can be lost in a virtual space. Nevertheless, students and teachers have shown an impressive ability to adapt, with many even expressing a preference for blended learning for English language acquisition. Improving the English learning process requires an integrated approach that includes the active participation of students, teachers, and the entire educational system.

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