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BLENDED COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AS A STRATEGY FOR COMPENSATING LIMITED INSTRUCTIONAL TIME IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In contemporary higher education, foreign language teaching increasingly takes place under conditions of reduced instructional time, which has a particularly noticeable impact on the development of communicative competence. The decrease in the number of synchronous classes, the shift towards digital formats, and the growing emphasis on learner autonomy highlight the need for pedagogical models that not only optimise the use of time but also preserve the communicative orientation of language education. In this context, blended learning in foreign language education is viewed as an effective strategy for compensating for limited instructional time. Its potential lies not in the mechanical combination of different formats, but in the purposeful redistribution of instructional functions between synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning.

When combined with the communicative approach to language teaching (Communicative Language Teaching, CLT), blended learning makes it possible to move the presentation of instructional content and initial work with linguistic form into the asynchronous online environment, while reserving synchronous time for meaningful interaction, negotiation of meaning, and the development of communicative competence. This approach can be conceptualised as Blended Communicative Language Teaching (Blended CLT) – a model of foreign language instruction in which different online formats do not function in parallel, but are integrated into a

unified didactic system aimed at maximising the communicative value of each instructional hour.

Blended CLT is defined as a model of foreign language instruction that combines synchronous communicative interaction with technologically supported asynchronous tasks designed to prepare for, extend, and consolidate communication. Unlike traditional interpretations of blended learning, which are sometimes reduced to supplementing face-to-face instruction with digital materials, Blended CLT is grounded in a core principle of Communicative Language Teaching: language is acquired most effectively through meaningful use in social contexts. Within this model, the digital component does not serve a merely auxiliary or purely informational function. Its primary purpose is to create conditions for increasing the amount of comprehensible input, organising structured practice, and preparing learners for communicative performance. Synchronous instructional time, which represents a scarce resource, is therefore reserved for communicative output, interaction, and formative feedback.

An important theoretical foundation of Blended CLT is the distinction between linguistic input and interaction. Under conditions of limited instructional time, it is inefficient to use synchronous sessions for activities that learners can complete independently, such as vocabulary memorisation, explanations of grammatical rules, or checks of general text comprehension. Shifting these components to the asynchronous online environment makes it possible to preserve synchronous time for activities that require genuine interaction, including pair and group work, role plays, discussions, and problem-based tasks. In this way, Blended CLT directly addresses the challenge of time constraints by increasing the overall volume of communicative activity without expanding the number of instructional hours.

The practical foundation of Blended CLT is the flipped classroom model, whose logic aligns organically with the principles of communicative pedagogy. In foreign language education, this means that learners engage with linguistic content prior to the synchronous session, while shared instructional time is devoted to the active use of the language. The pre-synchronous online component may include short instructional videos, guided reading or listening activities, preliminary vocabulary input, as well as micro-explanations of grammatical phenomena. It is essential that such

materials be concise, purposeful, and oriented towards subsequent communicative performance rather than the accumulation of information. The most effective pre-synchronous tasks are those that directly generate a communicative outcome during the synchronous session. For example, learners may work with authentic video or textual materials and prepare arguments for discussion, or acquire functional language needed for role plays, negotiations, or collaborative decision-making. In this format, the online component becomes an integral stage of the task cycle rather than an isolated form of “homework”.

One of the key limitations of traditional face-to-face foreign language instruction is the restricted number of opportunities for speaking available to each learner, particularly in large classes. Blended CLT addresses this issue through asynchronous speaking practice, which expands the communicative space beyond the synchronous session. Asynchronous speaking tasks may include voice messages, audio journals, short monologues, recorded dialogues, or mini-podcasts. This format allows learners to practice oral production regularly without requiring the simultaneous participation of all students. It increases the frequency of language output, provides opportunities for repeated practice and self-monitoring, and, for some learners, reduces foreign language anxiety. Moreover, asynchronous activities generate digital artifacts that can be used for formative assessment, feedback, and tracking progress. To maintain communicative authenticity, such tasks should be oriented towards real communicative goals: responding, arguing, explaining a position, informing, or persuading. This ensures that asynchronous practice is aligned with the principles of CLT, which focus on meaning, intention, and the functional use of language.

The effectiveness of Blended CLT largely depends on a clear instructional design, which ensures a logical interaction between the pre-, during-, and post-synchronous phases. Pre-synchronous tasks establish the linguistic and cognitive foundation for communication; synchronous sessions focus on interaction, negotiation of meaning, and spontaneous language production; post-synchronous tasks promote reflection, consolidation, and metacognitive awareness of learning outcomes. This cyclical structure ensures the continuity of communicative practice and the integration of all components into a unified system.

Assessment in Blended CLT is primarily formative and aimed at supporting the learning process. Short online tasks can be used to check comprehension and consolidate material, whereas synchronous time is most appropriately devoted to assessing communicative competence. The use of clear criteria, self- and peer-assessment, as well as digital language artifacts, allows for the objectivity and systematicity of assessment even under conditions of limited instructional time.

Despite its considerable didactic potential, the implementation of Blended CLT in foreign language teaching is accompanied by a number of challenges and limitations. One key issue is unequal access to technological resources and stable internet connectivity, which can negatively affect the regular completion of asynchronous tasks and reduce the overall effectiveness of the model. Under such conditions, the digital component, instead of compensating for time constraints, may exacerbate educational inequality.

Another significant challenge is the level of learner autonomy and self-discipline. The logic of Blended CLT requires active participation in pre-synchronous work; superficial or formal completion undermines the integrity of the learning cycle and diminishes the communicative value of synchronous sessions. This is particularly relevant for learners with underdeveloped self-regulated learning skills.

A further concern is the risk of cognitive overload. In the absence of a clear instructional design, instructors may attempt to compensate for time constraints by assigning an excessive number of online tasks, which can lead to decreased motivation, fragmentation of the learning experience, and a formal approach to task completion. In this context, the quantity of digital activities should yield to their didactic appropriateness.

Challenges also arise at the level of teaching competence. Implementing Blended CLT requires not only proficiency with digital tools but also the ability to design communicative tasks integrated into a unified learning cycle. The transition from the role of a knowledge transmitter to that of an interaction facilitator demands methodological reorientation and additional professional development.

Blended Communicative Language Teaching can be considered an effective strategy for compensating for limited instructional time in foreign language learning, particularly in the context of increasing online and

asynchronous interaction. The integration of communicative approach principles with the affordances of digital environments allows for the optimization of task allocation and focuses synchronous time on activities of high communicative value.

Blended CLT facilitates an increase in overall language practice without formally expanding instructional workload, supports the development of learner autonomy, and creates conditions for more systematic formative assessment. Asynchronous speaking practice, the flipped learning approach, and cyclical task design contribute to the continuity of communicative development and enhance the efficiency of every instructional hour.

The success of this model depends on careful instructional planning, the seamless integration of online and synchronous components, and the readiness of both learners and instructors to assume new roles in the learning process. When implemented effectively, Blended CLT offers a sustainable approach to addressing the challenges of language instruction in higher education, rather than serving merely as a temporary solution to time constraints.