

Blended learning means blended pace

Jérôme COLLIN (France) – Département Langue française, Ecole de guerre (Paris)

Blended or hybrid learning is likely to become the norm. As language center leaders, what position should we take on blended learning, what criteria should we use to choose between distance learning and online learning to make blended learning as effective as possible?

Spatio-temporal situations of classroom learning and distance learning

The classroom is a **common space** gathering the students and the teacher. But as soon as a dialogue is established between the teacher and the students, the common space becomes fragmented into as many spaces as there are possible dialogues. What is already difficult to manage in the classroom space becomes extremely difficult to manage in distance learning.

The classroom space can also be a space where the student group separates from the teacher. The work of officers **in pairs or triads** will be much more effective in distance learning, when the software allows the formation of small groups, because each small group becomes independent and the discussions of one does not disturb the others.

In distance learning, the **autonomy of the whole group** is more difficult to obtain, in this case, since the group is in its very nature fragmented.

The difference between **classroom space and home** no longer exists in the case of distance learning, it is only a temporal difference between online and offline time.

Differences and benefits of each of the two modes of teaching in each of the four skills

Distance learning allows us to switch from classroom work to homework as many times as desired, which can be very effective for **listening**. Distance learning also makes it possible to multiply real face-to-face situations with the teacher during which the student also improves his oral comprehension in an interactive situation.

Speaking in distance learning, whatever the software, fragments speaking time, makes each intervention more individual and more formal, and keeps everyone from confronting the living presence of the interlocutors. With Zoom, you learn to monologue with images, not talk with people.

In addition to better time management for **reading** and working through texts with the teacher, distance learning also allows the student to become familiar with immediate communication writing, such as chatrooms, which require immediate understanding and response.

This also applies to **writing**: distance learning allows students to learn how to write emails, use chatrooms or *WhatsApp*, which is a much more authentic use of writing than writing an essay or a summary in a classroom or at home.

One could say that distance learning is winning! But no: blended learning is the winner, since speaking remains the main skill in any foreign language learning, and we never speak better than all together in the same shared space.

- Distance learning, which is more recent than classroom learning, should not suffer from a feeling of inferiority.
- It should not try to imitate, through technological wonders, the teaching in the classroom.
- It corresponds to a new era, with its new constraints and new possibilities, and also corresponds to a new use of the language.
- It offers a specific space and temporality, different from the space and temporality of the classroom.
- Therefore, each activity will have to choose distance learning or classroom teaching according to their specific time and space requirements.
- It is the new role of language center heads to progressively and systematically encourage blended learning, and to help teachers make distance learning not a constraint, but a pedagogical choice.