

## **Session 5: Blended Learning with CALL**

### **Understanding the Role of CALL in Blended Learning Environments**

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#### **Introduction to Blended Learning**

In recent years, blended learning has emerged as a highly effective approach that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with technology-based learning experiences. This method offers the best of both worlds by incorporating the benefits of both online and in-person learning environments. For language learners, the integration of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) into blended learning models provides a unique opportunity to enhance language acquisition through interactive, autonomous, and collaborative tools (Sharma & Barrett, 2007).

In this lesson, we will explore how CALL is applied within blended learning environments, examining its impact on student engagement and achievement. We'll review key concepts of CALL, its role in modern language classrooms, and analyze empirical studies that demonstrate its effectiveness in promoting active learning.

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#### **What is Blended Learning?**

Blended learning refers to a teaching approach that combines face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning activities. This model allows students to engage in self-paced, technology-mediated activities outside the classroom, thus maximizing learning opportunities. The technology component may include video

lectures, online quizzes, forums, and other interactive materials that complement in-person lessons (Sharma & Barrett, 2007).

In the context of language learning, CALL is an essential tool in blended learning models. By using digital resources such as language software, mobile applications, and online platforms, language learners can practice reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills independently. The face-to-face component then allows students to apply and refine these skills in a structured environment under the guidance of a teacher.

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## **The Role of CALL in Blended Learning**

### **1. Enhancing Learner Autonomy**

One of the key advantages of incorporating CALL into blended learning is its ability to promote learner autonomy. CALL tools provide students with the flexibility to learn at their own pace and access a wide range of materials tailored to their individual needs. This allows learners to take more control over their education, choosing when and how they study (Sharma & Barrett, 2007).

For instance, language learning applications such as Duolingo and Babbel offer personalized learning paths based on the user's level, preferences, and goals. These tools enable students to practice language skills outside the classroom, thus enhancing their learning experience. Research shows that this increased autonomy results in improved student motivation and engagement (Gong, Liu, & Zhao, 2018).

## **2. Providing Immediate Feedback**

CALL tools often provide instant feedback to learners, helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses in real-time. In traditional classroom settings, students may have to wait for teacher evaluations, but with CALL, they can receive immediate responses to their exercises. This feedback loop is essential in language acquisition, as it helps students correct mistakes and reinforce learning quickly (Gong et al., 2018).

For example, interactive exercises on platforms like Quizlet or language software like Rosetta Stone allow learners to receive immediate feedback on their answers, making it easier to track progress and address errors. This not only accelerates learning but also helps students develop greater confidence in their language abilities.

## **3. Facilitating Collaborative Learning**

While CALL is often used for individual learning, it also supports collaborative activities that promote communication and interaction among students. Many CALL tools include features such as discussion forums, group projects, and real-time communication platforms, allowing learners to work together and practice their language skills in a social context (Sharma & Barrett, 2007).

Online language exchange platforms like Tandem or HelloTalk enable learners to connect with native speakers or fellow learners worldwide, fostering a sense of community and enhancing conversational skills. Collaborative learning in this context helps students gain valuable cultural insights and improve their language proficiency by interacting with real people in authentic communication scenarios.

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## **A Key Study on Blended Learning with CALL**

An important empirical study by Gong, Liu, and Zhao (2018) highlights the effectiveness of CALL in promoting student engagement and achievement in blended learning environments. The study found that the integration of CALL tools into a blended learning framework significantly increased student motivation and performance. The use of learning analytics allowed instructors to track student progress and adapt the course content to meet their needs, resulting in a more personalized and effective learning experience.

### **Findings of the Study:**

- **Increased Student Engagement:** The use of CALL tools in a blended learning model enhanced student participation and motivation. Students reported that the interactive nature of the technology made learning more enjoyable and accessible.
  - **Improved Academic Achievement:** Students who engaged with CALL tools performed better on language assessments compared to those who relied solely on traditional methods. The real-time feedback and adaptive learning features of the technology contributed to this success (Gong et al., 2018).
  - **Personalized Learning Paths:** Learning analytics allowed instructors to monitor individual student performance and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. This ensured that each student received the support they needed to succeed.
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## **Practical Applications of CALL in Blended Learning**

**1. Language Learning Platforms:** Platforms like Duolingo, Babbel, and Memrise offer interactive, gamified learning experiences that engage students outside the classroom. These platforms are widely used in blended learning environments to supplement classroom instruction.

**2. Mobile Applications:** Language learning apps on smartphones, such as Anki and Tandem, allow students to practice vocabulary and communication skills on the go. These tools are ideal for students who need flexible study options and prefer to learn at their own pace.

**3. Virtual Classrooms:** Tools like Zoom and Google Meet enable real-time communication between students and teachers in a blended learning environment. These platforms are essential for synchronous learning activities, such as virtual speaking practice or group discussions.

**4. Learning Management Systems (LMS):** Platforms like Moodle and Blackboard provide a centralized space where students can access course materials, participate in discussions, and submit assignments. LMS platforms are commonly used in blended learning environments to integrate online and face-to-face instruction seamlessly (Sharma & Barrett, 2007).

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## **Challenges of Implementing CALL in Blended Learning**

Despite the many benefits of CALL in blended learning, there are also challenges to consider.

**1. Technological Barriers:** Not all students have access to reliable internet connections or devices, which can limit their ability to fully engage with CALL tools. Schools and institutions need to address these issues to ensure equal access to learning opportunities.

**2. Teacher Training:** Instructors need to be proficient in using CALL tools to effectively integrate them into their teaching. This requires ongoing professional development and support for teachers who may not be familiar with the latest technology (Sharma & Barrett, 2007).

**3. Balancing Face-to-Face and Online Learning:** Finding the right balance between in-person instruction and online learning can be challenging. Teachers need to carefully plan their lessons to ensure that both components complement each other and provide a cohesive learning experience.

### **Blended Learning in Iran**

Blended learning, a hybrid model combining traditional face-to-face education with online components, has gained traction in Iran in recent years, particularly in higher education. It offers a flexible approach to learning by integrating the strengths of in-person teaching with the advantages of digital platforms. This model has proven especially useful in a country where access to education varies greatly depending on geographical location, socio-economic factors, and resources available to students.

In Iran, the adoption of blended learning has been primarily influenced by the rapid development of digital infrastructure and the increasing accessibility of the internet. Universities and educational institutions have integrated Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Moodle, Blackboard, and locally developed

platforms, allowing for both synchronous and asynchronous learning. This transition has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced educational institutions worldwide, including Iran, to rethink their traditional teaching methods.

One of the significant advantages of blended learning in Iran is its ability to bridge the educational gap between urban and rural areas. In remote regions, where qualified teachers may not always be available, online resources and virtual lessons can supplement local education. Students can access high-quality educational content, interact with instructors from across the country, and collaborate with peers through discussion forums, video lectures, and online assignments. This model also accommodates different learning paces, as students can revisit digital material to better grasp challenging concepts, something that isn't always possible in purely traditional classrooms.

Furthermore, blended learning has fostered innovation in teaching practices within Iran. Teachers are now incorporating a wider range of pedagogical strategies, including flipped classrooms, project-based learning, and peer assessment, enabled by digital tools. This not only improves student engagement but also allows for more personalized instruction. Teachers can monitor student progress more closely through online quizzes and assignments, adapting their teaching strategies to better meet individual needs.

However, the implementation of blended learning in Iran also faces several challenges. One of the main issues is the digital divide—while urban centers like Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan enjoy relatively stable internet access, rural areas often struggle with poor connectivity. This disparity limits the reach of blended

learning, as students in remote locations may not have the same opportunities to participate in online classes or access digital resources.

Another challenge is the need for teacher training. Many educators, particularly those accustomed to traditional methods, require additional support to effectively utilize blended learning tools. Workshops and training programs have been initiated to familiarize teachers with online platforms and digital pedagogy, but there is still a need for more extensive professional development.

Cultural factors also play a role in the acceptance of blended learning. In Iran, the traditional classroom environment, with direct interaction between students and teachers, is highly valued. Some parents and educators are skeptical of the efficacy of online education, fearing that it may not provide the same level of discipline and engagement as in-person learning. Overcoming these perceptions requires demonstrating the effectiveness of blended learning through continuous assessments and showcasing its benefits in improving student outcomes.

Despite these challenges, blended learning in Iran continues to grow, with support from the government and educational institutions. The Ministry of Education has been proactive in promoting e-learning initiatives, particularly in response to the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Universities have also increased investment in digital infrastructure, aiming to offer more blended learning programs across various fields of study. As technology becomes more accessible and widespread, it is likely that blended learning will become a permanent fixture in Iran's educational landscape, offering a more flexible and inclusive approach to learning.

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## Conclusion

Blended learning with CALL represents a dynamic and effective approach to language education. By combining traditional teaching methods with technology, students benefit from increased autonomy, immediate feedback, and collaborative learning opportunities. As research shows, the integration of CALL tools into blended learning environments significantly enhances student engagement and achievement. However, successful implementation requires addressing challenges such as technological barriers and teacher training. Moving forward, the role of CALL in blended learning will continue to evolve, offering exciting possibilities for language learners and educators alike.

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## References (APA 7th)

Gong, L., Liu, Y., & Zhao, W. (2018, July). Using learning analytics to promote student engagement and achievement in blended learning: An empirical study. In *Proceedings of the 2018 2nd International Conference on E-Education, E-Business and E-Technology* (pp. 19-24).

Sharma, P., & Barrett, B. (2007). *Blended learning: Using technology in and beyond the language classroom*. Macmillan.

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## Further Study References

- Chapelle, C. A. (2003). *English language learning and technology*. John Benjamins.

- Dudeney, G., & Hockly, N. (2012). *How to teach English with technology*. Pearson Education.
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## 10 Questions for Further Reflection

1. What are the main benefits of using CALL in blended learning environments?
2. How does CALL promote learner autonomy in language learning?
3. In what ways does immediate feedback from CALL tools improve language acquisition?
4. How can collaborative learning be enhanced through CALL tools?
5. What were the key findings of Gong, Liu, and Zhao's (2018) study on CALL and blended learning?
6. What challenges do educators face when implementing CALL in blended learning models?
7. How can learning analytics be used to personalize student learning experiences in CALL environments?
8. What role do mobile applications play in supporting language learners in a blended learning environment?
9. What are some potential solutions to overcome technological barriers in CALL?
10. How can teachers effectively balance face-to-face instruction with online learning in a blended learning model?