REDUCING THE ROLE OF AFFECTIVE FACTORS IN BLENDED LEARNING SETTINGS

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Introduction. In newly emerging reality teachers are demanded not only to be ready to switch from traditional to blended learning but to be ready to cope with all additional affective factors that arise whithin the process as well as to help students to reduce their negative impact.

Blended learning, or the integration of face-to-face and online instruction, is widely implemented in higher education with some scholars referring to it as the "new normal" in course delivery (Norberg, 2011). However, it is not new as its modality dates back to the medieval period. It has become the subject of careful study for many scholars and researchers: R. Bernard, E. Borokhovski, D.Garrison, J. Hartman, K. Kraiger, Moskal, P., M. Oliver, R. Schmid, R. Stewart, K.Trigwell, R.Wisher and others. The considerable influence of affective factors in a learning process was observed in the works of P. Bailey, H. Brown, R. Ellis, R. Gardner, H. Holly, E. Horwitz, R. Liebert, L. Morris, D. Young, etc. Nonetheless, the question of effective ways to reduce affective factors in blended learning settings still needs further consideration which makes it the aim of the study.

Research methodology and discussion. Students' learning process and their outcomes might be influenced by affective factors, i.e. the set of emotions and attitudes people have about themselves or the surrounding environment: emotions, feelings, mood, manners, attitudes, etc. The Affective Filter Hypothesis (Waltz, 2019) shows that the emotional factors strongly affect the learners' input and how much input is converted into intake.

When high level of motivation and self-confidence and a low level of anxiety are posed by students, they are considered to have low filters and so receive and take in a lot of input and vice versa. A low filter should be created and advocated for the effective language teaching and assessing.

Among the wide range of affective factors existing, the main that influence students' learning and testing process include motivation, self-esteem, inhibition, attitude, risk-taking and anxiety.

Motivation, i.e. the process by which goal-directed behaviour of students is stimulated, is the factor that highly affects the students' input and intake.

Researches show that motivation highly influences frequentness of students' usage of foreign language learning (FLL) strategies and the amount of the input they receive from language learning. Motivation has a great impact on students' general proficiency level and time they maintain FLL skills after language study is over.

Self-esteem is the overall self-confidence and self-respect level a person has, it also can highly influence FLL and its results. A person's self-esteem may be reflected in their behaviour, such as in assertiveness, shyness, confidence or caution. It is already clear that a student who feels confident is more likely to succeed.

H. Holly compiled a summary of many studies and pointed out that most of them indicated that self-esteem is the result rather than the cause of academic achievement. In addition, M. Covington (1976) concludes that "…self-esteem can be modified through direct instruction and that such instruction can lead to achievement gains". Lack of students' confidence can raise their feeling of timidity and make unable to express their own opinion during the lesson. Accordingly, teachers should create atmosphere that will help students boost confidence and lead them to success.

Inhibition, i.e. an act of avoidance and concession taken to protect oneself, correlates with self-esteem: the higher self-esteem is, the lower walls of inhibition and the greater success in learning a foreign language. Inhibited students feel less capable than their peers, they are afraid of making mistakes, but obviously successful learning of a foreign language is impossible without making mistakes and the teachers' aim should be to prove this.

Attitude is a factor that involves students' feelings and thoughts about the teacher, peers or learning materials. Positive attitude towards anyone/anything will definitely have a positive effect on students' continuous results and achievements, whereas real obstacles on the way to acquire a language will block learners' motivation. Hence, it takes positive attitude to raise learners' efficiency in FLL.

Risk-taking is one of the important parts in SLA which is built in the individuals as they grow: society, parents, family, friends, environment certainly take part in the making up of the individual itself and form the attitude of language learners. According to H. Brown (2007), "…interaction requires the risk of failing to produce intended meaning, of failing to interpret intended meaning, of being laughed at, of being shunned or rejected. The rewards, of course, are great and worth the risks". Having a strong intention of achieving success in learning, students endeavour for mastering. Although it may be impulsive and too awkward to make a mistake, a good learner should require this characteristic to succeed in SLA.

Anxiety, which is generally treated as an emotion characterized by an unpleasant state of internal shocks, often accompanied by nervous behaviour (Krashen, 1982), has a devastating effect on students' performance especially in oral communication: anxious students feel nervous attending the class and are afraid to cooperate with peers, the teacher or the given task, or concentrate directly on the learning process.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2019) defines blended learning as "…a way of studying a subject that combines being taught in class with the use of different technologies, including learning over the Internet". *Undoubtedly, this type of learning enables a teacher be more collaborative during class time. Although some technology tools can be overwhelming, there are six basic learning models and platforms to incorporate blended learning into the classroom:*

Flipped Classroom (a pedagogical model in which the lecture and homework has actually been reversed): the classroom lecture is viewed at home either through online videos or video podcasts. Afterwards, students interact with each other through

a discussion forum and note questions that they have from the lecture and the home assignment is then completed in the classroom.

Project-Based Learning (a learning model which provides students with series of activities that allows them to study, do research and act by themselves using their abilities, interests, personal experience and aptitudes to seek answers to a real world challenge or problem). It progresses under the guidance of an educator in terms of the topic, how to manage the data collection process, and planning. It provides students with skills to question, analyze, evaluate information, create new ideas in such a way that it leads them to higher-order thinking.

Moodle (a course management system that gives teachers options to post assignments, lectures, videos, and much more). Students can interact with each other through discussion forums, private messaging and chat rooms. Students have the ability to upload completed assignments by attaching files. Grades are added to the gradebook on the same site and students can also view feedback given by the teacher.

Blogging (writing, photography, and other media that is self-published online) promotes autonomous learning by providing opportunities for students to take more control of their learning; shapes new literacies which include things like digital citizenship, curation, critical evaluation, visual literacies etc., and essential skills like problem solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness; promotes discussion among students in a more comfortable and familiar way; encourages the use of the Internet and the Web among students and teachers.

Social Media Blending. By integrating social media, students can show mastery of content through a variety of digital tools such as blogging, Instagram, Telegram or video conferencing. Classmates have the option to constantly share knowledge and interact with each other well beyond the hours spent in the classroom and online discussions can become engaging.

Khan Academy (a set of online tools that help educate students by means of short lessons in the form of videos) is a good website to use within the classroom for students that either need remediation or acceleration, so teachers have a chance to differentiate a classroom and engage every student. Teachers have the option to

monitor each student's progress by accessing data on completed exercises. The data indicates areas of strengths as well as problematic areas.

While implementing blended learning, a variety of affective factors can be triggered by a range of reasons among which we can distinguish: unfamiliar format / learning surrounding (an inability or lack of skills to work with digital technology); individual qualities of a test-taker (lack of topical and language knowledge, personal traits, absence of strategic competence, etc.); unknown content (the test involves content that has not been taught in class, or that was not full and comprehensive); complicated and unfamiliar task/ test format (e.g. students are not accustomed to online tasks completion, lack of skills of processing online information, poor skills of interaction, etc.); inadequate time limiting (especially if students are mediocre, or have specific temperamental moods, etc.); lack of clear criteria for assessment.

When blended learning takes place, task completion and assessment remain an inevitable component to check the depth of students' learning. However, if it has never been practiced, there is a chance that students might fight their way through the technical tool they must use to perform the task, they need to adjust traditional learning patterns, as a result, a student might feel frustrated and anxious.

To make blended learning work well, to cover a large amount of course material, to improve test performance , to make learners take responsibility for their education, the following blended learning guidelines should be taken into account:

Explain the choice: it is essential to provide students with clear explanation what blended learning is exactly and why it is beneficial in terms of learners' pace, strengths, interests, outcomes, etc.

Be diverse: While some students prefer to learn by reading, others get better results by doing. Including diverse activities such as group discussions, online quizzes, games and even role playing drives learners' engagement at higher levels.

Control attendance and reduce students' absences and delays: whatever the learning format is, the teacher should monitor attendance and try to restrain absenteeism and delays, as those who attend classes regularly are more likely to receive higher grades due to lack of knowledge gaps.

Create the environment: when the students get acquainted with their new learning environment, it will definitely help them to visualize the setting ahead of time, making it more comfortable and to reduce the distractions of a new setting.

Train learning strategies: students should be acquainted with different types of tasks and ways to perform them: the skills required to carry out tasks successfully will teach students to think critically and help in further learning.

Increase students' motivation and develop students' self-esteem. Students' sense of achievement is strongly affected by the information they get from the teacher and their peers in face-to-face or online classroom. Teachers should realize that they influence not only students' academic performance but also their emotional states. Create such atmosphere that will build students' confidence, decrease anxiety.

Emphasise on preparation: the more time learners dedicate for preparation and learning the material, the less anxious they will be during a lesson or test.

Make adjustments: after analysing the educational resources, teachers can always identify the areas that need more attention. To this end, it is possible to create "problem" groups where students who have not mastered the material cooperate with those who have mastered it well. A great solution is to establish additional repetition of a theme/chapter/unit, additional self-preparation in a traditional classroom, etc.

Exclude comparisons. Students tend to experience anxiety when they are compared with others and found less proficient. Accordingly, they should be taught not to compare but to focus on their own learning process and achievements.

Apply positive attitude: communicate positively and constructively, without use of judgement and labelling. It is important for students to know that the teacher, apart from being their mentor, is their supporter and inspirer. A positive attitude towards anyone/anything will definitely boost continuous results and achievements.

Leverage media: it is effective to use engaging videos instead of whiteboard questions. Apply user-friendly and fun online platforms that can help learners master their language skills such as *Kahoot!, Lyrics Training, Quizlet* or *Storybird*, etc. They are excellent for consolidating information, help learners improve their language

skills in an enjoyable, immersive way, allow discussion and debate, where teachers can contribute to the conversation and correct errors where needed.

Moreover, teachers can use them as a distance learning tool by sharing their screens live from home, or sending students a link to practice as homework. The level of difficulty and the way students work with the tasks can be selected to respond students' abilities.

Conclusions. Overall, blended learning offers many opportunities for both teachers and students that a traditional classroom may not. With the increasing demands to education standards and unpredictable changes of modern world, blended learning permits students to learn a portion of the academic content at home and gives teachers the ability to engage students in a richer, deeper, and more meaningful context in the classroom.

It also enables teachers to facilitate student mastery of content with enriching learning activities introduced and completed when the class meets face-to-face in a traditional classroom. Moreover, digital inclusion helps to reduce negative influence of affective factors, it encourages students and helps them to achieve better results.

By practicing these, teachers can witness increased learners' engagement and motivation, greater capacity for learning, greater knowledge transfer, improved attitudes towards learning, reduced levels of stress and test anxiety, increased levels of self-confidence, better students' achievements.

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