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DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

“Blend it!”

Blended Learning Methods in the EFL Classroom

Verfasserin

Magdalena Innerhuber, BEd

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2014

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 190 344 333

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

UF Englisch UF Deutsch

Betreuerin:

Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Christiane Dalton-Puffer

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I confirm to have conceived and written this Diploma Thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references, either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors have been truthfully acknowledged in the bibliography.

Magdalena Innerhuber

Vienna, March 2014

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Special thanks to...

Ich möchte mich hier gerne bei einigen Menschen bedanken, ohne die ich dieses Lehramtsstudium und speziell auch diese Diplomarbeit nie in dieser Zeit und mit dem Erfolg geschafft hätte.

Zunächst einmal möchte ich mich bei meinen Eltern und meiner gesamten Familie bedanken, die mich bei allen meinen Entscheidungen rund um mein Leben immer unterstützen und mich immer wieder ermutigen, alles erreichen zu können.

Danke an meine Direktorin Sr. M. Margret Grill von den Fachschulen Erla und danke an meine Kolleginnen, die mir nicht nur durch Freistellungen vom Unterricht, sondern auch mit vielen Tipps und Tricks rund um die Arbeit und das Studium immer wieder aufmunternd geholfen haben. Ohne die Schwestern, die Schülerinnen und die gesamte Schule hätte ich mein Projekt „Moodle“ für diese Arbeit nie durchführen können. Danke hier speziell an Sr. M. Rosa Wieser für die Entscheidung eine Lernplattform anzuschaffen, Mag. Andrea Kastenberger fürs Korrekturlesen und Mag. Margit Rinnerberger für die Unterstützung bei computerspezifischen Fragen.

Special Thanks to Mag. Dr. Helen Heaney BA for her advice, her knowledge, inspiration and help and for being so uncomplicated, but also for being so accurate. Without her I would not have had the opportunity to write about this topic – she inspired me to choose a topic which enriched my teaching and she helped me with all her experience. Thanks to Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Christiane Dalton-Puffer for giving me the opportunity to write about the topic, for being the backup in the background and my official adviser.

List of abbreviations

BL	Blended Learning
CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CBT	Computer-Based Training
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CMS	Content/Course Management System
DOCX	Microsoft Word document
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELP	European Language Portfolio
ELT	English Language Teaching
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IT	Information Technology
L2	Second language
LMS	Learning Management System
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
PDF	Portable Document Format
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SLL	Second Language Learning
SLT	Second Language Teaching
TBI	Task-Based Instruction
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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Introduction

A year ago I had to take a special course at University as part of my teacher training. I decided to enrol in a course called Specific Issues in EFL Teaching – Innovative Approaches. In this course I started to think about this topic intensively and I wondered what really counts as an innovative approach. I also discovered and experienced the intensive use of a learning platform. After this course I came to the conclusion that for anything to count as innovative it has to be something that students usually do not do every day in school or at home. It has to be something that interests them and caters for different needs and language abilities.

I also thought intensely about how to integrate such innovative approaches into my own teaching and when I gained more insights into using technology, especially into learning via learning platforms like Moodle, I was convinced that this could be the innovative approach for me and my class. I have always been fond of working with computers. However, in this particular field I was afraid of making mistakes, and administering the whole learning platform was a big challenge. Firstly, I did not know exactly what Blended Learning actually is and why such hype has risen around this topic. Secondly, I was not sure how my colleagues and pupils would contribute to and enjoy working with the platform in the end. Nevertheless, I was determined to make the best of it and I realised the great potential for learning and teaching. After a while designing online materials and activities was challenging and fun, too.

The aim of this paper is twofold, first to show how blended learning relates to common theories about learning in general and about language learning in particular to justify its use in the language classroom. The second aim is to provide ideas how to introduce, integrate and maintain a learning platform like Moodle in the language classroom to facilitate language learning. There will also be a third part, namely an evaluation after having worked with the platform for one semester, and the experience gained will be summed up at the end when comparing the results to the theory.

The first chapter gives a detailed overview of recent discussions on and definitions about Blended Learning (BL) including clarification of the diverse

terms in this field. Additionally, some factors are examined for establishing Blended Learning in a classroom as well as its benefits and drawbacks. To lay the basis for further discussion the definitions are evaluated and some fears and future perspectives are presented. However, as research on this topic is rather in its beginnings the main experts in this field, Sharma and Barrett (2007), are mostly used to find explicit and most recent definitions. Also more theoretical papers and publications about this topic are rather difficult to find.

In chapters two and three Blended Learning will be related to learning theories and common language teaching models. General theories about learning will not be excluded because they might provide basic principles for using an online learning environment, like the learning platform Moodle. The focus will be on those learning and teaching theories which can be incorporated to facilitate language knowledge through Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) and Blended Learning. Therefore differences in learner individuality are explained and a brief overview of the development of learning theories for SLA and Blended Learning is also given. On the basis of the cognitive views and perspectives of learning, more focus is laid on the socio-cultural perspectives adapted from the ideas of constructivism. Lastly, motivation as a crucial part of learning is connected with humanistic theories. As communicative language teaching is a highly popular model when it comes to Second language learning (SLL) and Second language teaching (SLT) this concept is explained briefly and then two major concepts based on Communicative language teaching CLT are presented, namely task-based teaching and outcomes-based language teaching, with a focus on Blended Learning.

The fourth chapter focuses on methods, systems and approaches to Blended Learning and provides an overview of interesting teaching models when it comes to technology-based and Face-to-Face (F2F) teaching and learning. The world of Blended Learning is rather wide and therefore some of the main concepts, methods and approaches are explained and combined with some practical examples for the different language areas and language skills pupils have to acquire. The Internet in general is in focus as well as special office software and electronic formats of ELT materials. Finally, the chapter presents the theoretical

background to Learning Platforms and VLEs. All this is connected with the theories about learning and teaching presented before.

In the final part of this paper the practical project, Blended Learning in the language classroom, is presented. For one semester I worked with this teaching concept by combining F2F teaching with learning and teaching on the learning platform Moodle. First of all, I am going to present the school environment and the process of establishing the platform itself. A brief introduction to the main points and advantages, tasks, activities and main principles, as well as some theoretical knowledge about Moodle and course design and management, form the basis for the demonstration of the English course I developed for my class.

As an evaluation of teaching is always very important I wanted to investigate whether the concept worked from the pupils' point of view. Before I started my research project, I studied literature about research in classroom teaching and these findings are briefly presented in section 5.3. One of the two questionnaires was given to the pupils at the beginning of the term to see what kind of expectations the pupils have. The second questionnaire was given to them after one term of working with the BL concept. The findings are presented in the last part of this thesis. In the conclusion the findings are combined with the literature research and recent findings on the theories of BL presented before.

Finally I reflect on how they agree or disagree with my findings and why in the resume.

1 Blended Learning

This chapter should give a detailed overview of the definitions of Blended Learning and should raise awareness of why teachers should think about integrating this concept into their teaching. One of the main experts in the field of Blended Learning is Sharma (2010) and therefore his publications are the main sources used. However, some comparisons are drawn to other definitions and researchers and their opinions, too.

1.1 Definitions of Blended Learning

To begin with, it is very difficult to find a clear-cut definition of what Blended Learning really means because the term has been used in various areas. Sharma (2010: 456) is one of the main experts in this field but the fact that useful published material on Blended Learning is rather difficult to find also contributes to the fact that it is difficult to define. In connection with Blended Learning, some researchers also refer to the term “hybrid learning” (as for example Chew, Jones & Turner 2009: 40), which makes it even more difficult to find THE clear cut definition for both terms. It becomes even more confusing when the term e-learning is mentioned in connection with Blended Learning, as this term is probably more established and common for teachers and learners.¹ This sparks interest as to find out the actual differences between BL and e-learning. When it comes to the Austrian school system and its educational contexts Blended Learning might be the more appropriate term for the established models because e-learning would have to be limited to forms of learning and teaching that do without face-to-face meetings while Blended Learning, in contrast, is a mixture of different approaches. Therefore, Sharma (2010: 456) tries to differentiate between these three common definitions of Blended Learning, which are explained now in more detail and which are the foundation of this paper. After having read these definitions it could be argued that E-learning hardly happens in educational contexts like Austrian schools but that the more appropriate term must be BL.

¹ On 29 August 2013 the search engine Google found 249 000 Austrian websites mentioning “e-learning Schule” while, only 14 500 results for “Blended Learning Schule” were found. Thus I conclude that the term “e-learning” is more commonly used for what could also be labelled “Blended Learning” in Austrian schools.

One definition by Sharma (2010: 256) says that Blended Learning is a “combination of a number of pedagogic approaches, irrespective of the learning technology used”. This means that a course combines different approaches and methodologies ranging from “transmission to constructivist” which include and involve elements of the so-called “present-practice-produce methodology” as well as “task-based learning” (Sharma 2010: 256).² Likewise Mason (2005: 1) claims that Blended Learning does not always include technology but involves a mixture of inputs in various ways and with different approaches such that a variety of delivery modes are blended with each other. He even suggests that BL means that existing knowledge of students is blended with new information, or the ideas of a teacher and/or lecturer are combined with personal experience of the pupils. This is a rather broad definition because this involves blending nearly every classroom practice with another.

Sharma (2010: 256) then gives another explanation for Blended Learning. He says that this concept does not only involve a combination of methodologies but also a combination of “media and tools employed in an e-learning environment”. In such courses no face-to-face lessons occur but only pure distance learning. Communication between learner and teacher only takes place via different technologies, too, like email and internet telephony. This definition might be the closest one for e-learning as well, which would be rather an extreme form of BL. Therefore, the most helpful definition for this paper is the following one.

The most useful definition, and also the classic definition, provided by Sharma and Barrett (2007: 7), is that “Blended Learning refers to a language course which combines a face-to-face (F2F) classroom component with an appropriate use of technology”. F2F language lessons here mean the traditional learning situations in classroom teaching. When talking about technology they mean a wide range of recent technologies, such as CD-ROMs, interactive whiteboards or the internet. This term also includes the use of computers as a communication tool, via chat and email. There are a number of environments which enable teachers to create courses and Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) as well, like the learning platform Moodle, blogs or wikis. The use of other electronic tools

² These terms are explained in more detail later in this paper.

like I-Pads and Smartphones is also part of BL, because pupils can use chat rooms or bulletin boards on such devices, too. This is also one reason why the term Blended Learning is fundamental in this paper, in the first place to avoid confusion and in the second place because the virtual learning environment Moodle is of great importance.

To underline the relevance of BL for classroom teaching I am going to briefly summarise a range of meanings and several interpretations and definitions from other sources. This should emphasise the findings above and help to clarify the importance of this method. When browsing the internet a lot of definitions and explanations can be found. This does not mean that all of them are good definitions but they might be helpful to focus on the main one just presented.

In a glossary on the internet there is an entry which says that Blended Learning is a “combination of online and in-person, classroom learning activities” (Cyber Media Creations 2006: 1). This is a rather short and limited definition and does not include how this concept may function in reality.

The English version of Wikimedia says that Bended Learning is a

[...] formal education program in which a [pupil] learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path or pace. [This also means that] face-to-face classroom methods are combined with computer-mediated activities. (Wikimedia 2014)

This definition gives a bit more insight into what Blended Learning could mean and it also includes the autonomy of the learners involved as well as the combination of F2F learning and computer-assisted learning.

This makes one realise that BL can consist of various things and, therefore, using a computer, a laptop or even a Smartphone in order to do some research online or in order to do some exercises additionally to or in the lessons at school can count as Blended Learning as well. Also combining different teaching methods can be seen as part of the Blended Learning concept and after searching for and reading all these definitions, arguing that it is merely a label for what some teachers already do anyway would be not too wrong. This, however, can be

refuted because a BL course run without any principled approach may end up as rather a “mish-mash” (Sharma and Barrett 2007: 8).

When there is little or no relation between the online components of a course and the taught elements the learners may suffer the worst of both the e-learning world and the face-to-face scenario. Furthermore, there may be pupils who really enjoy face-to-face communication but only have to take part in web-based communication and the other way round. That is why online materials, additional activities and classroom components must be chosen carefully so that the learners have the opportunity to follow their interests, on the one hand to improve motivation and generate interest, and, on the other hand, to follow classroom principles, the learning aims and the curriculum, too.

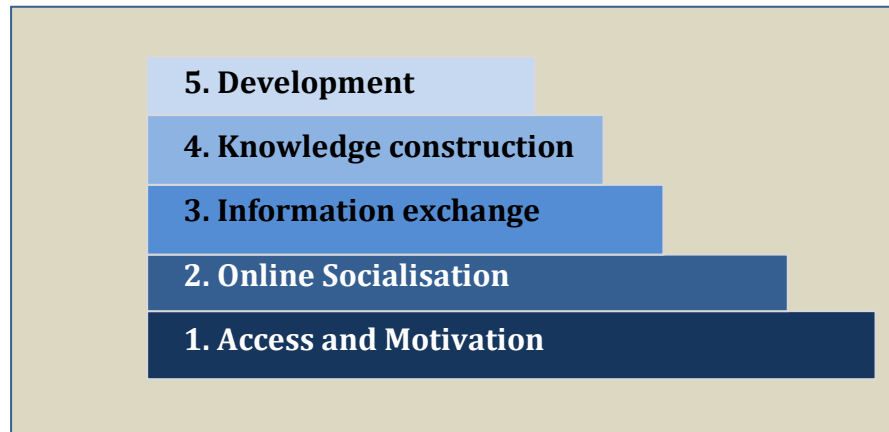
1.2 Didactic models for using Blended Learning

The above-mentioned definitions lead to another concept which is very closely linked to Blended Learning and has to be taken into consideration when talking about BL, namely, Salmon’s (2004) e-moderation and e-tivities, which might help to understand the concept of learning platforms and the organization of online learning materials a lot more.

Salmon is a famous researcher and practitioner on e-learning in the UK and has written various books on her model, which mainly focuses on online activities in combination with the use of online platforms like the learning platform Moodle. Her model, e-moderation or a model of teaching and learning online through online networking, is made up of five different stages, such as “access and motivation” and “online socialization” in which “the personal strength and knowledge within the individual learner is developed and constructed along the way” (Salmon 2004: 10). Although this programme is mainly suggested for e-learning and not for Blended Learning, in Section 5.2.2 a way of integrating this model in Blended Learning is shown in detail. Thus this concept could be a good guidance for introducing a learning platform in an EFL classroom. Salmon (2004: 10) says that participants of online learning can be supported through this structured programme. Each stage requires different “e-tivities” to assure the learning process. She also says that in such programmes one should always focus and build on the participants’ previous experiences: this is called “scaffolding”

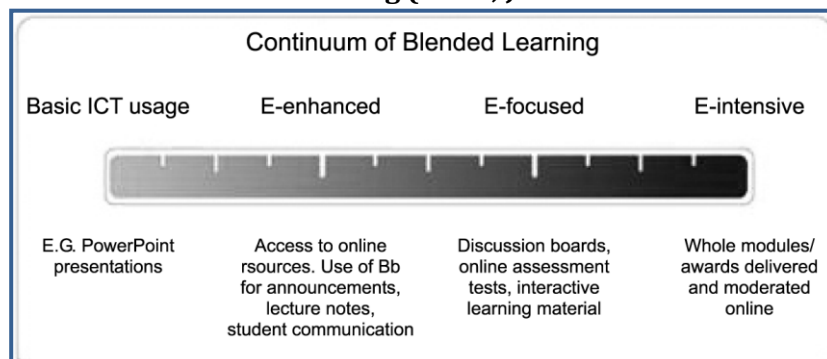
(Salmon 2004: 10). If the pupils are offered a structured learning scaffold they are able to develop expertise at each stage of the online learning process very quickly. As already mentioned, the pedagogical relevance for Blended Learning of the model established by Salmon and how this actually works in practice is going to be presented in more detail in Section 5.2.2, but Figure 1 shows the basic ideas and steps of the five-stage model.

Figure 1 Five-stage model



While this is a rather detailed model, also for teachers and the e-learning parts in Blended Learning as shown in 5.2.2 in more depth, Chew, Jones and Turner (2008: 46), for example, suggest that “the continuum of [B]lended [L]earning is a better guideline instead of a stage-like model [especially when it comes to] institutional wide adoption”. Jones is the Head of the Centre for Excellence for Learning and Teaching at the University of Glamorgan in the UK and for him the “Blended Learning Continuum” starts with the simple use of PowerPoint presentations, which is described as “Basic ICT usage” and moves on to “E-enhanced” and “E-focused” up to “E-intensive” usage, which is when whole modules of courses or classes are dealt with online (Chew, Jones & Turner 2008: 46). In Figure 2 this Blended Learning continuum is shown in more detail.

Figure 2 Continuum of Blended Learning (Chew, Jones & Turner 2008: 46)



E-intensive is the last category in this continuum where whole teaching and learning is delivered online after a F2F induction. Chew, Jones and Turner (2008: 46) argue that this continuum provides more flexibility for teachers to decide which aspects are best for their classes. This would fit the individual learners better than the five-stage model. However, as Communicative Language Teaching (see Section 3) should also be kept in mind and should also be included in the suggested Blended Learning approaches, the first Model seems to be more appropriate to me and for adoption in the classroom.

As can easily be seen, the different definitions and models already show how different the thoughts are on Blended Learning, and what it really is. What is important, though, is clear and in-depth considerations on the “appropriateness of each medium and the related matching of the delivery type to the learning activity” (Sharma 2010: 457). This means that not every activity or exercise can or should be dealt with online or through the use of technology in general. Pupils and students might favour one or the other delivery type and it could happen that the use of technology is not favoured by many of them or all of them. This is supposed to be considered as well and there Salmon’s model also seems to be more appropriate because the different stages also allow a lot of F2F communication and interaction. The students’ interests should be in the foreground in order to develop the various learning activities as effectively as possible.

1.3 Factors for adopting Blended Learning

It is worth thinking about the factors that influence the uptake of Blended Learning in general. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 12) suggest that these include “attitude, level, the volume and type of teacher training organized, [the teachers’] and [the] learners’ access to these resources, and cost”. The different attitudes towards technology of both teachers and pupils may be positive or negative or rather neutral. A small amount of healthy scepticism is necessary when it comes

to new technology but it is also important to consider all the positive effects and benefits. The learners' level might also influence which type of technology the teacher uses and how often it is used. A low-level learner, for example, might even need help when using a special computer program or starting an Internet Browser. Guided practice is necessary here while other pupils might be more familiar with a program or the computer.

Another vital factor in the uptake of new technology stated by Sharma and Barrett (2007: 12) is teacher training. Every teacher should have at least basic knowledge in using technology but many of them have troubles and fears with the incorporation of technology into their lessons because of missing skills. There should be more training because every teacher should know how to search the Web efficiently, how to create a worksheet and how to evaluate materials from the web. These are the so-called "core skills" (Sharma and Barrett 2007: 12). It is a teacher's job to be up to date concerning technology and to reach a basic level of efficiency. Also the pupils' media skills have to be taken into account. The use of technology in language classrooms gives them insight into where and why knowledge about and competences in technology are so important, especially also for their future careers and everyday life.

Some of the named factors might, of course, be more obvious than others, because, for example, the cost factor is always very important to the various schools, no matter which subject and issue. Teachers can hardly influence it. However, what I, as a future teacher, can influence is, for example, the attitude towards new approaches such as Blended Learning, and as mentioned several times already, I think that it is always good to be open-minded about new and innovative approaches to teaching that might help learners.

1.4 Benefits of using technology and Blended Learning in the EFL classroom

In the literature and everyday school life the term BL is used both positively and pejoratively (Sharma 2010: 457). Taking a close look at the benefits is necessary when deciding whether to use blended methods and approaches or not.

The first and, at least for me, one of the most important advantages of being a risk-taking and adventurous teacher and trying out something new like Blended Learning in the language classroom is that new methods and using technology can be very motivating for the pupils. As younger ones are already familiar with the latest technology available, being so-called “digital natives” (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 11), they simply like using the computer and laptops and they also “expect a [...] school to offer opportunities” (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 11) to do so. After all, we are living in the twenty-first century. The pupils like multimedia exercises and they can make choices about how to work through the materials provided on the learning platform for example. In the 1999 curriculum for pre-vocational schools, like my school, (*Lehrplan für die Einjährige Wirtschaftsfachschule aus 1999*) the integration of e-learning and new information and communication technologies is compulsory. Thus, teachers are actually forced to integrate technology into their teaching. Furthermore, it can help them to combine the best of their ideas with the best of technology and this will improve the learning outcomes of the digital natives.

Furthermore, many older workbooks do not cater for the different language abilities of the pupils. Some of the new editions at least try to contain activities and topics for different abilities and language levels. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 11) claim that through the use of computers and laptops and through various online exercises, if a lot of thought and time is invested in their development, it is possible to provide pupils with different exercises according to their needs and language levels. Pupils can access the online materials, for example, in a sequential or non-sequential way. They are allowed to navigate through the content in different ways. Some of them might want to obtain a global view before going into detail; others might need the detailed explanation beforehand. Information can be presented from various angles and the combination of elements such as quizzes, text, audio files, videos and interaction allows learning experiences for a wide range of different learning styles to be included. This can lead to a deeper understanding of the subject and to higher motivation in the pupils.

A recent study by Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariza (2010: 824) shows that BL can help to positively influence pupils' learning achievements and their final marks. When e-learning activities compliment traditional forms of learning, pupils may reach a higher degree of motivation and satisfaction, and this could lead students to have a positive attitude towards learning in general. The authors also found out that BL reinforces pupils' understanding of the subject and it enhances and supports the learning process of all different kinds of learner types. Especially those who enjoyed working independently benefited from blended activities. (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez & Rodriguez-Ariza 2010: 829)

The combination of F2F learning and online activities provided via a platform can thus cater for a variety of different learning styles and types. BL is a very successful approach but not only because of the simple integration of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in traditional teaching but also because it provides greater opportunities to extend and comprehend existing knowledge, and the BL resources help to change learning patterns and practices, too. (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez & Rodriguez-Ariza 2010: 818). Using technology and web-based exercises can be more efficient for the individual learner than paper-based ones. Every pupil has the possibility to work on the exercises for themselves, at their own pace, place and no one misses out something or is overruled by anybody, as is often the case in group works and in an average classroom. The pupils' attitude towards learning a foreign language in a blended way can also be changed because of a new way of giving feedback to pupils via new Blended Learning methods like a learning platform, because it is probably more visible to them in such a way.

As Hattie (2012: 19) suggests in his book *Visible learning for teachers – Maximizing impact on learning*, feedback is one of the crucial factors for encouraging learning. The teachers must know a range of learning strategies and when they give feedback they have to provide directions for the pupils in terms of the content being understood. Heift & Chapelle (2012: 563-564) also claim that if the pupils do not know what to gain out of the given feedback, they might be lost. This means that computer-generated feedback does not only include

traditional feedback like 'Well done!' or 'Try again!' but must be formulated explicitly. The pupils need reliable and valuable feedback to self-assess, feel safe, and learn. Online activities have to be set in such ways that they also include feedback with metalinguistic explanations because studies showed that, as a consequence, pupils subsequently perform better on language structures of the target language and their grammatical awareness is subsequently raised (Heift & Chapelle 2012: 563). The value of feedback must be maximized and the type of feedback which good interactive materials provide is very much appreciated by pupils (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 10). Sometimes they get instant feedback on what they have just done. If the activities are prepared in an appropriate way, they immediately know about their improvements or areas which they still have to work on. They become more autonomous and can work on their language skills away from school and whenever they want and have time to. In the right learning environment such as an "idea-rich environment" (Hattie 2012: 19), learners can experiment, be right or wrong, can think about the content again, make connections and try activities as often as they want. A learning platform with online activities could be such a safe environment where errors are human and allowed, because pupils learn a lot from errors and from the right feedback. When this goes in the right direction and the feedback presented after activities is well prepared, the pupils gain a lot from it. Hattie (2012: 19) also emphasises the fact that for creating such an environment a teacher has to be very passionate about it and has to invest a lot of time.

Whenever it comes to time management it is easy to see that a vast amount of preparation time indeed is spent on copying materials and other preparation work. The use of technology and online learning platforms can certainly save time in the end, after having prepared and set up an online learning course as you wish. Course materials can be posted online for the learners and costs for copying can be reduced (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 11). By using the internet, teachers also have a high number of tools and an endless pool of information resources, and these sources can be accessed really quickly, which again saves a lot of time. It is necessary to be aware of the fact that there are various sources which are not actually appropriate and preparation work and filtering all the materials can be time consuming, too. However, once authentic materials have

been found, they can be easily adapted and exchanged. Zederbauer (2008: 15) states that a sharing process among colleagues can also save teachers a lot of time. Additionally, previous works from students is available online and can be re-used as authentic materials in other teaching contexts or as samples for later pupils.

However, not only those pieces of work can be re-used but the internet opens the classroom to another world full of fellow learners, experts and teachers all over the globe. There can be exchanges between schools and pupils can find pen-pals to write emails and send chatmessages. Furthermore, access to up-to-date materials on any subject is not restricted. This means that the teacher and the pupils must be able to choose the right materials and have high media competence or information literacy. Thus, teachers and pupils should not only have technical skills or instrumental skills but also skills for using, selecting, manipulating, analyzing and evaluating media and the entire digital world (Alexandria Proclamation 2005). Competences require new skills for reading and writing, and also social, communicative and creative skills are needed and should be fostered. However, not only the teacher's skills are fostered but also the pupils' digital literacy is developed. Zederbauer (2008: 15) claims that this can contribute to a number of key competences such as finding and evaluating information. These skills are not only needed in a school context but in nearly every profession and they are useful for lifelong learning. This is also underlined in the summary of the OECD definitions of key competences (OECD 2005: 11). Whenever there are pupils who are not that familiar with computers and their skills and their key competences towards digital literacy are not that developed, BL can contribute to gaining better knowledge. BL is not only online learning, as already mentioned before, but it also starts with word-processing, the use of presentation software and so on. Those areas can become a tool for learning and working and not only the content of learning in special IT classes.

Sharma and Barrett (2007: 13) say that Blended Learning can also help the teacher gain a better understanding of what the pupils have actually worked on so far and what they can still work on in the future. This is especially helpful for grading, because online learning platforms, for example, show exactly who

accessed the activities, when and how many times. Therefore, even if participation in some cases is not obligatory, the teacher can still evaluate who is motivated and eager to improve in various areas. A computer is available 24 hours, seven days a week; a teacher is not. It can offer a wide range of exposure to the target language and pupils can replay, redo and revise an exercise until they are satisfied with the outcomes and results (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 13). This does not mean that the pupils are only working on their own and that communication is neglected. Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 10) state when pupils and teachers are working on a learning platform there have to be forums and chat rooms where the pupils can ask questions if they have difficulties or they can also just chat with their classmates when they are not at school. Geographical locations are not an issue. The two scholars claim that course creators should think about these aspects very intensely. This leads to the conclusion that the social aspect of the overall learning situation can be positively influenced through the use of BL. Communication between learners, teachers and learners, teacher and teachers via the internet allows a new way of collaborating and exchanging knowledge.

Another great benefit of BL lies in the empowerment of pupils. Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 10) argue that learners can take more responsibility for their own learning and this is not only because they can choose the time, place and pace of their learning activities but also because they can choose some of the topics according to their interests, aims and talents. They are very flexible when and where to log in. The pupils' individual level of knowledge can also influence their commitment and participation in Blended Learning processes. In an online learning course the pupils might have the opportunity to choose from a pool of materials that meet different learner levels and interests and so they have the option to actually learn according to their needs and interests. Especially in heterogeneous classrooms this form of individualization can easily be put into practice with the use of a learning platform and online materials. When teachers only rely on one single course book or other ready-made materials they might never be able to cater for all the learners' interests and needs. Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 10-11) also claim that more skilled pupils, for example, could be put in charge of creating their own online activities and so their passive role

can be compensated for. They can become actively involved in the choice of activities, materials, topics and even goals of their learning. Through the wide choice of materials that is provided on a learning platform, all pupils might find the right exercises for them.

1.5 Drawbacks of and prejudices against the use of Blended Learning in the EFL classroom

Because of all of the advantages just listed, it might be a good idea to try out new and innovative concepts like Blended Learning. However, a look at the possible downsides is also helpful in order to decide what really can be done and worked on in a specific class or school. Some teachers hesitate to integrate Blended Learning into their teaching and, of course, there are some areas of conflict. The main prejudices are related to technical issues and costs, questions of time, individual learner differences, requirements for suitable materials and pedagogical aspects like computer use in general.

One important and major problem with an innovative approach that uses computers and laptops as a learning tool is the dependency on technology. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 12) say that many teachers are concerned about its reliability. While computers are very useful tools and at this point mostly very reliable, it is also important to have a plan B when technical issues arise and computers or projectors just do not work properly. Schools which have computer labs might be often confronted with the danger that some computers or software programs do not function properly or that there are not enough working computers available at all. This mostly happens when pupils are allowed to use computers in their free time and during breaks and do not care whether they download viruses or other malware. Firewalls and anti-virus programs have to be installed and should help to prevent such problems. Furthermore, some computers might not function properly or the latest versions and updates are not installed. Zederbauer (2008: 11) says that a certain standard of technical equipment at school and at home is desirable if Blended Learning with technology is to be practised on a regular basis in class. Ideally, each classroom has got one or several possibilities, like computers or laptops with access to the internet or at least an IT Lab with enough computers for each pupil. LCD

projectors in the classroom would also be a positive situation. If there are no laptops or computers in the classroom, teachers should have the possibility to book computer labs according to their needs.

Starting up a learning platform (e.g. Moodle) is always connected with some costs, especially if the school is a private school, like my school, and not sponsored by the Austrian government like state schools. The organization named “edumoodle”³ helps schools to set up the learning platform Moodle in an easy way and the school does not necessarily need a server to establish it. For a small amount of money each year – 120 Euros for our school for example – the edumoodle organisation does maintenance work, provides automatic updates and gives technical support to the school and their platform. However, also the computer labs must be up to date, the computers should have the latest software programs, the internet connection must be upgraded to the highest level and software licenses or other costs might also hinder some schools from establishing learning platforms or other online learning materials. However, such costs have to be taken into account. The time-consuming job of an administrator for this platform might be expensive, too. At a school like mine a designated teacher could fulfil such duties with payment being organised via the usual wages for a custodian for technical issues. This could include duties like keeping computer programs up-to-date and setting up the learning platform and homepage of a school, for example. What is added to the costs of technical equipment, software licences and technical support for the educational institution is the costs for the individual users, i.e. the teachers and the students, who should ideally have a computer and internet access at home and at their work place. The use of technology might also lead to social or economic disadvantages for pupils with limited or no access to modern communication and information technologies and if they have access also lower-bandwidth connections can mean that not all media can be viewed that easily (Hockly &

³ Edumoodle is an organisation supported by the Austrian government: In the project edumoodle, which is processed by the Education group and the BMUKK, all Austrian schools and educational establishments can get space on a central maintained Moodle server for a small amount of money. For public schools it is without charge“. At my school we established this kind of learning platform because the costs are lower than buying our own licences and server (<http://www.edumoodle.at/moodle> 29 Aug. 2013).

Clandfield 2010: 10; Zederbauer 2008: 11-12). These problems must be taken into consideration when planning online activities in order not to discourage or embarrass students who are already disadvantaged because of their families' economic situation.⁴

Furthermore, preparing and setting up online courses on a platform can be very time-consuming and difficult, especially if teachers come from generations which need to get used to the newly available functions and possibilities. The materials have to be created and courses have to be set up. Some teachers who are not as familiar with technology or computers as others might need special training, which might cause more costs and could be more time consuming than planned. However, the creativity of teachers often counts more than the most professional online course and when the way of integrating online materials is meaningful and reasonable the pupils might also be satisfied. Pupils could, for example, do some web-search and internet research projects and afterwards they can present their findings on a poster and not in technically supported ways if their IT skills or knowledge do not suffice. (See Section 5.2.2 for such ideas.) When pupils have a lack of IT skills, they need to learn how to use the technologies effectively before starting real projects. However, this can be very time consuming and some of them might be so concentrated with managing the computer programs that they do not profit in language learning because they are simply unable to cope with this situation. At least in the beginning these factors should be kept in mind, which leads to the next concern about BL.

The individual learners play an important role in Blended Learning with technology and certain types of learners might not be as encouraged as others. Blended learning via a learning platform often requires a great amount of self-discipline and personal time management (Pachler & Kysela-Schiemer 2002, cited in Zederbauer 2008: 12). Their self-motivation must be very high in order to gain the most profit from and advantages of the possibilities offered. Pupils

⁴ In a boarding school like ours these problems are now avoided by having organised so-called 'learning lessons' in the computer lab for the pupils who do not have the opportunity to use computers at home or do not have internet access via their Smartphones, laptops or tablets. A time schedule which follows the lesson plans of all classes was set up for this by our headmistress and head of the boarding school. The IT room is now open during the lunch break, one hour in the morning and 3 hours after school and whenever there is no class pupils can use the computers in their free periods, too.

who are unmotivated or just not as capable as others might fall behind, although this can happen in regular classes, too. Some of the methods might also be somewhat impersonal and when students only work on their own in front of the computer screens, it could lead to some form of isolation, too. Therefore, the teacher has to create activities with a good balance between individual and collaborative work, between content work and communication. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 12) claim that the creation of activities also causes some problems when it comes to the pedagogical side of online learning materials. They argue that especially stimulus-response activities such as gap-filling exercises, true/false activities or mix-and-match-exercises are very boring for pupils in the long term. The learners are only informed about their achievement via behaviourist principles and the communicative approach is missing. Some of the traditional grammar exercises are known as “drill and kill” activities because the types of feedback offered are mostly very limited and the pupils often do not get the chance to correct mistakes immediately but have to do the whole exercise again (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 12). The pupils might then know all the other answers by heart already but do not know why the problematic ones are wrong. Sharma (2010: 547) also states that BL is not successful if there are no thought-through pedagogical relations between the blended activities. As a consequence the course might lack coherence and the pupils and the teachers might get confused and no improvement is given at all (Sharma 2010: 457).

This can lead to problems with the construction and compilation of online activities because there are hardly any guidelines for teachers on how to design and implement useful course materials. Pachler (2002: 25) and Frankish (2007) argue that teachers have a lot of freedom when it comes to creating materials and deciding what they want to use in their online courses in addition to course books or even as a substitute for course books and this can cause some danger. However, these concerns are not unique to BL because these problems may also arise with photocopied materials. It is always the teachers' responsibility to choose and evaluate their materials with regard to their compatibility with teaching aims and the curriculum. Evaluation and feedback might be left behind in some cases and because of a lack of knowledge the activities do not bring the expected results (Heift & Chapelle 2012: 563). The pupils may be even less

motivated then. However, I definitely think that the effort is worth it and whenever an exercise is seen as especially useful, it can be used over and over again, without having to make hundreds of copies for all the students, as already mentioned before. Zederbauer (2008: 12) found out that also the quality of digitalized materials is normally a lot better than pupils' notes and the learners have the opportunity to download the materials as often as they wish, according to their need for practice.

Finally, parents and critics also might argue that children and teenagers play video games and watch TV for hours a day already and giving them online homework and exercises forces them to spend more time in front of an electronic device, which is probably not good for them. However, I think that if they use computers and other devices, they can do it for a better reason, such as improving their language skills and abilities. Excessive use only for language learning and online communication does not necessarily provide a good basis because especially in language learning F2F interaction is essential. Body language, facial expressions and gestures might be neglected because of a lack of personal contact. Regular class time cannot be diminished and F2F communication and collaborative activities should still dominate in the EFL classroom (Buehger, Halwax, Krisper-Ullyett & Ortner 2007: 45-46). However, a balanced and additional use of online learning, according to pupils' needs and course aims, can be very beneficial as Sharma and Barrett (2007) have also mentioned in their studies.

While all of the considerations are worth thinking about, I believe that for the sake of the pupils and students, teachers should really be willing to try out something new and should be motivated in order to improve their teaching methods. It depends on what teachers do with the programs and the online learning materials on a platform. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 14) argue that practical online activities should be complements to classroom activities and one of the keywords is definitely integration. When there is a close link between the online materials and the classroom content, both will be used more enthusiastically. There are many ways to integrate BL in a meaningful way and there are some factors which underline possible future developments.

1.6 Future developments of BL

Sharma (2010: 456) and Claypole (2010: 36) are in complete agreement that the concept of BL is still developing. In the future there might be a number of other conceptualizations of BL, like “a combination of real world plus in-world” (Claypole 2010: 36). This means that the teacher instructs pupils during a F2F session and the follow-up lesson will be held in a virtual world like the learning platform. BL also exists for frameworks in educational settings which describe the basic use or switch from course books to CD-ROMs or web-based materials. This means that BL can also simply mean the blending or combination of print and digital media (Sharma 2010: 457). To underline these assumptions Claypole (2010: 36) has argued that this development is logical and the tendencies will always go in the direction of mixing different methods of teaching. An important factor is that the definition is not drawn too narrowly, because no medium should be excluded when it comes to BL.

Another major notion is to keep a balance between traditional approaches and technology when working in blended ways (Sharma and Barrett 2007: 13). The role of the teacher and the role of technology must be separate and interchangeable. It is important that the pupils always know what the one can do that the other is not able to. Teachers have to create needs analyses and should know about the personality and attitudes of their pupils. Although this can all be done with the help of technology, it can never replace personal contact. A teacher also creates the learning syllabus, lesson plans and is also there when there are some areas of language which are not predictable. Sharma and Barrett (2007:14) suggest that teaching should be driven by pedagogy and supported by technology. Implementing BL in such a way can enhance learning and improve teaching.

How the use of the term BL might develop is not really clear, though. It may become somewhat diluted because with such a variety of definitions, almost any approach could count as Blended Learning (Westbrook 2008: 13, Sharma 2010: 457 and Strauss 2012: ch.1). However, the concept is also likely to remain an important one in language teaching because the attempt to identify the perfect mixture of syllabus delivery in order to provide the most effective language

experience should be the focus for all teachers: They should search for “the best practice” (Sharma 2010: 457).

All of the above-mentioned benefits and concerns might be appropriate and so it can also be “useful to consider blended learning primarily as an approach to the design of learning interventions. These interventions will be a mix of learning media and methods with the aim of achieving specific learning outcomes” (Mason 2005: 219-220). In future the learning outcomes should be the most important things to remember and should be in the foreground to be the basis for considering innovative approaches such as Blended Learning. It is always worth thinking about why every teacher should consider BL and technology in their teaching process and in what ways this concept and the materials can be used in order to be most effective. Whether Blended Learning is a mix between F2F sessions and using technology or using online platforms and e-learning, the reasons why it should be used are always supposed to be considered beforehand and then both teachers and pupils can get the most out of it.

2 Learning theories and Blended Learning in SLA

Learning never stops, it endures over time (Schunk 2012: 3-4). This statement could be seen as one overall view on learning. But it could be asked how learning happens in the case of BL in an EFL classroom. For gaining insight it is important, especially when establishing BL in an EFL classroom, to find out about the most important thoughts on second language learning in connection with BL. Some publications on e-learning and learning theories have been published but it is not that easy to find specific publications on Blended Learning and its outcomes and basic learning theories in connection with language learning in particular. Schunk (2012: 4) argues that learning means a change. Buchegger, Halwax, Krisper-Ullyet and Ortner (2007: 15) break it down in more detail, claiming that learning brings about a change in the cognitive structure of a person. People who learn something are more capable of doing this in another way and this is a sign for learning (Schunk 2012: 4). Thus, knowledge changes and this also leads to a shift and change in motivation, or the other way around. On the one hand learners can accept this change and learn but, on the other hand, they can also refuse to learn and their motivation is low. Furthermore, learning can be seen as an alteration of group membership and ideologies, which is an important aspect when the socio-cultural aspect of learning is considered.

Learning leads to change in different areas, but this also means that there is a link between 'what' changes and 'why' this is changed. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 39) claim that this mostly happens through experience e.g. through practice or observation of others. Individual learner differences might be critical for pupils' language acquisition as well as social interactions with teachers and parents. Peers also have a strong influence on pupils' language achievements, especially when it comes to second and foreign languages. (Lightbown & Spada 2013: 39) As this paper focuses on learning in the EFL classroom, research about Second Language Learning (SLL) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) will be taken into consideration and as there are different fields and processes behind all these areas, the most important points will be now presented.

In connection to BL and learning with new technologies, it is necessary to think about new ways of adjusting already existing learning theories; publications

about e-learning and learning theories have been consulted. Attwell (2007: 4) states that there has to be a wider definition of learning. It is not only an activity which takes place within an institution and is only guided by qualified teachers, learning should also be seen as a purposeful activity which leads to changes in behaviour. BL has the potential to combine these two issues. The different worlds of learning can be interrelated and pupils can learn from school and life for school and life. All these factors can contribute to successful Blended Learning and Second Language Acquisition.

2.1 Individual differences in SL learners

Insights on differences among learners and how they affect language learning processes are very unclear and often fragmentary because research is difficult. (Hedge 2000: 16) However, it can be said that all second language learners, regardless of age, have already acquired at least one language before learning another one. This means, following Lightbown and Spada (2013: 36), that they have prior knowledge of how language systems work. Pupils have at least some cognitive maturity and metalinguistic awareness when they start learning English as a foreign language. On the one hand, this could mean great potential because such knowledge might allow learners to solve language problems and take part in language discussions. This is important when the time of contact with the second language is very limited, like in a normal school environment. On the other hand, Lightbown and Spada (2013: 26) have suggested that the use of already existing cognitive skills like these can interfere with second language acquisition because the innate language acquisition ability is reduced. However, all this depends on the age of the learners, too. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 37) say that children are often highly willing to use the second language, although their proficiency is quite limited. The older the learners get, the more stressful it can be for them when they do not know how to express themselves clearly and correctly. Especially pupils in a foreign language classroom mostly receive very low exposure to their second language. The time is usually limited to a few hours a week and also the situations where they actually need the new language are very restricted because they can deal with their everyday life in their first language easily. In BL this can be changed because through working with a learning platform, realistic and helpful websites, writing emails, blogs or posting

and listening to Podcasts, for example, pupils can be exposed to the second language also in their free time, for homework or whenever they want to. They can listen to English blogs or read English newspapers, play English video games, also in their free time, and the amount of confrontation with a second language in class can be raised.

The learning outcomes are also highly influenced by individual characteristics like language learning aptitude, learning styles, and their attitudes and motivation in classroom, identity and personality (Lightbown & Spada 2013: 79-91; Hedge 2000: 17). As the success of second language learners varies greatly, these factors have to be taken into consideration when it comes to learning.

An important characteristic is language learning aptitude. This is characterised as an “ability to learn quickly” (Lightbown & Spada 2013: 80). It is not unusual to hear people say ‘He has a flair for languages’ or ‘She has a good ear for languages’. Therefore, learners with a high aptitude may learn with greater speed. However, also slower learners can be successful if they spend more time on learning. The challenge in second language teaching and learning is to find instructional approaches that meet the needs of learners with a variety of aptitude profiles. However, Hedge (2000: 17) claims that one major problem with research about language aptitude is that it is not very conclusive and it is hard to distinguish between intelligence and language aptitude. Blended Learning methods and Language Management System (LMS) could be a great chance for pupils with a lower aptitude. Erard (2012, cited in Lightbown and Spada 2013: 83) says, however, that, without a willingness to work hard at tasks also pupils with high aptitudes for language learning will not be successful.

Learning styles and learning strategies, defined as an individual’s habitual and preferred way of processing and retaining new information and skills, are another important factor when it comes to the individual learner (Hedge 2000: 16; Lightbown and Spada 2013: 80). Attwell (2007: 2) argues that some theories which try to classify such learning styles are often not convincing because most people do not have THE learning style but often use different strategies for different contexts. However, it cannot be denied that every person has preferences and most often the learning types are categorized into auditory,

visual and kinaesthetic learners. These categories are referred to as “perceptually-based learning styles” (Lightbown & Spada 2013: 83). Hedge (2000: 18) also names these styles cognitive styles, which can be defined as a characteristic and preferred way of approaching learning. In particular contexts of LMS the learners are able to configure and develop a learning environment which suits and enables their own style of learning. They can use various strategies to become autonomous language learners. Hedge (2000: 77) says that there are four types of learner strategies which encourage independence in language learners and which make them a good language learner, summing the most important learner strategies, following Rubin (1989: 19 cited in Hedge 2000: 77). These strategies include “any set of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information, [...] that is, what learners do to learn and do to regulate their learning” (Rubin 1989: 19, cited in Hedge 2000: 77). These strategies can be summed up in four different strategies like cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, communication strategies and socio-affective strategies.

Cognitive strategies mean that language teachers have to know what learners do to include strategies that deal directly with the second language. These strategies involve thought processes used directly in learning. They enable learners to deal with information presented in tasks and activities and/or materials while working on them in various ways. Examples for cognitive strategies are given in Section 2.3.

Furthermore, it is important to know what learners do to regulate or manage their learning. These strategies are called metacognitive strategies. Hedge (2000: 78) claims that metacognitive skills involve planning for learning, thinking about learning and how learning can be made effective. Pupils also should be able to self-monitor and evaluate their learning and how effective it has been.

A third category which is sometimes included is that of communication strategies. These involve the use of gesture, mime, synonym, paraphrases and words from their first language to make themselves understood whenever they have gaps in their knowledge of the second language. Hedge (2000: 78-79) points

out that with this set of strategies pupils are able to keep involved in conversations through which they learn the foreign language.

A further category, suggested by Hedge (2000: 79) is that of socio-affective strategies. These provide learners with opportunities for practising the second language. Initiating conversations with native speakers, using other people as informants about the language, listening to the radio or watching TV programmes in the target language or fulfilling collaborative tasks would be examples. The aim of all four named strategies is to reach learner autonomy so that learners become independent. In Sections 2.3 to 2.5 these strategies are connected with common learning theories for SLA and BL.

It is necessary that teachers use a variety of activities and methods to suit the different learning styles and strategies. Attwell (2007: 3) states that in BL approaches this can be achieved easily, and a critical review of learning styles and strategies should make teachers sceptical about claims that a single teaching method or a textbook will suit the needs of all learners. Lightbown & Spada (2013: 84) mention the importance of the teachers' knowledge about this because they should not assume that pupils are working in wrong ways just because they spend more time on a single activity than on others. Teachers should encourage learners of a second language to use everything that is available to them.

In Second Language Teaching teachers also have to think about the pupils' individual motivation, attitudes and personality characteristics, including emotional responses like anxiety, the so-called "affective factors" (Hedge 2000: 20). As motivation is a very complex phenomenon the teacher should look at it from two sides. On the one hand the motivation of learners might be high if they have a special need for communicating in the second language. They should be engaged in different social situations or fulfil professional ambitions. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 88) argue that this could lead to a higher motivation to communicate in the second language and then pupils are also more motivated to acquire proficiency. Hedge (2000: 23) claims that when the pupils need a language as an instrument to achieve some purposes, such as doing a job or studying successfully, motivation is integrative. Pupils might also have some

special attitudes towards the native speakers of the language. When these are favourable they might feel more desire to contact them, to learn about their culture. When they feel a wish to integrate themselves into the activities or cultures of the native speakers, motivation becomes an instrumental part of learning. (Hedge 2000: 23). In terms of emotional response to learning, a very well observed field is anxiety. Hedge (2000: 21) found out that the greatest anxiety in classrooms seems to relate to negative experiences in speaking activities. This implies that teachers have a lot of power to keep anxiety low by building self-confidence through positive experiences. Feedback should be provided reassuringly and proficiency can be developed by promoting self-perception.

Another major point which influences second language learning is the motivation pupils have while learning in class and within their peer group. Social factors can affect motivation, attitudes and also language learning success. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 85) say that learners are very sensitive to social dynamics and power relationships and especially learners in secondary schools or in higher secondary education are in a phase of their lives in which the formation of their identity happens. There the motivation in class and within a group of people of the same age can mean either a high level of engagement or a rather low one. In the classroom this factor could mean that every participant brings their individual structures to this social space. Pupils are often concerned with their so-called social capital and also their cultural background. This randomly includes manners, attitudes, sympathy and antipathy, sexual characteristics, self-consciousness and confidence and even their hair style and status within their learning group. Buchegger, Halwax, Krisper-Ullyett and Ortner (2007: 31) call this phenomenon 'group dynamics'. This could influence motivation in class and has to be taken into consideration when it comes to learning.

In Blended Learning and its online learning phases, these group dynamics can be diminished. The social structures of online phases and courses are different to F2F phases. This means that when someone, for example, is writing an email or posting something in a chat-room they can read through it before posting it or record it again if something is not correct or they are not satisfied with it. The

pressure of immediate response is not as high as in F2F classes. Another factor is that in online learning phases it does not matter whether the pupils are sitting in front of the computer in their pyjamas with no hair styling at home. Buchegger, Halwax, Krisper-Ullyett and Ortner (2007: 31) claim that in collaborative BL pupils have the opportunities to try out different roles. It could be that pupils are very shy in class but with online activities they can decide which kind of role they want to have without being stared at by a group of classmates. This great potential of learner differences should be used for Blended Learning and then learning is again in the focus and not social dynamics and group pressure.

The characteristics of learners and the learning contexts in which they acquire languages are very different and this has to be taken into consideration when learning theories are presented in connection with SLA and their relation to BL.

2.2 The development of learning theories for SLA and Blended Learning

When it comes to second language learning Lightbown and Spada (2013: 103) argue that a general theory of second language acquisition also needs to “account for language acquisition by learners [...] in a variety of contexts”. The developmental process of theories concerning SLA ranges from the behaviourist perspective to sociocultural theory, a perspective that places second language acquisition in a very broad context. The theories linked to SLA are mostly theories from cognitive psychology, emphasizing the way in which the mind perceives, retains, organizes and retrieves information. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 103) argue that much of the early research into second language learning and acquisition was based on first language acquisition but in the past few years research in SLA has become more and more popular.

Although a lot of research has followed a behaviouristic view when it comes to learning with technology, it is challenged more often, especially in SLA research, and by a combination of more socially and constructively oriented theories (Ang & Zaphiris 2008: 5-6). One reason for this could be that technology-based activities often mostly focus on conditional stimulus and conditioned response, especially in speech and utterances. In language teaching, this approach presents the learner with a number of habit-forming modes. The first computer programs for CALL were highly influenced by these paradigms. They consisted of grammar

and vocabulary tutorials and repetitive language practices, the so-called drill-and-practice programmes. These followed a strict computer-as-tutor model. Ang and Zaphiris (2008: 6-7) claim that this view is only useful in explaining three aspects of language learning, namely phonology, orthography and the lexicon, as in early stages of learning a lot of imitation and stimuli response are involved. However, once learners have reached a higher level of language proficiency, they will realise that also exceptions prove the rules learned and acquired through stimuli and response. In the field of phonology, for example, sounds change according to the words and in the field of lexis, some words also carry different semantic meanings in different contexts and sentences. Thus, behaviouristic learning is maybe appropriate for certain aspects of early stages of language learning but is not appropriate for learning a foreign language at higher levels. Also for Blended Learning in particular behaviouristic learning theory does not seem to cover the desired outcomes.

Following Chew, Jones and Turner (2008: 41-42) two very prominent theories are associated with BL. These are the educational theories by Vygotsky and Maslow. Vygotsky considers socio-cultural factors in cognitive learning and education. This is a reason why his theory is widely adopted and a good guidance for classroom practice and Blended Learning. Maslow in turn puts forward the hierarchy of needs and his model can be applied especially to understand the motivation of learning and teaching for learners as well as teachers. As both theories are based on cognitive views and perspectives of learning, these cognitive perspectives will form the basis for the following section and are presented now.

2.3 Cognitive views and perspectives of learning

Lightbown and Spada (2013: 108) point out that since the 1990s research and theories from cognitive psychology have become more and more important for an understanding of SLL. These perspectives emphasise the role of the main human abilities to process and learn information on the basis of experience. This includes learning in general and languages in detail. Languages seem to be just one complex knowledge system that humans have to acquire. Robinson and Ellis (2008, cited in Lightbown and Spada 2013: 113) claim that all cognitive views

have one main aspect in common: language is learned through perceptual and cognitive experiences. The two scholars also maintain that language learning involves the discovery, categorization and determination of patterns through the use of the target language. Some of the learning theories based on cognitive psychology use the computer as a metaphor for the mind. They compare language acquisition to the capacities of computers for storing, integrating and retrieving information. In second language learning the areas and processes of perception, memory and categorization, as well as generalisation are really important. These processes are similar to first language acquisition. (Robinson and Ellis 2008 cited in Lightbown and Spada 2013: 113-114) However, the difference lies in the circumstances of learning, as already mentioned in Section 2.1, as well as in what the learners already know about language in general. Furthermore, the learners also have prior knowledge which shapes their perception of the new language. (Lightbown & Spada 2013: 108)

When it comes to second language acquisition, cognitive psychologists also work on an information-processing model of human learning. First of all learners have to pay attention to aspects of the language that they are trying to learn or produce. In this case this means that they use their cognitive resources to process information. There is always a limit to how much information learners can pay attention to. One example, given by Lightbown and Spada (2013: 108) illustrates how learners notice a grammatical morpheme attached to some different words while reading a text and the teacher makes them aware of it. They receive new information and through experience and practice, this information becomes easier to process; the learners will be able to access it quickly and eventually automatically. Step by step other cognitive processing resources to notice other aspects of the language are activated and they gradually become automatic.

Schunk (2012: 342) says that these theories primarily explain conditional knowledge, which means that learners know when and why to employ what they have just learned. However, knowledge about what to do and when to do it does not produce success in language learning. Pupils must also understand when knowledge and procedures are useful and what kind of information and knowledge is required when. Both Schunk (2012: 285) and Lightbown and Spada

(2013: 108) suggest that most cognitive learning processes start with declarative knowledge. Pupils who read a text in English may know what to do with the text e.g. read a chapter. Then they understand the meaning of vocabulary. Procedural knowledge means that the pupils know how to decode, skim, find main ideas and draw inferences. This information is stored in the so-called long-term memory. Conditional knowledge, or the basic form of knowledge, is a form of procedural knowledge (Schunk 2012: 285; Lightbown & Spada 2013: 108-109). Pupils who have gained basic knowledge know, for example, the strategy to skim a text to get the gist of it and they also know that summarising a text is valuable to derive greater understanding of it. They are able to combine declarative and procedural knowledge.

As BL should also lead to self-regulated, self-motivated and independent learning, Schunk (2012: 285) argues that conditional knowledge is an integral part of these ways of learning because it requires pupils to decide which learning strategy to use prior to being able to master the task. They are engaged in the task and they assess its progress using their metacognitive processes, as already mentioned before. Metacognition refers to higher-order cognition and it refers to the “deliberate conscious control of cognitive activity” (Schunk 2012: 286). Should there be any comprehension problem, students can change their strategy based on their conditional knowledge and use a more effective one. Metacognition is also defined as cognition about cognition, and cognitive and metacognitive skills play an important role in many types of activities. Hedge (2000: 78) states that one example for a metacognitive skill is that pupils are able to look for rules in second language on the basis of existing knowledge. Another cognitive strategy is that pupils can memorize visual forms and auditory sounds. Examples of other cognitive strategies in learning are repetition, writing things down and inferencing, e.g. making guesses about the meaning of a new language item. Activities like oral communication of information, oral persuasion, listening and reading comprehension, writing tasks and, problem solving would be among the most important ones for activating metacognitive skills and strategies. Pupils who are able to use metacognitive strategies are also able to think about learning and evaluate learning. They use their skills when they review the notes they have made, carefully read teachers’ comments on their writing tasks or preview the

next units of their workbooks. (Hedge 2000: 78) Additionally they employ various forms of self-control and self-regulation (Flavell 1985: 104 and Schunk 2012: 286).

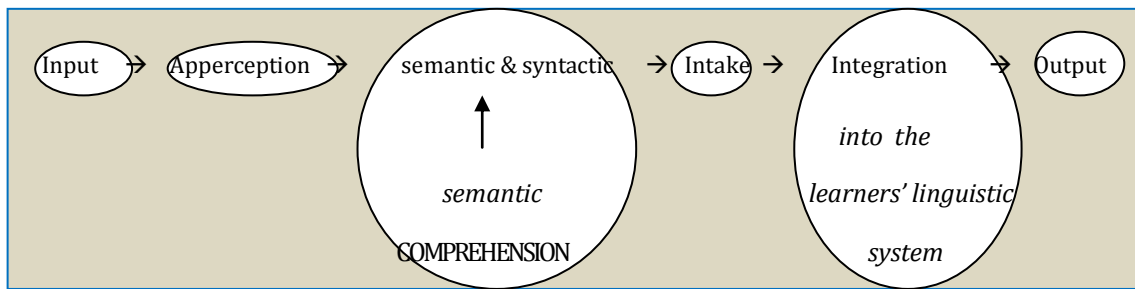
Teachers can help pupils to develop their metacognitive skills. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 108) suggest when working with pupils on a listening comprehension the teacher might at first include situations such as listening to an enjoyable story and probably a set of explicit instructions and questions. The pupils have to pay attention to special tasks and the teacher could ask the pupils to listen for different pieces of information. The teacher can work with the pupils on their listening skills and pupils should retell a story in their own words. Oral communication of information plays an important role here. For exchanging information they can take notes, and to foster their conditional knowledge the teacher can discuss various listening techniques that seem most appropriate for each situation. The pupils can learn how to solve problems and how to avoid difficulties in listening tasks. To help them with their memory skills, the teacher might give the pupils a list of items to memorize and later on to reconstruct this list. This again depends on the already mentioned memory capacity and as Lightbown and Spada (2013: 108) argue, there is always a limit to how much information learners can pay attention to. The different levels of pupils have to be taken into consideration. In Blended Learning with an online learning platform the pupils can practice these skills on their own. The teacher could post instructions and exercises on the platform and the pupils can listen to the text over and over again until they are able to master the different exercises to it. Their self-regulation and problem-solving skills are fostered, as is their metacognitive competence.

A good language learner is able to use these metacognitive strategies for thinking about and managing the learning process. This involves planning, monitoring various techniques and evaluating how useful any technique has been in the end (Allford & Pachler 2007: 160-161; Hedge 2000: 78). One central point of these cognitive theories is that the learners become autonomous, which means that they should also be able to see the exercise from different point of views, to reflect critically, to make decisions and to be independent. The learners should

develop a particular kind of psychological relationship to the process and content of their learning. Vygotsky (1986: 166 cited in Allford & Pachler 2007: 163) highlights the importance of this conscious process and the measurement of control over these processes. This means that the pupils need guidance before becoming aware of what they are doing and why. Teachers have to provide assistance, especially in learning a foreign language that enables the learners to progress to a higher level of proficiency. This is not a linear process but more a “spiralling, cyclical movement that involves both social engagement and separation” (Allford & Pachler 2007: 163). If teachers are not efficient constructing and planning their teaching and especially in creating online learning platform activities, developing metacognitive skills might not work in Blended Learning either.

Allford and Pachler (2007: 229) underline this by their explanations about the main perspectives in cognitive learning. In second language learning the two main perspectives are, as already said, information processing and, additionally, constructivism, which will be the topic of Section 3.4. In second language learning information processing explains the workings of the brain. Chapelle (1998: 22) suggests an easy understandable model and bases it on interactionist research. She claims that first of all there is the input of the target language. So pupils need, as already said, instructions and interaction to notice this language and make sense of it. The target language is then assimilated by the learners and meaning and structures have to be understood. This is also called the process of apperception and comprehension. Eventually, these structures become part of the learner’s linguistic system and integration into the learner’s memory happens. Finally, the learner is able to use the acquired target language and can produce all forms of output. In terms of BL and learning with technology this could mean that teachers have to be aware of the facts that before starting any software, the linguistic characteristics of a language have to be made clear and the input has to be put forward. The learners have to receive help in comprehending any linguistic aspects and they also should have the opportunity to produce the target language. Whenever they make mistakes in the output, they also should be able to notice them immediately and correction can be offered whenever possible. Chapelle (1998: 22) presents this model as shown in Figure 3:

Figure 3 Learning model (Chapelle 1998: 22)



Furthermore, the learners should be engaged in their second language tasks and opportunities to maximise good interaction should be offered (Allford & Pachler 2007: 230).

When all these factors are coherent, Schunk (2012: 324-325) sees great potential in technology and instructions when it comes to cognitive perspectives of learning. He summarizes how computer-based learning environments like a learning platform can affect learners' cognitive processes during encoding, retention, transfer, problem solving and other metacognitive skills. In F2F learning other types of cognitive processes might occur than in computer based learning. Schunk (2012: 325) states that the maximum benefits of technology derive from when it "energizes and facilitates thinking and knowledge construction". Technology can have different functions when it comes to instructed learning and cognitive theories. Computers can be a tool to support knowledge construction. Computers are also an information vehicle for exploring knowledge to support learning by constructing. Learning platforms can form a specific context to support learning by doing and are also a social medium to support learning by communication.

A computer-based learning programme can also be an ideal intellectual partner to support learning by reflecting, especially when doing exercises with immediate response and feedback and a progress can be seen in their achievements by the pupils themselves. Also personalized instruction can produce higher achievement and can improve meaningfulness. However, knowledge construction should always be supported with familiar tools and instructions. Chapelle (1998: 24) also argues that learners of a foreign language should be engaged in tasks which are designed to maximise opportunities for

good interaction. In connection with BL, Schunk (2012: 326) reiterates that technology can enhance learning but it is not a cause of learning. It is more a means for “applying different principles of effective instruction and learning” (Schunk 2012: 330).

To educate autonomous language learners who are able to use their different cognitive and metacognitive skills, teachers have to train their pupils, and Hedge (2000: 85) suggests that language learning and the development of cognitive strategies is more effective when it happens in a threefold way: through classroom training, self-access training and independent learning at home. The learners should become more involved, active and responsible for their own learning, which helps them again to develop and strengthen strategies in learning. This leads to the conclusion that Blended Learning can contribute to pupils’ development of cognitive and metacognitive skills when it covers certain elements of both self-access training and independent learning at home. BL is successful with cognitive theories in the background if there is a mixture and combination of F2F instructions, interaction, knowledge procurement and computer assisted and independent learning.

2.4 Sociocultural perspectives based on Constructivism

Recently, constructivism has been increasingly applied to learning and teaching, with a resulting shift in learning theories. As already mentioned in Section 2.3, cognitive developments, including language development, arise as a result of interaction. Thus, cognitive theories put great emphasis on the learners’ information processing and see it as the central cause of learning. However, as Schunk (2012: 228) points out, these theories fail to capture the complexity of human learning. Today, researchers have mostly shifted more toward a focus on learners. The objective is not to find out how knowledge is acquired, but how it is constructed. Constructivists believe that the individual learner contributes highly to what is learned. Social constructivists further emphasize the importance of social interactions in the acquisition of knowledge and skills in language learning. Furthermore, learners should be able to create their own learning, and knowledge is formed not directly from outside but within. The knowledge one person constructs does not necessarily have to be the truth and knowledge to

another person. Schunk (2012: 231) claims that people produce knowledge based on their beliefs and different experiences in different situations. This varies from one person to another. Learning is always situated in contexts and all knowledge becomes subjective and personal.

Lightbown and Spada (2013: 118) point out that in contrast to cognitive theories, which focus more on information processing, constructivist perspectives highlight the interaction of people and situations and the contexts in which learning happens. This is also a field dealt with in socio-cultural perspectives, a branch of constructivist theories. Socio-constructivist perspectives view thinking and speaking as related. This means that first learning is social and then individual. Learning is seen as a process that is always mediated and based on F2F interaction. Learning in socio-cultural theories has the aim of developing socio-affective learning strategies. (Hedge 2000: 79) This means, for example, that learners have opportunities to train their productive skills like speaking and writing. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 118) state that productive skills like speaking and writing, mediate thinking, which means that pupils are able to control their mental processes. This is a consequence of internalizing what other people, like teachers, parents, peers, say to learners and what they say to each other. In such situations the pupils have to activate their socio-affective strategies. As a consequence the internalizing process is meant to happen when individuals interact with each other in a situation in which the learner can perform at a very high language level because of a support offered by a so-called interlocutor. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 223) named this process scaffolding, which means that interactions happen in a supportive way and with supportive structures which help the learners to make the most of the knowledge they have. This leads to the acquisition of new knowledge. In the case of learning a second language this could mean that a teacher for example, provides the learner with a missing word or expands an unfinished sentence. (Lightbown and Spada 2013: 223) A teacher initially models a certain skill, then provides support for the pupils and, finally, reduces aid as learners develop that specific skill. Schunk (2012: 246) says that scaffolding is necessary and appropriate when teachers want to provide their pupils with some information, or for completing parts of tasks for them, so that pupils can concentrate on the part of the activity they

want to master. In second language teaching this could mean that when working on a special task like expressing ideas and arguments in a discussion, the teacher assists the pupils by initially giving them sentences with word meanings and spellings they might need for formulating their arguments. As a consequence, these needs would not interfere with their primary skills such as expressing their ideas and arguments in discussions. In online tasks this could mean that the teacher helps the pupils to manage the log in process and the handling of the computer so that the pupils can then concentrate on the task itself and learn without having difficulties with the technology itself. Hedge (2000: 96-97) states that these primary skills are also called core skills. These skills include, for example, that pupils are able to read instructions, locate items in alphabetical order, use an index or a dictionary, use the computer software programs, handle typewriting, and so on. Only if pupils are able to use their core skills can they fulfil tasks and activities on their own and in a self-access way. (Hedge 2000: 97) They should be part of the training for pupils to become independent learners and teachers should help and encourage them in the developing process.

This shows that language learning is not only a cognitive activity but also a social activity and language use mediates language learning; thus it can be said that language use and language learning can co-occur. Schunk (2012: 242-243) and Chew, Jones and Turner (2008: 41-41) complete these assumptions by working on the key principles of socio-cultural theory by Vygotsky, who claims that all social environments influence cognition through different tools like cultural objects and also language and social institutions, like schools. The theory says that cognitive change results from using these tools in social interactions and from “internalizing and mentally transforming [these] interactions” (Schunk 2012: 242). The internalized tools then function as mediators between already gained and new knowledge. Language is the most critical tool because it develops quickly from social speech to private speech and also to inner speech. The transmission of the tools contributes to human development. Another key principle of Vygotsky’s theory is that self-regulation is developed through the internalization of actions. Internalization means that pupils can, for example, develop an internal representation of a symbol or a language sign through mental operations and this happens in social interactions.

An important feature of constructivist theories is the so-called Zone of proximal development (ZPD). Schunk defines it as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (2012: 243). This zone illustrates the difference between what children can do on their own without assistance and what they can do with the help of teachers, or others. Everything that happens in this ZPD promotes cognitive development and change. Working in the ZPD requires a good deal of guidance and participation, as already mentioned with the scaffolding principles. The quality of the learners’ thinking and performance is much better if they are guided and aided by more skilful and knowledgeable educators. Skills and concepts that lie outside of the learners’ ZPD might fail to produce development, no matter how significant the instructional efforts may be. There the learners’ differences and individual concepts contribute, too. The kind of assistance learners need to develop new skills and concepts within their ZPD takes different forms for each pupil. Chew, Jones and Turner (2008: 42) claim that the educators, the teachers, are facilitators in this case because they have to utilize supporting techniques when they teach learners different concepts which are above their current skills and the level of knowledge required is outside their ZPD. The facilitators should motivate the pupils to succeed beyond their current levels. In Blended Learning this could mean that the teachers work as facilitators when providing different activities for different levels and strategies on their learning platforms. This also means that they must motivate pupils to retry and provide immediate feedback.

An important application area with socio-cultural theorists is peer collaboration, which is especially relevant in BL. Buchegger, Halwax, Krispen-Ullyett and Ortner (2007: 21-22) state that this concept reflects the notion of collective activity like group work and peer work. When peers work on special tasks cooperatively the shared social interactions can serve an instructional function. Such activities are most effective when every pupil has assigned responsibilities and every group member must attain competence before any are allowed to progress. In Blended Learning, approaches like Webquests could contribute to this specific type of learning in a social environment.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that the learning platform Moodle was originally created for educators under a philosophy called social constructionist pedagogy, a branch of socio-cultural theory based on constructivism. Nozawa (2011: 290) states that constructivism occurs especially when pupils are engaged in constructing something for others to see, for example when creating online presentations, wikis and other Blended Learning approaches in EFL teaching (see Section 4.4). While constructivists follow the idea that knowledge is created through interaction with the environment and constructionism means that learning effectiveness can only be observed when something is usefully created for pupils, social constructivists claim that learning is a movement toward a whole community forming culture and meaningfulness collaborative. A collaborative style is very important when it comes to the Moodle learning platform, as already mentioned above. One reason for this is that everyone can participate rather easily from the beginning because no real advanced skills are necessary to use Moodle and it is a very stable program. However, the learning platform itself does not promote learning and teaching on its own; therefore it is mainly a tool for Blended Learning and not a learning program itself. In conjunction with socio-cultural theories, the learning platform should offer active processes, and good interactive online instructions have to be provided (Zederbauer 2008: 17). When teaching English as a foreign language, a learning platform like Moodle would never work on its own. Its effectiveness in learning and teaching lies in the teachers' active and interactive participation and also in the pupils' collaborative interaction. Nozawa (2011: 291) points out that Moodle is not especially designed for language learning, but it provides a number of useful tools that can be used in EFL teaching and learning. The social constructivist theory promotes F2F interaction and interaction with others via the computers, too. Therefore, it is necessary to create authentic learning environments in which computers are no longer seen only as tools for interaction in collaborative ways. They should be seen as tools that can mediate human interaction through high-level interactive learning activities. (Ang & Zaphiris 2008: 1 and Zederbauer 2008: 18)

Both the socio-cultural and constructivist perspectives seem to fit in the process of Blended Learning quite well. They can help teachers to understand the

importance of collaborative work and blended methods in the classroom. The individuality of pupils and their socio-affective skills are also mentioned and highly important when it comes to learning and teaching. Teaching should be learner centred, pupils should be given more freedom and in turn they have to become more active and autonomous. The learners can gain knowledge from complex materials in cooperative and collaborative activities, as put in the foreground by socio-cultural theories and constructivist perspectives of learning. Interaction is the first level of all learning and if learning happens in the ZPD, pupils can integrate new knowledge in their mental map. Thus, teachers should plan their BL methods according to social cultural environments and the cognitive tools on offer to ensure interaction, communication and, lastly, assimilation.

2.5 Motivation – Humanistic theory by Maslow

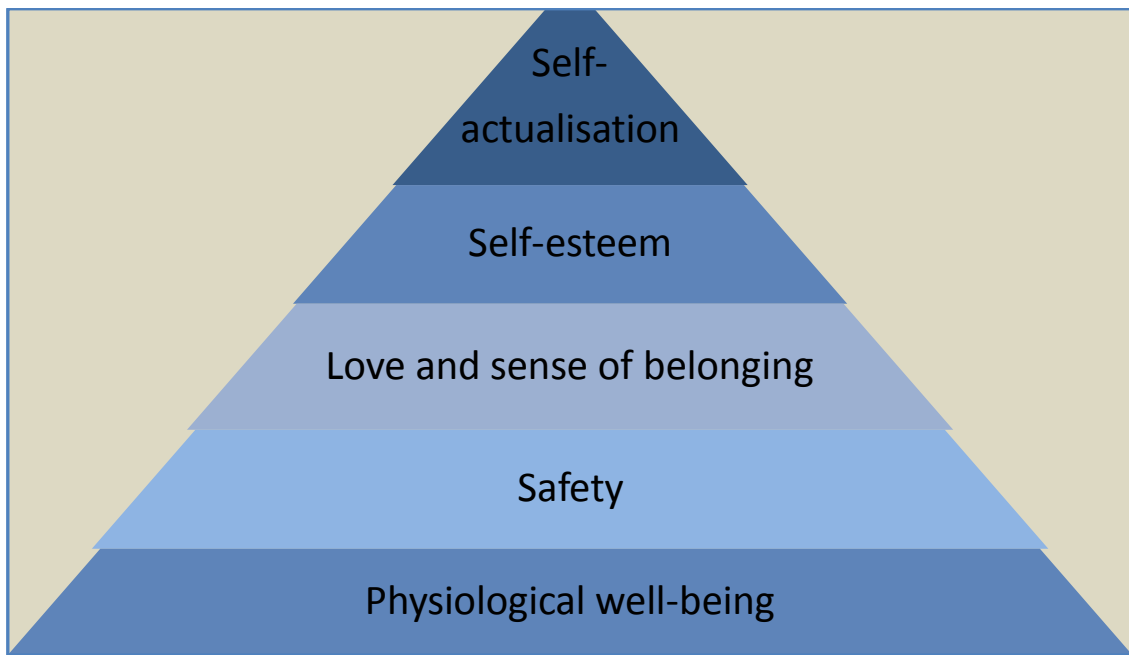
Much of human learning has common features. Learning begins with the knowledge and skills that learners bring to the situation. This knowledge is expanded and seen as a function of learning. As already mentioned in Section 2.4 learning involves the use of cognitive strategies and processes. These are summed up in attention, perception, rehearsal, organization, elaboration, storage, and retrieval (Schunk 2012: 346). Motivation is closely linked to learning and is defined as a process of “instigating and sustaining goal directed behaviour” (Schunk 2012: 346) Learners set goals and employ cognitive processes. This involves planning and monitoring. Furthermore they change behaviour with persistence and effort to achieve their aims. Motivation is not observable directly but it is a concept that helps to understand why people do something and why they behave as they do. Although simple types of learning can happen without motivation, it is necessary to say that most learning is motivated. Pupils who are motivated to learn attend to instruction and are more engaged in activities like rehearsing information or relating new knowledge to previously acquired knowledge. They also ask more questions and are willing to learn in their free time as well as at school. This is a very significant advantage for Blended Learning with a learning platform. Motivated students also choose to work on difficult tasks and do not give up easily. Motivation engages pupils in

activities that facilitate learning. Therefore, it is necessary to have a closer look at theories of motivation relating to BL.

Some of the early views on motivation follow the idea that motivation results from instincts. Theorists like Schunk (2012: 347) and Chew, Jones and Turner (2008: 42) think that motivation is closely linked to the optimal level of physical states. Another idea presented in Schunk (2012: 347) is that humans seek pleasure and want to avoid pain and that this is the basis for behaving in a motivated fashion. Although these views may explain some instances, they are not adequate for motivated activities during learning. The historical perspectives of motivation with relevance to learning range from drive theory, conditioning theory, cognitive consistency theory to humanistic theory (Schunk 2012: 347; Chew, Jones & Turner 2008: 42). As the last one is a very prominent one for Blended Learning, the focus of this chapter will be on this theory established by Maslow (Schunk 2012: 347; Chew, Jones and Turner 2008: 42).

The concept by Maslow is mostly constructivist in nature but also emphasises cognitive and affective processes. People's abilities are addressed and it assumes that potentialities lie in people to make choices and seek control over their lives. This concept follows the belief that human actions are unified by being directed toward goal attainment. Maslow emphasises motivation as being important to develop everyone's full potential and he believes that conditioning theories do not capture the complexity of human behaviour. Following Maslow's concept Schunk (2012: 351) illustrates how most human action happens to satisfy needs, which are hierarchically organised in five stages. Lower-order needs have to be satisfied before higher-order needs can be developed or can influence behaviour. Figure 4 presents the different stages, which are then explained in more detail below.

Figure 4 Hierarchy of needs (Schunk 2012: 352; Chew, Jones & Turner 2008: 42)



This hierarchy forms the basis for Chew, Jones and Turner's (2008: 42) research, and the pedagogical implications they elaborated are now connected to the five stages. The first four stages are called deprivation needs. If there is a lack of satisfaction, people might have deficiencies and are not motivated to work on them anymore. In the case of stage one, *Physiological well-being*, teachers have to think about their learners' well-being. This means that learners will lose attention and will not be able to learn well, if their physical conditions are not well attended to. Pupils cannot learn well when they feel hungry, have insufficient sleep or any illness. Noises from outside can prevent them from learning, too. In this case Blended Learning tools like a learning platform might help overcome these problems. Pupils can also access learning materials on a platform when they are not at school. They can choose a place of learning and avoid noise and distraction from others. However, whenever this stage is not fulfilled they might not be satisfied, which again hinders learning.

The second stage is the need for *Safety*. In general this could involve environmental security and also saving money, securing a job or taking out insurance policies. Chew, Jones and Turner (2008: 42) claim that in a pedagogical sense this means that the learning environment must be safe and sound for all

learners from any background and at any age. Psychologically, learners should feel safe to communicate with their peers and tutors in this stage. Safety could also mean that they can learn in surroundings and a learning environment where they can try something out before actually speaking in front of a group of people. A VLE and other Blended Learning approaches could contribute to this stage and help pupils to be confident and safe because it offers the chance to repeat speaking and writing exercises as often as they want and they can also learn in an environment where they are not always observed. Finally they only reach this stage when they feel safe to communicate with peers and tutors in real life, too.

Once the first two stages are adequately met the third stage, named *Love and sense of belonging*, becomes important. These needs can involve intimate relationships but also belonging to groups and having close friends. The individual learner has to feel comfortable and liked. The teacher should create learning communities to provide a sense of belonging to learners. A citation by Goethe already says “Überall lernt man nur von dem, den man liebt” (Goethe cited in Eckermann 2014). A VLE could also be a learning community where everyone feels accepted and an online course gives a sense of belonging to a special group of learners with the same goals and aims.

The fourth stage is called *Self-esteem* and includes self-esteem and esteem from others. Schunk (2012: 352) states that in general the needs at this stage include high achievement, independence and recognition from others as well as competent work. Chew, Jones and Turner (2008: 42) suggest that the personal strength, qualities and uniqueness within the learners are developed at this stage and can be found in the learning process. Pupils should be encouraged through activities and tasks and they should have the feeling that they really play an important role in the learning environment. These factors contribute a lot to this perception. In exercises like a Wiki or Webquest or expert tasks, each pupil has to fulfil a special role and without the contribution of all the pupils, the tasks cannot be solved correctly. Therefore, the pupils feel the need for collaboration and also feel the need to prove their ability within a group.

The last stage is the called *self-actualisation* or a desire for self-fulfilment. This phase includes the wish and need to become everything that one is capable of

becoming. The desire for personal growth is high and behaviour is not motivated by a deficiency any more. Learners at this stage will develop full potential as human beings and they realise the purpose of driven learning processes and cultural life. The aim of teaching, following Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is to assist learners to achieve self-actualisation and thus fulfil their potential for personal growth. (Chew, Jones, Turner 2008: 43) Social interaction plays an important role because through collaborative learning pupils might feel liked and a sense of belonging to a special learning group. Teachers can contribute to the sense of belonging to each other and to pupils' self esteem by ensuring the engagement of the learners in the community. This community can be formed in class as well as online in course groups on Moodle. Communities, virtual or in real life, have to be socially and academically reinforced. Such ideas easily go hand in hand with the models of BL; especially the edited concept of Salmon's model for e-moderation, which is presented in Section 5.2.2 in more detail, can contribute to successful learning in humanistic ways. This model emphasises socialisation with peers and clearly follows the humanistic concept, as the aim of the Blended Learning model is to provide a simple but very practical guide for those who are searching for an effective mixture of online and F2F education.

Chew, Jones and Turner (2008: 44) claim that Maslow cautions that a number of learners stop maturing after they have reached a high level of esteem. They sometimes never reach the higher level of self-actualisation, as presented in the model before. It is a very critical concern. In the educational context, learners who have reached the stage of self-actualisation cognitively know and explore knowledge which is new to them. They connect this knowledge to something beyond their self respect and ego. They even might help others to find self-fulfilment and to realise their inner potential. A great challenge for teachers in the concept of Blended Learning and learning with technologies might be that they bring their pupils to this last stage. Humanistic principles are also relevant to regular ELF classrooms with F2F teaching and learning. If teachers follow some important principles, instructional goals can be reached. It is necessary that teachers show positive regard for students and they should always separate the pupils from their actions. Teachers should encourage personal growth by providing students with choices and opportunities. Schunk (2008: 356) also

suggests that it is important to facilitate learning by providing different resources and encouragement of both learners and teachers. Blended Learning can help pupils and teachers to put these principles into practice.

3 Communicative Language Teaching and its relation to Blended Learning

Communicative language teaching has its origins in the early 1960s in foreign language teaching in Britain when scholars saw the importance of communicative proficiency rather than focusing on the mastery of structures. (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 153) Thompson (1996: 9) claims that it is one of the dominant theoretical models in ELT, also in terms of EFL. When it comes to communicative language teaching it is necessary to differentiate between natural and instructional settings because the two settings show other characters. Natural language acquisition contexts are those in which learners are exposed to the language in natural surroundings as, for example, in social interaction with native speakers in a foreign country. In such environments the learners of a foreign language are confronted with the target language through interaction with peers in everyday situations. (Lightbown & Spada 2013: 123-124) In educational situations this is not easy to achieve because hardly any of the teachers are native speakers. However, it could mean that teachers try to give all their instructions in the foreign language and also classroom management happens in the target language. In special cases it might be possible that English teachers at one school are not only talking in English with their pupils in class but also outside and in regular school life. This is only possible if the teachers are willing to do so. In structure-based and instructional settings, the foreign language is taught to a group of second or foreign language learners. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 123-123) say that the focus is mostly on the language and its system in such contexts. The messages carried by the language are in the background. Teachers aim at teaching the pupils vocabulary and grammatical rules of the target language. However, only learning in instructional and structure-based settings are a way to success. In some cases, one aim of instructional language teaching might be that pupils pass exams rather than to

success in everyday communication and interaction beyond their classroom. However, pupils should be encouraged to become confident speakers of the target language and therefore, a classroom should not be the only place where pupils have contact with the language. Some of the pupils might have some opportunities to continue learning outside the language class or the teacher can create such opportunities with offering suitable materials and activities which allow contact to native speakers. Blended Learning methods (as shown in section 4) can contribute to establishing natural settings for pupils via learning platforms and/or the use of the web, for example.

One major aim of this concept is that pupils benefit most of language teaching if learning a language happens with a special kind of classroom activities and methods that facilitates language learning in a communicative way and Hedge (2000: 57) claims that this is only possible if communicative practice is always part of the process. (Lightbown & Spada 2013: 125-127 and Zederbauer 2008: 20-21) Communicative competence is a central goal which means that pupils are able to use language appropriately for a wide range of different purposes and functions. Hedge (2000: 45) uses another term for this and says that communicative language ability is a more suitable term and concept as it follows the view that not only knowledge but also the ability to put that knowledge into use in communication is important. Richards and Rodgers (2001: 157) also say that communicative competence means that the pupils, for example, have the ability and knowledge to adjust the register and level of formality according to different settings. This includes learners being able to produce and understand different types of texts and show a high level of strategic competence, which means that they use language with different strategies to communicate. Communicative language ability is, therefore, a very good term and is divided into five different competences which are developed if the communicative approach in teaching and learning is implied: Linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and fluency. Bachmann (1990 cited in Hedge 2000: 46) and Hedge (2000: 56) worked on this topic and summed up the issues which arise for teachers in communicative classrooms and for the communicative curriculum as shown now in Table 1:

If communicative language ability consists of the followingwhat does this imply for language learning?
Linguistic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to achieve accuracy in the grammatical forms of the language - to pronounce the forms accurately - to use stress, rhythm, and intonation to express meaning - to build a range of vocabulary - to learn the script and spelling rules - to achieve accuracy in syntax and word formation.
Pragmatic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to learn the relationship between grammatical forms and functions - to use stress and intonation to express attitude and emotion - to learn the scale of formality - to understand and use emotive tone - to use the pragmatic rules of language - to select language forms appropriate to topic, listener, etc.
Discourse competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to take longer turns, use discourse markers, and open and close conversations - to appreciate and be able to produce contextualized written texts in variety of genres - to be able to use cohesive devices in reading and writing texts - to be able to cope with authentic texts.
Strategic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to be able to take risks in using both spoken and written language - to use a range of communication strategies, e.g. 'What do you call a thing that /person who ...'.
Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to deal with the information gap of real discourse - to process language and respond appropriately with a degree of ease - to be able to respond with reasonable speed in 'real time'.

Table 1 Implications of communicative language ability in teaching and learning (Hedge 2000: 56)

In connection with SLL Richards (n.d.: 23-24) formulates ten core assumptions as to why communicative language teaching practices are useful in EF classrooms:

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2. Effective [...] learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate intrapersonal exchange.
3. Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging.
4. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
5. Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning or underlying rules of language use and organisation, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
6. Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language and trial and error. Although errors are a normal product of learning the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently.
7. Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
8. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
9. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning.
10. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing. (Richards n.d.: 23-24)

These core assumptions underline the understanding of communicative second language teaching and learning. The move from teacher-centred instruction to learner-centred instruction is important. The concept of BL, as explained in detail in Chapter 2, shows some overlaps with these paradigms as typical activities in CLT classrooms show a great variety in approaches and methodologies and many competences have to be developed (Richards n.d. 23-24). Learning in blended ways can support the communicative language teaching model. Zederbauer

(2008: 28) sums up aspects of particular interest, which include how to engage learners in meaningful communication, how to integrate topics that are relevant and interesting for the learners, language learning aims, the role of errors and alternative assessment, individual differences, a shift to learner-centered instruction, learner autonomy, and a view of learning as a life-long process. The activities and blended methods can include accuracy and fluency tasks, activities for mechanical, meaningful or communicative practice, information-gap activities, task-completion activities and information gathering activities. Furthermore, teachers can present jig-saw activities and opinion sharing ones, as well as information-transfer activities and reasoning gap activities. The emphasis is placed on group work and pair work, including role plays (Zederbauer 2008: 21). None of these activities are restricted to F2F teaching but can also be included in VLEs and therefore communicative language teaching is not restricted to F2F language classrooms.

The change in thinking about language teaching has not led to a development of one single model of CLT but instead, several language teaching approaches have emerged. Lightbown and Spada (2013: 124) differentiate between communicative, task-based and content-based learning environments. Most task-based teaching is based on the major concept of CLT and also content-based language teaching follows the aim that learning the language itself counts and instructions lead to interaction, conversation and language use rather than to learning about the language itself. In combination with BL and SLA the concept of outcomes-based teaching is added in this paper, following some of the ideas of Leung (2012).

The concept of task-based teaching and instructions seems to be appropriate for BL as it can serve as the sole framework for course planning and delivery (Richards n.d. 33). Richards also says that task-based teaching can serve as one component of an English course or as a technique which is used from time to time. Therefore task-based instruction could be part of BL, as it seems to fit into a concept of mixing different components of English language teaching (Zederbauer 2008: 23). Outcomes-based language teaching can either be seen as a perspective, which aims at a conceptualisation of the curriculum as teachers

have to be facilitators who require students to understand, apply, generate new ideas, invent, diagnose and solve problems (Leung 2012: 162) or it can also be seen as a learner-focused and learning-oriented perspective and can be linked to the process of “constructive alignment” (Leung 2012: 162). These two concepts are now explained in more detail and the connections to BL established.

3.1 Task-based language teaching

Task-based instruction in second language teaching is based on principles of communicative language teaching, maybe even on a very strong version of CLT, as tasks are seen as vehicles for applying these principles which say that activities should involve real communication and the language used in activities should be meaningful and support the learning process. (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 223-224 and Ellis 2003: 30). A task-based curriculum has to involve decisions about what tasks learners will do, how they will perform these tasks and how teachers can assess the performance. Richards and Rodgers (2001: 224) claim that task-based language teaching (TBLT) is process-focused rather than product-focused. Therefore, TBLT favours activities which require and encourage meaning-oriented language use and target language communication. (Eckerth 2008: 31) This means that learning happens by interacting communicatively and communication and meaning are emphasised. The communicative goal is more important than the mastery of certain second language (L2) structures. Richards and Rodgers (2003: 224) say that speech processing is based on the production and reception of whole phrases and vocabulary, and meaning plays an important role in TBLT.

However, first of all it is necessary to decide what a task is. Williams and Burden (1997: 168) claim that a task is “any activity that learners [are] engaged in [and helps to] process learning a language”. Tasks can also be a range of activities from simple and brief exercises up to complex and lengthy activities such as group solvings, simulations and/or decision-making activities (Breen 1987: 23). These tasks have to engage pupils so that they have to use their cognitive skills, because, as Ellis (2003: 7) says, real tasks involve some process of thoughts. Pupils need cognitive skills like selecting, reasoning, classifying, sequencing and transforming information to fulfil the tasks. The cognitive dimension has to be

included when it comes to the definition of tasks. Key elements and competences of/in L2 learning are negotiation, modification, rephrasing and experimenting. Richards and Rodgers (2003: 225) claim that tasks should encourage these key elements.

Task-based teaching does not constitute a unified approach. Ellis (2003: 31) claims that it combines humanistic principles as well as cognitive theories. Tasks which are designed to follow humanistic principles include affective and linguistic purposes. This could mean that in a language game the pupils introduce themselves to each other by asking each other different questions. The affective purpose is to warm up the new group of pupils. The linguistic purpose would be the practice of questioning and answering. If tasks are constructed following cognitive principles, they are designed with a metacognitive focus for learner-training purposes. The tasks help learners to become aware of, reflect on, and evaluate their own learning strategies and styles they use to learn. This also leads again to autonomous and self-directed learning. (Ellis 2003: 33)

Furthermore, the tasks should be designed either so that learners might need to achieve them in real life or so that they have a pedagogical purpose for the specific classroom. They are also called pedagogical or real-life tasks. (Nunan 2006: 14; Richards & Rodgers 2001: 231) Pedagogical tasks are especially designed for the language classroom and require specific interactional strategies and specific use of parts of the language system. In a BL method like in a Webquest about Christmas traditions in different countries (explained in detail in Section 5.2.2) this could be trained. Pupils must answer 3 specific questions about Christmas traditions, food and presents. A Wiki and a forum provided on a learning platform could function as an information-gap activity. One learner or a group of learners has one set of information and another group or pupil has complementary information. They must work on a collaborative text and find out what the other party's information is in order to complete a varied argumentative text in the Wiki. A real-world task would involve the pupils using the language for example while practicing a job interview with peers or the teachers or writing real emails to pen friends from an English speaking country or their host families before/after a language trip.

There are six pedagogical task types and real-life tasks suggested by Willis (1996 cited in Richards & Rodgers 2001: 134) built on traditional knowledge hierarchies: listening tasks, sorting and ordering, comparing tasks, problem solving, sharing experience tasks and creative tasks. Ellis (2003: 33) claims that the key pedagogical issue is to include these tasks in a cycle of teaching. The task cycle consists of three phases, suggested by Ellis (2003: 33) and Willis (1996 cited in Ellis 2003: 33): 1) Pre-Task, 2) Task and 3) Language Focus. This, for example, could mean that in the pre-task phase teachers provide and highlight useful words and phrases or activate learners' existing knowledge of content and language. The task phase ends with a report where the learners comment on their performance, for example. The final phase includes consciousness-raising activities and practice activities directed at specific linguistic features that occurred in the input of the task. (Ellis 2003: 33) In connection with BL this could mean that the teachers show their pupils examples of formal and informal letters and emails and the pupils have to find out about the concept, language and phrases used in F2F teaching. The pupils then have to write the formal letter or, for example, a letter of application. As the task cycle includes planning, reflection and report on what the pupils do, the pupils have to write drafts and redrafts and they get some feedback on their writing process and have to comment on their own writing project. Finally the teachers highlight specific features and probably errors that occurred in the pupils' written texts. In Blended Learning activities like text writing, writing emails or also in the collaborative activities on a learning platform, the opportunities for paying attention to all stages are given. Through these different phases and a mixture of F2F teaching and learning and CALL, the motivation of the pupils can be kept high. This is important because Richards and Rodgers (2001: 235-236) also claim that tasks always have to promote motivation. This is done through the use of authentic language, varying tasks, physical activity in tasks, for example pair or group work, and varying communication styles.

Richards and Rodgers (2001: 235-236) state that the learners have special roles when it comes to TBLT. The pupils are group participants in first place. Many tasks will be done in small groups or in pairs. If students are used to individual work or whole-class and frontal teaching, some adaption may be required. The

pupils also function as monitors. This means that the class activities have to be designed so that students have the opportunity to see how language is really used in communication. They should feel the need to realise the form of messages which comes with the tasks. Thus, the task characteristics must enhance the pupils' interest and motivation. The pupils should also be risk-takers and innovators when it comes to TBLT. Many tasks will require learners to create and interpret messages although they lack the full linguistic resources or experience. Guessing, asking and consulting are the main skills the pupils will need and these competences should be fostered with the specially created tasks.

The teachers' roles are also summed up by Richards and Rodgers (2001: 236). They say that the teacher is the selector and sequencer of tasks. The tasks should be formed and put into instructional sequences to keep the pupils' interest high and to reach their needs, interest and language skill level. Teachers also have to prepare their learners for the tasks and make sure that everybody has acquired the core skills which are needed to fulfil a task. This could mean that they provide a word list or dictionaries before reading a difficult text and make sure that pupils know how to look up different words in the dictionaries. In terms of Blended Learning this would mean that the teacher should make sure that every pupil knows how to work with the computer and the software. A partial demonstration of task procedures can help. As pupils acquire language through participating in tasks they need to notice critical features of the language they use. Therefore, teachers have to raise the pupils' awareness and they should arouse their interest in solving language problems. This includes attention-focusing pre-task activities, guided exposure to similar tasks and useful material.

When it comes to useful pedagogical materials, TBI promotes authentic tasks by using authentic materials wherever possible. Yule (1997) claims that learners should be confronted with a so-called "referential problem" (Yule 1997 cited in Eckerth 2008: 31) which includes the kind of authentic referential communication that links L2 classroom learning to L2 use outside the classroom. This ranges from using the latest newspapers and television to the internet. Pupils could, for example, read a book from the library. Before that the pupils could search the internet for book reviews to make sure that they have chosen a

book that interests them. Another task could be that pupils are asked to imagine that they have to buy their own dictionaries. They could create a shopping analysis where they compare three internet sellers, price lists, mailing times and shipping charges. They should then choose one and justify their choice. Furthermore, the pupils could initiate a conversation in a special chat room where they talk about their interests, their life. They could develop answers to the first three people of their class responding and then they should start a diary with text sets, ranking the response (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 237).

In the context of Blended Learning, TBLT seems to form a useful basis for task implementation. It can provide an effective background for teaching and the task cycle can help to create authentic and meaningful tasks to ensure that pupils become autonomous and communicative learners who use their metacognitive skills and communicative competences to reflect on their learning process. As one definition of Blended Learning suggests, different models, approaches and methodologies should be combined and therefore TBLT can be a part of the whole teaching system.

3.2 Outcomes-based language teaching

Outcomes-based teaching has been adopted by some educational institutions in recent times. It is built on a complex set of ideas which have been interpreted differently in different circumstances. Leung (2012: 161) says that this is not a programme itself, but more a way of delivering, designing, and documenting instruction in terms of the intended outcomes and goals. The prominence of outcomes-based teaching can be associated with a broad public policy environment. This environment includes two doctrines: firstly, corporatist management and, secondly, public accountability. Corporatist management implies activities in different parts of society which are subordinated to the aims and procedures of the state and the government. Public accountability in turns stands for professionals who justify the government's activities in relation to the declared goal. Increasing pressure has been placed on educational authorities by governments in many countries to meet national economic imperatives. Brindley (1998: 45 cited in Leung 2012: 162) suggests that "economic growth and

international competitiveness are [...] seen as contingent on the capacity of education and training systems to produce a highly educated, flexible, and literate workforce”.

In terms of education, Outcomes-based teaching and instruction can be linked to a variety of ideas. Leung (2012: 162) and Brindley (1998: 54 cited in Leung 2012: 162) see the curriculum and its goals and intentions as an expression of what the pupils’ outcomes should be by the end of their school career. Thus, a curriculum is a collection of pre-specified outcomes in the form of student attainment. Leung (2012: 162) follows Bloom in her argumentation that learning can be seen to connect with outcomes in different ways. It should be the goal of teachers to enable their pupils in any class to benefit from their years at school. The teachers should organise the foreign language teaching into differentiated materials to suit the diversity of pupils’ needs and preferences. The pupils also should receive formative feedback and enrichment activities during the teaching learning process. Then the learners can move towards a desired curriculum objective (Leung 2012: 162).

The father of OBE is Spady. He states that

Outcomes-based education means clearly focusing and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences. This means starting with a clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do, then organizing the curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens (Spady 1994: 1).

This approach presupposes that it should be possible to determine what is essential for all the pupils to be able to do. It should also be possible to achieve this through the appropriate organisation of an educational system and through appropriate classroom practices. Killen (2000: 2) claims that the main idea behind Spady’s definition is that OBE is an approach to planning, delivering and evaluating instruction. This requires administrators, teachers and pupils to focus on the desired results and outcomes of education. Their focus and attention should be on the results that are expressed in terms of individual learners and their learning outcomes. A similar approach is competency-based education, a model which emerged in the 1970s in the United States (Mendenhall 2012 and

Ming 2008: 180). The most important characteristic of this educational approach is that it measures learning rather than time. Mendenhall (2012) claims that learners progress by demonstrating their competence. This means that they prove that they have mastered the knowledge and skills required for particular subjects but it does not matter how long it takes them. In OBE, competences and knowledge are measured, too but OBE is more time based. One semester at school lasts about four months and pupils have to achieve the special aims formulated for one class during the school year. If not, they are mostly not allowed to proceed to the next class. In Austrian curriculums all subject-related outcomes and competences are time-framed and limited to one year, therefore the focus in this paper is on OBE. The overall curriculum, however, emphasises long-term and cross-curricular outcomes in the so-called *Bildungsziele*. These involve the ability to solve problems and to work co-operatively. These outcomes are strongly related to the pupils' future life roles such as being productive workers, responsible citizens or parents. Killen (2000: 2) says that the overall aim is that the outcomes reflect the complexities of real life, and then learning is significant. Teaching should always focus on the life-roles that learners will face after their school career.

Killen (2000: 1) and Leung (2012: 162-163) have formulated some key issues in order to explain what OBE means: First, it is learner focused and learning-oriented, as it requires students to apply, invent, generate new ideas, diagnose and solve problems. There is an emphasis on student mastery of traditional subject-related academic outcomes. Secondly, teaching is objective or goal-driven, which means that it is supposed to lead to certain aims. The learning outcomes are in the foreground of teaching and the curriculum is used for developing a programme and aims what pupils should be able to do in the end in one subject.

To help reach the specific outcomes in language learning, there are descriptors and checklists for learners. Outcomes-based language teaching could be closely connected to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as this serves as a reference point. The CEFR is designed to provide a common basis for an explicit description of objectives, content, and methods for the study of

modern languages. The descriptors formulate learning outcomes, referred to as objectives, and these are associated with the use of a modern foreign language for a range of targeted activities. It was also designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines. It helps to design teaching and learning materials, and can be used in connection with assessment. The CEFR marks six levels in foreign language proficiency: A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2. The scheme makes it possible to compare tests and examinations across all countries and also within one country. It is based on empirical research and widespread consultation with experts. As for Outcomes-based teaching, educators can use this framework as a basis for recognising language qualifications and thus facilitating educational and occupational mobility (CEFR²).

Based on the CEFR concept the so-called *Bildungsstandards*⁵ have been developed in Austria which also define clear criteria pupils should reach up to their 8th year of schooling, or the 13th year, when they leave school with their *Matura*. This is the final exam at the end of their school career before they are allowed to proceed to University or College. Additionally there is the European Language Portfolio (ELP), which helps learners to check on their progress and comes in very handy during the working process as a toolkit (Moser 2007: 613). These competence models seem to be linked to the Outcomes-based concept because they define competences and outcomes which have to be evaluated and assessed by teachers to modify teaching and learning.

As the perspective of OBE is closely linked to the process of constructive alignment, this process can help to establish this concept of teaching. Constructive alignment is divided into the three steps of teaching educators should follow which are described now:

1. Teachers need to describe the intended outcomes in terms of what their students are supposed to be able to do after teaching. There the criteria of the ELP, the *Bildungsstandards* or the CEFR can help.

⁵ „Bildungsstandards legen jene Kompetenzen fest, die SchülerInnen am Ende einer definierten Ausbildungszeit erworben haben sollen. Es sind die Fähigkeiten, Fertigkeiten und Haltungen, die für die weitere schulische und berufliche Bildung von zentraler Bedeutung sind. Bildungsstandards sind Lernergebnisse, die aus den Lehrplänen abgeleitet werden“ (BMUKK 2012).

2. Teachers should engage students in learning activities that help them bring about the intended outcomes. As the pupils' learning styles are very different and everyone needs some individualisation, the Blended Learning approach could help to offer different activities so that everyone could reach the intended outcomes, but in different ways.
3. Finally, teachers also need to judge if and to what extent students' performances meet the given criteria. Giving feedback and reflecting on the activities carried out can help the pupils to reach higher levels and manage more difficult tasks (Leung 2012: 162-163).

The role of schools, teachers and pupils changes when it comes to Outcomes-based teaching. Killen (2000: 3) says that the institutions and especially teachers should be aware that all students have a talent and that it is the job of the schools and educational environments to develop it. The schools should find ways for learners to succeed and not ways for them to fail. Teachers have to prepare students every day for success and then the next day the need for correction will be reduced. Every child can be successful and excellent, not just a few. Pupils should work and learn collaboratively rather than competitively and therefore it is necessary that no learner should be excluded from any activity at school. Killen (2000: 3) also claims that a positive attitude towards pupils is crucial because if the teachers believe that they can get every pupil to learn well then they will.

There have also been some criticism and concerns about this approach. Some people argue that some learning experiences are valuable in their own right and that it is not appropriate to specify in advance what pupils will learn from an activity such as reading poems or watching plays. (Killen 2000: 6) However, specifying outcomes in advance is important, otherwise some exercises and tasks may not make sense at all for the teachers and the pupils. Pupils might not even become engaged with an activity if they do not see a goal or a specific aim behind it. Some people also argue, following Leung (2012: 163), that not all students can achieve the same outcomes. That is definitely true, but everyone can reach the levels they are able to reach and therefore the CEFR works quite well with the

different levels of proficiency. These formulated objectives, descriptors and competences make it easier to compare the outcomes and also to assess pupils' achievements individually. Although some scholars like Leung (2012: 163) and Talbot (2004) argue that these descriptors emphasise a minimum level of achievement and, therefore, encourage mediocrity, OBE, and the formulated benchmarks and qualificatory frameworks following this concept, are only as successful and dependent on the extent to which the teachers facilitate the pupils' learning through appropriate and responsive pedagogy and assessment. Thus, it is necessary to work individually on a concept that allows achievements at different levels of language competence and outcomes. The Blended Learning approaches and methods can cater for different proficiencies within a class and also for different levels of language knowledge. An OBE system also only works when the three major steps of instructional planning are followed. Firstly, the teacher has to decide on the outcomes that learners are to achieve. Secondly, they need to know how to assist pupils to achieve those outcomes with specific content and teaching strategies (i.e. integrating learning platforms and providing different activities). Furthermore, and probably most importantly, the teachers have to decide how to determine when pupils have achieved the outcomes. (Leung 2012) They have to decide on assessment and reporting procedures and they have to evaluate their teaching regularly to see whether their methods are suitable for reaching the aims and outcomes. So the learning programmes will have to be organised in integrated ways which draw attention to elements in all learning areas. In BL pupils do not only need their English language skills but also technological skills and social skills for example. Also, BL only works if it is thought through carefully and when it is goal-driven and if pupils get response, feedback and corrective acknowledgement. The educational merits of any outcomes-based teaching, ultimately, will depend on all these factors.

4 Methods, systems and approaches to Blended Learning

Considering the role of technology in the concept of Blended Learning is necessary to distinguish between different approaches and methods and also between the different language skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing plus the systems. Traditionally these have been divided into productive and receptive skills. When it comes to the area of receptive skills like listening and reading, a clear role for web-based learning environments like the learning platform Moodle can be identified. Digital audio files can be presented and listened to and the transcript can be read alongside or the recordings be paused at will. When learners read on screen they sometimes have the opportunity to click directly on a word/hyperlink to find out the meaning. When it comes to the productive skills of speaking and writing the roles of technology are significantly different. The assessment of speaking and writing relies more on human interpretation. Although pupils type their written texts into the computer, it is only to be evaluated and graded by a teacher and not a computer. Also spelling and grammar checkers, for example, cannot replace teachers and their assessment because they might not pick up every error. (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 14f) Therefore, F2F sessions where feedback is given by the teachers are necessary and an important part in Blended Learning. However, there are ways of integrating all the four skills in Blended Learning with technology and in the following sections different methods will be investigated. First of all Office software like word processing programmes or presentation software, as already mentioned in the Blended Learning continuum by Jones (Chew, Jones and Turner 2008, see 1.2) can also contribute to, firstly, develop competences in using technology, and, secondly, to foster different skills, like writing and reading as presented in the later mentioned examples. Using such software programmes can be seen as a first stage of getting used to working with technology in a Blended Learning environment. The Web in general is a point of interest as it offers a lot of opportunities and a variety of activity tools, or can be used passively for research projects and Webquests. In Videoblogs or Podcasts, for example, the pupils have the chance to get familiar with each other and their communicative competence can be trained. Furthermore, the socialising process between new course members at the beginning of a school year can be lighted up, as suggested

by Salmon (2004) in her five-stage model. The web provides a great variety of ELT materials and special programmes, like the Hot Potatoes software can easily be used by teachers to create materials which enhance language learning and can be used in the Blended Learning classroom. The last part of this section focuses especially on the use of VLEs and the general principles of how VLEs can be integrated in EFL classes. All of the activities presented are based on the principles of communicative language teaching as the aims of the tasks are to foster the pupils' communicative competences and abilities. The tasks and activities presented combine natural and instructional settings of learning and the pupils get insight to what the English speaking world outside a classroom offers. The ten core assumptions, formulated by Richards (n.d.: 23-24) (see section 3), why communicative language teaching practices are useful in the EFL classrooms, are always kept in mind.

4.1 Office software and the development of other materials

One part of Blended Learning is the use of the computer in all its different facets. This includes office software like word processors, databases, spreadsheets and presentation programs or email clients. A combination of such programs should be installed on most computers in schools. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 69) point out that because they are so common, they are often overlooked as teaching and learning tools. However, the integration of such programs can enable teachers to deliver a BL course with learners and teachers using these programs inside and outside the classroom, as already suggested by Chew, Jones and Turner (2008) and the Blended Learning continuum. Most pupils should be familiar with word-processing software, as this is already part of the curriculum in secondary schools and word-processing software is present in some form on most computers (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 69). Office software can contribute to establishing tasks which are relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging for the pupils and have some connection to real life. This then leads to meaningful communication and pupils train their communicative competences.

Text typed into a word-processor can be edited and formatted using a variety of different simple tools. Texts can be copied or cut from one location to another within a document or between different documents. Text from the Web can be

copied and pasted and formatted again. It is necessary to have the latest update of word processing formats and to agree on one format the pupils should use because some of the older versions might not be compatible with each other. Most of the programs have spell-checker features and the teacher has to warn the pupils that it is no substitute for proof-reading at all, as they do not pick up errors with homophones for example or third person <s> mistakes.

Writing is often an individual activity, which means that teachers can also set writing tasks to be undertaken outside the classroom. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 73) stress that teachers should be aware of the different types of activities word processing programs offer. The pupils can improve their writing skills and use the programs for letter writing, reports, memos and essays or creative writing like poetry, scripts for radio, preparing postings for blogs and vocabulary storage. They can format their written texts individually and once work has been completed, checked and submitted, a teacher can make corrections and add comments by using different coloured fonts or special features for giving feedback in the program. Writing tasks can both be printed and distributed to all members of a class or they can be uploaded on a platform and be published for the whole class.

Using presentation software is also very common in ELF classes. These programs allow presentations to be prepared made up of electronic slides. These slides can contain text, diagrams, pictures and also hyperlinks to websites, documents or any multimedia files like audio clips or videos (Sharma and Barrett 2007: 74-76). Gilbert (n.d.) says that one way to improve learning outcomes is to offer materials or ideas that the student would otherwise not have seen and presentation programs offer a number of opportunities to include pictures, diagrams or other multimedia tools. Presentation programs can be used as tools to support input lessons for grammar areas or functional language. Diagrams and pictures can be replaced by electronic slides and teachers do not have to draw them on the board. Moving forward and backward, from one slide to another and back again, is very easy and ideas can be presented more qualitatively. Gilbert (n.d.) also points out that slides can be made available to the learners and they can also click through them quickly and do not have to take so many notes.

Most competent computer users can learn the basics of such presentation programs in a very short time and it is already becoming a standard skill for digital natives like the pupils. (Sharma and Barrett 2007: 74-76) Therefore, learners can use these programs for creating their own presentations. For pupils who would like to enter the business world this can be a real-life-task, too. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 749) claim that new users could be easily carried away with all the special effects of such presentation programs. Therefore teachers should warn and force them to concentrate on the language and the content more than on the creative parts. Of course, they can create a lively presentation but it should not distract the viewer and listener from the real content. When the presentation is held in front of a class and the listeners are in the same room, the images and slides are presented via a projector and a computer or laptop. Another mode is a guided presentation in which there is no presenter, but the audience clicks through a presentation. Furthermore, Hockley and Clandfield (2010: 63) suggest a half guided and recorded presentation, which can then be uploaded on a platform and the pupils can listen and watch the presentation online. Some programs allow such voiceover presentations and then they can be run by themselves. It is necessary to give them some guidelines. Budiu (2005) and Sharma and Barrett (2007: 72) suggest some basic rules for designing a Power Point slide:

- Keep the text to a minimum – human attention is very limited
- Make the text big enough to read – use one format and short titles
- Be careful with colours – use colour codes
- Prefer an image to text – real photos can have more impact

Both pupils and teachers should stick to those basic rules and then presentations will be successful and a great chance for learning not only presentation skills but also speaking, writing, reading and listening. If pupils present their slides in front of the class in the target language they can practise formal language use and while the others are presenting, they can train their listening skills. Furthermore, while creating the text for a presentation and the slides, the pupils also have to think about register and they also can write down notes for their presentation.

Finally, they train their writing skills while taking notes during a teacher's presentation.

Two activities for classes with word-processing and presentation programs are now presented. I have again chosen two of the most interesting and fitting activities in this case.

4.1.1 Class newspaper: writing skills

Sharma and Barrett (2007: 76) suggest this activity and their aim is to create a class newspaper. The pupils do not only practise their writing skills and learn about different text types but also increase their knowledge about formatting in a word processing program. Furthermore, they can learn about the job of journalists and reporters. It can be organised in elementary classes as well as advanced ones. It can be used as an on-going project or end-of-course-project, too. Every member of the class must contribute something and the final product can be printed and distributed to family and friends. It can also be distributed via a learning platform or as an email newsletter if the resources are available.

Before starting the activity it is important to assign roles to the different pupils. The class could elect people for the different positions and duties or the teacher decides and selects the class members in advance. First of all the teacher explains the objective of the project. Then the class brainstorms the types of things that could be part of such a class newspaper. This could include reports on class activities, outings or/and trips, reports about what they have learned from each other, stories, articles about personal interests/hobbies, poems, word games, quizzes, pictures, photographs, horoscopes and probably a joke page. The editorial team is appointed then and the responsibilities for creating the content are allocated to other members of the class. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 76) give the advice that everyone should have something to do and should be included in the task. This can be achieved by a discussion activity with the editorial team leading the process. A deadline has to be set and a timetable for creating and writing the different pieces of texts is established. The teacher should not forget about the time the pupils might need for language support, correction and rewriting. The different tasks can be split up into some homework tasks and some in-school activities. A project plan can be created where the names, duties

and deadlines are noted. The editorial team has to decide on the layout once the content is nearly finished and corrected. The elements should be collected and typed and finally put together in a word processed document. The first draft is then printed and examined by the whole class and everyone tries to contribute and discuss mistakes and clarity of layout. Once the changes have been implemented, the final version can be printed and displayed. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 76) also suggest that if the first newspaper is a success and the class is together for a longer period of time the project can be repeated. Newspapers always have communicative functions and the pupils can practise their language levels and competences while working on this project. They should be able to select language forms appropriate to the topics and the readers. Not only their pragmatic and linguistic competences are fostered but also their discourse competence because they must be able to use discourse markers, and open and close conversations. They learn to appreciate written texts in the genre of reports and articles and are also able to produce contextualized written texts. All these objectives are part of communicative language teaching.

4.1.2 Slideshows: listening and speaking skills

This activity focuses on a presentation program like Microsoft PowerPoint and its multiple forms of use in the classroom. Creating and narrating a slideshow are the main aims of this activity suggested by Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 63). The pupils practise their listening and speaking skills and their presentation skills, too. The pupils need digital photos or images and a slideshow and presentation program with recording possibilities and loudspeakers. The teacher chooses five images on a topic that interests the learners. The different pictures are then uploaded and put into a slideshow program and the teacher then records text about the pictures. One minute talk per slide is an adequate time frame. If the learners have a low language level, a recording of one or two simple sentences per picture might be enough. The slideshow is put up on the learning platform or sent to the pupils by email. The learners then watch the slideshow and listen to the audio recording. This presentation will function as an example for the production of their own slideshow. They should decide on a topic and find five pictures that match the topic. The pupils can use pictures from the internet or their own digital photos, if they want to talk about their last holidays for example.

Then they should use the same slideshow program to produce their presentation in a similar length to the model. As a next step the individual presentations are uploaded to the learning platform with a short description of the topic. The pupils can listen to and watch the presentations of their classmates, leave a comment on the site in a forum or state what they liked about each slideshow. Creating such an audio voice-over slideshow is a good way to practise presentation skills at a distance. The teachers can give personal feedback to each learner on their presentation, by email or online on the platform. Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 63) suggest a variation of the project, namely that the pupils can also prepare PowerPoint slides on a business related topic and record themselves doing the real presentation if they have the equipment. There are some free programs which can be downloaded from the internet for a free trial, e.g. Camtasia Studio. This allows pupils to record what is on the computer screen, plus a voice-over, and to edit the records (Chip.de 2014). Sometimes practising in private and recording oneself can help to improve speaking and presentation skills because it can be repeated, analysed and rerecorded.

4.2 The Web in general

Electronic pages which hold a lot of information in the form of pictures, text, audio and video are part of the World Wide Web. When the internet was first established it was decided to make it a free technology, allowing anyone to use it with an appropriate connection and equipment. The Web has grown exponentially since its establishment in the mid 1990s. Internet Live Stats (2014) is a website which counts the number of websites and pages online. In 2013 the operators of this website stated that “We are fast approaching 1 billion websites, a milestone which at this rate will be reached by the end of 2014. From 1 website in 1991 to over 700 million in 2013 [...]”(Internet Live Stats 2014).

In this part the focus is on web pages which can be used passively; this means that pupils do not use their productive skills at first but their receptive skills. Then some examples are presented where both, passive and active use, is possible and pupils can contribute actively.

Teachers who want to integrate websites and pages into their Blended Learning modules need to have searching skills to find what they actually want from the

Web. Searching efficiently consists of knowing how to filter the information from accessible web pages in the most effective way (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 16). These two scholars also give advice on successful search engines use: the more words put in their search criteria, the smaller the number of results, which can contribute to a higher success in finding the correct pages. If the information required is not in the first 30-50 results, it is best to rethink the search criteria. Pupils who are not too familiar with search engines should get some training beforehand, otherwise they might be lost with all the findings. Therefore, the teacher can provide useful links and websites the pupils might need for their activities and exercises.

Multimedia, such as audio and video files, are easy to find on the Web. The variety of multimedia files ranges from clips, longer recordings, complete radio programmes up to songs and TV programmes or movies. Sometimes it is difficult to find fitting material and materials that are suitable for the pupils' levels of English and the teachers have to invest a great amount of time to find adequate files and materials. However, once materials have been found they can be stored and downloaded and used and reused and also shared via a learning platform. Especially receptive skills like listening and reading could be trained in such areas.

Next to websites, which can be used passively to gather information, listening to/watching Blogs or podcasts, or doing research, the Internet offers a great variety of activity tools. This means that these activities allow users to not only find, read and, listen but also to contribute materials easily. Static websites are not as involving as open pages, where users can be active. Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 21) suggest that teachers should not only do activities only involving writing skills. It is more motivating to combine the different skills.

One very common activity tool for training communicative competences as well as training reading and writing is a blog. These blogs are defined as online diaries to which authors, called bloggers, contribute written postings. The different posts appear on a web page in chronological order; the last post appears first. They can be on any topic and can include pictures, sometimes audio and video clips or even hyperlinks to other websites that contribute to their topic. Readers can

often respond to the posted messages. The blogs can vary in their level of English and there are also some blogs which are easy to read for beginners. For use in class Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 22) suggest that teachers should sign up for a blog on a homepage like <http://blog.com>. They also have to decide whether they want to use it as a class, learners' or teachers' blog. A class blog is a single blog set up by the teacher and all learners can contribute. A teacher blog belongs to the teacher alone and also every student can have their own blog. There are also a great number of active blogs on the web. To find a useful and interesting blog it might be best to use a specialist search engine. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 24) suggest <http://blogsearch.google.com> because learners can find professional and serious blogs there about different topics like news blogs, technical blogs, business blogs or even beauty blogs. The main opportunity offered to learners by blogs is reading material. The pupils can search for a blog topic that is of personal interest and this can contribute to improving their language skills or they can simply provide a motivation for regular contact with the language. This again can combine natural settings and instructional settings and communicative language abilities are trained. Blogs are mostly very authentic and they are of great value for discussion classes or debates or also project work in which pupils can explore different opinions surrounding a topic. However, it is important to find a clear balance between the learners' independence to choose and the quality of the language used in the blog. Some of the topics might not fit their age or are definitely not educational ones. Pupils should not be left alone with finding blogs but teachers can provide some websites and links for suitable materials which also fit the level of English and where the content is appropriate. If the blogs are too difficult, for example, the pupils might lose interest in reading them and in contributing and responding.

Another very popular tool is Podcasts or Podcasting sites. These sites can either be used passively or actively. Podcasts are computer audio files in mp3 formats. The Oxford English dictionary defines a Podcast as a "digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or portable media player, typically available as a series, new instalments of which can be received by subscribers automatically" (The Oxford English Dictionary 2013). Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 24) say that they can be compared to radio programmes which

vary in length, style, content and level of difficulty. Podcasts can come in the formats of monologues, interviews, discussions or simple dialogues. The audio materials available on the Web range from clips that are less than a minute up to news reports and live radio from around the world (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 22). The teachers have the chance to choose suitable and authentic materials fitting their class's level of English. The listening opportunities are always available and so pupils do not only have the chance to listen to authentic English language at school but also in natural surroundings, at home, in their free time. The use of online listening material as part of a language course and in instructional settings can differ from using traditional published listening comprehensions at school. However, if pupils are allowed to choose their own audio files and Podcasts the teachers might not have the chance to prepare comprehension questions or other pre-, while- or post-listening activities. However, this can foster autonomous learning and learner training as a teacher can show them beforehand how to use listening material for collecting vocabulary or/and as an aid to improving their pronunciation, for example. Some Podcasting sites provide transcripts of the materials pupils can listen to. This can help learners who work independently, too. Pupils can also contribute actively to Podcasting sites because sometimes it is possible to leave comments in written form or as audio-files. Furthermore, some Podcasting sites allow teachers and learners to record and share media files themselves. The different recorded episodes appear on a web page and texts and pictures can be added. (See also Section 4.2.1)

Both Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 21-26) and Sharma and Barrett (2007: 24) suggest some more activity tools for learners and teachers which can be included in learning platforms like Moodle and offer a great chance for teachers to raise interest in Blended Learning. They range from chat ware, comic creator sites, quiz makers, survey sites, and voice boards up to poster sites. These activities can be used in class in different ways and can also cater for all different learning areas. Although there are numerous interesting active tools I have chosen to provide one speaking activity and one grammar activity as they were most interesting to me and I could imagine integrating them into my BL programme, too.

4.2.1 Video/Blog - speaking skills

This idea comes from Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 35) and is a good chance to start the socialising process in a new English class working with a learning platform, as suggested by Salmon (2004) as the first stage of starting CALL. The activity can be adapted for different levels of English. If the pupils are beginners the requirements might be easier and the video blogs might be shorter. The pupils get to know each other and somehow have a protective shield – the computer or laptop – but do not have to talk in front of other people immediately. They get used to their own English voice and the voices of the others without the often embarrassing situation of talking another language with new classmates. They can repeat the recording as often as they want and then only upload a final version which is okay for them.

As Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 35) point out the pupils need either a webcam or a digital camera. If the pupils or the school is not equipped with such devices, a smartphone, for example, has also got a video app or a sound recorder. The teacher has to establish a course site on the learning platform or create a class blog on an external website. First of all the teacher prepares a short video him/herself with a webcam or a digital camera. It should range from one to maximum three minutes, depending on the English skills of the pupils. The spoken text can include the speaker's name and place of residence and their hobbies. With more advanced speakers of English some of the things hoped for during this course – e.g. getting to know everyone well – as well as course objectives, such as improving speaking skills, can be integrated. It might be interesting to add some amusing anecdote or, if the learner's level is not that high, they can include something personal like their favourite colour or favourite food. First of all the teacher uploads the video to the learning platform or to the class blog and asks the learners to watch it. After this they each record their own video introduction of themselves and use the teacher's video as a model. They can include similar information. Last but not least they upload the videos to the learning platform as a video blog. If they only have a sound recording, they upload the mp3 format in blog style. The next step is that the pupils are asked to watch each other's videos to find out more about their classmates. Once all the videos or audio files are on the platform the teacher could create a course quiz or

a survey about the information the pupils have shared. Hockly and Clandfield (2010: 35) also suggest that if the blog offers the opportunity to comment on different entries, they can also post some comments and welcome each other – via audio files or text messages. The advantage of this activity is that pupils immediately start communicating with each other in real spoken language but with the protective shield of the computer and recordings.

4.2.2 Grammar checker

Sharma and Barrett (2007: 29) suggest that some grammar topics can easily be repeated and revised via the internet like understanding of grammar keywords, e.g. modal verbs or signal words for tenses. This task is suitable for advanced learners of English. The pupils can work in pairs and all they need is a basic search engine. The teacher has to select the keywords to be learned and revised by the pupils and which they have to investigate. As a test it is good to try the word *may* and see how many examples are shown in the first 30 results that really demonstrate its uses for giving permission and talking about future possibilities. It might also be a good idea to note these phrases and to save some screenshots of the pages to be prepared if the pupils have problems, and to help with some hints. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 29) suggest the following procedure: first of all the teacher gives the learners the keywords which should be investigated, e.g. *may*, or words like *always*, *never*, *sometimes*. It is also important to tell them which search engine they should use or different search engines could be assigned to different groups to get greater variety. Before going to the computers the pupils should note down what they think the keyword is used for and give at least one sample sentence for each use. Once they are at the computer they have a time limit to search for other sentences that confirm their idea about the keyword's use or to modify their first idea. After searching the pupils compare their results. The teacher can provide gap filling exercises to check whether the pupils are confident in the use or not. As a follow up the teacher can return to previous mistakes the learners made with the keywords and ask them to correct these mistakes in the light of any new information they have just acquired. This activity is more a follow-up training for grammar topics already dealt with in previous lessons. The teacher can focus on special keywords and mistakes the pupils often make and by investigating their own mistakes they can

learn a lot about it and avoid it in future, particularly when working in pairs or small groups so that communication is included, too.

4.3 Electronic formats of ELT materials

Electronic formats of materials for EFL teaching can be divided into three main formats: downloadable material, online materials and software programmes. (Sharma and Barrett 2007: 35) Downloadable materials include materials like worksheets which can be easily taken from the internet and then either stored, printed in the case of worksheets or distributed via email, such as mp3 files. The web is a very rich source of materials for language teaching and learning. Worksheets and lesson plans can be accessed any time and downloaded and printed for a whole class. Not only official publishers offer such materials but also practising language teachers provide materials and lesson ideas. Some of the most popular ones are listed by Sharma and Barrett (2007: 37):

- Dave Sperling's ESL Cafe (Sperling 2013): This page offers not only materials for teachers but also for pupils. The variety ranges from Grammar worksheets up to listening activities, icebreakers and reading activities.
- English Club (Englisch Club 2014): This club page is a good source for teachers and pupils, too. The worksheets can be found easily and the navigation is not difficult. There are pronunciation worksheets as well as vocabulary worksheets.

Whatever site is used, the teacher has to evaluate the different sheets and to decide whether they fit the purpose, the language levels and skills or not. In contrast to downloadable materials Sharma and Barrett (2007: 39) mention online materials. These activities rely on internet access for each pupil and include online exercises, tests, games, reading and listening activities. However, many exercises available online focus on grammar and vocabulary. They can help to practise discrete items such as contrasting two structures or confusable words. Some of the most common activities are multiple-choice tests, gap-filling and drag-and-drop exercises. The pupils mostly get immediate responses as to whether they have got something correct or not. A lot of vocabulary and language

games are to be found on a website like the British Council's *Learn English Central*. This website offers a great variety of games like spelling activities or grammar activities. They are nicely designed and also very appropriate for young learners of English as a second language because the sounds of some of the games are really funny and motivate the pupils to press buttons and at least try the exercises. They also do not need that many explanations, too. As already mentioned (see Section 2.2) such programs are mostly based on behaviouristic learning theories and views and are largely limited to vocabulary training and practising already known structures. However, pupils often like to play games to revise already familiar structures and the immediate feedback they receive could also contribute to the memorization process. When the teacher includes such tasks in a meaningful task-cycle the pupils can also gain a lot from such activities. Furthermore, the pupils can access such exercises easily for themselves at any time, and becoming more autonomous learners as a result.

Furthermore the web offers some listening activities, which also force the pupils to participate actively, like the above-mentioned Podcasts. Some of the podcasts focus on specific grammatical, lexical or functional content and others are more relaxing and offer entertaining monologues or dialogues. Some of the podcasts are accompanied by material such as transcripts or vocabulary lists. The *ESLPod* is a very interesting page for different levels of English learners and the podcasts are spoken in beginners' level and American English. However, to download additional material the teachers have to register and pay for it and the podcast episodes are too long to use in the classroom. This might not be as appropriate as the teacher has to find some additional information and create worksheets and listening activities. A better website for listening activities plus additional material, suggested by Sharma and Barrett (2007: 39) is the BBC World Service's Learning English website. They offer specially recorded five to six minute audio reports and written texts on different topics. Vocabulary lists and texts for all topics are presented there as well. Pupils get pronunciation tips and special podcasts for the different seasons of the year. The variety of topics is tremendous and once pupils and teachers are familiar with navigation, the website has great potential.

Figure 5 BBC Learning English (BBC.co.uk: 25 Dec 2013)

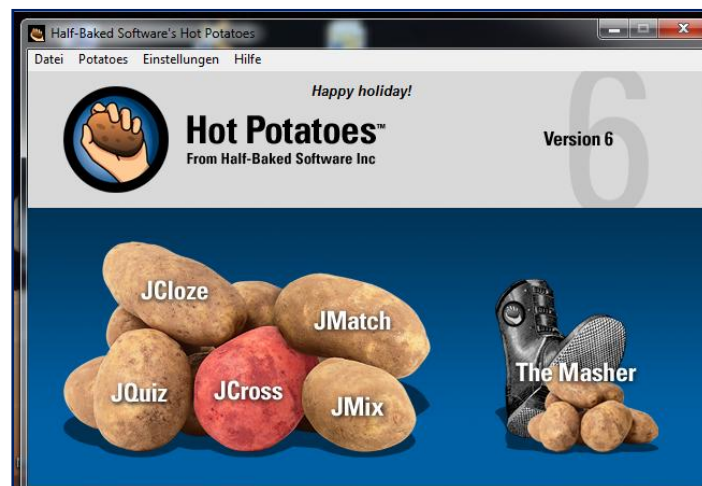


The third possibility for electronic formats of materials is those on disks like CD-ROMs. Some course books already include CD-ROMs and additional online materials to combine technology and course book support. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 41) present the idea that pupils can use the CD-ROMs as interactive learning material, and also some limited speaking practice might be presented in electronic formats. Learners can, for example, read and record alternate lines in a dialogue, then play back the dialogue and listen to it. They have the chance to evaluate their own speaking and pronunciation as well as to practise exercises more often. Some disks provide pronunciation guidelines where pupils can click on a version of a phonemic chart and listen to the sounds and repeat them. When course books are supported by such technological aspects and CD-ROMs the learners can redo exercises as often as they want and some CD-ROMs allow them to establish their own learning sequences. As Sharma and Barrett (2007: 44) point out, the pupils' learning is supported by a range of paper-based materials such as workbooks and they can also have a wide range of electronic support material. The teachers have the opportunity to choose the best of both worlds for their pupils. This is very important in Blended Learning.

A final option teachers have is to create their own materials that fit the learners' needs precisely. On the one hand this can happen via a Learning platform and its opportunities (this will be explained in Section 4.4 in more detail). On the other

hand there are also some software programs that enable teachers either to create their own interactive exercises and materials efficiently to include them in a learning platform or simply print them out. The easiest way is to download some authorised software. A very popular one is *Hot Potatoes*. This is free for teachers and others who work in non-profit institutions. In the program teachers can create different types of exercises and publish them on a website or print them. The different types of activities are multiple-choice quizzes, gap-fill texts, ordering and matching activities, jumbled sentences and words and crosswords. The Masher can be used to combine exercises. After some time of practicing it is very easy to use. These exercises can be easily uploaded and published on a learning platform like Moodle, too.

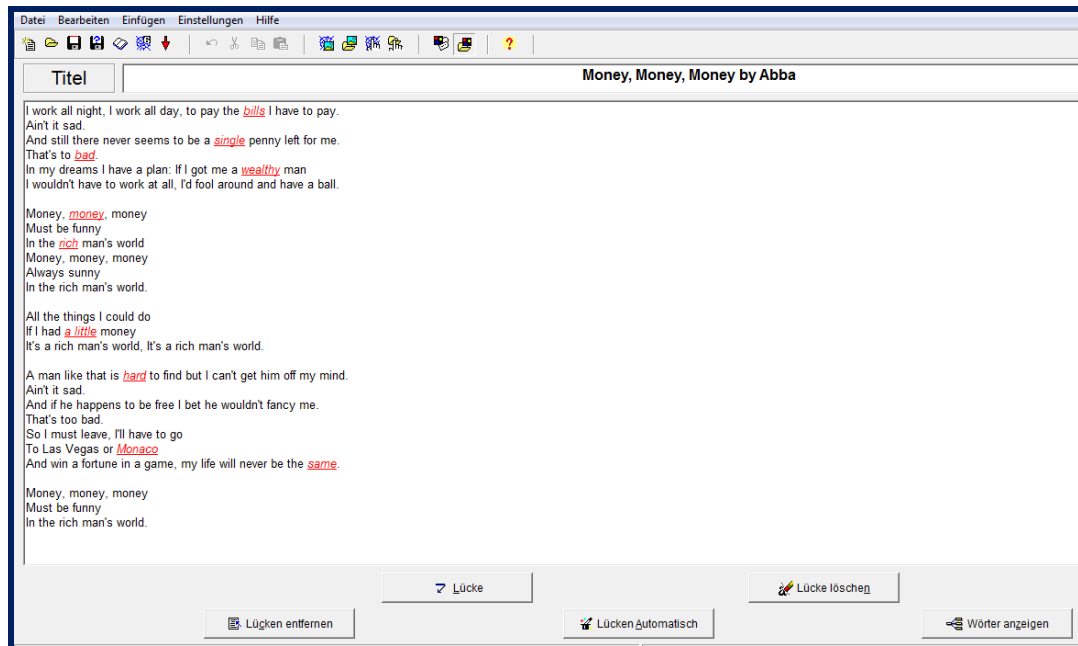
Figure 6 Hot Potatoes (screenshot)



The presented exercise shows a Hot Pot Activity created by myself for my English class. We had the topic of Shopping and Money in class and I was looking for an appropriate listening comprehension. In a course book, called *Focus on Modern Languages 1* published by Cornelsen/Veritas Verlag, I found the idea for a listening comprehension with gap-filling in a songtext. However, I translated the listening comprehension from this book into an Electronic format like this JCloze activity and took a song that fitted the topic in my class. JCloze is a Gap Filling exercise with hints. I decided to give them the song *Money Money Money* by ABBA because the lyrics include a lot of words they had on their vocabulary list for this unit. I prepared the JCloze in the Hot Potatoes software on my computer and uploaded the exercise with the Link for the ABBA video on Moodle.

The preparation process is not that difficult. First of all, the teacher types in the full text of the song into the empty field in the program. Then the chosen words to be deleted have to be marked. Finally a hint word has to be typed in. The pupils can, if necessary, press on the question mark next to the gap and they get a definition or translation of the missing word. Figure 7 below shows the actual preparation work in Hot Potatoes.

Figure 7 JCloze preparation

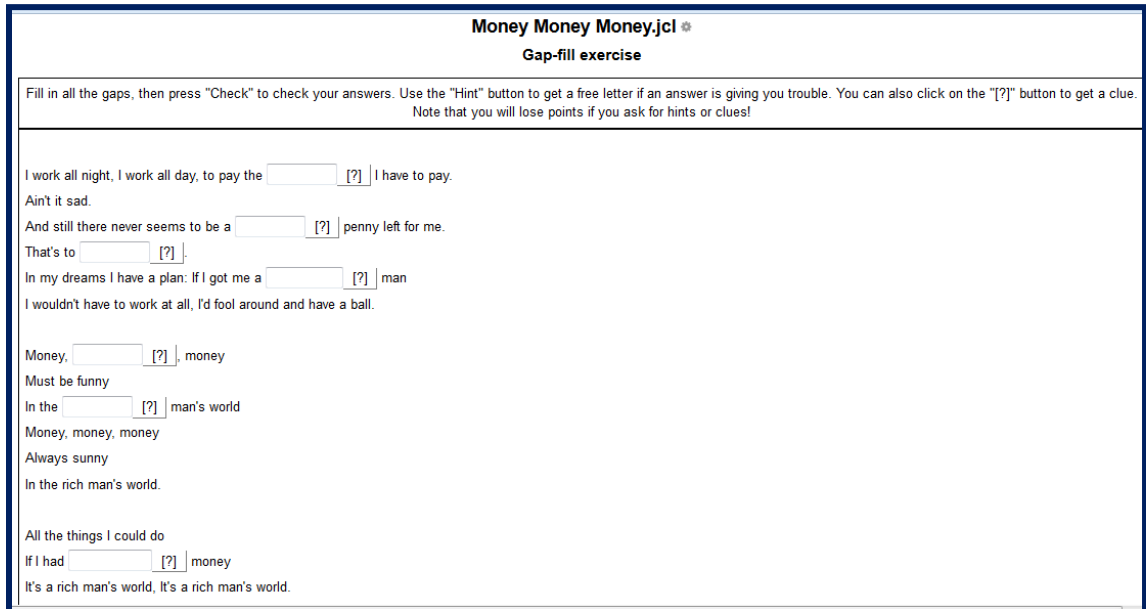



The pupils first have to read the text without the missing words. Then they open the link to the YouTube Video of ABBA's *Money Money Money* and listen to the song. While they listen to the song they have to type in the missing words. Afterwards they can press "check" and see how many words they have heard and found out correctly. If they have any words wrong, they can listen to the song again.

In this case listening skills, as well as reading and writing skills are trained. If the internet is not working, the JCloze can be easily printed out. The song can be played to the students from a CD player or an i-Pod, too. These types of materials can be handled very flexibly and that is one great advantage of electronically formatted materials like Hot Potatoes exercises.

The following screenshot (Figure 8) shows what the exercise looked like on the platform for the pupils to fill in the missing words.

Figure 8 Money Money Money (JCloze)



Money Money Money.jcl 
Gap-fill exercise

Fill in all the gaps, then press "Check" to check your answers. Use the "Hint" button to get a free letter if an answer is giving you trouble. You can also click on the "[?]" button to get a clue. Note that you will lose points if you ask for hints or clues!

I work all night, I work all day, to pay the [?] I have to pay.
Ain't it sad.
And still there never seems to be a [?] penny left for me.
That's to [?].
In my dreams I have a plan: If I got me a [?] man
I wouldn't have to work at all, I'd fool around and have a ball.

Money, [?] money
Must be funny
In the [?] man's world
Money, money, money
Always sunny
In the rich man's world.

All the things I could do
If I had [?] money
It's a rich man's world, It's a rich man's world.

The presented exercises and tasks can help to cater for different language learning types and the pupils need different strategies to complete the activities and tasks. All of those activities follow specific outcomes and the pupils can practise their communicative competences in a variety of ways. Most of these activities can either be presented, instructed in F2F sessions or via learning platforms. In the next chapter the special learning environments are explained in more detail.

4.4 Learning platforms - Virtual Learning Environments

Sharma and Barrett (2007: 103) define Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) as web-based platforms designed to support teachers in the management of online educational courses. Such a platform can consist of different tools, such as email and discussion boards and tools for organizing the administration. Other dimensions like testing learners through quizzes and exercises or sharing information can also be included. Sometimes these VLEs are also referred to as Learning Management Systems (LMS) or Course Management Systems (CMS).

Usually a VLE is empty so teachers can fill it with content. They create materials and distribute them. This can happen in the forms of word documents, quizzes, video streams, blogs, PowerPoint slides or a number of other things, already mentioned in the Sections 4.1-4.3. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 103) explain that Moodle is one of the most popular VLEs and also the best known. This specific learning platform is going to be described in more detail in Section 5.2. Learning via a platform is based on socio-constructivist principles, which means that in learning there is a movement toward a whole community forming culture and meaningfulness collaboratively. Collaborative style is very important when it comes to the Moodle learning platform (Nozawa 2011: 290). One reason for this is that everyone can participate rather easily from the beginning because no real advanced skills are necessary to use Moodle.

A learning platform like Moodle is a delivery system for documents and other information. Sharma and Barrett (2007: 103) claim that instead of paper print-outs and a lot of copying, learners can easily pick up material, they can hand in exercises and also find out about their progress in learning. Sometimes it is easier to upload materials and hand in exercises via a platform than by email clients, because teachers can assess the performances immediately, too. It is also possible to create more specialised courses for Blended Learning. These courses can involve marked placement tests, group projects, Webquests and many other methods and contents which are appropriate for Blended Learning environments. These methods are also referred to as “learning objects” (Sharma & Barrett 2007: 105). Learning objects are self-contained pieces of learning materials. These materials follow a specific aim and learning objective. Outcomes-based language teaching and the published guidelines could help to formulate aims and objectives which fit the curriculum and the levels and English skills of the pupils. Learning objects can be combined with other forms for different learning purposes.

One advantage of a CMS like Moodle is that no programming knowledge is needed because it is easy to handle after reading the handbooks or having attended a training course. Another big opportunity is that materials and learning objects can be shared easily and also reused. Teachers have to be

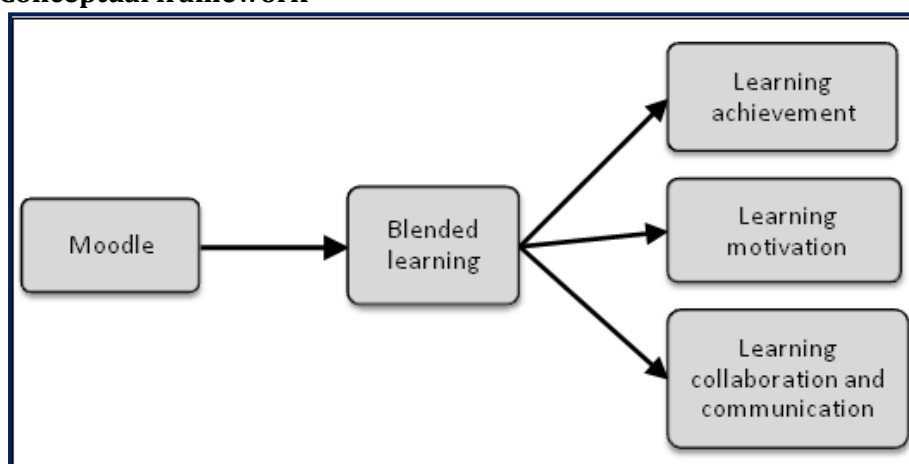
imaginative and have to follow specific aims when introducing learning platforms for their Blended Learning environment. Otherwise this might lead to more confusion and is not successful. Nozawa (2011: 294) claims that especially in EFL teaching, the integration of features like forums, links to dictionaries and newspapers, quizzes and journals in a CMS like Moodle helps to enhance the learners' interaction and also pupil-teacher interaction. In the virtual world pupils can find a real audience to interact with. Moodle can also foster students' independence when working on their own research study projects. Any BL approach can bring a change of routine and therefore a learning platform can contribute to that as well. However, whenever there is a lack of computer literacy in some teachers and pupils, Moodle might be used inefficiently and the learning outcomes might not be as satisfactory. Especially with lower level EFL pupils, interaction and communication on the learning platform can suffer.

However, Nozawa (2011: 294-295) and Sharma and Barrett (2007: 108) still think that also in EFL teaching, a Learning Platform like Moodle can be an ideal solution for promoting effective Blended Learning. First of all it can bring together many different tools and features in one system, especially in connection with face-to-face teaching. There are a number of possibilities to integrate blogs, wikis, forums, chats or teachers can simply use it as a material host. VLEs like Moodle bring all these already mentioned methods and approaches under one roof. The tools which are integrated in the platform itself are designed to work together efficiently; they have the same design and follow the same pedagogical ethos. So the effort of learning how to handle all the tools is reduced, for teachers and pupils. In addition, the workload for teachers can be lowered because numerous materials do not have to be copied or sent out in advance. Whenever pupils lose one of their worksheets or documents they can easily reprint it. Furthermore, pupils can be motivated to present their ideas and to share them without any hesitation and they can try different learning styles. They can access the course material at a time which suits them and they can refer to posted notes, try exercises, quizzes and tools as often as they want and each learner can develop their own learning discipline.

Sharma and Barrett (2007: 109) also say that a VLE provides synchronous and asynchronous communication tools and can help to foster pupils' communicative competence. Synchronous refers to communication which takes place in real time. Moodle includes chats and forums, for example, which pupils can use. Asynchronous communication means that it takes place at a different time. Sending emails and replying to them or sending letters and uploading them on the platform would be examples for this form of communication. Existing content can be displayed, reused and organized in an easy way.

VLEs like Moodle can contribute to enhancing pupils' learning achievements (Al-Ani 2013: 98). Figure 9 presents a framework established by Al-Ani (2013: 98), who believes that, when Moodle is used in learning, it helps in Blended Learning and mixing different learning environments. Both Moodle and F2F learning can lead to increasing pupils' learning achievements, their learning motivation, collaboration and communication. Moodle can help teachers to create interaction and collaboration with the course content.

Figure 9 Conceptual framework



VLEs as learning sources have rather a long history (Ellis 2008: 2). First Moodle started with the use of University intranets and VLEs were organised as home grown VLEs. This shifted onto the widespread adoption of such learning platforms around the world. Moodle provides many useful benefits, and using it as an interactive learning environment to augment traditional F2F classes means a change in teaching strategies. When this form of Blended Learning happens according to the many objectives of communicative language teaching and Blended Learning in general, it brings more benefits than disadvantages.

Learning is more flexible and a considerable body of scholarship and facilitators shows how this approach to teaching and learning is more suited to a student-centred and often constructivist approach (See Section 2.4). However, Ellis (2008: 2-3) also claims that F2F teaching still outplays teaching and learning with VLEs mainly because of routine. Therefore, a change in teacher training is probably necessary so that VLEs also become routine. All in all, using VLEs in BL environments can establish a great deal of potential. This will be shown and underlined in a practical case study in Chapter 5.

5 Project report: Blended Learning in the language classroom

The Moodle course presented in this section should function as an example of integrating the methods of Blended Learning in an average EFL classroom. As already mentioned, the Moodle platform is an open source Course Management System (CMS), also called a VLE. Such a VLE can be designed for individualized and also collaborative activities in a foreign language classroom. The target group of the established course presented here includes learners of English who are very heterogeneous but most of them have already reached the level A2. The majority of the pupils are in their ninth year of school so they will leave pre-vocational school in June and look for an apprenticeship. The main aims of this school year are to give them an overview of the English language and encourage accuracy in grammar and text writing in the first semester. In the second semester fluency is more in the foreground and their communicative skills should be fostered. The pupils' communicative competences are also fostered. The overall aim in the curriculum of this pre-vocational school is the following:

[Hauptaufgabe ist es] Kenntnisse und Fertigkeiten zu vermitteln, die den Schüler zur Ausübung einfacher beruflicher Tätigkeiten und auf den Übertritt in die Lehrausbildung in den Bereichen Soziales, Wirtschaft, Verwaltung, Tourismus und Ernährung vorbereiten [...].
(Lehrplan Einjährige Wirtschaftsfachschule 1999: 2)

Furthermore, one important didactic aim is that the teacher should choose different methods and approaches to enable the students to learn something new with interest and that the pupils' basic interest is awakened and fostered. A variety of methods and approaches is therefore necessary (Lehrplan Einjährige

Wirtschaftsfachschule 1999: 3). In this case, Blended Learning offers a great chance for pupils to gain basic knowledge in different areas of interest and in different topics. This is why I chose to integrate a Moodle course with all its possibilities in my regular English classes. The course facilitates self-paced and individualized learning. The pupils should be able to use the course independently of place and time. Some of the pupils need more revision and time for different exercises and others are a lot faster and finish most of the exercises at the first attempt.

The Moodle platform provides a variety of tasks and activities for the teacher to include the Blended Learning methods named in the chapters before. Most of the activities are, however, online ones and I tried to integrate as many different activities as possible to cater for all the levels of English in this class.

In the following sections of this chapter the course design and course management will be explained in more detail, including how I designed the tasks for this special English course. I will go through the process of establishing the platform at school and its implementation in class. As a last point the Moodle course will be evaluated, too.

5.1 School environment

The school I chose for this research project is the school I have been teaching at since September 2008. The overall name of this school is *Fachschulen der Marienschwestern*. All in all, we have three different school types under one roof. I started teaching my first English class in 2009 and at the moment I am teaching a class of twenty 14-16 years old girls in the pre-vocational school. Usually the pupils come to this type of school after lower secondary education to complete their compulsory years of schooling and after that they hope to start an apprenticeship. We are a private school with public status, so the teachers are usually paid by the state but the pupils have to pay school fees and also pay for the boarding school, if they stay there. At the moment of writing there are about 136 girls and 3 boys attending the school and its different branches. We also have a school for social work which lasts three years and the pupils can start this form right after secondary school. The third type of school in our building is a school for higher education in social work with the focus on working with elderly people

and which finishes after two years with an exam in social work with elderly people and after a third year they have a Diploma in Family Care and Social Work. This is a school for adult education and the people who want to attend it have to be over the age of 17. Their schedule is set up with half of the school year in practical training and the other half is spent at school.

The congregation of the Sisters of Mary of Mount Carmel is responsible for the maintenance of the school, the building and everything that belongs to it. Therefore it was not that easy to establish a learning platform like Moodle in the first place because this meant some more cost and effort. However, as the edumoodle organisation provided a good deal I was allowed to start the platform and buy it. Also my colleagues were excited about this new way of learning and teaching. Therefore I started the set-up process in May 2013 and by Christmas 2013 most of the 6 classes in the different school types were already using the platform in different classes with different teachers. Especially in adult education, with their work placements the teachers enjoy providing materials on the platform and keeping contact with the pupils while they are in different places. Whenever they have troubles or questions they contact the responsible teachers and write messages or post them in the forums on the platform. All in all the pupils and teachers are now happy that we have such a platform and they are still very excited about it. However, I have already found out that we might need some more training and probably a seminar on the different tools because most of them do not use the whole potential of this platform. The next chapter focuses on this potential and the ideas and history of the learning platform Moodle.

5.2 The Moodle platform

Moodle is a free, open source Course Management System (CMS), also called a Learning Management System (LMS) or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), designed to help educators create effective online learning communities using pedagogical principles. It is a software package that can be downloaded and used on any computer, from a single teacher up to a large community at university. This package enables teachers to produce internet-based courses and web sites. On the official Moodle homepage it is noted that it has become very popular

among educators around the globe as a “tool for creating online dynamic web sites for their students” (*Moodle Philosophy*).

It supports a social constructivist framework of education and is a global development project. Moodle is copyrighted but everyone has additional freedoms which allow users to copy, use and modify it. The word itself was originally an acronym for a Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment, which is now more used by education theorists and programmers. However, it is also a verb that describes the process of “lazily meandering through something, doing things as it occurs to you to do them, and enjoyable tinkering that often leads to insight and creativity” (*About Moodle*). Moodle was developed for students and teachers to study or teach via an online course. People who use the platform are called Moodlers. In Austria the governmental project called edumoodle provides an overall server for schools as already mentioned before and that is why I decided to go for this government-funded program, as we do not have the capacity for our own server location at school. At present there are 87,084 registered Moodle sites in 239 countries all over the world (*Statistics*). This shows the great success of this whole system.

There are many ways to use Moodle. However, the focus is always on giving teachers and other educators the best tool to promote and manage learning. The platform offers numerous features that allow it to cater for thousands of students but also for primary education and education hobbyists. Some institutions and schools use the platform simply to support and complement face-to-face courses as a Blended Learning Method, as described in Sections 1.1 and 1.2. Yet there are also institutions which use it to manage fully online courses, i.e. open universities in the United Kingdom. The variety of modules and delivery methods on the platform is vast and many of the users enjoy using activity modules, which will be mentioned in Section 5.2.1 in more detail. These activity modules allow users to access forums and databases as well as wikis which encourage pupils to build collaborative communities. Others in turn prefer using Moodle to deliver content and assess learning using different assignments, quizzes or tests. The reason for starting such a project was mainly to give everyone at the school the chance to make better use of the Internet and the maze of technologies and pedagogies.

5.2.1 Course design and course management

Establishing a platform at a school needs a bit more than only interest in computing and learning management systems. In this chapter the main points of course design, course management and the different tools of the platform will be illustrated.

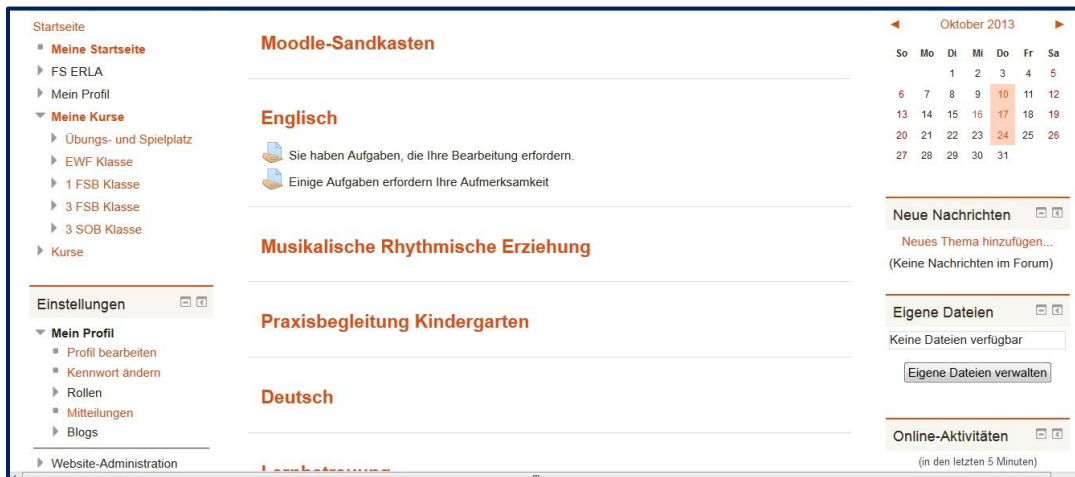
The basic units in Moodle are online courses. Via the edumoodle project the administrator of the school platform can create a main page where all the different courses offered in a school are listed. Each pupil has his/her own username and password which gives them access to the main page. No guests are allowed on our school platform so only registered teachers and pupils can enter it. Once logged in, the pupils see their individual starting page with a list of courses they are enrolled in. Figure 10 shows the login page of our school platform which can be reached via a link on our homepage (www.fachschulenerla.ac.at) or via www3.edumoodle.at/fserla, the webaddress we chose for our school on edumoodle.

Figure 10 Starting page (www3.edumoodle.at/fserla)



The main page of our school platform is reproduced in Figure 11 below and the main components will be explained now.

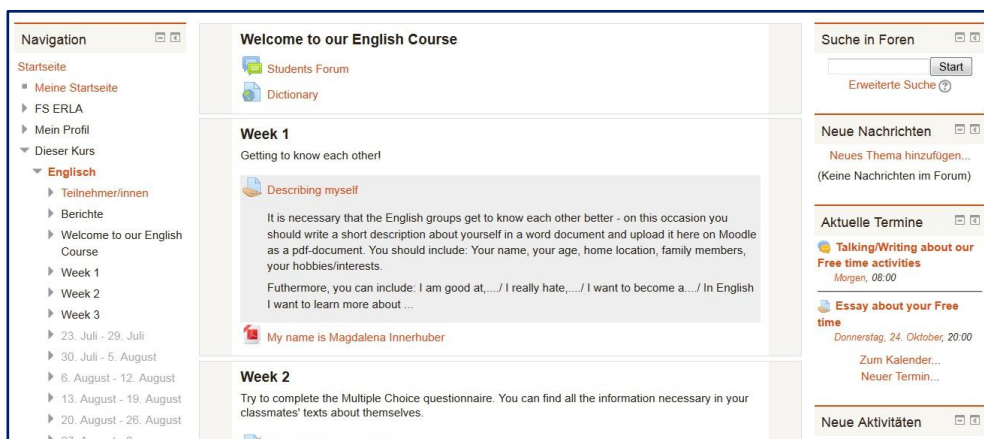
Figure 11 A Moodle main page (<http://www3.edumoodle.at/fserla/my>)



On the left hand side there are different blocks with a navigation tree. The pupils can find their own individual main pages there as well as the different courses at the school. They also have an administration block which allows them to edit their own profile, change their password and read their messages from different people. In the middle of the Figure 10 there are the courses an individual student is enrolled in. Furthermore, they can see whether they have activities to do in a course or not. The right hand side is for an official calendar where the closing dates of activities and/or exercises are noted or the next revision and test are included. When there are new messages in a forum they also have a direct link to them on this page.

Once the pupils enter their course they can see the different course contents and explanations, as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12 Course Page
(<http://www3.edumoodle.at/fserla/course/view.php?id=5>)



Most of the courses are organized in topics or in topics per week, like my English course in Figure 12. These topics/weeks are listed in the centre of the course page. The upper part is the so-called communication area where there is a forum for announcements from the teacher or the participants. Every member of the course gets an email when something is posted in this forum. There are also useful links which can be used all the time and might be helpful for the pupils while working and learning on the platform, like a dictionary link.

The individual weeks and topics, as illustrated in the screenshot, are filled with different kinds of activities, resources, materials and exercises. What kind of learning activities Moodle offers, will be explained now. Most of the information about the different tools comes directly from the learning platform and the given explanations. I translated most of the explanations from German into English, as we are using the German version of Moodle. The source for all the information is *Lernplattform Fachschulen Erla*.



Assignments: A teacher can provide different assignments for the pupils which can be processed online or offline. The solution can either be typed in as a text, which can be graded and assessed by the teacher immediately after uploading it, or the pupils also have the chance to hand it in via a data format like pdf or docx. The teacher can give them direct feedback or he/she sets up a gradebook with different criteria to be assessed. Only the teacher can see the solutions and uploads and has the right to assess them.



Forums: A forum is mainly a tool for discussions. Postings are displayed in a chronological order in several threads or discussion topics. Everybody who is registered in this course can see the individual postings and has the right to reply to them. After each posting the participant has the right to change, edit or correct it within the next 30 minutes. This helps students to correct typos. The teacher of the course has the right to edit all the postings all the time, which might be a good way of correcting mistakes so that learners are not confronted with too many mistakes and errors. Moodle offers four different forums. The first one is a standard one and is simply for discussions or collections of opinions. Pupils can

start a new topic any time and everybody can contribute. The pupils also have the chance to include documents like pictures/word documents or pdf files. A second form is a single forum about only one topic. This can be useful when the discussions should be short and focused. The question-answer forum is a third type where students have to post their comment or input before they can see the postings of other members. The last type of forum is very similar to a blog where everyone is allowed to start a topic any time and everybody can answer and write comments on all the topics. There is an overview where all the topics can be seen and all the inputs. Links to every overall topic help to keep some organization and overview.



Weblinks: Using a weblink teachers can connect different internet pages with Moodle. Participants can then access special sources for information or, as in my course, also to a dictionary for example.



Choices: This tool is a good way for collecting votes, for example on forming groups or on course dates. The teacher can provide fixed answers they have to choose. The results can be published for the participants anonymously or including the names of the voters. Only the trainer can see who has already voted and who not. In some cases also the pupils can see the answers and votes, this depends on the settings.



Hotpot: This kind of module allows the teachers to integrate virtual learning materials in their Moodle course. A single HotPot consists of a starting page, the actual exercises and a final page where the pupils can see a summary of their results. As already mentioned in Section 4.3, these exercises are interactive electronic formats of ELT materials with text, pictures, videos and audio files. The activities and solutions are always saved so the teacher can see how the pupils perform afterwards and how often they have already started one of these exercises. The HotPot activities are an externally created format with special software, also already mentioned in Section 2.3. Once finished the teachers can easily integrate each HotPot activity into their course.



Database: This module helps to collect different information in a database. The course editor has to decide on a structure for the different fields which should be presented in this database and also has to define what kind of content the pupils should see at the end in a table. The teachers can choose between different areas like checkboxes, radio buttons, dropdown menus, text formats, links, pictures or other uploaded files. Before the pupils can enter information the teacher can check on their entries and it is also possible to allow comments from other users of this course. These databases could be used for collecting vocabulary work and new phrases. They can also help to get an overview of different habits and hobbies of the classmates. A very useful tool in this module enables pupils to search for specific information through a special filter, once the database is filled and a table is presented.



Glossaries: With glossaries pupils can develop their own dictionaries or FAQ lists. Before the pupils can fill their glossary the teacher has to decide whether it should be an individual glossary for each pupil or for the whole class. The pupils can write in words and their definitions; they can also upload pictures or descriptions. If there is a quiz option or a word search quiz activated in a Unit the words are automatically updated for the word search quiz and appear in the games whenever the pupils start them again. If pupils want to have a printed version of their glossary there is an easy function to print it as a table.



Journals: The Journal activity helps to gather feedback from pupils and course participants about a special topic. Only the person who writes the feedback and the teacher can read it. This activity is very useful when the pupils have to write learning diaries or diaries about projects.



Test: This module allows teachers to use special testing formats within the course. All the questions are saved in a database and can be reused whenever they are needed again. The teachers can choose from a wide range of question types and answers because they have to set feedback sentences for correct and

wrongly answered questions. The participants get their feedback and a detailed analysis of their achievements at the end of the test. The possibilities of establishing and using this module are great.



Wiki: The word Wiki comes from the Hawaiian language and means fast. On the learning platform this means that pupils can write either on their own or together in a group very quickly. A wiki should allow pupils to work collaboratively on one single text or individually on one single text. An example for using a wiki in an English course would be to allow them to write an individual learning diary. The document can grow every week and the pupils can work on their entries whenever they have time to. They can edit something they have already written, too. In group Wikis the pupils can see the work done by others on their collaborative text and they can contribute. An interesting feature of this module is that one Wiki can include several parts. Pupils should for example write a collaborative Wiki on Great Britain. The first page can be named Wales. Another part of the wiki can be named Scotland or London or whatever interests the pupils. All the texts in the overall Wiki are linked together and in the end one Wiki with the title Great Britain can include several chapters with a lot of different information. While writing in a Wiki everything is saved and can be reproduced and followed. However, if one pupil is working on one text, no other pupil can access this text.



Folder: A folder is a good opportunity for teachers who would like to provide a large number of files for a specific topic or a variety of materials for the pupils. The files can be uploaded in a catalogue with a specific title and the teacher can also create subdirectories to make it clear for the pupils. This is a good way of including a lot of files at once or also zipped files. These can be unpacked in the catalogue. This can be used for worksheets that the pupils can print out whenever they want to have some additional practice in special fields. The teachers can also upload music and lyrics and music sheets for pupils and if they lose one song sheet they can easily print it out. It is also a good way of keeping track of what has already been worked on or a collection of songs.



Chat: In a chat pupils can discuss different kinds of topics and exercises in smaller groups. On the Moodle platform this option is only available for smaller groups of up to 6 people. A reason for this is that the web server would be overloaded with more than that. One chat can be a single exercise, the pupils can use it daily or weekly or chat rooms can be open for a month, too. All the chat contributions and communications are saved and can be followed by the teacher. The chat protocols can also be made public for the rest of the class.

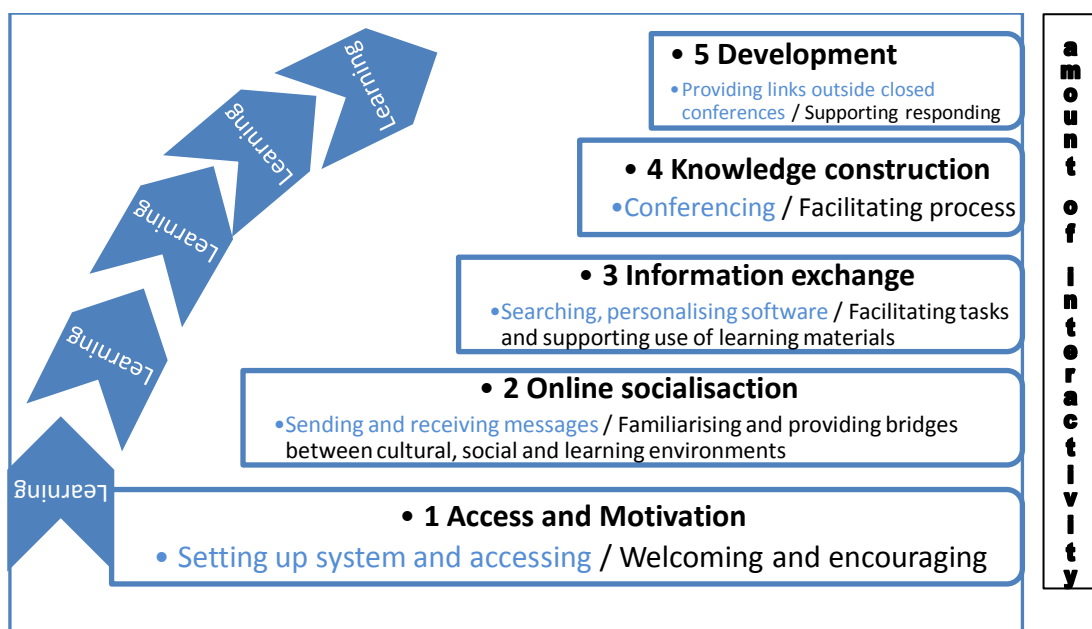


Feedback Tool: This tool is a good way of creating surveys or evaluation sheets. A number of question types are available and offer great opportunities for teachers. The answers can either be anonymous or individual per person. The participants can, if the teacher activates it, immediately see the data and outcomes. The results can also be printed. The teachers have the option to publish feedback questionnaires for all Moodle users or just for a single chosen course.

5.2.2 Our English course

When creating the Moodle course for my English class I mostly followed the five-stage model suggested by Salmon (2004: 102-105). She proposed that new users of a learning platform should solve the problems step by step and the early activities should be easier than the later ones. As the participants gain competence and expertise, they can handle more complex ideas. Her suggested model as shown in Figure 13 came in very handy for my Blended Learning approach, especially because this model provides some suggestions for learning steps to increase the amount of interactivity.

Figure 13 Salmon's e-moderation model (Salmon 2004: 102-103)



The blue coloured words are meant to underline the technical support needed and the black ones are meant to express the e-moderating steps suggested by Salmon (2004: 102-103) that help to initiate learning and increase the amount of interactivity.

I started with access and motivating the pupils. I tried to concentrate on encouraging motivation and I set the pace and rhythm for the pupils. The pupils gained experience with using the new platform while finding their way around the platform and I set them some easy tasks to become familiar with it. First of all they had to find the correct webpage and access to the platform and the log in process was easier than expected. All of the pupils immediately knew their passwords and everything worked out well. I explained the starting page and

showed them how to navigate through the platform and they worked with me. Salmon (2004: 103) points out that problems could occur with pupils who are not as familiar with computers and there could also be pupils who are a bit frightened. However, this class seemed to be quite familiar with this kind of technology and although I presented most of the instructions for their first task in English they immediately knew what they had to do. The first exercise was to create their profile page. I showed them how to upload a picture and I told them what specific information they had to include, for example, their hobbies and their personal interests. I also showed them how to keep their profiles private so only their classmates are allowed to see them. The activities at this stage should be quickly achieved while giving practice in the use of technology, too. (Salmon 2004: 116) She suggests setting a specific time and point for learning online and the participants should have the chance to get a good spark for the later use. One e-tivity Salmon (2004: 117) suggested was a quiz which I immediately tried with the pupils. Each participant had to upload a pdf document with a text about themselves. They had to include their family situation, hobbies, age and interests. The maximum was 50 words. They also had the chance to include some information about what they are good at, what they really hate and their future job interests. I offered them a possible structure and a sample text about me. After everyone had uploaded their texts I put them in a catalogue and made them available for everyone. I created a little quiz, based on the texts of the group members. I asked them questions about their classmates. As the class did not know each other well because they started in September they had to read the short texts about their classmates before they could answer the questions.

In stage two Salmon (2004: 103) suggests that the participants should focus on socialisation. This is again about getting to know each other in more detail and also to break the ice between the group members. I opened a chat room for the pupils at this stage where they should write and talk to each other about their free time activities and ask about reasons why they enjoy doing something or not. The groups included a maximum of 6 people so this was a bit difficult at the beginning because at first they were hardly online together. When I set this task again in a regular class in our IT room and everyone worked on their own computers, it was a success. The chat protocols are very interesting to read and


they tried to include most of the questions, phrases and words we had discussed and learned F2F in class before. I also included the module Choices so that they could find out about their free time type. They had to choose between four different types I presented. That helped them to find a bit more about the attitudes of the class, too.

The next stage that is suggested by Salmon (2004: 122) is information exchange. At this stage the participants should gradually take more responsibility for their active learning and interaction via the platform. I included questionnaires and set homework which they had to hand in via the platform, too. I also included additional exercises for the first written test in this class with glossaries, games, HotPot exercises and email writing. Salmon (2004: 123) says that at this stage the pupils should become increasingly familiar with the different tools and activities. The activities, modules and the rest of the preparation for the first test was a great success and the pupils were quite happy about having a variety of tools and external links for practising different grammar patterns or writing texts and learning vocabulary. I also included a listening comprehension with a gap-filling exercise. They had to listen and watch a YouTube video and fill in the missing words. Some of the pupils had troubles with the different pop-up windows at first and with their headphones.

Following the five-stage model of Salmon (2004: 126) the next stage is knowledge construction. Right before Christmas I set up a group work activity for the pupils they had to complete at first via Moodle and then present the solutions in class. I gave them a Webquest with the topic *Christmas around the world*. Salmon (2004: 126) says that at this stage it is important to introduce special ideas and theories, concepts for exploration and application. It is also a good stage to work in teams with specific roles like resource finder, summariser, presenter and time keeper. The teachers should also include some action learning tools. In Figure 14 the instructions are presented. Beforehand I formed the groups in class via counting because I wanted them to work with people they had never worked with so far.

Figure 14 Webquest exercise (Screenshot)

Week 7 - It's Christmas Time
Webquests and some things about Christmas!


 **Christmas in different countries**


Group work tasks
(work in the groups formed by your teacher in class)


Browse the given websites and try to find as much information as possible on how Christmas is celebrated in "your" country.
Answer the given questions/tasks as detailed as possible, then look for other websites and try to find interesting and additional information.
Upload your text as pdf document here on Moodle.
Create a poster and present the findings to your classmates.

QUESTIONS for your webquest

Describe what kind of food people eat at Christmas.
Summarise if people give/receive presents to each other? If yes, any special kind?
Are there any specific traditions at Christmas?

 **Christmas around the world**
Very informative page!

 **Christmas Traditions**
For additional information

 **Traditions and more**
Informative and detailed!

I included a F2F part in this exercise because I wanted them to work in different roles and to organise their tasks on their own, too. The group consisted of a maximum of five people and in most groups they had a time keeper, researchers and poster creators. However, I asked all of them to say at least something in the presentation in front of the class and that worked out really well. Salmon (2004: 126-127) says that at this stage all the participants should be encouraged to review and summarise. So it is a good idea to give individual groups different parts and areas to work on and then they should contribute to a whole piece of work. In our case the groups had to work on a single country in the world and then present the traditions. After the presentations every pupil knew at least something new about Christmas traditions and we had a nice in-class discussion about their own Christmas celebrations with their families and Christmas in Austria.

Salmon (2004: 128) suggests that the last stage should give the pupils the maximum amount of choice on how to use the learning platform and the resources. Pupils should reach a level of self-reflection and evaluation of learning. Assessment should be the focus at this level of work and this can also mean peer assessment and assessment of learning achievement. I asked the pupils to read an English book from the library while they were on Christmas holidays. They

chose their own books according to their levels of English. I called it our book project. The pupils should upload summaries of their books in a glossary. This should give everyone an overview of what kinds of books are available in the library and whether the content is interesting for a following reader or not. The instructions for this writing exercise are presented in Figure 15 below.

Figure 15 Book activity 1

In this glossary you should write a short summary of your book. (60-100 words)

- Use the Title and Author of the book in the Headline (e.g. Charly and the Chocolate Factory - Roald Dahl)
- State the overall topic in the first sentence
- Give a short overview of the characters in the book
- Describe the content and the plot in your own words
- Write the summary in the Simple Present
- Post your name at the end of the Summary

Then the pupils got a model of a book review and we worked on the differences between a simple summary of a book and a book review. They had to upload their written book review as a pdf document again. As the focus of this course is not e-learning but Blended Learning the next steps were then fulfilled in F2F learning and teaching again. The pupils shared the texts with each other and were allowed to give comments on the text. They provided feedback for their classmates, were allowed to correct mistakes and to read 4 different texts in all by their classmates. Afterwards they were allowed to work on their book reviews again and to include the comments, suggestions and corrections by their classmates. I encourage them to reflect on their overall experience and I asked them to review their own texts and rework them to show how they would like them to appear in the end. Once they had worked on the text they had to upload it again and the best ones were then published on the website of Amazon as a real book review. Salmon (2004: 129) says that after the teacher has received all of the texts they can be posted in a group area or a glossary again so that all the pupils can read the different reviews. They can discuss the books, their perspectives and interpretations and this can set another spark for the individual and autonomous use of the platform.

In our English course this five-stage model suggested by Salmon (2004: 102) contributed a lot to the success of the establishment of my Moodle course and the success of teaching and learning. She says that if the participants understand the concepts and exercises better, because of taking part and using such a Blended Learning course and a Moodle platform, the teachers also find their pupils more satisfied and motivated in some way. Once they have reached Stage 5 a great number of things are possible. As the platform offers more, I will definitely work with more tools and activities in future like Wikis and Journals. However, it is also necessary at some stage of working with a platform to gather feedback from the pupils. They should be able to express what they thought of the course and the new approach to teaching and learning and what they would have done differently as a result of taking part in the course so far. Therefore I had started a survey and established a questionnaire to get feedback on and insights into what the pupils actually thought about BL with a learning platform. In the next sections of this paper the research project will be explained in detail.

5.3 Research project and questionnaires

Educational research is important in all areas concerning school. The focus always “must be upon the quality of learning and thereby teaching” (Pring 2000: 27). In the case of this paper, the focus lies on the quality of learning and teaching in a blended way with the learning platform Moodle. As Taber (2007: 119) suggests, the first stage of any research in a classroom must be to identify the focus and to find out what is already known about a topic. This already happened in the section 4.1 above. The next step is to plan the research study and to develop the research questions and hypotheses. In the case of this research project I wanted to find out whether Blended Learning with learning platforms really stimulates pupils’ motivation for learning English while in school and at home and whether they profited from it or not. I also wanted to investigate beforehand if the students have already had some experience with a learning platform.

Taber (2007: 148) suggests that questionnaires are one good way of doing classroom research because they consist of a set of questions that can be answered by an identified group of people, like my English class or other teachers and colleagues. Questionnaires are usually paper instruments and the

questions can be answered in writing. Questionnaires could also be done via the Moodle learning platform but as some of my pupils were not familiar with a learning platform and the technological issues I decided to copy them and give them out in paper. Also the second questionnaire was given to them in paper and they had to answer them in writing. This was the case because they knew that it was very important and I was not too sure about how to compare the two questionnaires then in the end without having both results on real paper. The questions can vary from closed to open questions; they can be about factual matters or opinions. Examples for such different forms are now presented in Table 2 below.

Closed questions	e.g. How many nights a week do you normally do schools work? O less than 3 O 3-4 O more than 4
Open questions	e.g. What do you most enjoy about French lessons?
Questions about factual matter	e.g. How many older brothers and sisters do you have?
Opinion questions	e.g. What are the good and bad things about having to do homework?

Table 2 Question types (Taber 2007: 149)

One advantage of closed questions is that they are simpler to analyse; however, they only reveal which of the offered answers the test takers chose. Open questions give them a lot more freedom but they have to be categorized later on and the analysis of data is more complicated. Sometimes a mixture of closed and open questions is useful and allows the researcher to report proportions of responses in different categories. (Taber 2007: 149)

Also the types of scales may vary from one questionnaire to another.

Some examples are presented in Table 3:

E.g. how much do you enjoy your English lessons:	A lot	A little	Not really bothered	I dislike them
Exploring attitudes: Do you agree with the following statements?				
e.g. school is the highlight of my life	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Table 3 Types of scales (Taber 2007: 149)

It is important that questionnaire items are designed to ensure as much validity and reliability as possible. Something is said to have a high reliability if it produces similar results under consistent conditions. If the two questionnaires are of a similar type and the conditions while filling in the questionnaires are nearly the same the results are also reliable. It may help to include several equivalent statements to check the consistency of responses. One good way of ensuring reliability is to include several equivalent statements or also opposite statements. Also various types of scales might be used. Validity, in contrast, means that the measurement and the questions are well-founded and correspond accurately to the real world. The questions should focus on experience in real life so that the pupils can also answer because of their experience.

However, the questionnaire should not include too many questions as this will increase the chance of pupils losing concentration, interest and good-will towards the researcher. As I wanted to find out about the background of the pupils as well, I found it useful to include a questionnaire before starting the Moodle project. Avis, Bathmaker, Kendal and Parsons (2003: 191) also state that a questionnaire can always be used “to seek information on the background and experience of the [pupils]”. In my case it helped to find out whether pupils had already worked with a platform or in a blended way before.

A critical view on questionnaires shows that one severe limitation of this method is that they only elicit information about people’s thoughts, their recollections and their beliefs. They do not show actual behaviour. It is always important to consider and to remember that not only the asked questions but also the way

they are posed contribute to the outcome. (Taber 2007: 151) In the case of the research for this paper all these factors were taken into account and the questionnaires were designed on the basis of the findings in the given literature. The two questionnaires used are to be found in the Appendix.

The pupils are in their first year at the pre-vocational school and the level of their English is very varied. Because of that I only used German in the first questionnaire; otherwise the outcome might not have been very valid and reliable. Some of the pupils might not have fully understood all the questions. The second questionnaire for evaluating the first semester working with the learning platform is also in German, for the same reasons.

I created both questionnaires with questions for four different areas which were interesting for me and are also four important points for evaluating the success and usefulness of a learning platform and learning concept like Blended Learning. The four areas I focused on were Moodle/Learning Concept, Learning, Activities and their appropriateness and Motivation. I also included several equivalent statements and also some negative questions to ensure the consistency of the pupils' answers. Neither questionnaire exceeds two pages, because otherwise the pupils might have lost concentration.

The first questionnaire I gave to the students included one main part where I tried to find out whether they were already familiar with a learning platform like Moodle and whether they enjoyed working with it before or not. I also tried to find out in which subjects at school they had already used such a platform. The second part of the first questionnaire only included questions to explore their attitudes and gave them four possibilities to mark: I totally agree, I agree, I disagree, I strongly disagree. The pupils had to include their birthdates. This makes it easier to compare the two questionnaires but it is anonymous because I am not familiar with the pupils' birthdates and I do not want to find out about the identities of the people who answered the questions.

5.4 Evaluation and analysis of the questionnaires

The class consists of 20 pupils, 18 of which answered the first questionnaire entirely; and two of them were not useable because most of the answers were not given. All 20 took part in the second survey.

In the first questionnaire I found out that seven pupils had never worked with a learning platform like Moodle before. Sometimes this information is helpful for evaluating and interpreting the pupils' answers. All of the pupils who had already worked with a learning platform enjoyed working with it. Most of them, however, only worked with it in school settings and were hardly encouraged to work on their own on the platform or in their free time, for doing homework or practising for tests. Most of the pupils named subjects like IT and English in connection with working with computers and learning platforms.

In the first questionnaire I also wanted to find out whether they could remember some of the activities they had to do when working with computers or the learning platform. Most of the pupils said that they had to do Cyberhomework for English. These are special tasks which are presented on an online platform that comes with a school book. The pupils have their own usernames and passwords for this platform set up by the authors of the schoolbook. The teachers do not have to create the activities but can use the resources presented on the webpage of the schoolbook. Most of the pupils enjoyed it, and when I asked them for comments about anything they did not like about learning with computers, I only got answers like: 'I enjoyed all of it' and 'Learning with the computer is fun'.

The second page of the first questionnaire and both pages of the second questionnaire were all about finding out about the pupils' attitudes towards a) computers and the concept of Blended Learning and Learning platforms, b) learning in general, c) the activities, tasks and exercises offered and d) motivation. I included similar questions or also identical statements in both questionnaires and then summarised the categories when interpreting the pupils' answers. This helped a lot with interpreting the pupils' answers. Table 5 shows the categories and the numbers of the statements for each category. In the Appendix the questionnaires are included for comparison and also the entire data set is presented.

Category	Questionnaire 1 – Items	Questionnaire 2 – Items
a) Moodle/Concept	A1; B1; M1	A2; G2; H2; 1J2; K2; P2; Q2; X2; Y2
b) Learning	E1; L1; P1; R1; S1; T1	B2; E2; F2; J2; N2; O2; S2; T2; Z2; 1Z2
c) Activities	C1; H1; I1; J1; F1; N1; O1;Q1	C2; I2; L2; M2; V2; W2; 2Z2;
d) Motivation	D1; G1; K1; U1;	D2; R2; U2;

Table 4 Categories of questionnaires

The responses to the items are coded with different colours, as explained in Table 6.

Answer	Colour
I totally agree	Dark green
I agree	Light green
I disagree	Light red
I strongly disagree	Dark red

Table 5 Colour coding for answers

The first area of interest I want to evaluate in this section includes the questions about the concept and the pupils' attitude towards computers and Moodle in general.

It is interesting to see that although 7 pupils had never worked with a platform before their interest in working and learning with computers at school was high from the start. This was underlined by the answers to equivalent statements in questionnaires 1 and 2:

M1) Ich würde in der Schule gerne mehr am Computer arbeiten. (Fig. 16)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu
P2) Ich würde in der Schule gerne weniger am Computer arbeiten. (Fig. 17)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu

Figure 16 More working with computers **Figure 17 Less working with computers**

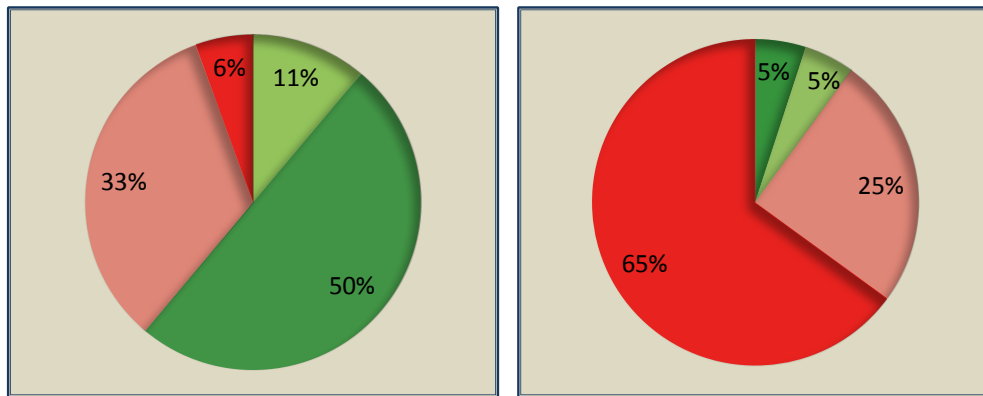
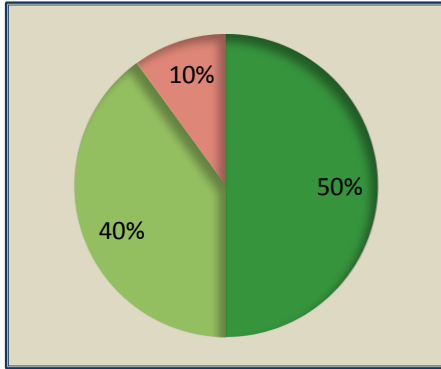


Figure 16 clearly shows that one pupil (6%), who had never worked with a platform before, did not agree with the statement. Other pupils (11%), who had never worked with a platform before, also disagreed somewhat with the statement. The rest of the learners seemed to enjoy working and learning with computers at school. The attitude towards working and learning with computers did not change dramatically during the term but it did change for the better. The statement in the second questionnaire was formulated in a negative way to check the consistency of responses. The distribution of answers in Figure 17 shows that interest in working with computers at school had increased, as more than half of the pupils decided that less working on the computer at school was not their desire at all. This shows that their attitude towards working and learning with computers is part of their daily routine. About 10% of the pupils wished to work less on the computer. Those are also the pupils who had never worked with learning platforms before and were also consistent with their answers compared to the first questionnaire. They did not change their attitude during the semester.

These two pupils also said in the second questionnaire that the concept itself was not explained well and the explanations concerning the learning platforms were not sufficient either, which is shown in statement A2 and Figure 18:

A2) Ich finde, dass das Gesamtkonzept des Lernens mit Moodle im Unterricht ausreichend erklärt wurde. (Fig. 18)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu
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Figure 18 Explanation of the concept of Moodle learning



Probably this is also the explanation why they did not enjoy working. They would have needed more guidance with working on the platform and probably with the computer system itself. However, this shows that the concept and system in general worked very well for 90% of the pupils and that they enjoyed working with computers.

Furthermore, the answers in Figures 19 and 20 show that most of the pupils think that the blended approach worked quite well and that the mixture of lessons of working with technology and F2F classes was appropriate.

Y2) Ich fand die Anzahl der Moodle/Computer-Stunden im Vergleich zu Klassenstunden passend. (Fig. 19)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu
G2) Die Online-Aktivitäten sind bis jetzt immer in Verbindung mit Lerninhalten aus den Englischstunden gestanden. (Fig. 20)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu

Figure 19 Mixture of Lessons

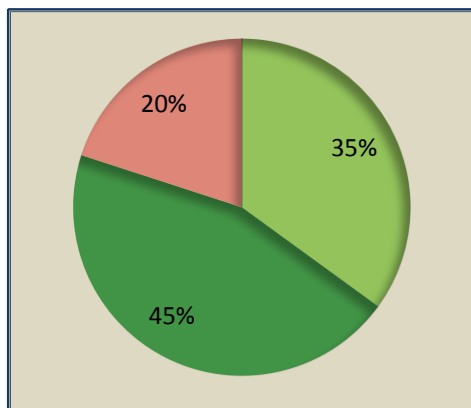
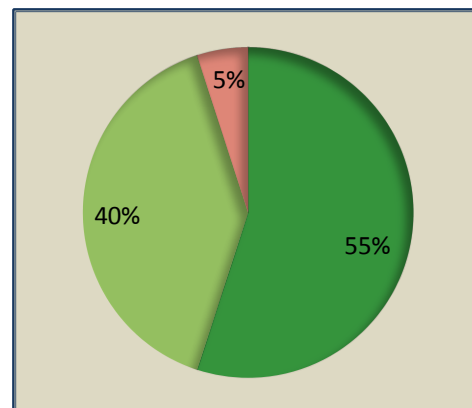


Figure 20 Connection between Online and F2F



These statistics show that most of the pupils agreed with the statement that the online activities were always connected with what we had done in class before and the number of F2F classes and computer-based lessons was balanced. In general theory it says that with Blended Learning the mixture of F2F learning and CALL should be balanced and the results underline that my schedule for the class was successful.

The second area the questionnaires focused on was the area of learning in general. I wanted to find out about the pupils' attitudes towards learning on the computers, their learning styles and learning attitudes.

One interesting outcome from the first questionnaire was that the pupils were not quite sure whether they could actually learn via playing games on the computer. This was before we started the Blended Learning concept with the activities and learning games on the platform.

The statement they had to assess was the following:

E1) Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen durch Computerspiele etwas zu lernen. (Fig. 21)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu
E2) Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen durch Computerspiele etwas zu lernen. (Fig. 22)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu

I also included the same question in the second questionnaire because the answers of the first evaluation were not clear enough. The results are presented in Figures 21 and 22.

Figure 21 No learning effect: games 1

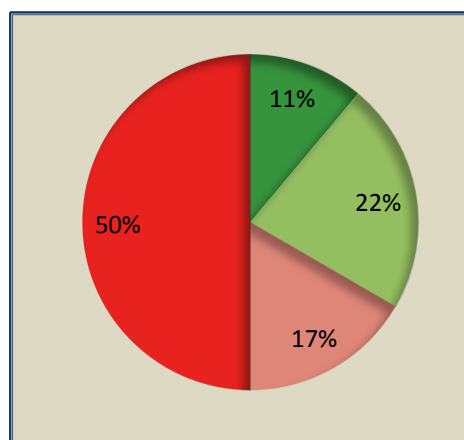


Figure 22 No learning effect: games 2

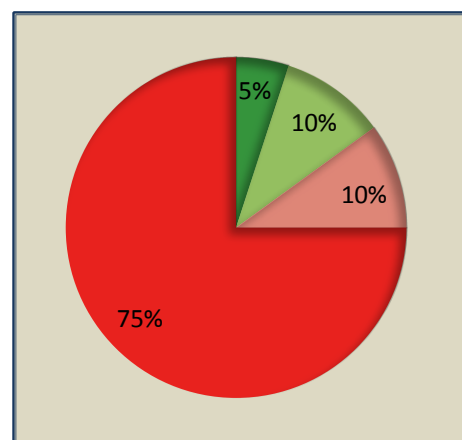


Figure 21 does not show a clear opinion amongst the pupils. It was interesting to see that two pupils, who had already had experience with learning platforms disagreed with this statement, while others who had not had experience before agreed. Half of the pupils thought that they cannot learn something when playing learning games. Figure 22 shows that the attitude towards learning through learning games changed after one semester of working with the platform. Only one person still disagreed with the statement but more than 75 percent of the pupils were convinced that learning games contributed to their learning achievements in a positive way.

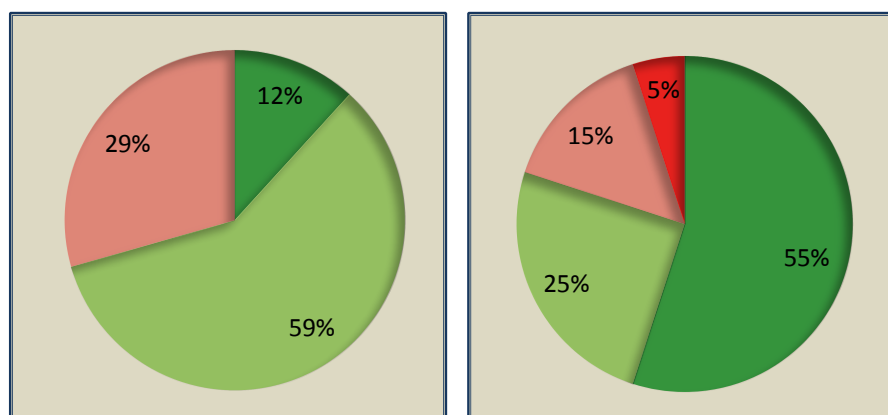
I also included questions asking for their general learning styles and whether they see themselves as competent autonomous learners. The statements ranged from time management in learning to self-study and autonomous learning.

First of all, I wanted to find out whether the pupils think that self-management of time and place is helpful to them in learning as the theory suggests this as one of the major benefits of Blended Learning with VLEs. The results of the first questionnaire show that the pupils agreed with the following statement in most cases.

S1) Ich finde freie Zeiteinteilung und freie Wahl des Lernortes beim Lernen sehr hilfreich. (Fig. 23)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu
Z2) Ich finde freie Zeiteinteilung und freie Wahl des Lernortes beim Lernen sehr hilfreich. (Fig. 24)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu

Figure 23 shows the results of the first questionnaire and Figure 24 the results of the same question in the second one.

Figure 23 Place and time management: 1 **Figure 24 Place and time management: 2**



Before I introduced the concept of BL and as the pupils were new at school, they were a bit unsure whether self-management of time and place of learning could contribute to their learning behaviour and achievements. Most of the pupils, 59%, agreed with the statement and 29% disagreed. After one semester of working with the platform 55% of the pupils totally agreed and were convinced that self-management of place and time can contribute to learning. However five percent still did not see any advantage in choosing the time and place for learning. All in all 80% of the class thought that their autonomy in learning was helpful.

I also wanted to find out whether the pupils think that they are independent learners or if they need a lot of help. I included the following statements in the questionnaires:

T1) Ich bin sehr selbstständig beim Lernen. (Fig. 25)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu
1Z2) Ich bin sehr unselbstständig beim Lernen. (Fig. 26)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu

Figure 25 Independent learners

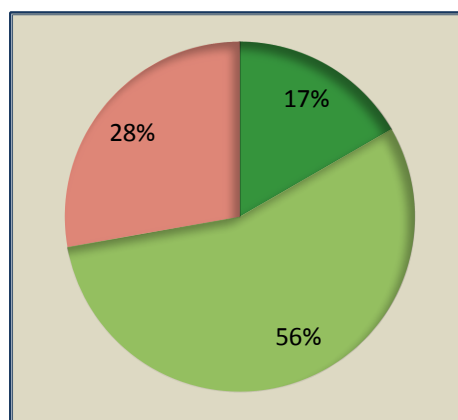
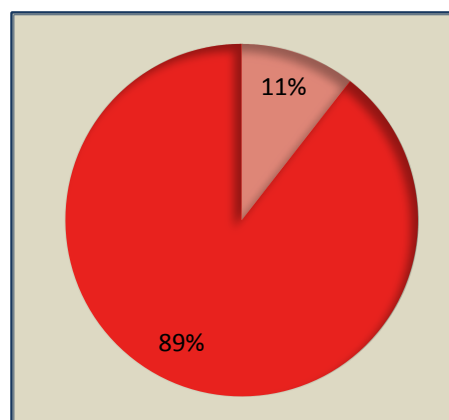


Figure 26 Dependent learners



These diagrams show that at the beginning of the term only 17% totally agreed with the statement that they are independent learners. 56% of the pupils agreed and the rest was a bit unsure, about 28%. When I asked the question in a negative way to check on their consistency and also to find out whether they are now more convinced, I found out that after one semester of Blended Learning with the learning platform 89% of the pupils strongly disagreed with the fact that they were dependent learners and needed a lot of guidance. 11% disagreed

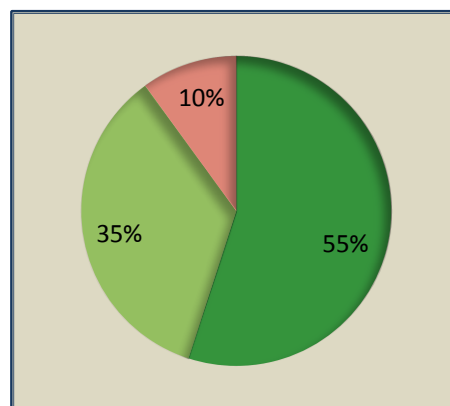
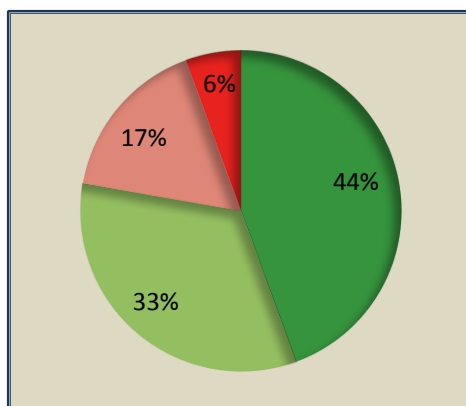
somehow with the statement. This shows that most of the pupils became more self-confident and became more autonomous learners during the Blended Learning project. This is a major goal of the concept and the results underline that this aim has been reached.

The third area contains statements about the attitudes towards the different tasks, activities and exercises. I included statements concerning their wishes and motivation towards different exercises and computer programmes. In the first questionnaire I added questions like the presented C1 and Figure 27 presents the results. In the second questionnaire most of the statements concerning the different exercises are answered quite positively. Most of the pupils think that learning on the computer is really interesting and they think it is exciting to search the internet for different topics. They also enjoy the download opportunities and online games like the HotPot exercises. At the end of the term this opinion had not changed either and the pupils enjoyed the range of activities. This can be underlined with the following statements and statistics in Figure 27 and Figure 28.

C1) Ich könnte mir vorstellen, Übungen zu verschiedenen Themen am Computer zu absolvieren. (Fig. 27)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu
Z2) Ich finde die Abwechslung der Aufgabenstellungen auf Moodle sehr gut. (Fig. 28)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu

Figure 27 Different topics and exercises

Figure 28 Diversity of exercises



The statistics in Figure 27 show that 77% of the pupils were motivated to complete exercises about different topics on the computer. Only one pupil (6%) was not that motivated, although this was a person who had already had

experience with learning platforms. Figure 28 shows that more than half of the pupils agreed strongly with this statement in the second questionnaire and 35% of the pupils agreed with it. Only 10% disagreed somewhat with the statement that the diversity of activities was rich. These results show that the mixture of exercises was good and the pupils generally also enjoyed doing them.

The fourth area I wanted to investigate is the area of motivation, as this seems to contribute highly to achievements in second language learning. The pupils' general motivation towards the language, the concept, computers and learning is the focus of the questions and the statements. In both questionnaires I asked the pupils to add personal comments about what they really like about learning with a learning platform for this. The interest in computer-assisted learning and their attitude towards the language and the subject English especially was the main focus of the pupils' comments and answers. One of the main statements and very interesting results was the question concerning their interest and motivation in learning with computers. I wanted to know their attitude towards boredom and CALL.

D1) Ich finde Lernen am Computer sehr fad. (Fig. 29)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu
D2) Ich finde Lernen am Computer sehr fad. (Fig. 30)	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu

The results presented in Figure 29 show that the pupils were motivated computer learners because most of them - 83 % - disagreed with this statement. One pupil (6%) however, thought that CALL was boring and was not motivated for this type of learning. In the second questionnaire I also included this question and the results show similar attitudes, as illustrated in Figure 30. Only 75% said that they totally disagreed with the statement. However, 20% still disagreed with it somewhat. All in all, this means that 95% were more motivated in CALL, and only one still thought that it is boring, although he/she had worked with a learning platform before, suggesting that this person was not motivated at all.

Figure 29 Boredom with CALL 1

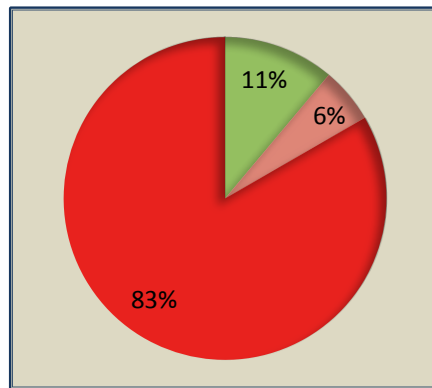
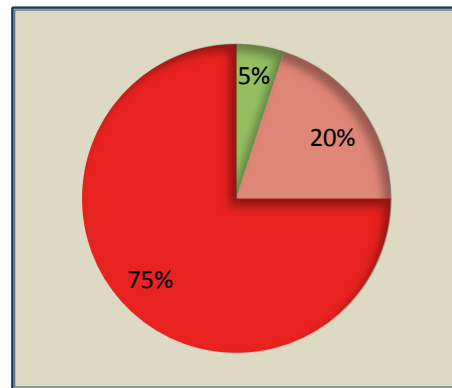


Figure 30 Boredom with CALL 2



I would like to add some comments which were formulated by the pupils after one term of Blended Learning as the degree of motivation is more detectable through personal comments. The comments in Figure 31 show that the pupils enjoyed working with Moodle and that their attitude towards the subject English at school changed during this term.

Figure 31 Personal comments about motivation

<p><i>Danke für die Übungen auf Moodle :D Es hat mir sehr geholfen, meine Note zu verbessern. (from Questionnaire of pupil 25.5.1998)</i></p>	<p><i>Learn on Moodle is very cool because you have more than one day to do this and it is different. (from Questionnaire of pupil 08.01.1999)</i></p>
<p><i>Ich find den Unterricht sehr verschieden und toll gestaltet. Englisch macht mir jetzt endlich Spaß. Danke =) (from Questionnaire of pupil 15.09.1997)</i></p>	<p><i>Moodle ist sehr hilfreich und man hat einen sehr übersichtlichen Blick darauf. Man lernt leichter und was ich gut finde, ist, dass wir immer Antworten auf Übungen bekommen und man sich verbessern kann. Mit meiner Lieblingslehrerin macht das alles noch mehr Spaß. (from Questionnaire of pupil 28.05.1999)</i></p>

This collection of comments shows that the pupils enjoyed learning English this semester and thought that the concept contributed to better marks, higher motivation and an improvement in the attitude towards the English language.

5.5 Conclusion

I was quite surprised to find out that only 7 pupils had never worked with a Learning Platform like Moodle before. The rest of the pupils had some experience, which contributed a lot to the success of my teaching ideas this semester, too. Learners who had never worked with the learning platform had some difficulties at the beginning getting used to working with the program. However, once these issues were out of the way most of them also enjoyed the Blended Learning concept, as shown by their answers in the questionnaires. The pupils were all highly motivated to work with the platform and after one semester of teaching in a Blended way I saw some changes in attitudes towards CALL and F2F learning as well as in their achievements. Most of the pupils achieved more than 95% in all the exercises and activities they had to do on Moodle and the pupils' grades got better during the semester. Also their level of English seemed to increase because at the end of the semester all the instructions and explanations on the Platform and in class were written and formulated in the target language and most of the pupils had no difficulties in understanding it. The pupils enjoyed the diversity of exercises and they liked the different deadlines and that they could choose the time and place for learning. The pupils agreed that they learned something by doing the different exercises, HotPot activities and also the tasks I set in the Moodle course. All in all, I come to the conclusion that the Learning Platform and the Blended way of teaching worked quite well and I also have the feeling that I used the learning platform and technology whenever it was helpful. I created an attractive online course and the pupils liked the straightforwardness of the course itself. The learners should now be kept motivated so that the online course will still be an enjoyable learning experience for both me and them. One major aim could be that more teachers work with the platform and the Blended Learning approach. Two of my colleagues already use the platform in such a way but most of the teachers at my school still see the platform only as a resource platform or do not make use of it at all. Motivating

more colleagues to use the platform could be one major aim for the next semester and year.

6 Resume

The aim of this paper was twofold and therefore, I would like to sum up the major aspects of this paper.

Chapter one looks at common definitions of Blended Learning and how they can be related to second language learning in the EFL classroom. Blended Learning is defined as a concept for a language course which combines a face-to-face (F2F) classroom component with an appropriate use of technology. F2F language lessons mean here the traditional learning situations in classroom teaching. The presented theoretical issues are mostly based on published literature by Sharma (2010) as he is one of the main experts in this field. Some models for using Blended Learning are briefly discussed and the practicability of the theoretical background was also used for establishing the online course.

The five-stage model by Salmon appears to work well in practice and fits in with the learning and teaching theories presented. The factors for adopting Blended Learning are supported by my research and evaluation. One of the main benefits presented is that the concept can help teachers to combine the best of their ideas with the best of technology and that this will improve the learning outcomes of digital natives. The combination of my different ideas changed the attitude of the pupils towards the subject English, English language learning and also the English language in general. Their interest in CALL was raised and their learning outcomes showed a clear improvement. About 60% of the pupils had already had some experience with learning platforms and CALL from schools they attended previously and their interest and motivation was also increased during this semester. Most of the pupils enjoyed the variety of exercises and the mixture of F2F learning and CALL.

The major factors for establishing a learning platform are presented, including a high degree of flexibility of both learners and teachers. The learners are empowered to take over responsibility for their own success. There are also pedagogical and social benefits when it comes to Blended Learning. My research shows that most of the pupils also agreed on the advantages presented. Only one or two pupils did not seem to enjoy the whole system; however, this was not

obvious to me during the semester. This is also one of the main concerns and disadvantages presented in chapter one: problems can always emerge related to individual differences in the pupils and this also shows that this concept does not work for each and everyone. There are always one or two pupils who do not enjoy working on the computer. However, for most of the issues and drawbacks presented, remedies are provided. One major way is that it works best especially if the teachers are willing to mix their activities in a blended way. Blended Learning is certainly no miracle cure to all challenges teachers face but it can entail a lot of advantages and also the future developments give an insight in how this concept will develop.

The next chapter is dedicated to three major learning theories, namely Cognitivism, Constructivism and Humanistic theories, which seemed to be most appropriate for Blended Learning. Blended Learning is, however, not limited to a single theory of language learning. Instead, it is the teachers' task to use approaches, materials and methodologies that will best support the learners in reaching their aims. The individual differences of the learners are put in the foreground as research has shown that these are very important in Second Language Learning, as presented by Lightbown and Spada (2013). The three learning theories, already mentioned, are explained to justify the use of the concept of Blended Learning based on brief historical views on learning and SLA. The cognitive views and perspectives support some of the components of Blended Learning in SLA. The metacognitive skills presented, like communication of information, oral persuasion, oral and reading comprehension, perception, attention, problem solving, and self-control and self-regulation are helpful when it comes to Blended Learning and indeed, this concept does not work without these skills. The Moodle learning platform is built on socio-constructivist theories and their socio-cultural perspectives and background. Constructivists believe that the individual learner contributes highly to what is learned. The social constructivists further emphasise the importance of social interactions in the acquisition of knowledge and skills in language learning. Furthermore, learners should be able to create their own learning, and knowledge is formed not directly from outside but within. Thus, teachers should plan their Blended Learning methods according to social cultural environments

and the offered cognitive tools to ensure interaction, communication and, lastly, assimilation. In the Humanistic theory presented next, social interaction also plays an important role. Through collaborative learning pupils might feel accepted and a sense of belonging to a special learning group. Teachers can contribute to the sense of belonging to each other and to pupils' self esteem by ensuring the engagement of the learners in the community. This also includes online communities, like the course group on Moodle and this again can contribute to a higher motivation for language learning.

The two language teaching models presented are both based on the overall model of CLT. This model can be understood as a set of principles about the aims of language teaching, the way learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and also involve the roles of teachers and learners. The ultimate goal is the development of communicative competence. The concept of task-based teaching and instructions seems to be appropriate as it can serve as the sole framework for course planning and delivery, also when it comes to learning and teaching with VLEs. It can also serve as one component of an English course or as a technique which is used from time to time. Outcomes-based language teaching can be seen as a perspective, which aims at the conceptualisation of the curriculum, as teachers have to be facilitators who require students to understand, apply, generate new ideas and invent, diagnose and solve problems. It can also be seen as a learner-focused and learning-oriented perspective and can be linked to the process of constructive alignment. In Blended Learning teachers are seen as facilitators and learning platforms can be generated in such ways that pupils reach constructive alignment.

Chapter four investigates different characteristics and approaches of Blended Learning in connection with CLT. The web and its major assets concerning grammar learning and speaking skills are presented as well as office software and the development of other digital materials. Writing, listening, reading and speaking are again the focus of the listed materials which could easily be adopted for Blended Learning. Electronic formats of ELT materials and websites are presented, followed by the main focus of this chapter, the chances and advantages of learning platforms, also called VLEs. In the research project the results clearly show that a mixture of exercises and the improvement of different

skills highly influence the motivation and attitudes of the pupils towards learning or a language.

The last part of this paper presents the project I started to evaluate the theory and to put the concept of Blended Learning into practice. First of all the course management system and VLE Moodle is looked at in more detail as this is the platform recommended and fostered by the Austrian ministry of education, too. This learning platform is aimed at helping educators create effective online learning communities and is based on constructivist principles. However, all the presented learning and teaching theories can serve as a background for designing Moodle activities. Some different possibilities for designing an online course and the activities like assignments, chats, choices, activities and games etc. are presented. I also introduced the English course I designed, which is based on the model developed by Salmon. I tried to include the most important aspects and give an insight into the Blended Learning concept in practice. The actual implementation of the course at school showed how flexible the learning platform Moodle is and how the mix of F2F learning and learning with technology can work. The school environment is also presented, as well as some difficulties which came up while establishing the platform and buying it for my school.

The evaluation and feedback of the pupils shown in the results of the questionnaires underline these points clearly. The drafts of my questionnaires are based on the ideas of Taber (2007). In the case of the research for this paper all the factors presented were contemplated and the questionnaires were designed on the basis of the findings in the given literature. The results of the questionnaires show that the main aspects learning, motivation, activities and attitude towards the concept of BL with a learning platform mainly agree with the theoretical aspects.

This paper has shown that Blended Learning has many faces and that teaching and learning in a Blended way can happen in different levels, to different degrees, and that incorporating a learning platform can also happen with different aims. Every teacher can choose tools, tasks and activities in accordance with their personal preferences, the needs of the pupils and the technological equipment available. This is all based on individualised and/or collaborative learning ideas

so that the learners can profit most from the time and effort invested in language learning. This paper also encouraged me, especially in connection with the evaluation done, to work on in a blended way as not only the online course works for itself but the human interaction and activities that take place around it are also very important. I always wanted to be a teacher who is enthusiastic about what she does and I always wanted to encourage pupils to be as enthusiastic and motivated as I am. I think through the blended way of teaching and learning and through the integration of the learning platform and other forms of technology into my teaching I have inspired, motivated and encouraged more pupils to change their attitudes towards English as a language and subject at school and their general opinions about learning.

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Appendix 1 Original questionnaires and data set

Schülerfragebogen 1

Dieser Fragebogen wird im Zuge der Diplomarbeit für das Fach Englisch von Magdalena Innerhuber BEd verwendet und deshalb bitte ich dich, ehrliche und offene Antworten zu geben. Deine Antworten bleiben anonym und haben keine Konsequenzen für und Einfluss auf jegliche Leistungsbeurteilungen. Danke für deine Mitarbeit!

Klasse: _____ Geburtsdatum: _____
Geschlecht: _____ Schuljahr: _____

1) Hast du schon einmal etwas von einer Lernplattform gehört?

Ja __ 13 __ **nein** __ 7 __

2) Hast du im schulischen Bereich schon einmal mit einer Lernplattform oder sonstigen Programmen am Computer gearbeitet?

Ja: __ 13 __ (weiter zu Frage 2a) **Nein** __ 7 __ (weiter zu Frage 3a auf der zweiten Seite)

2a) In welchen Fächern wurde Moodle-unterstützt und/oder Computer-gestützt gearbeitet? (notiere die 3 Fächer, wo ihr sie am meisten genutzt habt)

**Englisch: 9 Informatik: 5 Deutsch: 4 Soziales Lernen: 1 Physik: 1
Berufsorientierung: 1 Geographie: 1 Biologie: 1 Mathematik: 1**

2b) Notiere zu deinen 3 Fächern die Art- und Weise des Lernens: Hausübungen (HÜ) und/oder Schulübungen (SÜ) und/oder Schularbeitsvorbereitung (SA)

HÜ: 7 SÜ: 11 SA: 11

2c) Fandest du die bereitgestellten Materialien hilfreich für das Lernen?

Ja __ 13 __ **Nein** __ 0 __

2d) An welche Online-Übungen kannst du dich besonders gut erinnern? (notiere 2-3 Beispiele)

Cyberhomework, SBX Exercises, More Online, Biz, ECDL Übungen, Words-Übungen, Grammatik-Übungen, Spiele, Websearch, Aufsätze, Rechtschreibübungen, baa.at,

2e) Was hat dir am Arbeiten mit Moodle und am Computer überhaupt nicht gefallen? (notiere 2-3 Beispiele) (*only 4 pupils answered this question*)

*Wenn ich ehrlich bin, fällt mir nichts ein! Mir hat alles gut gefallen!
Das man nicht alles so verstanden hat, wie es eig. sein müsste!
Deutsch: Beistrichsetzung*

Bitte drehe nun das Blatt um und fülle den Fragebogen vollständig aus!

3) Bitte kreuze spontan die für dich passenden Antworten zu den Aussagen an:

	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu	No answer
a) Ich arbeite und lerne gerne mit und am Computer.	7	7	3	1	2
b) Ich könnte mir vorstellen, Hausübungen online zu erstellen und abzugeben	6	10	2	0	2
c) Ich könnte mir vorstellen, Übungen zu verschiedenen Themen am Computer zu absolvieren.	8	6	3	1	2
d) Ich finde Lernen am Computer sehr fad.	0	2	1	15	2
e) Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen durch Computerspiele etwas zu lernen.	2	4	3	9	2
f) Ich finde es spannend im Internet zu diversen Themen zu recherchieren und etwas auszuarbeiten.	5	8	4	1	2
g) Ich verbringe viel Freizeit am Computer.	1	2	9	5	3
h) Ich fände es toll, wenn man zum Üben zusätzlich Arbeitsblätter vom Internet downloaden und ausdrucken könnte.	4	6	7	0	3
i) Ich würde gerne einmal einen Webquest (Aufgabenstellung für Internetarbeit) machen.	1	2	11	3	3
j) Ich würde gerne einmal Lernspiele am Computer spielen.	8	7	2	1	2
k) Ich verbringe kaum Zeit vor dem Computer.	2	1	6	9	2
l) Ich brauche beim Lernen viel Hilfe.	0	3	7	8	2
m) Ich würde in der Schule gerne mehr am Computer arbeiten.	2	9	6	1	2
n) Ich kenne mich in vielen Bereichen am Computer nicht gut aus.	1	3	5	9	2
o) Ich könnte mir vorstellen Power Point Präsentationen auf Englisch zu gestalten.	3	5	6	4	2
p) Ich arbeite und lerne lieber in Gruppen und Teams.	5	11	1	1	3
q) Ich finde Internetsuche schwierig.	0	1	3	14	2
r) Ich fände es hilfreich, wenn man Aufgaben öfter wiederholen könnte und online Rückmeldungen bekommt.	3	6	9	0	2
s) Ich finde freie Zeiteinteilung und freie Wahl des Lernortes beim Lernen sehr hilfreich.	2	10	5	0	3
t) Ich bin sehr selbstständig beim Lernen.	3	10	5	0	2
u) Ich arbeite und lerne lieber alleine.	1	0	10	6	3

Danke für deine Mitarbeit!

Schülerfragebogen 2 – Nach einem Semester Blended Learning

Klasse: _____

Geb. Datum: _____

Dieser Fragebogen wird im Zuge der Diplomarbeit für das Fach Englisch von Magdalena Innerhuber BEd verwendet und deshalb bitte ich dich, ehrliche und offene Antworten zu geben. Deine Antworten bleiben anonym und haben keinen Einfluss auf oder Konsequenzen für jegliche Leistungsbeurteilungen. Danke für deine Mitarbeit!

<i>Bitte kreuze spontan die Antwort bzw. das Kästchen unter der Antwort an, die für dich zu den folgenden Aussagen passt.</i>	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu	No answer
a) Ich finde, dass das Gesamtkonzept des Lernens mit Moodle wurde im Unterricht ausreichend erklärt wurde.	10	8	2	0	
b) Ich finde es gut, dass ich Hausübungen online erstellen und abgeben kann.	12	6	2	0	
c) Ich finde die Übungen zu verschiedenen Themen am Computer gut.	9	9	2	0	
d) Ich finde Lernen am Computer sehr fad.	0	1	4	15	
e) Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, durch Computerspiele etwas zu lernen.	1	2	2	15	
f) Ich finde es spannend im Internet zu diversen Themen zu recherchieren und etwas auszuarbeiten.	7	9	4	0	
g) Die Online-Aktivitäten sind immer in Verbindung mit Lerninhalten aus den Englischstunden gestanden.	11	8	1	0	
h) Ich finde den Englischkurs auf Moodle sehr übersichtlich gestaltet.	10	8	1	1	
i) Ich finde zusätzliche Arbeitsblätter und Übungen zum Downloaden und Ausdrucken sehr hilfreich.	7	8	5	0	
j) Ich verliere oft den Überblick bei online gestellten Aufgaben.	0	2	9	8	1
j1) Ich weiß oft nicht, wann ich welche Aufgabe machen soll.	0	3	5	12	
k) Ich kenne mich auf Moodle nicht wirklich aus.	1	1	1	17	
l) Ich finde Informationssuche im Internet sehr schwierig.	0	0	5	15	
m) Ich finde die HotPot Übungen und Lernspiele auf Moodle sehr hilfreich.	2	0	10	8	
n) Ich verbringe kaum Zeit vor dem Computer.	2	0	10	8	
o) Ich brauche beim Lernen viel Hilfe.	2	1	5	12	

Bitte drehe nun das Blatt um und beurteile die restlichen Aussagen!

<i>Bitte kreuze spontan die Antwort bzw. das Kästchen unter der Antwort an, die für dich zu den folgenden Aussagen passt.</i>	trifft völlig zu	trifft zu	trifft eher zu	trifft gar nicht zu	
p) Ich würde in der Schule gerne weniger am Computer arbeiten.	1	1	5	13	
q) Ich kenne mich in vielen Bereichen am Computer nicht gut aus.	0	1	6	13	
r) Ich mache die Hausübungen am Computer viel lieber als „normale“.	5	5	8	2	
s) Ich kann mir meine Lernzeit durch die Moodle- und Online-Aktivitäten viel besser einteilen.	2	7	8	3	
t) Ich arbeite und lerne lieber in Gruppen und Teams.	8	3	9	0	
u) Ich würde gerne weniger mit Moodle arbeiten.	0	2	6	12	
v) Ich finde Internetsuche schwierig.	0	0	3	17	
w) Ich finde es hilfreich, wenn man Online-Aufgaben öfter wiederholen kann und online Rückmeldungen bekommt.	12	6	2	0	
x) Ich finde die Lernspiele und Hot Pot Übungen auf Moodle nicht sinnvoll.	0	2	1	17	
y) Ich fand die Anzahl der Moodle/Computer-Stunden im Vergleich zu Klassenstunden passend.	7	9	4	0	
z) Ich finde freie Zeiteinteilung und freie Wahl des Lernortes beim Lernen sehr hilfreich.	11	5	3	1	1
z1) Ich bin sehr unselbstständig beim Lernen.	0	0	3	17	
z2) Ich finde die Abwechslung der Aufgabenstellungen auf Moodle sehr gut.	11	7	2	0	

Wenn du noch persönlich etwas anfügen möchtest und deiner Meinung Ausdruck verleihen willst, hast du hier noch Platz. Ich freue mich über deine Beurteilungen und persönliche Meinung. ☺

All of the given comments can be found in Figure 31 – section 5.4!

DANKE FÜR DEINE MITARBEIT UND DEINE EHRlichen ANTWORTEN! ☺

Abstract

This paper has shown that Blended Learning has many faces and that teaching and learning in a blended way can happen in different levels, to different degrees, and that incorporating a learning platform can also happen with different aims. Every teacher can choose tools, tasks and activities in accordance with their personal preferences, the needs of the pupils and the technological equipment available. This is all based on individualised and/or collaborative learning ideas so that the learners can profit most from the time and effort invested in language learning. If teachers use a learning platform for teaching of a second language aims have to be formulated because if BL happens without planning and a regulated concept pupils might not profit from it and do not learn well or are less motivated.

Based on recently published literature three learning theories are presented in this paper and combined with the concept of BL and learning in the EFL classroom: Constructivism, Cognitivism and the Humanistic model are explained briefly. The learning platform Moodle is based on socio-cultural and socio-constructionist principles which means that, for example, social contact between learners is essential for learning processes and with learning in a blended way and using a learning platform some of these theories can be combined.

The communicative competence in its variety can be fostered and therefore the conclusion is drawn that the model of BL can be achieved in the methods and communicative language teaching. Task based learning and the outcomes of learning should be in the foreground and all the activities should include parts of preparation and post-processing. The web offers a lot of opportunities for teachers and learners as the range of materials is very manifold and the pupils receptive and productive skills can be fostered in many different ways. Speaking, Writing, Reading and Listening skills are addressed and also the areas of vocabulary learning, pronunciation, grammar and spelling. With special software programmes the teachers have the opportunities to create their own ELT materials fitting for their pupils needs and interests and also according to the different levels of English. Learning in a blended way is easier if the facilities at school are given and computer labs or laptops or other forms of technology are

available for all of the pupils. The idea of BL is based on collaborative and individual, autonomous learning and a mixture of both. The pupils' welfare and their achievements should be kept in mind all the time. Correct feedback at the right time helps pupils to see and feel the sense of success and that they can achieve something.

E-learning on its own is probably not as successful, especially in compulsory schools. Therefore, a blended way of learning and a mixture of F2F and online learning could contribute to more learning success and pupils' achievements in a second language. The pupils-teacher-interaction is very important for learning a foreign language.

This thesis should motivate teachers to try BL and to follow some of the principles mentioned here especially because the outcomes of the research project and evaluation of one term of Blended Learning in a real English classroom were very positive and encouraging.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit zeigt, dass das Konzept des Blended Learning im Lernen von Fremdsprachen viele Gesichter hat und dass Lehren und Lernen mit verschiedensten, gemischten Methoden auch auf verschiedenen Stufen, in unterschiedlichem Ausmaß passieren kann. Wenn eine Lernplattform mit einbezogen werden soll, ist es wichtig, verfolgte Ziele, Absichten und Vorhaben im Vorhinein konkret zu formulieren und diese nicht aus den Augen zu verlieren.

Ein unregelmäßiger Einsatz von Technologien im Unterricht und fehlende Zusammenhänge von Inhalten der Onlineübungen und Inhalten in der Klasse kann bewirken, dass Schülerinnen und Schüler weniger lernen und weniger motiviert sind, beziehungsweise das Konzept nicht den gewünschten Lernfortschritt bringt.

Basierend auf aktueller Forschung werden in dieser Arbeit drei Lerntheorien mit dem Konzept von Blended Learning im Bereich des Zweitsprachenlernens verknüpft: Konstruktivismus, Kognitivismus und das Humanistische Modell werden näher erläutert. Die Lernplattform Moodle basiert auf dem sozio-kulturellen und sozio-konstruktivistischen Modell. Dieses besagt, dass sozialer Kontakt unter den Lernenden und den Lehrenden sehr wichtig ist und Moodle, beziehungsweise das Konzept des Blended Learning, vereint diese Prinzipien.

Die kommunikative Kompetenz in ihrer Vielfältigkeit wird gefördert und somit wird angenommen, dass verschiedene Methoden auch dem kommunikativen Zweck und dem Modell des kommunikativen Sprachenlernens entsprechen. Handlungsorientiertes Lernen und Lehren sollte im Vordergrund stehen und alle angebotenen Aktivitäten sollten Phasen der Vorbereitung und Nachbereitung beinhalten. Das Internet bietet jede Menge Chancen für Lehrerinnen und Lehrer passende Materialien für ihren Unterricht zu finden. Die Auswahl ist groß und in dieser Arbeit werden verschiedene Methoden und Aktivitäten präsentiert, die alle rezeptiven und produktiven Fertigkeiten der Schülerinnen und Schüler fördern. Sprechen, Schreiben, Lesen und Hören werden angesprochen, genauso wie die Bereiche von Vokabel lernen, Aussprache, Rechtschreibung und Grammatik. Mit speziellen Softwareprogrammen hat jeder Lehrer, jede Lehrerin

auch die Chance, Aktivitäten und Aufgaben zu erstellen, die ihren eigenen Vorstellungen und Vorlieben entsprechen, beziehungsweise den Levels und dem Können von Schülerinnen und Schülern angepasst sind.

Wenn an Schulen entsprechende Ausstattung in Computerräumen oder in den Klassen vorhanden ist, gestaltet sich das Arbeiten mit Lernplattformen durchaus einfacher und Lehrerinnen, Lehrer und Schülerinnen und Schüler können von dem Konzept vielfach profitieren. Die gesamte Idee des Blended Learning basiert auf der Abwechslung von individuellem und gemeinschaftlichem Lernen. Das Wohl der Schülerinnen und Schüler und ihre Leistungen sollten hier immer im Vordergrund stehen. Die Schülerinnen und Schüler sollen durch gut platziertes Feedback Erfolgserlebnisse verspüren können.

Reines online Lernen bringt bestimmt nicht den gewünschten Erfolg, speziell in Pflichtschulen. Deshalb wäre eine gute Mischung von Unterricht in Präsenzklassen und online Lernen von Vorteil. Die sogenannte F2F Vermittlung, also die Lehrer-Schüler Interaktion darf keinesfalls zu kurz kommen. Diese Arbeit soll andere Lehrerinnen und Lehrer motivieren das Konzept des Blended Learnings in ihre Unterrichtsarbeit einzuflechten, speziell auch deshalb, weil die Evaluation des eigens durchgeführten Projektes sehr positiv ausgefallen ist.

Curriculum Vitae

Bildungsweg

1991-1995	Volksschule St. Pantaleon-Erla
1995-1999	Sporthauptschule St. Valentin
1999-2004	BAKIP im Schulzentrum der Kreuzschwestern Linz
Juni 2004	Matura
2004-2007	PÄDAK der Diözese Linz – Englisch/Sport für Hauptschulen
WS 2005/06	Murray House College of Education/University of Edinburgh Erasmusstudium
2006-2007	PÄDAK der Diözese Linz – Lehrgang zur a.o. Religionslehrerin
2007-2008	Aufbausemester an der PH der Diözese Linz BEd für Englisch/Sport Bachelorarbeit: „Ich habe Angst zu versagen – Alltag oder Ausnahmefall im Schülerleben?“ (Mit Auszeichnung)
Feb. 2008	Abschluss des Bachelors of education (Mit Auszeichnung)
2010-2014	Universität Wien Lehramtstudium Englisch und Deutsch (Abschluss Mag. phil.)

Berufserfahrung

2008-2010	HS1/IBM St. Valentin Religionslehrerin
Seit 2008	Fachschulen der Marienschwestern Erla Lehrerin für Englisch/Deutsch/Bewegung und Sport/ Musikerziehung/ Fest- und Fei ergestaltung/Musik und Bewegung für den alten Menschen/ Projektmanagement/ Kindergartenpraxis/Reflexion und Dokumentation/ Lernbetreuung