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Learning English based on blended tasks in a flipped online classroom

Aprendendo Inglês baseado em tarefas híbridas em uma sala de aula invertida

Aprendizaje de inglés basada en tareas híbridas en una clase online invertida

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to discuss learning English as a second language (L2) based on blended tasks in a flipped online classroom. Studies on Active Methodologies and the Flipped Classroom have shown that the learning process is enhanced when teachers expose students to activities in which they play a vital role in the knowledge development process. We seek to verify the possible contributions and limitations of blended tasks for learning English as an L2 in a Flipped Online Classroom. This study adopts a netnographic methodology that deals with theory and practice adapting the ethnographic method to investigate the influence of the internet in technology-mediated learning environments. The tasks were implemented synchronously and asynchronously with students at the Sul-rio-grandense Federal Institute, and we collected data using class notes and a questionnaire. Our observations and analysis of the results indicate a more active engagement of the students. Our findings also show that the Flipped Online Classroom promotes affordances for learning English.
KEYWORDS: Learning Languages Online. Flipped Classroom. Blended Tasks.

RESUMO: O presente trabalho tem como objetivo tecer reflexões sobre a aprendizagem de inglês baseada em tarefas híbridas em uma sala de aula online invertida. Pesquisas sobre as Metodologias Ativas e a Sala de Aula Invertida têm mostrado que o processo de aprendizagem se potencializa quando o aluno é exposto a atividades nas quais ele seja o protagonista do seu processo de construção do saber. Esta pesquisa busca averiguar as possíveis contribuições e limitações de tarefas híbridas, voltadas ao aprendizado da língua inglesa, em uma sala de aula online invertida. Esta investigação possui um caráter netnográfico o qual lida com aspectos teóricos e práticos adaptando a etnografia para investigar a influência da internet em ambientes de aprendizagem mediados pelas tecnologias. As tarefas foram implementadas de forma síncrona e assíncrona em uma turma do

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como Instituto Federal Sul-rio-grandense e os dados foram coletados usando anotações de sala de aula e um questionário. A partir das observações e resultados, verificou-se que houve um maior engajamento dos estudantes. Nosso estudo também mostrou que a sala de aula online invertida potencializa o ensino da língua inglesa.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aprendizagem De Línguas Online. Sala De Aula Invertida. Tarefas Híbridas.

RESUMEN: El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo tejer reflexiones sobre el aprendizaje de inglés basado en tareas híbridas en una clase online invertida. Investigaciones sobre las Metodologías Activas y la Clase Invertida han demostrado que el proceso de aprendizaje se potencializa cuando el alumno es presentado a actividades en las cuales él sea el protagonista de su proceso de construcción del saber. Esta investigación busca averiguar las posibles contribuciones y limitaciones de las tareas híbridas, orientadas al aprendizaje de lengua inglesa, en una clase online invertida. Posee carácter netnográfico el cual trata con aspectos teóricos y prácticos adaptando la etnografía para investigar la influencia de la internet en ambientes de aprendizaje mediados por tecnologías. Las tareas fueron implementadas de forma síncrona y asíncrona en un grupo del Instituto Federal Sul-rio-grandense y los datos fueron colectados utilizando apuntesde la clase y un cuestionario. A partir de las observaciones y resultados, fue posible constatar que hubo más participación de los estudiantes. Nuestro estudio también demostró que la clase invertida potencializa la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa.
PALABRAS CLAVE: Aprendizaje De Lenguas Online. Clase Invertida. Tareas Híbridas.

Introduction

Considering world history, it is a fact that new developments emerge during crises, as sad and complicated as it may seem. During the Second World War, Alan Turing's invention, Enigma, was put into effect. The allies used this machine to encrypt and decrypt war codes, changing the course of the world conflict, contributing to the defeat of the Nazi regime, and shaping the world we live in today and the computers that have revolutionized our lives. More recently, along with the advent of the internet, these computers have revolutionized our routines by changing the way we shop, watch films, and the way we communicate, among other aspects.

These historical facts are not different from what happened during the crisis brought upon us by the Covid-19 pandemic when we suddenly saw our lives and daily routines change dramatically. The coronavirus, originating in the Chinese city of Wuhan, took the world by storm at the beginning of 2020. The virus started its journey in China, but it was shortly identified in Europe and soon after in the Americas, leaving a trail of death in its wake and destroying the economy due to social isolation and even more restrictive measures such as lockdowns.

After this brief introduction to the tragic events of 2020, we turn our attention to the school environment, more specifically, the facts which took place at the Sul-rio-grandense Federal Institute (SrgFI) campus of Pelotas. The pandemic abruptly drove students out of schools affecting the learning of English as a second language (L2) due to the lack of

interaction. As a result, we came up with the idea to offer an online English course as part of a 60-hour education project using a synchronous communication tool (Zoom) based on blended tasks. In other words, the study presented in this article has as a background the classes taught during social isolation using active methodologies in a flipped online classroom aiming at conceptualizing blended tasks for learning English as an L2. Besides, this study investigates the following research questions:

> **1.** To what extent is it possible to use a flipped classroom in an online learning environment mediated by a synchronous communication tool to learn English as an L2 based on blended tasks?
>
> **2.** What are students' perceptions of the learning environment and its relation to the online flipped classroom using blended tasks?
>
> **3.** How can blended tasks-based learning mediated by technology be made to work for beginner-level students who do not have or have very little knowledge of the L2?

Following this introduction, we proceed to the Technology-Mediated Task-Based Learning and Active Methodologies approach, specifically the Flipped Classroom, which provides theoretical support to this study. We describe the methodology used to collect data, then analyze and discuss our findings. Lastly, we conclude the article by returning to our research questions and conceptualizing blended tasks for teaching English as an L2 using active methodologies based on technology-mediated tasks.

Technology-Mediated Task-Based Learning

According to Kenning (2007), although technological progress has affected how people learn an L2, this fact does not seem to have promoted a paradigm shift. There is a growing number of studies, yet modest, about Technology-Mediated Task-Based Learning (TMTBL). In the opinion of González-Lloret and Ortega (2014), despite the emergent mutual interest between the areas of CALL and Task-Based Learning (TBL), the question of how to integrate new technologies and tasks for teaching English as an L2 remains.

Tasks and technology seem to be ideal partners providing opportunities for researchers to seek, with the integration of technology in the language classroom, to enhance the benefits of TBL as well as to discuss how this teaching approach may serve as a framework in which to ground research conducted in CALL (ZIEGLER, 2016b). Still using Ziegler's (2016b) words, studies that address tasks and technology suggest that computer-

mediated environments may promote noticing forms and gaps between learners' interlanguage and the target language. Thus, the potential benefits of developing an L2 are highlighted due to increasing learning affordances granted to students. Another benefit suggested by González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) is that technology-mediated tasks may reduce students' anxiety and increase their motivation, along with creativity and promote more engagement and participation.

The use of TMTBL has been approached by some scholars in second language acquisition (SLA); however, it is a new research area. Although studies carried out up to this moment have presented promising results regarding the efficacy and practicality to integrate the principles of TBL in technology-mediated learning contexts, more long-term research is needed to enhance our knowledge of how this approach may be better put into practice in order to maximize the learning affordances promoted by technology-mediated learning (ZIEGLER, 2016a).

According to Lai and Li (2011, p. 499), one of the most relevant advantages of TMTBL is the existing synergy between technology and tasks:

> On the one hand, technology facilitates and enhances TBL both in terms of its effectiveness and contribution to our understanding of TBL; on the other hand, TBL serves as a useful pedagogical framework and set of principles that enrich and maximize the use of technology and language learning.

Considering the words of Lai and Li (2011), Ellis *et al.* (2019) suggest that technology facilitates tasks that need more complex results and may enhance the affordances provided to students to carry out the tasks. However, students and teachers must face a few challenges, such as restricted access to technology, resulting in low digital literacy. There is also a lack of digital literacy training so that teachers can deal with tasks in student-centered technology-mediated environments (Ellis *et al.*, 2019) and in a context focused on learning instead of teaching, creating affordances for learning to take place. Despite these challenges, there is an increasing interest in technology-mediated task-based learning, as reflected in publications in the area (Thomas; Reinders, 2010; González-Lloret; Ortega, 2014; Ellis *et al.*, 2019; Lopes Júnior,2019; Lopes Jr. *et al.*, 2021).

Some problems are listed regarding the implementation of TBL as a teaching approach. One of them is the allegation that TBL is inadequate for real beginners or even those with a low proficiency level. Littlewood (2007) claims that oral tasks are very difficult for beginners. However, Ellis *et al.* (2019) characterizes this criticism as a question raised

by outsiders to the TBL research area. This criticism is made when using TBL in the face-to-face context. However, it may also be extrapolated to the technology-mediated environment, as this new learning situation presents various other challenges such as teacher and students' digital literacy. We tend to agree with Ellis *et al.* (2019), and we intend to propose blended tasks to be used in a flipped online classroom to minimize these problems.

As TMTBL is in expansion as a research area, we intend, in this article, to take a step forward and demonstrate there is a suitable fit between TBL mediated by a synchronous communication tool and active methodologies, more specifically the Flipped Classroom, conceptualizing blended tasks for teaching English as L2. The following section lays practical and theoretical grounds for active methodologies, focusing more closely on the flipped classroom.

Active Methodologies

Studies on the insertion of Active Methodologies (AMs) in the process of learning a second language have drawn the attention of language teachers, researchers, and educators (AZEVEDO; NOGUEIRA, 2018; KIELING, 2018; LIMA 2019).

Mainly using Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs). Bacich and Moran (2018), when discussing AMs, point out that studies carried out in the area of education, including Psychology and Neuroscience, prove the relevance of approaching AMs in different learning contexts, whether face-to-face or technology-mediated. According to the authors, AMs consider students' effective participation in building a learning environment, creating affordances for engagement and autonomy. Students become more "active" once they get involved in activities focused on questioning and experimentation. Being active should be understood as the individual psychological state in performing activities. Bacich and Moran (2018) remind us that we start an active learning process when we are born, and this process is kept throughout our lives based on complex challenges and confrontations. The authors believe that learning using transmission is not only essential but necessary. However, a learning process that uses questioning, reflection, and experimentation equips students with "different forms of internal and external movement, motivation, selection, interpretation, comparison, evaluation and application" (BACICH; MORAN, 2018, p. 3). Following the same perspective, Almeida and Valente (2012) argue that deductive teaching, in which the teacher transmits information, and then students apply

it, made sense only when access to information was difficult.

Due to the DICTs, the contemporary world extrapolates the idea of passive learning in which the teacher is the knowledge owner. Nowadays, students have easier access to information, enabling them to navigate cyberspace (LÉVY, 1999). Almeida and Valente (2012) point out that contemporary students are more active since they browse, solve problems, share information, and build knowledge. It is worth considering that the Internet is not only providing fast access to data and communication, but it is also creating affordances for reflection on the use of digital tools in teaching practice, whether face-to-face or technology-mediated. Kenski (2003) shares this argument and stresses that the insertion of technologies in educational processes goes beyond the adaptation of traditional teaching. It demands a new pedagogical approach that enhances the teaching and learning process. Herein lies one of the most significant challenges for educators: learning how to use the Internet to contribute to the effective and meaningful construction of knowledge. In this article, we point to AMs as a possibility to reframe the process of teaching and learning languages in the contemporary world.

Bacich and Moran (2018) highlight that in order to understand AMs, we need to consider two concepts: (1) active learning and (2) blended learning. Regarding the former, Bacich and Moran (2018, p. 4) claim that:

> Active Methodologies are teaching strategies focused on students' effective participation in the learning process in a flexible, interconnected, and blended way. AMs, in a connected and digital world, are expressed through hybrid teaching models, with many possible combinations.

On the other hand, hybridism makes different possible combinations and blends in the teaching and learning processes. The author points out that, nowadays, blended learning is technology-mediated and potentialized by physical-digital, mobile, and ubiquitous strategies enabling different teaching arrangements (BACICH; MORAN, 2018). Valente (2018, p. 26), when conceptualizing AMs, points out that "Active Methodologies are pedagogical alternatives which focus on student's teaching and learning process, involving the learner by discovery, investigation, and problem-solving." These pedagogical alternatives can be explored and combined in different ways, such as (a) Flipped Classroom, (b) Research and Problem Based Learning, (c) Project Based Learning, and (d) Game-Based Learning. In this study, we focus on the Flipped Classroom, which inverts teachers' and students' roles in the process of building knowledge in an online classroom using Task-Based

Learning.

Jonathan Bergmann and Aron Sams proposed the Flipped Classroom model, which consisted of recording classes on video for students who could not attend face-to-face classes. The videos became popular with students who could not participate in the regular face-to-face classes. So, teachers took advantage of face-to-face moments to develop practical activities, and students would study the theory at home from the videos (BERGMANN; SAMS, 2012). Bottentuit Junior (2019) assists us in understanding the Flipped Classroom using the following teaching organization:

Table 1 – Teaching Organization in a Flipped Classroom

Before the class	During the class	After the class
The teacher plans classes using digital tools or educational materials so students can study and understand the concepts linked to the content.	The teacher plans practical activities to develop responses individually or collectively, focusing on creativity, discussion, experimentation, and teaching.	Students receive open, closed, or mixed tests to verify their learning through the methodologies used.

Source: Bottentuit Junior (2019, p. 15).

Before closing this section, it is worth recognizing the importance of digital technologies to an active flipped classroom practice. Bottentuit Junior (2019) claims that DICTs are needed to promote a more dynamic flipped classroom as they bridge the gap between teachers and content.

Methods

This study fits into the molds of the qualitative paradigm using netnography, a branch of ethnography, to better understand the behavior of individuals or social groups in technology-mediated environments and the dynamics of these groups when exploring this under-researched area (KOZINETS, 2014). The choice for this type of research is due to the fact that this way of conducting an investigation is a significant alternative once it allows to deal with questions regarding theory as well as practice by adapting ethnography tools to a technology-mediated environment using a synchronous communication tool and as a result analyze its influence on learning English as an L2 using blended tasks in a flipped online classroom. We collected data using class notes and a questionnaire.

Netnography follows five steps which were used in this study and are here described:

i) defining research questions; ii) locating and selecting the community; iii) observing the community and collecting data; iv) analyzing data and carrying out iterative interpretation of the findings; and v) presenting results (KOZINETS, 2014).

Participants were selected among secondary students from the Interior Design technical program at SrgFI campus of Pelotas. These students witnessed a tremendous shift in their academic lives due to the coronavirus pandemic and were isolated at home when school activities were canceled. The teacher, and the first author of this article, invited these students who had never done a formal English course using a WhatsApp group. The total number of students in the group was 30; 12 of them showed interest, and a total of 10 all-female students, between the ages of 17 and 18 started the online 60-hour education project.

Finishing the five steps of a netnographic analysis, we now present the results of this investigation and the practical and theoretical implications of using a flipped classroom in a synchronous communication environment using blended tasks.

Implementing a Blended Task in a Flipped Online Classroom

When planning and implementing tasks used in this study, we followed Bottentuit Junior's (2019) teaching organization, previously mentioned in this article, which will now be quickly revised and adapted for our online classroom. Bottentuit Junior (2019) suggests three steps for the organization of a flipped classroom: i) before the class, ii) during the class, and iii) after the class.

The tasks performed by students were planned considering Zoom as a synchronous communication tool, which presents some relevant differentials for teaching an L2, especially when using TBL. The first important feature of this tool is the possibility of recording the classes for later analysis. The second differential, and perhaps the most relevant for teaching an L2 using TBL, is the possibility to arrange students into separate rooms, called break-out rooms, which is of great value when students carry out the tasks in pairs or small groups. Students can also record these rooms once the teacher, the host of the meeting, authorizes them via the Zoom system. The third differential to highlight is the teacher's possibility of interacting with students in the break-out rooms. The teacher can either send each pair or group a message or access each of the rooms. This interaction is of great value because, at the same time that the teacher is available to help students when they are outside the break-out rooms, the privacy of the pair or group is respected.

Before the class

Prior to the online meeting, the teacher guides students to prepare for the task with all the instructions described below sent by email to each participant one week before.

In the first task, the teacher recommends students read the instructions, explore vocabulary, and consider how to go about the task. The teacher also sends out a video of himself performing the task with another person as a model. In the second task, students should initially carry out vocabulary exercises specifically to describe their families. Then they should watch two videos on YouTube, where two different people talk about their families. In the end, students record a short video or audio talking about their families and send this file to the teacher before the online class. In turn, the teacher watches the videos or listens to the audios and sends constructive feedback to students.

During the class

During online meetings, blended tasks aim to create affordances for students to develop practical activities in pairs or small groups, always allowing creativity, discussion, and experimentation.

In the first task, students are supposed to find information about two people from documents. Initially, students should read personal details about an employee and say whether the sentences on her identification card are true or false. Then, students receive cards with information about two different people and are divided into two groups; group A receives information about Jamie and group B about Chrissie. Students are instructed to fill in a table summarizing information about their person. At the end of this step, one A student is put together with a B student and instructed to complete the same table, but this time with information about the other person. This exchange of information should be performed orally in the break-out rooms. When the exchange of information is over, students return to the main room, and the teacher asks two pairs to carry out the same task for the big group. Students then return to the break-out rooms, but now they need to fill in the same table with information about their partners. Upon returning to the main room, students are supposed to report to the big group the colleagues' findings.

In the second task, students should first listen to a person talking about their family, and they should establish family links using pictures to aid. After this short introduction, students move to the break-out rooms. They are supposed to tell each other about their

families but add extra information about each family member, similar to the introduction. The teacher clarifies that students will have to tell the big group about their colleague's family on returning to the main room, so it is recommended to keep some notes. At the end of the established time, students return to the main room and report their findings to the big group. The teacher makes it clear that on returning to the main room, students will have to tell the big group about their colleague's family, so it is recommended to keep some notes. At the end of the established time, students return to the main room and report their findings to the big group.

After the class

After carrying out the tasks in class, students do not receive a closed or mixed test to check their learning. At this moment, we decided to slightly alter Bottentuit Junior's (2019) teaching organization and propose two written activities that students should return to the teacher for correction. Regarding the first task, students should write a small text about their colleague's details, reporting their findings in writing. For the second task, students are supposed to write a short text about their families. Both texts are returned to the teacher by e-mail or in the Zoom chat room, and constructive feedback is given. We believe that adapting Bottentuit Junior's (2019) proposal makes the teaching organization consistent with Task-Based Learning.

Data Analysis

We chose the criteria described below to conduct the analysis and, consequently, to discuss the data built during the performance of two tasks in an environment mediated by a synchronous communication tool.

In the following, we present students' insights on learning English using blended tasks for beginners in a flipped classroom in a synchronous environment. Based on the analysis, our idea is to encourage discussions about the concept of a blended task and debate the possible benefits and limitations of using class notes and students' answers to a questionnaire following the five steps of netnography as explained in the methods section.

We address the participants of this study as students using S (student) and the number regarding the quantitative sample (S1, S2, ...) to keep students' identities confidential. In order to discuss each point, we present below the questions addressed to students at the end of the learning experience with blended tasks followed by a discussion

based on students' opinions and considerations. Students answered the questions below in an online form in Portuguese, and the answers were then translated.

1. Regarding the English classes taught online: The tasks were conceived based on two steps: (1) sending contents and tasks before the online meeting (2) interaction between teacher and students in real-time. Considering these two facts, what did you think about blending these two steps? Please elaborate on your answer.
2. Which of the two steps mentioned above motivated you the most? Step 1, step 2, or both? Please elaborate.
3. Was it possible to learn English as an L2 based on the proposed tasks? Please elaborate.
4. What is your opinion about the interaction with the teacher during the synchronous moments?
5. Did you find any of the steps mentioned above difficult? Please elaborate.
6. In your opinion, what is the importance of the teacher during these two steps?
7. Do you think that your experience with technology influenced your performance during the class? Please elaborate.
8. In which moment(s) did you miss the face-to-face classes? Please elaborate.
9. Did you feel motivated to continue with online classes, or do you prefer the face-to-face ones? Why?
10. Imagine you are having a conversation with your friends, and one of them says that he does not believe in learning English based on tasks in an online environment. What would you say to your friend based on your experience? Would you agree? Partly agree? Disagree? Please elaborate on your answer.

Regarding the first two questions, which aimed to ask students' opinions about blending tasks, it seems evident that they were engaged in the pre-class activities based on their answers. In other words, they appreciated that the material was sent before the class, so the students were able to explore the material in more detail during the synchronous class. Students were engaged and motivated by the blended task, which contributed to the emergence of learning affordances. Ellis *et al.* (2019) mention the importance of putting students in a central learning position when performing technology-mediated tasks. Blended tasks, similarly to collaborative technology-mediated tasks (GONZÁLEZ-LLORET, 2020), promote collaboration and learner interaction essential for learning. Blended and collaborative tasks encourage understanding, foster relationships, build self-esteem, and reduce anxiety (GONZÁLEZ-LLORET, 2020). Bacich and Moran (2018) agree with Ellis *et al.* (2019) and highlight that the students' role is directly linked to an active role in the flipped classroom. In this sense, it was possible to verify that the moment "before the synchronous

class" was essential for students to recognize their roles and engage in task performance.

> In my opinion, the two tasks were exciting. The video the teacher sent us was of great importance as it was possible to use it as an example to understand better what would be expected from us in the following class. In the second task, the teacher's feedback after watching the video or listening to the audio was also essential. It helped me revise what I had said wrong and correct my mistakes before the online class when I practiced the content with my colleagues. (S2)

> I found it very interesting. I believe the new task format keeps us motivated and interested in performing it. (S3)

When students were questioned about the different interaction moments and the teacher's importance at both moments, they reported that the "before class" moment was of great importance to understand the task. They highlighted those instructions given by the teacher facilitated understanding of the content and the required task, making them feel more prepared for the synchronous moment. Students stated that it was meaningful and productive for the teaching and learning process regarding the synchronous classes. We could identify affection issues based on students' reports, which makes us realize the potential of the AMs, as these methodologies are concerned with the reality and the context in which students are inserted. We present below the students' statements corroborating these findings.

> The **synchronous moments were meaningful and unique for me** as I like to **have contact with the teacher** of any subject because I believe this contact is relevant for the students, especially when we have doubts. (S2)

> The synchronous class is a **great learning** moment, and it **was very well used**. (S3)

> These classes **reminded me of being in the regular classroom**, which I miss very much. They made me **feel good**. (S2)

> **The teacher played a crucial role** in helping us with pronunciation doubts, and performing the task. (S1)

Regarding learning English through blended tasks with the support of technological devices, students considered the potential of the flipped classroom. They reported that their English level had improved after the beginning of the classes, and studying the tasks before

the synchronous moment collaborated to a better understanding. Some students highlighted that some language skills, such as pronunciation and vocabulary, were better practiced.

We now have two relevant questions: the first is about the flipped classroom/blended task format and how much it made students' understanding of the content more accessible. In the students' reports, it is visible that they already consider the moment before the synchronous as a learning experience. This perception is because the teacher carefully plans all the materials and contents which are used to perform the tasks. This argument agrees with Talbert (2019), who states that technological tools are essential when planning the Flipped-Classroom. Based on the results of this study, we believe that the mix between materials and moments when the tasks are performed creates the affordances for communication using language and non-language resources along with the students' digital literacy, based on AMs, in agreement with Ellis *et al.* (2019), González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) and Lai and Li (2011).

With the second question, we intended to determine whether beginner learners noticed their language development during the synchronous moments. This argument disagrees with Littlewood (2007). The author states that teaching English through tasks using TBL is not adequate neither for real beginners nor false beginners; in other words, it is inappropriate for low proficient students.

> My **English has improved a lot** since I started taking these classes (S1)
>
> As **the tasks were different**, and we practiced them before the online class, **we learned the content better as we needed to read and speak out loud many times** (S2).
>
> I've **learned new things** and revised others. (S3)
>
> The **tasks helped my vocabulary and pronunciation skills**. (S4)
>
> Learning **becomes easier when we feel more comfortable with technology**. (S5)

In the end, we asked students about their perceptions and preferences regarding learning English in an online environment through blended tasks. We concluded that learners did not see physical distance as a learning problem. They pointed out that using blended tasks contributed significantly to the teaching-learning process as they considered the online environment "less disruptive," aiding the learning experience. One student, who

described herself as shy, stated that blended tasks performed in the virtual classroom contributed to his learning development. These arguments corroborate the idea that tasks and technology are ideal partners, not only because this combination affords new language learning experiences but it also affords teachers and scholars opportunities to explore the benefits of TBL by integrating technology into the L2 classroom. Besides, we can use this perfect fit to discuss how TBL might serve as a framework to investigate CALL (ZIEGLER, 2016b). It is essential to highlight that some students commented on how important the face-to-face moments were as they believe each student learns differently. On many occasions, the regular classroom helps them to manage time better.

> **The interaction was excellent,** and I even prefer distance learning to the regular classroom. (S1)
>
> **There is much noise in the face-to-face classroom,** and there are too many students. (S2)
>
> **I prefer distance learning** because **I feel embarrassed when my pronunciation is wrong,** so I can hear the Google lady pronouncing the words when I am in doubt. (S3)
>
> **I would continue with online classes**, as there is less noise, the teacher talks more and students listen to him more. However, **I believe I would prefer face-to-face classes in normal times without the virus as I believe I can manage my time better**. (S2)

Discussion

We can now address our research questions and discuss relevant aspects based on analyzing two blended tasks performed in a technology-mediated environment and theoretical-practical aspects.

In answer to the first research question, our findings indicate that it seems feasible to flip an online learning environment mediated by a synchronous communication tool to learn English as an L2 based on blended tasks. The analysis of the results presented in the previous section demonstrated that the procedures and materials used made it possible to use the Flipped-Classroom in this new learning environment.

Our second research question attempted to find out students' perception of the learning environment and its relation to the online flipped classroom using blended tasks. The findings of the interview revealed that students perceived the synchronous classes as great learning moments and acknowledged that the teacher played a crucial role in helping

them perform the tasks. They believed the new task format kept them motivated and interested and recognized that the "before the class" moment was crucial for understanding what was expected from them. Students also expressed feeling more confident and comfortable performing blended tasks during the synchronous class after the "before the class" moment.

The last research question of our study aimed to determine how blended task-based learning mediated by technology can be made to work for beginner students who do not have or have very little knowledge of the L2. Blended tasks afford language resources that increase students' agency and autonomy. Beginners can benefit from the affordances created by blended tasks, especially in the "before the class" moment when students are able to explore the necessary language on their own using technology to enhance knowledge and motivation. Teachers interested in using blended tasks should be aware that the "before the class" moment is crucial for beginner-level learners. On the other hand, critics of Task-Based Learning say it is not suited to low-proficiency learners (Ellis *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, speaking tasks are difficult for beginners. However, our study has shown that blended tasks facilitate the process and, if well designed, are suited to teaching real and/or false beginners.

We can conceptualize blended tasks for learning English as an L2 in a synchronous online environment by answering the three research questions. There are a few definitions for "task" in the face-to-face classrooms, but the one that seems more appropriate to us is: a task is an activity in which meaning is primary, there is some relationship to the real world; task completion is a priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome (SKEHAN, 1996). Blended tasks merge the learning and teaching process and afford a more active and participative learning experience. Blended tasks require previous preparation as students perform them in a flipped online environment where they use technology to contribute to effective and meaningful learning. Students are encouraged to do activities after performing the online, blended tasks to consolidate learning. This definition for blended tasks updates Skehan's (1996) to social isolation times when the Covid-19 pandemic forced classes to move to technology-mediated environments.

Before the pandemic, blended learning was defined as an approach combining online and face-to-face experiences. The teacher would make the material available asynchronously, and the interaction would take place in the regular classroom. With the advent of Covid-19, we also have blended learning but slightly different. Activities are still

sent to students asynchronously before the online class when the interaction between teacher and students occurs using a synchronous communication tool such as Zoom. The significant difference between the classes before the pandemic and blended learning during social isolation resides in the fact that blended tasks merge asynchronous and synchronous online activities. These synchronous moments allow interaction resembling the regular classroom. We developed this blended framework during social distancing enabling students to receive the material and prepare for the online task. Digital resources support the teaching process, as demonstrated in this study using videos, specific websites, and audio recordings. The three different moments in this blended framework (before, during, and after the class) complement each other in sequence affording a more personalized, exciting, and efficient learning experience in a technology-mediated environment.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this article come from English classes as L2 offered to SrgFI students during the isolation period when the Covid-19 pandemic forced face-to-face classes to move online.

Our main aim was to conceptualize blended tasks for learning English as L2 using Active Methodologies, specifically the Flipped Classroom, and seek to answer three research questions stated in the introduction.

By stating that it is possible to use the Flipped Classroom in a synchronous environment for English classes as an L2 based on tasks and proposing a new way to use this approach, but now in an online context, it was also feasible to conceptualize blended tasks for learning English as an L2. Such tasks are carried out using asynchronous activities, in which part of the material is sent to students by email before the class without any kind of interaction, and with synchronous activities in which interaction is put into practice between teacher and students and among students themselves, using Zoom as an online communication tool.

Thus, blended tasks seek to merge the teaching and learning processes, creating affordances for more active participation. As these tasks are performed in a new online learning environment, there is a need for previous preparation coordinated by the teacher. We acknowledge the "before the class" moment as a limitation of the present study. If students do not follow the teacher's instructions for the blended task, the "during the class" moment is affected as students are not appropriately prepared. Another limitation is that

our analysis is based on the perception of a limited number of students carrying out two tasks during two different classes. It is worth noting that students carried out more blended tasks during the 60-hour course and that our findings might be transferable to larger sample sizes. However, we decided to bring forward only two tasks due to lack of space and avoid unnecessary repetition. All the interaction afforded by this new type of task is carried out with the aid of digital resources, as demonstrated in this study, such as videos, specific websites, and both audio and video recordings.

In closing, this study indicates that blended tasks are more appealing to students when adequately performed in a technology-mediated environment using a synchronous communication tool, helping students feel more at ease in this new learning context.

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