Master's Theses & Capstone Projects   Education

8-2017

Blended Learning in the Spanish Classroom

Stacy Hauschildt
Northwestern College - Orange City

Blended Learning in the Spanish Classroom

Stacy Hauschildt

Northwestern College

Abstract

Since the inclusion of 21st century skills in education standards, technology inclusion in the

classroom has moved to the forefront as numerous districts across the country have gone 1:1 in

order to better prepare students for the future. While blended learning, a mix of face to face and

instructional technology use, has been primarily used at the university setting for distance

classes, there has been a growing call from administration to included more blended practices

into the secondary classroom. This action research project, given in a Spanish II high school

classroom, looked at including student choice in pace, path and task as a means to improve

student achievement including with oral communication.   This study used mixed methodology

with both quantitative results from test and quiz scores as well as a qualitative survey given to

students at four points within the intervention. Analysis of the data suggests that student overall

achievement and oral communication specifically did not increase while surveys indicated a

perception of increased workload and preference for the traditional classroom.

Keywords: 1:1, blended learning, world language, Spanish

Blended Learning in the Spanish Classroom

While blended learning is by no means a new pedagogical framework for the classroom, it introduces two things that are attractive to the average high school student: choice and technology use. Blended learning has varied definitions, however a commonality is a mix of face to face learning with technological learning. Horn and Staker (2014) expanded on that definition to include teacher supervision at school and student choice in "time, pace, path and/or place" (p. 34). Since definitions and models are varied and ever expanding, it is difficult for teachers to navigate blended learning without a model that features diverse classroom that are both age and content appropriate as the university level dominates relevant literature.

This study looks at blended learning in a 1:1 Spanish classroom at the high school level, where typically there has been a vacuum of literature in world languages beyond the confines of online discussions and secondary education examples. Unlike other subject matters, there is no free equivalent to the educational web, giant Khan Academy that dominates many math and science classrooms and alternatives that include the different modalities of listening, reading, speaking and writing for world languages are often are expenses high schools often cannot afford. Therefore, the teacher in the study created online content that was housed on the LMS (learning management system) Schoology that students can access at any time. In the study, the teacher implemented the flex model where online content is used for instruction and where the teacher is available during class time to help students and guide progress (Horn & Staker, 2014).

The researcher used action research in a Spanish II classroom comprised of 22 students. The class contained 10 males and 12 females including two heritage speakers. To augment the classroom context, surveys using the Likert scale and open student response were used at four points within the unit to gage student perception of work in the blended learning environment. The hypothesis was that more opportunities to make decisions in class and in their work would improve achievement.

Literature Review

When looking at blended learning, the many variables can seem daunting to a teacher from the type of blend, technological consideration, current student proficiency, classroom culture to the teacher's personal teaching style. Therefore encompassing all classrooms from elementary to higher education no matter the subject matter as being similar in blended learning is deceiving that the same models and variables would be the same for each.

There has been some misunderstandings in the role of the teacher in the blended learning classroom. Teachers have been seen as replaced by technology whereas the reality is often teacher's workload being expanded.   Teachers need to be reflective about student learning and outcomes while balancing time constraints (Bliuc, Casey, Bachfischer, Goodyear, & Ellis, 2012). Jokinen and Mikkonen (2013) discussed how teachers need to be aware of the time necessary not only collaborating with their colleagues but finding the right blended fit within a limited time. Besides additional time expenditure in creating a cohesive blended learning unit, there is also a change in the role of teachers towards facilitators instead of the key source of information (Norber, Dziubad & Moskal, 2011). For language teachers, this is especially true, as often the teacher is the only person fluent in the target language and therefore used to being the repository of information for all language questions. Nicolson, Murphy and Southgate (2011) warn that teachers cannot be everything to everyone; therefore, it would be prudent to help students to use a variety of tools and resources available online.   While some teachers will have trouble surrendering control, likewise students will feel challenged on their changing role (Nicolson et al., 2011).

Student responsibility in blended learning is often increased from the traditional classroom. Students need to be more self-motivated and responsible for their learning in order to benefit, and if students are reliant on teachers to direct them towards appropriate behaviors the blended classroom might be a challenge for the student (Kahn, Shaik, Ali, Bebi, 2012). Similarly, a possible pitfall in blended learning is the responsibility of the learner and

changing from passive to active learners (Neumeier, 2005; Simasathiansophon,

2014).   However this challenge is present in many secondary classrooms with larger projects

and less teacher led activities. Self-regulation can play a part in learning as off-task behaviors

are deterrents as they may impede learning, therefore teaching organizational strategies might be

useful when using blended learning or ideally before the implementation to help decrease off-

task attention (Fisher & Ford, 1998).

Technology also plays a role for students and teachers in effectiveness and

enjoyment. Wai and Seng (2015) explored the effectiveness of course materials and concluded

that PowerPoint and video presentations as well as online lectures were all significant in the

study as specific tools that were effective. Simasathiansophon (2014) found that in regards to

technology, overall students in the study had a positive experience in the blended-learning class

despite the varied technology accessibility differences. Perception towards technology use can

affect online learning experiences (Buzzeto-More, 2008).   Any difficulties in technology can

exacerbate an already frustrated learner. To stem this frustration, Stracke (2007) suggested that

print materials still be made available to students as well as allowing the opportunity for students

to write on paper in the target language as some students better connect and remember material.

In looking at language in blended learning, research is almost exclusively at the

university level looking at various distance education or hybrid models. Despite this, some of

the research is still applicable to the desired environment at the secondary level. Eryilmaz

(2015) noted that social interaction is still essential in the blended environment, consequently

teachers should not ignore the essentials of language interaction in practicing communication in

the target language in favor or increased technology use. Nicolson, Murphy and Southgate

(2011) elaborated on classroom communication, explaining that facial expressions and gestures

are readily used in addition to target language use which helps students to understand and

respond. Teachers still need days that are focused on oral communication as Jochum (2011)

found that while students gained confidence in reading and writing in Spanish, there was not

considerable improvement in speaking which is generally the biggest worry of instructors when implementing any increased online work in foreign language.

Methods

Participants

This action research project was conducted in a Spanish II classroom in a 3A high school. There was one student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and included two Spanish heritage speakers, one of which spoke exclusively Spanish in the household. All students were between the ages of 15 and 16, and 91% of the participants in the study were white with the remaining percentage being Hispanic.

Data Collection

The focus of this action research project was to determine if increasing student choice within the blended learning environment improved student achievement. While the unit was created in collaboration with two other department members, the researcher collected data only from their own classroom to decrease variance among teaching styles and student population. The researcher used previous oral quizzes and test scores as a baseline for comparison of achievement. The study was conducted over a two month period culminating in a final project and test.

To gain a more rounded view of the blended classroom environment, the researcher also gave a qualitative survey at each two-week checkpoint, using a five point Likert scale and open-ended responses at the end of the unit to look at student perspective of the blended learning as a whole. Having four survey results aggregated gave a more complete vision of the unit, as students worked through the material in a different order. Multiple choice answers asked in the survey included:

- I enjoyed more choices

- I prefer this type of learning to traditional learning

- How much class time was devoted to working on the folders?

- I had to work harder in class

- Have you spent more time working on Spanish outside of class than in previous chapters?

Short answer questions included at the conclusion of the unit:

- What was the best part of blended learning?

- What was the worst part of blended learning?

- What recommendations do you have for the future?

The primary purpose for the multiple choice and open-ended questions was to provide insight into the primary benefits and challenges that students experienced while providing the researcher with invaluable insight into what pedagogical and environmental changes need to be met to better serve students in blended learning in the future.

The class was held every other day in A/B 90 minute blocks. The researcher posted flipped content for students on YouTube and the LMS, Schoology that allowed for repeated views and skipping within the content. Folders and the work day calendar were uploaded to Schoology, so students could also access assignments from anywhere. For each folder, students chose one choice assignment along with completing the mandatory assignment. The folders were based around the four modalities: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Along with the choice assignment, students also chose the order of completion and the allocation of class time for dedicated work days. While the majority of class time allocated to student work time, at least once a week the researcher held class practicing skills needed within the unit. During days that were blended, the researcher talked with each student three times per class period answering language and assignment questions.

Data Analysis

  Quantitative Data. The preceding traditionally taught unit was used as the control due to the fact the researcher found the summative test scores to be representative of the class average throughout the year. The point value for both the pretest and posttest were 50 points. The baseline score was the beginning of February with a median percentage score of six with the

average of 6.81%. For the summative assessment in mid-March, the median percentage was 87.

The average score was 39.45 which was 79.27%.showing a 72.46% gain.

In the blended learning intervention, the same test of 52 points was used as both the pre

and posttest. When looking at the quantitative data for the pre and post test results, it is evident

that the students did improve overall within the blended learning unit as seen in Table 1.   The

baseline score from mid-March showed the median percentage score of 7.69 with the mean of

7.95. In the post test at the end of May, the median raised to 81.73% with the mean score of

75.96 showing an average gain of 68.01%.

When comparing the traditional unit and blended learning unit intervention, gains in

pretest and posttest scores are seen in Table 1. For world language classes, these large gains are

typical as the average student has not encountered the vocabulary, grammar and culture that is

needed to perform well on the test. As seen in Table 1, Student 14 showed a significant drop in

test scores that the teacher confirmed was due to the number of absences rather than the

treatment. With the outlier taken out for comparison, the difference in posttest scores decreases

to 1.76%. Notable, however, is that 12 students dropped an average of 5.25% while only 8

gained an average of 3.25% indicating that more students did worse with the intervention.

While the change isn't large, it does show that students did not improve in overall achievement

within the blended learning unit intervention and showed a decrease in overall scores.

Table 1

Unit Test Scores Comparisons

	Previous Unit		Blended Unit	
	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
Student 1	4	46	8	50
Student 2	6	90	10	81
Student 3	6	58	12	52
Student 4	2	88	2	81
Student 5	4	60	4	58
Student 6	8	62	10	62
Student 7	4	94	4	88
Student 8	6	92	8	88
Student 9	4	90	8	83

Student 10	0	94	6	96
Student 11	4	66	10	60
Student 12	0	60	0	54
Student 13	4	94	4	90
Student 14	24	96	15	62
Student 15	6	92	13	98
Student 16	8	78	6	83
Student 17	6	86	13	92
Student 18	8	90	8	87
Student 19	20	90	15	87
Student 20	10	82	13	83
Student 21	12	66	2	67
Student 22	4	70	6	71

As oral communication is the hardest method to offer practice within the blended learning environment, the student does need to take some responsibility to practice outside of the classroom. For both oral quizzes, the same rubric was used for both units. In looking at the traditional unit, the mean score was 10 with the average percentage 83.6. The standard deviation in the traditional unit is 1.65 compared to 2.58 in the blended learning unit. In the blended unit intervention, the average score dropped to 8.5 with an average percentage of 70.8. While five students did maintain their score within blended learning, only one student's score increased with the supermajority seeing a decrease. This indicates that more class time needed to be devoted to speaking within the blended learning and will need to be considered for future use.

Table 2

Oral Quiz Scores

	Traditional Unit	Blended Unit
Student 1	10.5	10
Student 2	7	7
Student 3	10	10
Student 4	9	10
Student 5	9.5	11
Student 6	3	12
Student 7	3	8
Student 8	6	6
Student 9	10	9
Student 10	8.5	12
Student 11	7.5	10

Student 12	8.5	11
Student 13	12	12
Student 14	3.5	10
Student 15	11	12
Student 16	10	10
Student 17	8	11
Student 18	8	11
Student 19	9.5	12
Student 20	11.5	10
Student 21	10	10
Student 22	10	8
Mean	10.0	8.5
SD	1.66	2.58

When looking at the other modalities, reading and writing appears to be most suited to the blended learning environment in Spanish. While speaking scores were by far the lowest of the four modalities in the study, listening followed thereafter averaging from 71.3 to 77.7% as seen in Table 3. Traditionally listening always lags behind reading and writing for students not exposed to the target language outside of class as students often look up words that are unfamiliar in reading or needed in writing. In listening in the target language, students first have to articulate what they are hearing to look up the word. High reading and writing averages for both the choice and mandatory assignment demonstrates that students can benefit in the blended learning environment and would be a good starting point for foreign language teachers interested in implementing blended learning in their classrooms.

Table 3

Score Overview in Blended Learning Unit

	Listening Choice Assignment	Listening Mandatory Assignment	Reading Choice Assignment	Reading Mandatory Assignment	Writing Choice Assignment	Writing Mandatory Assignment
Mean %	71.3	77.7	86.9	85.7	80.6	84

Qualitative Data. The Google Form survey was placed on the Schoology page as well as sharing a link to student emails. The researcher noted that the survey was given in email as a

common student complaint is all the clicking to get to an assignment or link. It also provided a

greater likelihood of absentees completing the survey, however was not forced if a student did

not want to complete it. Out of 88 possible survey results at the four checkpoints, 76 surveys

were received. When asked if the student enjoyed more choices, students almost equally

strongly agreed and strongly disagreed with the statement comprising of 61% of the total with
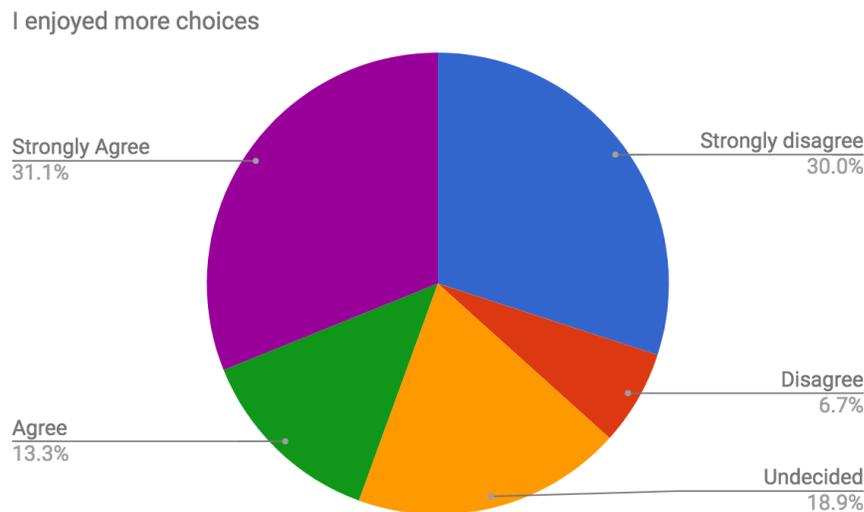
almost 19% remaining undecided (see Figure 1).

I enjoyed more choices

Figure 1. Student choice enjoyment pie chart

   When asked if students preferred blended learning in Spanish class, the vast majority said

no. Only 20.6 agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred blended learning while 55.8

disagreed or strongly disagreed. While there were about a quarter of the students that were

undecided, the results show that students in this classroom would prefer more of the traditional

format than the blended learning unit intervention (see Figure 2).
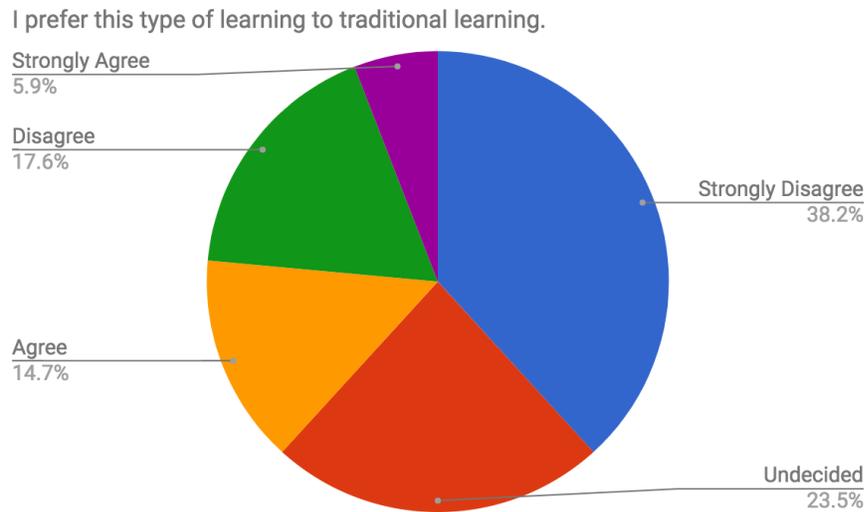
Figure 2. Pie chart about preference for blended learning in Spanish class

When asked how much of class time was devoted to working on the folders, over a third of the class said 70-80%, and another third saying 80-85% of the time was devoted to working on Spanish. The vast majority shared that they were on task most of their work time, which was similar to teacher observational notes (see Figure 3).
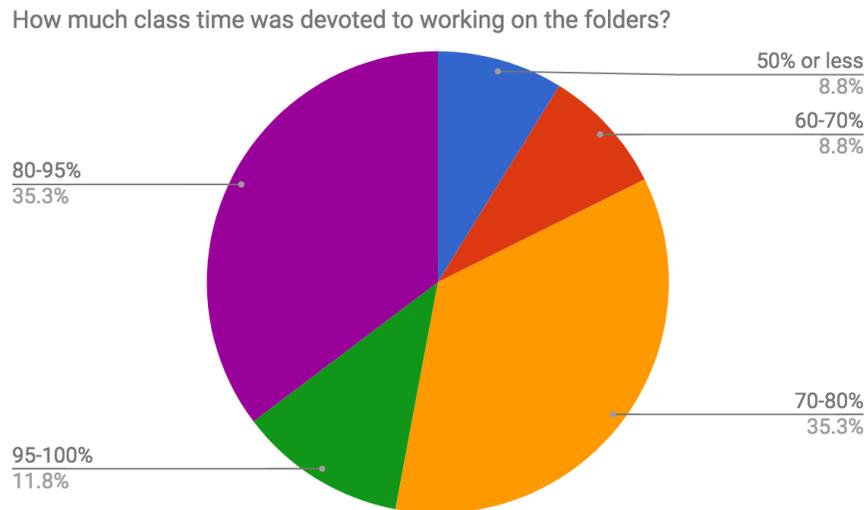

Figure 3. Pie chart regarding time on task

When asked if the student had to work harder during the invention, students agreed or strongly agreed 61.8% of the time with only 11.7% of students sharing that they found traditional learning to be more challenging. This shows there are more perceived challenges from the student viewpoint in the blended learning intervention (see Figure 4).
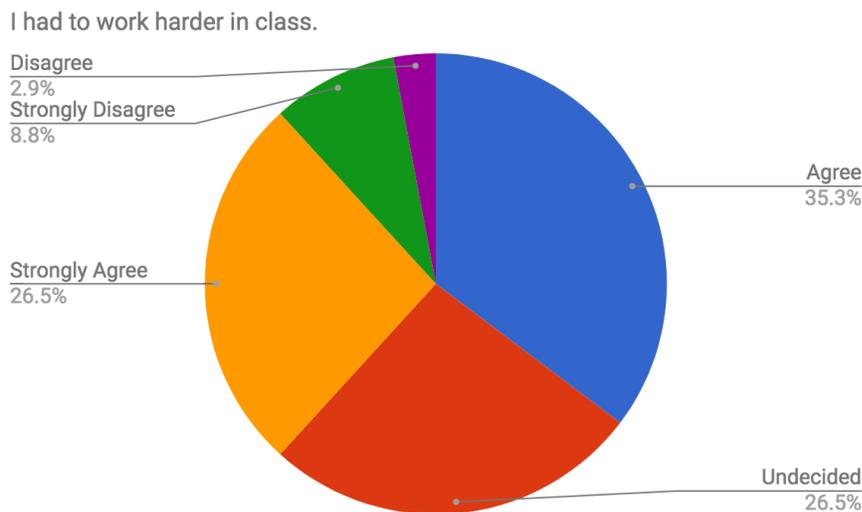
I had to work harder in class.

Disagree
2.9%
Strongly Disagree
8.8%

Agree
35.3%

Strongly Agree
26.5%

Undecided
26.5%

Figure 4. Pie chart regarding work effort in the intervention

When asked have you spent more time working on Spanish outside of class than with previous chapters, over 41.2 % stated they spent a little more time while 32.4% shared they spent a lot more time outside of class. About a quarter stated that they spent about the same amount of time in traditional units as with blended learning. With almost 75% of students saying that they spent more time outside of class, this indicates that there is a large student perception of increased workload that needs to be considered (see Figure 5).
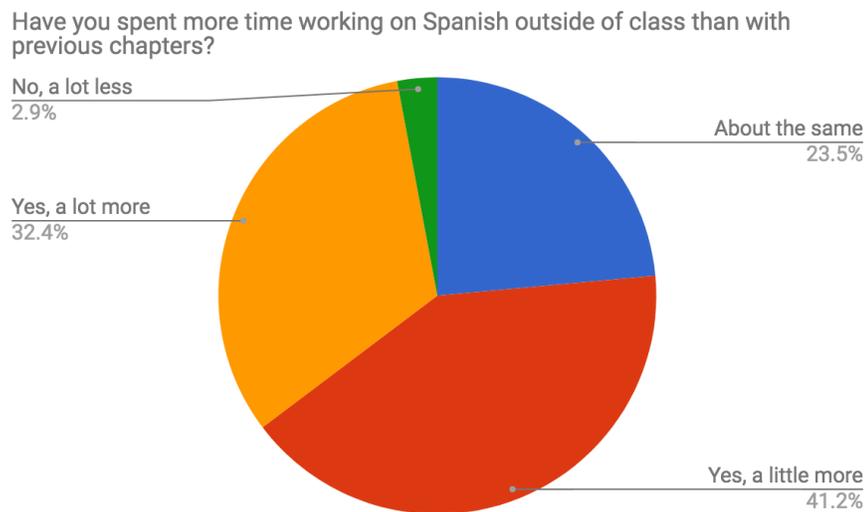
Have you spent more time working on Spanish outside of class than with previous chapters?

No, a lot less
2.9%

Yes, a lot more
32.4%

About the same
23.5%

Yes, a little more
41.2%

Figure 5. Pie chart of student response of time spent outside of class

In the open ended responses there were varied answers. When asked what the best part was of blended learning of the 19 responses, five students shared that they enjoyed the choice aspect or freedom. 6 students shared that they liked one of the assignments offered. 3 students said they liked working at their own speed. Two students shared they liked working in the library and one student said they liked being away from their classmates. Two students shared that it was easier to make up with absences/vacation.

When asked what the worst part of blended learning was, eight students said that the internet and/or staying on task was the biggest challenge. 12 students mentioned that they needed more speaking practice within class. Four students said they needed more help from the teacher either in directions or in grammar. There were multiple students that answered more than one response, so all were included in the tally.

When asked what recommendations students had for the future, only seven students responded. Three student said it was frustrating in some way, because the grammar was difficult or they needed help outside of school hours. One student shared that, "This seems better for maybe history or English where you don't have to practice with other people and can learn on your own." This indicates that students find some subjects more suited to blended learning than others indicating that the language gap on top of blended learning makes it even more

challenging from the student perspective. Two of the students responded that they preferred the

old way.

While there was some positive data, especially within reading and writing and student

responses, most of the data suggests that the format introduced was not successful. Within the

quantitative data, it was found that student achievement did not increase with the addition of

choice in the blended learning environment and saw some large decreases in oral communication

scores within the intervention. That qualitative data, suggested that many factors affected the

student learning environment that were not considered including the excessive time spent outside

of class, student concentration and time on task. While the researcher followed Jochum's (2011)

suggestion for dedicated days for speaking, the budgeted speaking time within the intervention

still did not provide enough practice to increase oral quiz scores and in fact decreased their

average over 10%. The class was more evenly split on whether they preferred blended learning

in Spanish, however there was a consensus that there was an increased workload that needs to be

investigated for causality.

Discussion

Overall the study did not find gains in achievement and included a large decrease in

achievement scores in the area of oral communication. While some students stayed consistent

with previous scores, the majority of the students did worse in the intervention.

While the assumption was made that students would put forth the same effort in class, the

unforeseen increased workload could have affected student motivation in completing work and

studying.   The timing of the intervention can also be seen as problematic as the last month of

school is often when high school students have additional projects and tests while others need to

turn in assignments in other classes in order to pass. In terms of scheduling, students are tracked

to a certain degree by the upper level courses they are taking such as advanced math, science and

English courses which directly determine which block they are in. This means that each class is

not an accurate sample of the level as a whole and would be more valid with the entire level of

Spanish. Lastly while students were used to the LMS system, by including choice assignments there were multiple blank scores that confused students to upcoming deadlines. To aid this, the teacher wrote on the board who completed each aspect which appeared to help from the teacher's observations. The teacher also marked the other choices as excused which was extremely time consuming.

With increasing student choice within the classroom, self-regulation and time management did affect student work. In the qualitative data, one students stated that, "freedom" was the best and worst aspect of blended learning which indicates that while the student did enjoy that aspect of choice there were increased responsibilities. Throughout the study, the researcher noted how often students needed to be redirected to the task at hand demonstrating that this type of learning comes with consequences for students that cannot complete tasks without direct guidance as in the findings of Kahn, Shaik, Ali and Bebi (2012).

Conclusion

It is suggested that before additional research be made with blended learning in the foreign language classroom that the researcher do a type of student readiness survey that would include questions about time management and self-regulation in spite of distractions like internet and friends in close proximity. Prior to the implementation, teaching organizational strategies as Fisher and Ford suggested (1998) would be beneficial to the learner, especially with students that are used to teacher provided classroom structure. As self-regulation played a part in student success in the study, student choice might need to be more limited.

Other models of blended learning which limit student choice to a certain degree such as the station rotation model might be more appropriate for the class. Since individual feedback is necessary to foreign language development and confidence levels using the target language, Tucker, Wycoff and Green (2017) found that the station rotation model provides more time for the teacher to work with small groups of students that allows for essential feedback. Due to the concern that more guided speaking practice is needed as seen by the drop in oral quiz scores, the

station rotation model might be more conducive to foreign language development. It would be beneficial in future studies to explore each model's effectiveness in the secondary foreign language classroom including varied levels. This alongside longitudinal studies would provide more of a framework for blended learning design and application.

This study concludes that the blended learning intervention does not increase student achievement in Spanish as scores showed a 3% drop, and for this particular group of students, oral communication suffered as a result of the intervention as seen with the 12.8% drop in scores. While there are many benefits to blended learning, it cannot be underestimated how much class make-up determines if a teacher can and should use this type of learning environment. As there is a greater push at the secondary level for the use of blended learning to provide more personalized learning opportunities, more teachers providing action research in foreign language will be invaluable to tailoring the varied models to the demands of a foreign language classroom and its increasingly diverse classroom needs.

References

Bliuc, A. M., Casey, G., Bachfischer, A., Goodyear, P., & Ellis, R. A. (2012). Blended learning
in vocational education: teachers' conceptions of blended learning and their approaches
to teaching and design. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *39*(2), 237-257.

Buzzetto-More, N. (2008). Student perception of various e-learning components.
Interdisciplinary Journal of E-learning and Learning Objects, 4, 113-135.

Eryilmaz, M. (2015). The effectiveness of blended learning environments. *Contemporary Issues
in Education Research, 8*(4), 251-256.

Fisher, S. L., & Ford, J. K. (1998). Differential effects of learner effort and goal orientation on
two learning outcomes. *Differential Effects of Learner Effort and Goal Orientation on
Two Learning Outcomes, 51*(2), 397-420.

Horn, M. B., & Staker, H. (2014). *Blended: Using disruptive innovation to improve schools*.
John Wiley & Sons.

Jochum, C. J. (2011). Blended Spanish instruction: Perceptions and design a case study. *Journal
of Instructional Psychology*, *38*(1), 40-47.

Jokinen, P., & Mikkonen, I. (2013). Teachers' experiences of teaching in a blended learning
environment. *Nurse Education in Practice, 13*(6), 524-528.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2013.03.014

Khan, A. I., Shaik, M. S., Ali, A. M., & Bebi, C. V. (2012). Study of Blended Learning Process
in Education Context. International Journal of Modern Education and Computer Science
(IJMECS), 4(9), 23.

Neumeier, P. (2005). A closer look at blended learning—parameters for designing a blended
learning environment for language teaching and learning. *ReCALL*, *17*(02), 163-178.

Nicolson, M., Murphy, L., & Southgate, M. (2011). *Language teaching in blended contexts*.
Dunedin Academic Press.

Norberg, A., Dziuban, C. D., & Moskal, P. D. (2011). A time-based blended learning model. *On the Horizon*, *19*(3), 207-216.

Simasathiansophon, N. (2014). A perspective on blended-learning approach through course management system: Thailand's case study. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology, 4*(2), 172-175. doi:10.7763/IJIET.2014.V4.392

Stracke, E. (2007). A road to understanding: A qualitative study into why learners drop out of a blended language learning (BLL) environment. *ReCALL*, *19*(1), 57-78.

Tucker, C. R., Wycoff, T., & Green, J. T. (2017). *Blended Learning in Action: A Practical Guide Toward Sustainable Change*. Corwin Press.

Wai, C. C., & Seng, E. L. K. (2015). Measuring the effectiveness of blended learning environment: A case study in Malaysia. *Education and Information Technologies*, *20*(3), 429-443.