

# Cyclical Blending: a case study of implementation and outcomes

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## Abstract

This presentation examines the implementation of a cyclically blended English language curriculum for engineering majors at a Japanese university and the effect such a method has on the design and implementation of activities in both the in-class and out-of-class. It describes a cyclical method of blending course components and materials to efficiently utilize F2F time while helping to build motivation and foster student autonomy outside of class. In addition, the presentation explains the process of cyclical blending its effects on the nature and style of activities in the F2F classes as well as the impact on teachers' lessons and roles.

## Keywords

blended learning, motivation, material adaptation, teacher roles, collaboration, TELL

## Introduction

Much of blended-learning research focuses on the e-learning components and how the software can add flexibility or options to a course. Unfortunately, little research focuses on how to best utilize the limited face-to-face (F2F) time teachers have with their students. The presenters are now in the fifth year of a blended learning curriculum with the goal improving student attitudes toward English learning, in overcoming their apprehension toward English, and motivating them to acquire the language skills they will likely need in their professional careers. One of the focuses of the curriculum design is on enhancing the F2F component of the technology enhanced language learning (TELL) environment through interweaving the lesson design process, material development cycle, and the e-learning component in a way that attempts to maximize the efficiency in-class time.

## 1 Curriculum Design

The course is a 2-year program launched in 2014

for students in the new the robotics program at Chubu University. Students in the course are split into four different 20-25 student classes based on CASEC (Computerized Assessment System for English Communication) test scores and teacher feedback. First year students are collaboratively taught by two teachers in a 90 minute session once a week. The second year of the program consists of once-a-week 90-minute sessions split between time with in a task-oriented class a Japanese native teacher (JNT) and time in a language production class with an English native teacher (ENT). These courses are supported through tailored materials and activities on Glexa, a learning management system (LMS), and Brix, which is an online program for developing listening and speaking skills.

## 2 Cyclical Blended Learning

Cyclical blended learning is a term the presenters have coined to refer to the cyclical nature of the blending in this curriculum.

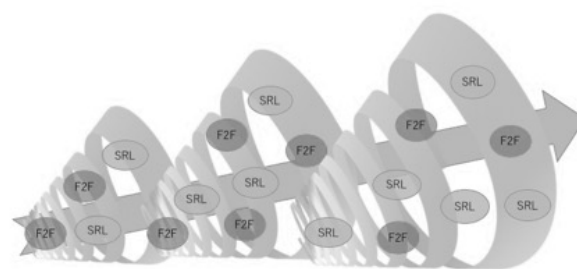


Figure 1: Cyclical Blending

To support the F2F lessons, original materials are created on Glexa where students engage in self-regulated learning (SRL) through a cycle of input, practice, output, and intake. In addition, students are assigned Brix lessons train their speaking and listening skills so they are ready to communicate in the F2F lessons. This same process is then

woven into the F2F classes for then next week, which are then forwards into another blended cycle with the e-learning components (see figure 1 above). Moreover, lesson materials and activities are also developed through a cycle of categorization, evaluation, adaption, implementation, and reflection.

## 2.1 Class Example

The sample lessons for the mid-level classes were based on *World English: Level 1* (Cengage Learning) with a focus on future “be going to.” This lesson was in its third cycle for both instructors. The ENT’s class began with questions using vocabulary from the text to illicit future-tense responses. Next was a paired speaking practice adapted from the text that then moved into a mingling activity designed to drill the grammatical point through controlled production. The lesson for that day concluded with a collaborative writing/communication exercise in which students shared and discussed future plans. The activities were all designed to be collaborative and explorative in order to familiarize the students with the target and spark enough curiosity for the JNT-led component.

The JNT led class had a more in-depth focus on the grammar in context. The main task of the lesson tested their understanding of verb tense and critical thinking skills as they worked to complete a reading from the same unit by filling in appropriate verbs (on cards) in the correct verb tense. This is accompanied by a listening activity to complete the reading and check accuracy. In this way, the activity targets 4 areas: listening, reading, vocabulary, grammar, and dictionary use. Because the activity is quite challenging, students worked in pairs to lessen the anxiety, boost confidence, and enhance collaboration.

## 3 Outcomes

Overall, cyclical blending altered teacher’s roles by not only expanding them, but moving them towards mentoring and facilitation. This is largely due to the support of the e-component removing the need for much exposition. Furthermore, the materials and activities began to become more intensive and communicative, with upwards of 80% of activities for a given class being adapted to better fit this mold. In short, teacher roles expanded to be more active in material development and reflective on the value of each resource to the students. Also, as the majority of the teacher tailored materials require students to

be practicing and producing during F2F time, the teachers have gained more time to monitor student aptitude and attitudes and identify how to respond to students that struggle.

In general, students highly value the cyclical blended-learning curriculum. Overall, 77% (n=155) of the students surveyed in fall 2017 indicated that they became more interested in learning English since starting the course. In addition, roughly 84% (n=155) found the use of the scaffolded materials on Glexa to be helpful for their language acquisition. This may be due to the amount of opportunities the system afforded students to study. Over 30 weeks in 2017, students had between 178 to 226 SRL activities, depending on the class, on Glexa alone.

There were also tangible improvements to overall language skills as well. Students in both first and second years increased their CASEC scores at the end of the course.

These results imply that cyclical blending allows for multiple revisions of each resource and helps to tailor activities to student needs. Finally, it allows teachers to provide more intrinsic and communicative activities in the F2F classes.

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