

## **BLENDED LEARNING AND ITS POTENTIAL IN EXPANDING VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE: A CASE STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This case study investigates the effectiveness of the application of the blended approach to teaching a foreign language. The approach can be defined as a combination of a face-to-face classroom component with online instruction (Graham 2003). In the present study the element that was blended within the face-to-face component was asynchronous computer mediated communication in the form of e-mail exchanges between a native speaker of English and a Polish learner of English. The effectiveness of the approach was measured in terms of expanding vocabulary knowledge. The findings revealed that e-mail correspondence treated as an integral part of a language course helped the student to expand her vocabulary, eliminate the majority of spelling mistakes and influenced the complexity of her writing.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years the growing support for the integration of computers in language education can be observed. The degree of integration differs from visiting a computer laboratory once in a while to distance learning which completely eliminates the classroom component. The proponents of distance education claim that this type of course design offers greater autonomy and flexibility. These advantages cannot be denied, however, as several studies indicate, not all students are ready to completely substitute the teacher, the classroom and the textbook with the computer (Krajka, 2002; Kilickaya, 2007). Hence, a combination of a face-to-face classroom element with the online instruction, popularly referred to as blended learning, has become the alternative that is gaining popularity among language educators. So far several studies reported that the provision of blended learning courses is highly appreciated and positively rated by the students (Delialioglu and Yildirim, 2007; Mossavar-Rahmani and Larson-Daugherty, 2007; Akkonyunlu and Soyulu, 2008).

The types of e-learning activities that are to be integrated into the course largely depend on the tutor and the needs of the students, and can vary from WebQuests, using blogs or learning platforms to chatting. The central component of the present study was asynchronous computer mediated communication in the form of an e-mail exchange. The

reason behind the choice was strictly connected with the fact that the integration of e-mail exchanges offers a real purpose for communication which is the benefit that cannot be substituted with a textbook alone.

## **PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

Many researchers who used e-mail exchanges reported on numerous positive outcomes of such collaborations. Warschauer (1995) points to encouraging equal participation in the classroom as according to his study, those students who were hesitant to express themselves in the classroom context were more willing to participate in the online environment. Kelm (1996) adds personalizing the process of learning as another advantage. Gonglewski et al. (2001) enumerate promoting student-centred learning as well as expanding topics beyond classroom-based ones as further benefits. Warschauer and Healey (1998) as well as Dudeney (2000) mention opportunities for authentic use of language as an advantage since students have a real audience to communicate with. O'Dowd (2003) points to culture-related benefits including creating cultural connections to the TL and raising cultural awareness.

Although these studies revealed a great deal of benefits, they omitted the linguistic advantages that such exchanges bring. The study that reported on improvement of lexical density and complexity of the participant was St John and Cash's research (1995). Here, however, even though the learner took part in a regular course, its content was not connected in any way with what has been discussed during the exchange. It is believed that creating a link between the course and the exchange and a more deliberate focus on forms used in e-mails, applied in the present study, would turn out to be even more profitable to the participant.

## **BLENDED LEARNING AND VOCABULARY LEARNING**

The assumption that blended learning would contribute to the enhancement of vocabulary knowledge is rooted in principles underlying vocabulary learning. First of all, the student has a chance to work on all aspects of knowing a word i.e. the spelling, the meaning, the phonological representation and the grammatical knowledge (Schmitt, 2000). The opportunities for that are created both during the lesson and through the correspondence. The acquisition of the written form is promoted through encounters with the written form in the letters and the ability to produce them when replying. The exchange creates opportunities to elicit the meaning from the context and the lesson part determines if guessing from the context is correct, as well as eliminates any misconceptions. The ability to understand sounds

and produce them is checked during the speaking part of the lesson. Deliberate practice of grammatical structures is provided through explicit instruction during the lesson.

The blended approach also encompasses all the processes necessary for establishing vocabulary knowledge, namely noticing, repetition/retrieval and generative use (Nation, 2001). Both components support noticing as the student is presented with an opportunity to notice the gap in his or her knowledge by comparison with the native speaker and choose these words which he/she finds useful in further learning experiences. Additionally, some vocabulary items are pointed out to the student during the lesson. Opportunities for retrieval are created immediately as a student can practice the newly acquired items both in writing when replying to his/her partner and also during the speaking part of the lesson. Generative use of newly learnt items is also reinforced by both components as it can take place when discussing a problem orally and/or in writing.

A good language training programme should ensure both incidental and intentional learning, as the combination of both guarantees that the items will be remembered (Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 2001). Blended learning meets that requirement as the incidental part occurs when the learner is corresponding with the native speaker. Intentional learning takes place during face-to-face instruction when the teacher provides deliberate discussion of structures and vocabulary items which could be problematic for the non native speaker and could be an impediment for unrestrained communication.

## **OBJECTIVES AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The majority of previous research that used CMC in teaching a foreign language was not conducted within the blended approach context. Additionally, it focused on other beneficial aspects, pushing aside improving linguistic skills. Hence, this research will attempt to address the following questions:

1. Will the NNS notice and use new vocabulary items used by the NS in his e-mails?
2. Will those items be remembered once the exchange is finished?
3. What other advantages can blended learning, with e-mail exchanges included as an online component, bring to a foreign language learner?

Other benefits that are addressed here refer both to other linguistic skills as well as increased motivation and improved intercultural knowledge. The evidence to support that will come from two sources. The correspondence will provide the insight into the improvement in other linguistic skills. On the basis of the participant's impressions expressed during the post

research interview some conclusions regarding other beneficial aspects of the approach will be drawn.

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The project took the form of a single case study. The subject was a 25 year-old intermediate student from Poland (NNS) corresponding with a 26-year-old native speaker (NS) of English. In accordance with the blended learning definition the course consisted of two components: the online part in the form of e-mail exchanges between the two participants and a regular lesson.

Prior to the commencement of the study, the participants were requested to provide a list of topics that would be of interest to them. In order to make the research meaningful for both sides the participants chose the topics which were a combination of controversial discussion provoking subject matters and those which demanded a comparison between the two cultures, introduced cultural differences and raised cultural awareness.

The material for the discussion was provided by the researcher in the form of a newspaper article, a movie trailer or a short film depending on the topic. The materials were chosen according to both participants' interests and matched or slightly exceeded the NNS' level of the foreign language command. Additionally, they had to be controversial enough so that they kept the participants engaged in the conversation. The materials derived from such sources as the *Guardian*, the *Washington Post*, BBC news, Yahoo news and youtube.com. Other articles were copied from three textbooks that were used for the purpose of this study, namely *Taboos and Issues*, *Ideas and Issues* and *Britain Explored*. Both participants received an e-mail from the researcher which contained links to appropriate materials if they could be found online. If the materials were copied from textbooks they were handed in to the NNS before the lesson and it was her task to refer to them in the correspondence. The list of topics, the materials used for the lessons as well as vocabulary practised during each meeting is presented in detail in *Table 1*. The items in bold were used for the post test.

Table 1. DISCUSSION AND LESSON TOPICS, MATERIALS USED AND VOCABULARY PRACTISED.

	Materials	Tasks	Vocabulary practised
<b>GLOBAL WARMING</b>	Inconvenient truth movie trailer: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjx6KETmi4">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjx6KETmi4</a>	Refer to the following opinions expressed by Al Gore: “This is not a political but a moral issue.” “Did the planet betray us or did we betray the planet?” “Our ability to live is at stake.”	<b>recycling, fossil fuels</b> , solar panel, insulation, <b>hold the monopoly</b> , green issues, wind farms, estuary, global warming, dustbin, <b>cut off</b> , scientific pattern, <b>to be green</b>
<b>DISCRIMINATION</b>	Gender equality 'is decades away' <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4582878.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4582878.stm</a> Discrimination against men in the UK <a href="http://www.ukmm.org.uk/issues/dam.htm">http://www.ukmm.org.uk/issues/dam.htm</a> Why we are banning ageism <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/5326774.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/5326774.stm</a>	Refer to the following statements which appeared in the articles: “It’s not realistic to aim for having 50% of men and 50% of women in every workplace because of people’s life choices.” “The fact the matter is that women are simply making different work-life choices. They prefer to be mums or to combine the two work and parenting roles.” “Ageism is the most common form of discrimination in the workplace today”.	political correctness, <b>equal opportunities</b> , gender discrimination, benefits system, <b>discriminate against</b> , plead equal rights, child bearing sex, bread winner, <b>split up</b> , tend to, <b>career focused, raise issues, to settle this side of Christmas</b>
<b>UNEMPLOYMENT</b>	Polish exodus shrinks job queue <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/5245946.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/5245946.stm</a> UK unemployment total rises again <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4715446.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4715446.stm</a>	Discuss the problem of unemployment in both countries and ways in which the problem is solved in your country.	<b>sickness benefit, jobcentre</b> , housing benefit, <b>pension, disability, retire</b> , income, fraud, subsidy, <b>to be honest</b>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	Can we have world-class universities as well as social justice in education? <a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/may/29/educationnews">http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/may/29/educationnews</a>	Address the question in the title and discuss pros and cons of introducing fees.	MA, PhD, BA, <b>full time student, evening student</b> , extramural

AMERICAN SUPREMACY	<p>Article: American Pop Penetrates Worldwide  <a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/mia/part1.htm">http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/mia/part1.htm</a>          Why we believe Americans are stupid.  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6r1IcY1pv0&amp;feature=Playlist&amp;p=4CBF1FEE217056E9&amp;index=1">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6r1IcY1pv0&amp;feature=Playlist&amp;p=4CBF1FEE217056E9&amp;index=1</a></p>	<p>Address the following problems highlighted in the article:</p> <p>“The USA transmits poisonous messages, in the social and moral order, to all families, to all homes, to all children.”</p> <p>Assume an attitude towards the following initiative in the Middle East:</p> <p>“The Taliban militia ordered Afghanistan to get rid of their TVs, video players and satellite receivers. Such goods were deemed morally unacceptable by the Department for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue.”</p>	<p><b>from the outset, lay the blame on, run for president</b>, follow sth, <b>pick up</b>, blend</p>
NATIONAL STEREOTYPES	<p>National Stereotypes          MacAndrew, R, R Martinez. (2001). <i>Taboos and issues</i> (p.39).          United Kingdom: Thomson Heinle.          Dome sculptures shows bleak side of the British          Johnston, O et al. (2000). <i>Ideas and Issues</i> (p.22). London: Macmillan Languagehouse.</p>	<p>Discuss which nations are being described.</p> <p>Discuss stereotypes about the Brits highlighted in the article.</p>	<p><b>tar people with the same brush</b>, respect for, <b>in comparison to</b>, <b>move on to</b></p>
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT	<p>The Death Penalty (the article served as a basis for discussion)          MacAndrew, R, R Martinez. (2001). <i>Taboos and issues</i> (p.39).          United Kingdom: Thomson Heinle..</p>	<p>Discuss for and against the death penalty.</p>	<p>outlaw, <b>community service</b>, <b>treason</b>, offence, <b>be in two minds about sth</b>, <b>commit a crime</b>, come down to, correctional facility, lock sb up</p>

<b>FAMILY</b>	Single out the selfish breeders Johnston, O et al. (2000). <i>Ideas and Issues</i> (p.23). London: Macmillan Languagehouse. Here come the fake Polish brides <a href="http://www.people.co.uk/news/tm_headline=here-come-the-fake-polish-brides--&amp;method=full&amp;objectid=18906983&amp;siteid=93463-name_page.html">http://www.people.co.uk/news/tm_headline=here-come-the-fake-polish-brides--&amp;method=full&amp;objectid=18906983&amp;siteid=93463-name_page.html</a>	Discuss the situation in families in England and Poland. Use the articles below as a springboard for further discussion.	<b>have more than your fair share, tie the knot</b> , go down the drain
<b>RELIGION</b>	Poster nuns to vie for 'Miss Sister Italy' title <a href="http://breakthroughtogod.wordpress.com/2009/04/19/miss-sister-2008-beauty-contest-for-nuns/">http://breakthroughtogod.wordpress.com/2009/04/19/miss-sister-2008-beauty-contest-for-nuns/</a>	Discuss the situation in both countries. Discuss the following questions: Should religion adjust to the times?	indoctrinate, <b>convert, push sth down sb's throat</b> , tone sth down,
<b>SPORT</b>	Sport and Money MacAndrew, R, R Martinez. (2001). <i>Taboos and issues</i> (p.35). United Kingdom: Thomson Heinle.	Express your opinion about the topic. The men's Wimbledon tennis champion wins £477.500, the women's champion £430.000. What is the reason for this? Great Britain has 4 teams to represent one country in football. Do you think it's fair?	tedious, go down, hooliganism, attendance, <b>birthplace of</b> , renowned by, bad at
<b>HOMOSEXUALS</b>	Gays and Jobs Gay Families MacAndrew, R, R Martinez. (2001). <i>Taboos and issues</i> (pp.14, 32). United Kingdom: Thomson Heinle.	Discuss the situation in both countries. Include controversial cases.	<b>come out of the closet</b> , announce, fancy, <b>tend to, from what I gather, in regards to</b>
<b>LIFESTYLE</b>	Harvey, P., & Jones, R. (2002). <i>Britain Explored</i> (pp.33-35). London: Longman.	Compare both countries in terms of: the cost of living, trends, rich and poor	outgoings, income, go through the roof, uncommon, <b>live on the breadline</b> , fall into a trap

The research began on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008 and lasted up until 21<sup>st</sup> September 2008. During that time the NNS participated in 12 lessons, both subjects discussed 12 topics, sent on the whole 83 e-mails, 41 on the part of the NNS and 42 on the part of the NS.

It was not imposed on the participants how long discussing a given topic would take, however, it was agreed from the outset that the discussion will not be shorter than 2

exchanges (4 e-mails). No agreement was made as far as the length of each letter is concerned as imposing the number of words could have a negative effect on the NNS's motivation. What was agreed on, though, was the intensity of sending replies. For the purpose of this study both participants expressed their willingness to send e-mails on a daily basis without any longer breaks that would disrupt the exchange.

The e-mails served as a preparation for a lesson, which took place towards the end of discussing a given topic. Out of e-mails written by the NS a certain amount of items was chosen for deliberate practice. The amount of items varied and depended on the length of the NS's letters as well as on the degree of their sophistication.

Each lesson lasted approximately 45 minutes and consisted of two parts: deliberate vocabulary practice and a discussion. The deliberate vocabulary practice was based on items chosen from the correspondence. The discussion part was based on exercises from the textbooks *Taboos and Issues*, *Britain Explored*, *Ideas and Issues* and researcher's own ideas. The lessons' objectives differed slightly according to the topic, however, the main aim of each lesson was reinforcing vocabulary learning through creating opportunities for retrieval and generative use and practising all aspects of knowing a word, determining if guessing from the context is correct as well as providing the learner with the guidance for further correspondence. The table below presents in detail each lesson's objective (*Table 2*). Handouts given out for each lesson can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 2. LESSON OBJECTIVES.

Date	Topic	Objectives
6 <sup>th</sup> July 2008	Global warming and environmental issues	The aim of the lesson was to make the NNS aware of the environmental problems, give her a chance to get to know content words typical of this particular topic and also create opportunities to use those words during the speaking time of the lesson.
14 <sup>th</sup> July 2008	Discrimination	Since the NNS is extremely knowledgeable about this topic, the aim of the lesson was to give her an opportunity to express herself without restraint in the foreign language by practising vocabulary connected with the topic.
20 <sup>th</sup> July 2008	Unemployment	Since the majority of new vocabulary used during discussing that topic was content words, the main aim of the lesson was to determine if guessing from the context takes place correctly and explain any misinterpretations if such take place.

24 <sup>th</sup> July 2008	Education	Here the order was slightly reversed since the lesson took place at the beginning of the discussion as soon as the NS changed the topic. The reason why such a design was preferred over the regular one was strictly connected with the complexity of the topic. I anticipated the difficulties that the NNS might have when discussing the subject and decided to introduce content words at the very beginning to enable free communication and comparison of systems of education between the two countries.
7 <sup>th</sup> August 2008	American Supremacy	The aim of the lesson was to practise vocabulary items used by the NS in his e-mails in their written and spoken form and to elicit her ideas about American stereotypes based on the film that she had watched. Another aim was to enable the comparison between the two countries and identify the determinants of their success or failure.
14 <sup>th</sup> August 2008	National Stereotypes	The aim of the lesson was to practise vocabulary items used by the NS, elicit her outlook on citizens of various lands and evaluate how national stereotypes change depending on the nationality of the person describing a given country. Another goal was letting the learner reflect on the stereotypes about her country and investigate their roots.
19 <sup>th</sup> August 2008	Capital Punishment	The aim of the lesson was to practise vocabulary items useful while discussing the topic, to deliberate about the righteousness of the death penalty on the basis of real life examples and find alternatives to it.
25 <sup>th</sup> August 2008	Family	The aim of the lesson was to exercise vocabulary used by the NS connected with the topic but also augment the use of those items which were previously acquired and could be easily applied to any other topic. Another goal of the lesson was to elicit from the NNS the information she accumulated from the NS about the condition of family life in the UK and how it is comparable to the situation in her country.
2 <sup>nd</sup> September 2008	Religion	The main lesson objective was to enhance noticing of vocabulary used by the NS and to allow the NNS to unreservedly express her feelings about the topic and also create opportunities to share her knowledge.
7 <sup>th</sup> September 2008	Sport	The aim of the lesson was to introduce and practise new vocabulary, allow the NNS to express her views in relation to the people of sport and their high income and to provide her with ideas for further debate with the NS.
12 <sup>th</sup> September 2008	Homosexuals	The lesson objective was practising vocabulary used by the NS, eliminating acquisition of erroneous forms that occurred in the NS's writing; elicit her ideas on homosexuals and family, and also comparing the view on homosexuals in both countries.
19 <sup>th</sup> September 2008	Lifestyle	The main aim of the lesson, apart from vocabulary practice, was discussing the differences between England and Poland as far as expenditures and the costs of living are concerned.

When the subjects finished discussing all 12 topics, an interview with the NNS was conducted. The aim of the interview was to enquire about the NNS's thoughts after the exchange, let her reflect on the benefits that such a course design brings but also trace the weaknesses of the approach. Most importantly though the interview provided the researcher with apparent answers as far as remembering items from e-mails was concerned.

To increase the reliability of measures a post test was administered. The test took place over 2 months after the end of the exchange and serves as a more credible measure of what has actually been learnt [1]. The aim of the post test was to determine if the opportunity to correspond with the NNS was an important source for vocabulary learning.

Out of all the vocabulary items used by the NS and practised during the lesson altogether 40 idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, content words and single vocabulary units were randomly chosen for the test (see Appendix 2). Those items were divided into 2 groups, each one consisting of 20 items. Group 1 contained items practised during the lesson and used by the NNS in her correspondence. Group 2 consisted of items used during the lesson but not used in the exchange. Such a design was applied in order to determine if the actual correspondence, i.e. the opportunity to produce written output in a real context, was of greater value for the participant and should be considered as an important component of a language course.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The data gathered to answer to the research questions came from three sources, namely the correspondence, the interview and the post test. For clearer understanding of the results each source will be dealt with separately.

### **THE CORRESPONDENCE**

The correspondence revealed that having an opportunity to correspond with the NS, the NNS expanded her vocabulary knowledge mostly due to imitating the NNS's structures, eliminated some of her spelling mistakes and changed her style of writing into a more formal and sophisticated style. Taking into account that learning vocabulary was the primary aim of this research, each result will be dealt with separately and will be supported with examples from the exchange.

Since the NNS found herself communicating with the NS whose style of written communication is rather formal, seeing the gaps in her command, she models her writing on

that of the NS's. That modelling can be observed from the very early stages of the exchange and takes place on different levels, namely a word, a phrase or a sentence level.

NS: "(...) older people are actually privileged (...)"

NNS: "Older people are not privileged at all (...)"

NS: "(...) hopefully we can change the whole mindset around being green."

NNS: "I think it's time to change the mindset (...)"

NS: "Not all the time but mostly they all seem to have picked up the American accent (...)"

NNS: "It's easier for students of English to pick up American accent (...)"

It is interesting to point out that the phrases that are frequently used by the NS are also frequently repeated by the NNS as illustrated by Figure 1 below. The phenomenon that can be observed here is known as communicative accommodation. The theory was developed by Giles and Wiemann and it explains the adjustments individuals make in order to create, maintain or decrease social distance in interaction (Giles and Wiemann, 1987). As Giles and Ogay (2007) further explain, "it explores the different ways in which we accommodate our communication, our motivations for doing so, and the consequences" (p.326). As a result, one can distinguish two types of strategies: convergence – whereby "individuals adapt their communicative behaviours in terms of a wide range of linguistic (e.g., speech, rate, accent), paralinguistic (pauses, utterance length), and non verbal features (e.g., smiling, gazing) in such a way as to become more similar to their interlocutor's behaviour" and divergence which leads to "an accentuation of speech and nonverbal differences between self and the other" (Giles and Ogay, 2007, p.326). The idea of convergence applies to the present study as under the influence of the NS the NNS adapts some of his writing habits.

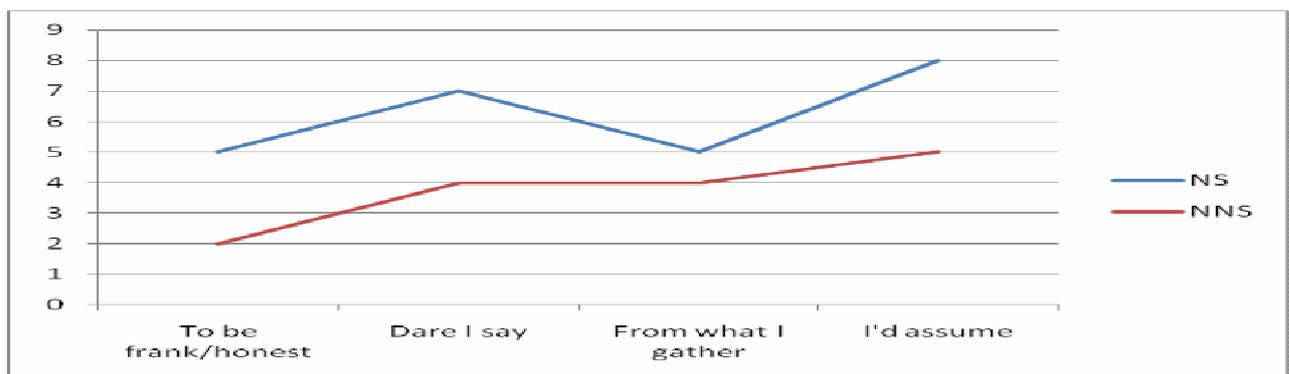


Figure 1. FREQUENCY OF NNS REPEATING NS'S PHRASES.

The number of spelling mistakes slightly decreased as the exchange progressed (Figure 2) [2]. The gradual decrease of mistakes in the NNS's e-mails can be attributable to two factors. The first is connected with the motivation since the NNS devotes more time to

writing her replies and by doing so is able to notice more flaws in her performance. The other factor, as explained by the NNS in the interview, is tied to the NNS noticing the gap in her performance and improving accordingly by comparison with the NS's forms.

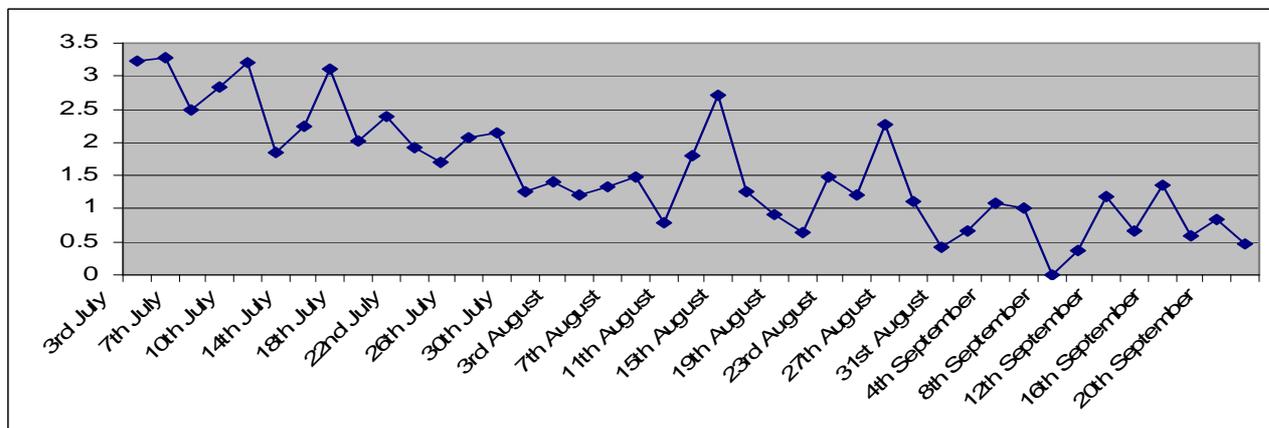


Figure 2. RATIO OF MISTAKES TO WORDS PER E-MAIL.

It is interesting to notice that the NS also makes mistakes. He forgets about apostrophes in contractions: *were* instead of *we're*, *cant*; and confuses homophones: “*because their too scared*”, “*do with there lives*”, “*to tell everyone their gay*”. These types of mistakes are not repeated by the NNS. The main assumption is that the correct form was internalized at the very early stages of learning the language. For that reason the NNS does not copy the incorrect form and abides by the rules she was initially taught.

With more complicated phrases that are unfamiliar to the NNS, the mistake could have been easily duplicated. In the example below the NS omits the preposition ‘of’ and uses the idiom incorrectly:

*“Is this a case of people finally ‘coming out the closet’ so to speak or just another craze.”*

Since the idiomatic phrase is unknown to the NNS, the NS could have been treated as the authority and such a mistake could have been easily copied [3]. Nevertheless, such a situation was prevented due to the proximity of the lesson. The sentence was included in the exercises and the NNS was made aware of the inaccuracy in the NS's letter. This advocates and also emphasizes the importance of the blended approach to learning a foreign language. When left to oneself a student would be exposed to incorrect forms that resulted from recklessness or lack of knowledge on the part of the NS. The blended approach offers the presence of the

teacher who although does not play the central role in the classroom, is still present and ready to respond to any learning problems.

The NS uses recast as a form of correction when the NNS is struggling with vocabulary. Those phrases which are corrected by the NS are repeated and remembered in the correct form by the NNS:

NNS (5<sup>th</sup> July): “*The best example is segregation of garbage (...)*”

NS (6<sup>th</sup> July): “*We have people checking out our rubbish making sure (...)*”

NNS (7<sup>th</sup> July): “*(... )for different type of rubbish but not many people are actually recycling (...)*”

The NNS’s style changes from informal into more formal. Because of that change it bears resemblance to the style of the NS. The NNS starts using more formal phrases when asking for opinion, changing a topic or making references and also starts taking the initiative when proposing new issues for discussion. Through this the overall quality of her writing improved (*Table 2*).

Table 2: CHANGES IN THE NNS'S STYLE.

<i>Language Function</i>	<i>Native Speaker</i>	<i>Non Native Speaker (beginnings of the exchange)</i>	<i>Non Native Speaker (as the exchange progresses)</i>
<i>Asking for opinion</i>	I look forward to your comments on some of the issues I've raised. I welcome your views on some of the points I have raised. Could you elaborate on those differences?"	What do you think about that?	I'll welcome your comments on the issues I've raised. I'll welcome your views on that. Could you elaborate about it?
<i>Changing the topic</i>	I would like to move on to different topic and discuss... I'm going to change the subject here...	What do you think about equal opportunities in work and everyday life for women and men?	I would like to move swiftly to another topic and talk about national stereotypes. I'm going to change the topic and start to talk about sport.
<i>Making references</i>	In regards to equal opportunities, I think that we have gone as far as we can. In regards to having to have a picture on your CV...	You've asked about the best job currently in Poland.	In regards to stereotypical views... In regards to speaking American English

The phenomenon that can be observed here, namely such a drastic change of style from informal into more formal and more sophisticated writing stands in accordance with Giles' and Wiemann's (1987) communicative accommodation theory. In this particular case the NNS found herself talking to the NS who communicates on a very advanced level of English. Having a rather knowledgeable native speaker as her interlocutor, as the NNS confessed, she was forced to try harder in order not to lose her face and be considered an educated person not only as far as content of her utterance is concerned but also the knowledge of the foreign language system. By using more complex lexical items and moving on to a more formal style she tries to bridge the gap between her command of English and the NS's level.

As far as grammar is concerned a slight improvement is visible, however, it is rather due to more careful writing than eliciting grammar rules from the NS's sentences.

## THE POST TEST

The post test revealed that even 2 months after the end of the course the NNS remembered the majority of vocabulary chosen for the test (65%). Out of Group 1 the NNS remembered 19 (95%) vocabulary items. As far as Group 2 is concerned the NNS gave only 7 (35%) correct answers. This points to the fact that the majority of vocabulary that was only practised during the lesson and was not used in the correspondence was dropped from memory.

The results indicates that the blended course proved to be beneficial for the learner. Exposing the learner to the input and giving her an opportunity to produce output positively influenced learning. The authentic context in which words were presented enhanced remembering and lowered the amount of repetition necessary for items to remain in the long term memory.

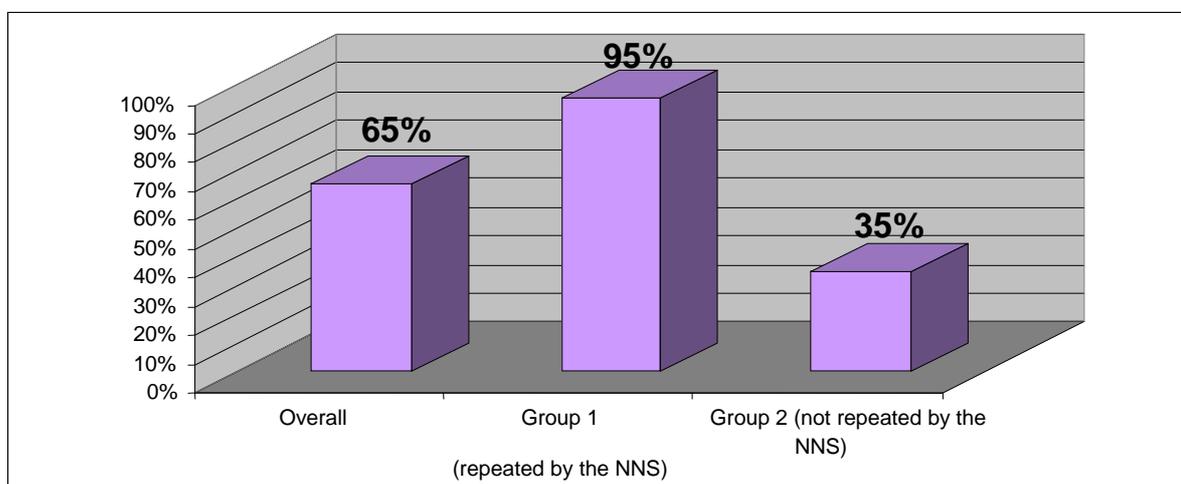


Figure 3. THE POST TEST RESULTS.

## THE INTERVIEW

The interview revealed that the blended course was valued greatly by the NNS. The exchange gave her more insight into the British culture and improved her intercultural knowledge through the comparison of the two countries. Adding the online component to the language course gave her an opportunity to use the foreign language in a real context. Consequently, her motivation to learn and her confidence to use the FL increased as a real purpose for communication in the TL was created. As the NNS speaker explains, the blended approach offered her learning in a more meaningful setting, as opposed to the classroom learning, since using the language was not artificial but natural. All in all the NNS appraised the course well as it introduced an element of excitement which the exchange gave her and which is lacking in regular courses.

The major flaw that was mentioned by the NNS was the intensity with which she had to respond. Unfortunately for the purpose of the study this could not be improved in any way.

## CONCLUSIONS

Recapitulating what has been discussed one can draw a conclusion that the course design adopted for the current study proved to be beneficial for the participant. The most important limitation of the research lies in the fact that it was conducted in the form of a single case study. Some changes, especially those concerning the intensity of sending replies, should be introduced if the findings are to be transferable to a bigger sample. For that reason further data collection is required to determine exactly how blended learning affects vocabulary learning as far as group teaching is concerned. It is hoped that this study will stimulate further investigation in this field.

## NOTES

[1]The NNS was not previously informed about the test so that no revision would take place. After the end of the course the NNS did not take any additional lessons. Incorrect use or lack of capital letters was not counted as a mistake. Incorrect spelling of the same word repeated several times was counted only once.

[2]The fact that mistakes were not completely eliminated confirms what the NNS confessed in the interview, namely that she did not use MS Word spelling check. Therefore the decrease of mistakes can be seen as a true expansion of knowledge.

[3]The researcher had been working with the NNS for over 4 months prior to the commencement of the study and was able to predict which items were unknown to her and might be problematic.

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**Appendix 1: LESSON HANDOUTS**

**Global Warming and Environmental Issues**

1. Match the word with a definition:

- Recycling                      fuel, such as coal or oil, formed from the decayed remains of prehistoric plants and animals
- Fossil fuels                    electrical device consisting of a large array of connected solar cells
- Solar panels                   to extract useful materials from (garbage or waste).
- Insulation                     a material that reduces or prevents the transmission of heat or sound or electricity

2. Fill in the empty spaces with an appropriate word from the box:

estuary	pattern	issues	farm
warming	holds	dustbin	off

1. Nowadays mainly Russia .....the monopoly on gas distribution.
2. Recently the British society has been preoccupied with environmental problems and focused their attention on green .....
3. In order to supply electricity to the majority of London homes, plans have been submitted to build one of the world's biggest wind ..... near the Thames .....
4. Because of the climate change, politicians started to pay more attention to the problem of global .....
5. Instead of leaving the garbage on the street, everybody should throw it into the .....
6. Because of political misunderstandings, the Russian government has completely cut .....the gas supply to other countries.

7. Because of the fact that Ice Age occurs every 60 years, we can assume that there is some scientific ..... that rules climate change.

3. Look at the 2 pictures and compare them. What are your comments on the changes that you can see.



4. Answer to the following questions:

1. Do you think you have already experienced the effects of global warming?
2. Do you think global warming could destroy us all?
3. Do you think that something can be done to prevent further destruction? If yes go to 4.
4. What single action should the world take to reduce the dangers of global warming?
5. How did global warming happen without us noticing sooner?

### **Discrimination**

1. Match the word with the definition:

1. Political correctness
2. Equal opportunities
3. Gender discrimination
4. Benefits system
  - A. Absence of discrimination, as in the workplace, based on race, colour, gender, national origin, religion, or mental or physical disability
  - B. The belief that one gender or sex is inferior to or more valuable than the other

- C. This system has to support those unable to provide for themselves because they are too old or young to work, are disabled, ill, or simply unable or unwilling to obtain work.
- D. Avoidance of expressions or actions that can be perceived to exclude or marginalize or insult people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against

2. Fill in the empty spaces in sentences using the words from the box:

Against	plead	raised	to
Bearing	Focused	winner	up

1. A lot of women claim there are discriminated ..... in their work place and because of that they ..... equal right for both men and women.
2. According to mane, a woman is thought to be the child ..... sex while a man is perceived as a bread .....
3. When parents split ....., the court tends ..... give parenting rights to the mother.
4. Women these days are becoming more career ..... and postpone motherhood for later.
5. Feminism ..... some interesting issues concerning women's rights.

3. Discuss the following questions:

- As far as relationships are concerned, do women always get bad press?
- What changes can you observe from the very beginnings of feminism movement?? Is it a big step?
- What steps can be taken to ensure equal opportunities for both men and women?
- Are men subject to discrimination in any way?

### **Unemployment**

1. Match the word with the definition:

1. Sickness benefit
  2. Jobcentre
  3. Housing benefit
  4. Pension
  5. Disability
- A. a government office in a town where Information about available jobs is displayed and where unemployment benefits are administered
  - B. a regular payment made by the state or a former employer to a person who has retired or to a widowed or disabled person.
  - C. money paid (by the government) to someone who is too ill to work
  - D. a severe physical or mental illness that restricts the way a person lives his or her life
  - E. Financial help towards rent and some service charges for private, local authority and housing association tenants

2. Fill in the sentences with appropriate words:

benefit	retire	income	fraud	subsidy
---------	--------	--------	-------	---------

1. When I'm old, when I don't have to work and when I ..... I want to travel all over the world.
2. I'm not paying high taxes due to low .....
3. People are claiming benefits when they don't need it all the time these days. Benefit ..... is a real problem nowadays.
4. The company received a substantial government .....
5. People who are not well off can get a ..... from the government to get some money to survive.

3. *Discuss the following questions:*

1. Is benefit fraud a big problem these days?
2. Do you think that European Union has given more career opportunities for people? Who do you think benefits the most?
3. What is the most desired job nowadays? Is it difficult to get it? What does a person need to be a good candidate?
4. Which person has a bigger chance to get a job: a person with education or the one with experience?

### **Education**

1. *Give Polish equivalents to the English titles:*

Ph.D - .....

M.A - .....

B.A - .....

2. *Provide definitions of types of studies in Poland:*

Full time - .....

Evening - .....

Extramural - .....

3. *Discuss the following questions:*

1. Taking into account the number of private schools in Poland, do you think that having MA is still a privilege?
2. Does a diploma give you more opportunities in life?
3. Do you think it's important which university you go to and which country you study in?
4. Which type of studies do you think is the best?

### **American Supremacy**

1. *Fill in the sentences with appropriate words:*

Run	lay	outset	Follow	blend	pick up
-----	-----	--------	--------	-------	---------

1. We have to get quite clear from the ..... what our policy is.

2. The president seemed to .....the blame for the shootings on video games and TV shows.
3. I think that Bill Clinton should .....for president instead of Hilary.
4. When I was in the USA it didn't take me long to .....the language.
5. Remove the herb stalks, then .....the vegetables in a food processor or with a hand-held blender until smooth.

2. *Discuss the following questions:*

1. Look back on the last century and think of the best:
  - Actor
  - Most influential politician
  - Sportsman/ sportswoman
  - Invention

How many of the people enumerated by you were American?
2. Why isn't your country so popular?
3. What does it have to offer to the world?
4. Do you think that America's influence is good or bad? Why?

**National Stereotypes**

1. *Choose the appropriate words to fill in the sentences*

It's unfair to generalize and tar people with the same .....

You have to show respect ..... the elderly.

Ford is a good car and still affordable, especially ..... comparison ..... a car like Lexus.

Can we move ..... to the next question?

2. *Choose the two adjectives that you think describe the nationalities listed below.*

American - .....

British - .....

French - .....

Spanish - .....

Punctual                      outgoing                      hospitable

Tolerant                      casual                      polite

Romantic                      lazy                      rude

Respectful                      talkative                      well-dressed

Emotional                      sociable                      arrogant

3. *Discuss the following questions:*

1. Do you think that people can fight the stereotypes? How?
2. Where do those stereotypes come from?
3. What are the stereotypes about your country? Do you agree with them? Can you see the origin of them?

**Capital Punishment***1. Match the words with the definition:*

- A. Outlaw
- B. Community service
- C. Treason
- D. Offence

- 1. the offence of acting to overthrow one's government or to harm or kill its sovereign
- 2. an act punishable by law
- 3. a punitive sentence that requires a convicted person to perform unpaid work for the community in lieu of imprisonment
- 4. to make unlawful or illegal

*2. Fill in the missing words:*

- 1. Abortion is a controversial issue and I have to say I'm in two .....about it.
- 2. He ..... the murder when he was drunk.
- 3. It comes ..... to this: the man is a cheat.
- 4. Prison should be treated as a correctional.....not as a holiday camp.
- 5. He was charged with murder and locked ..... in prison.

*3. Discuss the following cases and answer to the questions below***The case of Patrick Nicholls**

Patrick Nicholls, jailed for life 23 years ago for the murder of a 74-year-old family friend, was freed yesterday by the Court of Appeal. The court acknowledged that the evidence used to convict Mr Nicholls was unreliable and that the injuries suffered by the 74-year-old were, in all probability, caused by a fall.

- 1. How can the state compensate for 23 years of wrongful imprisonment?
- 2. Have there been any cases like that in your country?

**The Timothy McVeigh Case**

More than 1000 survivors of the Oklahoma City bombing in the USA were asked if they wanted to witness the execution of Timothy McVeigh by lethal injection. The death chamber at the prison has only 8 seats for witnesses, but over 200 victims and their families watched his execution by live video link.

- 1. Do you feel it is right that the survivors of a terrorist act should be invited to watch the convicted terrorist being executed?
- 2. Do you think that an execution like this should be televised?

Some countries give relatives of the victim a choice of what should happen to the murderer: they can agree to the murderer being executed, or they can ask for "blood money" from the murderer as a compensation for the loss of their loved one and the murderer goes to prison. What do you think about this?

**Family***1. Fill in the second part of the idiom:*

- 1. He was scared so he signed the confession under .....



I don't know if God exists, but it would be better for His reputation if He didn't.

*Jules Renard*

True religion is real living; living with all one's soul, with all one's goodness and righteousness.

*Albert Einstein*

All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual towards freedom.

*Albert Einstein*

Lighthouses are more helpful than churches.

*Benjamin Franklin*

Religions are many and diverse, but reason and goodness are one.

*Elbert Hubbard*

### **Sport**

*1. Match the word with the definition:*

Tedious	acts of vandalism and violence in public places, committed especially by youths
Go down	decline
Hooliganism	boring
Attendance	the act of attending

*2. Fill in the correct prepositions*

Here we'll visit the Great Hall, birthplace ..... modern democracy and see King Arthur's Round Table.

UK Tafe Tractors renowned ..... being basic, simple and reliable.

I'm really bad ..... learning languages, I can't remember anything.

*The average professional footballer in the Premier League in England earns £400,000 a year. He trains on average for 3 hours a day and plays one or two games a week for 10 months of the year. This means he earns about £520 per hour. For the top players you have to multiply it by 6 or 7. Which of the following reasons would justify this?*

1. It's a short career.
2. Top players can't go out partying and eating and drinking whatever they want. They have to look after themselves and be highly disciplined. They have a severely restricted social life for maybe 20 years.
3. Your career could end any time through injury.
4. Top players are high profile superstars who can't leave home without the media following them. The money they get is compensation for having no private life.

5. Julia Roberts gets \$4 million to make a film, so why shouldn't top footballers get similar pay? They are just like film stars.

### Homosexuals

1. Fill in the sentences with appropriate words, some clues are given in the bracket:

1. Two days before the election, the candidate suddenly came out ...the closet and denounced the proposed law.
2. When people are like each other, they tend....like each other.
3. We were hoping the radio would .....that school was closed because of the blizzard. (state something publicly)
4. Do you ..... a cup of tea? (would you like)

2. Comment on the following statements:

1. There are good and bad parents. Gay parents aren't automatically good or bad.
2. Two women could raise a family but not two men. They would be useless without a woman.
3. A lot of people grow up in a single parent family – two parents must be better than that.

3. Discuss the following views of same-sex marriages. Which views are closest to your own?

1. Gay marriage? Why not? If two people want to make a lifetime commitment to each other, they should be allowed to.
2. Marriage between a man and a woman is natural. If marriage stops being natural, where will it all end?
3. Marriage is for the procreation of children. Gay parents can't have children so they shouldn't be allowed to get married.

### Lifestyle

1. Write the words next to their definitions:

1. The amount of money or its equivalent received during a period of time in exchange for labor or services i\_ \_ \_ \_ e
2. expenses o\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ s
3. to increase beyond all expectations g\_ t\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ h t\_ \_ r\_ \_ f
4. not common; unusual; rare u\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ n
5. to be very poor l\_ \_ \_ o\_ t\_ \_ b\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ e

2. Discuss the following questions:

1. What were people more likely to spend their money on during the 1980s and 1990s?
2. Comment on the differences between Poland and the UK as far as lifestyle is concerned. Take into account the following:
  - Accommodation

- Monthly expenditures
- Ways of spending free time

## Appendix 2: THE POST TEST

### Exercise 1

Choose the correct preposition:

- A lot of people claim they are discriminated ..... because of their sex, age or race.  
A. of                      B. against                      C. for
- When parents split .....it's usually the mother who looks after children.  
A. in                      B. out                      C. up
- England is considered to be the birthplace.....hooliganism.  
A. of                      B. for                      C. on
- When I was in Spain I quickly picked .....the accent.  
A. up                      B. in                      C. off
- Because of political misunderstandings, the Russian government has completely cut .....the gas supply to other countries.  
A. out                      B. up                      C. off
- I think we can finish discussing this problem and we can move .... ..... a different question.  
A. up to                      B. in to                      C. on to
- Poland is still a relatively cheap country, especially ..... comparison ..... England.  
A. in...to                      B. on...to                      C. in...on
- I knew it .....the outset that he would cheat on her.  
A. with                      B. at                      C. from
- Do you know who is going to run .....for president this time?  
A. for                      B. of                      C. from
- Young people tend .....believe anything that is advertised on TV.  
A. in                      B. to                      C. at

### Exercise 2

Fill in the missing words from the idioms:

- Stereotypes can be harmful as it is not fair to tar people with the same .....
- It's quite a controversial issue and I don't think it will be settled this side of .....
- I was in two ..... whether or not to come this morning.
- A lot of people are afraid to tie the..... and postpone the wedding.
- Everywhere you turn someone's pushing down your ..... the belief that the secret to earning big money lies in good education.
- Elton John came out of the .....and stated publicly he was gay.
- A lot of people in Poland are very poor and live on the.....
- I have had more than my fair ..... of bad luck, I lost my job and I got divorced.

### Exercise 3

Write the word next to its definition:

1. Money paid (by the government) to someone who is too ill to work –  
S\_\_\_\_\_ B\_\_\_\_\_
2. Absence of discrimination, as in the workplace, based on race, colour, age, gender, national origin, religion, or mental or physical disability – E\_\_\_\_\_ O\_\_\_\_\_
3. A government office in a town where Information about available jobs is displayed and where unemployment benefits are administered -J\_\_\_\_\_
4. A student who is studying in the evenings as opposed to a full time student – E\_\_\_\_\_ S\_\_\_\_\_
5. A student who takes a full load of coursework each academic term – F\_\_\_\_\_ - T\_\_\_\_\_ S\_\_\_\_\_
6. To give up one's work, business, career, etc., esp. because of old age –  
R\_\_\_\_\_
7. To persuade or induce to adopt a particular religion, Faith or belief –  
C\_\_\_\_\_
8. A punitive sentence that requires a convicted person to perform unpaid work for the community in lieu of imprisonment – C\_\_\_\_\_ S\_\_\_\_\_
9. The offence of acting to overthrow one's government or to harm or kill its sovereign – T\_\_\_\_\_
10. Extracting useful materials from (garbage or waste) – R\_\_\_\_\_

#### Exercise 4

Fill in the sentences with appropriate words:

1. Nowadays it's mainly Russia that ..... the monopoly for gas supply in the whole Europe.
2. He .....some interesting issues while discussing the unemployment situation in Europe.
3. With all the companies that promote green issues it's much easier to be ..... and save the environment.
4. Nowadays criminals are not scared of punishment and still .....crimes.
5. Once you retire, it's extremely difficult to live off ..... alone.
6. .... regards to global warming issues, I support Al Gore and his initiative.
7. Coal, oil and gas are called "fossil ....." because they have been formed from the organic remains of prehistoric plants and animals
8. To be....., I don't think that pollution is such a big problem in our country.
9. Women nowadays turn out to be more career .....and postpone getting married.
10. The president seemed to..... the blame for the shootings on video games and TV shows.
11. ....what I gather, you support discrimination at a workplace.
12. After his accident he was paralysed and had to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair, however he was not brought down by his .....and managed to be successful.