

## **BLENDED LEARNING AS AN INNOVATIVE FORM OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

All teaching scenarios that are not exclusively face-to-face or online can be described as blended learning, i.e. a combination of virtual and non-virtual learning settings and methods. It also proves to be the most effective one because it combines the best elements of traditional and online teaching. The idea of blended learning is not new. As early as the 1970s, people were talking about “hybrid forms of learning” when it came to combining the then new media audio and video with conventional forms of learning.

There are many definitions and concepts of blended learning, but it is certainly not just a simple method of linking classroom learning and e-learning. Blended learning can be described as a “pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment” (Dziuban, Hartman and Moska) [1]. The concept of blended learning is rooted in the idea that learning is not just a one-time event, learning is more or less a continuous process. The crucial thing in applying this method is to take advantage of the best features of both face-to-face and online so that they complement one another instead of treating the online part as an add-on of what is thought in the classroom.

The blended teaching and learning method represents a fundamental change in the way teachers and students approach the learning experience, much greater than just adding computers to the classroom. The essence of blended learning lies in an increased sensitivity to learners’ needs and a better

understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of different media and communication technologies in the educational process.

In blended learning scenarios, three forms of activity can be distinguished or combined with one another (Alonso, Lypez, Manrique & Vices, 2007) as follows [2]:

- Self-directed e-learning: learners can determine the time, intervals, pace and location of their learning activities themselves (“learning anytime and anywhere”).

- Live e-learning: synchronous forms of e-learning, e.g. lectures as webcasts or working in a virtual classroom at a set time. This enables learners to ask questions to the lecturers in real time or to exchange information with other course participants.

- Traditional classroom teaching: lecture, seminar, exercise, discussion and exchange take place in the class, laboratory or seminar room and open up face-to-face interaction with lecturers and fellow students.

Various authors agree that the percentage of online/offline content is not as important as the pedagogical design, timing and sequencing of activities to create a cohesive learning experience.

The challenges coming along with this innovative T&L method are as follows: the teacher is acting as a coach and the student are in charge of their own learning, it requires the approval or agreement of both parties.

However, a well-designed blended course is not as simple as dividing your course into face-to-face and online components. Some main principles to guide the development of a blended course:

- It is obvious, that successful blended courses have higher rates of student-to-student and lecturer-to-student interactions. Therefore it is recommended to focus on interaction rather than the delivery mode of the course. Activities, which require students to engage in the course content and with other students should be aimed at.

- The course goals and objectives should guide the design of the course, not the technology [3]. “Ask yourself what isn’t working in your course that can be done differently or better online.” (Garnham & Kaleta, 2002).

Blended learning is a promising idea that has linked together many significant fields such as teaching methodology, educational technology, online teaching and learning [4, 5]. Despite these benefits, the use of blended learning can be associated with some challenges. More research has to be done to identify and deal with these challenges.

## References

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